# Building Professional Social Capital for Black Learners and Workers

AT A GLANCE

Mapping the landscape of programs specifically designed to help Black learners and workers build professional social capital.

Developed by

JFFLABS

With support from
University of Phoenix

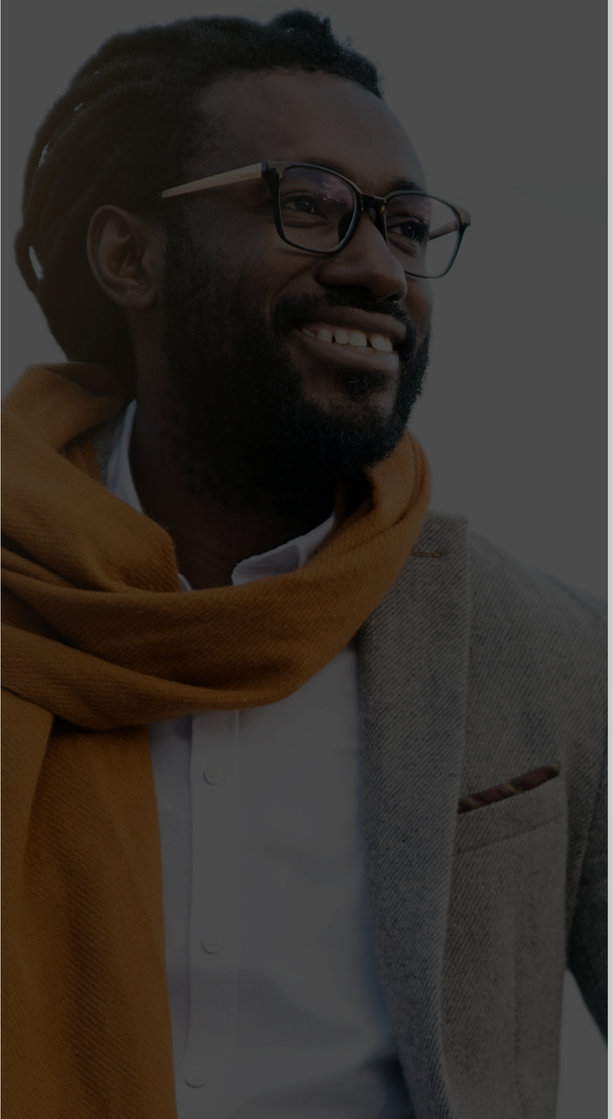
JUNE 2022

# Contents



Image courtesy of Here to Here

# Introduction



Professional social capital—the resources that arise from the web of relationships we build with those around us and that contribute to our professional goals—is a key component of anyone's career journey. It sets us up for success in the labor market, opening doors and serving as a source of information about and access to new career opportunities. It equips us with strategies, information, and resources that help us forge connections with the people we meet in the worlds of work and learning, and then strengthen those connections and expand our networks throughout our careers. And it's a critical, yet often overlooked, element to equitable economic advancement.

For Black learners and workers, who too often grapple with discriminatory systems and practices in education and the workplace, professional social capital can unlock opportunities for greater economic advancement and mobility, ultimately reducing the racial income, employment, advancement, and wealth gaps that hold our country back.

That's why, with support from University of Phoenix, Jobs for the Future (JFF) set out to map the landscape of programs specifically designed to help Black learners and workers build professional social capital.

We found many organizations and programs that have taken initial steps: starting internship programs, offering students advice about using LinkedIn, encouraging learners and workers to think of all the people they know who could help them in their careers. We're encouraged by this progress, but we also see a tremendous opportunity to do more—and an unmet need.

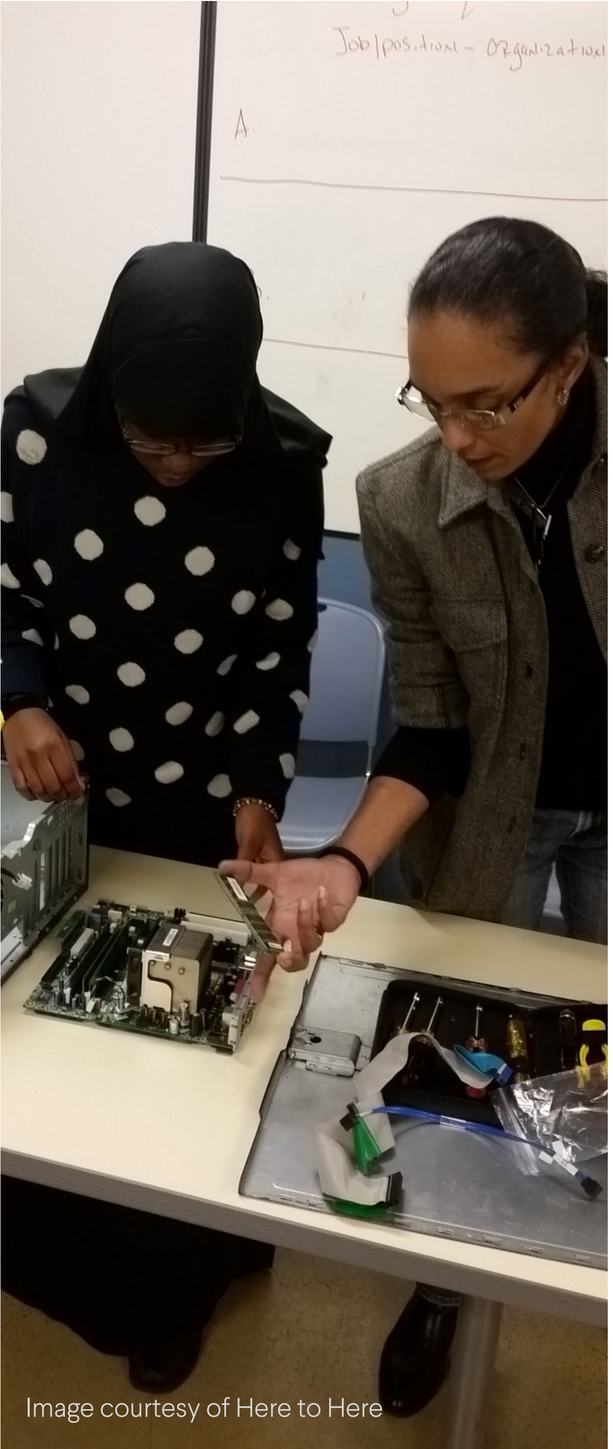


Image courtesy of Here to Here

For educational institutions, training providers, and employers, it's no longer enough to treat social capital-building activities as nice-to-haves or add-ons. **We need—and Black learners and workers deserve—comprehensive, strategic, and scalable approaches that both offer participants the support and resources they need to take action, and ensure that the organizations themselves are creating the conditions needed for truly equitable economic advancement at the systems level.**

In this market scan, we identify five elements that we believe the most innovative social capital development programs will and must incorporate to do this. We based our conclusions on in-depth research that included a dive into the history and context of professional social capital, a comprehensive look at the programs that are doing this work and the strategies they employ, and assessments of emerging trends and areas of opportunity.

We acknowledge that achieving true equity for Black Americans demands that we look beyond equitable career pathways to address the structural and systemic challenges that contribute to the persistent and pervasive Black-white wealth gap. This market scan only partially explores solutions that focus on this far broader challenge, which spans policy, financial innovations, efforts to advance Black entrepreneurs, and moonshot strategies to address social determinants such as health care, housing, and more. There's a lot to do.

Yet in each of these areas and more, stronger and deeper reserves of professional social capital will help learners, workers, and leaders spot potential, navigate networks, and seize opportunities—for themselves and for others. And that, in turn, will transform lives—and our country.

# Why Professional Social Capital Matters for Black Learners and Workers

Search Institute defines *social capital* as "the resources that arise from a web of relationships which people can access and mobilize to help them improve their lives and achieve their goals, which inevitably shift over time." In this market scan, we're using the term *professional social capital* to specifically refer to the resources that arise from people's webs of relationships and *contribute to their education and career goals*.

Sociologists have long studied the nature and impact of social connections and networks, and the idea of social capital dates back to the early 20th century. However, the term *social capital* and its commonplace use are relatively new, and it has just recently begun to gain increasing attention in education and workforce spheres as a critical element for success, especially in the modern labor market. Some organizations are using this term specifically, while others are getting at similar ideas through concepts like networking, human or life skills, professional development, and more. (You can read more about how to introduce learners to the concept of social capital, and about language and strategies that help communicate its value in this guide.)

We believe professional social capital is a critical ingredient in any effort to promote equitable economic advancement for the following reasons:

- **Education and training alone are not enough.** Regardless of the type or number of credentials an individual has, getting on a pathway to a job that pays family-supporting wages in a field that offers opportunities for economic advancement can be difficult without a network of professional connections. This is especially true for Black learners and workers. Professional social capital is an essential piece of the equation—it provides access to information and connections that open up new possibilities for learners and workers by introducing them to education or career options they hadn't previously considered and providing support that can help them build confidence about their prospects. The resources, connections,

and information that professional social capital provides are invaluable in helping Black learners "better understand the world of work and what credentials, relationships and set of experiences will help them succeed," as JFFLabs Executive Director Kristina Francis wrote in an article in THE Campus.

- **Black learners and workers lack access to opportunities to even *begin* building relationships that generate professional social capital.** For example, Ivy League schools are seen as places where students can build invaluable professional social capital—yet Black learners have made up only 7 to 8 percent of Ivy League enrollments since 1994. Likewise, leadership positions at leading corporations can confer a tremendous amount of professional social capital, but there have been only 19 Black CEOs of Fortune 500 companies since the list was first published in 1955—that's just 1 percent of the 1,800 people who have been Fortune 500 CEOs during that time.

- **Black learners and workers often meet with generalized assumptions about whether they "fit" in the workplaces or educational programs they're part of.** Even when they do become part of well-regarded institutions or companies, Black Americans may find it difficult to feel at home and make connections in majority white environments where standards of professionalism favor white cultural norms. They face those challenges in part because many employers assess job applicants and employees based on whether they fit within their organizational cultures, which leads to homogeneous workplaces where people from populations that are underrepresented on the staff may be subject to spoken or unspoken criticism of, for example, their personal habits or style of dress. California and several other states have taken initial steps to address that kind of workplace bias by adopting the Crown Act (or the Create a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair Act), which which prohibits discrimination based on hair style and hair texture.

We need to focus on explicit strategies to support Black learners and workers because professional social capital is not recognized or distributed equally across lines of race. There are structural barriers and challenges to Black learners and workers developing professional social capital that has currency in the dominant structures of today's working world—whether these barriers are the race-based discrimination Black learners and workers experience, the persistent gap in income—especially for Black men, the underrepresentation of Black workers in high-wage and high-growth industries like tech, or the unique challenges Black women face in the workplace, including misperceptions about their work and lower rates of promotion into managerial roles.

Therefore, we must promote strategies that eliminate the institutional, systemic, and policy-driven barriers that limit the ability of Black learners and workers to build social capital. However, there is currently no cohesive or unified approach to promoting policies and practices that make it easier for Black learners and workers to build professional social capital in education or the workforce.

**We acknowledge and celebrate the wide range of experiences, opportunities, and challenges that Black learners and workers encounter as individuals, and we recognize the unique intersectionality of each individual's identity that contributes to those experiences, opportunities, and challenges. In this market scan, we discuss Black learners and workers as a group that has certain shared experiences in the U.S. education and workforce systems, but we do not intend to minimize the unique experiences of individuals.**

# Mapping the Ecosystem

# Key Strategies for Building Professional Social Capital

Building professional social capital should be part of a holistic approach to supporting learners and workers that's woven into postsecondary curricula, programs run by community-based organizations, and employer policies. This will require more than one-off career fairs, static job boards that list openings but don't connect jobseekers to career navigation or networking supports, or a few mentoring meetings for new employees. Our research shows that while learners and workers are continually meeting people and expanding their networks throughout their education and career journeys, they aren't necessarily learning how to activate and mobilize those resources.

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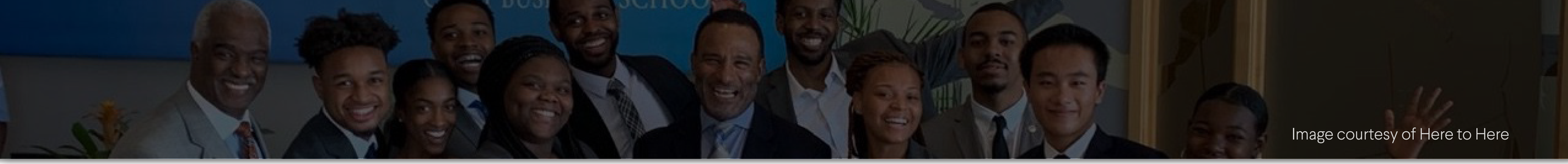


Image courtesy of Here to Here

Organizations that have found effective ways to promote efforts to build professional social capital, in particular for Black learners and workers, see the people they serve as powerful community builders and understand that participants in their programs are often motivated by a desire to give back to their communities. They also develop programs and activities that weave together technical skills, social justice priorities, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals, and a focus on relationship-building strategies and opportunities. They also combine training with practical experience, and they connect the worlds of education and work in their programming so participants aren't left to make those connections on their own.

On the following pages, we present a map of the market of organizations that are engaged in professional social capital initiatives, breaking the field down into the following five categories based on the strategies the organizations employ and the activities they engage in:


We offer detailed descriptions about the categories with which the programs align, and present a look at the criteria we used to identify high-quality and forward-leaning strategies.

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

# Elevating Current Assets

Programs that embrace this strategy start the process of helping learners and workers build professional social capital by focusing on participants' strengths, rather than calling attention to what they might lack. Here's a look at the types of activities that programs use to help learners and workers elevate their current assets:

- **Self-assessments.** Activities such as network mapping exercises can help learners and workers better understand what a professional social network is and the benefits such a network might offer. They spur participants to think broadly and creatively about their existing networks and to consider what resources they may be able to access through their current relationships. Because of discrimination in the U.S. labor market, Black learners and workers may not be in networks that yield abundant career and education advantages, but self-assessments and network-mapping exercises will help them identify and elevate the resources their

**Julia Freeland Fisher**, director of education research at the Clayton Christensen Institute, highlights the value of strengths-based self-assessments as a starting point for building professional social capital: "What we're hearing in the field from groups like Social Capital Builders, Beyond 12, Opportunity Network, and Basta is that asking their participants to map their existing networks is one of the most productive and strengths-based strategies for starting to talk about what social capital is and why it's valuable in the world of work. Self-assessments can not only identify existing or latent assets in people's lives, but also normalize the concept of networking and elevate their prior experience in network-building and mobilization. If you skip that step, efforts to teach 'networking' can default into teaching 'etiquette,' which can promote assimilation over agency in how learners and workers are urged to build their networks."



# Elevating Current Assets

current relationships do have to offer. And from there they can begin to consider who else they need to add to their networks and what additional information they should seek out. Connections don't have to be, say, business leaders or university professors to be valuable. For example, someone might have an aunt who's an administrative assistant at a bank, and she could provide valuable insights about what it's like to work at the bank, along with an introduction to her boss and contact information for managers who have job openings.

- **Preparation for relationship-building.** Effective ways to prepare workers and learners to start making new professional connections include exercises in which participants practice telling other people about their skills and areas of expertise, lessons offering tips on how to approach new people or reach out to current connections to ask for introductions to others, and workshops that illustrate how communication styles differ depending on the platform and setting—whether it's email, LinkedIn, social media, or an in-person meeting.

## Quality Criteria

High-quality and forward-thinking programs will elevate learners' and workers' current assets. This strategy is very important, and we believe that all programs supporting learners and workers in their efforts to build professional social capital should adopt it.

# Elevating Current Assets

BetterUp

FOUNDERS

BUILD

Bunker Hill Community College
imagine the possibilities

CODE2040

CREATIVE REACTION LAB

<div Inc>

DreamYard

GUTTMAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The HBCU Career Center

HERE TO HERE

INSTITUTE for SOCIAL CAPITAL

INORITIES IN EALTHCARE

nxu

THE OPPORTUNITY® NETWORK

PAUL QUINN COLLEGE

POSSE

PREP for PREP

Social Capital Academy

Social Capital BUILDERS



# Building Relationships

The goal of programs that emphasize the importance of building relationships is to connect learners and workers to people with whom they can have sustained, supportive relationships. Here's a look at the types of activities that programs use to help workers and learners build relationships:

- **Mentoring.** Mentoring programs should emphasize the two-way learning that can happen between mentor and mentee, and set clear expectations and boundaries about what each party can hope to get out of the relationship. Mentor Spaces is an example of an organization doing the critical work of shaping positive mentoring experiences for people who are members of populations that are underrepresented in fields that offer opportunity for economic advancement. The organization's strategy is driven by the notion that "a person can't be who they haven't seen."

- **Sponsoring.** Unlike mentors, who primarily offer advice or guidance to their mentees, sponsors actively position colleagues for advancement within an organization, according to BetterUp, which partners with companies to offer tech-enabled coaching and personalized professional development resources for employees. "A sponsor roots for you and your career development," says a BetterUp blog post. "A sponsor makes sure that you 'are on the radar' and that other decision-makers know your name."

- **Coaching and training.** The focus of coaching and training strategies is on the *how*: how to build, maintain, and activate networks. Activities may be related to college or career navigation: how to apply to a college or pursue job opportunity, how to present oneself in an interview, how to reach out to alumni networks for support. And finding a



# Building Relationships

coach doesn't have to involve signing up for an expensive service: Friends, relatives, and teachers or professors with relevant experience can all play the role. For example, a professor could shed light on the various career pathways within a student's major, provide access to resources with information about those pathways, and connect the student with real-world opportunities to explore a particular pathway.

- **Peer cohort experiences:** Connecting with, learning from, and supporting one's peers—especially in a close-knit, longer-term cohort experience—can be an effective way to access an ongoing stream of introductions and connections to job opportunities. This strategy capitalizes on the sense of trust that's more likely to arise among peers than in relationships that involve power dynamics. Organizations that use cohorts to help people build professional social capital include the Posse Foundation, BUILD, COOP Careers, and Braven. These types of programs often provide space for vulnerability, enabling participants to forge deeper connections within their cohorts.

## Quality Criteria

High-quality and forward-thinking programs provide learners and workers with opportunities to connect with others across both lines of similarity and lines of difference. Connecting across lines of similarity with people who have shared identities and experiences can be particularly important for Black learners and workers, who can benefit from building relationships with peers, mentors, colleagues, and leaders who are also Black. And connecting across lines of difference can be equally valuable because it allows people to expand their networks and access opportunities they might not have been exposed to otherwise.

# Building Relationships

ACCION
AI4ALL
AllStarCode*
Allstate
AMERICA ON TECH
AMERICAN EXPRESS
BACKSTAGE CAPITAL
BEST BUY
BetterUp
BB FOUNDERS
BLACK CAREER BCWN WOMEN'S NETWORK
BLACK GIRL VENTURES
BLACK INNOVATION ALLIANCE
BLCK VC
BCG
BRAVEN
BUILD
BYTE BACK
Climb Hire
CODE FEVER
CODE2040
collab
Deloitte.
digitalundivided
<div Inc>
First Workings
FORWARD CITIES
FUTURE FOCUSED EDUCATION
FUTURES AND OPTIONS The Future is in Your Hands
GENESYS WORKS.
Harlem Capital
The HBCU Career Center
HBCUVC
HERE TO HERE
HIGHER PURPOSE CO
i.c.stars |*
IBM
INROADS
JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.
we are ALL marquette
MENTOR SPACES LIFT AS YOU CLIMB
MINORITIES IN HEALTHCARE
MLT
MORTAR BUILDING BUSINESSES. TRANSFORMING CITIES.
MBK ALLIANCE
NSBE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF BLACK ENGINEERS
NEW VOICES
Northeastern University
npower
ONE TEN
OHUB
PARAGON ONE
Posse
PRONGHORN Fueling the Pace of Progress
PROPEL EDUCATION NOW. DESIGNED FOR THE FUTURE.
PURSUIT
RESILIENT CODERS .ORG
Rivet School
RoadtoHire
RUNWAY
SEO Seizing Every Opportunity
Social Capital Academy
Social Capital BUILDERS
STREET WISE PARTNERS
STRIVE FOR COLLEGE
SA Careers
SVAcademy
black UPSTART
The Links, Incorporated Linked in Friendship, Connected in Service
THE MENTOR METHOD
VERTICAL404
VISIBLE HANDS
WiT WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

# Making Connections and Introductions

The goal of facilitating connections and introductions is to help learners and workers meet people who can assist them with specific immediate needs, not necessarily to establish long-term relationships—although introductions focused on short-term goals could certainly lead to long-term relationships. The point is to expand people's opportunities to receive and share information, particularly through what are known as "weak ties." Here's a look at the types of activities programs use to create opportunities for workers and learners to make professional connections:

- **Informational interviews:** Less formal than traditional job interviews, these types of conversations can be valuable opportunities for learners and workers to get information about professions or industries as they explore their career options.

**Weak Ties**

Research has shown that weak ties are important vehicles for helping learners and workers build professional social capital because they expand access to opportunities. Through weak ties, people can learn about professional opportunities like fellowships, internships, or even permanent jobs that they may not have been aware of otherwise. And weak ties could pay off via acts as simple as sharing an article or mentioning a company that someone might want to learn more about. But it's important to remember that building professional social capital involves much more than racing to collect the most weak ties—the popular advice that everyone needs at least 500 LinkedIn connections notwithstanding. Weak ties are an important part of a balanced approach to networking that also includes plenty of strong long-term connections.

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

# Making Connections and Introductions

- **Employer introductions:** Introducing learners and workers to key people at organizations where they might be interested in working can be beneficial for a number of reasons. For one, an individual who is connected to people an employer knows and trusts is likely to get a favorable initial response when applying for a job with that employer. Programs can facilitate these types of introductions by, for example, arranging for businesspeople to work with postsecondary institutions to give classroom presentations about their careers or organizations, provide students with feedback on their coursework, or lead workshops in which they have students tackle real-life dilemmas they face on the job.

- **Networking:** The goal of programs that facilitate networking is simple: to help workers and learners build professional social capital by giving them opportunities to meet other people who can offer insights about career options or connect them with job opportunities. Networking activities take many forms, including meeting people through career fairs (virtual or in-person), community events, LinkedIn, Twitter chats and other social media gatherings, or job board platforms. While many workers and learners might focus on networking with people who are older, more experienced, or more senior in their careers, connections with peers are valuable, too. Programs such as Peer Forward and Social Capital Builders promote peer networking, recognizing that learners and workers might be more likely to pay attention, listen, and participate in activities that involve their peers.

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

# Making Connections and Introductions

## Quality Criteria

High-quality and forward-thinking programs do the following:

- Take a step beyond the basics of meeting people and gathering information to introduce learners and workers to the *how* of building professional social capital—how to assemble, activate, and maintain networks.
- Provide participants with time and space to actively engage in the process of making connections. Instead of just explaining activities for participants to try later, facilitators in these programs stop and encourage learners and workers to do things in real time.

# Making Connections and Introductions

ACCION
Adobe
AI4ALL
Alabama A&M University
AllStarCode*
Allstate
America On Tech
American Express
Backstage Capital
BASTA
Best Buy
BB Founders
Black Career Women's Network
Black Founders
Black Girl Ventures
Black Innovation Alliance
BlackRock Careers
BLCK VC
BCG
BRAVEN
Build
Byte Back
Climb Hire
Code Fever
CODE2040
collab
Creating IT Futures
Deloitte.
Deutsche Bank
digitalundivided
Inc 
DreamYard
First Workings
Forward Cities
Future Focused
Futures and Options
Genesys Works
hack the hood
Handshake
Harlem Capital
HBCU 20X20
The HBCU Career Center
HBCUVC
Here to Here
Higher Purpose Co
i.c.stars
IBM
INROADS
JOPWELL
JPMorgan Chase & Co.
we are ALL marquette
Mentor Spaces
MLT
MORTAR
MBK Alliance
NSBE
New Voices
Northeastern University
npower
nxu
BBF Oakland Black Business Fund
ONE TEN
OHUB
The Opportunity Network
Paragon One
Paul Quinn College
Posse
Prep for Prep
Pronghorn
PROPEL
Pursuit
Resilient Coders
Rivet School
Road to Hire
RUNWAY
SCORE
SEO Seizing Every Opportunity
Social Capital Academy
Street Wise Partners
STRIVE for College
SVAcademy
black UPSTART
The Links, Incorporated
The Washington Center
Vertical404
VISIBLE HANDS
WIT Women in Technology
workday
Year Up

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

# Career Onboarding

The goal of activities related to career onboarding is to help learners and workers connect to the next steps in their career journeys, and to do so in a way that sets them up for success. It also involves connecting that next step to the rest of the journey and ensuring that it matches the individual's needs in terms of pay, scheduling, and supports. Here's a look at the types of activities that programs could use to facilitate career onboarding for workers and learners:

- **Career navigation, exploration, and research:** These activities offer learners and workers opportunities to explore and think about career pathways that might interest them and identify which of their skills are aligned with pathways of interest. In addition to exploring options via research, effective career exploration activities include conversations and job shadowing. Programs like My Best Bets and Roadtrip Nation can also help build awareness.

- **Intentional connections to job openings and onboarding supports:** It's important to ensure that learners and workers have access to job postings. HBCU20x20 connects Black students and graduates to employers through its job board, networking events, and consultation and professional development services. Handshake's platform allows college students to explore career opportunities, connect with employers, and apply for internships and jobs. It's equally important to ensure that during their onboarding, new employees are thoughtfully introduced to coworkers,



# Career Onboarding

apprised of the knowledge their positions require, made aware of their new organizations' cultural norms, and given an opportunity to explore their career and learning goals.

- **Work-based learning:** JFF's Work-Based Learning Glossary defines work-based learning as "an approach to training in which a student or worker completes meaningful tasks in a workplace," and it goes on to say that "such programs are designed to prepare participants for full-time work and help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to enter or advance in particular career fields." Work-based learning programs include paid internships, co-ops, registered apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. Year Up, a national model, provides skills training to students, then places them in internships for hands-on experience, and later supports them in their job searches.

## Quality Criteria

High-quality and forward-thinking programs do the following:

- Offer thoughtful and intentional career navigation exercises and help learners and workers find meaning in their experiences. They also ensure that workers and learners have experiences that are connected to their long-term career and life goals.
- Recognize that professional social capital is best paired with (but is not a replacement for) skills training and education, because learners and workers need both to succeed in the labor market.

**Read more about work-based learning on page 27.**

# Career Onboarding

Adobe
AI4ALL
Alabama A&M University
AllStarCode*
Allstate
America On Tech
American Express
Basta
Best Buy
Black Career Women's Network
Black Girls Code
BlackRock Careers
BLCK VC
BCG
Braven
Build
Byte Back
Climb Hire
Code Fever
CODE2040
Creating IT Futures
Creative Reaction Lab
Deloitte.
Deutsche Bank
DreamYard
First Workings
Future Focused Education
Futures and Options
Genesys Works
hack the hood
Handshake
Harlem Capital
The HBCU Career Center
HBCUVC
Here to Here
i.c.stars |*
IBM
INROADS
JPMorgan Chase & Co.
we are ALL marquette
Mentor Spaces
Minorities in Healthcare
MLT
MBK Alliance
NSBE
Northeastern University
npower
nxu
One Ten
OHUB
The Opportunity Network
Paragon One
Paul Quinn College
Posse
Prep for Prep
Pronghorn
PROPEL
Pursuit
Resilient Coders
Rivet School
Road to Hire
SEO Seizing Every Opportunity
Social Capital Academy
Street Wise Partners
Strive for College
SA Careers
SVAcademy
The Washington Center
WIT Women in Technology
workday
Year Up

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

# Continuous Learning Journey

It's essential to provide people with skills and strategies that enable them to continue building and activating professional social capital throughout their lives so that they will always benefit from their networks and relationships—and the information and resources they offer—no matter where they are in their career and learning journeys. Equally important is the fact that people who have these skills and an awareness of the importance of professional social capital will likely be willing to serve as a resource for others, contributing to the prosperity and vitality of their communities. Here's a look at topics programs could emphasize in activities designed to help workers and learners make a lifelong habit of building professional social capital:

- **Opportunities to pay it forward:** Programs can help young workers and learners understand that serving as a professional social capital resource for others will benefit their communities and help them gain confidence and improve their own skills at the same time. They should emphasize that there are a number of ways to do this throughout one's career, such as serving as a guest speaker for your alma mater, being a mentor, introducing someone to an employer, and sharing key information. Climb Hire, a nonprofit that prepares working adults for entry-level tech jobs, brings alumni back as facilitators and mentors to help foster a community of care and support for participants.

SEGMENTS AND STRATEGIES

# Continuous Learning Journey

- **The value of continuous improvement:** Learners and workers should assess the health of their professional social capital by tracking data points such as the frequency and quality of interactions with people in their networks and the outcomes of relationships. One way workers and learners can do this to continue to engage in network mapping exercises throughout their careers.
- **The importance of maintaining relationships and networks:** If learners and workers actively maintain their own networks, they will be better able to help others build professional social capital. They can do this by keeping in touch with their mentors and advocates, thinking about the types of people and resources that might be missing from their networks, and knowing how and when to ask for support.

## Quality Criteria

High-quality and forward-thinking programs provide ongoing support for former participants by, for example, organizing and managing networks or communities of practice, distributing resources, and offering ongoing one-on-one coaching services—both to continue supporting learners and workers and to enable them to support others.

# Continuous Learning Journey

AllStarCode*
BLACK GIRL VENTURES
BLACK INNOVATION ALLIANCE
BUILD
Climb Hire
CODE FEVER
CREATIVE REACTION LAB
 Inc
DreamYard
FORWARD CITIES
FUTURES AND OPTIONS
The Future is in Your Hands
GENESYS WORKS.
hack the hood
HIGHER PURPOSE Co.
i.c.stars |*
MENTOR SPACES
LIFT AS YOU CLIMB
INORITIES IN EALTHCARE
MLT
MBK ALLIANCE
npower
BBF
OAKLAND BLACK BUSINESS FUND
OHUB
Posse
PREP for PREP
PROPEL
EDUCATION NOW. DESIGNED FOR THE FUTURE.
RoadtoHire
Social Capital Academy
STREET WISE PARTNERS
WiT
WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY

# Work-Based Learning: A Powerful Professional Social Capital Building Strategy

At JFF, we believe that work-based learning can play an especially powerful role in helping people build professional social capital. A core tenet of professional social capital is that it bridges the spheres of education and work to help people successfully navigate the labor market, and work-based learning experiences are intentionally designed to bridge those two spheres.

Here are just a few examples of the ways in which work-based learning programs create opportunities for participants to build professional social capital:

**Showcasing possible career pathways and providing participants with opportunities to develop career-related relationships:** Exposing learners to the world of work not only helps them explore their interests and gain hands-on experience in an industry, it also helps them build their networks and acquire valuable information. Thoughtfully designed internships, co-ops, apprenticeships, and other experiences allow participants to learn what it's like to work at a particular company and give them opportunities to hone their skills by applying the lessons they've learned in the classroom in real-world settings. Here are some examples of exceptional programs:

- Northeastern University's Cooperative Education program integrates semesters of on-the-job co-op experiences with semesters of classroom study. It enables students to build professional social capital and provides employers with access to a valuable talent pipeline.
- Pre-apprenticeship experiences that prioritize specific populations help young learners and workers explore career paths and prepare for Registered Apprenticeship programs that offer proven pathways to career success.

Examples include Chicago Women in the Trades training programs, the Workforce Development Institute's Access for All program, and the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership's Big Step initiative. At JFF, we're advocates of pre-apprenticeship. As we say on our website: "When pre-apprenticeship programs are implemented well, they can be bridges to career opportunities for students, new workers, or underprepared learners. Pre-apprenticeship is a particularly effective means of preparing people from underrepresented communities for high-quality employment opportunities—and thereby increasing diversity and equity throughout the apprenticeship and workforce systems."

- Workplace rotational programs for people who are already employed in a particular industry can serve a similar purpose. Programs like those that Baker Hughes, Texas Instruments, Allstate, and Abbott have set up for their new employees allow participants to learn what it's like to work in several different departments, exposing them to the full breadth of career paths in their chosen fields.

**Offering coursework that creates opportunities to build professional social capital:** At JFF, we believe in the power of postsecondary education that includes some form of work-based learning experience or other types of programs that allow students to build professional skills—especially when those activities are also designed to help learners build professional social capital. Moreover, we believe that strategies for building professional social capital should be integrated into postsecondary classroom coursework, and into the guidance and support services available to learners at institutions' career centers. Examples include Humanities 101 at Bunker Hill Community College in Charlestown, Massachusetts, Ethnographies of Work at Guttman Community College in New York City, and work-based courses.

# Notes on What Is—and Is Not—Included in This Market Scan

The innovators we feature in this market scan include the following types of organizations:

- **Institutions of higher education:** Academic programs or administrative departments (such as career centers) at colleges and universities or in other higher education settings.
- **Partners:** Independent for-profit and nonprofit organizations that partner with institutions of higher education or employers in order to help reach their learner/worker populations.
- **Community-based organizations:** Independent for-profit and nonprofit organizations that work with learners and workers in the community to build professional social capital.
- **Professional networks:** Organizations that offer people who have something in common opportunities to come together to make connections, build lasting relationships, and offer one another support and advice as they work to achieve


Image courtesy of the HBCU Career Center

their professional and educational goals. Such groups can be built around affiliations among people who share similar educational backgrounds, career interests and goals, or demographic backgrounds.

- **Large employers:** Companies whose workforces are so big that employees can build a good deal of professional social capital just by networking with their colleagues—often in employer-sponsored affinity groups. These networking opportunities can be especially valuable to entry-level workers.
- **Accelerators and investors:** Businesses that, as part of their efforts to help startups succeed, offer leaders of early-stage companies opportunities to build professional social capital, perhaps by setting up support groups for entrepreneurs, offering mentoring programs, or introducing company founders to potential investors or business partners.

People build and use social capital in a number of ways and in a number of settings, and we recognize that the list above doesn't begin to reflect the full range of tactics and strategies people use to build social capital, or the extensive array of settings in which they put those tactics and strategies to use.

- Because we focus on programs that help learners and workers build professional social capital at the point where they're transitioning from postsecondary education to career, we don't robustly capture the nuanced programs tailored to specific professions or industries or to people at more advanced stages of their education or career journeys. Examples include the National Black MBA Association, Black Women on Boards, the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, and the Black Professionals Network. Some of the other noteworthy organizations that we don't discuss in detail include Black-majority or Black-led organizations and institutions where professional social capital building may occur simply by virtue of the fact that many of those involved have shared identities and experiences.

- Likewise, we don't offer a comprehensive picture of professional social capital programs for young learners in K-12 systems. But we do discuss Genesys Works and other programs that help high school students begin to explore their postsecondary and career options in ways that build their professional social capital.
- In addition, while the following types of organizations may also play roles in helping people build professional social capital, we chose not to include them because their primary purpose is different: churches, social clubs, and sororities, fraternities, and related umbrella organizations like the National Pan-Hellenic Council (also known as the Divine Nine).

Finally, this market scan doesn't discuss the benefits and challenges of cultural capital—a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu in the late 20th century to describe the "accumulation of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that a person can tap into to demonstrate one's cultural competence and social status."

In other words, people build cultural capital because aspects of their identities—including, notably, race and gender—can determine what types of knowledge they have access to. And social status, in turn, labels some knowledge as more valuable than other knowledge—and people who share that "more valuable" knowledge, or cultural capital, often forge connections with one another and build networks that exclude those who don't share that knowledge.

Cultural capital is related to professional social capital—we see cultural capital as giving individuals access to certain conversations or gaining the respect of others for knowing about certain topics. However, in this market scan, we promote the importance of building professional social capital via relationships with all kinds of people.

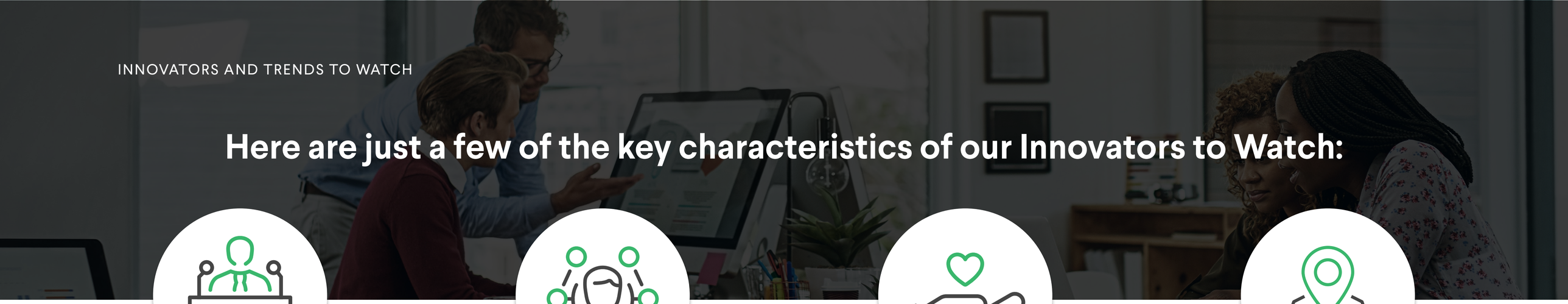
# Innovators and Trends to Watch

# Innovators to Watch

## *Programs and Companies Poised for Impact*

We scanned the market made up of organizations and companies that offer programs and enact strategies designed to help people build professional social capital, gathering data on more than 200 programs and organizations, with a particular focus on those organizations serving Black learners and workers. In this section, we profile 10 organizations that specifically position professional social capital as a core part of the learning and work experiences they provide. We still believe, as we discuss in our recommendations below, that there's a great need for even more integrated and holistic strategies, but these Innovators to Watch distinguish themselves from other organizations through the ways in which they use the development of professional social capital to foster economic mobility for Black learners and workers.

These organizations all engage in the types of activities we identified when we mapped the market. They touch multiple stages of learners' and workers' journeys—from supporting career exploration starting in high school to engaging experienced professionals as guest speakers at their alma maters and as mentors to current students. However, they largely focus on the transition from postsecondary education or training to careers. While they range in size and are at various stages of their organizational development, all have achieved initial success and have strategies that have the potential to be scaled and replicated in the field.



## Here are just a few of the key characteristics of our Innovators to Watch:

80 percent were founded by or are led by a team that includes Black leaders.

Half of the organizations were founded within the past 15 years, and three were founded in the past six years.

Eight of them are nonprofits.

They're based in cities across the country—from coast to coast and north to south, including San Francisco, the Bronx, Philadelphia, Austin, and St Louis.

The organizations we highlight are just a few of the hundreds of organizations, institutions, and companies that offer supports to help learners and workers—and in particular Black learners and workers—build professional social capital as they prepare to enter and advance in the labor market.

BUILD

## BUILD AT A GLANCE

**build.org**

Founded in 1999

Headquarters in
Redwood City, California

## MEASURES OF IMPACT

More than **6,000** students served in over **50 cities** through BUILD's core program and digital offerings

Over **3,800** mentors engaged

Over **550** youth businesses launched

BUILD works in schools with low graduation rates, yet **98% of students** who complete its program graduate from high school on time and over 80% enroll in college.

**100% of students increase their social capital while in BUILD.**

### What does BUILD do?

BUILD (Businesses United in Investing, Lending and Development) is a youth entrepreneurship program offered in partnership with local school districts that prepares students in grades 9 through 12 for career and college success through the hands-on experience of designing, building, marketing, and pitching a product or business. Through its Core Program, a four-year curriculum, students gain proficiency in six critical competencies dubbed Spark Skills, giving students a sense of ownership and agency in their education and career decisions. With the support of mentors from BUILD's vast network of corporate partners, students gain exposure and access to business environments, participate in skills training, and craft their postsecondary plans while growing their network and sense of self. This mutually beneficial relationship offers BUILD's corporate partners access to a diverse talent pipeline, while providing internship and job opportunities for their students. BUILD works with partners to help them understand the cultural needs and potential biases that can arise when working with young people from a wide range of backgrounds.

BUILD launched a $15 million, three-year growth campaign in 2021 to develop digital offerings, expand to new cities, and push for systemic change in education. As part of this campaign, BUILD now has a free online Design Challenge and is launching satellites in new markets outside of its hubs in Boston, New York City, Washington, DC, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

### Why did JFF select BUILD?

Students build professional social capital through support from skills-based volunteers, year-round mentors, BUILD staff members, and other partner organizations, and through career readiness opportunities such as mock interviews, resume writing workshops, introductions to LinkedIn, and summer internships and jobs.

With a focus on serving Black and Latinx students in areas that are underserved by public and private institutions, BUILD works to not only support individual learners in their career and college plans, but also to make a positive impact on learners' communities through recent updates to its curriculum. Its curriculum and model stand out for integrating entrepreneurship with civic and social engagement—helping students discover how they can make a difference while making a profit.

**SEGMENTS**


**Elevating Current Assets**


**Building Relationships**


**Making Connections and Introductions**


**Career Onboarding**


**Continuous Learning Journey**

## DIVINC AT A GLANCE

**divinc.org**

Founded in 2016

Headquarters in Austin, Texas

## MEASURES OF IMPACT

Over **6,000** entrepreneurs, investors, collaborators, mentors, and supporters reached annually.

More than **100 startup founders** served.

**Over 80 subject matter experts engaged.**

Eight cohorts completed as of 2021.

More than **$100,000** in technology and business resources provided per cohort.

**Over 50 hours** of pitch coaching per cohort.

**Over 35 hours** of executive coaching per cohort.

### What does DivInc do?

DivInc is committed to driving social and economic equity through entrepreneurship by supporting founders who are Black, Latinx, and women of all backgrounds from ideation to seed stage.

Through its 12-week Accelerator Program, DivInc helps founders scale their ideas through one-on-one support and partnership, a curriculum designed to fast-track development by building on their expertise, and access to an extensive network of investors, mentors, and partners. Cohorts are established around five key verticals (sports tech, social justice, web3, women in tech, and energy). DivInc prioritizes founders' input in order to select partners (such as employers and venture capital firms) to ensure that they are mission-aligned and will provide the best opportunities for growth and collaboration. Once partners are in place, they and the founders exchange ideas, with both acting as subject matter experts and learning from each other in a mutually beneficial way. After completing the program, alumni keep in touch with one another, the DivInc community at large, and an extensive pool of experts and investors through regularly scheduled programs and networking events. Alumni commonly stay engaged with DivInc and other founders by serving as subject matter experts, supporters, and investors themselves.

### Why did JFF select DivInc?

DivInc's collaborative approach to supporting founders from populations that are underrepresented in high-growth industries offers participants the opportunity to not only grow their businesses, but also be recognized as experts in their industries. Founders build professional social capital through mentoring and coaching, exchanging ideas with peers and outside partners, and learning to amplify and expand their existing networks to establish key relationships across industries.

In addition, DivInc focuses not just on improving the outcomes for its individual founders, but also on changing the system within which they operate—striving to ensure that its founders are represented on panels, selected as keynote speakers at events, and included in conversations where decisions that impact the greater ecosystem are happening in order to continue to break down systemic barriers to future success.

**SEGMENTS**

- Elevating Current Assets
- Building Relationships
- Making Connections and Introductions
- Continuous Learning Journey

## THE HBCU CAREER CENTER AT A GLANCE

**thehbcucareercenter.com**

Founded in 2007

Headquarters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## MEASURES OF IMPACT

It engaged thousands of employers in 2021, over **1,200** of which posted jobs and internships on the HBCU Career Center platform.

Over **4,700 students** attended career training events in 2021, with over 80 HBCUs represented.

### What does the HBCU Career Center do?

The HBCU Career Center supports the career development of students and alumni of historically Black colleges and universities by bridging the gap between education and employment. The HBCU Career Center offers workshops to help HBCU students and alumni discover their "Real VISA" (values, interests, skills, and abilities), and better convey their qualifications during job interviews, while also building their awareness of career possibilities. The HBCU Career Center also organizes seminars and lectures with influential speakers and hosts a job board to improve student and alumni access to employment opportunities.

The founder, Marcia F. Robinson, provides thought leadership and advocacy around strategies employers can use to recruit more Black workers. She encourages a shift from traditional assessments of applicants (such as GPA and six-second resume screenings) in favor of an approach that is more holistic and allows students and alumni an opportunity to share their stories and unique qualifications.

### Why did JFF select The HBCU Career Center?

The HBCU Career Center supports the work of HBCUs' career services departments, providing workshops, toolkits, and seminars to support Black learners in their efforts to build professional social capital. With resources that have reached students and alumni from over 80 HBCUs, the HBCU Career Center fosters increased career awareness, exploration, and opportunities and creates connection points and networking opportunities for Black learners across these institutions.

The HBCU Career Center is a platform that aims to instill Black learners with pride and confidence for having attended HBCUs, and to support them so that they feel competent and qualified as they enter the labor market. The organization trains program participants to understand how to activate and mobilize the resources and connections their education gave them, and how individuals contribute to the vitality of their communities.

The content is highly attuned to labor market trends and is purposefully designed to increase student and alumni awareness of trends related to the future of work, and access to career pathways in fields that have low percentages of Black workers.

**SEGMENTS**

- Elevating Current Assets
- Building Relationships
- Making Connections and Introductions
- Career Onboarding

# HBCUvc

## HBCUVC AT A GLANCE

**hbcu.vc**

Founded in 2017

Headquarters in San Francisco, California

## MEASURES OF IMPACT

**More than 300 program participants** trained in VC fundamentals

**91** HBCU VC fellows in 2021

**40** summer interns in 2021

**35** emerging venture leaders in 2021

**13** Black founders funded in 2021

**$61,000** spent with Black businesses in 2021

**Fellows, interns, and graduate professionals welcomed from 21 HBCUs**

### What does HBCUvc do?

HBCUvc is reimagining the $1 billion innovation economy by increasing opportunities and access to capital for Black and Latinx entrepreneurs, and putting investing power in Black and Latinx investors' hands. HBCUvc is a direct response to the fact that 40 percent of venture capital (VC) investors attended one of just two schools, Harvard and Stanford, and startups founded by Harvard or Stanford alumni are attracting the most investment. HBCUvc uplifts and provides resources to the HBCU community, and shifts power dynamics in the VC industry.

HBCUvc's fellowship program creates a network of venture capitalists who are people of color. Fellows undergo technical training and are matched with an internship, providing them with access to mentors and opportunities to expand their networks. VC firms that host interns benefit from expanded access to networks of potential startups to invest in. HBCUvc vets employer partners to ensure mission alignment and to determine whether they can provide a supportive environment for HBCUvc fellows.

HBCUvc created the HBCUvc 31 under 31 list to elevate those who are overlooked and underestimated in the industry. Its Emerging Leaders Award program aims to "paint a fuller picture of who is coming up the ranks in VC today" and "show just how diverse the class is in terms of race, ethnicity, geography, and role."

### Why did JFF select HBCUvc?

HBCUvc is addressing the inequities faced by entrepreneurs who are people of color in as asset-based manner—by uplifting the talent and innovation found in the HBCU community. It is working to disrupt traditional patterns in VC investing by supporting Black and Latinx learners and workers to ultimately acquire check-writing roles and therefore invest in more Black- and Latinx-owned startups—thereby redistributing wealth in a way that begins to undo years of underinvestment in communities of color.

HBCUvc builds professional social capital through its core fellowship program by expanding and strengthening fellows' networks, fostering community, and using a culturally competent curriculum that not only teaches technical skills, but also covers topics such as the racial wealth gap. HBCUvc alumni pay it forward by helping with program recruiting, connections to internships and jobs, and community building.

**SEGMENTS**

- **Building Relationships**
- **Making Connections and Introductions**
- **Career Onboarding**

## HERE TO HERE

### HERE TO HERE AT A GLANCE

**heretohere.org**

Founded in 2017

Headquarters in the Bronx, New York

### MEASURES OF IMPACT

**14 partner high schools** in the Bronx have embedded work and career readiness into course curriculum and culture.

**75 large and small employers have committed to Here to Here's braided pathways approach.**

Here to Here has **created over 5,000 school-connected internship and youth apprenticeship opportunities** for Bronx high school students.

It has **championed 50 student leaders** shaping the citywide work-based learning movement.

**Has incubated four new models of braided pathways.**

**More than 100 practitioners** at high schools, City University of New York, nonprofits, public agencies, and businesses convened to codify braided pathways through Here to Here's Key Distinguishers.

### What does Here to Here do?

Based in the Bronx, Here to Here is an intermediary that brings together schools, businesses, and community-based organizations to bridge the gap between education and meaningful, family-sustaining careers for young people. This includes working with partners to weave work-based learning with postsecondary and career exploration into high school curricula. Here to Here's student-centered approach includes students self-identifying their interests before participating in internships, apprenticeships, and job shadowing with corporate partners. Students absorb real-world context to apply academic learning, while developing both technical and life skills and building a professional network. Here to Here provides employers with the framework to develop quality opportunities, provide the support that students need, and create a sense of belonging through strategies such as ensuring that Black students see and interact with Black employees.

Here to Here worked with CEOs and chief human resources officers from leading New York City employers to launch CareerWise New York, a youth apprenticeship program providing career opportunities in the region's growing industries, including IT, finance, and business operations. In 2020, over 25 CEOs from Fortune 100 companies formed the New York Jobs CEO Council, partnering with City University of New York (CUNY) and the New York City Department of Education to expand this model. Additionally, with the Braided Pathways Community of Practice, Here to Here is partnering with high schools, CUNY colleges, and community-based organizations to highlight best practices for integrated work-based learning and produce resources to encourage scale.

### Why did JFF select Here to Here?

Here to Here reimagines the high school experience for Black and Latinx students, centering professional social capital development as a core component of their success. Here to Here explicitly names social capital as one of the Key Distinguishers in its strategy, and as evidenced by the aforementioned initiatives, it encourages partners in New York City and across the country to adopt a shared focus on social capital. Here to Here also advocates for policies such as expanding New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program and increasing capacity at high schools so that advising can include career planning.

**SEGMENTS**


**Elevating Current Assets**


**Building Relationships**


**Making Connections and Introductions**


**Career Onboarding**

INROADS

## INROADS AT A GLANCE

**inroads.org**

Founded in 1970

Headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri

## MEASURES OF IMPACT

It has more than **30,000 alumni** in 48 states.

**100% of College Links scholars have been accepted to college.**

After graduation, **70%** of graduating interns accepted a job and **10%** pursued further studies.

### What does Inroads do?

Inroads advances the development of diverse groups of students through training, internships, mentorship, and access to networking opportunities that support their pathways from high school to college and throughout their careers. In the College Links program, high school students receive year-round coaching and mentoring as they participate in training workshops focused on college readiness and life skills to prepare them for college and career success. Inroads Internships, the flagship program, takes this support to the next level, continuing business skills training and providing experiential learning via corporate-based internships. Through this multi-year, paid experience, students receive support from their Inroads coaches as well as corporate partners and alumni who assist in growing their network, navigating an office environment, and establishing a pathway to a full-time career after graduation.

Inroads selectively partners with companies that are committed to its vision of increasing diversity in the corporate world, working with those who are focused on actively engaging with students, establishing a sense of community that ensures that they retain them year after year, and building a clear pathway to future career possibilities.

### Why did JFF select Inroads?

Inroads is working to establish more equitable pathways to college and careers for a diverse group of students by helping them develop professional social capital through work-based learning and a focus on growing a robust network of support. With an engaged alumni network acting as mentors, coaches, and sponsors for internships, Inroads ensures that students establish a sense of community and belonging from day one that builds the confidence they need to succeed. In addition, Inroads partners with lower-resourced career centers at select HBCUs to increase their capacity to provide hands-on training and access to professional opportunities, broadening the available pathways for students. The collective goal of Inroads programs is to build a more equitable economic landscape.

**SEGMENTS**

NSBE
NATIONAL SOCIETY OF BLACK ENGINEERS

### NSBE AT A GLANCE

**nsbe.org**

Founded in 1975

Headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia

### MEASURES OF IMPACT

Has over **8,800 collegiate** members and more than 4,400 professional members.

**It has more than 330 active collegiate chapters and over 80 active professional chapters.**

## What does NSBE do?

The National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) supports the engineering and technical aspirations of pre-collegiate, collegiate, and professional members through a comprehensive suite of programs. A common thread of NSBE's programming is how it builds professional social capital for members through community building, networking, technical and human skills training, access to professionals and employers, and pushing for increased Black representation and belonging in STEM-driven industries.

NSBE's Integrated Pipeline Programs are talent development programs co-developed with individual employer partners such as Honeywell and Cummins to support NSBE members until they transition to the workforce. IPPs support students as they enter college—through scholarships, mentorship by Black professionals affiliated with the employer partner, and internship opportunities—building on the foundation laid by NSBE youth programs. Many students are offered full-time positions with the employer partner. As members transition into their full-time roles, NSBE continues to provide supports such as technical boot camps and career fairs.

NSBE is also piloting its Career Academy for collegiate members, a program to complement participants' technical skills with professional and life skills (via leadership self-assessments, personal brand development, and more) and career planning resources. Additionally, NSBE supports its members in their efforts to navigate work environments that may be influenced by racism by helping students develop the language to name what is happening to them (for example, "microaggression") and tools to manage the situation.

## Why did JFF select NSBE?

NSBE's holistic and member-driven approach to supporting the Black community provides learners and workers with lifelong opportunities to build professional social capital. NSBE offers customized employer partnerships and equips students with resources, supports, and awareness to navigate an industry that is currently only 5 percent Black. It also pushes for more systemic change—for example, it is currently working to make significant changes to curricula to enable Black students to see themselves in the field of engineering, to enhance their sense of belonging, and to eventually encourage more Black professionals to pursue careers in engineering and other STEM fields.

**SEGMENTS**

**Building Relationships**

**Making Connections and Introductions**

**Career Onboarding**

## SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILDERS AT A GLANCE

**socialcapitalbuilders.com**

Founded in 2019

Headquarters in Gaithersburg, Maryland

## MEASURES OF IMPACT

Has supported over **1,200** jobseekers and students with social capital literacy training, with **77%** reporting increases in social capital connections.

Has introduced more than **970** human service professionals to its social capital framework to increase engagement, employment, and educational outcomes.

**Has recruited over 120 "opportunity guides"** to serve as social capital coaches and mentors for youth and adult jobseekers.

### What does Social Capital Builders do?

Social Capital Builders (SCB) works to increase social capital literacy (promoting awareness of what social capital is and why it's important) in young adults and in the organizations that serve them. It does this through social capital analysis and development—first having students map the people in their current networks and then giving them opportunities to build new relationships through sustained engagement with a small group of people over six or more months.

SCB connects young people free of charge with "opportunity guides"—adults who can bring them into their networks and share information about careers. SCB's Not Normally in Your Network initiative engages workforce stakeholders to explore how information flows in their networks, with the goal of encouraging them to direct it to people not normally in their networks. Both of these efforts are designed to disrupt what's known as homophily (the tendency for people to seek out and interact with people who are similar to themselves). SCB has also built a first-of-its-kind social capital curriculum to help students and families understand what social capital is and how to effectively use it to increase lifelong social and financial well-being.

SBC also works directly in both training and consulting capacities with organizations that are interested in incorporating a social capital framework into their program designs. It hosts monthly webinars in partnership with academic researchers who focus on social capital.

### Why did JFF select Social Capital Builders?

SCB is a Black-founded and -led organization that emphasizes strategic social capital building in a unique and powerful way. SCB designed for sustainability and scale from the beginning by being intentional about revenue generation. It also developed the My Opportunity Hub platform, a social capital building platform that organizations can subscribe to so that their students can connect with industry professionals.

SCB addresses social capital building from multiple angles and serves those who have been severely impacted by systemic inequities. Its approach to the work is rooted in equity and systems change: it's not only about what learners can do to get themselves into spaces, but also about how those spaces can direct information and resources to learners.

**SEGMENTS**

**Elevating Current Assets**

**Building Relationships**

## STREETWISE PARTNERS AT A GLANCE

**streetwisepartners.org**

Founded in 1997

Headquarters in New York City

## MEASURES OF IMPACT

The organization annually serves over **600 mentees** in New York City, Washington, DC, and Michigan through the support of over 50 corporations and 2,000 volunteer mentors.

Since its inception in 1997, StreetWise Partners has scaled to **transform the lives of 8,000 jobseekers** through the support of 15,000 volunteer mentors.

Of mentees who participate, **85% graduate from their programs** and 70% find employment within a year.

Mentees make about **100 new contacts** through the program, and see average salary increases ranging from $10,000 to more than $50,000 per year.

### What does StreetWise Partners do?

Working in New York, Washington, DC, and Michigan, StreetWise Partners pairs volunteer mentors with unemployed or underemployed adults in its 12-month Workforce Development Mentoring program to help them secure and maintain employment. The program starts with 13 weeks of structured, curriculum-driven mentoring and is followed by nine months of job acquisition and retention support. The curriculum is laser-focused on developing skills for building and activating professional social capital, including lessons on how to write resumes and cover letters, how to interview, and how to learn about different industries and build a personal career map.

StreetWise Partners is committed to improving career pathways to industries such as finance and accounting, IT, marketing and media, and HR, and it engages over 50 employers in various ways. StreetWise ensures alignment between its programming and the needs of local employers, engages employers to participate in workshops on topics such as financial literacy, and hosts mock-interview and speed-networking events. StreetWise partners also matches graduates with internships and job opportunities with partnering companies.

### Why did JFF select Streetwise Partners?

With its emphasis on high-growth and well-paying fields, StreetWise Partners is committed to improving the economic mobility of participants (including people of color, women of all backgrounds, first-generation college students, and immigrants and refugees) who are underserved by current systems. StreetWise works with participants who have technical training in an industry, in acknowledgment that learners and workers are best poised to build professional social capital when armed with both technical and life skills. It also works to help participants build a sense of occupational identity and belonging (for example, through an activity in which they craft elevator pitches—an exercise that inherently leads individuals to focus on their strengths).

StreetWise Partners does mentoring differently by ensuring that students are building professional social capital as a result of their mentoring relationships. Its structured curriculum ensures that there is a clear purpose and outcome to each interaction. StreetWise Partners is challenging systemic inequities in who has access to professional social capital and it's empowering its constituents to capitalize on career opportunities for upward economic mobility.

**SEGMENTS**

- Building Relationships
- Making Connections and Introductions
- Career Onboarding
- Continuous Learning Journey

STRIVE FOR COLLEGE

## STRIVE FOR COLLEGE AT A GLANCE

**striveforcollege.org**

**Ustrive.com**

Founded in 2007

Headquarters in California and Texas

## MEASURES OF IMPACT

Has served over **1.5 million students** engaged in all 50 states since its founding.

**95%** of students served by the Strive platform go on to study at college.

**90%** of Strive college students continue on to the next year of college.

**80% job acceptance rate** for students hired from Strive's talent acquisition partnerships with employers and **90% retention** after one year of employment.

### What does Strive for College do?

Strive is a free, online mentoring platform that connects high school and college students with mentors to work on education and career goals. Students build professional social capital through the easy-to-use platform, where they are the drivers of their experience—posting about areas where they need support and choosing their mentors, whether they're looking for one-time support on a resume or a longer-term relationship to explore career possibilities. Mentors come from Strive's extensive employer partnerships, which include Amgen, Deloitte, UBS, and UPS. Corporate partnerships take the form of employees serving as mentors, customers serving as mentors (for example, American Express offers as a card member benefit the opportunity to serve as a Strive mentor), or frontline employees and customers being mentored on the Strive platform. Employers also gain new talent pipelines, and students are connected to internship and job opportunities through employer partners.

Strive has a partnership with the Common Application, through which any fee waiver–eligible student is referred to Strive, thus setting up hundreds of thousands of students with the opportunity to be supported through the platform's mentor program. The virtual platform reduces costs and bandwidth typically needed both to support in-person programming and to match mentors and mentees based on geographic proximity.

### Why did JFF select Strive for College?

Strive makes professional social capital building scalable—its platform, which shifted to virtual in 2012, allows mentors and mentees from across the United States to be paired, and offers flexibility for the pairs to communicate at their own pace via messages and calls through the secure platform. The virtual model also allows Strive to continually innovate new programming at lower cost—for example, it recently partnered with a financial institution to create financial literacy resources for students.

Strive connects its students—89 percent of whom are students of color and over 35 percent of whom identify as Black—with people, resources, and support to help them succeed in the labor market. It also supports the mentors, who are required to go through "mindful mentoring" training, as they work through the differences in privilege between them and the students and discuss how to mitigate implicit bias.

**SEGMENTS**

**Building Relationships**

**Making Connections and Introductions**

**Career Onboarding**

# Spotlight on Educational Institutions and Employers

Numerous **postsecondary institutions** are offering students opportunities to build professional social capital through programs in their career centers, introductory courses that teach students life skills, and work-based learning programs. Here are two examples we found to be especially compelling:

- **The Work Program at Paul Quinn College (PQC):** A comprehensive offering that combines work, learning, and service activities, PQC's Work Program provides students with meaningful on- and off-campus work experiences. All full-time residential students at PQC participate in the Work Program and receive scholarships and stipends to help offset the cost of their tuition. The program students develop the skills necessary to be competitive in the 21st century job market, directly connecting their education with the world of work and opportunities to build professional social capital. PQC is an HBCU and the first minority-serving institution in the Work Colleges Consortium, a group of nine federally funded work colleges.

- **Ethnographies of Work:** A two-part, yearlong course that New York City's Guttman Community College pioneered in order to put the subject of work at the center of students' learning, Ethnographies of Work helps students prepare for careers by exploring the systems at play in the world of work, how their interests align with labor market demands, and how to build and utilize networks. Students use ethnographic methods to investigate a workplace or career of interest. This approach combines education and work—and helps students begin to build networks that will help them acquire professional social capital.

We also found many **employers** that are offering young workers opportunities to build professional social capital through initiatives such as summer internships, apprenticeships, and rotational programs. Here are three examples that we found compelling:

- **Deloitte** gives students at HBCUs an opportunity to gain firsthand experience in the professional services industry through its HBCU Emerging Leaders Scholarship Program. Participants can begin to build professional networks as they take part in activities in several different units of the company.
- **Allstate** offers internships for students, rotational programs for early-career workers, and an apprenticeship program for students at community or technical colleges.
- **American Express** offers a number of opportunities for students who identify as Black or Latinx.

# Trends to Watch

In our research for this market scan, we reviewed more than 200 organizations throughout the learn and work ecosystem to see how they were building professional social capital, in particular for Black learners and workers. Here are some of the innovative strategies, tactics, and activities we are seeing at organizations that meet the moment:

### Helping people develop a sense of identity and hone their ability to tell stories about their journeys in their own words.

These are essential first steps that give people the foundational skills they need to begin building professional social capital. Learners and workers who are able to not only tell others about their skills and experiences, but also convey why they are interested in a particular career path or a job—and at the same time offer insights about the personal journey that led them there—will be more likely to connect with others on a deeper level and make lasting impressions on the people they meet. Innovative programs often focus in particular on strengthening participants' identity development and storytelling skills, with activities that give people opportunities to shape, refine, and share their own stories while learning from the stories of others in settings where they are guided by facilitators who also have stories to share. A couple of compelling examples include the Minorities in Healthcare Mentorship Program, which works with learners to explore strengths and weaknesses as they relate to their career paths, and NSBE's Career Academy, whose objectives include helping participants learn best practices for developing their personal brands.

## Building new facilities so people can make connections with one another in person.

While the world has learned that education and work can happen virtually, there's no true substitute for face-to-face interactions: Sharing space with other people, sensing their social cues, and having the same experiences they're having at the same moment are powerful. Programs are acknowledging this by building new physical spaces for connection. For example, the Propel Center has a new facility in Atlanta that's meant to "serve as a catalytic epicenter of learning that provides HBCU students with the knowledge, skills, tools and resources necessary to transform our nation's talent pipeline and workforce." We've also seen that several HBCUs are receiving grants to build facilities that will host community activities, such as the Delaware State University's new Riverfront building and Howard University's new music business center. And while working to create opportunities for people to safely meet in person, programs also continue to offer virtual experiences in order to engage as many people as possible and not limit access to services.

## Offering short-term training programs that include activities related to professional social capital.

In a trend that's especially evident in IT, many employers are starting to embrace skills-based hiring and are no longer requiring a four-year degree for every job. That has led to a rise in demand for short-term training programs, and innovative providers of such programs are adding professional social capital to the topics they cover. Programs such as Byte Back, npower, America on Tech, All Star Code, AI for All, and Creating IT Futures have adopted promising models that effectively combine skills training with content focused on the development of life skills and social awareness. For example, All Star Code aims to help learners develop an entrepreneurial mindset, AI for All connects its curriculum with current-day social justice topics such as racial bias in artificial intelligence, and Creating IT Futures and others offer job placement support.

## Aiming to have a positive impact on the communities they serve.

In addition to helping individual workers and learners achieve career success, programs that give people the skills to build professional social capital can in turn, help build vibrant communities. Organizations whose mission is to help entrepreneurs and company founders succeed can be especially effective in achieving this goal because startups that survive and thrive have a downstream impact on the economic and social prosperity of the communities in which they do business.

Compelling examples of organizations that have effective approaches to doing this type of work in Black communities include Visible Hands, Black Girl Ventures, the Oakland Black Business Fund, Black and Brown Founders, and MORTAR. They not only invest in Black entrepreneurs and founders but also help them create professional social capital by connecting them with established networks, organizing pitch competitions to showcase ideas, and offering personalized advice and technical assistance.

This same principle holds true for other organizations like the HBCU Career Center, which sees its work with individual students as inextricably linked to the prosperity of the communities those students come from.

# Recommendations for the Future

# Recommendations for the Future: Deliberate, Explicit, and Equitable Approaches to Building Professional Social Capital

Currently, building professional social capital is only incorporated into education, training, and career development programs in a piecemeal way. The topic is covered in standalone activities and lessons that typically aren't part of broader and more holistic approaches. Nonetheless, there are organizations that have adopted effective strategies for helping people build professional social capital, and for this market scan, we identified specific strategies we see leading-edge programs employing that help Black learners and workers build professional social capital.

In addition to embracing these best practices, the most innovative programs are—as all programs should be—pushing where they can on **the individual and environmental factors** that both facilitate and prevent the development of professional social capital. And the most innovative programs also engage in the broader ecosystem via partnerships and advocacy in order to support systemic solutions.

We believe that **all programs must follow their lead and find the most effective ways to *create conditions at the individual level*, and *control for conditions at the systems level*, that help ensure that learners and workers can fully develop and readily activate their professional social capital.**

To get to a world in which professional social capital is equitably accessible to all, we offer the following recommendations for education, training, and career development programs. These recommendations outline steps programs should take and strategies they should adopt to ensure that all workers and learners—and in particular Black workers and learners—have the skills and opportunities they need to build social capital. We built our recommendations around six characteristics that we think all programs should have—three related to creating the right conditions at the individual level, and three related to controlling conditions at the systems level.

To create the right conditions for building professional social capital at the individual level, programs should be human-centered, asset-based, and execution-oriented, and they should embody those qualities in the following ways:

## 1 Human-centered: Programs should lay a strong foundation for individuals to engage authentically.

Providers should design their programs around the fact that learners and workers can better build professional social capital if they are able to engage authentically in lessons and activities and bring their true selves to this work without fear of judgment or bias. Ensuring that Black participants see other Black learners and workers ***represented*** in positions of authority, are given support to build ***self-awareness and self-confidence***, and are surrounded by cultures of ***belonging*** can help create safe spaces where participants can confidently reach out, take risks, and consistently see themselves as worthy of opportunities.

## 2 Asset-based: Programs should elevate participants' current relationships and resources, rather than only encouraging them to acquire new ones, and they should promote two-way learning between both parties in activities that pair less experienced individuals with more senior colleagues or advisors, such as mentors, coaches, or sponsors.

Providers should design their programs around the fact that learners and workers can better build professional social capital if programs utilize a strengths-based approach and begin with mapping participants' current networks. The strategy of taking an asset-based approach also extends to relationship-building activities, such as mentoring, coaching, and sponsoring—mentors, coaches, and sponsors should make a point of highlighting and celebrating the strengths of the people they are working with.

## 3 Execution-oriented: Programs should work with learners and workers on *how* to develop and leverage professional social capital, rather than stopping at *who* and *what* they know.

Learners and workers must be prepared to build, maintain, and mobilize networks throughout their lives. Programs should not just teach and demonstrate; they should also provide opportunities to practice skills that allow learners and workers to access and mobilize their resources to propel and support them in their education and career journeys. Simply put, ***it's the how***—not just the *what* (information) and the *who* (connections). Learners and workers may see meeting people and digesting information as straightforward processes. But they won't derive the full value of professional social capital unless they truly understand how to leverage those relationships and utilize the information, and how to maintain their networks and use their resources to improve their opportunities for economic advancement.

To control systems-level conditions that either facilitate or restrict the development of professional social capital building, programs should be strategically-embedded, systems-enabled, and equitable, and they should express those qualities in the following ways:

4

**Strategically-embedded: Content related to professional social capital shouldn't be isolated in one-off activities and lessons. It should be incorporated throughout the design of the program, and the importance of providing Black learners and workers with skills and strategies for building professional social capital should inform the program provider's partnerships and advocacy work.**

Programs should look to models like work-based learning and innovative career onboarding initiatives that strategically embed professional social capital in their offerings. These programs by design connect education and work, intentionally embed professional social capital development into all aspects of their programming, and allow for customization to meet the specific needs of individual learners and workers.

## 5 Systems-enabled: Providers should build structures and processes into their programs that help them hold themselves accountable to their goals and visions.

Strong systems can help organizations better serve learners and workers and hold themselves accountable to meeting their goals. For example, programs should build and maintain a strong data infrastructure that allows them to gather, disaggregate, and analyze information on program performance so they have the insights they need to continually improve their offerings. Strong feedback loops both within the organization and with the constituents they're serving also support ongoing program improvement efforts. Additionally, programs should take advantage of technology-enabled applications that enable them to significantly expand the number of learners and workers they connect with in their outreach efforts—and in turn use those tools to help learners and workers expand their networks by making connections that wouldn't have been possible through face-to-face interactions.

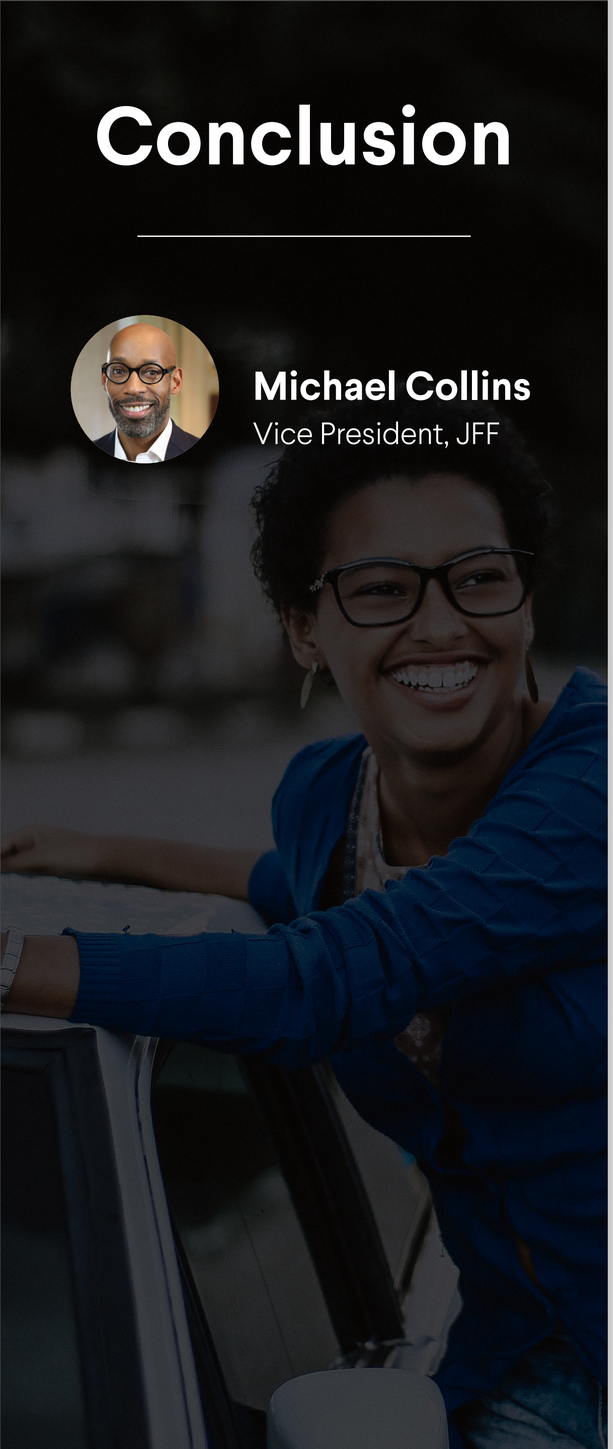
## 6 Equitable: Providers should deliberately create inclusive environments and disrupt implicit bias and structural racism.

Programs should be designed to break down barriers like unwritten standards of "professional" behavior that limit access to networks and workplaces. They should call attention to non-inclusive workplace norms that favor the practices and habits of a specific demographic group, and push for the adoption of more equitable standards of conduct that reflect and incorporate the behaviors and attitudes of a range of cultures. And they should emphasize that disrupting systemic barriers is a collective effort that involves all learners and workers actively participating in their networks and communities. The message shouldn't be that the onus is on individuals to overcome the specific barriers they encounter on their own. Rather, programs should make it clear that every step, no matter how small it seems—accepting a learner's request for an informational interview, getting actively involved in alumni groups—benefits the entire network and strengthens everyone's social capital.

# Conclusion



**Michael Collins**
Vice President, JFF



# Making Professional Social Capital Explicit in Education and Work

In an ideal, equitable society, all learners and workers would be able to build professional social capital and use it to access the information they need to make good decisions about their work and learning journeys, and to forge connections that help them expand their worlds—and everyone's social capital would be valued.

For many learners and workers—and especially Black learners and workers—who have achieved some degree of success in their educations and careers, professional social capital is the missing piece whose absence prevents them from accessing opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential. All education, training, and workforce development programs should adopt strategies that make fostering professional social capital a core component of their missions. No longer can the need for professional social capital be neglected or merely implied or assumed.

In the current labor market, "As much as 80 percent of jobs are filled through networking, which leaves students from less privileged backgrounds at a disadvantage," JFFLabs Executive Director Kristina Francis and Andy Chan of Wake Forest University wrote in THE Campus. In light of that reality, we need to do two things: ensure that Black Americans can build professional social capital that provides them with the same degree of access to information about job openings as their white peers, and disrupt the systemic barriers of favoritism and bias that have long prevented them from accessing those opportunities.

Moreover, while both Black and white jobseekers are more successful in the labor market if they use their networks to find jobs, "network-based methods are less likely to lead to job offers for African Americans," according to an article in American Sociological Review. Researchers David S. Pedulla and Devah Pager found that, compared with more formal methods of searching for a job, a "network-based job search . . . results in a higher probability of receiving a job offer for both Black and white job seekers. However, these benefits are significantly smaller for Black than for white job seekers."

What's the difference between Black and white jobseekers' networks? In this market scan, we argue that the difference is the breadth and depth of the professional social capital they have opportunities to build.

If developing and utilizing professional social capital were explicit parts of the education and workforce journeys of all Black learners and workers, Black Americans would see stronger returns from their networks. They would have better access to connections and information with value in the labor market, and they would have the know-how to build, utilize, and mobilize their networks in ways that ensure labor market success. Additionally, with stronger social capital, Black learners and workers would be better able to successfully contend with systemic challenges (such as workplace bias or discrimination in the college application process).

A key lesson to impart is that all professional social capital has value. Programs should encourage Black learners and workers to remember that everyone in their networks has something to offer, and that they shouldn't overlook friends and relatives or former coworkers and classmates in junior positions at their organizations.

To ensure that all Americans have equitable opportunities for economic advancement, we need to be more intentional about helping all learners and workers build professional social capital.

As Pedulla and Pager wrote in American Sociological Review, the “informal nature of networks of opportunity appears highly consequential for the perpetuation of racial inequality in the United States.”

Therefore, we must be deliberate about building professional social capital for all learners and workers, in particular Black learners and workers. Programs can use current resources like the Clayton Christensen Institute’s playbook for building social capital for students for ideas on how to incorporate and measure strategies to do so.

While we don’t know what the future of work looks like, it’s clear that skills, credentials, and degrees will not be enough to ensure that Black Americans succeed in the labor market at the same rate as their white peers. Professional social capital is a key component they need to navigate and succeed in their careers—and share their prosperity with fellow members of their communities.


Image courtesy of Inroads


## About JFFLabs Market Scans

At Jobs for the Future, we believe that innovation and technology, in concert with continued transformation of traditional systems and policy change, can revolutionize the learn and work ecosystem and, in turn, the ways in which we all live, learn, and work.

Our JFFLabs market scans are based on deep dives into innovation and technology landscapes filled with solutions that are transforming learning and working. Our goal is to identify opportunities, trends, market dynamics, and impact investment insights. Those efforts yield comprehensive reports that feature mission-aligned companies and nonprofit organizations of all sizes, from seed-stage startups founded by inspiring innovators and entrepreneurs to growth-stage organizations that are already creating significant social impact and business value. We review hundreds of organizations to assess their approach to and concern for social impact, and the traction their efforts have gained. We identify the most innovative and advanced technologies and programs connecting people to rewarding jobs and careers, valuable education and training opportunities, effective workforce and education systems, and equitable, resilient opportunities for economic security and mobility—at scale.

In developing this market scan, we sought guidance from a council of leaders focused on professional social capital that JFF formed to advise us on our work on building professional social capital for Black learners and workers.

## JFF's Commitment to Racial Economic Equity

As part of JFF's mission to drive economic advancement for all, we have redoubled our commitment to achieving racial economic equity. To reach this goal, we are drawing on JFF's decades of education and workforce development expertise to dismantle the structural, systemic, and institutional barriers that have limited Black economic advancement.

In an approach outlined in our newly drafted framework to advance Black learners and workers, *Achieving Black Economic Equity: A Purpose-Built Call to Action*, JFF is partnering with stakeholders across the learn and work ecosystem to focus on two foundational priorities: disrupting persistent occupational segregation and developing innovative solutions to eradicate the longstanding Black-white wealth gap.

This market scan, which is focused on the need to advance professional social capital, is relevant to both of those priorities: social capital is a critical asset to help ensure that Black learners are aware of and can access and advance in high-growth and high-wage sectors of the economy; and it is also a key resource to advance financial inclusion, Black entrepreneurship, and other strategies that support the creation and preservation of generational wealth for Black families.

Future JFF work will continue to build upon our call to action by identifying, disseminating information about, and supporting implementation of innovative programs, policies, and strategies that successfully address systemic barriers to equity for Black Americans and promote opportunities for economic advancement and wealth-building.

For more information about JFF's racial economic equity work, read *Achieving Black Economic Equity*.

## More From JFF on Professional Social Capital

This market scan is the first in our efforts to raise awareness and encourage adoption of efforts to promote the development of professional social capital as key components of career development, education, and workforce training programs. Here are two other elements of the work JFF has undertaken in connection with this market scan:

### Forthcoming Framework

With funding from University of Phoenix, JFF conducted the in-depth research that this market scan is based on. We analyzed existing strategies for promoting the development of professional social capital that employers, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education are implementing. The goal of this market scan is to help inform the creation of an evidence-based, actionable framework and raise awareness about the role of professional social capital in economic advancement. In addition to raising awareness, the framework developed by JFF and University of Phoenix will shape more expansive strategies to provide Black learners and workers with supports that put them in a better position to form strong professional networks that increase access to career navigation tools and quality information, lead to meaningful relationships with champions and sponsors in the workplace, and result in lifelong networks that lead to equitable employment and career advancement.

# Advisory Council

JFF established an advisory council of leaders focused on professional social capital who offered input to this market scan, and will lend their perspectives to the framework and provide crucial insights on sharing our research findings with the broader field.

**Christine Y. Cruzvergara**
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## About Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future (JFF) drives transformation of the American workforce and education systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

## About JFFLabs

JFFLabs bridges JFF's traditional field leadership with new relationships, practices, and business models. We partner with visionary entrepreneurs, Fortune 500 companies, and investors to foster innovative solutions that create positive change in education and workforce systems. We are proud to identify and scale the most innovative and advanced technologies with the potential to transform America's education and workforce systems.

## About JFF's Language Choices

JFF is committed to using language that promotes equity and human dignity, rooted in the strengths of the people and communities we serve. We develop our content with the awareness that language can perpetuate privilege but also can educate, empower, and drive positive change to create a more equitable society. We will continually reevaluate our efforts as language usage continues to evolve.

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University of Phoenix®

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## About University of Phoenix

University of Phoenix is continually innovating to help working adults enhance their careers in a rapidly changing world. Flexible schedules, relevant courses, interactive learning, and Career Services for Life® help students more effectively pursue career and personal aspirations while balancing their busy lives. For more information, visit phoenix.edu.

*“While Black Americans have made recent gains in educational attainment, too many Black learners and workers experience a talent marketplace that does not fully value their existing networks or provide opportunities to build relationships that contribute to career advancement. Jobs for the Future’s new market scan provides insights for higher education institutions and employers to support Black learners and workers in forming and leveraging strong professional social capital that increases access to quality information, meaningful relationships with champions in the workplace, and results in lifelong networks that lead to economic advancement.”*

— John Woods, Provost and Chief Academic Officer for the University of Phoenix and Executive Director for the University of Phoenix Career Institute


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