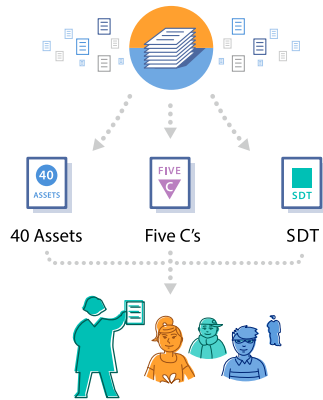Three major approaches useful for designing youth programming have strong evidence:
40 Developmental Assets™, the Five Cs, and Self-Determination Theory.

40 Assets   Five C's   SDT

40 Developmental Assets™

Five Cs

Self-Determination Theory

The Five Cs emerged from youth development practice, the 40 Developmental Assets™ from a research institute, and SDT from psychological theories about motivation. Despite their varied origins they all confirm the same three factors.

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Resources

Development frameworks in Youth Who Thrive: A review of critical factors and effective practices for 12-25 year olds [PDF]
Common critical factors across program frameworks [PDF]