Using Participatory Evaluation to Dramatically Improve Employment of Boston Youth

Marija Bingulac, Center for Social Policy
Rachele Gardner, YouthHub Boston
Susan R. Crandall, Center for Social Policy

UMASS BOSTON

CENTER FOR SOCIAL POLICY
JOHN W. McCORMACK GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF POLICY AND GLOBAL STUDIES

YOUTH HUB

CODMAN SQUARE

#CWC2016

Today's Objective

How can we leverage <u>participatory methods of measurement</u> and <u>innovation</u>, rooted in the <u>community context</u>, **to increase youth employment in economically disadvantaged communities***?*

Today's Agenda

I. About YouthHub and Crisis of Youth Unemployment

II. Using the PAR Model

III. PAR as data, engagement, and leadership development tool

IV. Small group work: applying what you heard

V. Open discussion

Why youth employment?

- **Top issue** identified through community process

- Youth employment is a critical indicator of **economic mobility**

- Youth employment has been shows to have significant impact on **education**, **economic**, **safety**, and **health** outcomes amongst low-income and youth of color.

- Youth employment contributes to improved **community** and **societal** outcomes.

- National crisis of youth employment in last 15 years

- Locally in Boston, youth employment has fallen from **54%** in 1999 to **31%** in 2014.

- In summer 2013, only 9% of low-income, black male youth had jobs. **Compared to nearly 50%** of middle-upper income, white male youth.

- In Codman Square, **90%** of youth say they want or need a job. On average, **only 25% are employed**.
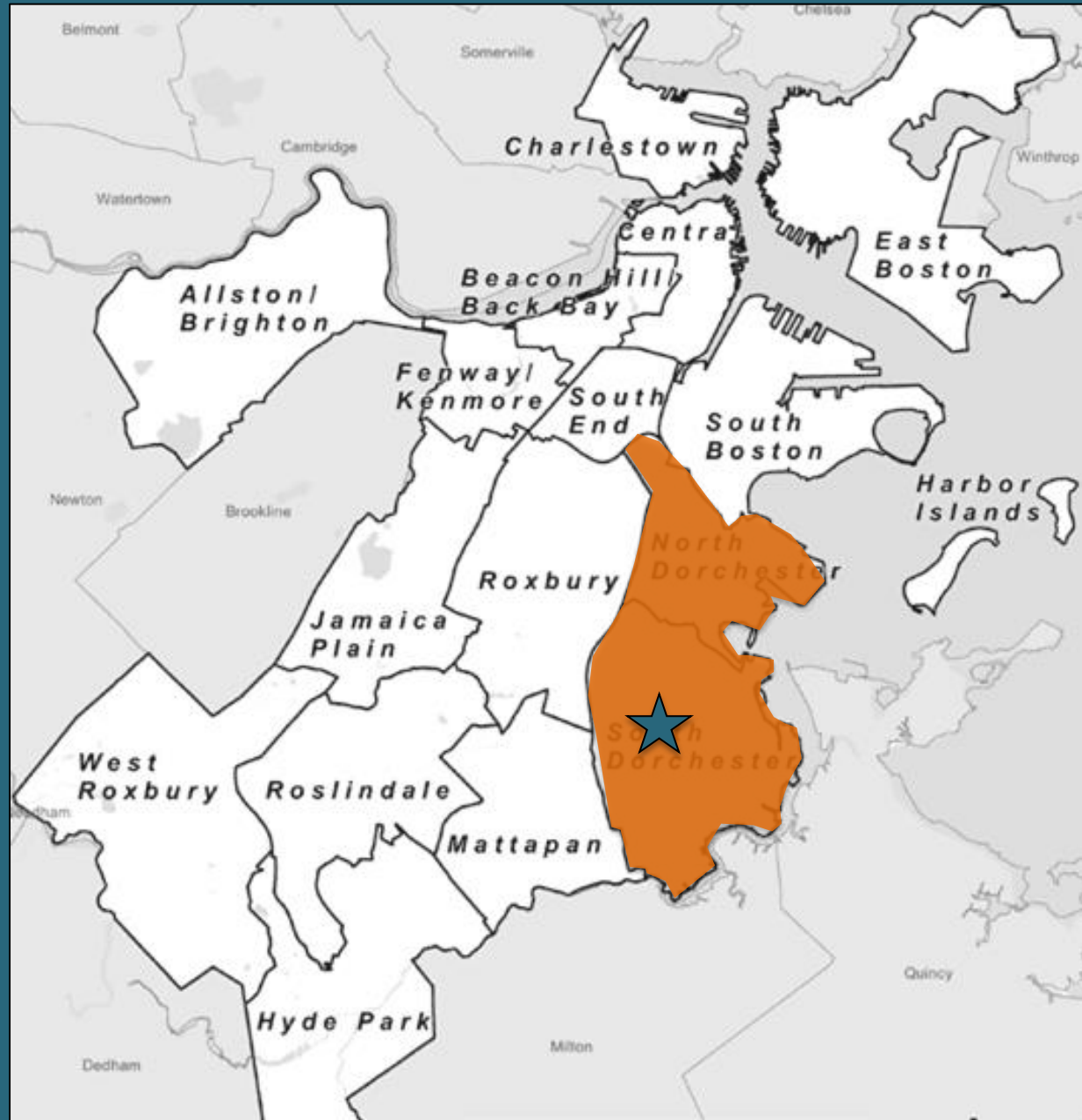
About Youth Hub

Youth Hub seeks to increase, improve, and innovate youth employment because...

"every youth who wants a job should have a job."

Neighborhood Context

➤ Boston
➤ Dorchester
➤ Codman Square

Youth Hub's Approach

Youth Hub utilizes participatory methods of measurement and innovation, rooted in the community context to build local leadership and capacity to achieve **breakthrough results** in Codman Square and beyond.

Can we increase youth employment from 25% to 60% in 5 years?

Participatory Action Research

Youth-Led and Rooted in Community
1. Identify problem
2. Observe/collect data
3. Reflect on findings/Interpret data
4. Plan/innovate for change
5. Act/implement

Iterative Process

1) Framing the Problem

- ✓ Why is it important to the community?
- ✓ How is it experienced at the community level?
- ✓ Who is focusing on this issue in the community?
- ✓ What should be our focus and approach as a community?

Forming a Share Logic Model

Interventions/Ideas

Youth
- Create support network for youth
- Identify and support youth at risk
- Increase funding for youth jobs via advocacy and "impact investing" sources
- Training for skills and job readiness
- Career counseling/job placement

Employers
- Business people meet youth before hiring
- Create support network for businesses
- Identify "youth ready" employers

Local Conditions
- Create list of entry jobs available
- Strengthen community-school linkages

Influencing Factors

Youth Employability
- "Employability" indicators include education, career plans, risk factors, personal development, etc.

Employer Readiness
- "Youth ready & willing" factors (ability to train, flexibility, etc.)

Local Conditions
- Neighborhood context, including job market (number & type of jobs available)

Outcomes

Youth Employment
- Percentage of youth with jobs
- Pay levels (as age-skill appropriate)
- Quality of jobs (e.g., career vs. temp.; "hard skills"/marketable; meaningful)

Employer Success
- Improved results
- Increased social impact
- Increased support from community

Community Wellbeing
- Reduced poverty
- Business growth
- Reduced violence
- Reduced incarceration
- Increased civic engagement

2) Collecting Data

Objectives:

- Better understand issue (baseline, barriers, challenges, opportunities)
- Build collective and common knowledge and unite around community goals
- Inform innovation/intervention

Methods:

- Youth-led
- Community-based
- In-person surveys
- Door-to-door
- Focus Groups
- Use of technology
- Goal-oriented

3) Data Observation and Interpretation

- Participatory analysis
  - What does it say?
  - What does it mean?
  - What else do we need to know?
  - What do we do with it?

Key Data Observations

- 25% youth employment rate (1/2 that of youth from middle- to upper-income families)

- 90% of youth want or need a job

  Top reasons:
  1. Buy things they need (62%)
  2. Save money (59%)
  3. Learn new skills (49%)
  4. Help support family (47%)

- Over 90% of youth contribute to family needs with paycheck when employed

- Low access rate of existing employment resources
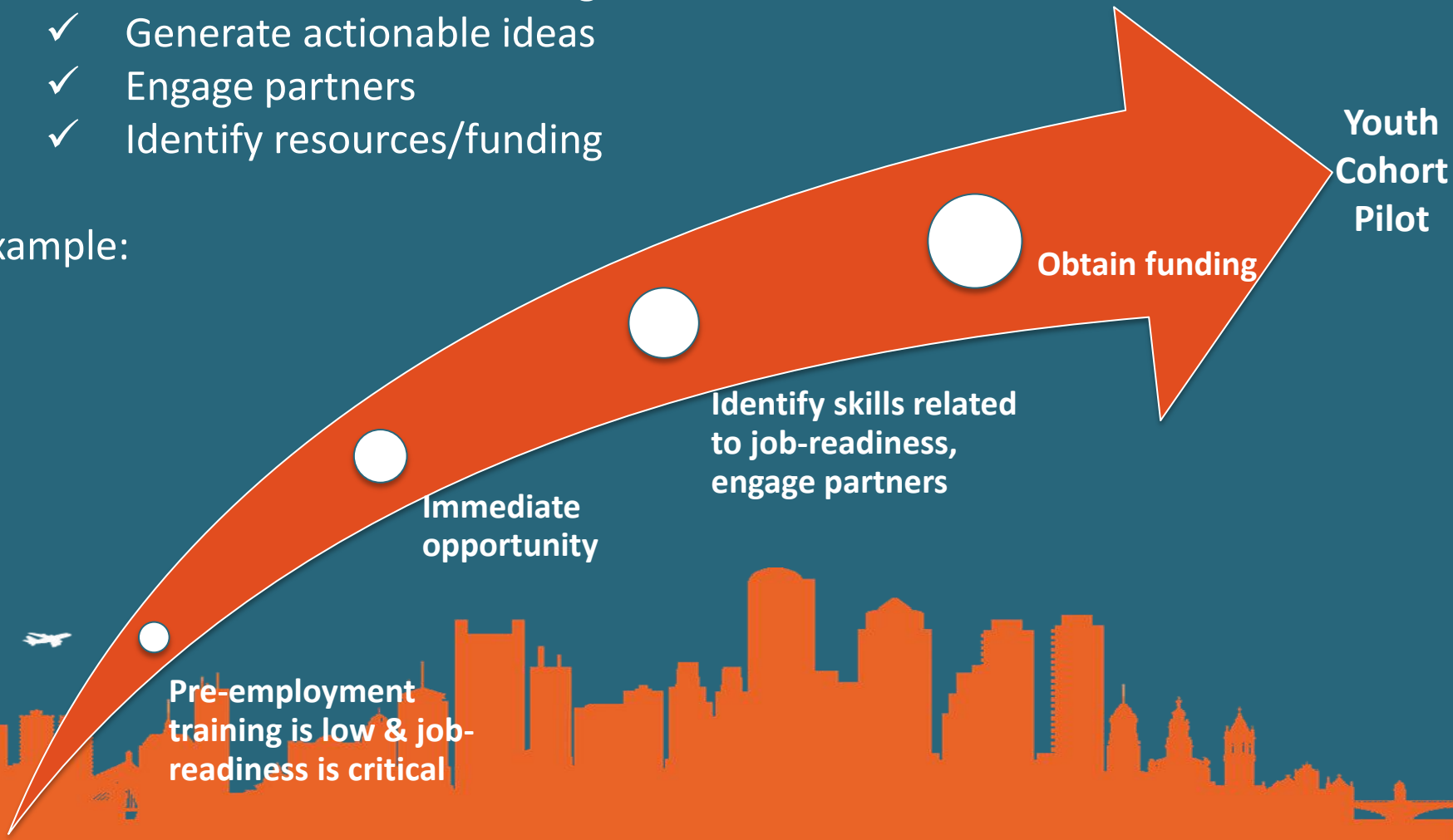
Key Data Observations

- Nearly 75% have never had job-readiness training

- Top barriers to employment (expressed by youth):
    1. Can't find opportunities
    2. Lack of job skills/experience
    3. Lack of job-readiness related skills & support

- #1 method of job searching = looking online (2014)

- Most youth find jobs through their network (family, friends, school counselor, etc.)

4) Plan and Innovate

- Participatory innovation methods with youth and partners
  - ✓ Identify key levers – barriers and opportunities
  - ✓ Think short, medium, long-term
  - ✓ Generate actionable ideas
  - ✓ Engage partners
  - ✓ Identify resources/funding

Example:

Youth Cohort Pilot

Obtain funding

Identify skills related to job-readiness, engage partners

Immediate opportunity

Pre-employment training is low & job-readiness is critical

5) Act and Implement

Youth Employability	Employer Readiness	Community Supports
▪ Youth Cohorts ▪ Workshops & Trainings ▪ Coaching ▪ Peer Leadership ▪ Referrals to Partners	• Outreach • Supports • Recruitment/matching	• Job fair • Targeted promotion and outreach w/ partners • Job Search Application

Data Collection Outcomes
By the numbers:

- Over 300 surveys completed in 2014-2015 (roughly 20-25% of total youth population)
- 160+ youth enrolled in "Membership Community"
- ~20 youth trained as surveyors
- 8 youth-led focus groups

Value of PAR & Emergent Opportunities:

- Leadership development
- Building social trust
- Youth engagement
- Community recognition and support
- Participatory management
- New partnerships, increased funding
- Model replication in other neighborhoods/ addressing different issues