

URBAN-Millennium 10 Measures Event – December 4, 2014 – Overview

Purpose

The purpose of the URBAN-Millennium 10 Measures event was to convene people interested in community-based measures to learn from local efforts and to identify shared interests, as a basis for promoting continued learning and development on this topic.

Description

The event was organized into two parts: 1) a case-study presentation with Q&A, and 2) sub-groups formed by topic to explore measurement applications to priority topics, including: gentrification/displacement, economic vitality, program evaluation, and neighborhood quality of life as well as youth employment.

The event positioned neighborhood measures in the context of related organizing trends in the civic sector—including “big data,” “impact investing,” “collective impact,” “participatory budgeting,” and social media. These trends and others are generating increased interest in how neighborhood residents and stakeholders can create and use community-based data to identify priorities, inform problem-solving, spur innovation, and improve outcomes.

There were about 40 participants, including researchers, institutional stakeholders (including health center and university administrators), and community activists from several Boston neighborhoods. One attendee was a state representative in Massachusetts who remarked that the survey data featured in the presentation could help her make better decisions about allocating funds for youth development and employment. Researchers in the room noted that this was one of the best examples of participatory research they had seen, and that it raised a number of useful questions to guide further development.

Case Presentation

The case-study presentation described how community-based measures are being used to improve youth employment in a high-poverty neighborhood in Codman Square (population ~25,000) in Boston. The case featured a participatory approach, in which a neighborhood coalition on youth employment—called the Youth HUB—convened diverse stakeholders (non-profit leaders, school representative, business owner, faith leader, as well as youth) to work with research and consulting partners to identify key issues, develop a measurement system, collect data, and then interpret results to develop innovative solutions for improving youth employment.

The presentation itself included two youth surveyors who reported on their experience going door-to-door in the community. They talked about the challenges, such as when they were chased away by a protective grandparent; and the inspirations, like the appreciation expressed by their peers and others in the neighborhood for helping them find jobs.

Since the initial survey, youth and other neighborhood stakeholders have participated in “innovation circles” to interpret the data and discuss action implications with institutional players. For example, data showed that many neighborhood youth were unaware of state-funded summer jobs; others had trouble filling out applications. The Youth HUB and several youth employment organizations are now collaborating on a door-to-door campaign and jobs fair to raise awareness and offer application assistance in the neighborhood. Their goal is to increase employment among youth age 15-19 from 30% in 2014 to 40% (or higher) in 2015. (Here are links to the [slide presentation](#) and a [video](#) of the talk.)

Learning Agenda on Community-based Measurement

- What is the nature of problem we want to address (e.g., youth employment, gentrification)?
- What are the measurement challenges that we face related to this issue?

- What are outcomes and influencing factors to measure?
- What are data sources—public, institutional, individual/group?
- How can we collect and analyze data, and use it to generate solutions and engage participation?
- What are additional challenges for building an effective community-measurement system (e.g., technologies, local stewardship, institutional partners, etc.)?

Specific measurement questions raised by the Codman Square/Youth Employment case

- What are pros and cons of using technologies (in this case, iPads) to collect data?
- How did you address difficulties applying a strictly randomized approach to data collection, and what are implications for validity of findings?
- Emoji's (used to indicate responses for some survey questions) may help to engage respondents, but do they also bias responses towards positive ratings?
- Are people who participated in the door-to-door surveys going to participate in forums to review the results and generate solutions?
- How to engage people in community to support youth getting jobs?
- How quickly will the community measures initiative (led by youth surveying youth) lead to more jobs (other than those gained by youth surveyors)?
- Did engagement in surveys lead to ongoing organizing work by those involved (youth, residents, partners, etc.)?
- How did you capture the experience of surveyors?
- How can you sustain this type of initiative?

Policy-making and community measures

There are a number of policy-related questions raised by the Youth HUB measurement initiative, such as:

- How determine indices for community wellbeing that align with city- and state-wide policy objectives, which can be measured down to the census tract (or block area) level?
- What are appropriate requirements for making institutional data (e.g., on aggregate grade achievement of students) more accessible for community-level problem solving?
- How ensure policy-makers have access to valid community-level data to inform decision-making about policy-making and funding allocations? (This question was raised by a state representative who attended the meeting.)
- What types investments should state and local governments make to support data collection, reporting, and skilled interpretation for community level problem-solving and advocacy (e.g., for participatory budgeting)?

Next steps

The event attracted a core group of people with shared interest in community measures, and it has spurred collaboration or strengthened connections among participants who are working on applications in this area. For example, Youth HUB members connected with peers working in another community on a similar initiative and planned follow-up meetings to share their experiences, applications, and learning challenges in more detail. Several participants have connected with an emerging community of practice that includes measures practitioners and researchers citywide, and URBAN participants are bringing more attention to distinctive opportunities and applications at the neighborhood level.

More information: See the [Youth HUB case study slide presentation](#) and an edited [video of the talk](#). For more on the broader Civic Stewardship Initiative in Codman Square, see a related [CSI presentation](#).