

EXCELLENCE IN ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING (EXCEL)



**EQUIPPING
BALTIMORE YOUTH
& EMERGING ADULTS
FOR OPPORTUNITY**

Coppin State University
College of Business
Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship
July 1, 2024



Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship (CSE)

The Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship (CSE) is the epicenter of entrepreneurship research, teaching, and practice at Coppin State University and within the community. The primary goal of the CSE is to improve entrepreneurial outcomes in the West Baltimore community and contribute to economic growth globally. Established in December 2020, the CSE advocates for transdisciplinary approaches to business and economic development. Through this advocacy, the CSE provides direction across all areas of study and industry, infusing ingenuity and enhancing economic velocity and mobility in the broader economy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn.

Peter Drucker

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.

Zora Neale Hurston

In the heart of our bustling urban landscape lies a beacon of hope and innovation, a Baltimore where every young mind is nurtured to its fullest potential. This Charm City is not limited to textbooks and lectures; it is a vibrant tapestry of hands-on learning and entrepreneurial exploration. Here, the dreams of the youth have no limits, as they are empowered with the tools to turn their imagined futures into lived realities. As a new skyline rises from a weary Inner Harbor, so do the aspirations of every community, guided by a collective “North Star” of fulfilled dreams and equitable prosperity. In the streets of our beloved “Bmore,” the underestimated and underserved find their voices amplified, their talents celebrated, and their paths illuminated by the promise of a brighter tomorrow. This is more than just a city; it is a testament to the boundless power of education, imagination, and opportunity. Welcome to a place where excellence in entrepreneurial learning is not just rhetoric, but an intentional process of equipping Baltimore youth and emerging adults for opportunity. ***Welcome to the Baltimore we built, together.***

This vision of what is possible is the driving force behind the Excellence in Entrepreneurial Learning (EXCEL) research project. This project was initiated to gain an understanding of entrepreneurship-related instructional efforts in Baltimore City targeting individuals aged 16 to 29. Inspired by the 2017 Annie E. Casey Foundation report “Reshaping Workforce Development in Baltimore: Ensuring Community Voice and Expertise Guide Us,” the project addresses the strong desire among Baltimore’s teens and emerging adults for inclusive entrepreneurship opportunities that are equitable and benefit their communities. Given this expressed desire, conducting studies like the EXCEL project becomes imperative.

The Coppin State University Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship, part of the university’s College of Business, is honored to engage in pioneering applied research. With 124 years of experience and community trust, the institution has a proven track record of delivering valuable education and empowering historically marginalized communities. Consequently, it is uniquely positioned to

spearhead community-focused academic exploration, combining its deep community roots with innovative, transdisciplinary research approaches aimed at continual improvement.

The EXCEL Project Timeline (Appendix A) outlines a two-year journey, beginning with initial discussions between the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Coppin State University leadership in the summer of 2022. This was followed by an agreement on research design and funding in the fall of 2022, researcher training in the winter of 2023, and the official project launch at the Economic Inclusion Conference at Coppin (EICAC) in April 2023. Subsequently, 12 months of research was conducted into entrepreneurship learning opportunities in Baltimore for individuals aged 16 to 29.

The findings of the EXCEL project revealed a complex landscape of entrepreneurship instructional options in Baltimore, with a variety of structures and programs but little coordination or systematic approach to sustainable entrepreneurial success. Despite the diverse structures, a network of partnerships has emerged, showing an

FINDINGS

- **Structure**
- **Partnerships**
- **Methods**
- **Effectiveness measures**
- **Challenges**
- **Trauma-informed approaches**
- **Beyond the launch**

interdependency among programs that could yield significant learning. Twelve partnership types were identified, including universities, cultural institutions, youth programs, and more. Methods and tactical actions used to deliver the programs varied, resulting in six methodological categories: Individualized Business Planning, Intrapreneurship/Entrepreneurship Skills Development, Curriculum-Based & Structured Experiences, Industry Sector Focused, Place-Based Emphasis, and Process Consultancy.

The aspirational description that opened the executive summary is a vision based on value and impact. What is the perceived value of entrepreneurship instructional programs? Value is determined by the measurable utility found in the information. Can I put information to desired use with discernible results? In other words, what is the impact of the experience on the lives of participants? The EXCEL project reveals evidence of nine impact metrics that establish a framework for analyzing entrepreneurship instructional programs for their value and impact: Output Measures, Outcome Measures, Impact Measures, Efficiency Measures, Sustainability Measures, Quality Measures, Equity Measures, Process Evaluation, and Return

on Investment (ROI). Assessments based on all, or a portion of these measures can be used as common standards and quality indicators.

The common funding challenge experienced by several study participants was not surprising. Addressing prevailing needs with high-quality service requires resources. The most interesting finding is the innovation in addressing deficits when they occur. Networking and collaboration resulting from the need to fill gaps in capacity and resources require further study. The behavioral tendencies, innovation, and collaborative synergy spawned by the absence of immediate solutions can be captured, learned, and used as best practices.

The exploration of trauma-informed approaches to entrepreneurship instructional programming revealed several ways in which programs align with the pillars of trauma-informed practice as described by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA). While acknowledging the ongoing discourse regarding the use of “trauma-informed approaches” and “strength-based approaches” because of a recognized need to avoid deficit-focused language, the six pillars of trauma-informed framework hold value for this study. Evidence was found in eight categories mapped to SAMSHA standards: Affirming/Embracing Approach, Family Approach, Basic Needs Approach, Parenting/Fatherhood Approach, Race/Ethnicity/Culture Approach, Returning Citizens Approach, Wellness, Dance, Yoga, Sister Circles Approach, and Wrap Around Services Approach.

The final finding is related to extending support beyond the instructional experience to create greater sustainability for participants, enabling scaling and growth of businesses. While there is evidence of activity beyond instructional

experiences, it is not consistent across participant programs and is not subject to formal assessment and tracking. As a result, value is diminished because of the inability to use activities as indicators of measurable growth and sustainability of entrepreneurial pursuits.

The following summary of recommendations transcends all areas revealed in the EXCEL project:

- Enhance program flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs and schedules of participants.
- Implement a hybrid program structure that combines in-person, virtual, and asynchronous learning modalities.
- Enhance program structure by integrating wrap-around services.
- Design programs with a longitudinal approach.
- Emphasize a holistic learning approach that goes beyond traditional classroom instruction.
- Infuse trauma-informed approaches throughout program delivery.
- Explore hybrid program models that blend face-to-face and virtual.
- Develop a robust system for measuring program effectiveness based on outcome-oriented metrics.
- Implement comprehensive post-instruction assessments to gauge the immediate and long-term impact.
- Establish mechanisms for gathering feedback from diverse stakeholders.
- Develop strategies to mitigate the challenges posed by funding instability.
- Implement initiatives to enhance participant engagement and retention.
- Advocate for policy changes and community initiatives aimed at addressing structural barriers that hinder youth participation in entrepreneurship instructional programs.

- Provide instruction and capacity-building opportunities for program staff and mentors on trauma-informed practices.
- Collaborate with mental health professionals and organizations to integrate mental health support services into entrepreneurship instructional programs.
- Develop culturally responsive programming that recognizes and respects the cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences of participants.
- Prioritize financial literacy education as an integral component of entrepreneurship instruction programs.
- Facilitate access to microfinance options, grants, and funding opportunities specifically targeted towards youth entrepreneurs.
- Strengthen the entrepreneurial support ecosystem by fostering collaborations between financial institutions, government agencies, nonprofits, and private sector partners.

The EXCEL team stands with the community at the threshold of a new era in Baltimore—a city filled with the energy of possibility and the promise of transformation. From the bustling streets of our Inner Harbor to the vibrant neighborhoods that weave the fabric of the community, the vision painted is not merely a dream but a blueprint for tangible change. The journey is to be taken together, remembering that excellence in entrepreneurial learning is not just rhetoric; it's a commitment, an intentional process of equipping our youth and emerging adults with the skills, resources, and mindset to thrive in an ever-evolving world.

This is our Baltimore—a city of resilience, innovation, and boundless potential. Enjoy the EXCEL Project Report and welcome to the Baltimore built on excellence and learning.



INTRODUCTION

The entrepreneurship instructional program landscape for youth and emerging adults in Baltimore City is diverse and complex, comprising various structures and methods aimed at equipping young entrepreneurs with the necessary knowledge and skills for success. Despite this, there has been a lack of comprehensive efforts to describe these initiatives and establish a baseline for continuous improvement.

Developing learning competencies, particularly the ability to learn how to learn, is crucial for fostering growth in an information-driven economy characterized by rapid social and technological change. Equipping young residents with the tools to be skilled learners provides them with the means to actively shape their economic futures. Those who master learning skills and competencies will be able to quickly adapt and maximize their impact on the future. For young urban entrepreneurs, the ability to efficiently acquire, process, and apply new knowledge can lead to innovative solutions and business models that address local challenges. This continuous learning mindset cultivates resilience and flexibility, essential traits for navigating the uncertainties of startup ventures. By advancing learning competencies, cities like Baltimore can nurture a generation of adaptive, forward-thinking entrepreneurs who drive economic growth and revitalization through their ventures, ultimately transforming the city into a hub of innovation and opportunity.

The design of the EXCEL project is grounded in the rigorous methodology of participatory qualitative research, aiming not to deduce effectiveness but to inductively infer plausible explanations. It seeks to address questions concerning the preparation of a specific demographic for entrepreneurship, assess the research process for potential improvements, and identify effective instructional practices used by organizations.

In line with the participatory nature of the project, direct engagement with instructional service providers and input from youth and emerging adults were integral. Project management procedures and researcher training were important to the success of the project. An EXCEL Advisory Board was formed, consisting of representatives from the public and private sectors, the Baltimore City Public Schools Work-Based Learning Program, and youth and emerging adults. Interim research process assessments were conducted to allow for real-time improvements. The project also involved recruiting and training researchers, presenting at various conferences and forums for ongoing feedback, and laying a groundwork for future inquiry.

A transdisciplinary team of researchers was formed, including individuals from diverse fields. Led by the Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship at Coppin State University, the team embodied a unique approach to understanding the entrepreneurship instructional programs. The team consisted of expertise in criminal justice, education, health information systems, management, psychology, social work, dance, and other fields.



METHODOLOGY & PROCEDURES

The EXCEL Project was designed to encourage collaboration among researchers, community members, and educational stakeholders. This exploratory study actively involves faculty and student researchers, Baltimore City entrepreneurship instructional programs, and youth and emerging adults, who are the primary focus of the research.

Development of entrepreneurial thinking is at the core of entrepreneurial knowledge and skill training. This mindset, characterized by informed assessment of opportunities, risks, creativity, adaptability, and continuous learning, empowers individuals to navigate the challenges and uncertainties of entrepreneurship, seize opportunities, and create value in dynamic environments.

Innovative Research Design

The EXCEL analysis of entrepreneurship instructional programs breaks new ground in several ways. The deliberate use of the term “instructional program” aims to differentiate the learning activities from the more traditional definitions of training, education, or development (Nadler, 1982, p.7). While acknowledging the distinctions between training, education, and development, the term “instructional program” streamlines the focus on learning without delving into these nuances.

The EXCEL project is not intended to be exhaustive but to address seven research questions (Table 1) and draw inferences from the findings. Data analysis protocols were followed to ensure the generalizability of themes through repetitive occurrences. Interviews, questionnaires, document reviews, and observations provided ample data sources to demonstrate the findings’ generalizability. Previous attempts to describe instructional services offered to this demographic group in Baltimore City were not found.

In addition to describing the entrepreneurship learning program landscape for younger residents in Baltimore, EXCEL was designed to demonstrate research as a learning system with real-time improvements and a foundation for future knowledge discovery. To accomplish this objective, the project included researcher training, undergraduate researcher training, formative assessment tools, advisory input, intentional amplification of youth and emerging adult insights and leadership, as well as interim presentations of progress in multiple forums (Table 2). One of the highlights of youth and emerging adult engagement is evident in the 24-week embedded engagements of five HeartSmiles Heartbeats (Table 3).

A system of interim check-ins was integrated into each phase of the research process to facilitate action-oriented improvements and real-time learning from experiences. Weekly stand-up meetings involving project staff and representatives from the Annie E. Casey Foundation fostered communication throughout the project.

The inclusion of youth and emerging adults, the primary beneficiaries of this study, was integral to every aspect of the

TABLE 1: EXCEL Research Questions

- What entrepreneurship instructional programs serve Baltimore, Maryland residents between ages 16 and 29?
 - What program models exist among entrepreneurship instructional programs that serve Baltimore, Maryland residents between ages 16 and 29?
 - What success outcomes/metrics are tracked in entrepreneurship instructional programs that serve Baltimore, Maryland residents between the ages of 16 and 29?
 - What is the perceived stakeholder value of entrepreneurship instructional programs that serve Baltimore, Maryland residents between the ages of 16 and 29?
 - What trauma-informed approaches, as described by the Center for Disease Control, are included in entrepreneurship instructional programs that serve Baltimore, Maryland residents between the ages of 16 and 29?
 - How are the financial resources developed and distributed to support entrepreneurship instructional programs that serve Baltimore, Maryland residents between the ages of 16 and 29?
 - How do instructional programs support Baltimore, Maryland entrepreneurs between the ages of 16 and 29 through their entire entrepreneurial lifecycle?
-

project. Their involvement spanned design, data collection, analysis, communication strategies, workshops, panel discussions, advisory board membership, and other activities.

Finally, this report provides insight into the participating organizations. Collaborating with them, in the tradition of participant observation, provided valuable data on their work.

Participant Recruitment

Following a collaborative design process, the EXCEL research team distributed 57 invitations to randomly selected youth entrepreneurship support organizations throughout Baltimore City to determine their interest and qualifications for participating in the study. Thirty organizations indicated a desire to participate by submitting a questionnaire that yielded the results found in Figures 1 through 6. Additional participants were added during the study resulting in 35 participating organizations.

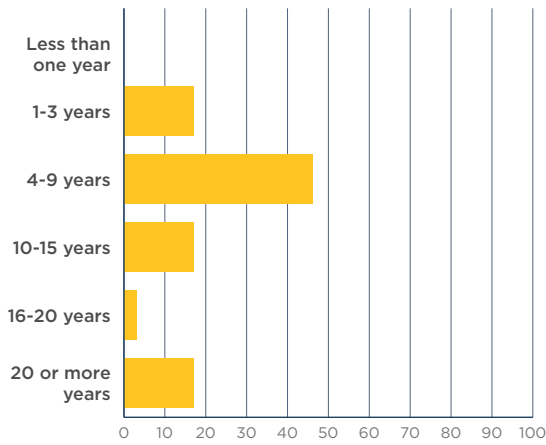
The primary data collection method involved interviews with 35 organizations, utilizing an interview guide tailored to the seven research questions. Additional data was gathered through structured activities, including post-interview questionnaires, interactions during conference presentations, and direct engagement with participating organizations.

Advisory Board Development

Project processes and practices were informed by a representative panel of stakeholders. The EXCEL Project Advisory Board was formed and met quarterly to offer recommendations and support. The board of advisors added a layer of transparency without compromising the integrity of research rigor and best practices. The EXCEL Advisory Board members included entrepreneurs, community leaders, youth, educators, and community organization members.

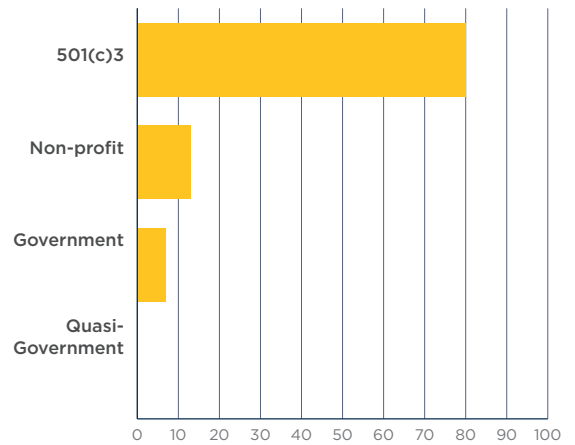
How many years have you been in business?

30 respondents



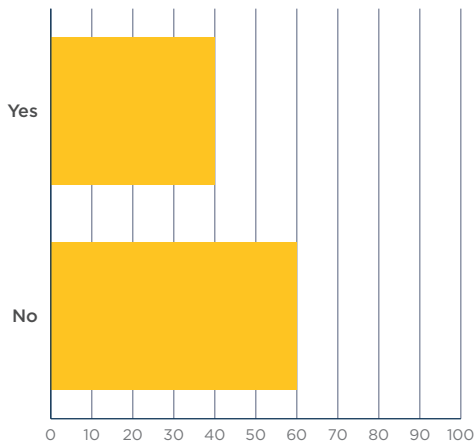
Type of Organization

30 respondents



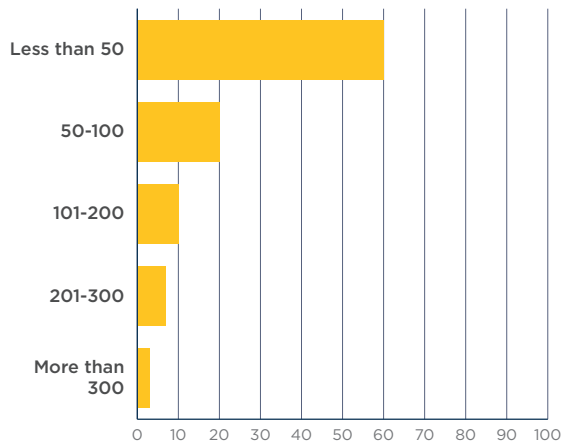
Does your organization have multiple sites?

30 respondents



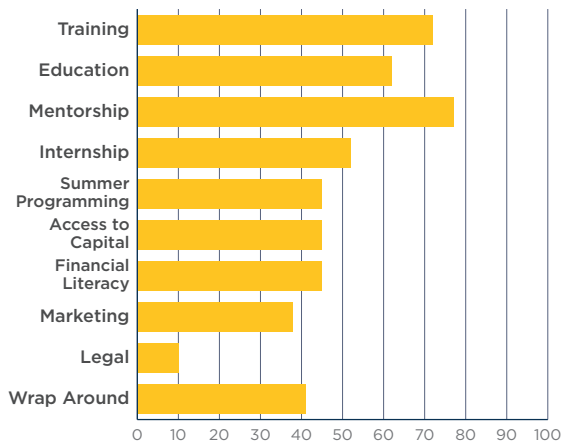
How many individuals between the ages of 16 - 29 does your organization serve annually with entrepreneurship programming?

30 respondents



What supports do you provide in the area of entrepreneurship? Check all that apply

29 respondents



What is the criteria you use for recruiting participants in your entrepreneurial programming? Check all that apply

30 respondents

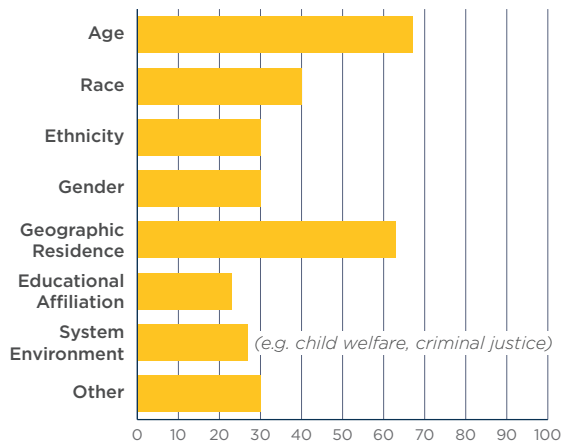


TABLE 2: Innovative Research Design

The EXCEL project was designed as a process of systematic discovery of entrepreneurship instructional programs serving a particular population. However, the process was also designed to engage youth and emerging adult learners, researchers, institutional collaborators, and public sector stakeholders in an entrepreneurial learning experience.

Undergraduate Researcher Training

An important goal of the EXCEL project is to amplify the creativity of the targeted population. Five undergraduate students engaged in four weeks of EXCEL orientation training to familiarize themselves with the project and general project objectives.

Researcher Professional Development

Several professional development activities were provided for the research team, including EXCEL Orientation, a facility site visit, a research tool workshop, presentations, and other structured experiences.

Conference Participation and Communication Planning

Researchers and students participated in multiple conferences, e.g., EICAC 2023 and 2024, Baltimore Together 2023, and Global Entrepreneurship Week 2023. Participation enabled researchers and students to discuss their experience as researchers, discover preliminary findings about the project, and sharpen communication skills. Participating youth members also participated in the communication planning for conference and report release activities.

Formative Assessment of the Project Process

One of the goals of the EXCEL project was to assess the research process as the project progressed in a way that would allow for adjustments and provide an opportunity to recommend best practices for future inquiry.

TABLE 3: HeartSmiles: 24 Weeks of Engagement

HeartSmiles is an organization “born from the pain and heartache of the Freddie Gray riots.” Their mission statement describes them as “all about providing youth from underserved communities with real opportunities to succeed in life.”

Five of the youth and emerging adults they serve and affectionately refer to as “Heartbeats” engaged in 24 weeks of structured learning. The five Heartbeats participated in data analysis, conference planning and organization, conference presentation and leadership, report review, and release planning and implementation.

The participation of the Heartbeats helped to ensure that input from young entrepreneurs was included throughout the EXCEL project.

What did we learn from the Heartbeats?

- Consistent engagement matters.
 - Meaningful engagement requires listening, understanding, and acting based on the authentic understanding of what was shared.
 - Challenging assignments are most appropriate when working with capable youth and all youth are capable.
 - Trust is built through authentic engagement combined with follow-through.
 - Influence is a powerful tool when used to improve the lives of others.
 - The way you show up is very important.
-



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FINDINGS

Structure

The structures of entrepreneurship instructional programs vary widely, encompassing diverse forms such as for-profit, non-profit, advisory, direct services, flat, and hierarchical models. These programs are defined by both their internal operational structures and their external relational networks. Structure is further influenced by the size of the organization and whether it operates in the public, private, or non-profit sector. Larger organizations tend to be more hierarchical with extensive support

networks, while smaller ones are typically flatter and rely on more limited support networks.

Programs in Baltimore also differ in various aspects, including duration, timing, daily contact hours, curricula, sector focus, and other variables. This diversity offers advantages for learners seeking instruction tailored to their needs and expectations. However, the processes of marketing, promotion, and recruitment vary based on program type, size, and partnerships. Most programs share a common need for ancillary wrap-around services such as

Structures Matter

“We offer a five week 25 hours a week paid summer program that’s, you know, about 100 to 150 students. They’re broken down into smaller tracks where they kind of learn in a smaller cohort of young people and, you know, experience everything. We have a startup garage track where they’re learning either 3D printing as their core skill or laser cutting or vinyl cutting. And then, there’ll be a one to six staff to student ratio. So, there’ll be two coaches, about 12 students at that site and then they’ll go through the design thinking process. We talk about this in a listen, think, build kind of approach where they’ll listen to problems out in the community, build products that solve those problems, and then they’ll go out and actually take them back to selling those products out to other folks within the community.”

“So, our typical structure is every day, usually Monday through Friday, four to five hours a day, five to six weeks, with breakfast and lunch provided. Sometimes we are flexible because we work with partners. So, it’s never just us; it’s always with a partnership organization. That is how we recruit young people. And it’s also how we run multiple programs at a time. So, just to let you know, sometimes the structure is flexible because if that space isn’t available every day, every week. And then, few days out of the week, they will actually go into the actual skills so we’ll partner with other entrepreneurs, such as photographers, bakeries, you name it.”

transportation, food security, mentorship, mental health support, tutoring, childcare, and other forms of assistance to facilitate participant learning.

The necessity for wrap-around services has led to the development of a loosely interdependent network of programs delivering various entrepreneurship instructional opportunities, supported by organizations offering a range of support services. Defining and categorizing these emerging entrepreneurship instructional networks is important for understanding the dynamic instructional landscape available to individuals aged 16 to 29 (Table 4).

Partnerships

The networks of entrepreneurship instructional programs and wrap-around service partners form a collaborative foundation for entrepreneurship preparedness initiatives. They include partnerships with universities, cultural institutions, and community-based organizations, which facilitate access to resources, expertise, and networks. While

the scope of networks extends beyond the relationships outlined in this research, their existence underscores the convergence of groups interested in entrepreneurial opportunities for young community members. Informal and formal interest-oriented networks include professional groups, non-profit leadership groups, funding organizations, and others.

Both non-profit and for-profit organizations often incorporate advisory boards, boards of directors, or other governance structures. These structures help facilitate the delivery, coordination, and sustainability of entrepreneurship instructional programs, ensuring they align with community needs and organizational objectives.

External network structures are as vital to success as internal operational structures. Many organizations describe unique support networks tailored to their specific needs, emphasizing the importance of customizing these networks to align with the organization's mission, vision, and goals. These support networks evolve from unstructured exploration to a refined design, highlighting the value of early-stage network assessment to support the sustainability of instructional programming

Partnerships Matter

“So, we work with partners who help us with mental health services. So, our youth, not only do they get weekly mental health sessions, they also can just go on and schedule a session with a licensed therapist on their own time and be able to get that support, we partner a lot with the city. To help us with issues of homelessness, we started a food insecurity group in partnership with Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the Center of Adolescent Health. ...and a partnership that’s in year five with the Baltimore Orioles where we’re one of the only African American companies that partner with the Orioles organization to have multiple locations to that Oriole Park.”

TABLE 4: Partnership Typology & Definitions

Partnerships exist in many forms. They were vital to the existence and sustainability of youth and emerging adult entrepreneurship instructional programs. Identifying and categorizing partnerships will enable organizations to be more strategically focused in building support networks.

Universities

Engaging with higher education institutions for credit and non-credit entrepreneurship education and experience. Experiences may include degree programs, certificate programs, pitch competitions, conferences, internships, and other forms of curricular and co-curricular programming..

Cultural Institutions

Engaging with organizations that provide entrepreneurial experiences associated with art or socio-cultural specific dynamics such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, and other factors.

Youth Entrepreneurship Programs

Engaging with organizations that focus on entrepreneurial training and education for those under 18. This report includes those who engage with ages 16 and above. However, collaborative programming extends to ages as young as kindergarten.

Project-specific Programs

Collaborations with organizations that involve specific projects associated with developing entrepreneurship skills. Projects are for a defined time and may only represent a portion of either organization's core mission.

Employment

Programs that address workforce development, career development, and entrepreneurship training recognizing that there are common and transferable skills.

Entrepreneurship Network

Partnerships are formed by entrepreneurship training organizations that involve the sharing of resources or programmatic infrastructure. Resource sharing may include financial, physical, or human resources.

Social Enterprise

Programs are established as social enterprises to produce and distribute goods and services to private or institutional consumers. Social enterprises and their partners provide training and development opportunities for emerging entrepreneurs.

Formal

Formal partnerships extend beyond time-bound relationship agreements that may be captured in a memorandum of understanding or similar agreement. Formal partnerships are established for the duration of the entity's life cycle and no longer exist when the partnership is dissolved.

Faith-based

Religious institutions in collaboration with religious or non-religious organizations or institutions. These organizations perceive economic development and economic mobilization as part of a social justice mission grounded in the pursuit of equity.

Public

Partnerships include government agencies or support. Engagement may often transcend other descriptive categorizations, linking organizations in an undocumented network of federal, state, or local governmental support.

Other Community-Based

Engagements include initiatives or services designed, implemented, and managed within a local area by its residents, and organizations, or through partnerships with external organizations.

Methods

Several categories of program methods were identified during the EXCEL project. Establishing categorical descriptions of entrepreneurship instructional program methods is important for establishing a foundation for further study.

Procedural methods include the sequencing of activities to deliver programming, encompassing a range of categories that are beyond traditional entrepreneurship instruction. Six categories were discovered, including Individualized Business Planning, Academic Institution Affiliated, Curriculum-Based Structured Experiences, Industry-specific, Place-specific, and Consultancy-oriented. Methods may align more strictly with a single category or in unique combinations.

Individualized Business Planning involves an intake and assessment process, identifying learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the start of instructional activities and assessing whether evidence-based outcomes are advancing individual preparedness for success. The knowledge and skills required for composing a business plan are seen as a prerequisite for entrepreneurial activities.

Asset Mapping is a process of identifying and assessing the resources, skills, strengths, and potential of individuals, organizations, or communities. It is a strength-based approach to achieving goals associated with entrepreneurship instructional programs. Efforts are made to identify, connect, and leverage the best available resources to improve outcomes. Unlike methods that target weaknesses and threats with interventions, asset mapping focuses on strengths and opportunities to advance progress toward instructional goals. The approach emerges as a best practice, allowing opportunities to build on existing resources, promote local solutions,

and support sustainable development by focusing on local capacities rather than solely on external assistance.

While intake and assessment methods may lead to personalized development plans, they may also result in a uniform group experience. Intake and assessment may be followed by a customized individual learning experience or a collective experience providing a singular plan for all learners, with assessment focused more on group outcomes. Both models are utilized without evidence that one is more effective or consideration for individuals' learning styles to guide decision-making.

Programs that integrate career paths into the entrepreneurial journey are more evident within Individualized Business Planning methods. This aligns with the growing number of part-time freelance workers who may also pursue entrepreneurship as an additional income stream or as part of a transition to full-time entrepreneurship. In each case, entrepreneurship instruction has significant value.

The abundance of academic institutions in Baltimore provides numerous opportunities to access resources in secondary schools, community colleges, four-year institutions, and graduate programs. The ages of learners served by study participants coincides with those transitioning from high school to employment or higher education. This underscores the value of instructional opportunities for this age group. Instructional programs include after-school programs, summer programs, curriculum-embedded support programs, certificate programs (credit and non-credit), degree programs, and other forms of non-classroom assistance and support. Collaborations result in a progressive system of entrepreneurship instruction. As this academic network is better understood, the potential for building a stronger ecosystem increases.

Primary Program Methods

Category	Activities
Individualized Business Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intake/Assessment• Asset Mapping• Personalized development plan• Career Paths as Part of the Entrepreneurial Journey
Intrapreneurship/ Entrepreneurship Skills Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment Skills Training (Community Colleges)• Entrepreneurial Skills Training (Business Planning, Financing, Capital, Legal, Accounting, Budgeting, Licensing, Marketing, etc.)• Higher Education• Hybrid• Family Engagement in Entrepreneur & Workforce Development• Other
Curriculum Based & Structured Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After-school Program• Apprenticeship• Communication Skills• Conferences, Summits• Design Thinking• Developing Hustling Mindset• Formal Curriculum• Informal Entrepreneur Curriculum• Intensity and Duration of Program• Summer Program• Workforce/Employment Development
Industry Sector Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocacy• Art• Communications, Media, Advertising• Dirt Bike Mechanics• Food Services• Gaming• Jewelry Making• Manufacturing• Printing, graphic design• Social Enterprise• T-Shirts• Technology• Other
Place-based Emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facility/Office Based• Home Based• Pop Up• Vending• Other
Process Consultancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organizational Development Consulting

Structured experiences encompass field trips, conferences, site visits, industry tours, and other activities designed to expose learners to potential entrepreneurial pursuits. Efforts are made to infuse inclusive practices with social and emotional implications. For example, the “I can be what I see” concept was included in the 2024 Economic Inclusion Conference at Coppin which was used as a platform for the EXCEL project. Secondary education students from five schools interacted with four Black founders and an organization serving a majority of Black and female clientele.

Industry-specific entrepreneurship instruction emerges for various reasons, including workforce needs and creating pathways for potential workers, leaders, and owners. Other programs function as apprenticeship models to revive declining crafts and sectors, or are driven by existing industries offering internships and other engagements. This mirrors place-based strategies and programs.

Moreover, program methods encompass the design and implementation of curricula, including after-school programs, apprenticeships, communication skills development, design thinking workshops, formal and informal entrepreneurial curricula, as well as programs of varying durations such as summer programs and time-bound workforce development initiatives. These elements collectively

shape program content and delivery methods of entrepreneurship instruction, tailored to the diverse needs and aspirations of program participants.

Programs interviewed engage effort to identify and document resources, strengths, and assets within community networks. Efforts include consideration of physical, human, relational, inter-institutional, financial, or social assets. Connecting and leveraging resources to aid in program delivery is common.

Programs also vary widely in their methodologies. Some models engage participants more clinically, with an intake process, needs assessment, and prescriptive programming. Clinical methods tend to be more prevalent in educational services offered to adult populations, while programs targeting older youth under age 18 are likely to be less customized and offered in a “one size fits all” approach.

One distinctive quality of instructional programs is their integration of employment-related skills with those distinctly associated with entrepreneurship. Some programs focus on opportunity awareness, planning, financing, regulatory matters, accounting, and budgeting, while others integrate entrepreneurship instruction into workforce development, family support, food security, commuter stipends, and other services resembling clinical social work models. In addition to

Methods Matter

“But in general, we are looking for our program participants to be as the whole reflective of the demographics of Baltimore. So each day, the girls visit a black woman who owns a business and then a black woman talks to them about their business and why they got into it and how they do their business.”

providing knowledge and skills to increase the chances of entrepreneurship success, programs incorporate specific workforce preparedness knowledge and skills, understanding that this information also facilitates entrepreneurial success.

The industries or sectors focused on by participating organization appear to be decided by learner interest rather than workforce demand or needs. The representation of advocacy groups, artists and creatives, media, dirt bike repair, gaming, graphic design, and fashion reflects entrepreneurial interests driven by learner choice. This places a responsibility on those in the economic development community to provide guidance on how to align interests into regional, national, or global demand. While those in sectors such as manufacturing and technology-related fields may be familiar with workforce deficits and entrepreneurial opportunities that have higher economic mobility multipliers, the opportunities may remain underutilized by learners without guidance.

Similarly, decisions about other business models such as facilities, home-based, pop-up, vending, or online models are explored to raise awareness of the planning process and provide initial exposure to such planning. However, sustained engagement required for ongoing learning may not occur. Several service delivery models were also observed, including after-school programs, apprenticeships, summer programs, conferences, and summits.

Effectiveness Measures

Program effectiveness refers to the frameworks used to assess the value and impact of entrepreneurship instructional initiatives. The value of instructional

programs is determined by the degree of detectable, desired change. Measures include quantitative and qualitative assessments, as well as individual and group progress assessments.

Quantitative assessments encompass measures such as attendance rates, college entry rates, completion rates, individual or business earned income, reduced arrest rates, retention rates, skill development, and the number of participants starting their own businesses. Qualitative assessments involve observable changes in circumstantial attributes, such as attitudes of graduates, staff, mentors, or leaders. Overall, tracking program outcomes provides opportunities for continuous improvement of instructional programs.

Participating organizations use various methods to capture data for assessment, some directly impacting success, while others are more related to reporting requirements by funding agencies. For instance, attendance, business income, program retention, businesses launched, and skill development may be considered programmatic success indicators directly linked to startup success. Conversely, data like college matriculation, program completion, and arrest rates are less about business success and more about choices influencing quality of life. Both types are valuable, but distinguishing between assessing entrepreneurial success and general quality of life improvement is important. Further analysis is necessary to determine if decision-making patterns affecting quality of life contribute to entrepreneurial success.

Descriptive data proves valuable in programs serving learners without legacy exposure to formal business development. The significance of social-emotional modeling and relatable stories cannot be overstated in improving the learning climate and enhancing learning outcomes.

Programs where graduates return as staff, mentors, and leaders embed relational influence in the learning process. Other methods that include modeling and relational influence are also worth exploring.

EXCEL instructional programs employ several types of effectiveness measures, providing a means to examine program characteristics based on performance in various assessment categories. Many service providers formally or informally track activities within each measurement category. However, awareness of these categories enables organizations to self-monitor more effectively and align more efficiently with resources. Framing the effectiveness measures also fosters a greater understanding of existing logic models, scorecards, and other methods for monitoring and reporting progress.

Challenges

The challenges faced by organizations providing entrepreneurship instructional services to Baltimore youth and emerging adults may mirror those in similar urban settings. However, the complexities uncovered during the EXCEL project reveal the necessity for unique strategies. While the benefits offered by the programs often outweigh the challenges, understanding the challenges provides a realistic view of the experiences perceived by service providers. These challenges span various areas, including engagement, funding, infrastructure, space, the impact of multigenerational divestment and trauma, and the repercussions of the pandemic.

Despite encouraging trends reported in studies like the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT® Data Center, statistics in health, safety, and education are overshadowed by persistently high poverty levels. The child poverty rate in Baltimore

surged from 24% in 2018 to 35% in 2021, compared to the national level of just 17% in 2021. In the same year, nearly one in three young adults in Baltimore lived in poverty. Although the city's young adult poverty rate decreased to 22% in 2019, it climbed back up to 30% in 2021.

Persistent poverty complicates progress, diverting time and attention to matters of daily survival. The continuous struggle to meet these challenges often leads to emotional tolls related to traumatic experiences. The convergence of high poverty rates and suicide clusters associated with trauma contributes to the difficulties faced by organizations serving youth and emerging adults. Many of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) risk factors at the individual, family, and community levels are also associated with the trauma of poverty (Center for Disease Control, 2024).

Offering instructional opportunities without accounting for the collective impact of these factors can lead to frustration among stakeholders, service recipients, and suboptimal use of resources.

Funding Challenges

Funding challenges for many organizations are numerous, from accessing initial funds to diversifying funding streams and building capacity. Smaller nonprofits particularly struggle with accessing diverse funding sources, compounded by high competition for grants in urban areas. The capacity required to monitor economic climates, project cycles, and changing funder priorities does not always exist. Addressing funding challenges requires strategic planning, outreach, capacity building, and creative funding approaches to close gaps and build adequate resources, especially related to overhead costs.

Value and Impact Measures

Metric	Descriptions	Evidence
Output Measures	These are quantitative counts of the services delivered or the products produced by a project. For example, the number of training sessions conducted, educational materials distributed, or people attending workshops. Outputs are straightforward to measure and provide data on the scope and scale of project activities.	<i>"We have 66 individuals who applied, and then, 41 individuals who completed six weeks of training."</i>
Outcome Measures	Outcomes go a step beyond outputs to assess the changes or benefits that occur as a result of the project. These can include changes in behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, condition, or status. Outcome measures are usually assessed through surveys, assessments, and other tools to gauge whether the intended benefits were achieved. For instance, an increase in employment rates following a job-training program or improvement in test scores due to an educational intervention.	<i>"Our youth fellowship program had an 80% graduation rate, our summer program had an 85% graduation rate. So, we're doing exceptionally well with that. And we retain more than 60% of the young people that start with us."</i>
Impact Measures	Impact evaluation seeks to determine the causal effect of a program by comparing outcomes with what would have happened in the absence of the program. This often involves sophisticated designs like randomized control trials or longitudinal studies. Impact measures help funders understand the direct effects of their investments on the population and whether these effects are sustainable over time.	<i>"We measured the number of dirt bike arrests that we have lowered, so it's been a 3% decrease since we started in 2017. The number of rides in the streets has decreased and there has been a 47 point increase in standardized test scores."</i>
Efficiency Measures	These relate to how economic resources (inputs) are converted into outputs. Common efficiency measures include cost per beneficiary, cost per service delivered, or cost per outcome achieved. These measures help funders assess the financial efficiency of their grants or investments.	<i>"So one is, you know, just generally as a lot of organizations do, you know, fundraising and like finding the right partnersto kind of grow our organization, especially because our programs have such high investment costs. Every student that we're trying to impact, those students are also getting paid in the programs. So, it's not like, you know, a scalable software where you can reach 1000 people for the same cost as reaching 100 people."</i>

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Value and Impact Measures *(continued)*

Metric	Descriptions	Evidence
Sustainability Measures	Funders are increasingly interested in whether the benefits of a project continue after the funding ends. This can involve assessing the long-term viability of the project's outputs and outcomes, the project's capacity to generate resources or become self-sustaining, or its integration into local or national policies.	<i>"We even employ some of our alumni as contractors to facilitate program delivery. We're all about the teacher being someone who's either gone through the program or experienced the topic that they're training on. So that is a big focus of ours. And many of our alumni have come back to either work with us in a full-time role or as the consultant or as a reviewer of applicants. There are many ways that our alumni get involved in both formal and informal ways."</i>
Quality Measures	These assess the quality of the outputs and outcomes. For example, not just the number of training sessions conducted, but the participants' satisfaction with those sessions, or not just the number of houses built, but the quality and livability of those houses.	<i>"Each program does have a unique set of metrics. But in general, we are looking for our program participants to be reflective of the demographics of Baltimore. So that's a metric that's important to us."</i>
Equity Measures	Funders may also evaluate whether a project effectively reaches and benefits all intended populations, particularly marginalized or underserved groups. This involves analyzing data disaggregated by demographics such as race, gender, age, and socioeconomic status to ensure equitable distribution of resources and benefits.	<i>"There is okay, the disproportionate poverty so if you're in Baltimore City. Chances are you're going to be working with probably black or brown youth, mostly black youth. Because of the demographics of Baltimore City, many of them may be coming from households that may be experiencing some sort of economic or financial hardship, deficit, or struggle."</i>
Process Evaluation	This type of evaluation focuses on the implementation process itself, assessing whether a project was executed as planned and identifying any operational issues. It often includes monitoring fidelity to the project design, the effectiveness of project management, stakeholder engagement, and the responsiveness of the project to changing conditions.	<i>"So, we do consulting, a lot of consulting. We've consulted with like 15 different brands, and startup brands that have been around. So, the consulting is one component of it."</i>
Return on Investment (ROI):	Particularly in the context of funding from corporate or private sources, ROI calculations might be used to compare the relative cost-effectiveness of different projects in terms of the financial return or social benefits (social return on investment, or SROI) generated per dollar spent.	<i>"But if someone sends me \$1,500, I got to do a three-page report. I got to speak to a program manager four times in one month while still running the program. \$1,500 and just doing the reporting, right."</i>

Engagement Challenges

Engagement extends beyond learners participating in instructional programming. Often, there is a lack of multi-generational family support systems, with no context for the demands of entrepreneurial pursuits. While popular culture glamorizes entrepreneurial lifestyles, only a small percentage of individuals achieve large financial rewards, complicating efforts to develop support systems for young entrepreneurs.

Infrastructure Challenges

Operational resources may pose barriers to scaling and sustainability, partly due to budgetary challenges experienced by program participants. Financial assistance is essential for many participants, enabling them to meet financial obligations while working toward socioeconomic advancement. Instructional providers may engage in innovative ways to increase capacity, but more support for business

startups, paid apprenticeships, benefits, scholarships, instructive competitions, and other “earn while you learn” opportunities would benefit learners and instructional organizations.

Infrastructure and funding challenges are intertwined. Infrastructure sufficiency results from effective planning, adequate financial support, and efficient program implementation. Demonstrating consistent alignment of planning, support, and implementation enables service providers to continuously deliver, improve, and scale services. Gaps in assessing, demonstrating, and responding to the demand for entrepreneurship instruction suggest a need for evidence of positive economic mobility for youth and emerging adults in Baltimore.

In conclusion, while the challenges faced by entrepreneurship instructional programs in Baltimore are significant, they are not insurmountable. Addressing these challenges with strategic, innovative,

Financial Resources Matter

“And so funding is often a challenge for many of the partners that we work with. So sometimes we have to get creative there.”

“And so our makeup right now is probably about now about 60% grants. The rest is a contract based individual donors, I would say probably like 60%, grants, full 30 service 10% individual donors, and while we do our donor campaign, and so that people again want to buy into what we’re doing, bear with us, but you can donate as little as \$5 If you want to and that makes you a contributor to you know, somebody’s success.”

“But I think more importantly is we took the approach to self-fund early. And no one funded us. And because no one funded us and we were very loud about our impact, funders wanted to work with us, as opposed to us asking for the funders.”

and trauma-informed approaches can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of these vital programs. By doing so, Baltimore can better support its youth and emerging adults in their entrepreneurial journeys, fostering economic growth and resilience in the community.

Trauma-Informed Approaches

Programs offer supportive services to participants who have experienced trauma while providing entrepreneurship instruction. These components are tailored to establish a safe and nurturing environment while addressing the diverse needs of participants. Service-related elements encompass approaches that embrace and validate individuals' experiences, a family-centered focus tackling housing and employment needs, and the provision of basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Additionally, programs offer parenting and fatherhood support, culturally responsive wrap-around services, and wellness activities like dance, yoga, and sister circles, all contributing to holistic healing. These integrated program approaches facilitate trauma-informed care delivery, fostering empowerment and resilience among youth and emerging adult participants.

The implementation of a trauma-informed approach typically involves several key components:

- Volunteer support for program delivery and participant engagement.
- Safety measures on premises to ensure the creation of safe healing spaces conducive to growth and healing.
- Peer mentoring initiatives, including one-on-one and group mentoring, to cultivate supportive relationships among participants, fostering mutual growth and resilience.

In the context of this study, which focuses on strategies to enhance learning outcomes, exploring entrepreneurship instructional programs would have been incomplete without addressing one of the major contributors to learning deficiencies: emotional or psychological trauma. Research, such as that conducted by Perfect et al. (2016), indicates that emotional trauma, including distressing experiences like abuse, neglect, or witnessing violence, can impact cognitive functions crucial for learning, such as memory, attention, and problem-solving skills. Instructional programs incorporating “trauma-informed approaches” or “strength-based approaches” are more likely to facilitate measurable learning outcomes.

Responses regarding the inclusion of trauma-informed approaches in programming varied based on respondents' understanding of trauma-informed protocol. The EXCEL project's use of the term aligns with the definition provided by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC) as an approach recognizing the widespread impact of trauma exposure, aiming to create a supportive environment for individuals who have experienced trauma (DHHS, SAMSHA, 2015). The Six Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Approach include safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment and choice, and consideration of cultural, historical, and gender issues.

It is important to acknowledge the distinction between trauma-informed and strength-based approaches to care. While there are ongoing debates that focus on deficits versus strengths, both are valuable in their respective contexts. The most important goal is to recognize and address the unique experiences learners bring to the instructional setting. Infusing affirming language and demonstrating the value of contributions of those receiving entrepreneurship instruction were part of the process.

Beyond the Launch

Young entrepreneurs benefit from support that extends beyond the startup phase. Ongoing support is essential for navigating the complexities of scaling, adapting to market changes, and maintaining competitiveness. This support may include mentorship programs, access to funding opportunities, business development workshops, and networking events. Those providing entrepreneurship instructional services assist by ensuring

that participants continue to have access to the tools needed to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and build resilient enterprises.

Investing in entrepreneurship instruction beyond the initial instruction is particularly important in efforts to drive economic growth. The 16- to 29-year-old demographic represents a window of opportunity for cultivating innovative ideas and an entrepreneurial spirit. By offering sustained instruction in entrepreneurship during these formative years, young people have additional opportunities to develop essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and risk management. Moreover, extending entrepreneurship instruction helps to instill resilience and adaptability, preparing individuals to navigate the uncertainties of the business landscape with confidence.

Futures Matter

“Our commitment is to demonstrate our lifetime; that’s our commitment. So whether it’s five years down the road, or seven years down the road, as long as this organization exists, our commitment is to wrap our arms around them, provide them with the support that they need to deal with whatever situation might have come up, or whatever situation has come up at that time that they would need to reach out to us so we have a life time commitment to the folks that we serve. And that’s why you see people who came to our strike program, you know, 20 to 23 years ago, who still come back and say, hey, you know, I know you guys are here for me, and, you know, many of these people are doing well, they don’t necessarily need our services. But they come back to say, you know, I know, you’ll always be here for me, and they appreciate that.”

Program Structures

EXCEL Program Participant Approach	Corresponding CDC-SAMSHA Principle	Programmatic Evidence
Affirming/ Embracing Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety, • trustworthiness and transparency, • peer support, • collaboration and mutuality, • cultural, historical, and gender issues. 	<p><i>“And so, it’s about our programming that we offer, it’s about, you know, the little things that we do, as I said, because we’ve restored safe space. Everything about us, the furniture, the lighting, you know, how we do community meetings. It’s all about investing in the fullness of individuals.”</i></p>
Family Approach to Services (Housing, Employment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support, • collaboration and mutuality, 	<p><i>“Okay, and so, one of the things that impact Empath has pioneered is what’s called a bridge to self-sufficiency. So, it’s, it’s a bridge with pillars, and each of the pillars are specific to aspects of specific areas where we know, we are going to be critical to someone’s ability to move to self-sufficiency. So, it’s things like, let me get my little cheat sheet out here because blank on all the empath pillars, but so we have pillars around workforce development and economic success. So it’s education, job quality earnings, we have pillars focused on housing, health and family stability, where we’re focusing on physical and mental health, family obligations and housing.”</i></p>
Meeting Basic Needs (Food, Clothing, Shelter, Childcare)	Safety	<p><i>“And so, our programming is aligned to that, what we try to get our youth as well as the adults that we serve to understand that trauma, pain is out there. It is not going anywhere. But what can we do to lessen its impact on our emotional and our physical well-being.”</i></p>
Parenting/ Fatherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • empowerment and choice, and 	<p><i>“Absolutely. Oh, my goodness. So parents always keep in touch. Because I mean, we’ve been doing this with the young people since 2010. So, less than 13 years or so now. So if I had them in eighth grade, they’re like parents themselves now or they’ve gone off to college, some have pursued, you know, their education and media, attending media colleges, and like really prestigious programs.”</i></p>
Race/ethnicity/ culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support, • cultural, historical, and gender issues. 	<p><i>“Whenever we do media press, like, I don’t let people talk to me, they got to talk to the people to actually write because their voice is more important than mine. And then even if we do a proposal or whatever, like, we don’t use deficit language. So like, you know, it doesn’t like for us, I’m really big one, affirming people’s stories and affirming the power that we have, especially as black people.”</i></p>

Program Structures *(continued)*

EXCEL Program Participant Approach	Corresponding CDC-SAMSHA Principle	Programmatic Evidence
Returning Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment and choice, and 	<p><i>“You know, we’ve always said that, because of the population we work with, whether it’s someone who might be returning citizen, whether it’s someone who might be caught up in the Child Support System, or child support, things of that nature, we have always said that we will never allow a member to be violated on our premises in terms of, you know, police showing up in terms of warrants being served, in terms of the sheriff’s showing up.”</i></p>
Wellness, Dance, Yoga, Sister Circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural, historical, and gender issues. 	<p><i>“I’m a yoga therapist. But we do have a yoga therapist on staff. And you know, she’s the one that incorporates the mindfulness and wellness opportunities for us.”</i></p>
Wrap Around Services (Mental Health, Case Worker, Therapist, Mental Health Check-In)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • trustworthiness and transparency, 	<p><i>“But we try to step in as a support for the trauma so that our program is recognized as a safe space, whether they’re in the classroom, or before class or after school, because we run this in a variety of ways, we want to make sure that they recognize it is a safe space no matter where they are, and that they can always reach out to us for additional support. And we will work through our network to, you know, try to support and provide support as we can.”</i></p>
Clinical Social Workers/Counselors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trustworthiness and transparency, 	<p><i>“We think it’s so important that we have in our team, three individuals who are LCSWs...We really leverage their expertise, their academic training, their professional experience.”</i></p>
Formal Trauma-Informed Staff Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trustworthiness and transparency, • cultural, historical, and gender issues. 	<p><i>“So, we had staff trained just before the pandemic. We had staff trained on understanding trauma, being able to recognize the signs of trauma, and understanding triggers, making sure that our space is not one that is triggering.”</i></p>
Community-Reflective Strengths-based Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support, • collaboration and mutuality, • empowerment and choice, and • cultural, historical, and gender issues. 	<p><i>“So even if we write a proposal, we’re not calling people like low income, like, you know, I don’t even know underrepresented, blah, blah, blah, none of that matters, right?”</i></p>



CONCLUSIONS

In urban settings, the need for youth-driven economies and innovation is paramount, recognizing younger residents as key drivers of growth, innovation, and change. Programs focusing on youth-driven approaches acknowledge their potential as active participants in economic activities, aiming to harness their fresh perspectives, novel ideas, and digital fluency to address challenges and seize opportunities across various sectors. The critical role of entrepreneurial learning and youth investment is evident in this context.

While the study did not solely emphasize empowering youth for economic development through entrepreneurship, employment, and innovation, such economies encourage younger people to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions, create jobs, and generate wealth for their communities. Policies and programs supporting youth entrepreneurship, skill development, access to financing, and market opportunities are essential components of youth-driven economies. By harnessing the creativity, energy, and talent of young residents, these economies can achieve sustainable growth and stronger, entrepreneurial, self-sustaining communities.

Whether through technology startups, social enterprises, or grassroots initiatives, young innovators are leveraging their skills and networks to develop innovative solutions to societal problems, disrupt traditional industries, and shape the future economy. Youth-driven innovation thrives in environments that foster creativity, collaboration, and risk-taking, empowering young people to experiment, fail forward, and iterate on their ideas. By nurturing a culture of innovation among younger residents, societies can unlock new sources of economic growth, social progress, and sustainable development.

The study revealed the need to develop support infrastructure that will spur youth entrepreneurship, such as transportation and childcare services. The lack of such

services is a barrier to participation and engagement in entrepreneurship instructional programs. Creating centralized networks of support with community partners and stakeholders should be part of a long-term engagement strategy.

Regarding program approaches for existing and future instructional programs, the implementation of alumni networks, mentorship programs, and ongoing support services to foster continued growth and success were identified. Hybrid programs combining in-person, virtual, and asynchronous learning modalities were discussed as working models to ensure accessibility and inclusivity while maximizing engagement and participation. Within program design, experiential learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, and hands-on projects, were described as essential to providing practical experience, real-world exposure, and long-term participant success.

Lastly, the cooperation of partnerships with local businesses and organizations to facilitate program growth stabilization was cited as instrumental in the development of the Baltimore City youth entrepreneurship ecosystems. Integrating trauma-informed support services, such as counseling, mental health resources, and peer support groups, into entrepreneurship instruction programs, along with ensuring participants have access to holistic support that addresses their emotional and psychological needs alongside their

entrepreneurial aspirations, was a recurring theme. Thus, equitable investment and resource allocation to ensure underserved and marginalized youth have equal access to financial and wrap-around support services are critical to creating a thriving youth entrepreneurial-focused network of capabilities in Baltimore City.

The shift from output-oriented metrics to outcome-oriented metrics emphasizes the long-term impact of entrepreneurship instruction programs on participants' lives and communities. Universal tracking indicators, such as employment rates, educational attainment, business sustainability, and community engagement, were identified as key measures for tracking ecosystem development and ongoing success. Implementing transparent and accountable processes for resource distribution, guided by principles of equity and social justice, is important.





RECOMMENDATIONS

Program structures that can accommodate the diverse needs and schedules of participants, including variations in age, educational background, and employment status, are needed.

- Enhance program flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs and schedules of participants. Consider offering both short-term intensive programs and long-term extended programs to cater to varying availability and preferences.
- Implement a hybrid program structure that combines in-person, virtual, and asynchronous learning modalities. This approach ensures accessibility and inclusivity while maximizing engagement and participation.
- Enhance program structure by integrating wrap-around services such as transportation assistance, childcare support, and access to mental health resources, ensuring holistic support for participants.
- Design programs with a longitudinal approach, offering continuous support and opportunities for skill development beyond short-term engagements, thereby fostering sustained growth and success among participants.
- Infuse trauma-informed approaches throughout program delivery, creating safe and supportive environments that acknowledge and address the diverse traumas and challenges faced by participants, thus promoting resilience and healing.
- Explore hybrid program models that blend face-to-face and virtual, leveraging the strengths and benefits of integrated components for youth and young adults managing both work, family, and school commitments. By combining different modes of delivery, these hybrid models offer flexibility to adapt to the unique needs and contexts of young participants, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility across various learning environments, while accommodating their diverse schedules and responsibilities.

Holistic curriculum integration supported by flexible program structures that can accommodate the diverse needs and schedules of participants, including variations in age, educational background, and employment status, are key to program design and strengthening program approaches.

- Emphasize a holistic learning approach that goes beyond traditional classroom instruction, incorporating experiential learning, mentorship opportunities, and real-world projects to enhance skill acquisition and application.
- Using a combination of outcome-based metrics to measure overall program impact, post-instruction assessment, and stakeholder feedback mechanisms to capture qualitative insights into program effectiveness, including regular surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews, can provide valuable perspectives on program strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.
- Develop a robust system for measuring program effectiveness based on outcome-oriented metrics, including participant success rates in employment, education, and entrepreneurial ventures, as well as long-term socio-economic impact on individuals and communities.
- Implement comprehensive post-instruction assessments to gauge the immediate and long-term impact of

entrepreneurship instructional programs on participants' skills development, mindset shifts, and socio-economic outcomes.

- Establish mechanisms for gathering feedback from diverse stakeholders, including participants, educators, employers, and community members, to continuously evaluate program effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and ensure alignment with stakeholders' needs and expectations.

Addressing Challenges: Funding Instability, Participant Engagement, Structural Barriers

- Develop strategies to mitigate the challenges posed by funding instability, such as diversifying funding sources, cultivating long-term partnerships with philanthropic organizations, and exploring innovative revenue-generating models to sustain program operations.
- Implement initiatives to enhance participant engagement and retention, such as incorporating culturally relevant curricula, providing personalized mentorship and support, and creating opportunities for peer learning and collaboration.
- Advocate for policy changes and community initiatives aimed at addressing structural barriers that hinder youth participation in entrepreneurship instructional programs, including access to education, transportation, affordable housing, and mental health services.

Comprehensive instruction and capacity-building opportunities for program staff to enhance their understanding of trauma-informed care principles and practices foster a culture of sensitivity, empathy, and trauma awareness within program delivery.

- **Instruction and Capacity Building:**
Provide instruction and capacity-building opportunities for program staff and mentors on trauma-informed practices, including trauma awareness, trauma-responsive communication, and creating trauma-sensitive environments.
- **Integration of Mental Health Support:**
Collaborate with mental health professionals and organizations to integrate mental health support services into entrepreneurship instructional programs, offering participants access to counseling, therapy, and other resources to address trauma-related challenges and promote well-being.
- **Culturally Responsive Programming:**
Develop culturally responsive programming that recognizes and respects the cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences of participants, ensuring that trauma-informed approaches are tailored to meet the unique needs of diverse communities.

Exploration of opportunities to diversify funding sources beyond traditional grants and philanthropic support for youth entrepreneurship instruction should consider revenue-generating initiatives, social enterprise models, and partnerships with private sector entities to augment financial resources.

- Prioritize financial literacy education as an integral component of entrepreneurship instruction programs, equipping youth with essential skills and knowledge to manage finances, make informed decisions, and build sustainable businesses.
- Facilitate access to microfinance options, grants, and funding opportunities specifically targeted towards youth entrepreneurs, enabling them to access capital for business startup or expansion, with a focus on underserved and marginalized communities.

- Strengthen the entrepreneurial support ecosystem by fostering collaborations between financial institutions, government agencies, nonprofits, and private sector partners to create pathways for youth entrepreneurship, including mentorship, networking, and access to investment opportunities.





IMPLICATIONS

The findings and themes identified in the study have significant implications for the design, implementation, and evaluation of entrepreneurship instructional programs tailored to youth in Baltimore. By synthesizing these key points, several implications emerge, informing future research, policy development, and programmatic interventions.

The emphasis on holistic learning approaches underscores the importance of integrating diverse educational modalities, including experiential learning, mentorship, and real-world projects, to foster comprehensive skill development among youth participants. Thus, there is a need for programs to prioritize flexibility and adaptability in their structures to accommodate participants' diverse needs. In particular, schedules of youth participants who are school-aged and emerging adults who are likely working and perhaps even furthering education at the post-secondary level should be considered to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. To this end, the exploration of hybrid program models suggests the potential benefits of leveraging both virtual and face-to-face modes to maximize impact, sustainability, and scalability of entrepreneurship instructional initiatives while addressing the unique needs and contexts of youth and young adult participants.

As previously mentioned, efforts should be made to develop robust systems for measuring program effectiveness based on outcome-oriented metrics, such as participant success rates in employment, education, and entrepreneurial ventures, to inform evidence-based decision-making and program improvement. Likewise, strategies to mitigate the challenges posed by funding instability should be explored, including diversifying funding sources, cultivating long-term partnerships, and exploring innovative revenue-generating models to sustain program operations and impact. Strategic drivers include advocacy

for policy changes and community initiatives aimed at addressing structural barriers such as access to education, transportation, affordable housing, and mental health services, which are essential for creating an enabling environment for youth and emerging adult entrepreneurship. Ultimately, they are key to socio-economic mobility that results in high impact and sustainability of youth-driven ideation and economies.

Recognition of trauma-informed practices as a foundational element highlights the need for creating safe and supportive environments that address the diverse traumas and challenges faced by youth and emerging adults in Baltimore. Equally important to supporting this population is understanding the impact of trauma in providing effective support and intervention. Trauma-informed approaches recognize that behaviors and reactions often stem from past experiences. Thus, in urban settings, where exposure to violence and adversity is common, trauma-informed approaches are essential for promoting resilience and fostering positive socio-emotional development among youth and young adults. Programs should prioritize instruction and capacity building on trauma-informed practices for staff and mentors, integrate mental health support services, and develop culturally responsive programming to address the unique needs and experiences of youth participants.

Initiatives to enhance financial literacy education, facilitate access to microfinance and funding opportunities, and strengthen

the entrepreneurial support ecosystem are critical for empowering youth entrepreneurs and fostering economic empowerment and self-sufficiency.

Collectively, these efforts should be made to enhance participant engagement and retention through culturally relevant curricula, personalized mentorship, and opportunities for peer learning and collaboration, addressing barriers to sustained participation and positive outcomes.

In conclusion, the implications derived from the study findings and recommendations underscore the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurship instructional programs and the critical role they play in empowering youth, fostering economic development, and promoting social inclusion and resilience in Baltimore. By leveraging these insights and recommendations, stakeholders can work collaboratively to design and implement effective, sustainable, and inclusive entrepreneurship instructional initiatives that empower youth to realize their full potential and contribute positively to their communities.





WHAT'S NEXT

Building on the concepts of youth-driven economies and innovation in Baltimore, MD, here are five priorities for ecosystem building and engaging youth and emerging adults in effective entrepreneurship to boost the city's economy:

- **Accessible Entrepreneurship Education:**

Ensure that entrepreneurship education and instructional programs are easily accessible to youth and young adults across Baltimore. This includes offering both face-to-face and virtual training options to diverse schedules and preferences. Additionally, prioritize outreach efforts to underserved communities and schools to ensure equitable access to entrepreneurial resources and opportunities.

- **Holistic Support Services Investment:**

Develop holistic support services that address the multifaceted needs of aspiring young entrepreneurs. This may include providing mentorship, coaching, access to capital, legal and financial guidance, and networking opportunities. By offering comprehensive support, young entrepreneurs can navigate the complexities of starting and scaling businesses more effectively.

- **Tech-enabled Innovation Hubs:** Establish tech-enabled innovation hubs or co-working spaces tailored to the needs of youth and emerging adult entrepreneurs. These hubs should provide access to state-of-the-art technology, prototyping facilities, and collaborative workspaces where young innovators can develop and test their ideas. Additionally, foster a vibrant community of like-minded peers, mentors, and industry experts to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration.

- **Integration of Trauma-Informed Practices:** Integrate trauma-informed practices into entrepreneurship instruction programs to support the socio-emotional well-being of young participants. Recognize and address

the impact of trauma and adversity on Baltimore youth development and provide supportive environments that promote healing, resilience, and personal growth. Incorporate mindfulness, self-care practices, and mental health resources into instructional curricula to empower young entrepreneurs to thrive both personally and professionally.

- **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Foster partnerships and collaborations between government agencies, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, private sector companies, and community stakeholders to create a robust ecosystem for youth entrepreneurship in Baltimore. Leverage resources, expertise, and networks from diverse sectors to provide comprehensive support and opportunities for young entrepreneurs. By working together, stakeholders can amplify their impact, leverage collective strengths, and drive positive change in the city's entrepreneurial landscape.

In conclusion, by prioritizing these initiatives, Baltimore can cultivate a thriving ecosystem for youth entrepreneurship, empowering the next generation of innovators and business leaders. Through this concerted effort, the city can position itself as a dynamic tech hub and economic powerhouse for youth and emerging adult entrepreneurial instruction. The envisioned future of sustained growth and success for Baltimore's thriving ecosystems hinges upon the delivery of safe, supportive, and sustainable models. These attributes are central to a comprehensive approach aimed at ensuring participant readiness and fostering entrepreneurial success in the long term.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

EXCEL Project Progress Timeline

September 1, 2022	Proposal Submission Approved
September 13, 2023	Weekly Standup Meetings Begin
October 14, 2022	CSU Institutional Review Board Approval
December 11, 2022	Initial Annie E. Casey Award
January 14, 2023	EXCEL Researchers Recruited
March 28, 2023	Initial Request to Youth Training Organizations
February 9 & 10, 2023	Research Team Development & Orientation
April 27, 2023	EXCEL Panel Discussion @ EICAC 2023 EXCEL Kickoff Reception
June 22, 2023	Data Collection Begins
July 17 - August 7, 2023	Undergraduate Researcher Training
August 14, 2023	Graphic Designer Meeting
August 15, 2023	10 Interviews Completed
August 17, 2023 - January 31, 2024	35 Interviews
September 1, 2023	Finalize EXCEL Communication Plan
September 28, 2023	First Convening of the EXCEL Advisory Board
September 29, 2023	Visit to Early Charm Ventures, Inc.
October 1 - October 31, 2023	Data Analysis Begins
November 2, 2023	Baltimore Together Panel Discussion
December 7, 2023	Launch of COB/CSE EXCEL Web Page Second Convening of the EXCEL Advisory Board
January 2, 2024	Data Collection and Analysis Phases Continue
January 4, 2024	Initial HeartSmiles Youth Integration Meeting
January 16, 2024	Initial 2024 Engagement with the Research Team
January 19, 2024	Initiate Graphic Design RFP Process Release of EICAC RFP
January 20, 2024	HeartSmiles Orientation & Analysis Assignment

Continued on next page

EXCEL Project Progress Timeline *(continued)*

January 22, 2024	Completion of Youth Entrepreneurship Op-Ed
January 26, 2024	Update of Communication Plan
January 31, 2024	Orientation Material to EXCEL Advisory Board Members Service as EICAC Proposal Evaluator
February 2, 2024	Initiate Analysis of Additional Data
February 8, 2024	Third EXCEL Advisory Board Meeting
February 15, 2024	Finalize Report Structure Outline
February 16, 2024	Request Information to Close Data Gaps
February 23, 2024	Notification of EXCEL Participants in EICAC
February 28, 2024	Closing of the Interview Phases (Other Methods of Data Collection Continue and Analysis)
March 4, 2024	Data Collection in Exemplar Organizations Begins
March 18, 2024	Close of Data Collection
March 23, 2024	HeartSmiles Comms and EICAC Preparation
March 31, 2024	Completion of the Analysis of Exemplar Organizations
April 1, 2024	Closing of All Data Collection Methods and Analysis (except for EICAC)
April 8, 2024	Official Start of Report Composition
April 11, 2024	Advisory Board Meeting
April 15, 2024	Initiate Requests for Research Stipends
April 25, 2024	EICAC 2024
April 30, 2024	Final Report Draft
May 1 - 30, 2024	Report Editing Finalize Comm and Dissemination Strategy
May 1 - June 30, 2024	Planning for an EXCEL Report Release Event
June 1 - 30, 2024	Finalize Report Release Plans and Composition
June 13, 2024	Final Advisory Board Meeting
July 1, 2024	Official Release of the EXCEL Report
July 1 - September 30, 2024	Post-Release Events Schedule

APPENDIX B: RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT

1. Initial Researcher Orientation
(February 9 & 10, 2023)

https://www.greaterspacesandplaces.com/_files/ugd/02a262_19ba03e3040b4510aa0338a860deedc9.pdf



2. Participatory Action Research
(February 10, 2023)

https://558c161a-511a-4d71-8e92-7f87f5b3ff86.filesusr.com/ugd/02a262_bc-f1ae494eb7423f880be1fc7a3e46a4.pdf



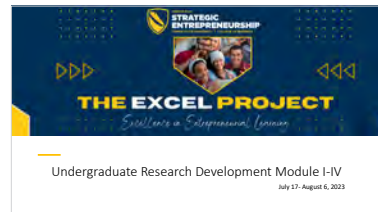
3. Researcher Tools Training Session
“Leveraging tools to ensure project success”

https://558c161a-511a-4d71-8e92-7f87f5b3ff86.filesusr.com/ugd/02a262_379279ce72294b379c-428210837fee88.pdf



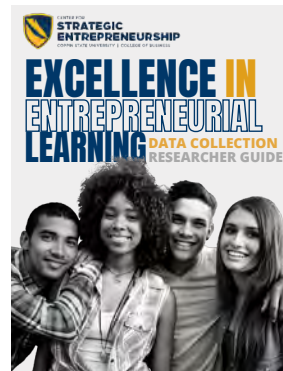
APPENDIX C: UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCHER TRAINING

https://www.greaterspacesandplaces.com/_files/ugd/02a262_20fa38871bef421092aba5ca21e3c697.pdf



APPENDIX D: DATA COLLECTION RESEARCH GUIDE

https://www.greaterspacesandplaces.com/_files/ugd/02a262_6f6bca3029604bc2b8af21be02d90ebf.pdf



APPENDIX E: EXCEL POST-DATA COLLECTION REPORT (DCR)

1. Participant: _____

2. Researcher: _____

3. Date: _____

4. Location: _____

Instructions: Complete the PDR survey immediately following each data collection session.

Depth of Responses:

Participant's responses provided rich and detailed information related to the research topic.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments:

Relevance to Research Questions:

The responses address the research questions or objectives.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments:

Coherence and Clarity:

Participant's responses were coherent and clear.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments:

Richness of Detail:

Participant's responses offer rich and vivid descriptions.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments:

Participant Engagement:

The participant was engaged and actively sharing during the interview.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments:

Reflective and Thought-Provoking Responses:

The participant's responses demonstrated reflection and critical thinking.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments:

Uncovering Multiple Viewpoints:

The interview captured diverse viewpoints and perspectives related to the research topic.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments:

Participant Comfort and Trust:

Rate the comfort level and trust established between the researcher and the participant.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments:



REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Baltimore CAN
Baltimore Empowered
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Citywide Youth Development
CLIA
Code the Schools
Coppin State University
Dent Education
Edmondson High School
Epic Universe
Graves Business School
Greater Baltimore Black Chamber of Commerce (GBBCC)
Greenmount West CC
HeartSmiles
Impact Hub
Innovation Works
Jubilee Arts
Junior Achievement?
Keys Empower
Let's Thrive Baltimore
Made in Baltimore?
Mayor's Office Small and Minority Business Enterprise
Mentoring Mentors
Reconstruct N Rebuild
Requity
Roots Branch Media
TEDCO
The Cube
UMBC
Young Successful Leaders



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