EXCELLENCE IN ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING (EXCEL)

EQUIPPING BALTIMORE YOUTH & EMERGING ADULTS FOR OPPORTUNITY

Coppin State University
College of Business
Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship

A Summary of Key Information | August 1, 2024

Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship (CSE)

CSE is the epicenter of entrepreneurship research, teaching, and practice activities within Coppin State University and the community. The primary goal of the CSE is to improve entrepreneurial outcomes in our West Baltimore community and contribute to economic growth across the globe. Established in December 2020, the CSE advocates transdisciplinary approaches to business and economic development. Through this advocacy, the CSE provides direction across all areas of study and industry, infusing ingenuity and greater economic velocity and mobility into the broader economy.

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INTRODUCTION

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 success. ***Welcome to the Baltimore we built, together.***

This vision of what is possible drives the Excellence in Entrepreneurial Learning (EXCEL) research project. The project aims to understand entrepreneurship-related instructional efforts in Baltimore City for 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 young adults for inclusive and equitable entrepreneurship opportunities that benefit their communities. Given this desire, conducting studies like the EXCEL project is essential.

The EXCEL Project encourages collaboration among researchers from multiple disciplines, community members, and educational stakeholders. This exploratory study actively involves faculty and student researchers, Baltimore City entrepreneurship programs, and youth and young adults, who are the primary focus of the research.

The research questions focus on program structures, partnerships, methods, effectiveness, challenges, trauma-informed approaches, and engagement following instructional activities. Besides describing the entrepreneurship learning program landscape for younger residents in Baltimore, EXCEL aims to demonstrate research as a learning system with real-time improvements and a foundation for future discoveries. The forward thinking reflected in the research design was also informed by the EXCEL Advisory Board, which met quarterly during the project. There were real-time, process improvement and development activities in the form of undergraduate researcher training, researcher professional development, conference planning and implementation, participation from over 500 ecosystem members, media outreach, and post-release stakeholder engagement.

Invitations to participate in the EXCEL project were sent to 57 youth entrepreneurship support organizations throughout Baltimore City. Thirty organizations indicated a desire to

participate, and additional participants were added during the study, resulting in 35 participating organizations. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the participating organizations have been operational for less than nine years, with 60% serving fewer than 50 youth and young adults each year. Over 50% of participating organizations provide training, education, internships, and mentorships to those within the study demographics, using age and residential criteria to determine eligibility at a single location.

This summary provides an overview of key findings, recommendations, implications, and a vision for the future. The full report provides a more comprehensive account of the two-year project. EXCEL establishes a foundation for future inquiry into entrepreneurship instructional programming and research.

Download the full report here:

https://www.greaterspacesandplaces.com/excellence-in-entrepreneurial-learning

FINDINGS

Structure

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.

- Entrepreneurship instructional programs vary widely in structure, including for-profit, non-profit, advisory, direct services, flat, and hierarchical models.

- Most programs require ancillary wrap-around services such as transportation, food security, mentorship, mental health support, tutoring, childcare, and other assistance to facilitate participant learning.

- This need for wrap-around services has led to the development of a loosely interdependent network of programs offering various entrepreneurship instructional opportunities, supported by organizations providing multiple support services.

Recommendation

Strategically develop programming that accommodates the diverse needs and schedules of participants, considering variations in age, educational background, and employment status.

Implication

Programs achieve efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the learners' needs.

The Future

An AI-enabled needs assessment tool that helps programs quickly identify learner informational, technical, and emotional needs.

"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."

Partnerships

The network of entrepreneurship instructional programs includes partnerships with universities, cultural institutions, and community-based organizations, which facilitate access to resources, expertise, and networks.

- Both informal and formal networks may include professional groups, non-profit leadership groups, funding organizations, and others.
- Support networks evolve from unstructured exploration to planned engagement, revealing the importance of early assessment to help build productive, sustainable partnerships.

Recommendation

Use network analysis frameworks to assess and improve collaborative relationships between programs.

Implication

Reduced costs and improved economies of scale for programs' development and delivery maximizing the return on funder investments.

The Future

Accessible ecosystem program data that allows real-time resource mapping and recommendations for collaborative best practices.

"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."

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.

- Methods span six categories: 1. Business Planning, 2. Academic Institutional, 3. Curriculum-Based Structured Experiences, 4. Industry-specific, 5. Place-specific, and 6. Consultancy.
- Programs that integrate career and entrepreneurship skills support a growing number of part-time freelance entrepreneurs.
- Intentional engagement with secondary schools, community colleges, four-year institutions, and graduate programs expands instructional opportunities.
- Industry-specific instruction is decided in many instances by learner or organizational interest rather than workforce or industry demand.

Recommendation

Emphasize holistic learning approaches that incorporate experiential learning, mentorship opportunities, and real-world projects.

Implication

Learners will develop analytical and critical thinking skills that are important to being competent learners.

The Future

Instructional strategies and methods that produce measurable improvements in learning competencies and sustainable economic mobility.

"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."

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.

- Participating organizations use various methods to capture program assessment data, often guided by funding agencies reporting requirements.

- Descriptive data that tells a story is valuable in programs serving learners without legacy exposure to formal business development.

- Nine categories of effective measures exist among the EXCEL study organizations: 1. Output Measures, 2. Outcome Measures, 3. Impact Measures, 4. Efficiency Measures, 5. Sustainability Measures, 6. Quality Measures, 7. Equity Measures, 8. Process Evaluation, and 9. Return on Investment (ROI).

Recommendation

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.

Implication

Organizations providing entrepreneurship instruction services will be able to measure the long-term sustainable impact of programming and correlate to quality-of-life indicators.

The Future

Real-time predictive analysis will enable instructors and organizations to adjust methods and produce longitudinal data showing continuous improvements in programming.

"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."

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.

- Challenges in providing entrepreneurial instructional services were found in engagement with learners, funding, infrastructure, space, the impact of multigenerational divestment and trauma, and the pandemic.

- Smaller nonprofits struggle with accessing diverse funding sources, compounded by high competition for grants in urban areas.

- Engagement with instructional program participants is often complicated by the glamorization of entrepreneurship by popular culture, a lack of multi-generational family support systems, and an inaccurate perception of the demands of entrepreneurship.

- Infrastructure challenges can be reduced by effective planning, adequate financial support, and efficient program implementation.

Recommendation

Develop strategies to mitigate the funding instability, such as cultivating long-term partnerships with philanthropic organizations and exploring innovative revenue models.

Implication

Sustainability based on a combination of financial, operational, and strategic practices aimed at creating stability and resilience, allowing organizations to fulfill their missions.

The Future

A dynamic entrepreneurial landscape of empowered entrepreneurs supported by continuous, consistent, and expanding learning opportunities provided by programs that have sufficient funding sources, enduring partnerships with philanthropic organizations, and innovative revenue-generating models to ensure the longevity and growth.

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

Trauma Informed Approaches

Trauma results from events that are harmful or threatening and can cause lasting adverse effects the diminish the ability to function and achieve mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being. Trauma-informed approaches include efforts to mitigate the negative effects of trauma. EXCEL research discovered that:

- Programs aim to offer comprehensive and supportive services to individuals grappling with trauma, tailored to establish safe and nurturing environments while addressing the diverse needs of participants.

- Organizations integrate trauma-informed care into instruction through 10 types of service design and staff preparation that align with the six CDC SAMSHA trauma-informed approach protocols, including:
1. Affirming/Embracing Approaches,
2. Family Approach to Services,
3. Meeting Basic Needs, 3. Parenting/Fatherhood, 4. Race/ethnicity/culture,
5. Returning Citizens, 6. Wellness, Dance, Yoga, Sister Circles, 7. Wrap Around Services, 8. Clinical Social Workers/Counselors, 9. Formal Trauma-Informed Staff Training, and Reflective of Community Experience Strengths-based Interaction.

Recommendation

Provide comprehensive instruction and capacity-building to enhance program implementation of trauma-informed care principles and practices to foster a culture of sensitivity, empathy, awareness, relational competence.

Implication

Greater learner outcomes based on learners feeling understood and supported increase the potential for progress in entrepreneurial pursuits.

The Future

An entrepreneurial ecosystem that aligns with the expressed desires of Baltimore youth and emerging adults, including freedom from discrimination and unlimited opportunities to serve their communities.

"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."

Beyond the Launch

Sustaining instructional engagement beyond the limits of an initial program has advantages. For example, longer engagements increase knowledge retention, Long-term interventions are more likely to result in lasting knowledge retention, enhance development of critical thinking skills, and improve social and emotional development. Evidence of extended engagement of learners was discovered during the EXCEL project.

- Support for entrepreneurs extends beyond instructional services and technical assistance during the startup phase.

- This support network may include mentorship programs, access to funding opportunities, business development workshops, and networking events after the instructional engagement.

- 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 are empowered to develop skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and risk management.

Recommendation

Invest in long-term growth sustainability strategies that include accessible entrepreneurship education, holistic support services, tech-enabled innovation hubs, and integration of trauma-informed practices. Direct investments to long-term sustainable improvements to economic mobility that can be attributed to increases in knowledge and skills related to entrepreneurship.

Implication

Continuous observable growth in a well-prepared entrepreneurial class with equitable opportunities and positive community impact.

The Future

A thriving entrepreneurial community of empowered entrepreneurs with sustained economic mobility and growing collective wealth.

"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."

WHAT'S NEXT

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.

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.

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.

EXCEL TIMELINE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS REFERENCES

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

EXCEL PROJECT PROGRESS TIMELINE (cont.)

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Participating Organizations

Art with a Heart
B- 360
Baltimore Corps
Baltimore CAN
Baltimore Empowered
Bon Secours
Center for Urban Families
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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Annie E. Casey Foundation