



# United Teen Equality Center Prospectus

## Description:

*The United Teen Equality Center (UTEC), founded in 1999, was the result of an organizing movement driven by young people to develop their own teen center in response to gang violence. Today, UTEC is a youth-led agency that uniquely blends a drop-in, safe-haven center with more structured youth development and organizing work, serving over 1,500 Lowell teens annually. Guided by its core values of peace, positivity, and empowerment, UTEC staff proactively "meet teens where they're at," using every opportunity to build trust and engage them in one or more of its four program areas: Streetwork/Peacemaking, Youth Development, Education, and Youth Organizing/Political Action. By directly linking prevention and intervention services with youth-led policymaking, UTEC provides a pathway from the street to the state house, from peacemaking to political action for older youth most often overlooked and considered disengaged. UTEC's long-term vision is to serve as a model for other youth agencies across the Commonwealth and beyond.*

**Location:** Lowell, MA

**Website:** [www.utec-lowell.org](http://www.utec-lowell.org)

**Founded:** 1999

**Current Budget:** \$1.16 million

## Geography & People Served:

UTEC serves the young people of Lowell, ages 13 to 23.

## Social Problem:

- The poverty rate among youth in the state's 10 largest cities is 24 percent, just under one in four and double the statewide average. This concentration of poverty in urban areas leads to a concentration of problems for young people.
- Lowell, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the state, is home to 18,000 young people ages 13 to 23. Approximately one in 10 are gang-involved, and there are 25-30 gang sets active at any given time.
- Lowell has the 9<sup>th</sup> highest teen birth rate in Massachusetts.
- Lowell High School's four-year graduation rate of 69.5 percent ranks in the bottom 10 percent of all high schools in the state.

## Key Accomplishments & Social Impact:

- Received Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Health Leader award and honored with the Citizens Bank and NECN Champion in Action award.
- Invited by Senator Kennedy to testify at the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on gang violence prevention.
- Facilitated three successful peace summits in 2007, resulting in truces between six rival gang sets.

## Two-Year Goals:

- Complete the construction of UTEC's new building addition, the second phase of a \$6.3 million capital campaign, and expand to serve 2,200 youth per year.
- Implement a rigorous evaluation and data-tracking system.
- Develop curriculum and pilot program for the Streetworker Training Institute.
- Create a leadership development training program for UTEC's youth staff.
- Expand the statewide youth policymaking coalition with three regional staff.
- Formalize college partnerships to benefit UTEC alternative high school students.

## Total Investment – Two Years:

Operating: \$2.1 million

Capital: \$3.3 million



## Contact Information:

Gregg Croteau

978-265-7173

[gregg@utec-lowell.org](mailto:gregg@utec-lowell.org)

## Ways to Invest

### In-Kind Support

- Advisory board members
- Capital campaign website
- Catering supplies/kitchen equipment
- Music studio equipment
- Building material donations
- 15-passenger van
- Sports equipment
- Database design development
- Upgraded technology (hardware and software)

### Financial Support

<b>\$50,000</b>	Peacemaking or statewide coalition staff
<b>\$25,000</b>	Data and evaluation staff
<b>\$10,000</b>	Curriculum development for Streetworker Institute
<b>\$5,000</b>	Two peace summits
<b>\$1,000</b>	Training for three youth UTEC staff

## Need & Opportunity

### **Social Problem**

Too many young people in Massachusetts and across the country are struggling to navigate the path to adulthood successfully. These youth are most often overlooked and considered disengaged or unreachable. The prevailing view is that it is “too late” to work with them effectively and make a lasting, positive impact on their lives. Data on Massachusetts from the Kids Count database and the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey provide evidence that there is a sizable population of marginalized youth at risk for serious adult problems:

- On an annual basis, between 9,000 and 10,000 teens ages 15-19 have become young mothers over the last five years.<sup>1</sup>
- 64,000 youth are out of school with no high school diploma or GED certificate.<sup>2</sup>
- 15 percent of teens report carrying a weapon in the past month; 29 percent report getting into a physical fight.<sup>3</sup>
- Nearly 10 percent of youth report being in a gang in the previous year. Youth involved in gangs are three times more likely than their peers to carry a weapon and three times more likely to have considered suicide.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2006, nearly 10,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 went to the emergency room for assault-related injuries.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, these young people are not just concentrated in Boston, the state’s largest city. Instead, they can be found struggling to make their way in communities across the Commonwealth. As an example, Lowell, Massachusetts, where UTEC is located, is home to 18,000 youth between the ages of 13 and 23. Their challenges include:

- *High school drop-out rates:* Lowell High School’s four-year graduation rate of 69.5 percent ranks in the bottom 10 percent of all high schools in the state. For a given class of 900 students, roughly 275 will not graduate within four years. An additional 150 youth will drop out.<sup>6</sup>
- *Young parenthood:* Lowell has the 9th highest teen birth rate in Massachusetts (50 out of every 1,000 teen girls).<sup>7</sup>
- *Violence/gang involvement:* According to the Lowell Police Department, between 1,500 and 2,000 Lowell youth—about one in every 10 young people—are engaged in gang activity, and there are 25-30 gang sets active at any given time. People under the age of 20 commit 70 percent of violent crime in Lowell.<sup>8</sup>

Ignoring this group of young people is costly for society as a whole. A review of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, completed by Karen Walker and supported by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, found a strong relationship between adverse outcomes in late adolescence and serious negative outcomes in early adulthood:<sup>9</sup>

- High school dropouts were three times more likely to be on public assistance.

<sup>1</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center, [www.kidscount.org/datacenter/](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, “Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2005,” [www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/hprograms/yrbs/05/summary.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/hprograms/yrbs/05/summary.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Massachusetts Department of Public Health, “Youth Violence Prevention Data and Statistics.” From a presentation to the Youth Violence Prevention Coalition, March 12, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, “Lowell High School, Cohort 2007 4-Year Graduation Rate,” [profiles.doe.mass.edu](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu).

<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts Department of Public Health, “Massachusetts Births 2006, Table 7: Trends in Teen Birth Rates for Selected Communities,” [www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/research\\_epi/birth\\_report\\_2006.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/research_epi/birth_report_2006.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Lowell Police Department interview, March 14, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Karen E. Walker et al., “Critical Junctures on the Way to Adulthood: Options for Intervention,” (2007).

- For young women who gave birth under the age of 18, the public assistance rate was even higher; as young adults, they were six times more likely to be dependent on the welfare system.
- Youth who belonged to a gang were two to three times more likely to have an adult conviction or report weapon use in the year prior to the survey.

Thus, failing to intervene with older adolescents who are already considered high risk means that their difficulties are likely to persist in the future, fueling poverty and raising costs for health care, housing, law enforcement, and social services. Each of these young people represents a potential cost between \$250,000 and \$2 million over his or her lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

### **Root Cause Factors**

Poverty and racial/ethnic discrimination in Lowell, as well as in other urban areas in Massachusetts and across the country, create an environment where many young people struggle to transition to adulthood successfully. Poverty is concentrated in these urban areas, along with all of its associated problems—substandard housing, lack of economic opportunity, and high rates of community violence. The child poverty rate in the state's 10 largest cities averages 24 percent—just under one in four—or double the statewide average.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the percentage of young people who are new to this country or whose parents are recent immigrants is twice the statewide average (for cities closer to Boston), which adds a host of challenges, including racial/ethnic discrimination. These factors in combination greatly increase the stress on young people and interfere with their ability to get the help they need.

The City of Lowell, as an example, is located approximately 35 miles northwest of Boston and has a population of 105,000. Contrary to the prosperity the city saw as a leading industrial center in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lowell has struggled economically in recent years. Today, the median household income is about \$45,000, or 25 percent less than the statewide average. At the same time, Lowell is a diverse immigrant community with a significant Latino population (15 percent) and the second largest Cambodian population in the United States, estimated at approximately 30,000 and second only to Long Beach, California. According to community research conducted by the University of Massachusetts Lowell, approximately 50 percent of all Lowell's residents are immigrants/refugees from such countries as Cambodia, Vietnam, Brazil, Portugal, Africa, and the Dominican Republic. A recent article in the *Lowell Sun* noted that 38 native languages are spoken by students at Lowell High School.<sup>12</sup>

Within this context, it is challenging for young people to get the support they need. Even if they are aware of available community resources, youth are often unable or unwilling to access services for various reasons:

- Mistrust of adults in general and professional service providers in particular
- Services which are not teen-friendly or oriented to the needs of older adolescents
- Cultural norms which dictate problems should stay within the family or at least within the community
- Care-taking responsibility for siblings and other family members, or the need to have a job, which means there is little time to seek out and participate in support services

Within the context of this environment and without adult support, many youth feel marginalized and undervalued, which creates a reason for them to further disengage. They are less likely to participate in the political and civic process, which in turn reinforces social and economic inequality.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Depending on their level of engagement in criminal activity. M. Cohen, (1998). The monetary value of saving a high risk youth. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 14(1), 5-33 from Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report. (Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice, 1999), 82. [www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/chapter3.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/chapter3.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> KIDS COUNT Data Center and 2000 U.S. Census. Ten largest cities with child poverty rates: Boston (27%), Worcester (26%), Springfield (33%), Lowell (24%), Cambridge (16%), Brockton (20%), New Bedford (28%), Fall River (26%), Lynn (24%), and Quincy (12%).

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Scott, "Bienvenidos and Welcome," *Lowell Sun*, May 6, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Kristen Zimmerman, "Making Space, Making Change: Profiles of Youth-Led and Youth-Driven Organizations," (2004). Written for the Young Wisdom Project of the Movement Strategy Center.

An estimated 109,000 youth (ages 13 to 23) live in poverty across the Commonwealth, the majority of whom reside in urban areas.<sup>14</sup> Integrating these adolescents and young adults into the social, economic, and political life of Lowell and other Massachusetts cities is critical to the state's viability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

### **Current Landscape**

Many youth organizations provide a range of youth development activities—cultural arts, recreation, job skills training, and other activities. These programs play an important role in fostering the healthy development of youth of all backgrounds. However, young people who initiate participation in the types of structured youth development programming typically offered may be the ones who would be more likely to seek out activities and succeed without additional help, rather than those who are difficult to engage and more likely to be involved in risky behaviors. Few programs do the targeted, intensive outreach required to reach those youth who are most often overlooked and considered disengaged, particularly older youth ages 16 and up. Moreover, there are a handful of programs that mobilize youth to take action on a problem in their communities through direct action or grassroots organizing strategies; it is rare to see youth participating in actual policymaking—particularly poor and immigrant youth.

Most youth development and youth organizing agencies are not designed to move youth from life on the streets into structured programming, and then into organizational and civic leadership positions, while at the same time dealing with the inevitable crises that occur along the way. They typically do not have crisis intervention skills in-house (i.e. mediation/conflict resolution expertise, mental health clinicians) that allow them to continuously serve youth considered most at-risk. Without linking direct service to advocacy and providing a vehicle for the most disenfranchised young people to influence the legislative process, the root causes of youth violence and risk behaviors go unaddressed. At the same time, there is a missed opportunity to leverage the resilience and experiences of those young people who are most affected and closet to the problems.

### **Opportunity**

The research noted earlier, completed by Karen Walker et al, identified late adolescence as a “critical juncture” when intervention can potentially prevent serious adult problems.<sup>16</sup> The researchers concluded that working with older teens who have already experienced adverse outcomes may be a cost-effective way to allocate resources, focusing on those young people who are most likely to have long-term difficulties.<sup>17</sup> The ongoing challenge for practitioners and policymakers is to develop and invest in programs that effectively engage this population over several years and can intervene, often in crisis situations, to change life trajectories. Programs with the capacity to do this type of targeted outreach and intervention have the following characteristics:

- Adults work in partnership with young people, seeing themselves as supportive advocates, in contrast to adults motivated to save, reform, or rescue young people from their situations.<sup>18</sup>
- Youth are valued and nurtured as decision-makers.<sup>19</sup>
- Expectations for young people are high.<sup>20</sup>
- Older youth support emerging generations of leaders.<sup>21</sup>

Sustaining this work also requires shifting policies so that resources are directed toward understanding what works and how best to support program efficacy, and regularly re-investing in the most effective programs, allowing them to demonstrate results, learn, and grow.

<sup>14</sup> KIDS COUNT Data Center.

<sup>15</sup> Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson, “Boston Unbound: Tapping Greater Boston’s Assets and Talents To Create a World-Leading Citistate,” (2004). The Citistates Group. [www.tbf.org/uploadedFiles/Citistates\\_final.pdf](http://www.tbf.org/uploadedFiles/Citistates_final.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Karen E. Walker et al., “Critical Junctures on the Way to Adulthood: Options for Intervention,” (2007).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> J. Walker and L. White (1998). Caring adults support the healthy development of youth. *The Center*, 14-19. [www.fourh.umn.edu/educators/research/Center/Center1998.html](http://www.fourh.umn.edu/educators/research/Center/Center1998.html).

<sup>19</sup> Kristen Zimmerman, “Making Space, Making Change: Profiles of Youth-Led and Youth-Driven Organizations,” (2004). Written for the Young Wisdom Project of the Movement Strategy Center.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.





UTEC fills a gap in youth programming by providing intensive outreach to youth who are most often overlooked, a structure for keeping them engaged over time, and a process for supporting them to influence public policies that directly affect them. Based on over nine years of experience, UTEC believes that these particular youth are best positioned to foster enduring, system-level change because they are already leaders “on the street” and have in-depth knowledge of youth and community issues. UTEC’s innovation is its ability to provide multiple entry points and routes to leadership and civic activism. UTEC’s pathway from the street to the state house, from peacemaking to political action, directly links prevention and intervention services with youth-led policymaking. UTEC’s model is designed to ensure alignment between youth needs, the policies that govern program practices, and the allocation of resources. With renovations to its 20,000 square-foot building underway, UTEC is poised to expand its programs to reach over 2,000 youth annually and emerge as a state and national leader in street outreach, peacemaking, and youth policymaking.

## **Social Innovation in Action: The United Teen Equality Center Model**

*Peace is not merely the absence of tension, but rather the presence of justice.*

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

UTEC is a youth-led safe-haven for youth development and organizing that serves 1,500 Lowell teens annually. UTEC seeks to reduce risks that youth face day-to-day, increase opportunities for them to make positive changes in their lives and communities, and influence state and local policies that affect their ability to reach their potential. Guided by its core values of peace, positivity, and empowerment, UTEC proactively reaches out to teens in their neighborhoods, engages them in youth-driven programming, and provides a pathway to youth leadership and civic engagement. Based on its success, UTEC continues to experience strong demand for its programs, both locally from youth and the City of Lowell, as well as more recently from organizations in Massachusetts and across the country that want to emulate its approach.

### **History**

In 1999, UTEC grew to fruition from an organizing movement led by young people to develop their own teen center in response to gang violence. The initial planning of UTEC dates back to 1997, when the Downtown Neighborhood Association and the City of Lowell’s Streetworker Program were propelled by a group of teenagers who stressed that there was no place to “hang out” in the downtown area. At the time, there was a high level of gang violence between Latino and Southeast Asian youth, and the downtown area was regarded as the one true neutral zone, a place where teens could safely socialize without fear of any gang or turf associations.

Knowing that a downtown location was critical, UTEC first partnered with St. Anne’s Episcopal Church and moved into its parish hall. However, when St. Anne’s looked to expand its own program, UTEC was forced to find a new home. After temporary placement in a storefront on Merrimack Street, UTEC was finally able to purchase its own permanent home on Hurd Street, and is currently in the midst of an extensive, multi-phased, \$6.3 million renovation. The new home is ideal—a space in the heart of downtown that is large enough to house UTEC’s numerous programs—and will eventually allow UTEC to serve at least 2,200 youth annually. Once the renovations and new addition are complete, this 20,000 square-foot building will be Lowell’s first LEED-certified green building and will serve as a community education center for sustainable energy and environmental practices.

### **Participants**

UTEC serves Lowell youth aged 13 to 23 with the following demographic profile:

- The average age of participating youth is 16 to 17.
- Over 80 percent reside in the low-income areas of Lowell’s Renewal Community census tracts: Acre and Lowell Highlands. The average annual household income in the Renewal Community is \$16,450.
- 96 percent are minorities, reflecting Lowell’s diversity; 45 percent are Latino, 25 percent are Southeast Asian, 16 percent are African American, 10 percent are West African, and 4 percent are White.
- Young women and men participate equally, with the female-male ratio roughly 50-50.



Within this group are young people who are dealing with any number of seemingly insurmountable challenges, often in combination—homelessness, gang violence, family violence, school failure, pregnancy and young parenthood, and substance abuse. UTEC intentionally engages these youth—who are typically regarded as the most “problematic” or most “at-risk”—based on an unwavering belief in their potential, respect for their resilience, and years of experience working with the promising young leaders who have emerged from this population.

### ***The Model***

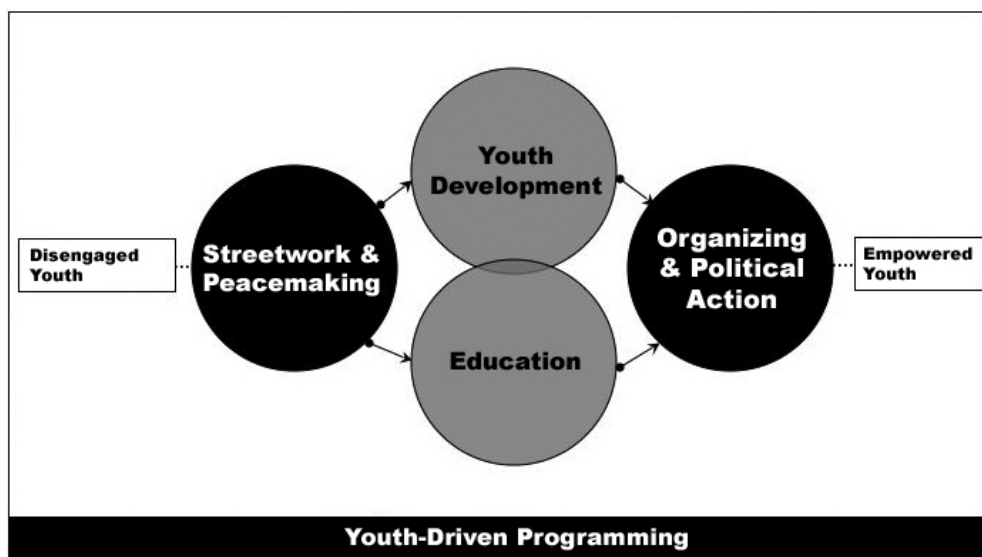
On any given afternoon, UTEC’s drop-in center is busy with 100 or more young people participating in a variety of activities. But the activity of the center itself only tells part of the story, as UTEC has a strong presence on the street, meeting youth at school, in their neighborhoods, and at family events. UTEC operates from the following core principles:

1. *Street outreach is an intensive, all-staff effort.* Outreach, “meeting teens where they’re at,” is a key responsibility of all UTEC staff. Each day, all staff are outside Lowell High School after dismissal, talking with students, listening, and telling them what is happening at UTEC. In addition, all staff have MySpace pages and participate in UTEC’s quarterly outreach weeks. As an example, for outreach week this past winter, staff members were outdoors giving out hot cocoa. UTEC is strategic about getting young people involved, rather than simply waiting until young people come into the center. Staff use an approach of “respectfully aggressive curiosity” and take it as a compliment when teens say, “UTEC staff are all up in my business!”
2. *Relationship-building is intentional and persistent.* The young people that UTEC targets are not likely to seek out support, so UTEC takes a deliberate, patient approach to relationship-building and sticks to that approach even when young people push back. UTEC is committed to being continuously present and to reaching out. Whether on the street or at the center, UTEC staff members are working to build trust and demonstrate their commitment to the young people they serve. Rather than focusing exclusively on their problems or needs, UTEC staff seek out young peoples’ likes and interests, emphasize what is going right in their lives, and build from there. UTEC embraces an asset-based counseling approach known as narrative therapy that draws upon young people’s stories of their lives and their social, cultural, and political context. Because of the relationships they develop, many youth describe UTEC as family.
3. *Drop-in and structured programming are equally important.* Framed within the Taoist philosophy of yin-yang, UTEC uses a balanced approach that includes drop-in programming offered alongside structured youth development opportunities and supports. Having the drop-in component makes relationship building possible for teens who are less likely just to walk into a youth program and express interest in joining a structured activity.
4. *Youth-led is institutional.* While many youth organizations describe themselves as “by teens, for teens,” UTEC’s commitment to this principle endures because it is woven into the fabric of its organizational culture and operations. Half of UTEC’s board members and staff are under the age of 23, and programs are adopted and improved based on youth input and action. Every program starts by a group of teens getting at least 10 signatures from their peers, and teens evaluate all programs. Fairness across the organization is a youth-led effort through the disciplinary council, and teens interview all applicants for adult staff positions. At UTEC, the concept of being youth-led is an institutional reality.
5. *Crisis is opportunity.* UTEC believes that crisis events are pivotal moments of opportunity for outreach, relationship building, and transformation. UTEC is intentionally organized to handle the various crises that occur; with a team of streetworkers and a licensed mental health clinician on staff, UTEC welcomes the opportunity to get involved rather than step away. For example, streetworkers actively seek out any crises on the street affecting a young person’s well being, dropping by a local gang hotspot or attending the funeral of a young person lost to violence. UTEC sees every crisis as an opportunity to engage a young person in positive youth development activities based on their interests, hooking them into education, the arts, or even youth organizing and political action.

These operating principles guide the activities that take place in each of UTEC’s four “centers” or program areas. As shown in the graphic on the next page, these program areas collectively provide **a pathway from**

**peacemaking to political action** that allows UTEC to reach youth who might not normally participate in youth development and youth organizing programs, while making it possible for youth to choose their own route to success based on their individual interests and needs.

UTEC is working to develop a core group of engaged youth leaders, who assume management responsibilities for the organization, and who become active citizens who help shape the policies that directly affect their present lives and future opportunities. While UTEC encourages as many teens as possible to become involved in the political process, UTEC knows that every teenager who comes through its center will not pursue civic activism. However, the goal is to ensure that young people are represented in crafting the policies that directly affect their peers on the streets. Success for UTEC is fostering safety, academic achievement, and skill development in the short term, while changing the way policymaking is done over the long term, so that those young people who are most affected have a much larger role in defining the course of action.



1. **Streetwork & Peacemaking:** UTEC's Streetworker program includes four critical components to engage and support young people who are most often overlooked: outreach, referrals to community resources, peacemaking, and intensive follow-up, which includes home visits, nightly phone calls, or visits to a key support person. Streetworker staff provide gang intervention, conflict resolution/mediation, and around-the-clock crisis intervention. Steps in the peacemaking process include:
  - identifying and engaging the gang "shot callers" (gang set leaders);
  - inviting members of the same gang to a peace circle where they initially agree to move forward with the peace process;
  - taking them on a peace trip to create trust and to help staff understand pressing issues with rival gangs; and
  - inviting rival gang members to a peace summit—a weekend retreat outside of Lowell where rival gang members are able to learn about one another and sign a peace contract.

Last year, UTEC organized three peace summits and successfully mediated over 80 conflicts, with over 90 percent of mediations being successfully resolved without further incidence of conflict. Recognized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as a model program for youth violence prevention, UTEC is poised to be a field leader in street outreach and gang peacemaking across the country. As a first step in achieving that goal, UTEC is in the early stages of planning a training institute (The Street Outreach and Peacemaking Training Institute) that would be open to other community agencies. In addition, researchers from the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University are completing an 18-month evaluation of the program, the first major evaluation of street outreach and peacemaking as an approach to reducing youth violence.



2. **Youth Development:** UTEC's youth development programs provide opportunities for creative expression, personal development, and skill building. The cultural and performing arts programs ranging from sound recording to salsa, hip-hop, and step, are among the most popular and often have waiting lists. In addition, UTEC offers health and wellness programs, including a Young Women's Center, sports and fitness classes, and Spectrum, which provides support for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning teens. For youth who are seeking to enter the job market, UTEC provides hands-on pre-employment programs in sustainable agriculture at Richardson's Farm, catering/culinary arts, and computer repair.
3. **Education:** UTEC's "Open School" center is geared toward those older youth (ages 16 to 23) who are interested in the opportunity for employment or furthering their education. In fall 2007, UTEC began offering a Lowell Alternative Diploma Program in partnership with Lowell Public Schools, which combines class work (within a project-based learning environment) with community organizing and internship placements. UTEC also offers GED classes for youth who want to pass their high school equivalency exam.
4. **Youth Organizing and Political Action/Public Policy:** UTEC supports *youth organizing*, where young people identify a problem and take direct action to create lasting change by addressing the problem's root cause. Organizing activities include candidate forums for Lowell City Council and School Board members (which serve as a launching pad for more targeted future campaigns), as well as other strategies such as marches and demonstrations to foster awareness of local community issues. In addition, UTEC engages youth in *political action*, where young people play a direct role in crafting a policy position and work with legislators to advocate for specific programs, typically in partnership with other organizations across the state. As an example, in 2005, UTEC partnered with Boston-based organizations Health Care for All and the Public Policy Institute to spearhead a youth-led statewide organizing initiative called Teens Leading the Way. Through lobby days and state house testimonies, UTEC teens garnered 39 legislative co-sponsors for a new bill they created to fund mental health services in youth drop-in centers across the Commonwealth. UTEC does both youth organizing and political action to prepare young people to take a variety of approaches to addressing systemic issues.

## Social Impact

UTEC has grown exponentially since its founding in 1999—in youth served, in budget, in programs offered, and in physical space. The next step in its growth will be to develop a rigorous outcomes measurement system so it can provide quantifiable evidence about its impact on the youth it serves. To date, UTEC staff members have been able to make qualitative observations of its impact, including:

- greater peace due to its extensive gang mediation work;
- greater safety for youth who are navigating the world of gangs;
- increased self-confidence and skill development among teens participating in arts and wellness classes;
- youth once mired in problems on the street now leading initiatives to change local and state policies; and
- a reversal of negative attitudes toward teens by local businesses.

In addition, UTEC youth participants and alumni, along with funders and policymakers, are able to speak to UTEC's effectiveness:

*Before I came to UTEC, I was labeled a 'bad kid' because I didn't know what to do with my life. At UTEC, the staff treated me differently—like family. They learned about me and helped me figure out what I wanted to do and how to start doing it.*  
—Aleck Casara, UTEC alum

*You know, you actually just stopped a big war. Without you, we would have had to retaliate. You know these guys and you talked to them. You made something good happen.*  
—Lowell gang member who had been involved in a peace summit with UTEC streetworkers





*There's so much potential here. If we don't invest [in UTEC], then not only have we done a disservice to this city—we've done a greater disservice to the future.*

–State Senator Steven C. Panagiotakos

*We look to UTEC to serve as a potential national model for outreach and violence prevention with youth, particularly those who are gang involved and including some of our most vulnerable first-generation Americans. In fact, we have been so consistently impressed with this organization that we have been featuring UTEC as our "Project in Focus" on the homepage of our website.*

–Sandy Lopacki, Deputy Director, Local Initiatives Funding Partners Program,  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

*These [UTEC peace] summits have provided an unprecedented opportunity to bring teens together to build the relationships necessary to end the ongoing violence and move forward in a more positive direction individually and together.*

–Senator Edward M. Kennedy

Current evaluation systems include monthly reports filled out by each program area coordinator to track key measures and outputs. Additionally, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded a Johns Hopkins-led comprehensive evaluation of UTEC's Streetworker program, which will be completed over the summer of 2008. To supplement these evaluation methods, UTEC will implement additional systems over the next two years to collect more targeted data to demonstrate that its activities correlate with the positive outcomes they have observed in their youth.

To accomplish this, UTEC is planning to implement a survey system; surveys will be issued at time of initial intake into UTEC, and re-administered at regular intervals. Questions will range from "What are your grades?" to "To what extent do you feel you can impact your community?" Additionally, UTEC is poised to purchase an outcomes measurement software system by Social Solutions called ETO: Efforts to Outcomes. ETO captures all data related to service delivery to allow an organization to better analyze its progress and make future decisions based on evidence of what is working. ETO is currently being employed by Roca, another Boston-area youth development organization that has had great success with the software. The ETO approach has also been used by leading national foundations, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

## Program Performance

The table below presents a sample of data that UTEC tracks to measure the organization's growth and development. Since its inception, UTEC has steadily served an increasing percentage of Lowell's 18,000 young people, ages 13 to 23. UTEC has expanded its programmatic offerings to reflect the interests and needs of its youth population, and it has resolved a growing number of gang disputes, helping to bring increased peace to the Lowell community. Throughout this growth, UTEC has remained true to its commitment to be a youth-led organization, as the numbers of young people in leadership positions continue to grow.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of youth served	1,400	1,600	1,800	2,100	2,200+
Number of classes/programs offered	16	18	19	20	20
Number of gang mediations conducted	76	85	100	110	120
Number of youth in leadership positions at UTEC	12	14	16	23	25

## Financial Sustainability

### Operating Budget

In 1999, UTEC started with a single \$40,000 grant, a group of 20 to 30 youth leaders, and one part-time paid staff member, all of who were committed to creating a safe space for young people. UTEC grew steadily over its first five years, and then maintained a fairly constant operating budget of \$500,000 to \$700,000 from 2004 through



2007. Then, in the past year, UTEC made the jump for the first time to an operating budget exceeding \$1 million to expand its education and streetworker programs. At this important moment of its organizational development, with the opportunity to reach a greater number of Lowell's 18,000 youth and share the organization's approach to street outreach and organizing statewide, UTEC is seeking an investment of \$2.1 million over the next two years.

Funds will be used to:

- increase the number of youth served on an annual basis by at least 25 percent to 2,200 while supporting the full range of UTEC's outreach, education, youth development, and organizing activities;
- add two streetworkers which will enable UTEC to expand its outreach and peacemaking;
- hire three youth as regional coordinators to lead the statewide coalition;
- develop a structured training program for UTEC's youth staff members;
- implement an evaluation and data-tracking system, including required surveys and ETO software;
- develop curriculum and pilot the Streetworker Training Institute with at least one agency partner; and
- expand the new alternative diploma high school program, increase the number of students, formalize partnerships with local colleges, and gain recognition as a Coalition for Essential Schools affiliate.

The table below summarizes UTEC's anticipated budget and staffing growth required to achieve its milestones. In addition to its full-time staff, UTEC currently relies on 6 to 8 adult instructors and other part-time staff, along with 20 youth staff who work 8 to 15 hours per week.

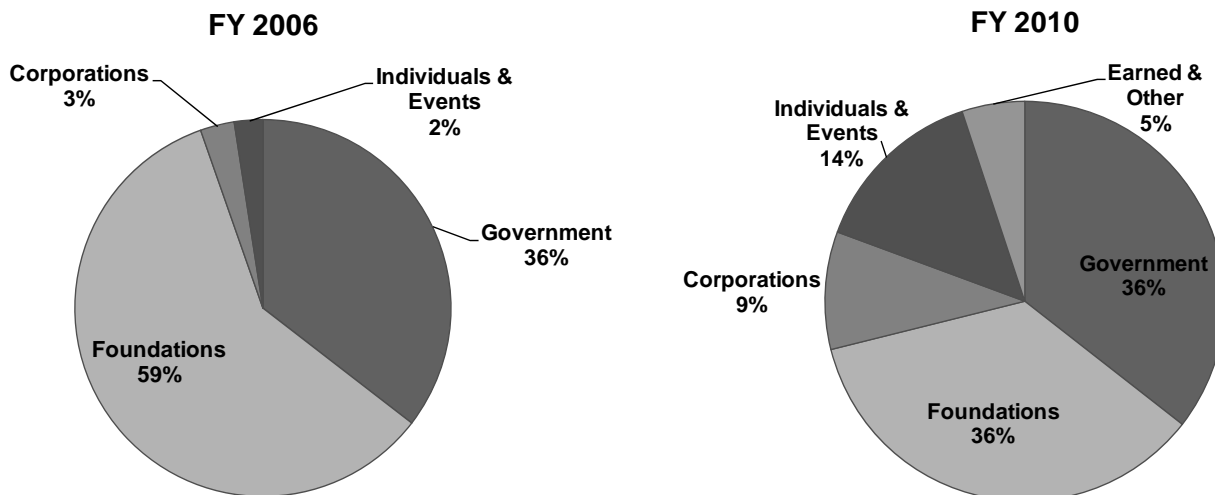
	2006A	2007A	2008E	2009E	2010E
<b>Total Budget</b>	\$730,746	\$787,674	\$1,164,000	\$1,391,000	\$1,572,000
<b>Number of Full-Time Staff</b>	9	9	12	16	19

In its early years, UTEC was nearly 100 percent foundation funded, and foundation partnerships will continue to be a critical part of the organization's growth and success. As part of its long-term financial sustainability strategy, UTEC has committed to developing its individual giving infrastructure. As such, UTEC recently hired staff to expand this area and just purchased a new donor management database. UTEC will focus heavily on increasing donations from individuals through its annual campaign, events, and major gifts, with the goal of raising 10 to 20 percent of its budget from individuals by 2010. In addition, UTEC is planning to build increased relationships with corporations, with the goal of turning in-kind support into corporate sponsorship.

UTEC has gradually been able to secure government funds, first from the City of Lowell, then from Massachusetts, and more recently from the Federal government. UTEC will continue to pursue relationships at all levels of government, but remains committed to a public-private model with some flexible dollars that will allow the organization to remain entrepreneurial and innovative, even as it matures.

UTEC is also in the early stages of exploring options for earning revenue through activities that leverage its assets and directly support its mission. Potential avenues include renting its facility (currently generating \$3,000 annually), expanding its farm/culinary arts programs (currently generating \$5,000 annually through catering and produce sales), and providing training in UTEC's approach to street outreach.

The charts on the next page present the projected change in UTEC's revenue mix over the five-year period from 2006 to 2010:



### Capital Campaign

UTEC is in the midst of a \$6.3 million capital campaign to renovate its new home, a historic building in downtown Lowell within walking distance of Lowell High School. Prior to the acquisition of its new building, UTEC had been unable to expand and add programs due primarily to a shortage of space. Once the renovations are complete, UTEC will have a state-of-the-art youth center in a LEED-certified green building with nearly 20,000 square feet of usable space, including outdoor space of 3,500 square feet. Plans for the building include: a basketball gym/large multi-purpose space, a video production suite, a black box theatre, a sound recording lab, a computer room, a computer repair lab, a dance studio, a fitness center, classroom space, a lounge area, a meditation room, and staff office space.

Since the beginning of the campaign, UTEC teens have been in the forefront. They signed the deed at the closing and have been regularly meeting with architects and engineers for over a year as part of UTEC's design team. UTEC has raised nearly \$3 million and expects to raise the balance over the next two years. In-kind supporters to date include the Harvard Graduate School of Design (three student fellows), Cisco Systems (wireless network products and voicemail/IP telephony system), and Comcast (internet installation).

### Leadership

Gregg Croteau has served as UTEC's executive director since 2000. Gregg graduated from Wesleyan University in 1993 with a B.A. in East Asian Studies. During his undergraduate years, he also studied Vietnamese language and history at Hanoi University, which provided him with a strong academic foundation for his work with gang-involved Southeast Asian youth in the Boston area. Gregg was awarded his Master of Social Work from the University of Michigan, where he focused on nonprofit administration.

Prior to accepting the position as UTEC's first executive director, Gregg spent two years in Hanoi, Vietnam, as a research fellow conducting a study on the redevelopment of social work in Vietnam. Before working in Vietnam, Gregg coordinated various youth development and organizing programs within such organizations as the Arab Community Center for Economic & Social Services in Michigan, Maverick Family Support Program in East Boston, and Roca in both Chelsea and Revere.

In 2006, Gregg was honored as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Health Leader; he was selected as one of only 10 national awardees from a nomination pool of over 300. Gregg received further recognition for his outstanding leadership at UTEC when he was named the Community Health Education Center's Fernando Miranda Outreach Educator of the Year, also in 2006. Gregg was recently appointed to the Governor's Advisory



Council for Refugees and Immigrants, and the Massachusetts Speaker of the House appointed him to a newly created Health Disparity Council.

UTEC's 12-member board of directors has provided invaluable guidance and support as the organization has grown. Six of the board's members are young people who also serve on UTEC's leadership team, which demonstrates UTEC's commitment to being a youth-driven, youth-led program. The remaining board members bring legal, financial services, public education, law enforcement, corporate, and nonprofit experience.

### **Key Funders**

UTEC has received funding from a variety of sources, demonstrating support for the organization's approach and results to date. They include:

- Amelia Peabody Foundation
- Jane's Trust
- Jessie B. Cox Trust
- Hermann & Frieda Miller Foundation
- Theodore Edson Parker Foundation
- Riley Foundation
- Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Clowes Fund
- Hunt Foundation
- Bank of America
- Banknorth
- Cisco Systems
- Citizens Bank
- City of Lowell
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- MassHousing
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice
- U.S. Department of Agriculture



## Key Measures Report with Targets (April 2008 – March 2009)

Below is a summary of the key measures that UTEC will be tracking for the first 12 months after the Social Innovation Forum's showcase event, as a way to demonstrate progress toward its two-year goals, capture lessons learned, and make course corrections as needed.

	Baseline (March 2008)	Target (March 2009)
<b>Program Performance</b>		
Increase number of youth served	1,800	2,100
Develop curriculum and business plan for the Streetworker Outreach and Peacemaking Training Institute	-	Developed
Develop youth staff training curriculum	-	Developed
Expand the new alternative diploma high school program:		
• Increase the number of students	15	30
• Formalize partnerships with local colleges	0	2
• Gain recognition as a Coalition for Essential Schools affiliate	-	Completed
Hire regional youth coordinators to expand the statewide coalition	-	3
<b>Organizational Health/Capacity Building</b>		
Implement outcomes measurement system	Funds raised for ETO	ETO purchased and implemented
Complete construction of new addition	\$3 million raised Initial renovations to existing building (Phase I) complete	Remaining balance of \$3.3 million raised Construction of 7,500 square foot new addition (Phase II) started
Complete 12 individual asks (one per month) with a 50 percent success rate	-	12 asks; 6 gifts
Cultivate new major gifts of at least \$1,000	-	6
Establish advisory board with 20 members	0	20

## Success Stories

### Alek Casara

When Alek first came to UTEC, he didn't feel like anyone believed in him. "People called me a bad kid. I didn't have any goals, and I didn't know what to do with my life," he says now. But Alek didn't want to be labeled. He wanted to lead and to give back. And that's exactly what he did when he came to UTEC.

In 2007, UTEC moved into a new building that was designed from sketches Alek drew. Excited by the idea of a new youth center, Alek stayed up all night drafting a set of plans for his "ideal youth center." There was no building at that point—just a dream. But Alek's dream inspired the floor plans developed by UTEC's architectural team. Watching his late night brainstorming session blossom into a real project has been transforming for Alek. He has realized that his unique leadership skills can be released on his own terms.

Alek's resiliency was put to the test when he returned from a National Guard tour of duty in Iraq. He found himself without a home or employment. Alek partnered with the UTEC Streetworker Outreach team and was able to find temporary shelter and independent living support. He's now living in a place of his own and no longer confused about what he's going to do next. In fact, he's making music and planning to take art classes so that he can share his passion for art with others as an instructor. Alek also worked part time with UTEC using his experience to help other teens. As a teen connector, Alek heard of a young woman who was trapped in an abusive relationship. He acted quickly, getting her in touch with an experienced counselor and making sure she knew she would be supported as she got herself out of a dangerous situation.

"The staff at UTEC treated me differently—like family. They learned about me, and helped me figure out what I wanted to do and how to start doing it," said Alek. There's no doubt Alek is capable of so much. From initially being confused about what to do with his life, Alek has now found a niche in art and in using his knowledge to empower other teens. He is a true leader.



***The staff at UTEC treated me differently—like family. They learned about me, and helped me figure out what I wanted to do and how to start doing it.***

Alek Casara

## Ricky Le

It's not easy to be an outsider, and many young people go to great lengths to fit in. Ricky Le knows that desperation. He suffered an ultimate price for wanting to fit in—after being severely beaten, Ricky ended up in a coma for 10 days, and went through a year and a half of grueling therapy to reclaim his health.

Ricky's beating was not at the hands of enemies, but the men he called his brothers, members of a gang he joined when he was only 12 years old. A new face in a new city, Ricky felt "alone and lost" and joined the gang because they finally made him feel comfortable. They gave Ricky an instant family, protection, and a good time almost every night. But as a member of a gang, Ricky was expected to start fights with rival gang members, an activity in which he reluctantly participated. One day after school, he found himself in another fight. This time, the fight was broken up by Sako Long and others from UTEC's Streetworker team. Sako slowly got to know Ricky and the two talked about all the reasons Ricky had joined the gang, and all the reasons he might have for leaving. Sako created a safe space for Ricky to come to his own decision and to choose to transform his own life.

On a September night, Ricky decided to break free from his gang set. Unfortunately, Ricky wanted to leave his gang "the real way," to save his reputation. Surrounded by his former brothers, Ricky was beaten, punched, and kicked in a "jumping out" ceremony. When the gang members heard his neck crack, they dropped him at the emergency room of a local hospital.

The streetworkers eventually received word that Ricky was at the hospital and the entire team rushed to the emergency room, and then supported Ricky through his long recovery process. When Ricky was ready, Sako helped him find employment, work toward his GED, and deal with the new challenges in his life due to his traumatic brain injury.

Over the past two years, Ricky has spent considerable time sharing his story with parents, police officers, politicians, and other youth. He wants to educate people about the dangers of gang involvement, and prevent other young people from going through what he went through. He has become a leader for peace by transforming a horrific tragedy into a powerful message. And today, he has already begun the process of fulfilling his dream to write a book detailing his life story.

We look forward to getting one of the first copies of his book.



Ricky Le

***Sako Long and others from UTEC's Streetworker Team slowly got to know Ricky. They talked with him about all the reasons he had joined the gang, and all the reasons he might have for leaving. Sako created a safe space for Ricky to come to his own decision and to choose to transform his own life.***