The Emergence of the Boston Ujima Project

A thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

I document the emergence of the Boston Ujima Project, a project to develop a local politically organized economic ecosystem. My case study follows the first six months of activity, including an account of project efforts to design a participatory multi-stakeholder visioning process while simultaneously establishing an organizational structure and capacity to facilitate it. I situate the project in the context of a movement approach to societal transformation, identify and discuss specific transformative opportunities in the project, and then assess the activities of the first six months using the lens of prefigurative practice as a strategy for transformation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

My thesis documents the emergence of the Boston Ujima Project, a project initiated by Boston-based social movement organizations to design and pilot neighborhood- and city-level economic and political structures, activities, and relationships. Through these experiments the project aims to build economic and political power and both resist and replace neoliberalized capitalism on a broader and more systemic level, focusing especially within communities that have been historically excluded from and exploited within existing institutions.

The Boston Ujima Project (Ujima) established as a membership organization in August 2017 to cultivate "a community-controlled economy" in the city. Today there are roughly 300 individual members and 15 business alliance members. Ujima facilitates a range of spaces and activities in which members learn, connect, and cooperate together, including a lecture series, arts and cultural events, social gatherings, working committees, and a general governing assembly. The centerpiece of Ujima's economic ecosystem, a democratic community investment fund, is still in development. However, Ujima has established a strong presence in several of Boston's neighborhoods of color and has been collaborating with local grassroots organizations to pilot its participatory neighborhood economic planning process.

The seeds of the project were planted when a constellation of activists were convened by the Center for Economic Democracy in the summer of 2014. They met for eight weeks to learn about community finance and to explore how a financial institution could work "co-productively" with local grassroots organizations. I learned about the effort in the spring of 2015. At that time, project leaders were preparing for a

second, deeper, and more structured effort to investigate the feasibility of the democratic investment fund, and an ecosystem of complementary and mutually supportive economic structures and relationships. I joined the project that summer, intending to identify a research assignment that would at once be directly useful as a resource for the project and suitable in scope for my thesis.

The project's feasibility study was launched in October 2015. The objective at the time was to assemble a representative array of the different types of potential project stakeholders and engage with them in a long-term effort to co-develop concrete proposals for how the fund and other components of the ecosystem could be designed and operationalized. I refer to this process in this thesis as "collective visioning." Gradually I came to take on a role as startup organizer for the project, which gave me a direct incentive and a close-up perspective to critically examine the implementation of the collective visioning process. My thesis is a case study of the first six months of this process:

How did the collective visioning process of the Boston Ujima

Project unfold?

In the Methodology chapter I describe my research questions in more detail, including changes made to my research focus that occurred while I was collecting data. I describe the different sources of data I used as evidence, including documents, meeting observations, and formal interviews. Finally, I explain how I used my data to

address my research questions and how I adopted an action research perspective in the final analysis and presentation.

I present the case study in three sections. In the "Aspiration" chapter I provide an account of the learning and organizing activities that led to the development of the guiding vision of the project and the assembly of a network of individuals and organizations inspired by it. This chapter spans a period from May 2014 to October 2015, a phase just preceding the official launch of the project.

The second chapter, "Action," describes the planning, organization, activities, and baseline conditions of the first six months of the project, from October 2015 through March 2016. I detail how project leaders pursued, simultaneously, the objectives of establishing a productive organizational structure; recruiting and engaging stakeholders; developing stakeholder capacity; and initiating collective visioning activity.

In the "Reflection" chapter I seek to develop a movement practitioner-relevant approach with which to assess my case. I start with an interpretation of the project and its transformative aspiration through a movement lens, on a landscape of movements responding to neoliberalized capitalism. I look specifically at solidarity economy as a guide for the project, and re-examine the organized ecosystem concept using a solidarity economy framework. Finally, I analyze the events and my experience of the first six months using the framework of prefigurative practice. I include a few relevant project updates that occurred between March 2016 and April 2018.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research questions. The focus of my research questions shifted in the middle of my formal data collection period based on an early review of the evidence. My original question asked, "How is the initial vision evolving through the collective visioning process?" It was based on the hypothesis that the early activities of the project would be determined by the need for explicit mediation among the different and potentially misaligned ideologies, preferences, interests, and material constraints of the diverse array of participants that had been assembled. I aimed to use interviews to uncover the visions for the fund and ecosystem advanced by active participants and by non-participants that had been exposed to the concept, and then to use meeting notes and observations to study when, where, and how any differences were made explicit and negotiated.

However, by the end of February 2016, after I had completed several interviews and formal meeting observations, I uncovered a more interesting and important process to investigate. I was noticing that many—even most—project participants were not actually engaged deeply enough in those early days for any substantive disagreement to emerge. This was not what I anticipated and, recognizing that the project was in fact only just emerging, I adjusted my focus on the processes I was observing. The research questions, more exploratory in nature, became:

How did the collective visioning process of the Boston Ujima Project unfold?

    A.   Who was interacting to influence the vision?

    B.   How were the activities influencing the vision?

    C.   How was the vision actually evolving?

Data Collection. I used a case study approach to data collection. This was an appropriate approach because my research question was a "how" question, because the "case"—the project as a whole—was a contemporary situation, and because I had limited control over how events unfolded (Yin 2014). The case study was also an ideal research approach because of the level of access I had to evidence as a startup organizer.

I had access to historical and active project documents stored in a Google Drive folder. I had in fact created or contributed to many of these documents myself. They included work plans, internal memos and meeting notes, internal process evaluation materials, and external-facing communications materials.

I was able to attend every formally scheduled project meeting to observe, share my own thoughts, and ask questions. I took extensive notes during all meetings on behalf of the project and made formal thesis observations for the meetings that fell within the data collection window. Formal thesis observations are listed below.

Table 2.1 Meetings for Observation

February 1, 2016	Community and General Member Engagement Working Group
February 4, 2016	Project Modeling and Design Working Group
February 16, 2016	Media and Communications Working Group
February 22, 2016	Community and General Member Engagement Working Group
February 26, 2016	Project Modeling and Design Working Group
March 10, 2016	Interim Steering Committee
March 22, 2016	Interim Steering Committee
March 22, 2016	Media and Communications Working Group
March 23, 2016	Project Modeling and Design Working Group
March 23, 2016	Information and Technology Working Group
March 26, 2016	Organizing Committee
March 30, 2016	Business and Investor Engagement Working Group

I created a preliminary list of individuals to interview based on 1) project documents, 2) meeting observations, and 3) consultation with the startup director. I sought to interview people who represented a range of positions with respect to the

project. Because I perceived that project activities at the time took place almost exclusively in meeting settings (although project leaders, described in the "The steering committee" section, sometimes planned and strategized in between meetings), I sorted potential interview subjects by meeting attendance behaviors:

- Active Participants: Attended the October 5, 2015 meeting or one after it
  - Regular: Attended meetings regularly
  - Occasional: Attended some meetings
- Former Participants: Attended a meeting only before October 5, 2015
- Non-Participants: Invited to participant but never attended a meeting

I aimed for 6-8 interviews with active participants, and 8-10 interviews with former participants and/or non-participants. I included additional candidates to allow for some individuals who declined to be interviewed. Below are the individuals I interviewed (see Appendix A for a full list of individuals contacted for interviews):

Table 2.2 Interview Subjects

Active Participants		Former Participants	Non-Participants
Regular	**Occasional**		
Hendrix Berry	Anand Jahi	Sutton Kiplinger	Darlene Lombos
Libbie Cohn	Darnell Johnson	Matt Meyer	
Stacey Cordeiro	Glynn Lloyd	Mike Prokosch	
Deborah Frieze			
Nia Evans			
Vanessa Green			
Lisa Owens			

Ten of the interview subjects were current participants, including seven who attended meetings regularly and three who had attended only some meetings (all contribute to one working group). Three interview subjects were former participants. And one interview subject had known about the project and had been invited to participant, but had never attended a meeting.

The ratio of active participants to former participants and/or non-participants that I actually interviewed was the opposite of what I initially intended. This is in part because many more active participants granted interviews than former participant and non-participants, likely due to the direct relationships I had developed with the active participants. But, more importantly, based on meeting observations and some of the earlier interview responses that led me to shift my attention towards ongoing project activities and processes, the focus of the interviews shifted more towards the implementation process. It became more important to speak to active participants than to continue to seek out those not involved.

I developed three versions of questions, one set for active participants, one for former participants, and one for non-participants. To prepare for each interview I spent a little time examining publicly available documentation (website and news articles) on the organizations with which interview subjects were affiliated. My questions were designed to encourage open-ended answers. This led to a more conversational back-and-forth, so the questions were answered in a different order with each interview subject. Additionally, the questions were refined over time as I found better ways to ask questions so as to uncover the types of responses I sought; thus interview subjects did not hear all questions phrased the same way.

In the chapters that follow, including "Aspiration," "Action," and "Reflection," all unidentified quotations are taken from these direct interviews.

Data analysis. Because my research focus changed over time, the original data collection plan and especially the interview protocol were not designed optimally for the research questions I ultimately sought to answer. However, because

of the amount and richness of the evidence I collected and which I had access to, I was

able to address each research question to a sufficient level. The table below shows

how I used the different sources of data (interviews, meeting observations, and

project documents) to address each research sub-question.

Table 2.3 Data Analysis Plan

Research Questions	Sub-Questions	Analyzing Data
A. Who is interacting to influence the vision?	How was the body of participants determined?	• Identify the full universe of potential participants and document characteristics • Identify factors that potentially influenced participation or non-participation
	To what extent did participants agree on the mission, vision, and implementation strategy?	• Compare how different participants conceptualize the vision • Document moments when mission, vision, and implementation were discussed • Search for any indication of broad consensus; note any disagreements
B. How were the activities influencing the vision?	How did participants plan to organize activities and make decisions?	• Document and integrate written work plans and recorded statements of intention about structuring activities • Document and categorize all activities relating to the project's work and track which participants were involved • Compare the actual course of events to the documented intentions; search for explanations for any deviations
	What were the challenges to following through?	
C. How was the vision actually evolving?	What elements of the vision were taken up during the collective visioning activities, and how were the activities resulting in changes to those elements of vision?	• Documents moments when specific elements of the vision were being discussed • Track the nature of discussion over time and determine whether there was any change in how participants were conceiving of those elements

Reflective practice. As I settled into the role of a startup organizer for the

project, it was natural to adopt the perspective of an action researcher. I was

positioned within the project and using my research to observe and reflect on the

project activities in order to learn and improve our work. These efforts to improve took several forms. Because of my frequent interaction with other project participants, my observations and suggestions were shared in real time—not with the weight of formal judgment or recommendation, but as a participant speaking to peers. Additionally, my reflections influenced the way I communicated to other participants more generally, and how I recorded meeting notes. The most formal reflection took place in March 2016 with a small group, including five regular participants and two occasional participants, who sat down to discuss my early thesis research findings, following an organizing committee meeting.

Note that an "action researcher" is distinct from a participant-observer. The latter participates only or primarily to understand activities from the perspective of actual participants but *not* to influence or change the activities. It is also related to but distinct from participatory research which Kindon et al. (2007) describes as based on "the politics of the research process itself", pointing to how participatory research engages participants in the actual process of research deliberately to "break the monopoly on who hold knowledge and for whom social research should be undertaken" (11).

With the perspective of an action researcher, one final adjustment to my focus occurred in the process of analyzing and summarizing my case study findings. The research sub-questions in the table above are framed from the perspective of an outsider watching a process. But as I later sought to make sense of the evidence of what happened in the first six months of this project, the framing and focus of the questions shifted to the following:

A. How did project leaders shape the body of project participants?

B. What structures did project leaders establish to implement activities?

C. How did project leaders pursue central collective visioning objectives?

It is also important to recognize another position I identify with that has had a bearing on my research and analysis. Although my role in the project was of a startup organizer and my core responsibilities of note-taking and project document management demanded a degree of neutrality with respect to the different perspectives and contributions of the different types of stakeholders that were engaged, I was (and still am) also working with another local social movement organization (Community Labor United). Because of that, I have a much stronger affinity with the perspective of political grassroots organizations above than with other types of stakeholders in the project. That affinity undoubtedly influences my presentation of the project here, as well as the topics on which I chose to focus in my reflection.

3. ASPIRATION

Here I give an account of the events that led to the development of the guiding concept for the Boston Ujima Project and the gathering of an assembly of individuals and organizations committed to realizing it. Much of this occurred before I joined the project, so I relied on historical project documents and interviews to tell the story.

3.1 Setting the course with the Community Finance Working Group

The immediate predecessor to the Boston Ujima Project was a learning initiative, centered on a series of study sessions, known as the Boston Community Finance Working Group (CFWG). A flyer advertising the sessions posed the following questions: "How can we capture the economic power of our communities to generate community-controlled wealth?" and "How can we create the sustainable infrastructures through which social movement organizing can help create a more democratic and just economy?" In some spaces, finance can be felt as a set of inaccessible or inexplicable instruments restricted to those wealthier and more powerful—something to resent or to be wary of, not something to use. The study sessions were an opportunity to look at existing models of institutions designed to put finance at the service of working class communities of color—populations that are typically underserved and sometimes deliberately exploited by conventional financial institutions.

Over the course of eight study sessions during the summer of 2014, more than fifty Boston-area organizers, advocates, developers, funders, academics, and community members gathered together to learn about finance. Leading the Boston CFWG was the recently formed Center for Economy Democracy (CED), a "movement

strategy and capacity building organization" seeking to form strategic collaborations among different local stakeholders working toward social, political, and economic transformation. CED was founded in 2012 by Boston-based organizer Aaron Tanaka. Tanaka had recently stepped down from his position as Executive Director of the Boston Workers Alliance, where his work included leading a criminal record policy reform effort and supporting a worker cooperative development project (a rare instance of a worker cooperative emerging from a grassroots organization). These are just some of the experiences that Tanaka cites as influential in his developing conviction in the need for deeper, more radical transformations in our institutions.

Seed funding for CED was provided by local philanthropists David Ludlow and Joann Gu, which CED used to support its other projects as well as the Boston CFWG, including the Boston Jobs Coalition and the Solidarity Economy Initiative. CED's advisors include prominent organizational leaders, thought leaders, and academics working within the local social movement: Chuck Turner (former Boston City Councilor); Juan Leyton (Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative); Kalila Barnett (Alternatives for Community and Environment); Lisa Owens (City Life Vida Urbana); Lydia Lowe (Chinese Progressive Association); Mel King (former Massachusetts State Representative); Nene Igietseme (Massachusetts Institute of Technology); Penn Loh (Tufts University); Rebecca Tumposky (Tufts University); and Xau Ying Ly (Boston Impact Initiative).

CED convened the Boston CFWG in partnership with several other local organizations. Key among them was City Life Vida Urbana (CLVU). CLVU is a nationally renowned "strong organization led by people of color", respected especially for its

achievements in movement building. CLVU was born in Boston in the 1970s as a socialist collective, and though it is "no longer overtly socialist", its work is still guided by "a strong anti-capitalist analysis". It seeks to be "part of the broader social justice movement" and that is reflected in it choice to organize in ways that "highlight the contradictions of capital and fight corporate capital power instead of individuals."

CLVU's ongoing work in housing rights rests on a "three-legged stool" of interlocking tactics: first, effective grassroots political organizing, mobilization, and protest actions; second, drawing on legal experts to create innovative legal defenses; and third, partnering with alternative financial institutions. At the time of the Boston CFWG, CLVU had just lost its alternative financial institution partner, and so its interest in the idea of community-centered finance was also fueled by a concrete and immediate organizational need. And as an organization whose work is grounded firmly in principles and values, Tanaka's "personal integrity" was also a critical factor in CLVU's decision to become a close partner in the project.

Around the time the Boston CFWG was meeting, Tanaka was hired as Startup Manager for the Boston Impact Initiative (BII), an impact investment firm piloting a model for small business finance in support of a shift to a more equitable and resilient economy. BII's early involvement in the Boston CFWG happened primarily through Tanaka's leadership role. Tanaka was working at BII at the same time he was convening the Boston CFWG through CED. BII was interested in being a part of the project and decided that Tanaka could include the work as part of his formal BII responsibilities.

Founded in 2014, BII has been developing theory through practice concerning what kinds of resources and supports are most effective for the local enterprises and individuals it invests in. In contrast to conventional finance models that deploy capital to maximize returns regardless of impact, and that have not served low-income communities of color well, BII sees its approach as "using private capital to catalyze community capital." The object is not merely to ensure these enterprises are successful but also to build the owners' capacity as community members to "own and control their future."

BII hopes to continue to develop this model of local impact investment in such a way that is can be expanded and replicated elsewhere, affecting how other investors approach their work. Finance as an industry, as a cultural arena, and as a set of skills and competencies has evolved according to a set of principles and values antithetical to the social justice movement, and there are a limited number of institutions like BII that have concrete experience in approaching finance in a different way and that have a genuine interest in imagining a different role for finance in society.

There were 27 people at the CFWG's introductory meeting. CED established a "curriculum committee" at the first session that would be open to volunteers from the working group who were interested in meeting separately to help shape the content that the CFWG would study. There were at least three meetings of the curriculum committee, and at least 17 people were a part of those meetings (attendance was not taken for one of the three known meetings). Following the introductory meeting there were seven study sessions, each one focused on a different topic in finance and banking:

1. Organizing and Alternative Financial Institutions
2. Nuts and Bolts of Banking
3. Financial Landscape and Credit Unions
4. Loan and Equity Funds
5. *Open Session*
6. Coops and CoHIF (Coalition for Occupied Homes in Foreclosure)
7. Self-Help Credit Union

Over the course of nine meetings (an introductory session, seven study sessions, and a closing session) as well as five follow up meetings, at least 55 people attended meetings (there are some gaps in meeting attendance records). More than half (30) attended more than one meeting. Of the 55 people who attended CFWG meetings, 44 of them have organizational affiliations recorded in the documentation. Nine of them represented the sponsoring organizations of CED, CLVU, or BII. The rest include: public banking advocacy organizations; local universities; local businesses, progressive foundation funders, technical assistance providers, grassroots organizations, community centers, radical arts and media organizations, service organizations, and housing advocacy organizations.

After the CFWG sessions had completed, a volunteer (who would later also go on to help coordinate the Boston Ujima Project) synthesized the conclusions into a report (Ly, 2014). The report ended with several "key priorities," paraphrased below.

1. Ensure the alternative financial institution is rooted in and co-productive with grassroots organizing and movement building, and that low-income communities and people of color are involved in decision-making through the entire process. This recognizes that 1) the financial institution cannot foster social transformation in isolation from broader movement efforts, 2) the

financial institution strategy should complement and not duplicate ongoing efforts; and 3) unintentionally replicating the institutions this project is meant to replace is a real danger.

2. Provide access high-quality financial products and services to low-income communities of color that can replace predatory models, and support literacy around economic system and finance, recognizing that these systems exclude low-income people of color in part through the embrace of language that is deliberately inaccessible.

3. Build ownership and equity in low-income communities of color in a way that mobilizes community members as savers, investors, and owners and provides a more diverse stream of financing options to small, local businesses and to solidarity economy projects who are typically neglected within the current financial system.

4. Practice collective ownership and democratic governance with low-income people of color at the center. This is to ensure the financial institution will be truly accountable to these communities, and as prefigurative practice to transform the way we engage in relationship with one another in the economic sphere, and thereby ultimately transform the local economy itself.

5. Incorporate the alternative financial institution into a broader vision and strategy to address fundamental problems with the structure of our economy and institutions. This recognizes that the scope of the problems facing low-income communities and communities of color—gentrification and displacement, unemployment, and others—cannot be addressed without addressing root structural problems.

6. Adopt democratic practices in the planning and coordination of financial and economic activities associated with the alternative financial institution. This recognizes that a democratic approach, especially one in which different local stakeholders can communicate and engage with one another in a constructive way, would invite concerns beyond a narrow profit focus to guide thinking and decision-making around how capital is allocated in a local economy.

3.2 CED's concept of a politically organized economic ecosystem

A subset of CFWG participants continued to meet after the formal study sessions had finished. In ongoing conversation with these participants, CED advisors, and others, Tanaka drafted a new concept paper: "Boston Ujima Project: A Community Controlled Economy." The concept paper presents a model of a politically organized economic ecosystem and proposes the Boston Ujima Project as a "multi-stakeholder community organizing and power-building initiative" to drive this experiment in economic democracy.

"Community" is defined from the beginning explicitly and firmly as working class communities of color in Boston. It is argued that centering accountability within

these communities is a critical transformative element because these are communities that have generally been excluded from and exploited by mainstream institutions. Through a governance system with an elected board of directors and a general assembly of stakeholders, the voice and interests of these "core" stakeholders would be weighted above those of other classes of stakeholder.

The ecosystem is assembled from a variety of complementary and mutually supportive structures and relationships, guided by the core principles of cooperation, democracy, and solidarity, and "anchored by the grassroots organizing sector" in Boston. Each component is drawn from actually existing models from around the country or the world.

Popular Investment: The centerpiece of the vision is an investment fund driven by a democratic planning and capital allocation process that would be modeled on participatory budgeting processes used in alternative municipal finance models.

The fund would accept funds from many types of investors, but also position itself to co-invest with outside entities in order to partake in larger investment projects beyond the scale of the fund alone. It would also seek to attract different types of funding, in order to be able to offer different forms of capital that would variously be appropriate for the needs and stages of any given enterprise.

Investment capital and eventual surplus would be controlled by community stakeholders. While conventional investors have only as much say as they have capital invested, community investors through this popular process would have their votes weighted based on their stake in the particular investment project at hand (including place of residency and other factors). Profit maximization would be replaced by a

direct expression of community aspiration as a driving force in shaping economic development, so that community stakeholders could decide to fund a new childcare center or an affordable housing development, for example, even if such projects would be less financially profitable than another liquor store or check-cashing outlet.

One basis for this level of community control over financial capital (and therefore control over the rest of the ecosystem) rests in the plan for the investment fund to be capitalized in part by the small equity contributions of those residents, as non-accredited investors—that capital literally belongs to them. However, given the likelihood that the greater portion of the fund will be contributed by large, external actors, more important is the basis in the principle that decisions regarding local economic development should be made by those who will be most affected.

Organized Consumption: Businesses receiving loans or investments from the investment fund would be expected to adhere to a framework of community standards regarding hiring and employment policies; community benefits activities; and environmental practices. These standards would be developed through values-driven conversation and good-faith negotiation among community stakeholders, businesses representatives, and business support providers. The standards system would be nuanced by the sector, stage, and place of the business. It would also be designed and implemented to carefully navigate the objective to exert upward pressure on local business practices and the objective to accommodate entrepreneurs of local backgrounds; of the working class; of immigrants; and of people of color who are value-aligned with the project but are constrained from meeting high-road business practices immediately.

The community's financial investment in these enterprises as well as their commitment to the framework of community standards would incent the community to engage in organized efforts to support and uplift these "good" businesses while simultaneously putting pressure on businesses with more harmful practices. Community members could organize as consumers to make a jointly financial and political decision to support member businesses, facilitated by a local currency on a physical card or mobile phone app. This act of collectively switching patronage could play a part in exerting pressure on other, non-member businesses to align their practices as well; or, community members might choose to organize and engage in direct action corporate accountability campaigns for a more powerful effect.

Organized Production: Businesses could be organized into a network and share resources such as a hub for human resources or B2B (business-to-business) lending, strengthening the collective and buffering members from the conventional "race to the bottom" dynamics of marketplace competition. Technical assistance consultants could support the investment process and help member businesses increase both efficiency and local impact. The network of businesses and technical consultants could engage in a planning process to identify opportunities for local import substitution or vertical integration that would complement and inform the popular planning process described above.

The workers of member businesses would be organized separately from their employers. A worker council could provide workers human resource supports that small business often cannot provide on their own, including mediation services, training, first source hiring, and benefits. Although the community standards would

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exert pressure on employers with respect to worker conditions and compensation, workers might find power in their council to negotiate directly with employers.

Popular Reinvestment: To close the loop, fund surplus—and perhaps other sources of revenue such as transaction fees or payroll deductions—could feed back into the ecosystem by growing the investment fund and subsidizing other community needs. Through the planning and investment process, community members and stakeholders might invest in new businesses, distribute dividends back to investors, subsidize specific products and services that are unaffordable, or provide grants to member nonprofit organizations.

Impact: Each component of the politically organized economic ecosystem model is intended to meet community needs and interests. It is comparable in many ways to more conventional economic development or asset development approaches intended to combat poverty. However, the mission and strategy suggested by CED's model reach well beyond the concerns that such conventional approaches focus on.

The strategy of layering and interlocking different structures and practices—is based on a hypothesis. Anti-capitalist models have been developed and deployed with moderate success in isolation but have mostly remained limited in impact—for example, participatory budgeting, unaccredited community investment in local business, local currencies, time banking, consumer cooperatives, worker cooperatives, and so forth. Perhaps, CED's concept paper suggests, deliberately bringing them together will help them generate synergies, mutually reinforce one another, and enable them to collectively stand more firmly against the hostile and co-optive forces of the dominant institution.

The ecosystem components are bound together not by transactional relationships alone but by organizing strategies and new ways of imagining relationships between different stakeholders. In this way, not only are separate economic models brought together in hope of a synergistic result, but also "previously siloed" community development strategies are brought together and coordinated—again, in hope that the result of such integration is greater than the sum of the parts deployed separately. The imagined organizing strategies complement the ecosystem model in erecting defensive and offensive efforts against the "race to the bottom" dynamics of the neoliberal market system, and they furthermore explicitly challenge the historical and continuing allocation of public resources toward the growth of that system. In particular, the concept paper proposed organizing strategies to secure "discounted land, tax breaks, and other subsidies that local, state, and federal governments historically offer to large corporations," and to secure procurement contracts for member businesses from local public and private anchor institutions.

Scale: The ecosystem structure not only reflects the integration of many different components, but a framework representing a "full cycle of value creation, consumption, and reinvestment." The ecosystem is not perfectly self-sustaining, but in staking a position in each stage of the economic cycle, it deliberately positions itself grow in that capacity over time. Although city-level experiments in economic democracy are uncommon, the concept paper closes with speculation on how the Boston Ujima Project might achieve an even broader impact. It suggests that the politically organized economic ecosystem model could be replicated in other cities

around the word, not only spreading the practice but also opening opportunities to create "trans-local linkages" through trade.

The visualization below was not created until spring 2016, but the design was based on CED's concept paper.

Figure 3.1 Boston Ujima Project Ecosystem Map
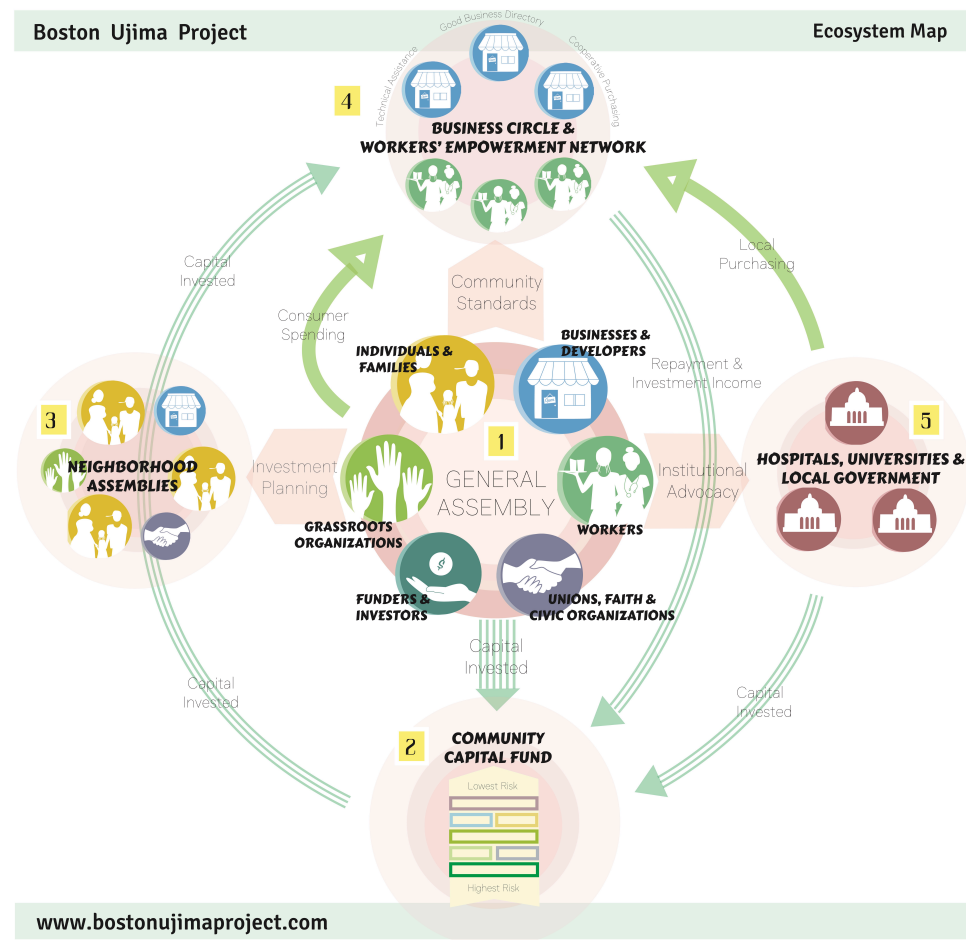
Early responses to CED's concept paper: The development of the organized ecosystem in the concept paper, which solidified a focus on a community-controlled investment fund rather than a public bank (one of the alternative financial institutions discussed during the CFWG) was almost certainly the occasion for the departure of participants most interested in the public bank concept—for example, Hub Public

Banking. But many CFWG participants remained involved, and new individuals were attracted to the project when it kicked off. Interviews and meetings indicated a high level of enthusiasm.

Individuals rarely explained the ecosystem concept in the same way. They would use different terms, tackle the components in different orders, or perhaps leave out some components entirely. This is possibly because few people actually read CED's concept paper in full. They learned about it instead from Tanaka's in-person explanation or by word-of-mouth from others. However, the *mission* suggested by the guiding concept seemed to come through with considerably greater unity of expression. Below is a sample of statements made in interviews and meetings:

> At its core Ujima is about communities of color experimenting with anti-capitalist models.
>
> Ujima's experiment must be a challenge, putting people of color, women of color, low-income working class people at the center.
>
> Ujima will let us challenge power.
>
> Ujima is a direct response to community members seeking an alternative path for independence, self-sufficiency, and community control.
>
> Ujima is a local, diverse, and activist-centered organization of people signed on to build a new economy.
>
> Ujima is a community where people can live their personal values.
>
> Ujima is more than any one component. It's about the relationships that govern the components: cooperation, democratic participation, and co-ownership.
>
> Ujima is a next-wave anti-capitalist CDC driven by social justice and a faith in what community can accomplish democratically.
>
> Ujima speaks to the needs and aspirations for a non-capitalist future.

Ujima is an anti-capitalist intervention both fighting and experimenting.

Ujima is like a little alien in the belly of capitalism.

The statements suggest a common grasp of the project's anti-oppression politics, its anti-capitalist stance, and the community-based ecosystem scope of the vision. For some reason, despite the obviously aspirational nature of the mission, it was much more rare to hear explicit acknowledgement of the experimental nature of the project. It was only in the relatively confidential spaces where project leaders and volunteers conversed that people spoke of the vision as a "crazy and ambitious" but "absolutely necessary" experiment, and as "an experiment" that "might fail."

On a more concrete level, it was clear in interviews and meetings that the democratic investment fund was emerging as the most central component of the vision to participants. Despite variation in explanations of the vision, the fund was almost always included. In one conversation, when the centrality of the fund was questioned ("How much do the other pieces [of the ecosystem] rely on the investment fund becoming a reality?"), a project leader paused and responded:

> Project leader: What I'm hearing you ask is, 'Could we talk about Ujima without talking about the capital fund?' That's a very provocative question for me. For me, absolutely not. When I think about it… with no fund, what do we have left? Time banking? [Project leader mimics horror] Nooo!

The democratic investment fund was so compelling that, for newcomers (as opposed to those that had been involved since the CFWG), it sometimes eclipsed the political dimension of the project. Newcomers were often focused on the material

possibilities of incubating good, local businesses. They did not always immediately connect that to a broader effort toward societal transformation.

I also recorded some critical and skeptical responses to CED's concept paper. There were not as many of these, though this must be in part because I spent more time with active participants, who were by definition enthusiastic enough to contribute their time without immediate compensation or benefit. But several interview subjects admitted to experiencing skepticism at first.

Two interview subjects shared a more concrete concern about the viability of the project, specifically concerning the proposal to keep grassroots organizations in such a central position. They cited the constraints that grassroots organizations face today merely in advancing their core work of building power, contesting over public policy and practice, and acting directly against exploitative or abusive private corporations. "Grassroots organizations are not as strong as once before," one interview subject lamented. The other interview subject expressed worry that attempting to add on the activities envisioned in CED's concept paper, while "important," would introduce a "major capacity issue."

Additionally, confidence in the viability of the investment fund was not unanimous. One participant worried that "it would be difficult to establish something meaningful" and another suggested the fund was "the most experimental and uncertain" of all the components. A third participant worried people were being unrealistic in expecting significant returns from businesses. One oft-raised concern is how the democratic allocation process will actually work and specifically how power might be sought by those outside the core constituency.

4. ACTION

In October 2015, just over a year after the final formal session of the Community Finance Working Group was held, the project entered a distinct new phase. Tanaka had already begun to rebrand the project as the Boston Ujima Project that summer. But October was the point where he introduced a concrete implementation plan and started to organize project participants into productive structures to conduct a more systematic exploration of the organized ecosystem. This is the point I consider to be the launch of the Boston Ujima Project.

In this chapter I summarize the implementation plan and some critiques of it. I then look at how the organizational structure of the project emerged and how the collective visioning process was pursued.

The implementation plan: CED's concept paper represented a starting place. The model had a clear form and logic but the details were left open with the understanding that they would have to be informed by and negotiated among stakeholders. Tanaka himself felt there were only two truly "essential" aspects of the concept paper: 1) the political organization of economic value creation and 2) direct democracy in investment decisions. The rest, in his view, was subject to adjustment.

The implementation plan Tanaka presented to launch the project was, accordingly, a dual-tracked organizing and research process. It would both cultivate a committed body of future stakeholder members and, with them, refine the design of the ecosystem concept. Over time, the ecosystem proposals would increase in clarity and strength. The participating stakeholders would become more numerous, committed, and practiced in these new ways of thinking about themselves, about

their communities, and about relating to one another. Eventually, the process would culminate in a capstone event wherein a robust quorum of stakeholders would collectively ratify a clearly defined ecosystem model ready for launch and operation.

The implementation plan had two, interrelated process objectives: first, to establish an organizational structure to facilitate the collective visioning process; and second, to facilitate the collective visioning process with as much stakeholder engagement as possible.

Critiques of the implementation plan: When the implementation plan was first presented, Tanaka sought feedback and general reactions from the group gathered. The plan was also presented at subsequent organizing committee meetings as well as other working group meetings. The implementation approach also came up as a point of discussion in several of my interviews. I recorded two critiques:

First, at the October 2015 meeting, one participant cautioned that ecosystems "can't be built, like a house" but must emerge organically. He suggested that an alternative approach would be to start by spreading information about the possibilities for economic alternatives more widely to generate interest and excitement. These comments elicited nods of agreement among several other participants but otherwise did not affect the adoption of the implementation plan.

Second, another interview subject worried about "over-structuring" the concept without enough involvement from the people envisioned to be core stakeholders. "There is a danger," she observed, "in presenting an idea that is too fully-formed, such that people are really only able to say yes or no, instead of being empowered to envision something for themselves."

4.1 Establishing a new organizational structure

The Boston Ujima Project was incubated by the Center for Democracy and fiscally sponsored by City Life Vida Urbana, with no legally incorporated entity, staffing, structure, or practices of its own. This section describes how the project started to establish structures and practices to advance the implementation plan.

Below is a replication of a table from the implementation plan illustrating the suggested evolution of the project's organization and objectives over three phases:

Figure 4.1
Ujima Organizing Committee Structure and Workplan Fall 2015 (Excerpt)

	Pre Startup	Startup (beta)	Launch
Project Time	Oct 2015 - Feb 2016	March 2016 - Aug 2016	Sep 2016 - Aug 2017
Summary	Engage stakeholders; raise operating funds; conduct feasibility study; establish core operating systems; conduct pilot experiments	Establish initial membership and governance; engage membership in development decisions and process; grow operating systems; recruit broader membership; raise startup operating and investment capital	Form as a legal entity; begin full operations and implement member governance structures; begin evaluation and monitoring; ongoing organizational development
Organizing Structure	Organizing Committee with Working Groups and Steering Committee; Advisory Council	Member Assembly with Working Groups and Member Committees and Steering Committee; Interim Board of Directors	General Assembly with Neighborhood Assemblies and Member Circles; Elected Board of Directors
Governing Body	Organizing Committee	Interim Board of Directors	General Assembly
Staffing	Center for Economic Democracy	Center for Economic Democracy	Ujima Project and partners

The table shows the proposed organizational structure included an organizing committee, steering committee, working groups, and an advisory council. The organization would have no staff of its own but rely on the staff of the Center for

Economic Democracy as well as any volunteers that could be recruited to fill out the working groups. Governance was to sit with the organizing committee itself.

Below I describe how the different structures of the organization were convened for the "pre-startup" phase, how governance was established, and how operations were launched. Note that the advisory council was not created at this time as planned.

The organizing committee

The implementation plan proposed that an organizing committee, comprised of all project participants, would be the body of oversight for activities, products, and decisions. The organizing committee would be "a transitional organizing body stewarding the development of the Ujima Project" in the early phases of the project, until a quorum of stakeholders could be assembled to take over governance. While the plan stated that membership would be "open to those who have a demonstrated alignment with the Ujima Project values" it also asserted that "the Organizing Committee will strive to operate with collaborative and inclusive decision-making processes that also privilege the voices of low income residents of color."

In practice, organizing committee meetings were effectively a continuation of the big-tent gatherings of interested individuals that had been meeting since the CFWG. All organizing committee meetings were held in the spacious gathering hall of City Life Vida Urbana, a decision made as reflection of CLVU's role as the project's "home" in a political as well as physical dimension. Ever since CFWG, maintaining this relationship with CLVU has been a concrete way to reflect the aspiration to embed the

activities of alternative institution building firmly within a context of grassroots organizing. The full array of participants gathered in this space included:

- project leaders and project volunteers who had taken on staff responsibilities
- regular and semi-regular participants engaging as potential stakeholders;
- individuals willing to offer specific expertise in support of the project; and
- newcomers encountering the project for the first time.

Thus in the first six months organizing committee meetings fulfilled several purposes: to orient newcomers and introduce them to model; for active participants to continue learning; for project leaders and volunteers to communicate and coordinate amongst themselves; and for those in the broader network to stay abreast with the project until a clearer opportunity to become involved arose. Because of the mix of uses for the organizing committee space, it was proposed and decided in December that the monthly meetings should be planned alternatingly as an "internal" meeting for coordination and oversight and as an "external" meeting open to newcomers for recruitment and orientation.

The organizing committee had not yet grown into a body with the capacity to oversee the project. However, it did serve as a space where participants could provide some feedback on day-to-day practices. At the December organizing committee meeting, participants made several observations about how systems and practices could be improved, most of which are described later in this section.

The steering committee

In the implementation plan, it is suggested that the Organizing Committee would delegate certain responsibilities to the Steering Committee, which would be comprised of a subset of the Organizing Committee. Responsibilities would include fundraising, developing a budget for the project, contracting for external services, and other similar matters. The implementation plan states that the steering committee should be "nominated by CED staff and approved by the organizing committee" and "include representation from each of the Working Groups." In later meetings it was suggested that there could be an election process to enable organizing committee members to volunteer or nominate others for placement on the steering committee.

The steering committee was convened in March 2016. Evidence suggest that it was a formalization of the role that the leadership team organizations had already been fulfilling as trusted and committed stakeholder representatives from whom Tanaka continuously sought involvement and feedback.

The leadership team. Fundraising for the project started in the summer of 2015 but no funds had been granted at the time implementation plan was introduced in October. Without financial resources to hire formal staff, Tanaka relied heavily for the first six months on the voluntary commitment of individuals and, especially, leadership team organizations. They had been assembled deliberately by Tanaka to represent core stakeholder interests. Many had known Tanaka for many years; his reputation and credibility was mentioned several times as having played a decisive role in assembling the organizing committee in both interviews and meeting notes.

The leadership team included seven organizations that maintained relatively formal organizational commitments to the Boston Ujima Project. These included the Center for Economic Democracy (CED), City Life Vida Urbana (CLVU), the Boston Impact Initiative (BII), the Boston Center for Community Ownership (BCCO), the Boston NAACP, Right to the City (RTC) Boston, and a local worker cooperative, CERO (Cooperative Energy, Recycling, and Organics). These organizations were either directly or effectively resourcing formal participation in the project, as shown below in Table 4.1. CED of course was funding Tanaka's work on the project as an official CED project. CLVU folded its participation into its existing budget, as did the Boston NAACP, CERO, and RTC. BII supported its own participation as well as allotting resources to support CED's (Tanaka's) participation. BCCO donated its time for general participation and formally contracted with the project for payment for specific deliverables.

Table 4.1 Leadership Team Resources

Organization	Resources Contributed
BCCO	Pro Bono participation
BII	Pro Bono participation, funding support for Tanaka
Boston NAACP	Funded participation
CED	Funded participation, Pro Bono participation
CERO	Pro Bono participation
CLVU	Funded participation
RTC Boston	Funded participation

The leaders of five of seven organizations were among my interview subjects; below I provide more context on their reasons for joining the Boston Ujima Project.

Lisa Owens is the Executive Director of City Life Vida Urbana (CLVU) and inherited CLVU's role in participation from the preceding Executive Director, Curdina Hill. CLVU has been a core partner of the project ever since the Community Finance Working Group. Owens regularly says she "loves" the project and has a deep

understanding of the potential significance of the vision for social ownership to CLVU and for the broader social movement. She reports seeing Ujima as something she is pursuing to "catch up" to what the CLVU base has been looking for. Since inheriting the project she says she has been "holding space" for CLVU, initially simply attending meetings herself and contributing her own thoughts, and only beginning to bring in leadership only more recently.

Nia Evans was the Executive Director of the Boston NAACP at the time of this research, formerly the volunteer chair of its economic development and labor and industry committees. She learned about Tanaka and about Ujima through conversations with different community practitioners and professionals in the area. She had an interest in cooperative economics and participatory budgeting and was drawn to the vision for an infrastructure to support cooperative economic models. Evans saw Ujima as a direct response to the interests of the Boston NAACP membership in cooperative economics and fashioning their own solutions to economic distress and had made the project an official initiative of the Boston NAACP during her tenure there.

Darnell Johnson is the coordinator for all the Right to the City (RTC) groups in Boston. He reported seeing the potential for the RTC groups to participate and feeling the importance of knowing what individual groups are involved in. However, Johnson also indicated he was driven by his personal interest in the premise of an economic ecosystem where communities could live out their values. RTC Boston is a branch of the national RTC movement that focuses on housing and land rights. The various RTC Boston groups are seen by several project leaders as natural fits for project, but

Johnson, Lisa Owens of City Life Vida Urbana, and Tanaka report an even mixture of interest and skepticism from the other directors, and Johnson emphasized that capacity is a major constraint among the other groups, saying, "Everybody is so stretched." Johnson noted that he himself was participating by logging his hours with the project as professional development.

Stacey Cordeiro has been working to incubate and support cooperatives for many years and now co-runs the Boston Center for Community Ownership (BCCO), which provides research and technical assistance in a variety of ways to community-based businesses and initiatives. She has known Tanaka since he first started organizing in Boston and they have collaborated on many different initiatives to build alternative economic models—the Boston Ujima Project is the type of project she says she personally has always wanted to work toward and felt it was a given she and Tanaka would work on it together.

Deborah Frieze met Tanaka in 2014 and offered him a position at Boston Impact Initiative (BII) after one conversation over coffee. BII is an investment firm that serves low-income communities directly and by creating a model for other investors to follow. Frieze was one of only a few participants who voiced reservations about the feasibility of the project and said during her early February interview that she was still waiting for a clear plan of action to emerge before devoting more of her time, but she has been supporting the project not only by attending meetings but also by allowing Tanaka to log some hours for the project as paid BII work.

The interim steering committee. When Tanaka moved to convene a steering committee in February 2016, it was particularly motivated by the receipt of a

foundation grant and the urgent need to establish a fair process to allocate the resources. Several members of the leadership team, consulted during a working group meeting where they were in attendance, agreed that an "interim" steering committee could be a placeholder until a more democratic process could be implemented.

The interim steering committee first met in March, intending to quickly facilitate the selection of an official steering committee. With feedback from the interim steering committee I designed a flyer to invite participation on the steering committee. We distributed the flyer and issued the invitation to participants at the March organizing committee meeting to volunteer or nominate others. The interim steering committee had entertained the possibility that, using the self-nomination procedure, the official steering committee could potentially grow too large to be effective. In that case, it was suggested, the steering committee could internally decide to close themselves to new members. But the opposite challenge was the reality. Following the announcement about the steering committee at the March organizing committee meeting, no volunteers came forward. The steering committee remained in its "interim" composition for some time. In lieu of formal accountability structures, one project leader suggested the informal decision-makers—the project leaders and highly involved volunteers—should seek to be "transparent and open" but also to "trust our gut."

Interim steering committee members expressed discomfort with the reality that they would be making significant decisions without explicit accountability from the organizing committee. The process to allocate the first foundation grant to the project exemplified the dilemma. As the committee discussed Tanaka's proposal to

allocate a portion of the project's first grant towards leadership team organizational

"re-grants", one project leader raised a question: Would it be better to re-grant to

leadership team organizations to recognize the resources they have dedicated? Or

would it be better to offer participation grants to other organizations that have not

been participating because of a lack of resources to support their participation?

Complicating matters was the fact that only leadership team organizations

were represented on the interim steering committee; from the outside they could be

easily construed as giving themselves the money. Eventually, by informal consensus

the interim steering committee chose to allocate part of the first round of funding

towards leadership team organizational partners, and then offer later rounds of

funding to support new organizations to join.

The structure for decision-making and oversight suggested in the

implementation plan is depicted in Figure 4.2 below (not used by the project but

made for this study exclusively).

Figure 4.2 Intended Governance Structure

Figure 4.3 shows my interpretation of how decision-making actually occurred during the first six months of the project. The blue arrows show the direction in which guidance flows.

Figure 4.3 Governance Structure of the First Six Months

The Project Manager role reflects Tanaka's central role, as the founder, in establishing structures and driving activities in the startup phase. In interim steering committee meetings, the leadership team members were effective in providing sound and substantial feedback on the ideas presented by Tanaka and me on all discussed topics, but were not yet at a place where they regularly brought many issues, thoughts, or directives of their own to the meetings.

Tanaka's intention was for his relationship with the steering committee to eventually evolve away from founder toward a staff-to-board relationship. Towards the end of the first six months, Tanaka suggested to the interim steering committee that, in the future, he expected the project would hire someone else to be the project

manager. There was some disquiet at the prospect of losing Tanaka's leadership—one participant quickly jumped in at that point to clarify that the transition of leadership would *not* be happening soon.

The working groups

Based on the implementation plan, the main activities of stakeholder engagement and research and development were to be divided up among several working groups. Eight working groups were initially proposed:

1. Community and General Member Engagement
2. Business and Investor Engagement
3. Special Events
4. Project Modeling and Design
5. Legal and Regulatory Research
6. Information, Technology, and Data
7. Media and Communications
8. Evaluation and Feedback

The first three working groups were intended for engaging stakeholders, both to recruit them into the project and to initiate conversations to gather information about their needs and interests. The Community and General Member Engagement working group would focus on community-based organizations and general neighborhood residents. The Business and Investor Engagement working group would organize small local business owners already interested in supporting the community and strategize an approach to all types of investors that might be persuaded to contribute capital to the investment fund. The Special Events working group would coordinate larger events for potential members.

The results of those conversations would be transmitted to the fourth and fifth working group, the Project Modeling and Design and Legal and Regulatory Research

working groups. The information provided would help these groups design components of the envisioned ecosystem (such as the investment fund and the overall governance model) so that they would be maximally relevant and beneficial to stakeholders.

The next two working groups would provide tools and materials to the first five working groups. The Information, Technology, and Data working group would explore technological approaches to enable and strengthen the internal collective visioning process as well as the envisioned ecosystem. The Media and Communications working group would create physical materials and digital media to communicate the vision to the public. The final working group, Evaluation and Feedback, would develop both an internal evaluation to assess the strength of the internal collective visioning process, and developing an outcome-oriented evaluation for the eventual envisioned ecosystem.

When the working groups were first convened in November, only five of the eight planned working groups actually met. One working group, the Legal and Regulatory Research working group never met because its responsibilities were passed to the Project Modeling and Design working group. Similarly, the work plan of the Special Events working group was integrated into the Community and General Member Engagement working group's work plan after only one meeting. In both cases, a significant overlap in the membership of the working groups was a factor in the decision to merge the working groups.

In a third case, the Evaluation and Feedback working group never met because of insufficient interest. At the October meeting where project leaders first

sought volunteers for the working groups, no participant aside from myself indicated an interest in joining. Instead, formal process evaluation activities were pushed back indefinitely. Although project leaders discussed seeking outside resources to conduct evaluation activities, the project did not do so in the first six months. Tanaka and I sought at one point to present a framework for a process evaluation to the organizing committee, and it was included as a formal item on the agenda of the December meeting, but other agenda items ended up taking more than their allotted time and we were unable to review the evaluation framework. When we returned to the project in the new year in 2016, other project priorities continued to assert themselves over advancing evaluation activities.

Recruiting contributors. Working group meeting sizes were relatively small throughout the first six months (with an average of six people at each meeting). Project leaders and working group contributors sometimes expressed discomfort at the limited breadth of engagement those numbers implied, considering that the most substantive work of the project was taking place in working group settings more than anywhere else. In some cases, working groups chose to work with outside consultants because of the difficulty of finding volunteers with sufficient expertise or capacity for particular assignments.

The Project Modeling and Design group sought outsider help in several forms. The working group contracted with groups of graduate and law students from nearby universities (including Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) to provide research support. It also sought advice from organizations specializing in alternative finance models to help understand and develop options for

the project's envisioned investment fund, including The Working World and Cutting Edge Capital.

The Community and General Member group quickly identified a need for workshop facilitators to reach out to prospective members in the community (defined at the time as people from the neighborhoods of Roxbury and Dorchester, but this definition evolved over time). Outreach would include engaging community members in a popular education workshop designed to present the project's general vision for an alternative economy, and to generate feedback and recruit participants to aid in the collective visioning process to clarify and refine that vision. The working group decided to seek out a small group of workshop facilitators, and spent several meetings discussing the best way to approach identifying candidates and whether or not to offer a stipend of some sort.

The Information, Technology, and Data group had the most difficulty identifying and recruiting capacity. Despite having reached out to several prospects through participants' personal networks, and dedicating the December working group meeting to pitching the project to candidates with technological aptitude, the working group was not able to recruit more than one participant with significant technological expertise in the first six months. While there was initially interest in recruiting a team to build a dedicated technological platform for the project, including paying a professional project manager to lead development, the working group shifted to pursuing relationships with existing platform developers to determine whether project objectives could be satisfied, at least initially, by existing tools.

While the Media and Communications group started out with a very small number of contributors, it was able to find participants with arts and design capabilities toward the end of the six-month period and was able to create visual materials in time for the large organizing committee meeting held at the end of March.

The only working group that did not report a lack of expertise or an absence of needed perspectives was the Business and Investor Engagement Working Group. This was also the largest working group out of the five, consistently drawing more participants than the average for the working groups and at one meeting hosting 14 participants.

Schedules and locations. Working groups each met once a month (or meant to). In the first six months there were a total of 21 working group meetings. Four working groups had to cancel or delay meetings because too many participants were unable to meet (sometimes at the last minute). Two working groups experienced brief hiatuses at the beginning of 2016, going without meetings for more than eight weeks. Otherwise, the working groups met consistently during the first six months.

Although City Life Vida Urbana was the default home of the project and the space for all organizing committee meetings, participants supported the idea of holding working group meetings in different locations around the city. Locations were chosen on the basis of availability and convenience for working group members. After some initial exploration, each working group settled into a primary meeting space, including organizational offices and community gathering spaces located in Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, and Cambridge.

At one organizing committee meeting, participants discussed the practice of holding meetings by phone. Although some participants seemed receptive to the idea, other participants were more vehemently opposed. The opposing participants felt like conference calls would make it more difficult for participants to interact with one another. Ultimately, over the first six months, only two meetings were held entirely over the phone. However, there were many working group meetings in which at least one participant was attending remotely by phone, despite that fact that this was seen as a suboptimal way to attend meetings.

The monthly meeting intervals for all the working groups and committees was never explicitly explained either in documentation or in meetings or interviews; however, the rationale is not difficult to infer. First, monthly meetings were likely the most that could be managed during this first period when planning and facilitating were held primarily by Tanaka and myself (altogether, each of us was attending at least six two-hour meetings each month and contributing work for each working group in between each meeting). Second (and, again, because of the early phase), the project was heavily reliant on the volunteer hours of people who held other jobs. Thus the monthly interval provided the greatest opportunity for participants to complete assignments in between meetings, while still having a semblance of frequency.

Several participants observed that it was difficult to attend meetings scheduled during normal business hours. At the December organizing committee, after each of the working groups had met at least once, Tanaka sought feedback from participants on scheduling: "we need to try to be creative; people are busy and we have a big agenda." While some participants mentioned being able to "sneak away"

from work in order to attend meetings, it seemed clear to participants and leaders alike that meetings would likely attract more attendance if they were scheduled in the evenings, after 6:00pm. Following these discussions I observed a clear, conscious attempt to schedule more meetings during evening hours. However, because it was generally challenging to find times during which most working group participants could meet, not all meetings were scheduled in the evening.

Coordination and communication. The first meeting of each working group included time to review the scope of work as initially planned by Tanaka. Each meeting also included time to identify priorities and carve out feasible work assignments for individuals to complete before the next monthly meeting, sometimes on their own and sometimes in email collaboration with other members of the working group. During the first six months of working group meetings, these priorities and assignments were usually thought of on a month-to-month basis rather than attempting to plan longer term.

To spread coordination responsibility more broadly, Tanaka made one of the first priorities for each of the working groups to identify a coordinator to, at minimum, handle this work of coordinating meeting schedules and locations. At the first meeting of each working group Tanaka issued a call for a volunteer to take on the coordinator role. Despite some expressions of reluctance (one coordinator agreed "if no one else volunteers" and another cautioned that it would be only "for now" because of "unstable capacity"), three of the working groups were able to immediately name a coordinator that was not Tanaka or myself. The Media and Communications working group found a coordinator in January. And Tanaka himself served as coordinator for

the remaining working group, Business and Investor Engagement, for the first six months of the project. The four coordinators varied significantly in the level of coordinating leadership they embraced for their working group. I often provided support when coordinators were unable to handle scheduling or other logistics. By February, when one of the coordinators was no longer able to volunteer their time, I stepped in as coordinator myself.

As the working groups embarked on implementing their work plans, they had to create and maintain new systems and practices for communicating with other project participants outside of meeting spaces. A Google Drive folder that was established prior to the October 2015 launch was maintained to hold project documents and meeting notes. During the first few months of the project, Tanaka considered different workflow management software platforms before settling on Trello as the least complicated option. Tanaka went as far as setting up a Trello workspace for the project and providing directions for participants to set up accounts. But Trello failed to gain traction among participants, with comments at the December organizing committee meeting about how difficult it was to sign up for Trello, and by March Google Drive remained the main platform used to organized project materials.

One of the challenges of Google Drive is that the contact lists and folder contributors require more constant updating and organization than project leaders and coordinators were able to spare in the first six months. As a result, in a feedback session held during the December organizing committee meeting, several participants reported not receiving project emails.

There were several suggestions for methods to improve coordination among working groups that did not come into fruition in the first six months. One participant, with the support of others, suggested on more than one occasion that having working groups meet at the same time could help inter-group coordination. The main obstacle cited was that several participants, including Tanaka and myself, were still very central to multiple working groups and until that changed it would not be very practical to hold simultaneous working groups. Additionally, at one point during the first six months I and other participants raised the idea of recording short video updates as a way to keep other members of the project appraised of important project developments. We briefly experimented with creating these video updates at the end of each working group meeting, but the practice did not carry on for reasons that were never articulated (which suggested it was not a deliberate decision but a reflection of strained capacity). A contact directory of participants was discussed on occasion, to help participants identify and communicate with one another, but it was never created. Another option was the regular circulation of meeting notes, but it was felt by several participants that this was hardly the most engaging way to share updates, and in an oversight participants were not able to access the notes of working groups that they were not formally a part of.

Emerging working group structure. In interviews and meetings across the project it was taken for granted that Tanaka would remain indispensable to the project for a good period of its emergence. For the first six months Tanaka played a lead role in setting the work plans and agendas for the working groups, especially those involved in stakeholder outreach and research and design. He noted on many

occasions the need for more leadership capacity to avoid turning him into a "bottleneck" for productivity. Interview subjects raised the need for the project to increase working capacity not only for fairness ("it would be nice if the work was more shared") but also to capture the value and benefit of genuine broad participation ("It needs to not be just Aaron's show").

It took time for other working group participants to develop the absolute levels of familiarity and confidence with the vision and the process needed to fully embrace staff-like responsibilities. And in terms of relative levels of familiarity and confidence, for the first six months, even the most engaged working group participants simply were not spending the same number of hours each week or month immersed in the project that I spent, which was still much less than Tanaka. As the project founder, Tanaka reported that he had spent "thousands of hours" on the project since initiating it. While one working group participant reported spending five to ten hours each week on the project, this was a clear exception—the other participants interviewed (and the interview sample was skewed towards more regular participants) reported spending only "a couple" of hours each month outside of meetings, or even only attending meetings. Note that in several cases interviewed subjects reported wanting to spend more time on the project but not being able to because of other professional obligations.

Without a formal, reliable system for tracking work between working groups, Tanaka, myself, and sometimes other participants who were active in more than one group served as the primary connective tissue between separate spaces. Interviewed participants reported a wide range of levels of access to Tanaka, which may be

treated as a significant proxy indicator of access to the project overall given Tanaka's role as a central node for knowledge and strategizing. Some participants had regular contact with Tanaka, including in both professional and personal contexts apart from the project, and they reported feeling comfortable contacting him at any time. Other participants admitted that they had never spoken to him outside of meetings and did not feel comfortable contacting him even with a specific reason. A few participants reported contacting Tanaka and not being able to connect with him.

Although I did not have access to any informal communication between participants and I did not ask interviewees about the nature and extent of their communication with other participants outside of the formal channels of meeting spaces or official emails, my impression from incidental conversations is that informal communication among participants, and especially between different working groups, was relatively infrequent. There were no incidents that I was aware of in which informal lines of communication were deliberately used to withhold substantive information from other participants.

Of the 33 individuals who attended working group meetings, only 18 attended two or more, and only 12 were regular or semi-regular participants—either functioning as volunteer staff, or more-committed-than-average stakeholders. Even among these twelve regular working group participants, the level of time spent on the project varied considerably. Outside of these twelve participants, during that six-month period, participation was limited to occasional meeting attendance. Figure 4.4 below shows the centrality of involvement of working group participants based on meeting

attendance data, involvement in coordinating and facilitation, and contributions to

meeting discussions and work completed in between meetings.

Figure 4.4 Regular Working Group Participants, March 2016
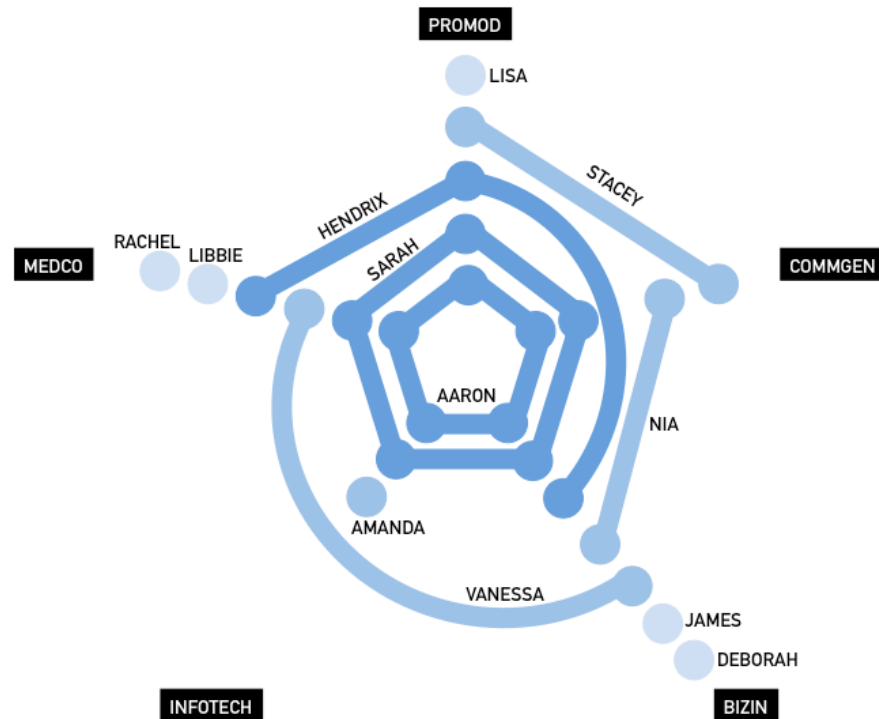
Notably, those 12 participants had all been involved since the launch. Five of

them sat on the leadership team (three of those being founders) and represented

organizations with an official affiliation with the project. I was one of six individual

volunteers, not representing any organization officially, with a strong interest in the

organized ecosystem concept and with relatively privileged circumstances that

enabled us to contribute our time. Two of those six also had specific and highly

developed skillsets that had a clear application to their working group. The twelfth

individual was a participating stakeholder who was interested in the project not only

because of aligned values but also because of the potential for it to provide needed

material support.

The working groups represented the most substantial pathway for interested individuals to get involved in the advancement of the vision first proposed by CED— and there was perhaps even more influence on the development of the vision within the working group settings than there was in the interim steering committee. Thus the rendering in Figure 4.4 of the sphere of influence within the working groups is one representation of the influence structure throughout the project as a whole in the first six-month period.

4.2 Facilitating the collective visioning process

The second track of the implementation plan was to advance the collective visioning process. The collective visioning process involved two main objectives: 1) to reach and recruit stakeholders and 2) to cultivate stakeholder engagement in collective visioning activities.

Below I describe how project leaders pursued these objectives, including evidence of early efforts to meet the main objectives; evidence of future plans and intentions to meet the main objectives; and evidence serving as baseline indicators of the extent to which the objectives were being met in the first six months.

To reach and recruit stakeholders

Although the leadership team of the project represented each of the core stakeholder types—grassroots community organizations, values-aligned local business, impact investors, and impact-oriented technical assistance—it was still a priority to reach, connect with, and recruit a broader assembly of stakeholders to participate in collective visioning activities. "Reach" here refers simply to the act of making contact with a stakeholder (individual or organization) to introduce to them

the Boston Ujima Project and the concept being pursued. "Recruitment" might be considered achieved if the stakeholder's connection with the project showed signs of becoming sustained over time. Recruitment was the ultimate goal, but it recognized that not every person or organization contacted would join the project.

Almost immediately, project leaders and volunteers began to develop a systematic approach to this objective. The Community and General Member Engagement working group and the Business and Investor Engagement working group were most responsible for leading outreach efforts to community-based organizations (whose participation was prioritized, in the beginning, over residents without organizational affiliation), local values-aligned businesses, and progressive investors. During the first six months, the Community and General Member working group was refining a workshop to introduce the model to community members in a participatory setting. The Business and Investor Engagement working group was developing a set of documents and proposals that could be shared with prospective business members and prospective investors.

An overall framework of engagement began to take form:

- The project would have a variety of communications materials to explain and promote the model, not only for the general public, but also tailored to specific stakeholders, to more clearly illustrate what participation in the project would mean for them. This would include fact sheets, visualizations, short and long pitches, and so forth. Participants would become practiced in describing the model and the project succinctly.

- There would be more formal engagement activities that newcomers would be invited to participate in, depending on the type of stakeholder. All stakeholder types would be welcome in the organizing committee. The participatory workshop was designed with community members and business owners in mind, while more formal interviews and information sessions were imagined for business owners and investors.

- As a follow up to these workshops and interviews, there would be at least one major project-wide gathering event that would serve as a space for further education about the model; piloting a collective investment process to practice and experience the investment fund model; and socializing and building community.

At an early working group, one participant critiqued the idea of relying entirely on meetings and educational workshops to reach stakeholders—"What about spaghetti dinners," she suggested, "or other events, engaging community on a human level?" Participants agreed that events oriented towards socialization would likely be more compelling than work-oriented meetings, and also contribute to building a sense of community among recruits.

In working groups, meetings included time to brainstorm and refine a list of potential recruits, to discuss how to strategically time and frame pitches, and to give out assignments to individual working group members. Additionally, time was carved

out during the November organizing committee meeting for meeting participants to engage in a deep exercise to brainstorm the individuals, organizations, institutions, businesses, etc. that they were personally connected to that might be interested either in engaging in the visioning stage or eventually playing a role in the envisioned ecosystem.

As project leaders and participants discussed suitable targets for recruitment, several factors emerged as key considerations:

First, to support the intention for the organizing committee to provide an oversight function for the collective visioning process, and the intention to elevate the voices of working class Boston residents of color, it was generally agreed (there was no practice for recording formal resolutions at the time) that recruitment efforts should focus on those particular stakeholders. This was important because it was imagined that the organizing committee created at the time would eventually evolve into the general assembly that would govern the envisioned investment fund and ecosystem. Meeting notes show project leaders elaborating on this point—it was argued that the legitimacy of the governance authority of the organizing committee was meant to come from its composition, with robust representation from the core constituency of low-income Boston residents of color. No system of proportions or quotas was set to define the optimal makeup of the organizing committee.

Second, to protect and strengthen the expression of the foundational values and mission of the project throughout the collective visioning process, and protect the project from intentional or unintentional co-optation, it was generally agreed that recruitment efforts should focus on "values-aligned" individuals and organizations.

Again, no explicit definition was adopted, but the working groups started to brainstorm lists based on political alignment (as determined by prior experience). The Community and General Member Engagement working group discussed focusing their first recruitment efforts on local base-building organizations. Similarly, the Business and Investor Engagement working group talked about "businesses we want to support" such as those with roots in core stakeholder neighborhoods, or those aspiring towards "high road" business standards with respect to local hiring, worker conditions, environmental impact, and so forth.

Third, as project leaders and participants discussed how the Boston Ujima Project would aim to position itself within the landscape of local progressive and radical efforts—how it would present itself and relate to other organizations and associations—two themes emerged: connectivity and complementarity. For example, it was generally agreed that the project should not seek to compete with base-building organizations for their members, or to compete with business associations in providing services to businesses. This suggested recruitment through existing entities.

Early reach and recruitment activities: While the formal strategy and materials were still being developed, informal activities continued to shape the makeup of the organizing committee. Recruitment activities had started with the CFWG. For the most part, project leaders and participants simply reached out to other individuals and organizations they knew through personal or professional networks and recognized as values-aligned and potentially interested in the vision. Draft versions of the workshop and some basic communications materials were used in lieu

of finalized versions, with much more reliance on individuals' ability to explain the model and the project to newcomers.

After three organizing meetings were held, project leaders began to prepare for a major recruitment-focused organizing committee meeting. This meeting, held at the end of March, ultimately took on the status of a minor project event, which shaped the short-term priorities efforts of all the working groups in February and March. While the first three internal organizing committee meetings were planned and facilitated by Tanaka with minor support from myself, for this meeting Tanaka and several members of the leadership team developed the agenda together and shared facilitation roles. The March meeting constituted the largest organizing committee meeting of the first six month period, with a significant number of newcomers, and was considered a very successful effort by project leaders and coordinators.

Baseline measurements of reach: My data collection protocol was not initially designed to evaluate reach and recruitment efforts or to measure project membership. Here, I chose to use meeting attendance from October 2015 through March 2016, including attending organizing committee meetings.

Organizing committee meeting attendance is not sufficient to look at reach or recruitment but can be a rough baseline measurement of who was reached (as it was common at the time to invite all to attend organizing committee meetings) and of who might have been recruited. Meeting data of course would not indicate individuals or organizations that played some role in the project outside of meetings. It would have been difficult to measure recruitment in any case because project "membership" in those first few months not strictly defined or policed. At a later point, data to

indicate reach might be collected later by asking as many participants as possible two questions—who they reached out to invite to the project, and who it was that first introduce them to the project.

I found 65 individuals attended at least one project meeting between October 2015 and March 2016. Despite the limitations of the data, I look at crude indicators of networking effects, racial diversity, and organizational affiliation. I also compile a list of potential reasons for non-participation.

Networking effects: In interviews, the phenomenon of "network credibility" was raised by many interview subjects as a decisive factor in joining the project at this early stage. They cited the perceived strength of the individuals and organizations that had been assembled, expressed optimism for the potential of the project because of the perceived quality of that network, and in several cases claimed that this perception of "buy-in" by "the right people" was powerful enough to overcome their initial skepticism about the feasibility of the proposed vision.

Evidence suggests that participants continued to be drawn in not only by the vision, but also by way a personal or professional connection to Tanaka. In the first six months the project was bolstered by Tanaka's ability to directly invite so many participants. That outcome likely reflects his many years working within and leading the local social justice movement, his involvement with efforts to build alternative economic models like worker cooperatives and a municipal youth participatory budgeting process for Boston, and the extensive professional networking in which he engaged in relation to both of those avenues of work.

As time passed, an increasing number of newcomers were brought to meetings by participants other than Tanaka. This was measured by looking at the connections of individuals who attended organizing committee meetings. At the first organizing committee in October 2015 nearly all the attendees had come through Tanaka. By the fourth organizing committee in March 2016, about a quarter of the 37 attendees had been invited by someone other than Tanaka. Further research into the networked relationships among participants might reveal interesting patterns.

Racial diversity: Figure 4.5 below depicts the basic racial demographics of the organizing committee compared to the racial demographics of the city of Boston as reported in the 2010 Census. The organizing committee meetings were attended by a lesser proportion of white and Hispanic attendees, and a greater proportion of black and Asian attendees, as compared to Boston citywide demographics.

Figure 4.5 Racial Composition of the Organizing Committee, March 2016
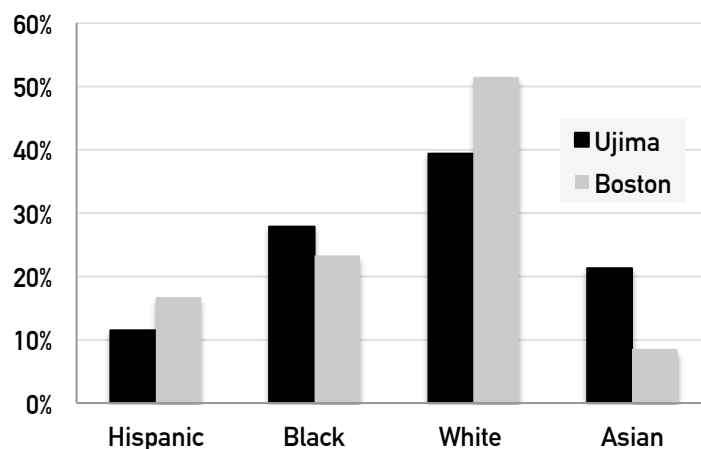
I was unable to collect data on additional demographic indicators, including several that would have been of interest to the project such as location and length of residence, age, income level, educational attainment, nativity, etc. Based on meeting

observations and participant conversation, however, it seemed that there was not yet strong direct representation of working class Boston residents, or workers (particularly immigrant and undocumented workers) that form the membership bases of local grassroots organizations.

Organizational affiliation: One way of examining stakeholder representation among those reached and recruited is by looking at the organizations with which meeting participants were associated. The evidence used here is from meeting notes and other documents—in other words, incidental records. Better data could be obtained by asking participants what organizations they consider themselves meaningfully affiliated with.

Figure 4.6 on the next page shows the specific organizations associated with the full universe of participants as of the first six months of the project.

At the center of the snapshot are green boxes representing organizations that are formally participating in the project. Prior relationships among them are indicated with a dashed line. Above are two larger network formations that the Boston Ujima Project is affiliated with. Below, the blue box holds businesses that were participating as interested stakeholders. The purple box holds contract-based relationships where the organizations were not considered part of the project but were producing some work for it. In the grey box at the bottom of the page there are organizations, businesses, and institutions affiliated with individuals who have attended project meetings but were not formally participating in the project.

BII's portfolio of enterprises includes several that have come to be involved in the project, whether through BII or through different connections.

Figure 4.6 Organizational Relationships, March 2016

Boston Ujima Project
Organization Map

Solidarity Economy Initiative

Reinvest in Our Power

Center for Economic Democracy

Boston Impact Initiative

City Life Vida Urbana

Boston Ujima Project

CERO Cooperative

Right to the City - Boston

Boston Center for Comm. Ownership

Boston NAACP

Coop Power
City Fresh Foods
Democracy Brewing
Haley House
Place Tailor
Restoring Roots
Tremendous Maids

Intelligent Mischief

Harvard Transactional Law Clinic

Commons

Present but not Participating:

Accion
Asian American Resource Workshop
Balanced Rock Investments
Beautiful Solutions
Bocoup
Boston Staffing Alliance
Boston Workers Alliance
Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corp.
Community Labor United
Cooperative Fund of New England
Datawheel
Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative
EMW Bookstore
Hyams Foundation
Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corp.
Jamaica Plain New Economy Transition
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
New Economy Coalition
Public Banking Initiative
Restaurant Opportunities Center
Sheet Metal Workers Local 17
Tufts University
Yale University

Network Affiliation

Core Relationship

Prior Relationship

Stakeholder Participant

Contract Relationship

A tabulation of organizations reveals a mix of different perspectives—community, business, and investors—many with strong ties to communities of working class people of color in Boston. 86% of the organizations represented are based in the Boston area, 4% are Massachusetts-based, and 10% are national or international. Figure 4.7 below shows the affiliations of the 65 attendees from the first six months. In order of prevalence, organizations represented included community organizations and advocacy groups; undergraduate and graduate students, professors, and technical assistance providers; business owners and cooperative worker-owners; investors, investment advisors, and funders; and workers and labor representatives.

Figure 4.7 Organizational Affiliations in the Organizing Committee, March 2016
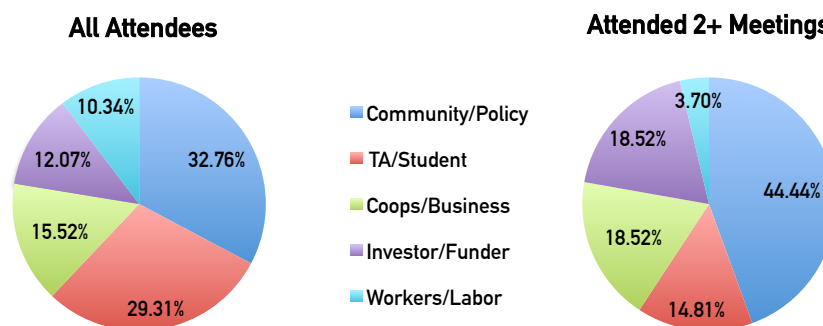
Among the 29 individuals who had attended two or more meetings, individuals affiliated with community organizations and policy and activist groups dominated the space, while the representation of worker and labor interests was notably scarcer.

Missing perspectives: In my interviews with ten participants I asked explicitly whether they saw any stakeholder perspectives missing from the organizing committee. Most cautioned that they did not know the other participants well enough

and offered their impressions that there was a good and varied mix of perspectives, but a few offered some suggestions of who might be missing. One participant felt that a labor representative was missing and someone with government policy expertise. Another participant wished there were more investors of color. Two observed that there are not enough people with a business perspective. And another participant asserted the need for more base members from community organizations in the organizing committee and working groups. The data on participant affiliation suggests that all of these proposed deficits accurately reflected the makeup of the organizing committee at the time, with the exception of the two suggestions that business perspectives were not sufficiently represented.

Reasons for non-participation: The research design did not include a systematic examination of the reasons for non-participation or limited participation. However, several different types of data provide some suggestions. I used comments from interview data and meeting notes to infer potential reasons for non-participation. Additional potential reasons for non-participation or limited participation are based on inference related to the motivations given by participants (described earlier) as well as on conversations and observations made over the course of the first six months. They include:

Skepticism in the viability of the concept: A few participants explicitly mentioned initial skepticism upon hearing about CED's concept. Another participant reported hearing deep skepticism from one of their colleagues, who was resistant even to direct and repeated invitations to join. At one meeting of the Information, Technology, and Data working group, candidates for recruitment expressed two

specific types of skepticism: first, concern that this model had never been demonstrated successful before; and second a question about how to prevent co-optation of the project ("how do you prevent turning people into capitalists?").

A preference to wait until the project is more developed or moving more quickly: Many participants mentioned "watching for now" rather than participating. One participant recalled feeling let down by the slow pace of the project in its initial stages. At a meeting of the Information, Technology, and Data working group, one candidate or recruitment explicitly hesitated because the vision was "not concrete enough." The interviews with participants that had stopped participating before the October launch revealed that all four expressed interest in being involved later.

Two of the three individuals I interviewed who had stopped attending meetings before the CFWG transitioned into the Boston Ujima Project suggested they had stopped participating because there was no immediate action to take that connected with the existing work of their organizations. However, they were both open to conversations in the future about becoming involved. One thought his strengths would translate into helping to organize investors or exploring a partnership with his own coop house. The other thought her organization might experiment with local investment through the project, when the investment fund became ready.

A feeling of uncertainty around participants, whether specifically or in general: Two participants reported feelings of mild suspicion of other participants, or skepticism of their motives in participation (though, as participants, these feelings were not determinative in their engagement).

A lack of capacity or support to participate: As described in other sections of this thesis, even many participants who are committed to the project have had trouble participating regularly and in depth.

A perception of a lack of alignment of mission and vision for the organization: One interview subject explained that she had not seen a specific role for her organizations in the project, but she was willing to explore how the Boston Ujima Project's objectives could be tied to her organization's long-term strategic planning.

A belief that they should not participate because of their identity: One subject I interviewed who said he remained interested in the project but had not continued to attend meetings at least in part because he assumed his participation would and should be limited because his race (white) and economic status (middle class) put him outside the project's definition of core stakeholders.

Disinterest in or aversion to the project environment: The startup environment was characterized by regular sit-down meetings dominated by professionals and focused on discussion technical and theoretical aspects of the vision.

This list of reasons for non-participation is exploratory, not comprehensive or even representative. Further research could involve more systematically conducted interviews or surveys with a larger sample of individuals or individuals representing organizations that could theoretically play a role in the vision, informed by these findings as well as any literature that could inform factors that influence the desire and ability of individuals and organizations to participate in activities that are exploratory and/or experimental.

To cultivate stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement in the collective visioning process was thought to involve, at the time, three types of activity:

- Stakeholders could engage more deeply through the organizing committee in activities to imagine, question, discuss, and debate elements of the developing ecosystem, including providing regular feedback on the proposals designed by the working groups.

- Stakeholders could join working groups to engage more directly in the research, design, and refinement of proposals.

- Stakeholders might become involved in recruitment approaches that include collective visioning activities, using a peer-to-peer model of outreach and learning.

We did not expect every stakeholder we encountered to choose to engage in these more sustained ways, as mentioned above. Project leaders and volunteers also planned ways to seek feedback and information from those stakeholders who we would only interact with once—they were included as part of the reach and recruitment activities described above.

Separately, there was a general sense that it would also be valuable to have stakeholders take on volunteer work within the project beyond engaging in collective

visioning. For example, they could help to coordinate or facilitate a working group or create concrete project materials within a working group, which would deepen their contribution and also develop their leadership capacity or specific skillsets. However, in the first six months, most of this administrative, advancement, and operational work was done by project leaders and a small core of volunteers.

Early efforts to deepen stakeholder engagement in collective visioning included both 1) regular practices to cultivate engagement in our project spaces and 2) concerted efforts to build stakeholder capacity to engage.

Practices to cultivate engagement: Project leaders and volunteers consciously tried to facilitate meetings to generate as much conversation and feedback from participants as possible, especially to draw upon the perspective and expertise participants brought as potential stakeholders in the envisioned ecosystem.

Also, recognizing that visioning activities were happening in small working group meetings, project leaders sought methods of generating feedback from stakeholders who were not able to participate in meetings. Some of the approaches raised to strengthen coordination among working groups were suggested for this purpose as well, such as circulating meeting notes or creating more engaging short video updates. By the end of the first six-month period, project leaders had not yet found an effective way to regularly engage stakeholders outside meetings.

Building capacity to engage: Project leaders recognized the need to develop the capacity of stakeholders not only to participate more deeply in the collective visioning process, but also to prepare for meaningful participation in future stages of project development—for example, preparing the stakeholder assembly for the role of

ratifying a mission and vision and governing the ecosystem. For both purposes, both *individual* and *collective* capacities were identified.

Individual capacity. Perhaps the two most-emphasized capacities for individuals, at this early stage in the project, were 1) a familiarity with the proposed ecosystem, and 2) a feeling of ownership over the eventual ecosystem as a stakeholder and therefore a feeling of both license and obligation to participate in its development. Many participants described the concept to be "overwhelming" not only because of the many different components but also because the vision overall pushes people to see themselves and their communities in a different way. Additionally, meeting notes demonstrate the strong tendency of peripheral participants and newcomers to treat the vision as if it were a blueprint. Newer participants often asked questions as if they were seeking to understand something that had already been decided, rather than understand thinking around something that they were being asked to help create. In meetings and in interviews, several participants made reference to "waiting" and "watching for now" to see how the project progressed rather than seeing themselves as integral to developing the vision.

I observed a variety of activities and instruments intended to help participants understand CED's concept. Organizing committee meetings were the most common spaces to introduce and deepen familiarity with the concept, to help participants practice describing the vision to others, and to clearly understand tensions and challenges inherent in the vision.

Much of the first three-hour organizing committee meeting in October was spent in activities to walk through the vision of CED's concept paper. Participants'

varied considerably in their level of familiarity with the vision in CED's concept paper

had many questions. Challenging conversations about values and vision were started

and left unfinished and open at the end. Still, one project leader who had been

involved since the CFWG said at the end that the meeting made her optimistic that the

project was becoming more concrete, adding, "When people start arguing, that's

when I know something is happening – we're not just in the clouds."

The November organizing committee meeting provides an example of an

impromptu approach to building clarity around the vision:

> Tanaka had just completed a walk-through of the three-phase implementation structure, leading one participant to ask what has become a standard question: "What is something concrete that we can start with?" The idea of a pilot event had been floating around since before the project launch (notes from an August meeting mention the need to "pilot something small") and Tanaka shared here the idea that the pilot event would be an experiment in collectively investing in local businesses meeting project standards.

> Another participant then asked a question inspired by this exchange: "What can be done about problems like rising rent and grocery store affordability in Jamaica Plain?"

> Tanaka responded by facilitating an impromptu activity to brainstorm ways to address unaffordable food prices using the strategic lens of the proposed vision. Participants came up with ideas such as providing technical assistance, creating cooperative purchasing clubs, subsidizing costs across the hypothetical ecosystem of businesses, individuals subsidizing one another in solidarity, working on the supply side by supporting community gardens, and political organizing to gain control of the real estate on which the store is located.

> It was, as Tanaka said after the exercise was completed, "an example of how a neighborhood assembly might operate – folks come with an analysis of their local situation, a democratic process of naming a problem, and then it becomes a space to start finding solutions."

The example also points to a moment when Tanaka took advantage of a

question to deviate from the agenda and delve even more deeply into the vision than

originally intended.

At the following organizing committee meeting, in December, participants engaged in two activities meant to help develop clarity around the vision and improve our approaches to communicating the vision to outsiders. Some of the questions prompted in these activities were:

•Do we feel effective when describing the vision to others?

•Do we experience pushback from others? What about?

•What would help us become more fluent in describing the vision?

In response to the last question, participants suggested incorporating these practice activities more regularly into our organizing committee meetings, adding activities like role playing scenarios, and reporting back on real conversations.

Beyond organizing committee meetings, there were several other spaces and ways that project leaders and participants used to strengthen stakeholders' grasp of the concept. For each working group, Tanaka dedicated the introductory meetings to summarizing the full concept, before narrowing the focus to the role and responsibilities of the working group. Thereafter, Tanaka spent less time in each working group meeting explaining the model, with the exception of whenever new participants were attending.

The Media and Communications working group played a major role in supporting activities to build clarity around vision through the creation of communication materials. Because of the complexity of the vision, with many different components, several participants were particularly interested in Tanaka's suggestion of creating an internal "wiki" website for participants. The website would compile in one easy-to-navigate place clear explanations of the different alternative

economic models the vision meant to weave together, including real world examples.

However, despite the interest and the obvious utility of such a website, no working

group was able to tackle this project in the first six months.

There were some different views on what capacity building should entail. For

example, in a Community and General Member Engagement working group meeting,

participants offered critiques of and suggestions for the popular education workshop

designed for newcomers to experience the envisioned ecosystem. A major concern

was the length and complexity of the workshop, as one project leader raised:

Project leader 1: Can we clarify what the learning goals are? There's so much packed in here, we need to prioritize. And then also mix and match the pieces and tailor the workshop to the specific group.
Project leader 2: Hopefully people would come away with the vision, a sense of possibility, a feeling like there is something for them to do. I don't expect people to really retain details, but get a sense they could intervene at an ecosystem level.
Project leader 1: Is it enough right now just to do show and tell? How participatory does it need to be?

At a later meeting, another project leader again argued for a simpler approach.

Project leader 3: We want to inspire thought… what if the workshop is more broadly about economic topics? For example, defining economic success, or talking about credit, which brings up the question: Who decides if you're creditworthy?

The discussion about the popular education workshop and education

objectives for stakeholders broadly suffered somewhat within the conditions of the

resource-constrained pre-startup phase environment. The two excerpts above

occurred several months apart, interrupted by a project hiatus for the end of the year

holidays, followed by a cancellation of the first meeting of the year as working group

participants prioritized catching up with their paid work first, and then a meeting

spent re-orienting participants following the gap. The suggestion for more general popular education for stakeholders in matters like finance and economics thus did not get addressed in the first six months of the project.

For the second form of capacity, an early approach was to communicate clearly at each meeting, especially in the beginning, that there was still much work to be done to bring the ecosystem concept into reality. "This is still very exploratory," Tanaka asserted in a March working group meeting with several newer project participants. "I personally don't know, and we all have different ideas of what this could look like – it's not only about external research but talking amongst ourselves to get more of the collective vision".

The Media and Communications working group's objective to render the imagined ecosystem into a visualization uncovered a tension between the two forms of individual capacity. As one participant explained,

> Volunteer: Things are changing every time we talk. And in my experience, when you put on paper an understanding in the moment it creates a problem with people thinking, "this is what it is."

In other words, the working group wondered if creating the visualization meant to aid other participants in understanding of the model might actually have the unintended effect of solidifying the model—suggesting that the vision was something that had been decided already rather than something still in formation.

Collective capacity. For the collective of project participants to eventually become a collective governing body, project leaders recognized the need to develop inter-stakeholder awareness and solidarity, as well as direct practice in making decisions collectively.

One early approach to strengthening the sense of collective involved being intentional and pointed in describing the project to newcomers: the fact that the project brought together the different stakeholders in an economy (community members, businesses, investors, and others) was emphasized as one of the project's characteristic strengths.

One potential challenge to developing solidarity among participants was raised by three participants who all separately shared with me, in interviews, expressions of some distrust of other participants in the project. One reported hearing skepticism regarding the reliability of a particular stakeholder group as a whole; another reported having reservations about a specific participant because of uncertainty about that participant's motivations; and a third expressed distaste for the political orientation of a participating organization.

Project leaders recognized the need for open discussion over values and vision, seeing the practice of struggle and negotiation among participants and different stakeholders as a crucial part of developing solidarity and laying the groundwork for direct democratic practice. One approach taken involved planning and hosting a multi-stakeholder panel as an activity during the March organizing committee meeting.

However, in the first six months there were few opportunities to experiment with collective oversight, feedback, or decision-making. In part this was because the project leaders and volunteers in the Project Modeling and Design working group, whose work plan included investigating governance models, had a difficult time broaching the matter (this is described in more detail in the next section). However,

there was one minor experiment that took place at an organizing committee meeting

toward the end of our first six months. The Information, Technology, and Data

working group prepared by testing different live SMS polling applications and then, on

the day, led the meeting participants through the simple steps of connecting their

phones to the system via text message and then responding through text to the poll

questions projected onto the wall. The participants had the experience of seeing their

responses aggregated in real time. While no real decisions were at stake, the

experiment was well received by those who participated—it inspired the only bout of

spontaneous applause at the organizing committee meeting.

The first six months of visioning activities: At the same time project leaders

were establishing the organizational structure and recruiting stakeholders, they were

also beginning the collective visioning process to turn CED's concept paper into more

concrete proposals. These activities took place in the working groups, but there were

also exercises in organizing committee meetings—both planned and unplanned—that

contributed to visioning.

Several components (listed below) of the vision were discussed in the first six

months. In the beginning, we inefficiently tackled several elements at once, several of

which were arguably not priorities. Quickly, attention focused on the investment fund.

- Legal entities, regulatory requirements for the investment fund
- Technology supports
- Membership: benefits and responsibilities
- Stakeholder types, geography
- Governance
- Time-banking
- Local currency
- Business Alliance
- Investment terms

Working groups engaged in several activities:

- Literature, case studies
- Calls with practitioners, consultants
- Collecting information from stakeholders, mostly in small focus group form
- Facilitating discussion within spaces
- Transmitting discussion points across spaces
- Drafting proposals

The Business and Investor Engagement working group spent the first six

months of the project (apart from orienting participants to the vision and process) on

preparing materials to reach out to prospective business and investor stakeholders.

This involved developing preliminary proposals for how those stakeholders would

interact with the investment fund and other elements of the ecosystem. This working

group's meetings were characterized by relatively substantive conversations in which

participants drew easily upon their various areas of expertise to opine on vision

propositions—in other words, participants were able to speak for themselves as

prospective stakeholders and assert their interests and concerns. Three instruments

were created in or for this working group in the first six months, all of which

articulated or informed some part of the proposed vision: a concept paper for

businesses about potential benefits and responsibilities related to joining the

"Business Alliance" component; a concept paper for investors detailing the social

impact value of the community-controlled investment fund and providing sample

investment terms; and an original report written for the project by a group of MIT

students on anchor procurement strategies specifically related to MIT.

The Community and General Member Engagement working group spent the

first six months of the project planning for outreach and engagement activities which,

at this stage, focused particularly on seeking information that would help inform the

ongoing design of the ecosystem and strategies. Several instruments were created in this working group during those first six months, including a draft of the participatory workshop and a survey for community members.

The Media and Communications working group worked to scope out potential communications instruments and prioritize several of them: a one-pager, a four-pager, taglines, and an ecosystem map. Incidentally, the two participants with the strongest skills in visual communications had also been the least present in other project meetings and were not in the project representing stakeholder interests; they were thus fairly reliant on the vision as expressed in CED's concept paper. Several participants tried their hand in creating a comprehensive map of the vision outlines in CED's concept paper. It was in this context that members of the working group demonstrated their cognizance of the potential impact this working group's activities on the collective visioning process, by shaping how other participants might perceive and understand the vision:

> Volunteer: Maps tell a story. They're understood to be an incomplete representation, so we're choosing what to highlight. This map [referring to a visual of the entities and stakeholders in the project] shows a hierarchy and feedback loop and it looks like the board of directors is the boss. This other one has a center, shows the aggregate, and shows the geographical spread. There's a story. The question is, what is the main story you want to come away with?

By the end of the formal observation period in March, one participant presented a draft of the visualization that is still in use today to represent the proposed ecosystem.

One of the most central elements of visioning was also the most challenging: imagining and practicing collective governance, as mentioned above. Perhaps some of the challenge came from our awareness of the weight and importance of governance in our project. Governance is the mechanism meant to ground accountability in working class communities of color. Developing a governance model to support that objective was a high priority. Participants had numerous conversations about the need to be aware of the inherent power they have over the vision for governance and the need to take action to minimize or counterbalance it where possible. The Project Modeling and Design working group was sensitive to the fact that there were so few of us in the project taking part in those conversations.

Despite regular attention to the matter the organizing committee had made little progress at the end of six months. The challenge of tackling the issue of governance in an abstract way seemed to have been exacerbated by our organizational capacity constraints. In governance discussions in the Project Modeling and Design working group, it did not seem like the participants had been able to complete much reading or research to prepare. The working group brainstormed different decision-making models and structures, but the conversation was held back not only by a lack of grounding in theories about governance, but also by a lack of shared clarity around what exactly was being governed—no hypothetical governance scenario was specified so conversation remained very abstract. Frustration was clearly voiced at several points in that meeting.

The working group eventually began to think of engaging in small experiments in collective oversight. At one meeting, participants debated ways of presenting ecosystem models to the organizing committee for feedback:

Project leader 1: We need to be more prescriptive, give people buckets to react to. It's hard to give feedback when thinking abstractly.

Volunteer: We need to be careful and allow room for other opinions.

Project leader 2: What is the relationship between the working groups and the organizing committee?

Project leader 1: The working groups are responsible for coming up with the options. The organizing committee is responsible for decision-making.

Project leader 2: Would you say working groups are making decisions and checking in with the organizing committee?

Project leader 1: We haven't had an organizing committee meeting yet this year. The working groups are doing research, not decision-making.

Volunteer: Although research is a form of decision-making.

Project leader 1: We could experiment with this presentation to the organizing committee. Present three options, and then afterwards ask them, "Was that too few options, or too many? Did you feel like the process was something you had meaningful voice in?"

Although the experiment suggested in that conversation did not take place in the first six months, there was one smaller experiment that was conducted at the March organizing committee meeting (described above).

Overall, meeting notes show that it took a few meetings over the course of the first six months for each working group to settle on a broad work plan and priorities. The first six months did not represent a slow, steady build, but two separate waves of effort. When the working groups first convened in November there was a flurry of startup activity to pull working group contributors onto the same page with respect to the different working group roles, the strategy of the implementation plan, and so forth. That first round of organization closed down for the holiday season, and then

when the working groups found traction once more in February and March it was to

rally around the planning and preparation for the March organizing committee

meeting.

The collective visioning process of the project seemed to unfold like an

extended, multi-episode conversation held by a large and variable cast of participants

who were never in the same space at the same time. Ideas were sometimes caught

and carried forward, and other times slipped through the cracks. Despite the efforts of

Tanaka and myself to transmit ideas across working groups and to hold ideas over

time, I found some instances in which ideas were dropped after being raised by a

participant who was no longer able to participate (most of the substantial examples

were included in this thesis).

Towards the end of the six months, a project volunteer captured something of

the chaos and challenge of trying to recruit stakeholders and advance visioning

activities at the same time:

Volunteer: It's like we're all on a bus, trying to determine the direction
the bus is going in together. The bus has pieces falling off
and we're trying to keep it in one piece. Then there are
newcomers running after the bus: they catch, just got here,
and they have to jump on and jump right into figuring out
the direction.

It was clear to project leaders and coordinators very early on that the original

timeline suggested by the implementation plan was more aspirational than realistic.

There was some worry at the beginning of 2016 that the project had lost some

momentum following the holiday, and one participant worried specifically that

"people will experience fatigue" if the project "takes too long" but otherwise most

project leaders accepted that lengthening of the timeline. As one project leaders opined, "For having no money and no staff, there is an incredible amount of work getting done." And while another project leader admitted to wanting the project to happen "faster and bigger" he also acknowledged that "if we had a paid dedicated staff, it would grow differently" and even suggested there was a benefit to the slower pace: "slow creates time and space to build trust, and a solid base for this to stand up in the long term."

Challenges in engaging stakeholders in the visioning process: Over the course of the first six months, there were several instances in which project leaders and volunteer staff expressed discomfort with the limited level of stakeholder engagement in specific visioning activities, both in working groups and in the organizing committee. There was a range of views on the importance and urgency of ensuring participatory stakeholder engagement in collective visioning activities. In our first half-year, we did not have any formal conversations or come to any explicit consensus regarding how much to prioritize cultivate participation and democratic engagement over other project objectives.

Two project leaders felt it essential that participants feel included, empowered, and comfortable in the project spaces. One said the project would have "the potential to be a big deal IF people feel good about it." Another observed, "this [project] is all about participatory democracy" and that "this problem we have now [with people not feeling comfortable speaking up] is a great opportunity to figure how to make sure 'minority' perspectives are represented." A third project leader was less concerned with the democratic character of the organizing committee than she was

with the productive accountability structure—for her, the priority for moving forward

is to have a concrete objective and clear plan of action, and a structure by which

people can be assigned specific work and be held accountable to the organizing

committee. Similarly, a fourth project leader argued that democratic participation *at*

this stage in the project was less of a priority than making progress. He agreed that it

should be an aspiration to enact participatory and democratic engagement but

argued that we would also "have to lead and drive to get anything done."

Below is a compilation of evidence of challenges in the objective of deepening

stakeholder engagement in collective visioning in the first six months of the project.

Limited sustained engagement through meetings: One baseline indicator of

sustained engagement is the proportion of individuals who participated in more than

one meeting. Figure 4.8 below shows that out of the 65 individuals who attended at

least one meeting during the first six-months, only 29 returned for a second meeting.

Figure 4.8 Participants, By Minimum Number of Meetings Attended, March 2016
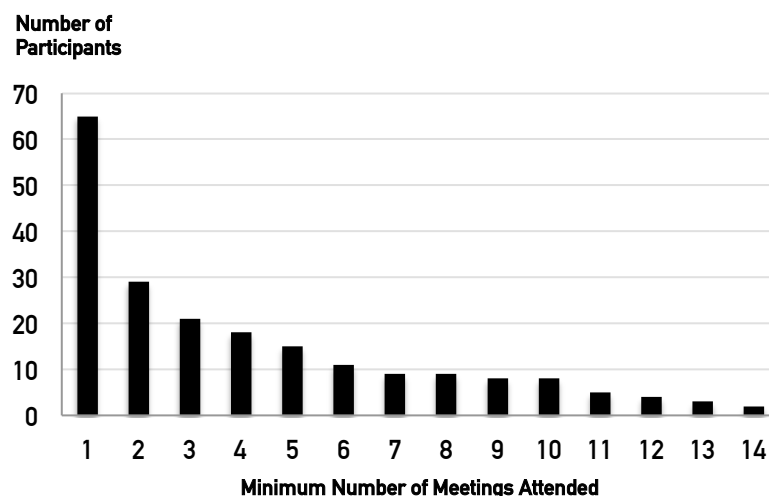
The numbers are skewed somewhat by the fact that the meeting with most

newcomers occurred right at the end of the formal observation period (March 2016)

and thus it does not capture whether or not newcomers from *that* meeting returned to another meeting after.

Incomplete stakeholder representation: In the first six months of the project, stakeholder representation of workers was limited. The evidence presented above on organizational affiliations showed a low proportion of organizing committee meeting participants identified themselves with an organization focusing on workers' rights and issues. While CED's concept paper suggested that labor unions could have a place in the ecosystem, they were not targeted for outreach and recruitment in the first six months of the project. Only one (known) union member attended an organizing committee meeting, based on her own interest in the project and not as a formal representative.

This was noticed by several project participants. At a December organizing committee meeting, as participants offered feedback on a survey instrument meant for community members, one participant pointed out that there were no questions that really reflected community members in their capacity as workers in the area. The lack of representation of workers as stakeholders could have been related in part to the fact that CED's concept originally focused on workers *as employees of member businesses*, and at that early stage of the project there was not yet a solid group of businesses through which workers could be identified and recruited. This proposed approach for organizing workers was not discussed in depth in the first six months, though newcomers often asked for clarification on the matter—whether or not workers could only be worker-members through their employment at member businesses.

Meanwhile, visioning topics that concerned workers were being explored in the Business and Investor working group. In one meeting, a project leader was seeking feedback from a small number of business owners about the idea of the worker council proposed in CED's concept paper. Several business owner raised doubts:

Business Owner 1:	It could be difficult to get companies to agree to let us talk to their workers.
Project Leader:	Framing is going to be really important.
Business Owner 2:	What structure would give voice or power to workers without freaking out the CEO?
Project Leader:	On the organizer side I'm all about the rebellion… but I can see how, on the investor side…
Business Owner 2:	[Joking] We're starting to soften you up a bit?
Project Leader:	This is a *value* [for businesses]. How do we frame it so it's authentic and not threatening? Maybe as HR support, service, etc. to help their business.
Business Owner 2:	*That* is how you sell it. Speaking as a business owner, the benefit needs to be clear, business owners are always asked to join things, this and that, so pitch benefits as HR infrastructure, employee satisfaction, because retention is key as it's expensive to retain workers. The idea of "worker voice" is a hard sell.

At the time, there were no deeply engaged worker stakeholders or worker advocates who could share their thoughts on the matter, whether in another working group space or organizing committee meeting.

In the Project Modeling and Design working group, as participants explored models for governance that would be consistent with the project's values and objectives, one participant made a joke about the small size of the working group:

Volunteer:	We need to schedule time to sit down and work with the criteria.
Project leader:	And work on ways to have input beyond just the three of us in a cabal…

Instances of uneven participation in meetings: Meetings notes show that not all participants were contributing to visioning conversations equally. There were two instances in which working group participants, in two different working groups, were silent for long periods and had to be prompted specifically and repeatedly to share their thoughts. In both cases the meetings involved only four to six participants, suggesting meeting size was not the primary obstacle to speaking.

The data collected for this thesis was not designed to comprehensively uncover the reasons for unequal participation in the project. However, there are some suggestions from notes and interviews. One participant mentioned not feeling comfortable with the theoretical language frequently used in describing the vision, a concern that was echoed frequently by members of the Media and Communications working group as they sought language to communicate the vision to newcomers.

Two other participants mentioned feeling discomfort speaking during meetings. A third participant reported feeling like there were so many questions to ask that it seemed easier to wait and have faith they would be answered in time. A fourth participant reflected with regret on an incident during one meeting that she thought might have discouraged others from participating in discussions: in one exercise, she recalled reacting to someone's brainstormed idea in a way that might have embarrassed them for being unfamiliar with a particular business practice.

Project leader reflections on stakeholder engagement: Toward the end of the first six months, one project leader shared her discomfort and uncertainty with a small group of project leaders and volunteers:

Project leader 1: I feel like a lot of my assumptions are getting challenged here. It has become a technocratic solution that this group is offering. I feel a little queasy about that… but maybe that's okay, maybe there's a role for that.

Another leader responded agreed with her concern that the project had, so far, been dominated by a small number of professional activists and organizers. She felt that it was important to have more base members in the working groups where they would contribute to developing models, and not merely in the organizing committee where they would provide feedback. Until that happened, she suggested that feeling some tension around the level of community participation we have or have not been able to cultivate is not only expected, but even perhaps a healthy sign:

Project leader 2: I'm really glad that you're feeling a little uncomfortable. If you didn't feel uncomfortable then maybe something would be wrong. I think that tension is really good. It's keeping us honest.

5. REFLECTION

The first time I synthesized my case study data, it was for a presentation to a small group of project leaders and volunteers. I used the data to describe the baseline condition of our project and our efforts to engage stakeholders in visioning activities. I focused on:

- Characteristics of individuals who had attended project meetings

- Motivations for getting involved or for choosing not to get involved

- Perceptions about the project's mission and vision

- Productivity across the different working group spaces

- Differential levels of participation by different individuals

- The formal and informal power structures in our organization

From this first look it seemed as though our project were not proceeding entirely according to our aspirations. But why? And how realistic were our expectations? How could we tease out the influence of different factors, including the relative immaturity of our organization and efforts, the lack of institutional resources, and the inherent difficulty of the proposition of collective visioning? Following my presentation, as I continued to sort and make sense of my case study data for my thesis composition, I drew on the lens of prefigurative practice to help *explain* the findings and perhaps develop some recommendations.

Over time, I became increasingly interested in situating my analysis more firmly within the context of our project's aspiration for societal transformation. Our

project was advancing, and I expected it would continue to evolve in ways we could not predict. So, what I really wanted was to articulate some kind of standard or guiding framework for our day-to-day activities that was explicitly, strategically, and aggressively oriented towards realizing the transformative potential of our project. With such a framework, we would be able not only to reflect on efforts to implement transformative practice in the collective visioning process during our first six months, but also to guide and assess other aspects of our work moving forward.

I have started to scope out this framework in this reflection. My thinking is not complete. If the time were available, I would prefer to share these thoughts with my project collaborators and then incorporate their responses in this thesis. Instead, this thesis will have to serve only as a starting point for that conversation. I ask:

- What is the context for our project's transformative aspiration?

- What are the specific transformative opportunities in our project?

- How can we orient our practice toward transformation?

5.1 What is the context for our project's transformative aspiration?

My thinking about societal transformation relies on a movement lens. Movement-relevant theory is driven by questions like, "What should we do? How can we win?" (Cox and Nilsen 2014, viii) or "How can our activities tangibly build toward future revolutionary transformation on a large scale?" (Dixon 2014, 114). It is particularly distinct from a tradition of academic research on social movements that has failed to provide much in the way of relevant, practical findings for movements or practitioners (Dixon and Bevington 2005).

The movement approach is distinct from other modes of changemaking or belief systems about how change happens, which emphasize different mechanisms of change or targets for change. For example, most of us are probably familiar with the "disruptions" of various technology-based ventures, or the "black swan" theory of unpredictable and improbable but highly impactful events or historical turning points. The movement approach is explained nicely by Cox and Nilsen when they assert that "to argue about change in any honest way is to engage with collective agency—the more so for anyone who agrees that popular participation in shaping society is important in itself" (206). In other words, change—at least the type of change we would want to see advanced through our project—is achievable only through collective action. This is not a guarantee, of course, but a call for a mixture of faith and optimism based on a reading of the history of movements and their achievements and failures.

Movement history is long and rich. Cox and Nilsen articulate the concept of "movement waves" that crest at different times in different places in the world. Across these waves, there are varying issues; participants; strategies; and tactics. And of course, there are varying outcomes. Many of the histories I reviewed identify a distinct contemporary era of Left movement activity that has its roots in a series of events that occurred in the 1990s. Accounts often include the struggles of the Zapatistas in 1994, said to have inspired the People's Global Action Network that organized the 1999 protests in Seattle around the World Trade Organization. This wave has been called the alter-globalization movement, or the movement of movements, among other terms. Over the last decade here in the United States I remember watching the

emergence, from the Left, of Occupy in 2011, Black Lives Matter in 2013, the Women's March and #MeToo in 2017. From the Right, I can remember the Tea Party in 2009, and coverage of the resurgence of white supremacist and white nationalist groups during and following the 2016 election.

In surveying our history and assessing the landscape of the current moment, I agree with DeFilippis et al. (2010) when they emphasize the importance of recognizing that collective action is a strategy without an ideology. Those on the Right, various communities and movements with motivations and values in conflict with ours, organize and strategize together like we (on the Left) do. I am similarly persuaded by Cox and Nilsen to recognize movements not only as emerging "from below"—the most popular conception of movements as collective efforts of the oppressed against the oppressors—but also as coming "from above" (55). In other words, individuals and groups in some position of power or dominance in society also organize and strategize together like we (from below) do.

These perspectives are consistent with a more constructivist rather than structuralist interpretation of what we perceive of and often refer to as the "systems" that shape our society. That is, systems do not spring forth from some kind of natural law but are imagined, socially organized, and reproduced collectively by humans. Moreover, they are reproduced imperfectly, with "limits, gaps, and contradictions" that can potentially be exploited (Wright 2010, 290). This is the basis for the optimism, underlying movement efforts, that by coming together we can imagine, socially organize, and reproduce *different* systems. A related implication is that, on our way toward organizing different systems, we will almost certainly run into a variety of

forms and sources of deliberate opposition. Our theories of transformation, strategies,

and tactics will have to take the countering efforts of these (sometimes shifting)

coalitions of allies and adversaries into consideration.

One place to start is with an account of the "systems" we face in this

contemporary moment. These are what many movement practitioners identify as the

"root structures" that result in the many specific crises—in economy, environment,

democracy, and so forth—to which various movements emerge and respond today.

Neoliberal ideology dominates discourse in the United States, and upon the

global stage where the United States has a powerful economic, cultural, political, and

military presence. It guides and infiltrates mainstream consciousness to such an

extent that many regard it as having achieved the status of political and cultural

hegemony (Harvey 2005; Day 2005; Peck 2010). Harvey defines neoliberal ideology as:

"…a theory of political economic practices that proposed that human

well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual

entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework

characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free

trade" (Harvey 2005, 2).

Neoliberalism in practice is more complicated. Peck (2010) argues that the

neoliberal "utopian vision of a free society and free economy is ultimately

unrealizable" and focuses his attention on what he calls "*neoliberalization*" as "an

open-ended and contradictory process of regulatory restructuring" (7). Peck's

perspective emphasizes neoliberalization as a process unfolding in particular in the arena of government. Like Peck, Mirowski (2014) highlights the constructivist aspect of neoliberalism, suggesting it "will not come about 'naturally' in the absence of concerted political effort and organization" (53). I favor the linguistic construction of "neoliberalization" as well because it emphasizes a process rather than a fixed reality, and because it draws attention to ongoing efforts to neoliberalize more and more aspects of our society.

Harvey links the constructivist process of neoliberalization to a class struggle, arguing that in modern times economic "theory" itself has been twisted into nothing more than a smokescreen to cover policies designed primarily to protect the status of "elites" and that neoliberal practice is indistinguishable from a project to fortify elite class power. "Redistributive effects and increasing social inequality," Harvey argues, "have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project" (16). Echoing this, Cox and Nilsen (2014) interpret the neoliberal project as a "global, elite-led project" (2) that has "sought to restore the power of capital over labour" by "reversing the victories that had been won by movements from below in the first half of the twentieth century" through "a political economy in which the market has become the fulcrum of the organization of human needs and capacities" (136-7).

I find it helps to distinguish between neoliberalism and capitalism and clarify the relationship between them. Heilbroner (1999) defines capitalism as "an economic system, a social system, and a political system" characterized by private ownership of property (particularly capital) and the means of production, a reliance on markets

with prices as information, and the drive of individuals pursuing their self-interest and

engaging in competition within markets (320). These "mechanisms" of capitalism

tend to produce a variety of social and economic consequences. Wright (2010)

emphasizes class relations—the relationship between workers who do not own the

means of production and capitalists that do—as well as a "characteristic competitive

drive for profits and capital accumulation of capitalist firms" (34-5). Cox and Nilsen

recount how, for a period of time in the mid-20th century, capitalist logics and

mechanisms were nested in a framework of state regulations and social norms that

were intended to constrain capitalist dynamics that were seen as unfair or harmful to

society and the environment. Like others, they interpret the current era of

neoliberalization as a period or phase of capitalism—one in which capitalism, as a

mode of production, is becoming "disembedded" from that regulatory (and cultural)

constraint (137).

What processes and practices can be connected with the neoliberal project?

Harvey proposes the concept of "accumulation by dispossession" which includes:

- Privatization and commodification "to open up new fields for capital

  accumulation…[including] public utilities of all kinds…social welfare

  provision…public institutions…and even warfare."

- Financialization, which involves the expansion of financial instruments and

  practices into more and more realms of life, and which since the 1980s has

  been "marked by its speculative and predatory style."

- The management and manipulation of crises, which Harvey interprets as "the fine art of deliberative redistribution of wealth from poor countries to the rich," such as by "the springing of 'the debt trap.'"

- State redistribution, wherein a neoliberalized state "becomes a prime agent of redistributive policies, reversing the flow from upper to lower classes that had occurred during the era of embedded liberalism" by such means as privatization, reducing social spending, revising the tax code to benefit returns on investment rather than income and wages and promoting regressive taxes like sales taxes, imposing user fees, and providing a vast array of subsidies and tax breaks to corporations (160-4).

Harvey recognizes the suite of practices of accumulation by dispossession as following and expanding on practices of accumulation associated with capitalism more generally (or, capitalism in its earlier stages) such as: the commodification and privatization of land; the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of various forms of property rights into exclusive private property rights; the suppression of rights to the commons; the commodification of labour power; the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); the monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; the slave trade; and usury, the national debt, and the use of the credit system (159).

Cox and Nilsen add to this the argument that the neoliberal project, as an effort to restore profitability for capitalist elites, depended not only on these practices of accumulation by dispossession but also on the process of global economic restructuring that helped to break the (counter) power of organized labor. They point in particular to the relocation of industrial manufacturing to the global South, a "spatial reorganization of capitalist accumulation" that "enabled capital to break free from the compromises that had been struck with organized labour in the post-war era" and simultaneously "benefit from the 'huge reserves of cheap labour' that are themselves the product of neoliberal restructuring" (142-3).

How and where specifically is the neoliberal project advancing and sustaining itself? Who participates? Neoliberal ideology was born in academic circles, but accounts of the neoliberal project point out that the spread of neoliberal ideas into the arenas of policy and culture was deliberate and strategic. "Progressive funders generally give money to specific issue-oriented campaigns, whereas right-wing foundations see the need to fund the intellectual projects that enable the Right to develop a comprehensive framework for presenting its issues to the public" (Smith 2007, 6). Harvey (2010) notes "the state, with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role in both backing and promoting these processes" (159). But we as individuals and society play a greater role than we realize because of how pervasive the neoliberal ideology is in our culture. Wright (2010) offers a framework of "social reproduction in capitalist society" that includes both "active" forms enacted by institutions as well as "passive" forms that are "anchored in the mundane routines and activities of everyday life…with ingrained habits and dispositions, a sense of

naturalness and taken-for-grantedness of the social world that comes simply from living in it" (274-5).

Accounts of capitalism as a mode of economic organization, and of neoliberalization as a project to benefit the capitalist elite, often focus exclusively or primarily on class relations (unless they are written with the specific premise of investigating the intersection of multiple social relations). There are many social relations characterized by inequality, exploitation, and oppression—Left movements from below in the United States often point especially to our nation's institutions of colonialism, white supremacy and white nationalism, and heteropatriarchy that shape social relations based on race, ethnicity, nativity, gender, and sexuality. And scholars point out how the historical and ongoing advance of the neoliberal project is inextricably intertwined with these institutions—for example, how neoliberal policies are advanced in part by exploiting social inequities and divisions, and target already vulnerable peoples and communities with the worst impacts.

Braedley and Luxton (2010) argue that neoliberal theory is not only indifferent to "the social relations within which individuals are born, raised, and live" but that is "developed in part to counter the equality demands of feminist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist activists, as well as the socialist demands to end class exploitation." They note that women are held most responsible for reproductive labor, which undergirds the rest of the economy but is undervalued and excluded from official accounting. The arrangement undermines the economic self-sufficiency of women and is exacerbated by neoliberal efforts to reduce state spending on programs that would either support their wellbeing directly or collectivize responsibility for reproductive needs. In relation

to race, Braedley and Luxton observe that "racist claims of physical, cultural, and religious superiority legitimated, and continue to legitimate, the actions of European/North American genocide and conquest" and that neoliberalism exacerbates the systemic inequalities built on those "four hundred years of imperial and colonial economic and political domination." They argue that neoliberal theory's reliance on racialized conceptions of ability and upon individual "choice" erases "the effects of racialization in producing privilege and discrimination" (11-7).

Strauss and Ramos (2018) describe a number of recent "selective onslaughts" wherein marginalized peoples are targeted, and/or social prejudices are exploited to advance neoliberal policies—in some cases by using a separate issue as a front and intersection for building coalition. The attack on organized labor is cited here, for "despite a popular image of union members as White men, unions are a major economic equalizer for women and people of color, helping to narrow both gender and racial wage gaps". Strauss and Ramos also cite how neoliberal efforts to reduce public spending on programs and services have relied on "portraying women of color as undeserving." They look at the use of religious liberty arguments to exempt religiously affiliated employers from providing specific health care coverage, and to withhold state spending on health care. Finally, they look at the criminalization of non-white children in public schools, turning them into business opportunity "by providing fodder for efforts to replace public schools with charter schools…and driving business for private prisons and juvenile detention facilities" (7-9).

This account is just a beginning. There is much more to analyze in relation to the just last two years, for example, as the field of our opposition on the Right has

shifted somewhat in relation to the 2016 election cycle and Trump's presidency. The landscape on the Left in the United States, too, seems to have become more emboldened. Additionally, the account here is still a very general one. Observers of the neoliberal project note that its advance takes place in different ways in different places, dependent on history and local context. For our project we will need to develop a specific understanding of the local landscape of Boston and Massachusetts.

- Is it possible to develop some kind of project-wide clarity about the different systems of oppression, exclusion, and exploitation we seek to resist and replace?

- Is it within the scope of our project or is it anyone's role in our project to monitor the activities and initiatives of our opponents and consider how our project can play a role in responding in both the short- and long-term?

Again, many movements today respond in part to the process and conditions of neoliberalization. Where does our project sit? I have chosen to look at CED's concept—the starting point of the Boston Ujima Project—through the lens of solidarity economy. I think of solidarity economy (SE) not just as a set of theories and practices to shape economic organization, but also and especially as a movement to counter the neoliberal project and replace capitalism as a mode of economic organization. SE is not the only possible framework to fit our project. However, it seems particularly

suitable because the principles, values, and strategies guiding our project find a comfortable home in SE theory.

The central objective of solidarity economy is to advance radical transformation of our society and economy to reflect SE values. As Kawano (2010) puts it, "we have a society in service to the capitalist economy, whereas what we want is an economy that serves society" (12). SE is typically defined in close conjunction with the explicit set of principles and values upon which it seeks to build an alternative economy. The United States Solidarity Economy Network, formed in 2007 (organizers admit that, relative to other countries, the U.S. solidarity economy movement is seen abroad as somewhat late to the game), lists the principles of solidarity economy as follows:

- Solidarity and cooperation

- Equity in all dimensions

- Social and economic democracy

- Sustainability

- Pluralism

- Puts people and planet first

These principles and values can be contrasted with those that undergird a capitalist framework: self-interest and competition; inequality as a feature and not a bug; market exchange as communication and money as voice and power; endless

growth; and profit maximization. Loh and Shear offer a deeper interpretation with their four "underlying cornerstones" of SE:

- A view of humans as interdependent, social beings, with complex motivations

- An adoption of solidarity as a core value basis for social relations, balancing collective and individual interest

- A centrality of democratic practice, especially through collective ownership and cooperative management, in the private and public sector

- A recognition of a diverse and plural economy, with many forms of exchange, production, and ownership beyond the capitalist market

Almost two years ago now, I worked with Penn Loh on a project to document solidarity economy projects in Massachusetts. In our report we identified three aspects of solidarity economy that, together, build movement to advance societal transformation. I build on that framework here by integrating concepts I have encountered since then. I present the three dimensions as three tracks of activity:

1. To meet immediate needs through alternative forms of economy

2. To develop consciousness

3. To build and wield collective power

1. To meet immediate needs through alternative forms of economy: The main transformative thrust of SE is through the prefiguration of the desired economy

in the here and now. Prefiguration is varyingly referred to in different places as 'prefigurative politics', 'prefigurative praxis', 'micropolitics', or 'direct action'. Dixon (2014) sees the "core idea" as acknowledging "*how* we get ourselves to a transformed society (the means) is importantly related to *what* the transformed society will be (the ends)" (84-5). There are two main forms of prefiguration. The first involves the adoption of aspirational behaviors and relationships *within movement spaces* among those who perceive a counterproductive dynamic between the vision of the future they aspire to and the behaviors and relationships they enact while fighting for that future. The second involves *the creation of alternative institutions* for groups to provide goods or services to meet immediate daily needs that are ill served within the existing system. Both forms are relevant for solidarity economy, for the alternative economic models we pursue tend also to demand alternative ways of relating to one another within them (Day 2002; Maeckelbergh 2011; Dixon 2014; Murray 2014; Yates 2015).

SE models are tied together by their reflection of solidarity economy principles and values. There is no one set model. Part of the narrative shift SE seeks to make is the existence of many possible ways for economy to be organized—a pluralist approach contrasting with the neoliberal mantra that "there is no alternative." The pluralism of SE is often associated with a phrase of the Zapatistas, "un million de si" (a million yeses). It is a pragmatic recognition of the reality that the ways in which we allocate resources and meet needs will look different in different places, and that values can have many different interpretations and different ways of manifesting depending on the individuals involved and the local context. Miller (2010) contrasts the pluralist approach with the rigidity of blueprints, which "often miss the richness of

what might emerge from a collective process of imagination and creation; no one

person or group is capable of figuring out an economic structure for millions of others

to live in" (28). SE's approach reflects

> "a core belief that people are deeply creative and capable of
> developing their own solutions to economic problems, and that these
> solutions will look different in different places and contexts…
> solidarity economy is not so much a model of economic organization
> as it is a process of economic organizing; it is not a vision, but an
> active process of collective visioning." (28)

There is no shortage of models of solidarity economy. A common way to

present these models is by organizing them according to different phases of an

economic cycle. Figure 5.1 below is one example.

Figure 5.1 Solidarity Economy in an Economic Cycle (Loh and Jimenez 2017)

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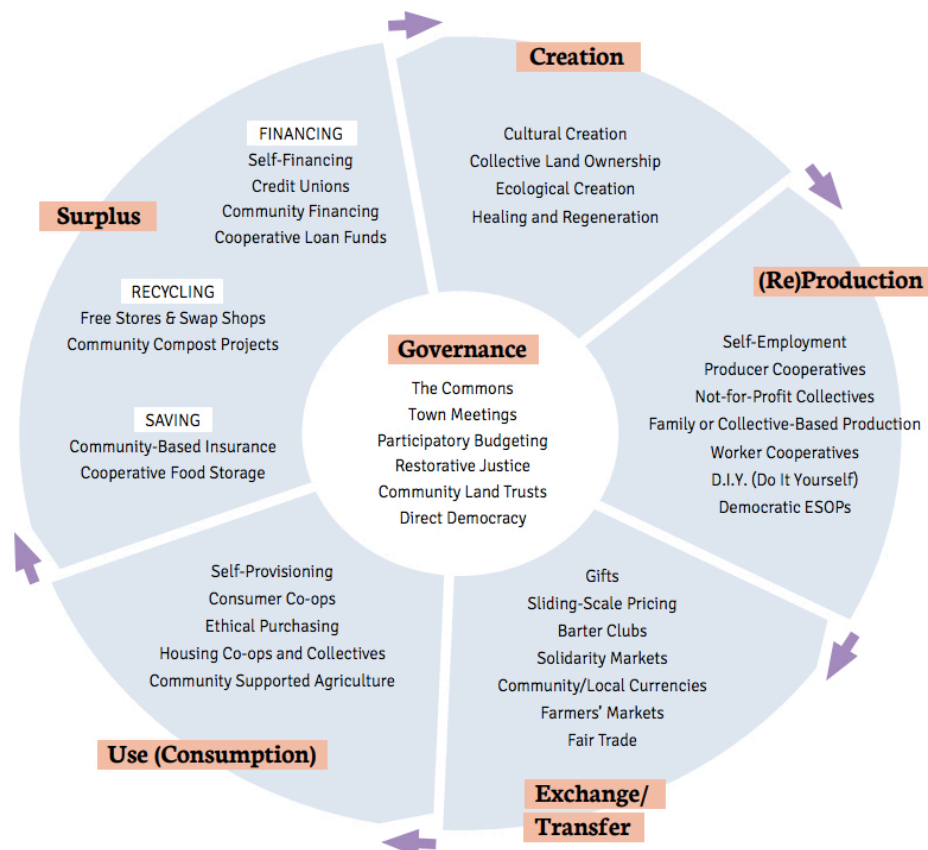
With an orientation toward long-term transformation, we can recognize that the forms of economy we develop today are by definitional transitional. They can only represent a nascent and constrained version of the world we seek, designed defensively to survive in a hostile environment. Dixon proposed "letting go of perfectionism" because

> "Failure is an unavoidable part of trying to model and manifest a new world…we are not going to be able to create completely democratic, liberatory, healthy spaces while relations of exploitation and oppression are dominant in our society… But rather than being discouraged… we need to see that such experiences signal that we are approaching the limits imposed by existing social relations and the conditions they produce. These are limits that, through struggle, people can and do move" (103).

Broader change is the goal, not the survival of any particular project. But this attitude is not easy in practice. Solidarity economy initiatives are, at their best, driven by real community need. Participants can become very invested in their success. It can also be challenging to combine the work of building and operating these prefigurative models with the other aspects of work—developing consciousness and building power—because it is an immensely time- and resource-intensive activity.

2. To develop consciousness: Solidarity economy consciousness encompasses several types of knowledge and attitude. One is an awareness of the societal structures shaping our lives and how different exploitative and oppressive structures reinforce one another and advance together. Part of this involves realizing the connection between personal lived experience and the experiences of others. It also includes knowledge of our own roles in social reproduction. This may or may not lead to another kind of knowledge, which is a conviction that radical societal change is necessary.

This brings us to a third type, which is the ability to imagine a different world, or many different worlds, and recognition that pieces of those worlds are already here around us. The fourth includes knowledge of working theories of transformation, including intimate knowledge of local conditions, issues, agents, and power relationships. This includes understanding how transformation can occur through collective action, based on seeing how our world is already constructed through collective action, and especially cultivated by learning the histories of movements and collective struggles.

There are many activities that can support the development of consciousness. Some include popular education; communications strategies; grassroots organizing and leadership training; development in the process of power mapping and crafting strategy and tactics; and development in the process of economic mapping or similar visibilizing activities that demand clarity around our definitions and criteria for categorizing projects and efforts.

One common obstacle to the development of consciousness is our years (typically decades) of immersion in the institutions we seek to transform which undergird our "common sense" perceptions of the world. Fully developed consciousness is not always a requirement for entering into solidarity economy activities; in fact, many SE theorists and practitioners regard SE activities as spaces in which consciousness can be strategically developed among participants coming with skepticism or unrelated motivations (Matthaei and Allard 2008). But this is only an opportunity for developing consciousness. Sometimes our tethers to capitalist logic and systems are not only ideological but also material—for example, homeowners

may resist the community land trust model because of their actual or potential financial benefit within a system where land is a commodity on the open market.

Additionally, many observe that being near or even participating in SE activities does not automatically lead to the development or deepening of consciousness. This is especially likely if the activity reflects SE in form but does not explicitly identify as SE—for example, public libraries or community gardens. And I wonder if it just as likely that those imperfectly aligned participants in an SE project can be a force for co-optation or at least confusion. For example, non-aligned stakeholders could embrace a more narrow framing of an SE project as an economic development initiative without political implication. This is particularly apt to happen in this historical moment because of how contemporary community practice has been "heavily influenced by decades of neoliberal policy and politics" (DeFilippis et al. 2010, 29). Community-based economic development has taken on several forms, such as market-based community development corporations, that avoid conflict or critique and "seem to offer an alternative to unbridled neoliberalism, but in reality fit all too neatly within that context" (ibid., 99). These neoliberalized community development strategies can be much more familiar to the layperson than anti-capitalist projects, even if they look similar on the surface. Confusion on the part of participants or mixed public messaging can indicate a window of opportunity for spreading consciousness, but it can also potentially undermine it.

Another obstacle can arise in SE projects that choose to be covert about their ideology—perhaps in order to broaden participation or to attract specific actors

known to have non-aligned views—and adopt different messages that might obscure elements of consciousness or confuse those developing their consciousness.

3. To build and strategically wield collective power: If we seek to transform, we cannot limit the exercise of our power to spaces where we already have control. Instead we must work to ex*tend* power, not only by extending the boundaries of our activity, but also by stretching and reaching to wield our power beyond our boundaries. This is important because prefigurative projects are often planted on a hyper-local scale and an observed tendency is for them to remain insular and isolated.

Figure 5.2 Building and Extending Power
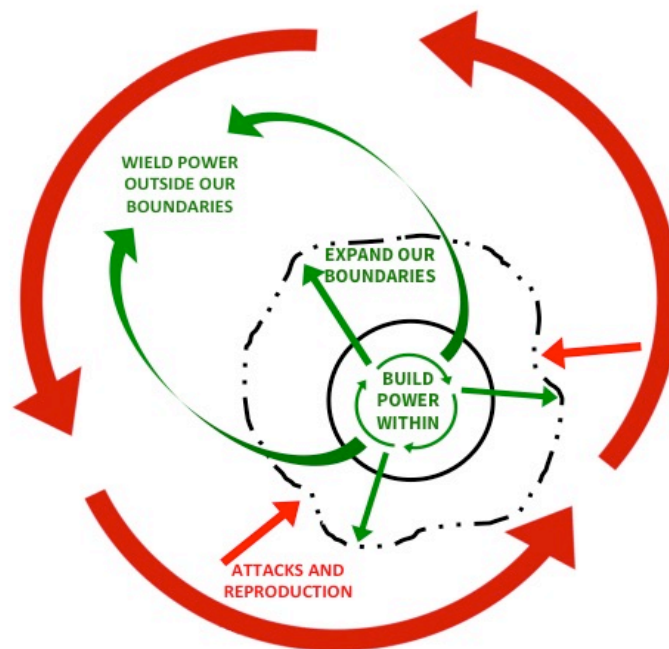
Extending our power beyond what is in our control necessitates strategies of resistance and confrontation. SE is most closely associated with the prefigurative strategy, but as many theorists and practitioners from a variety of movement strands remind us, the strongest transformative potential comes from the combination of prefigurative strategies and confrontational strategies—a "dual power" approach.

Indeed, the concept of dual power is often asserted to end the counterproductive

dichotomization of two modes of movement strategy: on the one hand the

confrontational campaigns against powerful actors over matters of policy or practice,

and on the other hand the prefigurative experiments in shaping personal and

community lives and livelihoods according to values and a positive vision for the

future. There are many ways theorists and practitioners frame the importance of dual

power strategies, many expressions: "against and beyond", "resist and build", "two-

sided struggle", and others.

Cox and Nilsen frame the mission of movements as achieving some "control"

over the "self-production of society." As many frameworks of societal reproduction

show, reproductive forces and dynamics pervade every aspect of our lives, and thus in

many arenas where we must seek to build and wield collective power. Below I

elaborate on the role of power in the economy, in the state, and the nonprofit sector.

The economy. This includes power within and over economy, including

physical and financial resources and human capacities. This power enables us to:

- expand our capacity to meet our own needs, and displace the capitalist
  economy and lessen its influence on our lives

- offer support, assistance, and protection from co-optive dynamics

- influence anchor institutions (to wrestle them back from corporatization and
  financialization), or their boards (where financial sector agents seek power),

with respect to their practices and impacts and to secure procurement

contracts or endowment investment

SE theorists recognize the importance of connecting SE practitioners and their

activities to one another in order to build scale and strength. This is often supported

through mapping initiatives, some quite elaborate and advanced, which double as an

approach to building consciousness because of how they "visibilize" solidarity

economy. Mapping not only enables SE practitioners to find one another and make

connections, but it can also raise awareness of SE in mainstream consciousness and

perhaps enable people to recognize SE practices they engage with already without

knowing it, thus bringing them into the SE sphere as well.

The state. This includes power within and over the state and its various

bodies. There is some disagreement among SE practitioners on the role of the state.

Miller (2010) suggests this is because of a perception that the state inherently has

"oppressive potential" that can threaten the efforts of movements to build grassroots

power (40). Those who do see an important role for the state suggest that policies and

regulations, currently captured and tilted in favor of capital power, should be

reformed to benefit SE practice instead.

One need is to build power to protest and prevent harmful policies as well as

to move our own policy agendas, through legislation, regulatory agencies, ballot

initiatives, budgetary and financing processes, etc. Another need is to build power to

contest for the resources of the state and divert them away from our opposition, such

as through the tax code, through public pension fund management practices, or through economic development benefits and subsidies.

The nonprofit sector. The term "non-profit industrial complex" (NPIC) was introduced by the organization INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (INCITE!) in 2004. The term is used not as another word for the nonprofit sector but as a system that encompasses not only nonprofits but also the state and the capitalist class.

One critique concerns how the NPIC perpetuates the social and financial privilege of the wealthy at the expense of the working class. Through a variety of regulations and mechanisms associated with a 501c3 tax status, the wealthy can reduce their tax obligations and use their resources to fund their own interests and reputations (by donating to their alma maters, operas, or museums) and finance think tanks and policy centers to disseminate their own ideologies and influence the public and the state (Smith 2007; Ahn 2007).

A second critique concerns how the nonprofit industrial complex strategically blocks or structurally impedes the efforts of movements to challenge power within existing systems and/or to create alternative system. I have heard colleagues describe "NGO-ization" as a defining challenge for movement organizations in the present era—that the system of nonprofit funding limits our work but is hard to escape. Rodriguez (2007) asserts the NPIC "grounds an epistemology—literally, a *way of knowing* social change and resistance praxis" that makes it difficult to imagine making change outside of the nonprofit form (31).

The first problem is the scarcity of funding available for social justice organizations. Within the nonprofit sector, charitable donations to grassroots

organizations are miniscule—Ahn (2007) estimates it to be 1.7 percent. Today,

grassroots organizations are essentially expected to suffer from chronic funding

shortfalls. A related problem is the potential for counterproductive funder influence.

Funder influence can discourage transformative work and redirect attention to

market-based strategies or other reform-based solutions. Separately, standard

practices among funders can also have a constraining impact—for example, fixed

grant cycles can influence organizational timelines, work plans, and priorities. Short

grant cycles can make longer-term planning more difficult.

Another problem is the pressure on organizations and individuals to

professionalize. This comes in part because of the requirements associated with the

501c3 tax status and in part because of the requirements imposed by foundations that

provide grant funding. These requirements can lead organizations to replicate the

dynamics of the very institutions they seek to transform. They can convert activists

into professionals, or favor the hiring of individuals with higher levels of formal

training and credentials who may be less connected to the organization's

membership (Dixon 2014; DeFilippis 2010; Smith 2007).

On a broader level, the NPIC is seen as contributing to the fractured state of

the movement landscape. A competitive dynamic is established in the process of

seeking funding, which can encourage organizations to develop niches that

differentiate themselves from one another and even set organizations against one

another, rather than helping them build together to advance a broader movement

cause. The competitive dynamic can also incent organizations to downplay failures or

setbacks (which could threaten their funding) rather than reflecting on them to learn (Smith 2007).

What does it take to build power? Building power necessitates building relationships and solidarity across many forms of difference: race and ethnicity, gender, nativity, language and culture, wealth and income, position within institutions, and so forth. Spaces containing such difference create opportunities to build solidarity, but it does not come automatically; it must be helped along if possible. It is similarly important to build power through building relationship and solidarity among organizations, where it can also be hard to navigate differences in organizational identity and culture, societal position, and access to resources.

Building some of these forms of power calls for serious time and effort. We need to practice solidarity and democracy—to exercise ways of thinking, relating, and behaving toward one another that we generally do not have many opportunities to enact. We often do not have the time this takes. Time is a scarce resource for everyone but especially for individuals and families and communities that are least privileged and most vulnerable to exploitation.

5.2 What are the specific transformative opportunities in our project?

Below I discuss the major opportunities for this project to a) counter systems of oppression to advance our vision for societal transformation b) by modeling an alternative to the neoliberal project and its capitalist mechanisms and c) by building power in different sectors and arenas both by expanding our boundaries and also by reaching beyond our boundaries, d) all guided by a conscious and well-developed analysis.

Opportunities related to the organized ecosystem: The participatory planning and democratic investment process that fuels the organized ecosystem is an opportunity to model solidarity economy finance. It prefigures a non-capitalist approach to economic development and finance that we hope will immediately and better meet the needs and aspirations of our communities

We can use the process itself to embody a critique of neoliberal economic development and finance, which we see as existing for the purpose of capitalist accumulation. The process is an opportunity to build the consciousness not only of participants but also the broader public, if we are deliberate and strategic about our language, messaging, and communications. The application of deep democracy to finance distinguishes Ujima's fund from most other community-based funds. While there are many investment funds that allocate capital based on some conception of community need and wellbeing rather than profit maximization, including funds that target alternative and/or transformative economic enterprises such as worker cooperatives, the norm is still for a professional team to allocate investment capital, relying upon their own expertise and judgment in addition to some guiding framework of principles.

We can use creative means of governance to ensure the process is used to build power—power within and over economy—specifically among the communities who have been excluded from and negatively impacted by neoliberal economic development and finance models. In our analysis, this includes working class communities of color without meaningful access to investment opportunities, without meaningful voice in development in their neighborhoods, without any leverage over

local businesses and their practices, and without access to capital to launch their own enterprise. This governance power will require us to learn and strengthen deep democratic practice. In CED's concept paper, class is the most emphasized social dimension, with regular reference to the dimension of race in the context of asserting that the project should be rooted in Boston's working class communities of color. Other dimensions of oppression are not mentioned explicitly in these founding documents. We should develop clearer approaches to injustice in all its dimensions.

Building this power within and over economy will depend on participants being able to re-imagine their relationships with one another. In the organized ecosystem, community members play the roles of investor, business owner, consumer, and neighbor. The model encourages more interdependent relationships and more complex motivations, hopefully overpowering the narrow profit motive, conditioned self-interest, and the norm of using passive market signaling to communicate. Thus, even as the community members become investors and gain the economic power to push businesses that receive investment to adhere to community standards, the relationship imagined is not a punitive one. The community asserts these standards, but also recognizes a collective responsibility and interest to support businesses in meeting them. Recognizing that the business and owners most likely to struggle to meet the standards in the beginning are in that position as a consequence of systems that restricted their access to resources and opportunities, CED's model treats the community standards as a bridge rather than a wall.

The power within and over economy that we build can be grown by extending the boundaries of the organized ecosystem—by scaling up. The ecosystem design,

encompassing different stages of (re)production and consumption, suggests a clear

trajectory and impulse to expand. The participatory planning process is the concrete

mechanism by which we can identify and incent opportunities to connect or to fill in

gaps where there is a need but no aligned project to meet it. For the United States,

such a city-level scale ecosystem is unusual (though there are an increasing number of

examples: Cooperation Jackson in Jackson, MI; the Wellspring Cooperative

Corporation in Springfield, MA; the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, OH and

others). This is in part because our country lacks the broad cultural and policy

infrastructure to support regional-scale models found elsewhere, such as in Europe,

Canada, and Latin America. In those countries there are inspiring examples of

communities or regions where SE is more firmly established as a guiding logic rather

than something that appears only in the nooks and crannies.

Can this power within and over economy be stretched beyond the boundaries

of our ecosystem? Perhaps not directly. But we can try to use the pre-existing sense of

collective to build another kind of power, the power of collective demand, to contest

in the arena of the state and the nonprofit sector—wherever there are resources that

we can demand, which are likely to be appropriated by neoliberal actors. By wielding

the power of collective demand, we can extend the power within and over economy to

control resources that are external to our ecosystem and community (not just our own

pooled resources). Greater levels of financial capital could increase our project's

ability to counter predatory financial institutions. It is worth noting how CED's

concept of relation to local anchor institution differs from the model popularized by

the Democracy Collaborative. Rather than approaching anchor institutions as

partners, CED's concept envisions organizing community power to confront and push anchor institutions to shift their investments and procurement to the local solidarity economy. Relatedly, we can organize ourselves to wield our power within and over economy in such a way that could make a statement and perhaps financial impact on corporate actors outside our ecosystem (consumer organizing to direct our purchasing power).

The organized ecosystem emphasizes the private sector. Is there a way that our power within and over economy could be stretched outward to support the public sector, and the universal provision of critical public services? I think it would be good to have a conversation in our project about how our work can take into consideration the ongoing neoliberal attack on the public sector and public sector unions by privatizing services provided by the state. This is especially true because of how the working class, people of color, and women rely heavily on public goods and services, and because employment in the public sector has been a significant route to greater economic security for women and people of color.

Opportunities through relation to the grassroots organizing sector: The organized ecosystem is to be "anchored" by grassroots organizations. I found two main ways that this anchoring role is imagined.

First, grassroots organizations can support the objective of building power (within and over economy) specifically among the communities who have been excluded from and negatively impacted by neoliberal economic development and finance models. Not only does this approach to building power recognize the work that grassroots organizations already do in engaging with these communities (in other

words, recognizing the shared constituency) but it also reflects the suggestion of some SE theorists that social justice movements can help keep the SE movement "accountable" to its principle of "equity in all dimensions" (Kawano 2010, Miller 2010). This suggestion is based on the fact that, despite the theoretical principle of "equity in all dimensions," the practitioners find it can be a struggle to meet that aspiration toward equitable practice in the context of SE initiatives. It is also possible that, by recruiting through grassroots organizations, the project can find participants who have already developed a certain degree of consciousness.

Second, grassroots organizations could take on the role of facilitating the participatory planning and democratic investment process—facilitating the application of power within and over economy—within the organized ecosystem. They could also take on the role of organizing and leading the campaigns—wielding the power of collective demand—to extend our power over resources outside our boundaries (state and anchor institution resources and procurement contracts). Facilitating community process and organizing campaigns are two competencies that are associated with grassroots organizations.

In addition to playing these roles, grassroots organizations could derive benefit from the organized ecosystem in two ways. First, the potential scale of the organized ecosystem could provide a larger pool from which grassroots organizations might find individuals to organize and to demonstrate support for their separate campaigns. For example, the organized ecosystem might have many participants willing to support a corporate accountability campaign. Second, in relation to the two anchoring roles (or perhaps independently of it), the organized ecosystem could

allocate financial resources to fund grassroots organizing activities. Such activities are

typically poorly funded by foundations. There is, in fact, some precedent for using

business revenue to fund organizing activities, but my impression is that it is a rare

feat, and one whose feasibility should not be taken for granted.

There are more possibilities for relation beyond these proposals. When our

project engages in confrontational strategies, as part of a suite of activities to

strengthen our economic ecosystem, can we try to align our narrative and objectives

with those of other organizations on the local movement landscape? For example, I

would be interested in exploring how the organizing campaigns to confront the state

and contest for economic development resources (subsidized assets, tax incentives

and tax breaks, etc.) could be coordinated with the Public Good Campaign (led by my

current organization, Community Labor United), which is likewise focused in part on

the capture of public resources by corporate actors. Superficially there may seem to

be a tension between these two messages—one seeking public resources for private

economic development, one decrying public handouts to private economic

development—but perhaps through conversation and exploration we can find value

alignment, and, importantly, develop alignment in our messaging and demands.

And what are the possibilities for our project to engage with the campaigns

and agendas of grassroots organizations or coalitions beyond rallying support from

our project's membership base? This might include developing joint campaigns or

working to integrate our long-term theories and strategies of transformation. This is

an especially interesting question because I am aware that grassroots organizations in

Boston (related to my current professional work) are going through their own

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processes of reimagining their organizing and campaigning work. For example, take the possibility of grant funding from the organized ecosystem. Rather than fund individual movement organizations, we could fund the movement infrastructure that is being imagined and explored as part of the Ten-Year Agenda effort (also led by Community Labor United). The aspiration is for this movement infrastructure (including structures to develop different skillsets and forms of leadership as well as manage the administrative needs of organizations) to break out of, or at least start indicating a direction away from, the constraints of the nonprofit industrial complex. Securing a source of funding outside of normal channels might be one way to do that.

Of course, as mentioned, funding organizing with economic revenue is not easy. And if there were such funding available—from investment returns and transaction fees, for example—then our project's administrative organization (perhaps we can call it Ujima, Inc. here, even though it has not yet been incorporated, to distinguish the entity from the project at large) would be a more immediate candidate for that funding. Ujima, Inc. has several paid staff members now, and is currently reliant on foundation funding to support those positions.

3. What other opportunities might we find? The account above might be compared to the description of CED's concept in the first chapter, on "Aspiration." It reinterprets the concept using the language of the solidarity economy framework articulated above, and I found it helpful in clarifying how and what *specific actions* might unlock the transformative potential of the different elements of the concept. It is, of course, still hypothetical. But it starts to tease the possibilities of concrete strategy for transformation, once the project reaches a state of greater maturity and

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sharper realization. I think there is value in continuing what I started here—enriching the tripartite solidarity economy framework with details about our specific landscape and local circumstances. In this way, we can turn the abstract framework into a more customized and strategic atlas for our project—one that scopes out potential ways of transforming our city and state beyond the reach of our project that we can keep in mind as we advance our work, build power, or encounter unexpected opportunities. Below are some more questions that start to move in this direction:

- What forms of knowledge, specific to our city, state, country, and point in history, do we think would enrich our members' experience of our project? What obstacles do members or newcomers report to grasping the project's organized ecosystem model or other project elements?

- How we can imagine using the state apparatus to strengthen our project? Is there a way the power we develop in our ecosystem can extend outward to support the public sector and universal provision of public services? Are there any ongoing public processes that would present a good opportunity for our project to intervene and assert our narrative and vision?

- What are all the ongoing processes of neoliberalization happening in our city and state today? Who is behind them? Who would view our project as a threat? What power do they have or could they build to undermine our

project? Are there any policies, regulations, or administrative practices on the city or state level that could be used to obstruct or weaken our project?

- What are the possibilities for our project to engage with the campaigns and agendas of grassroots organizations or coalitions beyond rallying support from our project's membership base?

- How are we all thinking about what the social, political, and economic landscape in Boston and Massachusetts specifically might look like in ten years if our project advances successfully?

- Where are the boundaries of our organized ecosystem? What are the assets we have collective control over? What else is out there? I know we attempted a mapping project a few years ago—how can we continue with that effort?

- What is the precedence, if any, for the "trans-local linkage" strategy to scale?

5.3 How can we orient our practice toward transformation?

Based on the previous section, one way to orient practice toward transformation would be to develop local strategies that use both prefigurative and confrontational tactics, and which are grounded in a clear analysis of the systems we seek to transform and our own positive vision. Such work would likely start upon inception of the organized ecosystem. However, I recall that some project leaders were interested in including activities of resistance and confrontation during the

collective visioning stage as well—for example, by directing members to support the efforts of grassroots partners engaged in such work.

- What other opportunities might there have been to engage in activities of resistance and confrontation before the organized ecosystem was launched?

Another way applies more clearly to the collective visioning stage. Although there was disagreement among project leaders over the necessary and/or ideal *depth* of stakeholder participation at such an early stage, I sided with those who wanted to cultivate as much deep participation and democratic practice as possible. First, to ensure the ecosystem would balance the needs and interests of all the relevant stakeholders, we would need to cultivate broad and deep participation in the process to design the ecosystem. And second, for stakeholders to prepare to *inhabit* the ecosystem, we would need to provide opportunities to practice solidarity and democracy.

The similarities between an ideal collective visioning process and the participatory and democratic practices of the imagined ecosystem (multi-stakeholder standards development, participatory planning, democratic investment, anti-oppression governance) provide a compelling reason to *at least try* to use the former as a way to design and practice the latter. Both contexts rely on multi-stakeholder engagement wherein stakeholders both communicate their needs and interests but also learn about the needs and interests of others and then engage in a process (driven by solidarity rather than exclusive self-interest) to negotiate a resolution

satisfactory to all. And both contexts involve governance and decision-making activities designed around direct democratic practice with privilege accorded to communities most impacted by the matter at hand. There was sound reason to use the collective visioning process to prefigure aspects of the eventual ecosystem.

The prefigurative approach also takes into account the reproductive power of the systems we seek to transform. We, even in movements, still exist in and are a part of those systems. Prefigurative practice is an instrument to help us consciously identify the ways in which our efforts may be subverted or co-opted or tamed, whether by factors outside our control or through our very own actions and behaviors. The general challenge of prefigurative practice is clear, then—we must consciously and persistently engage in ways of thinking and acting that are out of step with the norms and expectations of our broader lived environment. Prefigurative practice involves struggling along the path of greater resistance.

Given that, what might be the specific challenges to prefigurative practice in the context of our collective visioning process? Here are three hypothesis: 1) the time demand of a complex project, 2) the limited capacity of stakeholders to engage, and 3) the limitations of an organization that is just starting up.

Time demand of a complex project: The ambitious scope of CED's concept paper was a major factor in the level of excitement it inspired. It also meant that the time demand of the collective visioning process was likely to be considerable. The activities would be many, including:

- learning about CED's concept and the aspiration for societal transformation;

- cultivating inter-stakeholder solidarity, organizing and building collective power for action, and practicing direct democracy and anti-oppression governance;

- imagining community standards and negotiating them across the different stakeholders;

- imagining the participatory planning and democratic investment processes; and more.

This time demand would represent a burden for participants (as explained more below) and would likely cause a considerable delay between the launch of the *idea* and the launch of the actual project and any benefits it would provide for interested stakeholders.

Limited stakeholder capacity: A prefigurative approach would involve deep engagement with the full array of potential ecosystem stakeholders. It would also arguably involve a careful curation of participants in order to shape what perspectives, ideologies, and ideas are brought into the project—a space where participants are meant to interact with and learn from one another to a substantial degree. But, given the likely time demand of collective visioning, a major challenge would be that the community stakeholders who would ideally have a strong presence in the process are the most likely to face constraints to volunteering their time— whether to take part in visioning activities, or to take on organizational roles to help design, facilitate, or oversee the broader process.

Capacity is also likely to be a problem in persuading grassroots organizations to engage deeply. In the conditions of the nonprofit industrial complex explored earlier, these organizations are among those that tend not to have the slack capacity to engage in such speculative work. However, it is also possible that grassroots organizations would have reservations about participating in our project because of the historical separation between the political and confrontational strategies that they tend to be more familiar with and the prefigurative strategies of our project.

Constraints of the startup environment: The time demand of collective visioning for an expansive and complex project would also be felt by the project leaders and volunteer staff designing and facilitating the process. On top of that, the project was a true startup, with no pre-existing structures or resources. And, in part because of the way nonprofit funding works (or does not work), funding for the project did not become available until the end of that first six-month period. Project leaders and volunteer staff would thus be in the position of 1) establishing new organizational capacity and practices, 2) without any significant funding support, 3) while at the same time initiating the collective visioning process.

Can we see these challenges at play in our first six months? A full account of the case is included in the "Action" chapter of this thesis. Here is a summary of our struggles and achievements specifically related to prefigurative practice:

We had not completed planning our work and therefore our activities were still informal (and presumably less effective): The working groups were still only developing our formal activities for recruitment, for developing consciousness

and building power, and for advancing the designs of the ecosystem components. While we were planning, the work all took place in informal ways.

Outreach occurred mostly through word-of-mouth introductions to the project. Participants were asked to think of individuals or organizations they knew through personal or professional networks (relationship mapping) and whose values were aligned with the project. While Tanaka was most responsible for recruitment in the beginning, over time more and more people came to the project through other relationships. Participation was not policed in any way.

For building consciousness, the informal approach in the beginning was to verbally explain CED's concept. It took most participants a fair amount of time to grasp the full picture because of how many pieces there were. Still, despite the fact that the concept could be overwhelming, it was still a primary asset of the project. As the "Aspiration" chapter demonstrates, CED's concept was developed through a substantial and participatory process. It was a serious proposal, and a compelling one, and it fueled the powerful enthusiasm that helped push the project through this first, challenging, resource-scarce stage of the work.

Otherwise, building consciousness was built into other activities. It was built into relationship mapping, where participants were pushed to think about who would or would not be aligned with the project. There was an effort within one of the working groups to map the local solidarity economy, but it was handled primarily by one person and not used as an exercise to talk about what could/not or should/not be included in our local map. There was some research into potential targets for anchor institution procurement contract campaigns, but that was shared only with one of the

working groups. Some of the recruitment activities could include opposition mapping exercises but only on a quick and conceptual level.

The informal approach to building solidarity was simply to draw attention to the multi-stakeholder design of the project as one of its key strengths. There were some pre-existing relationships among participants but most were meeting one another for the first time. There were a few indications of distrust among participants, but one project leader suggested that the slow(er than initially expected) pacing of the project was enabling people to build with one another more deeply. Toward the end of the first six months we piloted a more formal approach to building solidarity: A multi-stakeholder panel on which project leaders (who were each representing different stakeholder positions—business, investor, community, and technical assistance) conversed and answered questions about the imagined "good" business standards component of the ecosystem.

Visioning activities took place primarily in small discussion-based meetings. Conversations could be disjointed and hard to move forward over time with only one two-hour meeting for each working group per month. Again, participation in these visioning activities in working groups was limited. Larger and more participatory visioning activities were still being planned. Most project participants liked the idea of concrete pilots and experiments with hands-on, interactive, and perhaps "gamified" components. We were still studying and planning ways to experiment with participatory and democratic processes (the working group responsible had a hard time with this assignment), so the only practice opportunity in the first six months was a quick text-based polling experiment at an organizing committee meeting.

Stakeholder representation was not yet strong or equal. There was a greater contingent of businesses and investors and far fewer working class people of color represented in the project. The demographic data of meeting attendees showed our project was slightly more racially and ethnically diverse than Boston at large but also still majority White. No new grassroots organizations had joined. Project leadership planned to provide funding for grassroots organizations in order to support their participation but the project did not receive its own funding until the end of the first six months. I also found uneven levels of stakeholder representation and engagement in different spaces across the project.

While some of the suggested reasons for non-participation were not surprising (one reason was a preference to wait for more concrete opportunities to engage and another was that there was not enough of a connection to their organizational mission), others suggest problematic dynamics that we might want to address: distrust of other participants; discomfort in the project environment; limited capacity to engage; and self-selection based on identity.

Most participants did not engage in oversight or governance activities: Project-wide strategizing, management, and oversight were located in a leadership team that had been deliberately assembled prior to the October 2015 launch of the project. The longer-term plan was for participants to provide broad oversight through the body of the organizing committee, and for participants to elect the steering committee, but that had not happened by the end of the first six months.

Even the leadership team did not have a great deal of time to spare for the project. However, their role in the project was a crucial one for as long as participants

were not themselves engaged in oversight or governance. It was an asset to the project that the leadership team, representing most of the project stakeholder perspectives, had been deliberately recruited prior to the launch of the project.

Project work was driven by a small group of participants: The working groups were the centers of productivity in our project, variously responsible for stakeholder outreach and engagement; communications; and ecosystem design. There were five in all, consolidated down from eight in part due to some overlap in their roles and in one case because no one signed up to join it. The working groups were all small, with the exception of the one responsible for outreach to businesses and investors. This was despite the fact that new individuals were being introduced to the project and many newcomers were attending the organizing committee meetings. Although about half of all participants attended at least one working group meeting, few continued to participate. Some working groups had a hard time recruiting people with specific skills, especially technological skills. However, several working groups were able to identify and enlist outside expert assistance.

Over the first six months we recruited four people as working group coordinators; otherwise, coordination was handled by Tanaka or myself. The twelve "regular" working group participants were all individuals who had been involved prior to the October 2015 launch. For most people, participation was limited to attending meetings. Only a handful of individuals contributed work outside of meetings.

Productivity practices were still emerging: Our systems of planning and coordination among the working groups were still informal and emerging in our first six months of activity. Few other participants knew one another well and there was

little inter-working group communication. Meeting schedules were still erratic, and sometimes set during the daytime when working participants were not able to attend. In lieu of more robust communication and coordination systems, and while the newer volunteer coordinators were learning to work more independently, Tanaka and I served as the drivers and connectors across different meeting spaces.

Progress was sometimes delayed: It took some time to get started. Enthusiastically, the working groups started out trying to do everything at once, before realizing the need for prioritization and discipline. Some working groups only managed to create a clear work plan at the end of the first six months. Each working group tried to meet once a month but they were not always successful, and individuals producing work outside of meetings were not always able to meet the deadlines they set for themselves. The project timeline overall was moved back continuously.

However, I think delay can be an appropriate response to limited capacity—a sign of patience, or caution. Project leaders and volunteer staff had many concerns and convictions about how to advance our project. The slow pace of discussions about governance could reflect their respect for its importance and reluctance to rush. Similarly, there was a delay in allocating the first round of grant funding received because the project leaders made sure to discuss and deliberate on the matter of how to allocate it fairly. Delay might also be a byproduct of capacity building. For example, recognizing the importance of supporting participants in developing leadership and other skills, project leaders provided the new coordinators plenty of space to fulfill their roles within the working groups. This might have had a slowing effect at first.

Importantly, "delayed" does not mean, "stopped." Our first six-month period came to a climactic point in March with a major organizing committee meeting that was widely considered a very successful project event. This event saw more participants coming through a wider range of personal connections, strong political education through the multi-stakeholder panel on community standards, a trial run of real-time text-based crowd polling, and it later led to an increase in attendance in at least some of the working groups.

Conclusions: Looking at our activities in the first six months, it isn't difficult to imagine that all of these challenges were present in full force. However, while there were clear signs of difficulty, there were also strengths and assets in play, and we were nonetheless able to gradually move forward. What can we learn from our experience?

First, we can appreciate what a tall order it was to prefigure the participatory and democratic practices of the ecosystem in the course of the collective visioning process—at least in its earliest stages. In fact, the struggles we experienced in our opening months were predicted. The three-phase design of the implementation plan was meant to delay the concretization of our ecosystem design in part so that our early limitations would not necessarily hinder the eventual outputs. Our project was in the very first stage of the *transition* to becoming the ecosystem. Dixon's exhortation about "letting go of perfectionism" seems to be applicable here.

And, second, we could expect that the work would get easier over time. Our activities would be more effective (we hoped) once we finished planning our formal implementation strategy and started to execute it. We could also hope that work would proceed more smoothly as project leaders and volunteer staff settled into their

roles and developed stronger working relationships, and as we began to secure

funding. In the first six months nearly all of us were still learning about the project and

setting up work plans and working relationships from scratch. And we could see a

clear relationship between funding and participation during that time as well. Tanaka

was able to pour his time into the project because it was a central, funded initiative of

his own organization. The leadership team consisted of organizations that had

embraced the project as an official initiative, some of them able to build participation

into their existing budgets (for example, as professional development hours).

Funding became available right as the first six months was coming to close.

Since then we have received several foundation grants and donations from location

organizations and individuals. The first resources were allocated as re-grants to

support the participation of the leadership team organizations; to professional

consultants like BCCO and local creative social action lab Intelligent Mischief; to a

stipend for a startup organizer (myself); to stipends for eight summer organizing

fellows to hold participatory workshops across the city; and to expenses for events

and trainings. Later on, with larger grants, the project hired a director and a fund

manager. More recently, we hired a part-time communications organizes and a part-

time fund strategist. We are currently hiring a member organizer.

- How has funding helped or not helped the leadership team organizations

    sustain their roles and participation in the project?

Of course, time and funding couldn't solve every problem. For example, the complexity of the democratic investment fund has continued to pose a challenge. Even with pro bono assistance and consulting from outside experts and allies, it has been a struggle to bring that central piece of the ecosystem into reality. As another example, we could not fully fund our way out of the reality that the strength of the collective visioning process was reliant on the deep engagement of those individuals and organizations that were most likely to face constraints to participation. What was necessary in that case was thoughtful strategies to enable those individuals and organizations to participate more easily and to make the best use of their scarce time.

- To make the best use of scarce time, how do we distinguish between essential and gratuitous applications of participation and direct democracy? When is representation and delegation sufficient?

Project leaders recognized that project events must be easy to attend (for example, in terms of location, transportation options, length and time of day, interpretation, child care options, and food), they must be both fun and productive, and they should try to simultaneously inform the ecosystem design and provide an opportunity to practice for it. The Solidarity Summit hosted in August 2016, the first major experimental event, was a good example of this. It involved an abbreviated investment process attended by around 150 participants. Participants spent a day learning about five pre-selected businesses that were small, local, and committed to the wellbeing of their neighborhoods. They could study the businesses' plans and

financial information and ask questions directly of the owners. At the end of the day, participants voted together on how to allocate $20,000 in 0% loans, half of which came from over 175 separate small investments from community members. $10,000 of it was raised in three days; it was then matched by a local foundation.

The only downside of the August 2016 event was that it was incredibly time intensive to host (I wonder what a somewhat smaller scale and more easily replicable version of it might look like). Instead, starting at the end of 2017 and the beginning 2018, project leaders initiated a new approach to project engagement meant to increase the number of ways to get involved, and to make it easier to participate more regularly. This included hosting more social events; launching a regular lecture series; and establishing regular meeting times both for working committees and for project newcomers. It also included adopting existing technological infrastructure to support member engagement—for example, using platforms like Kiva, Spendrise, and Voatz. This may involve sacrificing some control but at least there is a gain through saving on administrative costs.

Over time, as the organizational structure has evolved, project leaders have established concrete mechanisms to reflect anti-oppressive governance principles. When the project formally opened for members at the end of 2017, we established different membership types so that members could differentiate themselves into "general" members representing working class people of color in Boston, and "solidarity" members who would participate and support but forego voice in decision-making processes. Additionally, the project established identity-based caucuses to amplify the voices of groups that are typically marginalized.

- How can we assess the effectiveness of these strategies (different types of membership and identity-based caucuses) in privileging the voices and interests of the most marginalized communities?

Despite the progress, it has still been an ongoing challenge to engage grassroots organizations and residents of local working class communities of color. Project leaders found that efforts to explore partnerships with grassroots organizations did not initially progress as imagined. Conversations were initiated in the last few years to explore what partnerships could look like, but did not lead immediately to any action. There was one setback in relation to the idea that grassroots organizations could facilitate the participatory planning and democratic investment process; this was because of how time- and resource-intensive the imagined processes were shaping up to be. This has resulted in a pivot toward working with organizations that are already involved in neighborhood planning processes, which has led to a series of co-hosted experimental events.

In summary, the three specific hypothesized challenges (the time demand, stakeholder capacity limitations, and startup constraints) certainly seemed to be at play in the first six months. They could explain why our productivity practices were erratic and why we were only still planning more strategic and systematic approaches to the collective visioning objectives—and relying on informal activities in the meantime. They could explain why our body of participants was not fully representative of all stakeholders, why participants engaged only to a limited or

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nonexistent degree in working groups and spaces for oversight, and why overall

project progress kept getting delayed.

However, there were clearly also strengths and assets that likely played a role

in helping move the project forward in spite of those challenges. These included the

inspirational strength of CED's concept; the leadership team representing many

crucial stakeholder perspectives; the resourcefulness of identifying outside capacity

to provide assistance; and a sense of patience and caution among project leaders and

volunteer staff to make sure activities were implemented in the strongest, rather than

fastest, way possible.

The project updates show how our collective visioning practices have evolved

as project leaders have found new ways and new means of meeting the challenge of

the prefigurative approach. We should continue to pay close attention to whether and

to what extent these updated approaches are effective in meeting the prefigurative

objectives. One first step would be to establish a more formal approach to tracking

what is happening in our project, which today has many different spaces and a

sprawling network of members with different ways of involving themselves. We should

continue to look especially at stakeholder representation and levels of engagement.

Ideally we could find ways to assess the outcomes of different forms engagement.

- How can we measure the dimensions of consciousness? How can we measure

  power building?

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS

Initially Considered	Contacted	Interviewed	Organization
Participants			
Lisa Owens	Lisa Owens	Lisa Owens	City Life / Vida Urbana
Curdina Hill	X	X	City Life / Vida Urbana (formerly)
Deborah Frieze	Deborah Frieze	Deborah Frieze	Boston Impact Initiative
Glynn Lloyd	Glynn Lloyd	Glynn Lloyd	Boston Impact Initiative
Darnell Johnson	Darnell Johnson	Darnell Johnson	Right to the City
Lisette Le	X	X	Right to the City (formerly)
Nia Evans	Nia Evans	Nia Evans	Boston NAACP
Stacey Cordeiro	Stacey Cordeiro	Stacey Cordeiro	Boston Center for Community Ownership
Curtis Rollins	Curtis Rollins	X	Boston Workers Alliance
Anand Jahi	Anand Jahi	Anand Jahi	New Economy Coalition
	Vanessa Green	Vanessa Green	Divest-Invest Individual
	Hendrix Berry	Hendrix Berry	JPNDC / Balanced Rock
	Libbie Cohn	Libbie Cohn	MIT - DUSP
Non-Participants			
Aisha Shillingford	Aisha Shillingford	X	Intelligent Mischief
Nancy Goldner	Nancy Goldner	X	Hub Public Banking
Priscilla Flint	Priscilla Flint	X	Black Economic Justice Institute
Matt Meyer	Matt Meyer	Matt Meyer	Lucy Stone Co-op
Sutton Kiplinger	Sutton Kiplinger	Sutton Kiplinger	The Food Project
Darlene Lombos	Darlene Lombos	Darlene Lombos	Community Labor United
Kalila Barnett	X	X	Alternative for Community and Environment
Jodi Sugerman-Brozan	Jodi Sugerman-Brozan	X	Bikes not Bombs
Melonie Griffiths	X	X	Jobs with Justice
Elvis Mendez	X	X	IWCC (formerly)
	Mike Prokosch	Mike Prokosch	Boston Climate Action Network
	Bob Terrell	X	Fair Housing Center

Below is the first iteration of questions that guided the interviews:

1. How were you brought into the Ujima organizing committee space?
2. Does your organization hold an explicit political analysis? What is it?
3. What is the mission and what are the objectives of your organization?
4. How would you describe the Ujima Project? What are the essential or defining characteristics as you see it?
5. How do you see your organization's missions and objectives as relating to those of the Ujima Project? What components are of greatest interest?
6. How do you see your organization's agenda intersecting with Ujima this year?
7. Has it been difficult for you or your organization to participate and be represented in the organizing committee and working groups?
8. Who in your organization has a voice in the decision to participate in Ujima?
9. What is your evaluation of how the project has been executed so far? What process-related activities are going well, and what is not?

10. Can you think of any other information you want to share that would help explain your participation in Ujima?

This is the last iteration of questions that guided the interviews:

1. How did you end up in Ujima? How long did you know Aaron at that point?
2. What is the political analysis that guides your work with Ujima, personal, organizational, or both?
3. How do you see your organization's mission and objectives as relating to Ujima?
4. Who are you accountable to in your organization for your work with Ujima?
5. What do you see as the essential, defining characteristics of the Ujima Project? Which are most interesting and which are least interesting to you?
6. How has the vision/proposal changed since you first learned of it?
7. What do you think of as the short-term objectives for Ujima in this phase?
8. What role do you see yourself filling now in the organizing committee?
9. Is there anything preventing you from participating to the degree you'd like?
10. Do you expect your participation role or level will change in this coming year?
11. Regarding our implementation process, what's your impression of what is going well and not going well?
12. Is there a particular point of view that isn't sufficiently represented in Uijma?
13. What do you hope will come out of this research process?

Here are the questions that I asked the three former participants who had previously participated in the Community Finance Working Group:

1. How did you end up in the Community Finance Working Group?
2. When did you leave, and was it a conscious decision?
3. What is the political analysis that guides your work, personal, organizational, or both?
4. What are the mission and objectives of your organization?
5. Have you heard much about where the Ujima Project is now? [If the subject had not been updated, I provided a brief summary]
6. How does Ujima relate, or not, to your organizational mission and objectives?
7. Do you see a future connection between your organization and Ujima?

I interviewed one subject who had heard of the Ujima Project but had never participated: Darlene Lombos, who is the director of the organization at which I currently work part-time. Because she had made a conscious decision not to participate in the Ujima Project I asked different questions of than of the other interview subjects:

1. When did you first hear about Ujima? How was it described to you?
2. Who in your network has spoken to you about Ujima?
3. What do you know of where Ujima is now?
4. What are your concerns about Ujima?

5. What are ways that Ujima could satisfactorily address your concerns?

I had fairly regular access to the project founder and was thus able to ask question on an ongoing basis instead of creating an interview protocol. The questions I asked over time, which were understood to be both for the purposes of the project and as information for my thesis process, included the following:

1. Essential components of vision
2. Democratic participation in the organizing committee
3. Who are all these people I have not met?

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