



Boston Ujima Project

Our Work, Our Community, Our Economy

THE BOSTON UJIMA PROJECT is organizing neighbors, workers, business owners and investors to create a new community-controlled economy in Greater Boston. We are challenging poverty and developing our communities by organizing our savings, businesses and customers to grow local wealth and meet our own needs.

UJIMA (oo-JEE-mah) is a Swahili word, the celebrated Kwanzaa principle for “collective work and responsibility.” Ujima inspires us to take responsibility for our communities, to see our neighbor’s problems as our own, and to build collective power to solve them together.

The Ujima Project demonstrates new ways to invest, work, buy, own, and advocate. We are driven by a belief that another world possible, and that we can help build it today.

THE PROBLEM AND OPPORTUNITY

Metropolitan Boston, per capita, is one of the five wealthiest regions on the globe. But in our neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, 2 out of 5 children live in poverty. On average, white families in Boston own over 350 times the assets of Black families, while Black business owners are underrepresented by over 30%. Boston is now one of the fastest gentrifying cities in the country, pricing out families and businesses that have contributed to Boston’s cultural and economic vibrance for generations. Current efforts by the government to address complex problems like poverty, unemployment, and property prices are not meeting our needs.

As residents committed to this City, many of us do what we can to make our communities better. We shovel snow for our elderly neighbors. As business owners, we hire youth and mentor them in their first jobs. Many of us donate, invest, and shop consciously when we can. And as activists, we volunteer our time to knock on doors, rally at city hall and get out the vote to secure our political voice.

There are good people across our city who practice caring for community every day. The Boston Ujima Project harnesses this spirit of solidarity to create a comprehensive model for a new economy that reflects our values, meets our needs, and allows our communities to thrive.

A NEW APPROACH

We want to end business as usual. Big corporations and developers shouldn’t get tax breaks and contracts while local businesses, tenants and workers struggle to survive. We believe in a new approach to urban development that puts community needs over unchecked private profit.

The Boston Ujima Project is working to unite working class residents and workers, small businesses, grassroots organizations and other local economy stakeholders in a democratic community development organization. Ujima’s multi-stakeholder membership will forge a new circuit of investment, production and consumption that meets local needs, creates jobs, distributes wealth, and models economic democracy. While we fight against the dehumanizing effects of capitalism, the Boston Ujima Project builds new infrastructure that allows us to live into the future we seek to create.

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

As an anti poverty project, The Boston Ujima Project will create a “Good Business and Real Estate” certification, a community controlled investment fund, a worker empowerment network, and an alternative local currency. Each of these innovations help our communities leverage our assets and better meet our own needs. As an interlocking system, the Ujima infrastructure allows low-income communities to govern the creation of a more just and sustainable local economy.

Good Business Certification and Alliance

Public laws around jobs and housing do not ensure that full time workers can survive or support a family in Boston. The lack of standards allows for predatory businesses and developers to grow wealthy by exploiting customers, employees and local land. Ujima’s members will establish community standards that consider business practices like living wages, CORI friendly hiring, local purchasing, environmental impact and affordability to draw a line between exploitative businesses and the enterprises in our communities we choose to support. Certified companies will be listed in a Good Business directory, receive a seal for storefront display, and enjoy free community promotions. These companies will also be eligible to join Ujima’s Business Alliance, gaining access to capital, technical assistance, cooperative purchasing, and other joint ventures to strengthen operations and market share.

Community Capital Fund

Local entrepreneurs and affordable housing developers lack access to patient capital, while public assets, nonprofit endowments, and private savings are invested in extractive corporations like Exxon, Walmart and the Corrections Corporation of America. The Ujima Fund will pool savings and investments from its diverse membership and use our equity to leverage additional capital from universities, union pension funds and foundation endowments. Local banks and credit union partners can also leverage our members’ deposits and savings to extend additional credit to Ujima’s collective fund. Ujima will host democratic neighborhood assemblies and business summits to engage members in the participatory budgeting of capital to meet the enterprise, housing and consumer needs of the community.

Worker Services Network

Small businesses often lack the resources to provide strong supports and benefits for their employees. The lack of unions in most small and medium sized businesses also leave many employees without ways to address their workplace grievances. Ujima will create a Worker Services Network that organizes human resource programs like group health insurance buying, an internal staffing agency, and workplace mediation services to grow employee satisfaction and security.

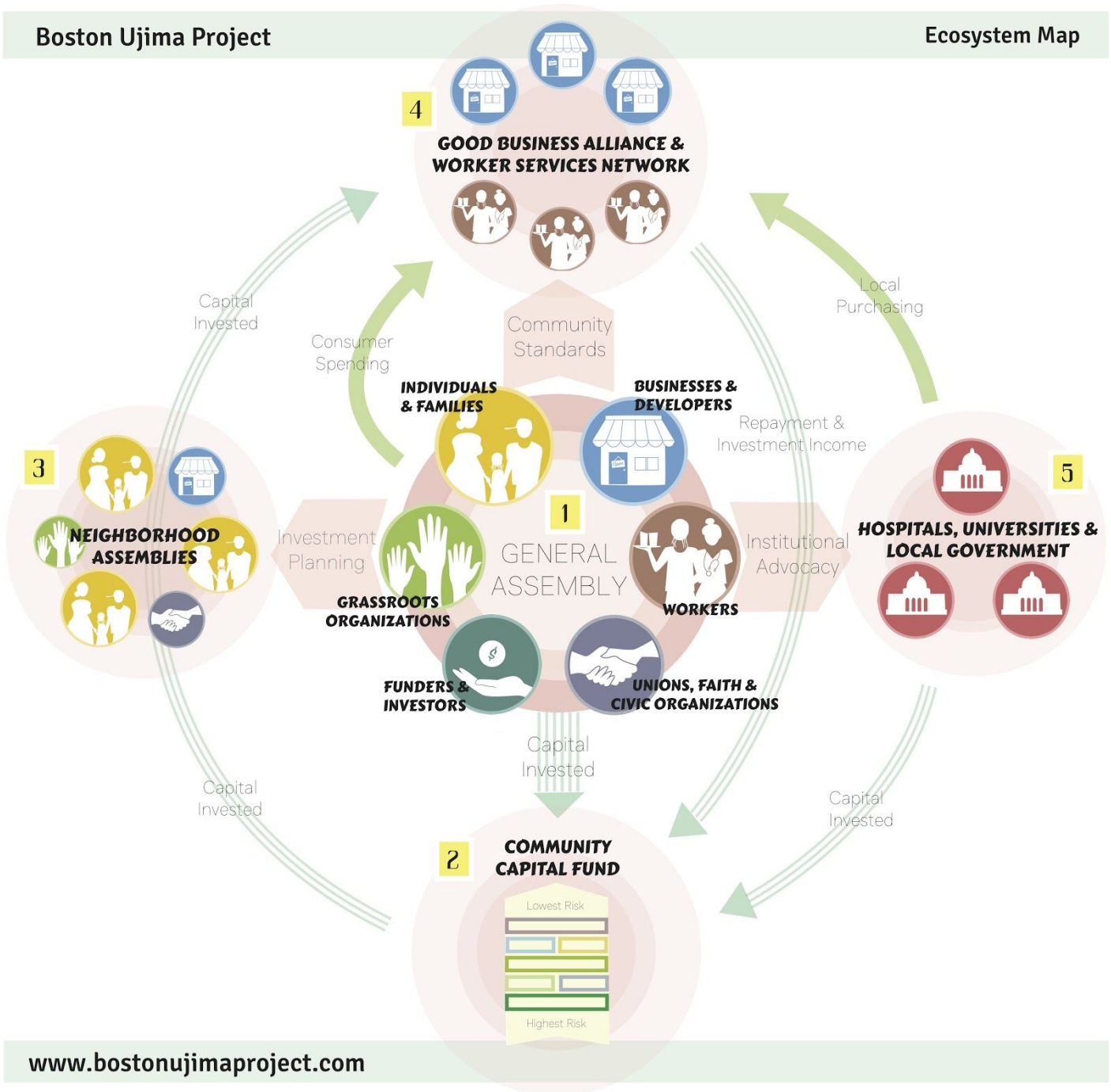
Alternative Local Currencies

The lack of business credit, and the misdirection of local consumer spending leaves good companies in uphill competition with less responsible, more extractive corporations. Ujima members will have access to an internal electronic currency that offers consumer discounts at local Good Businesses, while providing interest free credit for businesses-to-business purchasing. Ujima members will also access a Time Bank that allows for individuals to trade their skills and labor with their neighbors on an hour-to-hour exchange. These currencies incentivize purchasing and trade within the Ujima network, and grows local wealth by ensuring the circulation of resources within the community.

Anchor Institution Advocacy

Boston’s large universities, hospitals and government agencies drive economic activity with limited attention to the impacts of their capital. The Ujima network will advance campaigns for the City, State and large nonprofits to direct investment, subsidy and procurement dollars to Ujima’s network of certified good businesses and developers. Ujima will also unite our communities across sectors to grow political power and win new policies that advance our transformative economy strategies.

Massachusetts has examples of successful co-ops, community funds, buy local campaigns, and alternative currencies. The Boston Ujima Project hopes to integrate and manage these models within a locally governed ecosystem with the potential for scale.



An Ecosystem View

The Boston Ujima Project modernizes traditional economic development strategies by structuring democratic coordination through the full cycle of local value creation, consumption and exchange. The Boston Ujima Project allows its members to see the possibility and benefits of a non-capitalist, community controlled economy.

The establishment of good Business and Real Estate Standards allows members to decide who is “in,” and who is “out” of our community economy. As a coordinated strategy, Ujima’s members boycott the old, while feeding our “good businesses” with capital, technical assistance, purchasing dollars and political support. Ujima members shift the cultural, political and economic landscape of Boston to end handouts for big business and developers, while creating advantages for locally owned, high road social enterprises, land trusts and co-ops.

As a mass organization, the Boston Ujima Project will generate resources to support and scale its ecosystem. Ujima will earn revenue from membership dues, investment income, fees for businesses and worker services, and from an internal sales tax that returns a percentage of member purchases back to the Ujima ecosystem. Ujima Boston can use these resources not only to maintain operations and fund grassroots organizing, but also to subsidize basic needs like high quality childcare or organic vegetables that might otherwise be inaccessible in our communities.

The Boston Ujima Project’s ambitious and holistic approach empowers communities to take back the reigns of economic governance from politicians and corporate lobbyists. While the broader capitalist economy continues to enrich the 1%, The Boston Ujima Project paves a new path for a democratic alternative based on mutual aid, shared assets, and community ownership and control. We are planting the seeds and nurturing the sprouts of a new economic system that we can grow and control together.

Project Background

The Ujima Project was launched in the spring of 2015 after a year-long cross sector study group involving 40+ leaders invested in Boston’s low income communities of color. Hosted by the Center for Economic Democracy, Boston Impact Initiative and City Life / Vida Urbana, the group studied strategies for our communities to control capital, grow co-ops and land trusts, and protect locally owned companies from the “race to the bottom” economy.

The Ujima Organizing Committee was launched in July 2015 to turn our learnings into action and to begin research and planning for a systemic intervention and a holistic proposal for shifting our economic culture. As we pilot new ways to invest, work, buy, own, and advocate, we are driven by a belief that another world is needed, possible, and coming into being today.

As racism, patriarchy and other forms of oppression breed poverty, violence and environmental crisis, Boston’s growing network of cross sector leaders are driven to create transformative solutions that uplift our communities and model real alternatives for a new economy.

Join Us

The Boston Ujima Project is currently in a community planning, research and stakeholder outreach phase, with plans to launch full operations in 2017. The Ujima Project is being driven by a volunteer Organizing Committee that includes some of Boston’s prominent business owners, grassroots organizers, investors and local economy leaders.

The Ujima Organizing Committee holds open monthly meetings, and maintains five Working Groups that are responsible for advancing outreach, research and development to lay the foundation for our pilot ecosystem.

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