



Industry Clubs: A Response to Community Poverty

A Case Study of the
Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN



SCHOOL of EDUCATION
and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
YOUTH-NEX



All photos in this case study were provided with consent from Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan.

Authors:



Ashlee L. Sjogren
Priscilla M. D. Little



Please cite as:

Sjogren, A. & Little, P. (2024). *Industry Clubs: A Response to Community Poverty, A Case Study of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan*. University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development. Charlottesville, VA.



Youth-Nex research is supported by a grant from Philip Morris USA, an Altria Company. We gratefully acknowledge this important support. The work of Youth-Nex is solely determined by itself and Youth-Nex does not represent the official views of the sponsor.

For more information please visit
<http://education.virginia.edu/Youth-Nex>
or contact Youth-Nex@virginia.edu

Report © 2024 Rectors and Visitors of the University of Virginia.

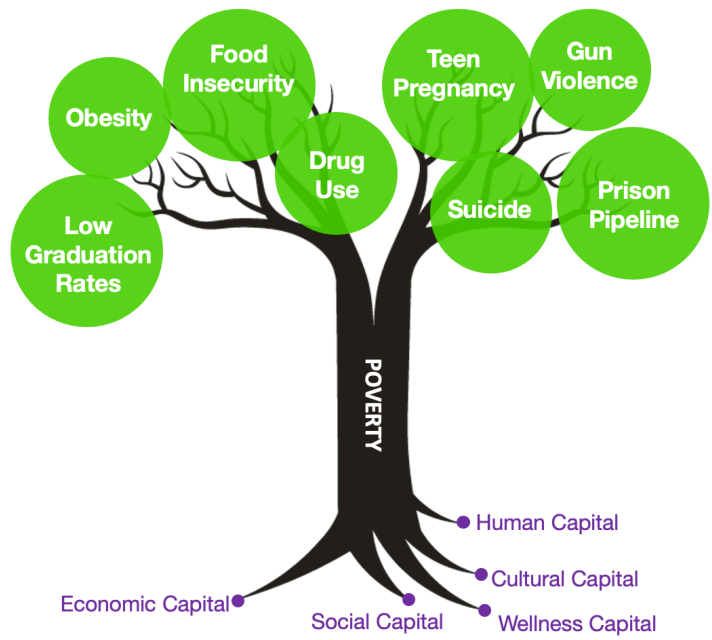
⚡ About this Case Study: Setting the Context ⚡

Today, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan (BGCSM) is a thriving Club with an annual operating budget of \$18 million. But, in December, 2018, when Shawn Wilson¹ was named CEO, BGCSM was about to close. Its operating budget was in the red, financially, they were in debt, and the image and reputation of the Club was not good in the community. Shawn Wilson knew that he had to do something differently to make the Club relevant and impactful so he turned to the community to help him identify what their issues and needs were that could be met by the Club. Root cause analysis identified that the issues facing Detroit’s youth—gun violence, drug use, food insecurity, and low graduation rates, to name a few—were symptoms of poverty, the root cause of which was lack of access to the capital young people needed for economic mobility (see Figure 1)². But the disconnected ecosystem of service providers across the city were treating the symptoms of poverty rather than the root cause.

About the Club

Founded in 1926, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan has been providing positive youth development experiences. Every year it serves approximately 11,000 youth ages six to 24 in 4 Club locations throughout the school year and in the summer. With over 300 full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees, its annual operating budget is \$18 million.

Figure 1: *Root Cause Analysis*



¹ We are using actual site and Club leader names with their permission.

² The Root Cause figure was developed through the reimagination sessions that BGCSM conducted with local community stakeholders.

To address the root cause, the Club reframed its mission to focus on preparing youth to climb the economic mobility ladder and be career, start-up and homeowner ready and proficient at the end of their Club experience. All the work of the Club became supported by four program pillars referred to as the BEST model (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: *BEST Model*



In 2019, the idea of Industry Clubs was born as part of the Talent and Innovation pillar.

Introduced in 2020, Industry Clubs provide youth hands-on, paid opportunities to be exposed to career options, explore their interests and passions, and gain experience to become contributing members of the workforce. Specific Industry Clubs such as sports, risk management, and fashion help youth acquire knowledge and tools not only directly tied to their particular Industry Club, but also employability skills including

communication, organization, technical literacy, and time management among others. As such, Industry Clubs play a vital role in the ecosystem of support for youth, helping them access the economic, cultural, social, human, and wellness capital they need to achieve economic mobility.

This case study is based on interviews and focus groups with Club staff, youth, and stakeholders as well as document review (see last page for more information on how we developed the case). In it you will learn about:

- ⚡ The nuts and bolts of Industry Clubs.
- ⚡ How they evolved over time.
- ⚡ Contextual factors that support and hinder the work.
- ⚡ Lessons for other youth-serving organizations who want to take an Industry Club approach to supporting workforce readiness.

⚡ **The Nuts & Bolts of Industry Clubs** ⚡

As mentioned, Industry Clubs were developed in response to a need and desire to address poverty head on, as an issue facing Detroit's youth. Thus, the goal of the Clubs themselves is to prepare youth to be “career, startup, and homeowner ready and proficient” by the time they graduate. Tangibly, this manifests in a unique form of youth workforce development programming in which youth 1) apply and interview to participate; 2) engage in real-world industry-specific activities; and, 3) are paid weekly for their work. Currently, BGCSM runs a total of 8 Industry Clubs (see Figure 3). Approximately 15-20 youth participate in each Club session, and BGCSM runs five Clubs four different times a year. While the timing of Industry Clubs vary throughout the year (e.g., summer vs. afterschool hours), each Club requires a minimum of 120 industry specific skill development hours. The industries represented by these Clubs vary from technology to officiating to fashion. The sidebar provides a brief overview of how BGCSM describes each of these Clubs.



Industry Clubs provide youth with real world opportunities to sketch cars, develop apps, and design business plans all while learning the basic background and developing industry-specific skills and connections. These opportunities necessitate hands-on effort such as actually learning how to use the sewing machine to bring a garment to life. In this way, youth are more engaged in their work, and expected to have a final product to share at the end of their work experience.

While the industries considered for Clubs are flexible, each Club is designed to address the following areas of capital identified in the root cause analysis:

- ⚡ **Human capital** - through certifications and/or technical skill development.
- ⚡ **Social capital** - through Clubs being led by industry professionals.
- ⚡ **Economic capital** - by paying youth and providing financial literacy training.
- ⚡ **Cultural capital** - through the inclusion of the capstone project.
- ⚡ **Wellness capital** - by integrating behavioral health and social emotional learning.

⚡ **Key Features of the Industry Club Model Today** ⚡

To pull this off, BGCSM collaborates with funders and industry partners in their local ecosystem to identify which local industries they should develop Clubs around. As a Club is being developed, there are a few key features that BGCSM is sure to include. For example, they believe that it is important for youth to learn from current industry experts who are up to date on trends, skills, and connections so all Industry Clubs are led by industry professionals who are vetted using a comprehensive rubric that considers funding, student interest, and a host of other key factors when making a decision to invest time and finances in developing a Club. These industry professionals are paid for their work with youth, ensuring that they are fully bought-in to the Industry Club experience. In this section, we highlight some of these key features as we explore how the Industry Club model grew to be what it is today.

Figure 3: Industry Clubs



As mentioned, Club leadership developed a **thorough rubric** to determine which industries should be adopted as an Industry Club. Shawn Wilson highlighted that the rubric allows the leadership team to engage with questions and challenges such as “is it



“For me, it's a bit easier to say coding, but specifically Xcode and Playgrounds. I know before I got here, I was just very secure in only knowing HTML and JavaScript, and it has opened up a whole new world, a new language for me to learn. Xcode is definitely a bit more difficult than what I'm used to, but for what it's worth, it really expands your knowledge and everything. Xcode is the future. It is what app developers are driving more into and using nowadays, so I'm glad to have that skill now.” - Youth



an emerging industry? Will the kids be excited about the industry? And for instance, with risk management, that was really a struggle. Like, no, the kids will not be excited about insurance. So it was just a true answer. So then the question was, well, what would make it exciting for them? And that's where the whole Shark Tank pitch competition came into play.” This rubric has become an essential part to determining whether or not to partner with the various industries that reach out to them interested in developing a Club. This also highlights the ways in which **Industry Clubs are built from the local ecosystem**. In other words, BGCSM staff lean on their partners and funders in the ecosystem to

identify new potential Club opportunities as well as staff their programming. When discussing staffing for a shoe design Industry Club, Alise Dixon, BGCSM Chief Program Officer, highlighted that they “*lean on our partners, we put asks out, we go to the industries themselves and say we need to staff this with individuals who have the skills, knowledge, and desire to support this program.*”

This ecosystem design reinforces another key model feature which is that Industry Clubs are **led by active industry professionals** who are paid for their participation. BGCSM leadership discusses the importance of working with active industry professionals noting that the leaders are “*real life entrepreneurs, real life professionals, giving that human capital to the kids.*” **Paying the industry professionals** \$70-80 an hour also ensures commitment of the adults and honors the time spent teaching their trade. Moreover, the use of current industry professionals to staff the Club leads to youth engaging in **hands-on industry experiences** such as designing and sewing their own fashion creations, developing and coding their own apps, and officiating live sporting events. When asked about what they like about Industry Clubs, one fashion youth noted, “*I would say the hands-on elements. Drawing on the computer is nice and typing or whatever, but I think really being actually to do it yourself is a whole other world in them itself because bringing something from a computer to actually sewing it is amazing.*” These experiences are both hands-on and supportive of **transferable skills** such as the communication and planning skills needed to host a fashion show, the



critical thinking needed to develop a portfolio, and the public speaking skills needed to give a shark-tank style pitch. Youth reported that these experiences benefit them now by helping them to develop these transferable skills and they also drew connections to how Industry Clubs may help them in the future as depicted in the quote boxes.

A final key feature of the model that promotes engagement of youth is the pay.

Paying the youth allows more youth to participate, making the experience more equitable. Much like having a job, youth apply and interview for Industry Clubs and are held accountable to a signed employment agreement in order to remain in the program and receive the associated hourly wage. They are given a handbook, clock in/clock out, and receive a paycheck as they would if they worked anywhere else. Industry Club stakeholders that we spoke with mentioned that if youth do not uphold their agreement, they can be let go from employment, though they are still welcome to engage in other Club activities and even re-apply to Industry Clubs once they are ready to fully commit. Another benefit to paying Industry Club members is that youth report gains in their knowledge of financial literacy. For example, one youth noted,



"I applied to Taubman College, which is their architecture and urban planning program. So although I wouldn't go into car design, I feel like there are certain aspects within this and in architecture, designing landscapes and locations that's pretty similar. Just the design process is very similar. Although there may not be as many squares in cars, just the sketching process and going from the basics to your complete sketching idea is pretty much the same. So yeah, I feel like I connect with this program in terms of continuing. I submitted my online application for UM yesterday, but I still have to, in order for it to be considered complete, I have to create a portfolio, which is due February.... But since I'm in this program, I will be able to use some of the things I made from the program for the portfolio." -Youth



"it's helping me learn about budgeting. It's helping me learn about, like I said, financial responsibility and time management and of course taxes." As exemplified here, the financial benefit of the program accomplishes multiple goals for youth and community members. Together these key features led to a program that youth held in high regard as exemplified by the following quotation which summarizes many of the themes shared throughout focus groups with youth participants:

I think that it's important to have clubs like these in Detroit, especially for Black kids specifically, where we are able to indulge in a passion-based career because there's a lot of pressure nowadays to get a job as a teen, and maybe you don't want to work in customer service or a McDonald's or Wendy's, just a regular fast paced motion of that where you're doing mindless work. So I feel like this gives an opportunity for kids in the community to just come here, meet other people, learn. So yeah, I think it's definitely benefiting the community. I feel like there should be more clubs like the Boys and Girls Clubs, especially keeping kids busy after school. There are a lot of things that teenagers could be doing rather than this.

Industry Clubs: The Stepping Stones for Implementation & Growth

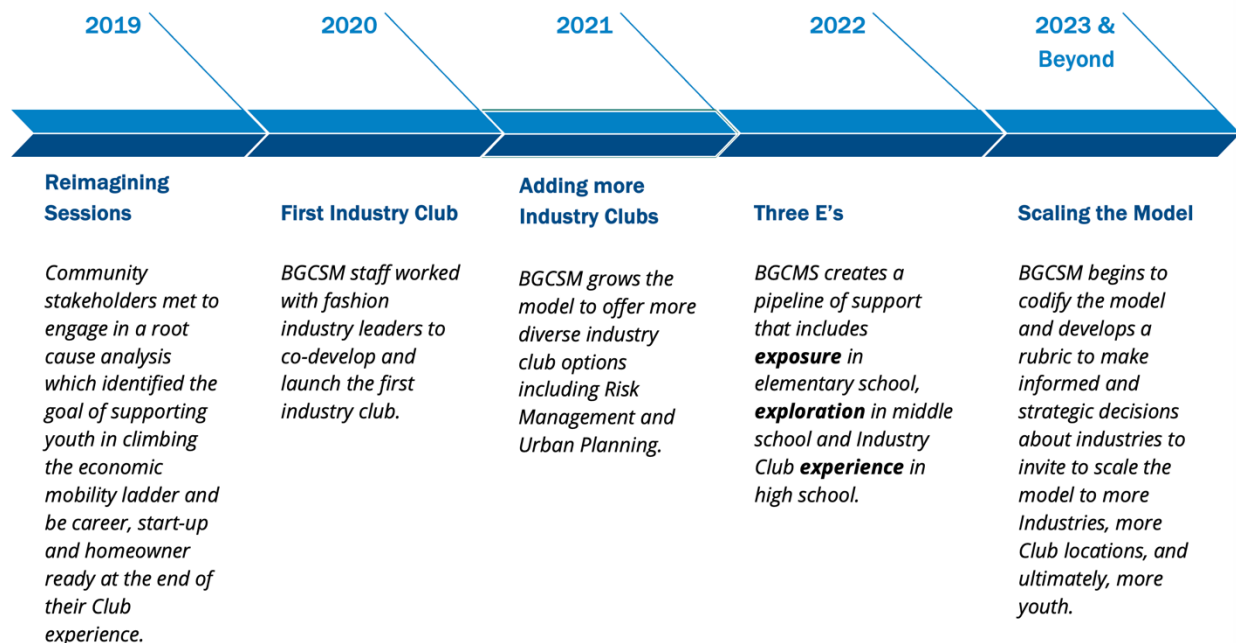
It is important to recognize that Industry Clubs did not start with eight fully formed Clubs and should not necessarily be replicated in this form in other communities. At the crux of the industry Club model is an attempt to be responsive to the unique needs of the Detroit community. In fact, Industry Clubs began with reimagination sessions in which local stakeholders (e.g., youth, families, funders, leaders) were intentionally pulled together to engage in the aforementioned root-cause analysis. Shawn Wilson reflected on these re-envisioning sessions noting that they

“had youth, parents, staff, board members, funders, other community stakeholders all in a room, and we curated the table so that there was no dominant voice at the table and at least two youth at each table. And the power of that is that when I talk about shared vision, you are creating the shared vision simultaneously. Because normally... change management happens where those at the top set the vision and then it gets cascaded level by level versus in this case, it was created with all the stakeholders, which then allowed us to carry the vision forward quicker.”

This quote emphasizes how the community-focused nature of these sessions not only ensured the balance of voices but also supported vision buy-in. Once economic mobility was identified as a means to address poverty in the community, the first Industry Club (Fashion) was developed and piloted. This piloting process included a lot of back and forth between the fashion partners and the BGCSM staff, to ensure that they were meeting youth needs and interests. This allowed the team to co-construct the first Industry Club, ensuring it fit the vision developed in the re-envisioning sessions. With the first Industry Club well underway, 2021 brought the addition of new Industry Clubs. In the year that followed, Club leadership determined that for young people to get the most out of the **experience** of the Industry Club, the Club had to be more intentional about creating a pipeline of support that started with **exposure** in elementary school

and then **exploration** in middle school so in 2022 it solidified its 3 E's pipeline model. 2023 brought conversations about strategic growth, applying a rubric the Club developed to help identify industries to invite to participate in the Industry Clubs initiative. See Figure 4 for more details.

Figure 4: *Timeline*



Contextual Factors

Developing Industry Clubs has not been without its challenges and there have been some key contextual factors that have both enhanced, and inhibited progress.

A key factor in implementing Industry Clubs is **safe and sufficient transportation** for Club members. Even though BGCSM purchased three vans to transport Club members from school to the Club, there is still the challenge of getting them home. They often have to use their Industry Club wages for Uber or Lyft or walk upwards of an hour and this is a deterrent from participation. In response to these challenges, BGCSM has continued to invest in purchasing additional vehicles (6 total) to support the growing need for transportation.

Remaining competitive in wages with other employers such as Target and McDonalds creates competition for youth. Some Industry Club participants don't see the tangible skills they are learning and if they can make more money to contribute to their families, it is hard to convince them of the long-term gains when they need short term cash. To address this challenge, BGCSM has increased its hourly wage to \$15 as of January 2024, but that still falls short of what youth can earn in service jobs. As Club

leadership noted: *“If you can go to Target for 18, if you can start at Wendy's at 16, we're still going to be behind that.”*

Space is an important factor in successful implementation of Industry Clubs. When it first implemented Industry Clubs, all of them were run out of the same Club. This centralized the management of the Industry Clubs. But having maxed out that Club site



at six Industry Clubs, it is now scaling the approach to other Clubs sites that aren't historically set to house workforce programming for older youth. This means that they are trying to figure out how to have the equipment needed for an Industry Club (for example sewing machines for Fashion industry Club) accessible but not in the same space as the younger Club members. Space can be a factor in deciding if you can take on a specific kind of Industry Club. For example, as Shawn Wilson reflected:

“When you start an industry club you need to ask ‘do we have the capacity within our clubs to transform space to be

relevant to that industry?’ We just had to say ‘no’ to a medical industry club because we would have had to equip a room with nursing beds and things of that nature and we just don't have the space to take that on.”

Youth recruitment and retention is a multifaceted challenge. As noted, some youth can't attend because of transportation, and others choose higher-wage jobs.

Additionally, Industry Clubs are competing with extracurricular activities as well as “down-time.” Industry Clubs require a commitment to regularly scheduled time over the course of 12 weeks.

After a full day of school some youth just don't want to take on that level of commitment. On the flip side, some Industry Club members say that there isn't sufficient time to really master some of the key skills being taught.



Given that the Club works to alleviate poverty and improve economic mobility, the youth they engage with are living with the chronic stress of income inequities. The **mental health challenges** associated with chronic stress can be a barrier for young people to fully engage in and commit to Industry Clubs. To address this challenge, BGCSM launched its mental health initiative in 2021 as one of its foundational pillars of support to Club members. In partnership with local universities, the Club is now a training site for psychology doctoral students and offers individual therapy, group therapy, workshops, and parent coaching.

Convincing funders to invest in Industry Clubs requires an appreciation for the depth of our work with Club members, not the breadth. Helping youth develop very concrete skills necessitates more intensive focus on fewer Club members. Oftentimes funders want to see numbers served, not depth of service. One aspect of convincing funders is getting them to make a multi-year commitment which enables an Industry Club to launch and take hold. *“Funders come in and see what we were doing in fashion and say, ‘oh, I would love to do this in risk management. I would love to do this in sports.’ And as long as they can provide three years of funding, that’s okay because it allows us to launch an industry club...and protect against starting an industry club and in year two, having to postpone it because the funding’s not there.”* (Shawn Wilson)



Embarking on Industry Clubs necessitates several **cost considerations**. As noted above, Industry partners are paid anywhere from \$70-80 per hour and youth are paid about \$15 per hour. Additionally, it is essential that the Club space is configured in a way that is conducive to supporting the Industry Club. This may mean reconfiguring, or building new space and investing in the equipment needed for the Industry. Finally, as also described, transportation is a necessary cost to maximize youth participation.

⚡ **Lessons Learned Along the Way** ⚡

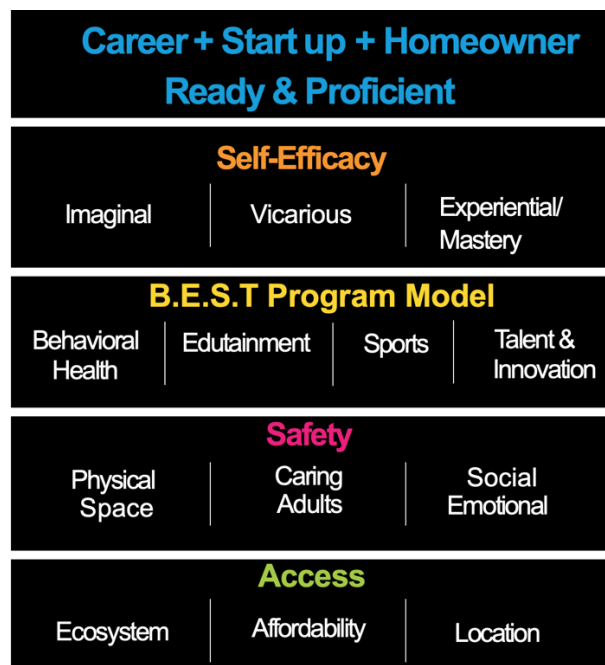
The evolution of the Industry Clubs at the BGCSM points to some lessons for other youth-serving organizations who want to adopt or adapt this approach to supporting economic mobility.

Industry Clubs need to support the overall mission of your Club. For BGCSM, Industry Clubs were a natural evolution of their commitment to helping move young people out of poverty by helping them be career, start-up, and homeowner ready. As one Board Member commented, *“If you were just to take this industry club approach and say, ‘Okay, all other clubs need to be able to do it,’ if it doesn’t completely align with your mission, it won’t work.”* And to further make this point, Shawn Wilson advises: *“Don’t get into it unless you see it as a core part of what you’re doing that truly ties back to your mission. You’re better off focusing on what you think is a part of your mission and what you can do better than anybody else. For example, we don’t talk a lot about education. Is it because we don’t care about education? Absolutely not, we view education as an important step towards economic mobility but it’s not **our** end all...remember that ‘Resources follow vision, vision does not follow resources’.”* Taking

stock of the assets you have, including your physical space, your staff, the talent in your community, and the young people themselves, helps determine whether and how an Industry Club approach is right for your organization.

Before embarking on any additional programming approach, it is essential that your organization has all the foundational elements of a quality youth development program in place. This includes everything from well-maintained physical spaces, to an environment filled with safety and belonging, with well-trained staff, ongoing professional development, and a robust system for getting and using information for continuous improvement and accountability. For BGCSM the foundation begins with access (affordability, proximity/transportation, inclusivity); then safety (social/emotional support, caring adults, meals); next is the BEST Program model (Behavioral health, Edutainment, Sports, Talent and innovation), which leads to self-efficacy (imaginal, vicarious, experiential/mastery). And when these foundational pieces are in place, they lead to being career, start-up and homeowner ready and proficient (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: *The BGCSM Approach*



Know your landscape to understand what is already being offered to young people in your community so you are not creating competition. Many high schools have vocational-technical programming, and many cities have summer youth employment programs. Mapping out what kinds of support and services are already available, and how you can create new options for workforce exploration and experiences expands options for youth and potentially decreases competition for funding those options. Knowing your landscape also involves knowing what the main industries in your

community are so that you can use Industry Clubs as a pipeline to create career pathways that help youth enter well-paying jobs in their communities. *“Some of the vocational tracks such as the building trades, plumbers, and electricians are tracks that are already embedded into high school curriculum across the state so kids can get a taste of those tracks early on. But the two biggest workforce shortages in Michigan right now are mobility and health care and there really isn’t access to those tracks through high school. So, our Industry Clubs could create those tracks.”* (Board Member)



Brand Industry Clubs to appeal to youth. Oftentimes “Boys & Girls Clubs” is associated with younger children but teen programming needs its own identity to appeal to older youth. BGCSM is in the process of trademarking “Industry Clubs” as its own brand of teen programming. While still under the umbrella of BGCSM, teens apply to the Industry Club separate from being a Club member, allowing them to feel like they are applying to something that is for their own age, which, in turn, bolsters recruitment.

Establish a pipeline of support starting in elementary school so that youth are ready to interview and apply for Industry Clubs when they become ninth-graders. BGCSM strives to build self-efficacy among its Club members using the three E’s: Exposure, Exploration, and Experience. Starting as early as age 6, youth are exposed to various career possibilities to help them identify their passions. They are offered opportunities to explore different options through hand-on experience so that by the time they are eligible to apply for an Industry Club, they have identified their talents and interests and they know to apply to the Club that best matches their career path. The Club also provides the scaffolding for them to learn about resume writing and interview skills so they are prepared not only for the Industry Club application process but for post-secondary education and other workforce opportunities.

“Industry Clubs didn’t stop the work that we also do with the six- to 12-year-old age group. What it has done though, is inform the type of programs we need to do with that age group to create a pipeline for those youth to enter into Industry Clubs...and that’s how the Three E’s were built. We built the ship backwards,

we started with Industry Clubs’ workforce model, and then said, “What else do we need to do ahead of that to create a full strategy and a full pipeline into it?” (Alise Dixon)



Industry Clubs can’t be mandated from the top-down. They need to have buy-in from the entire organization. Alise Dixon reflected: *“This is not something that if you are a program director, club director, you can lead on your own, it took Board buy-in for CEO’s vision—when you start talking about paying young people to engage in something*

and paying program partners to deliver programming it isn't an easy flip. Typically this is not a path that Boys & Girls Clubs have gone down. We typically leverage Scouts or a local Zoo that come in and do things for free or very little cost. Industry Clubs are different. And so to take a leap like this, you have to have your board support, you have to have your executive team support, and then you have to do it."



It isn't enough to hire staff with strong program delivery skills. **It is essential to hire staff with strong coordination and program management skills.**

"Bringing in somebody who knows how to run a Boys & Girls Club is very different from project management."

(Board Member) Each Industry Club is essentially its own project to manage: they each have their own staff, hours, goals, participants, and intended outcomes. Expansion to more Industry Clubs in more Club locations has necessitated a full-time position dedicated to Industry Club project management.

Create a playbook to guide the roll-out and scale of Industry Clubs. As mentioned previously, BGCSM created a rubric to vet industry partners as well as to set milestones for becoming an industry partner. It also has a common application that youth need to fill out. Partners stressed the importance of putting all these materials together in a Playbook to ensure that youth and partners alike have consistent expectations and experiences across the various Industry Clubs. As one Board member noted: *"We need to create a playbook that other Clubs can take and still is customizable, but lays out the elements that need to be in place. They can take that model and they can create their own Industry Clubs from that, but you need a common starting point that lays out: partner expectations and commitments, youth expectations and commitments, sample curriculum, learning goals, a budget for the revenue it will take to engage the target number of youth, and demonstration of a three-year funding commitment."* Part of scaling Industry Clubs is engaging in continuous quality improvement to understand from youth and program partners whether or not a partner is a good "fit" and developing criteria for partner renewals.



⚡ Data for the Case Study ⚡

Data for this case study was collected using group and one-on-one interviews with Club stakeholders, observations of Industry Clubs, and analysis of BGCSM documentation. In the fall of 2023, the team conducted virtual interviews with 13 adult stakeholders (e.g., Club leadership, staff, board members, Industry Club leaders, funders) and a two-

day site visit to the Industry Clubs. During this site visit, we observed four Industry Clubs in action, spoke with 8 participating youth in 3 focus group conversations, and spoke with 3 parents/guardians in a focus group conversation. All data conversations were recorded, anonymized, and transcribed for analysis. Member checking was completed with BGCSM leadership to ensure trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn in this case study report.



Industry Clubs: A Response to Community Poverty

A Case Study of the
Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN



SCHOOL of EDUCATION
and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
YOUTH-NEX