

Unmet Need for Summer Programming in Boston: Report of Findings from 2008 Web Survey

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Background

The Associated Grant Makers Summer Fund leverages resources to support quality summer camps and programs for urban youth. The Summer Fund provides operational support grants to nonprofit organizations to provide a variety of summer program opportunities to serve the needs of low-to-moderate income urban youth in Boston, Chelsea, Cambridge and Somerville. In July of 2008, as part of their ongoing fundraising efforts, management at the Summer Fund sought to document unmet need and service gaps. The goal was to paint as accurate a picture as possible about the number of children and youth who seek out summer programming but are turned away due to a lack of funding for slots. In order to obtain real data about the current level of unmet need, Boston After School & Beyond proposed conducting a brief web survey of providers of summer programs in Boston.

Currently the most comprehensive listing of summer and other out-of-school time (OST) programming in Boston is through the BOSTONavigator website and database (www.BOSTONavigator.org). The Navigator project was created through the collaborative efforts of the City of Boston, BOSTnet, and Boston After School & Beyond. Through ongoing outreach to OST providers, the goal of this project is to provide a searchable online guide to all supervised programming opportunities for Boston's 5 to 18 year old population. In July of 2008, over 600 organizations provided information on more than 1300 OST opportunities (during both the school year and summer) for Boston's children and youth through the BOSTONavigator website. Because contact information is collected for each organization, the Navigator database could serve as a source for a web survey of OST providers.

Survey Population

The population for this study was defined as every organization that included a listing for at least one summer program in the BOSTONavigator database as of 21-July-2008. A total of 314 organizations met these criteria. Valid email addresses could not be obtained for 37 of these

organizations (12% of the population). As a result, 277 organizations were contacted by email to participate in the web survey.

Organizations may run several summer programs concurrently. While the majority of organizations in the Navigator database provide information for a single summer program, 26% of the organizations reported information for 2 or more concurrent summer programs. Regardless of the number of programs listed, each organization was contacted only once (in accordance with the schedule described in "Data Collection" below). The names of each summer program associated with the organization in BOSTONavigator were listed in the email invitations to inform potential respondents that their answers should encompass information from all applicable programs.

Questionnaire

A 5-item survey was developed for web-based administration. The questionnaire asked about the approximate number of youth served during the summer, the number of youth who were put on wait lists due to lack of slots, the number of youth turned away due to lack of slots, and the percentage of wait-listed youth who would ultimately be able to participate in programming. Respondents were asked to give their best estimates and all response options were presented as ranges rather than exact numbers to minimize respondent burden.

Data Collection

An advance email notification was sent from the AGM Summer Fund manager to all potential respondents to inform them of the purpose of the upcoming research and to let them know that a survey invitation would be sent within the next week. Five days later, a personalized email was sent to each provider with a direct link to the online survey. Seven days later, a reminder invitation was sent to everyone who had not yet responded. Responses were collected between 18-August-2008 and 3-October-2008.

Results

Table 1 presents an overview of the number of completed surveys as well as the response rate and cooperation rate for this study. Both rates were computed in compliance with the standard definitions for best practices outlined by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). The response rate for this study is 34%, as calculated using AAPOR’s formula RR2 and is the more conservative of the two rates. The cooperation rate is 39% and was calculated using AAPOR’s CR2 formula.

Table 1. Completed Surveys, Response Rate, Cooperation Rate

Number of Eligible Organizations	314
Number of Invalid Email Addresses	37
Number of Organizations Contacted	277
Number of Completed Surveys ¹	107
Response Rate ²	34%
Cooperation Rate ³	39%

¹Includes 10 surveys with missing data for 1 question and 1 survey with missing data for 2 questions

²Number of completed surveys divided by the number of eligible organizations

³Number of completed surveys divided by the number of organizations that were contacted

Tables 2 through 6 present the distribution of responses to each of the main survey questions. When interpreting these results to assess the level of unmet need for summer programming in Boston, it is worth noting that:

- 76% of the organizations surveyed did not have the capacity to serve every youth that sought summer programming in 2008. These organizations were forced to either turn youth away, put them on wait lists, or both.
- 60% of all organizations surveyed reported that they turned youth away (rather than putting them on wait lists) during the summer of 2008. Additionally, 40% of the organizations that did not turn anyone away had to put youth on wait lists.
- Of the organizations that keep wait lists for summer programs, 93% reported that they had to put youth on these wait lists in the summer of 2008.
- Over two-thirds (68%) of organizations that wait-listed youth said that fewer than a quarter of those youth were ultimately served; 85% of organizations surveyed reported that no more than half of their wait-listed youth were ultimately served in the summer of 2008.

Conclusions

Over 100 organizations that provided summer programs for Boston’s youth in 2008 participated in this study. The population surveyed was restricted to organizations listed on the BOSTONavigator website. Although it is impossible to know how many summer programs providers were not contacted for this study, the fact that over 600 organizations are listed in the Navigator is an indication that a relatively representative cross-section of the OST provider community was eligible for participation.

There is a clear pattern in the responses of those surveyed regarding unmet need for summer programming for Boston’s youth. The vast majority of participating organizations (76%) reported that they did not have enough available slots to serve every youth who sought programming in the summer of 2008. Youth were put on waiting lists at 93% of the organizations that keep such lists, and 60% of all organizations reported that they had to turn youth away. While further research would be necessary to obtain more detailed results, this study provides a snapshot of the experiences of Boston’s youth-serving programs in the summer of 2008.

Table 2. Youth Served in Summer 2008

	n	%
1 to 20	10	9
21 to 40	16	15
41 to 60	10	9
61 to 100	15	14
101 to 200	18	17
201 or more	37	35
Total	107	100%

Table 3. Youth Turned Away from Programs (Not Wait-Listed) in Summer 2008

	n	%
None	42	40
1 to 10	31	30
11 to 30	11	10
31 to 50	12	11
51 or more	9	9
Total	105	100%

Table 4. Youth Wait-Listed in Summer 2008*

	n	%
None	6	7
1 to 10	26	33
11 to 20	15	19
21 to 30	13	16
31 to 50	12	15
51 or more	8	10
Total	80	100%

Table 5. Wait-Listed Youth Ultimately Served in Summer 2008

	n	%
About 25% or fewer	50	68
More than 25%, less than 50%	6	8
About 50%	6	8
More than 50%, less than 75%	1	1
About 75% or more	10	14
Total	73	100%

* In a separate screening question, 27 organizations indicated that they do not maintain wait lists and were not asked the follow-up question regarding the number of youth placed on wait lists.

Table 6. Number of Youth Wait-Listed By Number of Youth Turned Away in Summer 2008

		Number of Youth Turned Away						Total
		None	1 to 10	11 to 20	21 to 30	31 to 50	51 or more	
Number of Youth Wait-Listed	None	25	4	–	1	1	2	33
	1 to 10	8	17	–	–	–	–	25
	11 to 20	1	5	4	1	3	1	15
	21 to 30	3	1	3	2	3	1	13
	31 to 50	3	3	–	–	3	3	12
	51 or more	2	1	–	–	2	2	7
Total		42	31	7	4	12	9	105