

THE POP UP PRIMER

Lived Lessons + Next Steps

In summer 2012, Boston Children’s Museum partnered with the [Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative](#) and the [Food Project](#) to create a temporary play space at Dudley Town Common, a 3200 sq ft, triangular shaped park at the five-way intersection of Blue Hill Ave, Magazine St, Mt Pleasant St., Hampden St. and Dudley St in Roxbury. This document pairs “plusses” of Pop Up Children’s Museum days with “deltas”: room for growth. Every “pop up” operation outside a group’s homebase is an opportunity for [placemaking](#) and communication of mission. Thoughtful planning can amplify success.

IN SUMMARY, A SUCCESSFUL POP UP EXPERIENCE INCLUDES:

<i>A partner with a past & future with you</i>	<i>A location with high foot/car/bus visibility</i>
<i>Young people as paid staff</i>	<i>Content that fits a community need/want</i>
<i>Complementary services in the Pop Up space</i>	<i>Opportunities that appeal to not just kids</i>

WHO’S ON THE BUS? (THE PLAYERS)

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Our mission matched our long-term partners’.

Boston Children’s Museum has a nearly two decade relationship with DSNI and the Food Project. If the Pop Up failed gloriously, all partners could have faith that partnership would continue, all the better for the lessons learned. Partnership--whether institution--to-institution, institution-to-users or (ideally) both-- betters a Pop Up. Here, all three organizations shared values of youth-led intervention and placemaking; DSNI’s Dudley Children Thrive intends to a) Build capacity among local organizations, merchants, service providers, and others to provide high quality programs, resources and information, and b) Build capacity among families to be primary educators and advocates for quality childcare: a good fit.

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Pre-partner before you Pop Up

You don’t need to know your partners for twenty years, but if possible, do smaller scale activities together leading to the Pop Up. Host an activity table at your partner’s event. Get to know the feel of the spaces your partner wants to create. If possible, invite your partner to host a table/activity at your place. Pop Up planning benefits from examples drawn from experience.

WHO'S ON THE BUS? (THE PLAYERS)

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Youth leaders made the difference.

BNY Mellon CityACCESS Teen Ambassadors work year-round at the Museum, and helped shape the content and types of activities. DSNI teens joined the process in the early summer. They shared skills with each other and helped lead planning sessions. Teens mentored younger kids from their own neighborhood, creating a powerful links.

The whole Museum family got involved.

The Museum president asked senior leadership to visit the Pop Up. They did so, and brought popsicles for the teen staff. The Education team lent ideas and their presence to Pop Up days. The result was a sense that the Pop Up was a crucial part of the workings of the Museum proper.

We set expectations, then experimented.

The Pop Up didn't start off as a Pop Up; initially, the Museum had suggested creating an alternative reality game to support WordBuild, DSNI's early literacy initiative. Families would hunt for words hidden on signs, stores and other public spaces on Dudley St.: a game somewhere between *Dora the Explorer* and *Carmen Sandiego*. But when we noticed DTC's potential, we brought in the Food Project and began planning to create a platform for engagement that *could* ultimately include an ARG, but was not limited to one. We could switch gears like this because DSNI/Museum staff had discussed mutual expectations that our partnership would produce a fun, unusual mechanism that would get parents and kids talking. DSNI trusted the Museum to produce.

If you can, pay youth as part of your Pop Up.

If you want to think outside the box-- and Pop Up projects certainly are "outside the box"-- then include young people as activity developers and deliverers to bring fresh perspective. Importantly, in a Pop Up in a community setting, neighbors get to see teens doing good work; instead of "hanging around on the corner," they are talking to toddlers and turning rope.

Encourage an inter-departmental approach.

The Pop Up is an unusual and often unexpected demonstration of your group's mission and values. Offsite, it can also be "out of sight, out of mind." Creatively involve staff members not directly related to the team, and work with them to create meaningful ways to interact with the project.

Be open to mechanisms other than a Pop Up.

Even a very basic Pop Up installation can be time and resource costly. The Museum's eight-week Pop Up cost about \$2800. When times are financially lean, drawing staff away from (what is perceived as) the core operations of a group may draw criticism. That's good practice-- look critically at these choices! The Museum calculated that the potential benefits of this experiment outweighed the cost, in part because A. We saw the benefit of talking with families in their own neighborhoods and B. DSNI was doing good work and had already networked families, who could then attend the Pop Up. Think about your motivations. Could you do this through one event? Are there other ways of accomplishing your goals? Is anybody in the community in which you wish to work already doing this work?

WHAT'S YOUR POP UP'S BUSINESS? (CONTENT)

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The content fit a voiced community need.

Youth and adult staff created activities based on two content areas: early literacy, with a focus on scaffolded introduction of advanced vocabulary, and health and wellness, with a focus on physical activity and eating five fruits and vegetables a day.

Elders lingered near the bus stop.

Near the end of the Pop Up run, we noticed elders hanging out at benches. Could chess boards or domino tables encouraged elders to play? Could we have presented mancala/oril boards and connected with elder groups from the predominately Cape Verdean parish of St. Patrick's, across the street?

We developed activities week by week.

BCM Teen Ambassadors, trained in family engagement, and DSNI youth, from the neighborhood and skilled in community organizing, designed each week responsively. They rapidly prototyped activities that combined A. Vocabulary-building/"juicy words" and health and wellness; B. Observations of public use of the Common, and C. Family interest. When a child was curious about rollercoasters, the youth transformed railings into a mini-marble racetrack. When families worried about missing the bus, youth brought giant Connect Four to the stop.

Start with something that matters.

Children's museums often struggle with their reputation as "something to do on a rainy day." A Pop Up showcases your core mission publicly. Rally the community around an issue. Bring people together around literacy, and then be intentional about the fun you initiate.

Consider intergenerational aspects/amenities.

Connecting elders with families can be a key component of community building/reinforcing. If you're a children's museum considering a Pop Up, consider creating playful opportunities for older adults without kids or grandkids-- or employ elders as volunteers.

Be responsive.

A Pop Up matches your institution's mission with the unique character of a neighborhood. Some level of improv is required in any experience outside the regularity of your homebase. This can be a precious opportunity to do research and development for "in house" activities. Bring a set of solid favorites-- we used jumprope and fort building-- to rely on if new ideas falter. And let users know you're experimenting. We found that users were excited to prototype something new that might get taken back to the Museum, and it shows that your institution is open to user input.

MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF SOMETHING (SPACE & LOCATION)

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Dudley Town Common is highly trafficked.

We didn't know this when we started out, but 2700 people used the busses that picked up at DTC between 3 and 6pm. At least 2300 cars drove through the intersection. Overall, approximately 5000 people saw the Pop Up each day of its installation, 100 times the number of people who participated in actual programs.

We knew how many kids lived there.

Through DSNi's statistics, we knew that families with children under 18 years represent almost half of Dudley neighborhood households, which is twice as large a share as in Boston citywide. One of two children in the area lives below the poverty line. Dudley Children Thrive aims to connect with a high percentage of the neighborhood's children under five, and in summer 2013 had enrolled about 100 families. We could adjust our expectations realistically; ultimately, though our Pop Up numbers in average might seem low, we engaged about 30% of that target group at least once through our activities.

Food Project + two bus stops anchor space.

The triangular DTC is a tricky spot. Just waiting for the walk signal from either Dudley St or Blue Hill Ave can take five minutes. You need a reason to go there. Thankfully, the site had two complementary draws: one, bus stops on either side of the triangle, and two, the Food Project farmer's market.

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Use data to select sites (and carry a big sign).

Actual attendance at a Pop Up site may be low. For the 2013 Pop Up, an average of 19 people participated each day. However, the specific promotion afforded by a Pop Up may outweigh more traditional marketing. A Pop Up *shows, not tells* what you do. Hundreds of people might drive by a billboard, but when they drive by a museum doing the work of that museum, it demonstrates commitment to both mission and neighborhood: a win-win. Make sure your signs are prominent and that staff wear recognizable uniforms. You never know who is watching.

[MassDOT traffic counts](#)

[MBTA Ridership and Usage Statistics](#)

Use data to set expectations.

First, narrow your target audience (our target was families with at least one child under five). Final evaluation metrics need a baseline, even if your audience base expands. For instance, we began to think about how we might include elders, but it was still in reference to our target audience and the benefits for that audience. Finally, choose three or four quantitative outcomes in addition to more qualitative outcomes. We hoped to increase Museum attendance from zip code 02125 (and it did by 15%). We also hoped to evaluate and promote a new EBT discount and see its impact on this zip code (20% of discount users came from 02125 in 2013).

Survey the basic needs met in the space.

If you weren't there, why would people go here? If the space meets no needs, critically consider whether your services make your site a destination. People drive miles to a vacant lot to buy M& M food truck's ribs and banana pudding. Is your "banana pudding" good enough?



MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF SOMETHING (SPACE & LOCATION)

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We learned about area activities from users.

We actively observed and questioned where people came from. Kids often walked to DTC from the pool 4 blocks away. They came after a summer camp at St Patrick's Church. Learning about what people did before they came helped us better promote the Pop Up.

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Survey parks nearby + keep track of leisure.

Ask about and keep a list of other ways people are spending their time in the neighborhood. Understand what parks and public spaces are nearby. This data fuels an expansion, transfer, or other opportunities for the Pop Up.

[City of Boston Roxbury park survey](#)

MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF SOMETHING (SPACE & LOCATION)

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We inhabited a place with promise/investment.

Dudley Town Common was created in 1988 as a “beautiful gateway to Dudley’s planned urban village.”* Its creation was a milestone in DSNI’s plan to transform vacant lots into viable spaces. The Food Project anchored the space every Tuesday and Thursday, but the park was largely unused by community members on a regular basis.

The space made sense for us.

The Museum’s Design facilities were four blocks from DTC. Four staff members lived within two miles. In addition to our partners’ continued work in the community, the Museum had roots there.

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Pop Up in a place that may continue to grow.

Choose a place that has potential after your Pop Up packs up. One of the worst outcomes of a community project can be a sense of abandonment among community members. Having a Pop Up in the summer left some expectations; though we wouldn’t be there in the winter, we planned to support DSNI in its tree lighting and other winter activities at DTC.

Think about the personal in the professional.

Who or what is your local connection to the place? Who on your staff can invite her neighbors to the event, connecting institution + neighborhood in a very personal way?

2012 POP UP CHILDREN’S MUSEUM PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

Denise Gonsalves
Ayesha Rodriguez
Ros Everdell
Emmanuel Miranda
Jaimorry Carter
Shavone Schofield
Emily Soto
Isaiah Wilkerson
Ronaldo Andrade
Luis Santana
Anthony Goncalves

The Food Project

Jess Liborio

Boston Children’s Museum

Jonise Brevil
Kimberly Volquez Diaz
Megan Dickerson
Kit Ha Un
Patrick Melo Modesto
Tayquan Pomare-Taylor
Leora Viega Rifkin
Tairy Villar
Carole Charnow
Linda Markarian
Leslie Swartz
Jeri Robinson
Alice Vogler
Lucia Flores

FOR MORE ON THE 2012 POP UP CHILDREN’S MUSEUM, VISIT:

www.popupchildrensmuseum.wordpress.com

OR CONTACT MEGAN DICKERSON, SENIOR MANAGER OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:

dickerson@bostonchildrensmuseum.org or 617-426-6500 x311