

# PropelNext In Action

## *UTEC Improvements Set the Stage for a Major Grant*

When Gregg Croteau began his career as a youth worker on the streets of Revere and Boston, he saw firsthand that he could change the trajectories of disadvantaged young people. So when he had the opportunity to interview for a position as the first executive director of UTEC, a youth development organization in Lowell, MA, he grabbed it—and was hired by the teens who founded the organization.

Seventeen years later, Croteau has built UTEC from a local teen center into a nationally recognized agency. UTEC's mission and promise

is to ignite and nurture the ambition of proven-risk youth to trade violence and poverty for social and economic success. Its model begins with intensive street outreach and gang peacemaking.

***“Our goal isn’t to collect data.  
It’s to become better.”***

***- Gregg Croteau  
Executive Director,  
UTEC, Inc.***

Young people who want to take the next step are paired with a Transitional Coach who guides them to achieve their academic and career goals.



**propelnext**

an initiative of the  
Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

Youth can earn their GEDs and participate in employment and job training through UTEC's social enterprises, which include food services, mattress recycling and woodworking. Values of social justice and civic engagement are embedded in all programming.

UTEC had a solid track record and the satisfaction that comes from making a difference in young lives, but that wasn't enough. When UTEC was invited to apply for *PropelNext*, Croteau saw an opportunity to strengthen UTEC's impact through smarter use of data. "Our goal isn't to collect data. It's to become better," says Croteau.

The process was more complex than it appeared. Once the staff bought in to the process, their excitement threatened to overwhelm it. They identified so many metrics to track that it was impossible to analyze and learn from them all. With support from the *PropelNext* team, UTEC staff became more intentional, identifying the specific areas they wanted to track in order to improve programs.

Today UTEC is using data judiciously to inform and improve its programs. When the data showed that students who receive case management services along with a GED program have better outcomes than students who receive a stand-alone GED program, the agency decided to cancel the stand-alone GED program and invest more resources in programs that deliver stronger outcomes for young people.

The *PropelNext* experience laid the groundwork for significant growth at UTEC. In 2016 UTEC applied for and won a multi-year

Social Innovation Fund grant from REDF, the nation's largest funder of social enterprise. UTEC's documented performance outcomes were an important part of the REDF application. "Being part of *PropelNext* does allow you to propel to the next level. We had three years of intense coaching, and we had EMCF look under the hood and choose to support us. I think that gives other funders confidence," says Croteau.

## IMPACTS

LAUNCHING NEW CENTER TO  
*support childcare*  
FOR CHILDREN OF  
UTEC PARTICIPANTS

USED PERFORMANCE  
OUTCOMES TO  
HELP SECURE A  
*multi-year Social  
Innovation Fund grant*

UTEC, INC.  
National 2015 Cohort  
[utecinc.org](http://utecinc.org)