

Mapping Micro-Enterprises in Cambridge:

Opportunities for Youth Entrepreneurs

Background

I have the good fortune of working for a new youth-serving non-profit based in Cambridge, MA. This organization, The Possible Project, operates an after-school program that focuses on imparting entrepreneurial skills. Our mission is to, “inspire, empower, and educate young people through the hands-on experience of working for a business, and ultimately starting their own venture.” After conducting an environmental scan of youth programs and potential service gaps, our founders chose Cambridge. This city is most well known for its two premier universities, Harvard and MIT, and its great number of bio-technology firms.

Less discussed, is Cambridge’s great wealth and educational disparity among residents, visualized in the maps below. The Possible Project aims to reach the youth who simply because of their family’s socio-economic background face limited opportunities.

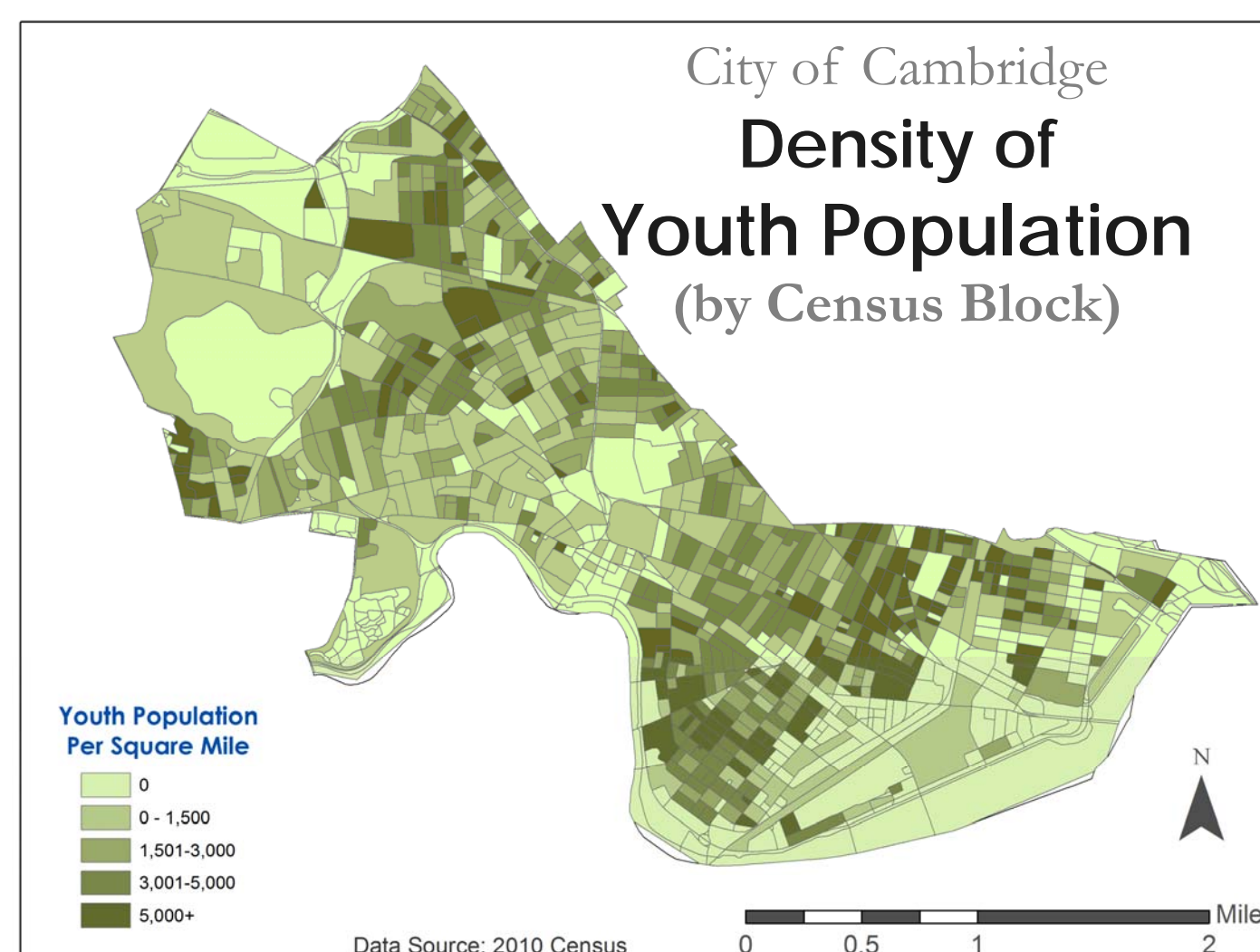
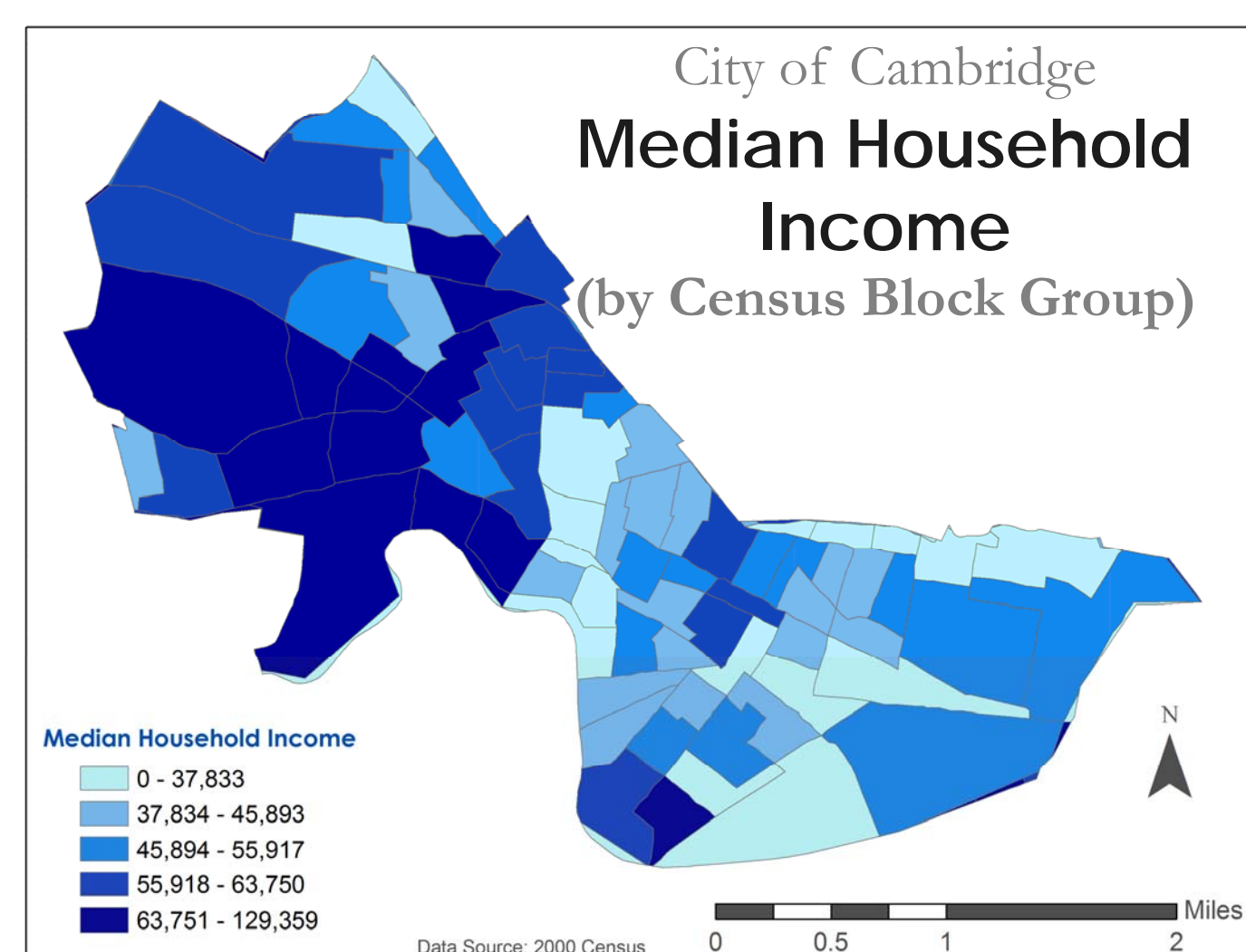
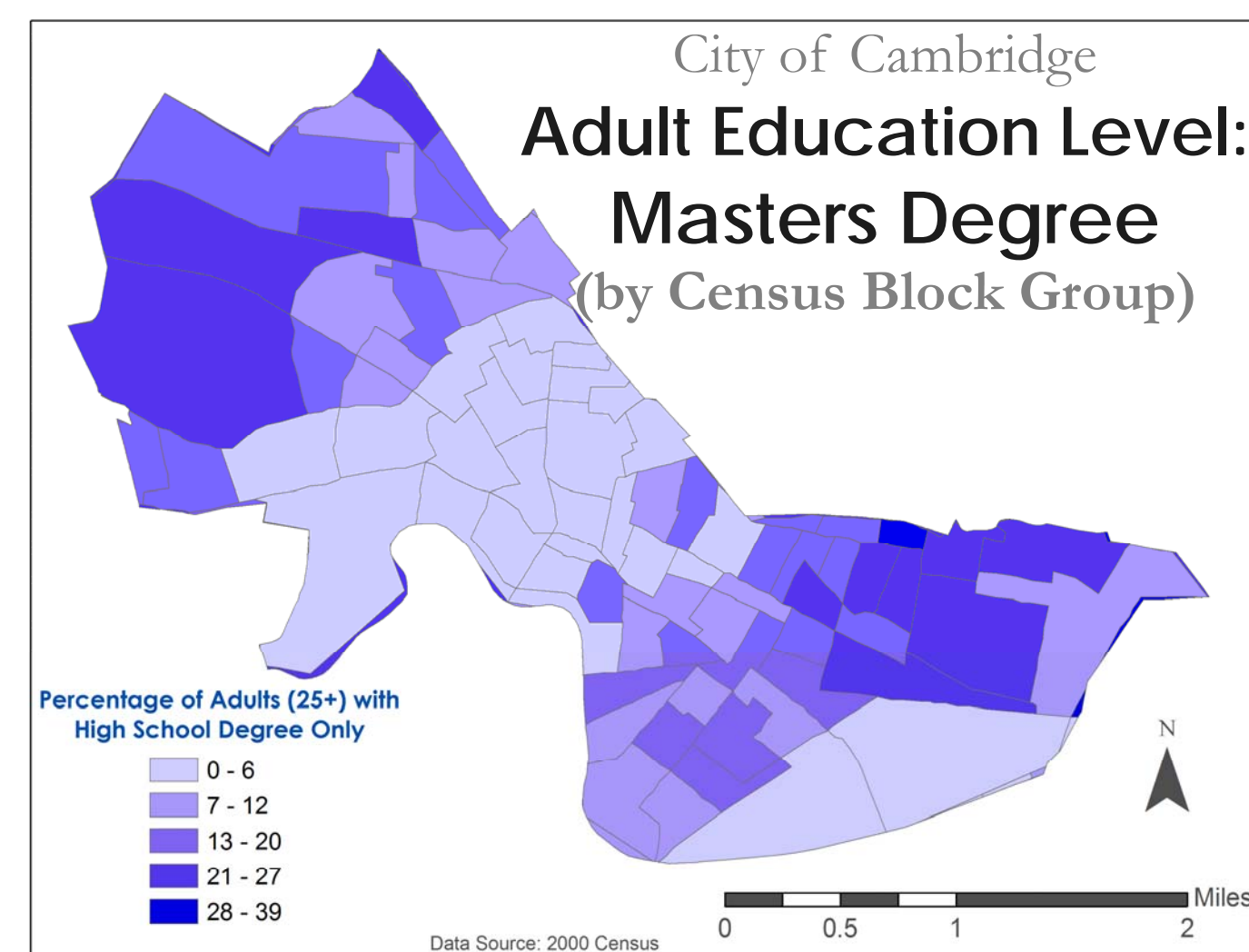
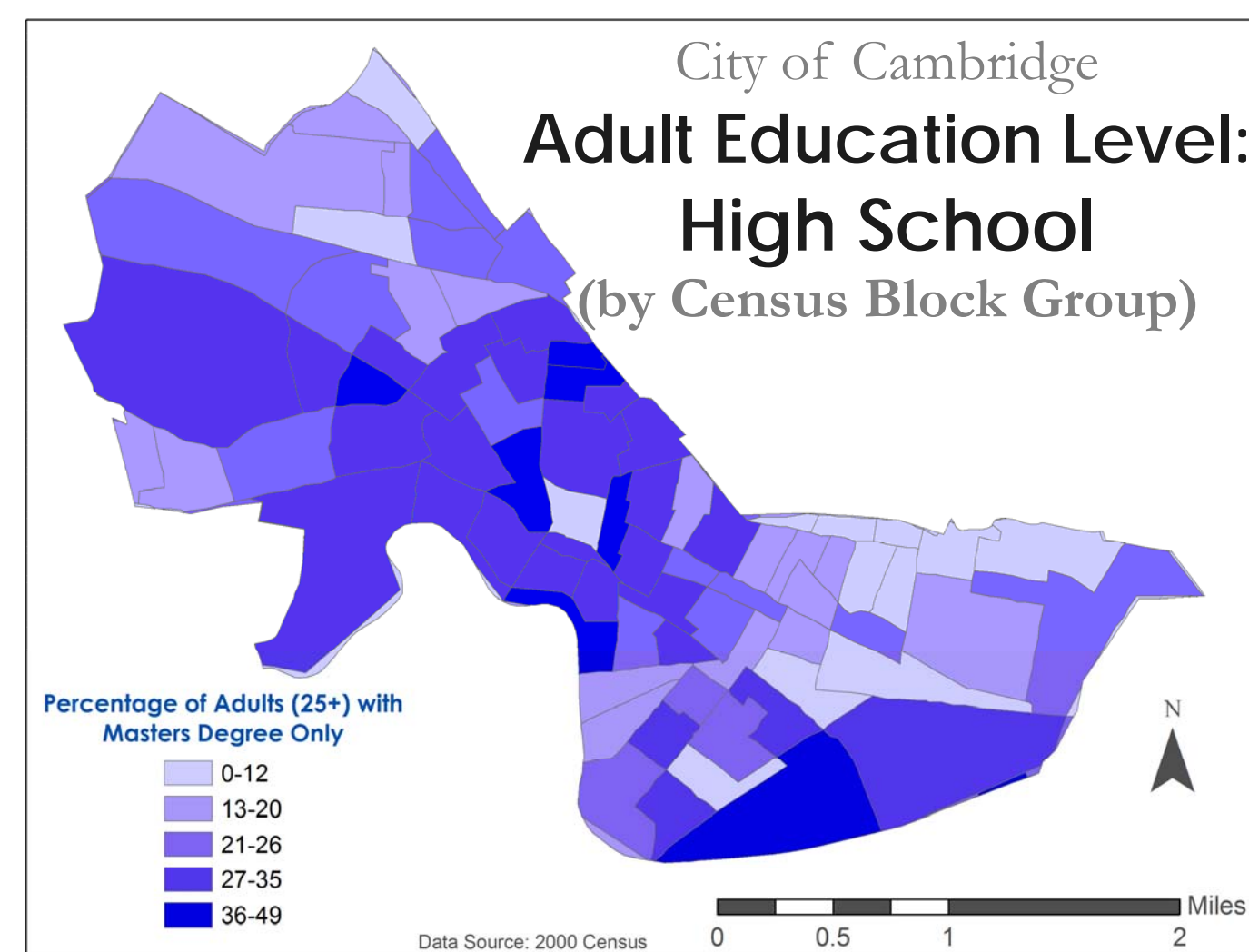
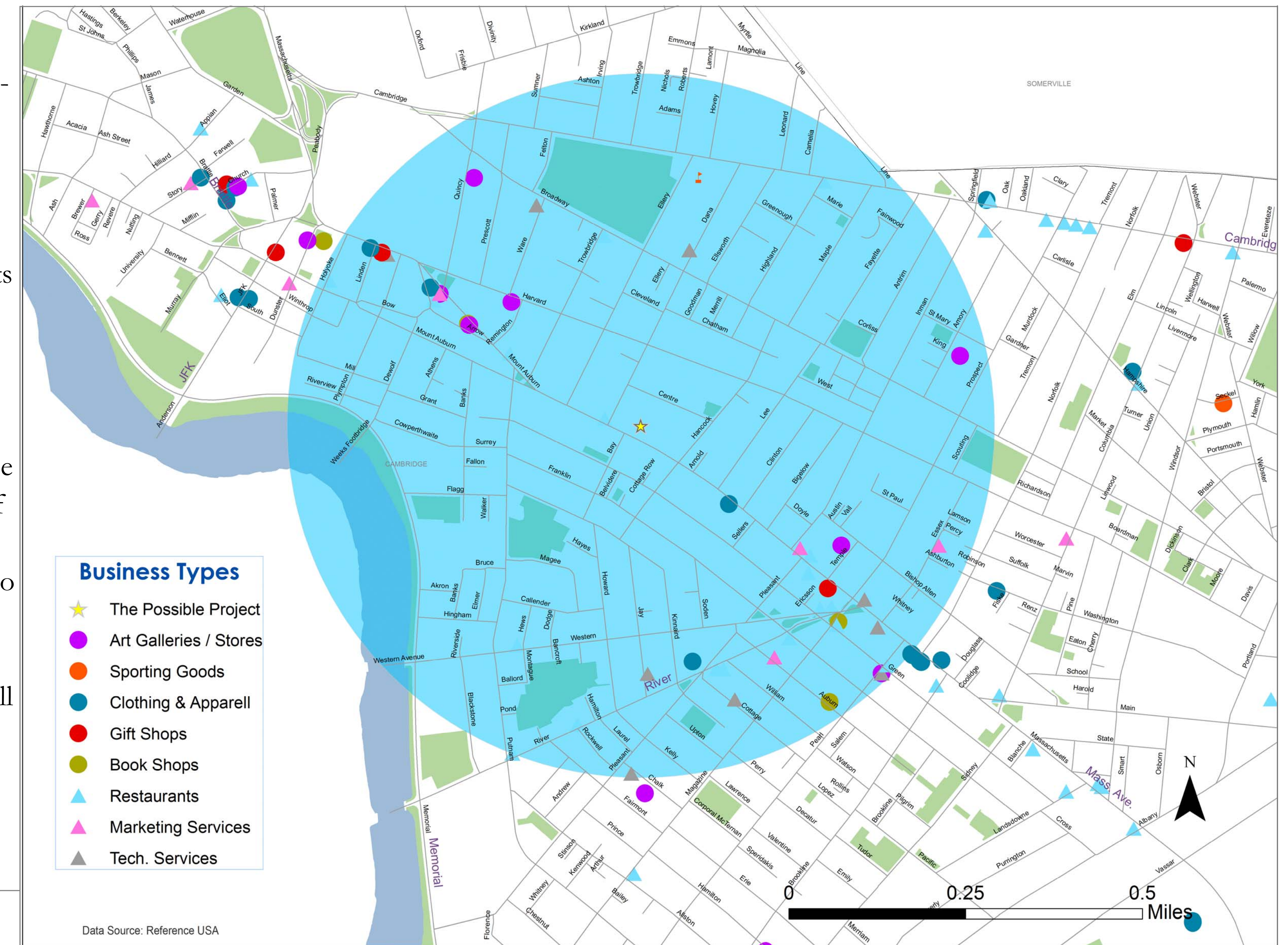
Purpose

In year two of programming, we plan to secure externships for our students at various Cambridge-based businesses, targeting microenterprises. A micro-enterprise is defined as a business with five or fewer employees. We believe

that small entrepreneurial ventures offer our students the best opportunity for meaningful work experience as they will be able to engage with all facets of the business. In this project I conducted a community inventory of microenterprises that fall into one of eight categories for which our youth have expressed an interest. Generally their interests lie in retail- and service-based businesses.

Methodology

I accessed data on microenterprises from Reference USA, which is a comprehensive online directory of businesses. From there I sorted and categorized the information and added it to my map. I chose to plot microenterprises across the entire city, as well as panning in on those that fall within a one-half mile radius of our office. The demographic data all came from the U.S. Census Bureau, specifically datasets from the 2010 census as well as the 2000 census.



Findings

Though Cambridge is known for its large bio-tech firms, this city is also home to thriving community of microenterprises. Locally-based entrepreneurs offer the best opportunity for our youth to learn the ins and outs of starting, operating, and working for a business, lessons which they will not receive simply working the register at fast-food chain restaurant. Cambridge youth are surrounded by a wealth of resources, and it is the responsibility of adults, teachers, community members, and non-profits like The Possible Project to connect young people with these vital opportunities.

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