

## FY25 AmeriCorps Impact Webinar 1

*November 19, 2024*

Katy Hussey-Sloniker:

Welcome to the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Evidence webinar series for the fiscal year 2025. This year our office will be celebrating a new generation of AmeriCorps evidence building. Today's webinar kicks off the public release of the Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement Dataset. We're glad you've joined us. My name is Katy Hussey-Sloniker, and I'm the learning officer for the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation. Next slide, please.

Every two years, AmeriCorps partners with the US Census Bureau to conduct the most robust survey about civic engagement across the United States and over time. The data takes the pulse of our nation's civic health and informs AmeriCorps volunteering and civic life and America research, a comprehensive look at how Americans make a difference in their communities and promote the common good. Our learning objectives are threefold. Celebrate the release of the current population survey, civic engagement and volunteering, supplement data, showcase top-line findings, and garner insights from leaders in the field. And reflect on the potential for use of the civic engagement and Volunteering Dataset.

Next slide, please. They were excited to have our presenters share their knowledge and expertise with this data from policymakers to scholars and practitioners to our very own AmeriCorps research team. The session will be packed that we are encouraging participants to place questions in the chat that will be compiled and answered in our Q&A discussion towards the end of the webinar. And with that, I would like to introduce Michael D. Smith, chief Executive Officer of AmeriCorps to kick off our public release celebration and webinar presentation. Michael?

Michael D. Smith:

Thank you Katy. And good afternoon everybody. It's a pleasure to join you today to help celebrate the release of AmeriCorps latest data on the status of civic engagement and volunteering in America. First, I would like to thank my colleagues Dr. Mary Hyde and Dr. Laura Schlachter and the entire team from AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation for their incredible leadership and partnership alongside the US Census Bureau to conduct another round of the nation's most robust research on civic engagement across the country and over time. Their unwavering passion and dedication to this work is an excellent example of AmeriCorps commitment to evidence-based learning and solutions. This team's efforts to bring the data forward. This data forward every two years only strengthens our national service movement while highlighting our continued progress as an agency and as a nation. I am pleased to share with you the results of the latest survey, which took the pulse of our nation's civic health for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic.

And that data shows us that volunteering is rebounding. The data tells a hopeful story about our nation. The national formal volunteering rate has increased by more than five percentage points in just two years. The largest expansion of formal volunteering ever recorded, and it truly showcases that the spirit of volunteering is on the rise in America.

After the pandemic disrupted many Americans' lives and their ability to volunteer, they are finding meaningful ways to give back. Our data from the past two years tells us that how much ... it tells us just how much volunteering is strengthening our communities. However, I want to make sure that we are not simply [inaudible 00:03:37] on the numbers of hours served to measure our progress, but also the quality of that service and the impact of volunteering. Volunteers are the lifeblood of our schools, of our

shelters, our hospitals and hotlines, of food banks, and civic nonprofit, tribal and faith-based organizations across this country.

And some people think that volunteering and community service is just a nice thing to do, but this data underscores just how powerful service can be improving the livelihoods of our fellow citizens while boosting our economy. More than 75.7 million people, or about 28.3% of Americans formally volunteered through an organization giving almost 5 billion hours of service and creating \$167.2 billion in economic value. Let me say that again. Our volunteers in America created \$167.2 billion in economic value. And lastly, this foundational research is evidence of why national service matters. AmeriCorps is a force multiplier. We bring people together from across divides, making community stronger for a more United America. For example, during their service terms. Last year, AmeriCorps members leveraged 1.9 million community volunteers to increase the impact of the organizations where they serve. So I don't want to steal too much thunder from my colleagues who are going to share more on this data in a moment, but I think it's important for us to examine what this really means to our national service movement and to our nation.

This research comes at an inflection point. It comes at an inflection point during American history. And while there is much uncertainty and there's certainly political divisions, we know that when the going gets tough, America gets tougher. Americans have always chosen to turn outward, wondering how we can help others not turning inward, wondering how we can help ourselves. And the latest data on volunteering proves it. The bird's eye view of formal volunteering, informal helping, and other metrics shows that renewed engagement in American civic life. It shows that renewed engagement American civic life and for that we should be proud and we should be optimistic. The time that I've spent crisscrossing the nation over these past few years tells me that AmeriCorps has been at the heart of volunteers coming back. These results support our agency's evidence-based decision-making and show how Americans are making a difference throughout the country every single day.

Dr. King said it best, everybody can be great because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love. Service is strengthening our communities. It's transforming lives and it's the soul of America. One full of grace and love for our fellow citizens. And it is not only propelling us forward, but it is also saving us. So as we reflect on the progress we've made to reach this milestone, I want to encourage you all to think about how we can increase our focus on impact. Rather than just counting hours of service, let us use the power of our collective action to take volunteering in America to higher heights and deeper depths. With that, let me turn it over to Dr. Mary Hyde, director of AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you Michael. And thank you for your energy and enthusiasm and kicking us off on this important conversation. Your leadership around evidence-based learning and national service solutions is both a notable and greatly appreciated by me and the Office of Research and Evaluation team. Today we are sharing findings from a survey that is a cornerstone of our national service and civic engagement research. As Michael said, this foundational research is evidence for why we would expect national service and volunteering to matter. Next slide please. Understanding the ways in which everyday Americans are engaging with each other and their communities informs how AmeriCorps can most effectively contribute to civic life in America. The survey also provides data-driven insights into who is engaged in civic life and who may be less engaged, providing critical information about who AmeriCorps might invite to participate in a national service program or a day of service.

In essence, as you can see by the visual on this screen, AmeriCorps strives to have impact on all of these areas, both in terms of our own agency, the way in which we engage participants, the way in which we engage our partner organizations, which in turn influence civic life in our communities and in society. We do this in a number of ways and today is just one way in which we contribute to this ecosystem of impact and build the evidence for our role in this space. In essence, the research we are sharing today is a critical part of the AmeriCorps ecosystem of impact. It is also the longest standing component of the agency's evidence story. We are grateful to have Dr. Pam Paxton with us today to provide additional and firsthand context for this trusted national resource. Dr. Paxton?

Pam Paxton:

Thank you so much. So people's engagement in society, their associations and networks and the characteristics of their communities profoundly affect their quality of life. Today I will briefly introduce the history of AmeriCorps sponsoring the collection of nationally representative data on these topics and stress the importance of having these data be part of the federal statistical system. So beginning in 2002, AmeriCorps entered into an agreement with the US Census Bureau to conduct a nationally representative survey about volunteerism. These questions were attached to the current population survey or CPS, which is a monthly nationally representative survey conducted by the US Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The CPS is the primary source of labor force statistics in the US, things like the unemployment rate. So you are very familiar with these data. Besides the basic questions, there are rotating supplemental questions about a variety of topics.

Different federal agencies can sponsor questions in these supplements to better understand trends relevant to their mission. By sponsoring a supplement in 2002 therefore, AmeriCorps allowed us to get official US statistical data on volunteering in the United States. And these began to be collected each September. And in 2008, AmeriCorps introduced an additional current population survey supplement fielded in November to assess other forms of civic engagement such as attending public meetings or getting together with neighbors to do something positive for the community. Shortly thereafter, AmeriCorps convened a panel of experts through the National Academy of Sciences to review the measurement of civic engagement and how to leverage the strengths of the AmeriCorps-sponsored questions to inform researchers, policymakers, and the public. One recommendation was to streamline questions and narrow the focus to behaviors. Another was to merge the volunteering supplement and the civic engagement supplement into a single survey administered every two years.

This new CPS Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement or CEV was launched in 2017. Since then, the census has fielded the CEV every other September. As a member of the National Academy's panel, it has been wonderful to see these data come to life. And I can attest to their utility as I've personally published on social capital using them. Next slide please. I also want to recognize the importance of having these data in the federal statistical system. This is the network of more than 100 US government agencies and programs that produce official statistics and data about the country's economy, people, infrastructure, and natural resources. This system has gathered data since the nation's founding. Data collected in this way are viewed as timely, relevant, trusted, and objective. They become part of official US statistics and are the most credible data source for policymaking, research, and for informing public and private decision-making.

So after a national emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, these data are playing exactly the role we need them to, providing robust, trusted data to assess impact and resilience. So again, I'm happy to have been a part of the national academy's panel that advised AmeriCorps on the collection of these data. I am delighted to have seen them in use in my own and others research over the past 20 years. And I'm excited to hear about the latest findings about volunteering and civic engagement today. So with that, I will turn it over to Dr. Laura Schlachter who will provide us with this new information.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Oh, thank you so much, Pam, for your service on the National Academy's panel that helped the CEV come to be and for sharing that important history. I love hearing your perspective. And thank you so much to everyone for joining us today. I see lots of familiar names in the chat and I'm just really grateful we have this opportunity to gather virtually, to celebrate the release of this new data and the findings. So as AmeriCorps' technical lead for the CEV, I'm really excited to share some of the top-line findings that we released today with you all now. I'll start with a bit more context about our agency's approach to this body of work and then dive into takeaways related to trends, informal volunteering, informal helping, and other key measures. Next slide please. Thank you. As Michael and Mary's remarks highlighted, civic engagement is really at the heart of AmeriCorps' mission.

Because this term has no standard definition, our team has recently spent some time thinking through and articulating how we understand civic engagement in the context of our work. Next slide, please. For us, civic engagement is the constellation of activities individuals engage in to make a difference. And this can take many forms. Some people find community in their neighborhood, others find it online. Some people formally volunteer through a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Others make a difference through informal acts of kindness like picking up groceries for a neighbor. And civic engagement is an umbrella term for all of these activities and more. Next slide, please. As Pam mentioned, since 2002, AmeriCorps has partnered with the US Census Bureau to take the pulse of our nation's civic health. Since we launched the CEV in 2017, the survey has been conducted every two years and that means 2023 marks the fourth wave of data collection for the current version of the questionnaire.

And as she mentioned, along with past AmeriCorps sponsored supplements, the CEV really produces gold standard estimates of civic participation rates. And we can generate these rates at the national level within states and in the largest 12 metro areas where it's possible to produce reliable statistics. And so the findings I'll discuss today are based on CEV data collected in September 2023. I'm very grateful to the 47,000 Americans aged 16 and up who answered questions about their civic attitudes and behavior in the past year. The survey covers the five areas you see here, engaging with organizations, neighbors, politics, friends, family, and social issues and economic institutions. And new in 2023 is a first of its kind measure of virtual volunteering that we developed in partnership with Dr. Jennifer Crittenden, who we are delighted to have with us on this webinar.

Now I'll tell you, I have spent months pouring over the new data and today we published a comprehensive report highlighting key insights in each of these five areas. Next slide please. But if you take a step back from all the details, you'll see that overall the picture emerging is one of renewed engagement in American civic life. Next slide please. So broadly, that means formal volunteering is rebounding. Several other key measures of civic engagement are also rebounding, and informal helping is climbing. And so I'll unpack each of these findings in turn. Next slide please.

First formal volunteering is rebounding. Next slide. As you can see here, the national formal volunteering rate that is the share of Americans who reported they volunteered through an organization in the past year has been relatively stable for the past two decades. Important side note, the difference between 2015 and '17 is an artifact of introducing the new CEV questionnaire in 2017. Now, the significant drop between 2019 and '21 at the height of the pandemic brought the national formal volunteering rate to a historic low. But as you can see in 2023, formal volunteering is on the upswing. The latest CEV data shows that over 28% of Americans volunteered through an organization between September 2022 and September 2023. Next slide please. So 28% of Americans works out to 75.7 million people and as Michael mentioned, collectively these formal volunteers served 4.99 billion hours and contributed over \$167.2 billion in economic value. Next slide please.

Now this jump from 23% in 2021 to 28% in 2023 represents an absolute increase, as Michael said, of five percentage points. We haven't quite closed the gap from pre-pandemic levels. The nation's formal volunteering rate remains two points lower than rates in 2019 and '17. But if you look at these same figures in terms of the pace of growth, the increase over just two years represents the fastest expansion of formal volunteering on record. Next slide please. That said, rebounds are unequally distributed by geography. And this is a really key point. At the state level, the latest rates of formal volunteering match or exceed pre-pandemic levels in the 14 states. You can see here in blue, for example, in Connecticut, which had the largest difference between pre and post pandemic volunteering figures, over 37% of residents volunteered through an organization in 2023 compared to 31% in 2019 before the pandemic.

In the 25 states shown here in gray, the latest rates of formal volunteering is less than five percentage points below pre-pandemic levels. So for example, in my birth state of Oregon, almost 36% of residents formally volunteered in 2023 compared to 37% in 2019. Finally, formal volunteering rates remain more than five percentage points below pre-pandemic figures in the 11 states. You can see here in yellow, for example, in my home state of Wisconsin, only 31% of Wisconsinites volunteered through an organization in 2023 compared to almost 38% in 2019. Now, unfortunately, these summary statistics are better suited to tell us what the trend lines look like than why we see these patterns. And that's one reason we're so grateful to have Kathy Spangler from Serve Virginia joining us today to share how they leverage this data to learn about drivers of and barriers to volunteerism in their state and how they will be continuing to develop strategies to take action at the local level with this new data moving forward.

Next slide please. Now one set of strategies is about making volunteering more accessible. And anecdotally, we know that many nonprofits introduced opportunities for volunteers to serve online during the pandemic, and it turns out thanks to this new measure of virtual volunteering we just introduced in 2023, we learned that 18% of formal volunteers were either virtual, serving completely online, or hybrid, doing a mix of in-person and online activities. Next slide please. And when we look at the characteristics of virtual and hybrid volunteers, we see some patterns that are consistent perhaps with conventional wisdom, but also some that perhaps challenged some stereotypes. So compared to those who serve completely in person, virtual and hybrid volunteers engaged in more hours of service in the previous year were slightly older, were more likely to be living with a disability and had more education. They also informally helped their neighbors belonged to organizations and donated to charity at higher rates. So this suggests that virtual and hybrid volunteering complements rather than displaces other forms of civic engagement. Next slide please.

The second indication of renewed engagement in American civic life is that several key measures in the CEV are rebounding alongside formal volunteering. Next slide please. Now, as I mentioned earlier, the CEV covers many different kinds of civic behaviors and the trend line isn't universal. As you can see here, we are seeing declines in national rates for some measures between 2021 and 2013, or excuse me, 2023, but the dominant pattern is rebounding. Next slide please. And importantly, the 2023 data shows meaningful growth in all four of the CEV measures that experienced the largest relative declines during the pandemic. So like formal volunteering, for example, national rates of belonging to organizations and attending public meetings are rebounding in 2023. Even though they haven't yet returned to 2019 levels, they're headed in that direction. In contrast, the share of Americans who reported they took action with their neighbors to do something positive for the community is actually the largest since the CEV launched in 2017.

So the 2023 rate has surpassed pre-pandemic figures. Next slide please. We can also see that the two measures of social connection we have in the CEV, which are talking to or spending time with neighbors and then with friends and family are rebounding in the latest data. In 2021, 79% of Americans reported they talked with friends and family a few times a week or more compared to 83% in 2023. That's a four percentage point jump. The share of Americans who talked with their neighbors at least a few times a

week also slightly increased from 27% in 2021 to 28% in 2023. And I'm really excited to hear Edna Ishayik's thoughts on this. She is from the office of the Surgeon General and has been leading the charge to promote social connection policy across the federal government, and we're really grateful to have her with us today to reflect on these trends during the discussion. Next slide please.

Now, the third key finding that points toward renewed engagement in American civic life is that informal helping is climbing. And this is good news in part because previous research has shown that formal volunteering and informal helping tend to track together. People who give their time and talent to help others through organizations also tend to be people who help others informally. And as you can see here, the national informal helping rate is the share of Americans who report informally helping their neighbors with tasks like house sitting, watching each other's children or lending tools at least once in the past year. And the national informal helping rate was basically flat between 2017 and 2021. But now this national rate has become even more prevalent in the wake of the pandemic. It's increased three percentage points to 54% in 2023. And about 1 in 10 Americans reported they informally helped their neighbors a few times a week or more.

So I know this might seem like a small uptick, but in both statistical and practical terms, it's a really meaningful deviation from the trend line. An increase of three percentage points translates into 12.9 million more neighbors helping each other informally. That's 12.9 million more Americans building social capital outside of an organizational context and leaning on each other to promote the common good. Next slide, please. And while we don't see growth in state level, informal helping rates across the board, it's pretty close. In 38 states, informal helping was more prevalent in 2023 than it was pre- pandemic. And I personally think that's pretty remarkable and absolutely crucial at this inflection point in American civic life.

Next slide, please. Thank you so much for your attention. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have in the Q&A or by email. I know my colleagues have dropped a lot of links in the chat. Next slide please. But I would also encourage you to check out the latest CEV data, our report titled Renewed Engagement in American Civic Life, A Research Brief on Virtual Volunteering, our new interactive dashboard and more. Next slide, please. And with that, I am delighted to hand it off to my colleague Rose Johnson, our resident dashboard wizard.

Rose Johnson:

Thank you, Laura. Just one moment as I share my screen. So, hi everyone. Today I'm going to walk you through the AmeriCorps civic engagement and volunteering dashboard. To access this, you can go through the AmeriCorps website, select Our Impact then navigate to the Volunteering in America section

Here you can scroll down to the dashboard section. Before we dive into the data, I'd like to give you an overview of the key elements you'll find on this story page. This dashboard is a comprehensive tool that provides insights into volunteering trends in civic engagement across the United States. Once you open the story page, you'll see the title and the dashboard at the top. When you scroll down, you'll first notice our recommended citation. We encourage users to take screenshots and export data, but we ask that you please cite it appropriately if you're going to use it in any publications or reports.

We have a guide to the content. This guide provides links to the background information in the dashboard. If you click on any of these links, it'll take you directly to the relevant section on the page. First here, we have a description of the dashboard and its data sources. This dashboard is based on survey data and it's organized into four main tabs that I'll explain shortly. Next, we have the how to navigate the dashboard section. Here you can view a step-by-step guide for each tab. This guide provides directions on how to customize the analysis within each section.

Next, we have some additional user tips. I'm utilizing the dashboard functionality. I'll also point out these tips as we go through the demo. And finally, this section includes background resources on civic engagement and volunteering to give you more context for the data. I'm just going to open a larger screen so everyone can view the dashboard. For today's presentation, I'll be focusing on formal volunteering and informal helping. Specifically, I'll use examples from Laura and I's home states, Wisconsin and California, to illustrate some key points mirroring Laura's presentation. This dashboard contains four tabs. We'll start with the national trends tab, but you can also navigate to other sections by using the white buttons below. Down here. These tabs include national trends, formal volunteering, national trends by frequency, and state level trends. Each of these provides different insights and visualizations on civic engagement and volunteering.

Let's begin with the national trends tab. At the top, we have the title followed by the filter bar on the top left where you can select various CEV measures. When you select a measure, it will appear as a bubble at the top along with the description of the measure. So I'm going to select informal volunteering or formal volunteering. Thank you. Below this, we have the national rate section. This section shows the average national rate across years, the national rate by year, and the change in the national rate between each data collection wave. If the change is positive, it'll be highlighted in blue, and if the change is negative, it will appear as red. If you hover over any of the years, you'll see the exact rate for that year. So here we see that the formal volunteering rate in 2023 was 28.3%. Moving down, we have the national rate by demographic.

On the left side, you can select a demographic category of interest and view your selected rate over time. When you hover over any point, it will show the specific rate for that year. So let's look at generation for an example. I'm a part of Gen-Z, and as you can see, this clearly shows an increased in formal volunteering from 2021 to 2023. And on the right side, you can also compare two or more CEV measures across years. Here we have a comparison of formal volunteering and informal helping. By holding the control button on your keyboard, you can select multiple measures to view their rates side by side. So let's say we want to add boycotting and boycotting along with formal volunteering and informal helping. So I clicked control and selected boycotting and boycotting, and you'll see how the rates compare over time. This can be especially useful for spotting trends and identifying areas of engagement where they've increased and decreased over the years.

Let's take a look at the formal volunteering tab. This section provides information specifically on the formal volunteering rate. On the top right, you'll see a map that shows the average rate of formal volunteering by state. If you hover over the state, you'll view the state's formal volunteering rate. So we can see in California it's 23.2%. On the right, you can view the national formal volunteering rate by year, and the average and median hours of formal volunteering served across the country. Once again, if you hover over the visuals, you can see the exact rate. And below you'll find a breakdown of all formal volunteers by the total number of hours they volunteered in the past year. This section allows us to see how much time volunteers are contributing each year. So we see this by frequency and distribution of hours.

So the next tab is national trends by frequency and focuses on how often people engage in different civic engagement activities. For some measures, the CEV asks not only whether people participated in the activity, but also how frequently they did. So at the top you can select the measure of interest and it'll display the measure name along with the survey question. So let's take a look at informal helping. Below, on the primary visual, we can view how often people engage in a particular behavior each year. So in 2023, we see that 18.5% of informal volunteers participated in informal volunteering less than once a month. And on the right you can view the share of Americans who participated in the selected activity at least once per year. In this case, we see that 54.3% of Americans informally volunteered in 2023.

And last but not least, so here is the state level trends tab. Here you can select a measure of interest and choose your state. Once selected, you'll see the selected measure, measure description, and the state map. So I'm going to select formal volunteering and California. So below we see the state rate section, which displays the average state rate of your selected measure. On the right, you can view the state rate compared to the national rate, and you can see the percentage point change in the state rate between each data collection wave. Once again, if you hover over it, you can see the change.

At the bottom, you can view the state rates by different areas of civic engagement. At the beginning of Laura's presentation, she explained how the CEV measures civic engagement across five areas. In this section, you can view each of these areas for your chosen state over time, providing a detailed view of how civic engagement varies locally. So if we select political engagement, we can see the various CEV measures and how they change over time for the state of California. And last on the right, you can select multiple states and compare the selected CEV measure rate over time. So once again, you can control click and select the states of interest. So we have California and we can take a look at Wisconsin. So here we can compare the formal volunteering rate of California and Wisconsin across years.

So in closing, I want to mention that this dashboard is a work in progress and we are continually adding to it and expanding its functionality. We also welcome any suggestions for features or data you would find useful. In the story page here, you will find the CEV email where you can provide feedback and suggestions. And I want to thank you all for joining me on this walkthrough of the AmeriCorps Civic Engagement and Volunteering dashboard. I hope this provides a better understanding of how this tool can be used to explore civic engagement and volunteering trends. And now I'd like to reintroduce Dr. Mary Hyde and our three guests. Thank you.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you, rose. I think this is going to be a valuable tool for everyone. So thank you for walking us through that. I would like to now welcome our panelists to the conversation. If you would please come off your camera there so we can all see you. And we're going to ask each of you to introduce yourselves. So today we are joined by Dr. Jennifer Crittenden, Edna Ishayik, and Kathy Spangler. Each of you have been AmeriCorps colleagues and consumers of this data. Can you please introduce yourself, your organization, and share how your organization and work relates to our conversation? Perhaps we can start with Edna.

Edna Ishayik:

Hi everybody. I hope you can hear me okay. My name is Edna Ishayik. I am a senior advisor for Science and Policy in the office of the Surgeon General. My portfolio is focused on social connection as a public health issue. I helped lead the advisory that our office released last year, and we have continued to advance this issue since that time. We firmly and deeply believe that social connection and community life are deeply, deeply intertwined, and today's CV data continues to bear that out. So congratulations on this release. And thank you so much for inviting me to be with you today.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you Edna, and welcome. Kathy.

Kathy Spangler:

Good afternoon everyone. I'm Kathy Spangler. I am the director of Serve Virginia. We are the Virginia State Service Commission, one of 52 state service commissions that administer AmeriCorps state national programs. We also are responsible for ensuring that volunteering and civic engagement is



healthy in the states in which we serve. And so we're here today because we have partnered with ORE and AmeriCorps and some of the research that we have done at a state level to benchmark against the CEV. And to develop even more granular information that gives us the insights we need to build capacity for service and volunteerism across the Commonwealth of Virginia. So really excited to be here. Mary, Laura, the entire ORE team. Congratulations. This is really phenomenal information. I love the dashboard.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you, Kathy, and welcome. Good to see you again, Jennifer.

Jennifer Crittenden:

Hi everyone. I'm Dr. Jennifer Crittenden from the University of Maine. I'm an assistant professor of social work and the associate director for research at the Maine Center on Aging. I'm a social worker and gerontologist by training, and I've been an AmeriCorps research grantee since 2017, examining volunteerism topics related to aging. I have a current project funded by AmeriCorps that is examining older adult, virtual volunteerism. Dr. Rachel Coleman and I partnered with AmeriCorps to develop the virtual volunteerism brief with CEV data that we've been discussing today. And as a researcher in this area, I want to also congratulate AmeriCorps and thank them for their leadership in this area. We have been anxiously awaiting these data, and I'm so pleased to be here to discuss it today with you all.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you, Jennifer. We're excited to have you. As you can all see, we have a great range of perspectives and expertise on this panel. And I have three questions that I'm going to be posing and we're going to ask folks to weigh in with their perspective and their expertise. So the first question I'm going to ask is this, for the data release this year, there's a new measure of virtual volunteering and working with virtual volunteers. What do you see as the key implications of virtual volunteering findings for scholarship and on the ground? And Jennifer, given your research, maybe we'll start with you.

Jennifer Crittenden:

Sure. So there are three points I want to make based on these data. So the first is that for a long time, the volunteer field has been talking about the growth and the potential for growth of virtual volunteerism over time. However, we've not had the data to support that until today. And so these data give us the first documentation of the prevalence of virtual volunteerism across the country, and I cannot underscore that enough. So I think continuing to collect these data into the future will allow us to more accurately examine and track this trend. And in particular to understand who has access to virtual volunteering and who does not. So I think these data are very important to the future of that, you know, tracking that particular trend. Second, as a gerontologist, I am very interested in these findings because there are prevailing notions about the lack of interest and ability of older adults to use and engage with technology.

And what we call this is digital ageism. And so I think the findings here really challenge those notions. Seeing that adults 55 and older are engaging in virtual volunteerism at a higher rate than adults and folks in other age groups, I think really helps to break down some of those ageist myths. And hopefully encourage nonprofits and other organizations to consider how they can integrate technology into the volunteer space. And I think finally, there are some policy implications really embedded in the findings here. So that being that the data really underscore the importance of technology as a facilitator of social

connection. And for those individuals and communities that lack access to internet and technology, they also face barriers to engagement.

So I think now more than ever, these data tell us that we need to pay attention to and address the digital divide through increasing broadband access and technology access. And I think that's especially going to be the case in rural areas of the country. So I see within these data, within the virtual volunteerism data, that intersection of other policy initiatives that could increase access for not just older adults, but people of all ages.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you. Kathy. We'd like to add

Kathy Spangler:

Yes, please. And so appreciate Jennifer's perspectives. From the research lens, we represent more on the ground indicators that suggest that there have been early adopters to engage and support virtual volunteering. Our volunteer center network coming out of COVID made a concerted effort to create opportunities and publish them and provide them for individuals to engage. And so for those early adopters, this research is affirming. I think, for other organizations who use technological tools to inform and educate the public and invite them to participate in volunteering, whether that's in person, on your own, or through virtual means I think we'll see a continued spike, a growth curve in opportunities for people to engage through virtual volunteering.

We see increasingly that people want to be connected and technology tools are creating that access and opportunity. I think particularly here in Virginia, number of communities are rural. We do have our urban areas, but we have a large percentage of rural communities here in the commonwealth. And we're starting to see uptick in opportunities for expansion of volunteering through virtual means in the rural spaces. And so reducing barriers, creating greater access, we think that it will continue to grow. And this data will, I think, inform and support that trendline of organizations creating, not replacing, but creating new strands of opportunity to give people option, to give them choice, to be flexible in supporting people's social connections and volunteer experiences.

Mary M. Hyde:

Great. Thank you. Yes, I think it's just another reinforcement of how this data can give us insights into ways in which people can engage. And how different opportunities might open doors for folks who typically have not had the opportunity to do so. So very much appreciate that perspective. Kathy, I'm going to stick with you for the next question. How are you leveraging this data and positioning service and volunteerism to strengthen community and enhance people's lives?

Kathy Spangler:

We've been on a three-year journey in Virginia and our state service commission. We are required through our AmeriCorps relationship to have a state service plan. And three years ago, through our leadership's vision, we established a commitment to better understand the landscape of civic engagement, service and volunteerism in the Commonwealth. And to use that data more effectively. We were really excited to be able to partner with your team, Mary at AmeriCorps and use the CEV to really understand and guide the work that we did in developing our own community engagement index, which we fielded two years ago now. It seems like amazing that two years have gone, but we were looking, we went a little bit more granular. We were looking specifically at identifying what Virginians cared about,

what did they really want to see us focus on? And that was really important to prioritize. There were so many needs.

We also wanted to assess what actions, what civic actions they felt would be more most impactful and what they would be willing to participate in. So that sort of willingness to or most effectiveness areas. And then third, we wanted to understand what motivated people to engage and participate in civic life. And so our survey, we were fortunate enough to field it with over 6,000 responses, which was pretty significant for an initiative at our level. And the insights have been transformational. I would say that it's great to issue a report and we're issuing a report, but it's the application of this data, the utilization of the information to frame strategy and to inform tactics that can actually improve the capacity of service and volunteerism to have impact in communities. So what have we done? We literally moved from creating a survey and fielding it and reporting the results to using those insights to develop an on the ground demonstration project in one of our metro regions in Virginia, the central region around Richmond, and really engaged stakeholders around what they cared about institutionally, organizationally, individually, what would matter.

And that journey for us developed a framework by which we now can apply that in regions and communities across the Commonwealth to help facilitate a practice of using data and applying it to real world practical projects that you want to see happen. So we've started this rolling out where we're now moving from an urban metro area where we'll be lifting up this model in a rural setting. We're also, and I think this has been something we didn't anticipate, but we came to, we've incorporated the CEV findings as well as our own community engagement index findings in our AmeriCorps grant making.

And so every grantee now in their application needs to reflect on the data and apply it to their planning, whether it's a planning grant or an operational grant. They're utilizing the information in understanding how their programs, their AmeriCorps programs can be strengthened with a broader community set of supports and how it can deliver and impact and engage more volunteers. That force multiplier that Michael talked about how we're not just sitting in a vacuum, that we're really creating force multipliers in communities, and that AmeriCorps is that pathway to ignite that. We're on the front edge of that as our first cycle grant making. That has allowed us to deeply engage our grantees with data. And I think that it's going to be a game changer for the depth of quality and capacity of our AmeriCorps programs to actually have greater impact.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you, Kathy. I love how you have used this dataset to catalyze a more conversation and more ways of learning about your community and then applying it to the national service work in volunteering in Virginia. Let's take the scope a little bit broader, and I'm going to go to Edna. We sort of talked with how we can do this in this national service sphere. But Edna, I know you've done a lot of work a bit more broadly, so I'd love to hear your perspective on this.

Edna Ishayik:

Thank you so much. Yes. We obviously come to this from the lens of public health where strong research suggests that quality connections and relationships can improve health and make us more likely to live longer. So the flip side is loneliness can increase the chance of earlier death by 26%, and social isolation can increase the chance of earlier death by 29%. So through that lens, through the lens we take to this, does it seem important that people are speaking to their neighbors more? That they're back talking to friends and family more? Is it important from our lens that this data shows that people are engaged in their communities more? Yes. From our perspective, these networks, these connections, these relationships literally could be saving lives. So that's sort of the broadest view on how we see this

important data. I want to say one thing very quickly on formal volunteering in particular, since it showed such a rebound in this data, we've looked at a little bit of the research on this and how formal volunteering in particular can play an important role in our health, especially for older adults.

Researchers are finding that although volunteering and service are about helping others, that actually it's beneficial for our own health, for the health of a volunteer. And two quick stats on older adults in particular, one study found that older adults who volunteer over 200 hours a year had a lower risk for hypertension than those who didn't volunteer at all. And another very large and important study found that older adults who similarly consistently engaged in volunteering had a 24% reduced risk of early death, even when you control for various factors, health conditions. So from our lens, more study is always needed, but these are very, very strong indicators of the importance of community connection and the importance of engagement to our health and how it can really be a form of healing, both for the volunteers that are engaging, but also for the communities that they're working in and helping in. So it couldn't be more important and couldn't be more heartening to see these numbers start to rebound.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you, Edna. I love that volunteering as a protective factor for our health. That's great. Jennifer, what is your thoughts on this?

Jennifer Crittenden:

Yeah, I think to continue on the vein of how does volunteerism impact not just community, but the person, the volunteer themselves, certainly what we've seen as it relates to virtual volunteering and technology is the opportunity for a spillover effect in that we learn technology in one domain of our area, in one domain of our lives, and that can transfer over to other domains. And so we see, and we hear from volunteers and volunteer programs that that learning transfers.

So learning technology as a volunteer, we're going to use it in those other areas of our lives. So a good example of this is the older adult volunteer who learns about video calling, gets comfortable with that in the volunteer space now using that same technology to connect with family members across great distances. So I think there's tremendous opportunity there to continue to look at those spillover effects. And from my perspective, with these data, we're going to continue to spread the word about the value of volunteerism through research and education. In addition to the brief, we're also working on a deeper dive white paper where we explore some of these issues in more depth.

Mary M. Hyde:

Great. And what I also heard in your remarks is how this can also impact not only your personal health, but as you're learning skills, they can transfer to perhaps other areas like opportunities or other ways in which you can connect to your community through an economic sort of lens there. So lots of advantages to this type of engagement. I have a final question for each of you, Jennifer. I think I'll start with you. Go back to Edna and then maybe end with Kathy before we open it up to more broader Q&A as we begin to wind down this conversation. So my last question for you all is this. As you saw in Laura's presentation, I've described this research as showing an inflection point in American civic life. So this is what Michael said, this is what Laura has said. This is basically our theme. We're at an inflection point. Many measures are rebounding, but in many places we haven't yet closed the gap. So from each of your perspectives, how do we keep this momentum going and what do you see as some of the challenges? So Jennifer, I'll start with you.

Jennifer Crittenden:

Yeah. I think what I see in these data are really hunger for connection. I think people want to connect with each other. And likely coming out of COVID, we're feeling that even more. So I think what's the challenge for that is in terms of technology in particular, again, how do we get people access to things like broadband to the technology itself, to training to use technology. From the non-profit sector, do they feel like they have the tools and the resources needed to really fully engage volunteers? I think those are all challenges and areas to continue to explore.

Mary M. Hyde:

Edna?

Edna Ishayik:

Yes, I completely agree. Access and opportunities to serve is the most important factor in our advisory. One of our main recommendations was to create more and better, we called it social infrastructure, which really just means the groups, the systems, the networks that facilitate connection and engagement locally. We must invest more in this and it's investment that will pay dividends. You heard some of the stats earlier in this webinar, but especially in places where there are not enough opportunities, it really pays, redoubles in its investment. But in addition to sort of the structural and the systems pieces that enable connection, I wanted to add one other opportunity that I think could come sort of work with this momentum that is already clearly in place as we see in this data. And it's to draw on an important dynamic that I think we know both from research and experience, that helping others just feels good and volunteers know that feeling of being appreciated, of contributing something, of mattering to the neighbors around us, that that is a really good feeling, that sense of purpose and understanding that your talents and skills are needed, to feel needed.

And I think research certainly shows that these are some of the most human feelings. And to feel those satisfied by volunteering as one way of doing that, it just sort of fills one of those universal needs that need to belong. And so I think that that message, in addition obviously, to the opportunities and the access, I think that amplifying that message and maximizing on that message, I think can build on the positive momentum that we're seeing in this data. And I think obviously AmeriCorps does that already so well. But that's one additional opportunity I see as we seek to kind of take advantage of the wind in our sails here.

Kathy Spangler:

I have two thoughts.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you, Edna. Kathy. Go for it, yes,

Kathy Spangler:

I have two thoughts. So first, I think that it just gives us great hope that because we've expanded the definition of what it is to be engaged in civic life, I think we have taken those steps. Virtual now is going to be a new avenue for us. We still need to be mindful that the greatest barrier is the invitation. So we've got to continue to find ways to invite people through these various mediums and give them a reason to be connected socially and civically. I think the other thing that I would just challenge all of us because we can convene, we can catalyze, we can execute new approaches.

We need to come together and influence policy to support the backbone needs of the infrastructure for volunteerism and service to thrive. This data gives us rich, rich insights to develop not only how we do it or why we do it, but to get the support so that we can do it. And I think that would be my sort of last thought is we need to enter a policy sphere using this data in ways that leaders can see that their communities will be enriched when they leverage and support volunteerism and service.

Mary M. Hyde:

Thank you. And thank you all for sharing your perspectives and your reflections. I think this has been a really rich conversation. And what I'd like to do now is open it up for some broader Q&A for anyone here on the panel or anyone who has presented today. So let's see if there are any questions that we can try to answer for you all. And folks can feel free to turn on their cameras. I am not seeing any particular questions showing up in my feed here. Let me see. Katy, are there any questions? Andrea, any questions?

Andrea Robles:

There's a lot of comments. I think it's important that people are seeing this panel as a wraparound view of civic engagement and thinking about increasing civic infrastructure. So I don't know if there's something that any of the panelists or you Mary want to talk about in terms of what these different perspectives show.

Mary M. Hyde:

Well, I can just say that I think they show all the ways in which you can take some data and just extend that into not only what you want to learn about other research efforts, but also very practical, what does this mean for community life? How do we take this information? How do we create new opportunities? How do we engage folks? How do we extend that invitation?

As Kathy has said, I think oftentimes it's easy to look at a survey or look at a set of data points and forget about the communities behind them, the individuals behind them, and the ways in which they can be used to really bring around change and action in community. So it's not static, it's not just there because it's interesting. I think each of our panelists today has illustrated through their own work and their own engagement with this data, how it can be used to turn into action. It's a very sort of actionable data set and people have used it in a variety of ways. And I think for me, that's sort of come through in the perspective shared today. And I don't know if others on the panel wanted to add to that.

Kathy Spangler:

Ditto.

Mary M. Hyde:

I have seen maybe two questions that Laura could answer as they're flying by here. So someone asked about state ranking of data, and I think someone asked earlier about the demographic breakdown of some of this data. And I know we have it, but let me just invite Laura to speak to it at a high level here.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Okay. Thank you so much. So I believe the question was about if we could talk more about demographic findings by age, especially among older adults. And here I'm going to again give kudos to my colleague Rose. I want to share with you how I would start to think about that question. I'm going to go back to

the dashboard here and hopefully you can see my screen. So let's say you wanted to look at formal volunteering, and there's this handy dandy feature where you can go into focus mode, and you can look really easily at figures. But I'll tell you that one of the big takeaways is that for adults 85 and older, that's where we're actually, that's the age group where we saw the largest relative decline between 2019 and 2021 at the height of the pandemic.

And that group is also rebounding. You can see the slope of this line is pretty steep, but actually the group that saw the largest relative gains within these age groups between 2021 and 2023 is among 80 to 84 year olds. And so that age group here in red, you can see it has the steepest slope. And so this is just one way that you might begin to look at some of those questions. But overall there, I would say that there's a lot of really hopeful evidence at this point that the rebounds we're seeing are consistent across age groups. And the rebounds that we're seeing tend to be relatively larger among groups that were most affected by the pandemic.

And so for example, we see really substantial rebounds among millennials, among millennial volunteering rates. And that's a group where we saw volunteering rates really precipitously decline at the height of the pandemic. And so there's a lot more to dig into there, but I would really encourage you to explore the dashboard, cut the data in different ways, and reach out to us because we are not just launching this and letting it sit in a drawer. We are embarking on a whole new set of research that our office will be continuing to dive into with our partners, like all the folks on the call today in the coming months, years. And these are exactly the kinds of questions that we're going to dig into more as we hear more about what's of interest to you.

So thank you.

Mary M. Hyde:

Laura. I see a couple more questions, but given the time, I think we have time for one more. And I think it's actually really good question and a way to maybe conclude the conversation before we wrap up. I'm going to try and read this quickly. So someone has asked the data exciting, I'm struck by how expanding the definitions of service. For example, as was done to include virtual and hybrid volunteering, has changed what is measured. I am wondering about the civic work concept in other ways of trying to make sure civic, other ways that civic engagement is inclusively defined for different cultures as well as people with many care work commitments in their daily lives. I'm thinking concretely, it's what we capture count for ways that someone who has worked two jobs engaged in their community.

Well, you are in the right company, my friend, because Dr. Crittenden has looked at role conflicts among older Americans who are trying to volunteer and want to volunteer, but who have care given responsibilities. We have an entire national service and civic engagement research grant program that looks at these very questions. As I think Laura said earlier, the survey data certainly tells us what's happening. It gives us trends. It gives us a good sense of what and who. It does not speak so much to the why, but it certainly can point out gaps and beg the question, well, who isn't showing up? And why might that be? And in many ways, that's why in part, the National Academies of Science of which Dr. Paxton was a member, asked us to think about ways to complement and supplement this nationally representative data with more local data and more local research that you could get that inclusion of members of the community and their perspective on what that looks like.

And lastly, I'll end with one of the ways in which we tried to address that very critical and important question is by lifting up not only formal volunteering through an organization. Because as we know, not everyone in every group is invited to participate in those organizations. And those affiliations does not always track to all members of a community. So we lift up informal helping as another critical way in which you can contribute to the civic life of your community. And we felt that that is important to

showcase, as well as, all of the other types of behaviors that are in this survey because it broadens the tent and it recognizes, acknowledges, and honors the various ways in which people are actively contributing to their civic life.

Even if they're working 10 jobs, they're probably still helping somebody in their family or their neighborhood. And we understand and want to acknowledge that that's also critical. So no measure is perfect, no method is perfect. But I think you certainly in this group have a group of people who understand that question and take it very seriously. So with that, I'm going to conclude and I'm going to invite, I think, Katy to come in and wrap us up and explain how you can find more information. So thank you for participating today and thank you to all the panelists for your time and sharing your perspective.

Katy Hussey-Sloniker:

We're now at the close of our webinar. We'd like to thank each of our presenters for making the time to share their work with us today. We hope we hit our mark on the webinar objectives and that you walk away from the session excited about the research tools and resources offered by AmeriCorps on the civic engagement and Volunteering Supplement data and data set. I'd like to extend a thank you to our guardians of honor, colleagues for their technical support and coordination. This webinar recording and support materials will be posted on AmeriCorps.gov website under evidence and impact webinars within the coming weeks. Please feel free to share with your colleagues and networks.

We'll also be sending out a post-webinar survey, so please let us know your thoughts on this webinar and any ideas for future webinars. Next slide please.

Learn more about how you can make a difference by exploring our data, reviewing our research, and applied guides, and engaging with your community. We hope you've had a wonderful rest of the day. Thank you very much.