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Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue  
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MARY HYDE: Thank you, Connor. Hello, and welcome to our Grantee Dialogue. My name is Mary Hyde. I am the director of the Office of Research and Evaluation here at AmeriCorps. I am a community psychologist by training. We are excited for this series and we sincerely hope that through this dialogue we can all broaden our perspectives, find shared meaning, find places of agreement, allow for and invite differences of opinion and experience, and challenge our own and others' preconceived notions.

And because of some of the ideas that were generated yesterday, before I continue with my introductory remarks, I would like to invite two colleagues to introduce themselves and to translate what I've just said into their languages. Jada?

JADA: [SPEAKING SPANISH]

And now, we will have a welcome with Ms. Peng.

PENG: [SPEAKING CHINESE]

Back to you, Mary.

MARY HYDE: Thank you. The ideas and research our panelists will share today are a culmination of two decades of systematic inquiry into civic engagement sponsored by this agency. Following the tragedy of 9/11, the agency initiated a survey research program in partnership with the US Census Bureau. Surveys on volunteering and other forms of civic engagement generated national statistics on the percentage of Americans who report participating in the civic life of their communities.

These nationally representative statistics remain a cornerstone of our research program. After a decade of administering these national surveys, the agency partnered with the National Academies of Sciences. The National Research Council convened a panel on measuring social and civic engagement and social cohesion and surveys.

The consensus studied report civic engagement and social cohesion, measuring dimensions of social capital to inform policy, included several recommendations for advancing scholarship in this field of study and increasing the utility of research findings for improving community conditions. One of the main panel recommendations was to conduct research using methods and measures capable of capturing a more contextualized understanding of civic engagement and community change.

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The report suggested the need to supplement survey research with additional approaches for understanding this constellation of behaviors and their implications for transforming lives and communities. In response, the agency launched a research grant program in 2015 to do just that. The panelists assembled for this week's dialogue will share what they've learned through this research grant program.

The panels represent academic and citizen expertise. We invite each of you to share your expertise and lived experience, so we can collectively create research informed and innovative solutions for some of our toughest community challenges. I again invite my two colleagues to please translate my last remark in their languages.

JADA: [SPEAKING SPANISH]

Ms. Peng?

PENG: [SPEAKING CHINESE]

Back to you, Mary.

MARY HYDE: Thank you so much. We're excited to have you all here today, and let's dive in. Back to you, Connor.

PRESENTER: Thank you, and I'll actually turn things over to Melissa to kick off this first session. Thank you very much, Melissa.

MELISSA GOUGE: All right, good afternoon. And thank you so much to Mary, Jada, and Peng for that energizing introduction for the beginning of our session today. So good afternoon again. Welcome to everyone who is here for this panel on civic engagement and pathways to employment. I'm Melissa Gouge. I'm a sociologist, and I'm an analyst in the Office of Research and Evaluation.

We just want to thank you again for taking the time to be with us. And panelists, we're just so glad to have you all together today to speak. And for the audience, these panelists have all been studying civic engagement and its relationship with stability and/or employment broadly, focusing on a variety of populations and stakeholders, from communities impacted by the opioid crisis, college students, workers, young people experiencing homelessness, and others.

Just so you know how we're going to proceed today, we'll first hear from our panelists. Each will introduce themselves and present in the order they appear on today's agenda.

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And then, after that, I will circle back with questions for each of them as well. And after that, we'll be put into breakout sessions, so we can all kind of get in a real dialogue together, the intent of the gathering. And finally, we'll come back together as a group to finish our discussion.

So we'll go ahead and get things started by having the panelists introduce themselves and give a little bit of background on their studies. I will now hand this over to Carlin and Emily to get started.

CARLIN RAFIE: Great, can you all hear me? Melissa?

MELISSA GOUGE: Yes, we can hear.

CARLIN RAFIE: Oh, OK, good because the volume-- the audio was coming in and out. I didn't know if that was on my end or your end. Great. So I'm Carlin Rafie I am--

[AUDIO OUT]

Well, maybe I'll just introduce Emily. So Emily, my colleague who is with me, is associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health at Virginia Commonwealth University. And she's the director of community engaged research and qualitative research in the Center on Society and Health at Virginia Commonwealth University. So we are just delighted to be here.

And I appreciate the opportunity to present our work on Martinsville in Henry County. And if you could switch the slide, the next slide.

Melissa, is somebody going to advance the slide? There you go. OK, so most everyone is aware that opioid addiction is an increasing problem in the United States. And in fact, opioid misuse, opioid use disorder was declared a national public health emergency in 2017. And rural communities have been hit particularly hard by this health emergency, including Martinsville in Henry County, which is the community that we work with.

Martinsville in Henry County is located at the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains in southern Virginia and is known for outdoor recreation, arts, and cultural events here in Virginia. It has a rich history that has seen years of prosperity as well as some economic hardship. In July of 2017, they kind of became infamous because of a U.S. News and World Report that identified Martinsville as having the highest per capita rate of opioid prescriptions in the country.

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The overall opioid prescription rate in 2016 in Martinsville was 399 per 100,000 residents compared to 66 in the United States. So it was quite high. In addition, mortality rates in Martinsville from opioid overdose was three times higher than the state average, and the area had the highest rate of emergency room visits for unintentional opioid overdose. And so the community knew there was a problem, that because of all of this novelty they mobilized to actually take some action.

And they formed a task force to address the issue. And they approached our community academic partnership engaging Martinsville for help in looking at this issue, evaluating it, and developing some strategies to respond to it. So engaging Martinsville had employed the SEED method, which is the method we used previously to address a disparity in lung cancer outcomes in the community, and it actually made a real difference using that method.

And so SEED uses principles of community-engaged participatory research to involve key community stakeholders from various levels in the society to evaluate health issues relevant to them and develop responsive strategies. These strategies are then brought back to the community-at-large to gain their buy-in and prioritization for action. So engaging Martinsville involved, over a period of a year-and-a-half or more, involved 54 community stakeholders as participants in topic groups and focus groups.

And three topic groups made up of community members – well, three topic groups were formed to actually do the hard work of looking at this issue, evaluating it, and developing strategies related to it. So the three topic groups that we actually engaged in this process were community members that had been directly impacted by opioid misuse in some way. Another group of health care and service providers who are providing services to people with opioid or substance misuse.

And then policymakers in the community, who could make policies that might impact the issue. And so these groups worked over a period of three to four months, meeting on seven occasions, looking at the issue, doing a real evaluation of the factors in the community that were impacting opioids, and then developing strategies. And they ultimately came up with 15 priority strategies that we then brought back to the community to get their buy-in. And if you could go to the next slide.

So during a community forum, all of these 15 strategies were presented to the attendees, and the attendees voted on those that they wanted to actually take action on in the coming year. The four strategies that they chose included: to develop a detoxification center in Martinsville in Henry County to assist people who wanted to detoxify and develop a continuation of care for these individuals; establish a drug court in the community as an alternative to incarceration; increase the public awareness of all of the local resources that actually existed within the community, because they felt that there was a real problem. People just didn't know what was available if they needed help. And

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then to expand and sustain preventive education within the school system both to youth, but also to their parents. And so they formed four work groups of committed individuals from the community who said they were willing to work over the next year or so to develop action plans around these, and then put those action plans into place, to actually do those action plans.

Engaging Martinsville continued to support these groups in two ways. One, a member from our team became part of each work group, and functioned kind of in an administrative capacity. And then also, we had SEED funding that would help for any activities that might require funding to get them started. So to date, they have just had wonderful success with these four work groups.

There has been a formal and unique collaboration formed between the two hospital systems that serve Martinsville in Henry County and the major public mental health provider to ensure a continuum of care for individuals who arrive at the emergency room with an opioid overdose crisis issue, links them into care and to a peer counselor to make sure that those individuals move into treatment and care.

They've also applied for and received permission to establish a drug court in Henry County. And they will be starting that. That court will begin functioning this year. And that was a bigger job than any of us thought was possible, and it's wonderful that they've accomplished that. A video was also produced by each of the organizations in the community that provides services to people with substance use in their families.

That video was produced professionally and now resides on the websites of each of those organizations as well as the major provider of mental health services. And then beyond that, the group identified a curriculum for youth in 9th and 10th grades. They have trained their teachers. And those students, now in ninth and 10th grades, will be receiving that education annually starting this year.

So some wonderful accomplishments. We're currently doing an evaluation of the outcomes of our project beyond just their accomplishments using the model of, a conceptual model of participatory research and evaluating through surveys of those individuals who have been directly involved in our project the areas of the context partnership, intervention, and research outcomes. And we're also conducting a ripple effects mapping, which will have the results for soon.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Carlin.

CARLIN RAFIE: No.

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MELISSA GOUGE: And Sam, you're up next.

SAM INTRATOR: Great. Welcome, everybody. I'm Sam Intrator. I'm a faculty member at Smith College, and I'm here representing our entire research team, which is over the years now probably 25 or 30, including community members, high school students, young adults, college students. And I am grateful to be able to speak on their behalf. And a special shout out to Erin DeCou who's been leading up our team, and is on this Zoom now, and Josiah Gonzalez, who is our partner at the New North Citizens' Council in Springfield, Massachusetts, and Director of Youth Services.

So with that said, let me say this. I started teaching high school my first year out of college. I was 21. Thirty-five years later, I am a grizzled veteran of so many high school and college graduations. And I got to tell you, I can distill the whole message of all those graduations into three big ideas: number one, dream big, number two, the journey is hard, number three, keep on going.

And for the last 20 years, I've been part of this team running a youth leadership program in Springfield, Mass. And when we started the program, the graduation rate in the city was 54%, the high school graduation rate. And our goal was to get young people to graduate. And we did. And almost every young person that participated in our sport-based youth leadership program Project Coach graduated.

And so, if you hit the next slide, this will give you the image. This is the image. They were graduating from high school and they were on this springboard. And they were aspiring to sort of go forth. And this is very sporty, but the three things that we hoped as they got ready to bounce and launch off that springboard was: stride forward, practice makes possible, and we're all better when we have a team.

And so those were the three big values that all of the youth that were leaving our program had, you know, as they experienced what is next, feeling a sense of positive momentum, having a plan, and having big dreams. And then to be honest, this is reality hits. Nearly 70% of students in the Springfield public schools aspire to go to college. By the time they are 24, six years later, only 4.8% have a college degree.

In our program, 90% of the young people were heading off to college or some kind of higher ed, and only about one in eight, or 16%, were able to have a degree six years, that six-year span. So let's hit that next slide here. And this is our project. We interviewed young adults. We wanted to understand what was happening after high school, why so many young people were getting ready to leave high school on that springboard with such momentum.

And the overarching matches that we heard was that when they entered into that time after high school, they were hopeful, they were excited, they were trepidatious. They felt

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like they had a plan. But so many of the interviews that we did really identified – and this comes right out of our interviews – this notion of feeling stuck. And our research with all the young people sort of lifted up some of the conditions of getting stuck.

And those were precarious finances, not feeling like a fit, not having mentors that could help anticipate the challenges, uncertain about what to pursue and how to pursue it, not feeling rightness of fit in the institution that they ended up in. And so this is not new data. It was hyper-local in that it really investigated the conditions that young people were identifying as thwarting conditions in their journey.

And so let's sort of hit the next slide here. And the organizing metaphor kind of came out of one set of focus groups and interviews we did was that high school was many things, but it was a consistent, familiar institution. And we heard so many versions of this. The day that I graduated, all of those supports that had come accustomed to having in my life ended right after high school.

And one person said that it was swim-at-your-own risk at this point. We were used to having lifeguards, but now the institutions that we were joining next were not really set up to anticipate when we were starting to struggle. And so one, in the interviews that we did, one positive aspect that we heard young people identified was that youth programs, organized youth programs, seem to provide tremendous support for young people.

And so we entered into a second phase of our research, where what we wanted to do is understand what were the structures in these organized youth programs that provided the support that young people were identifying as pivotal and as sustaining as they negotiated the precariousness of young adulthood. So we asked ourselves, what does it take to help a young person get unstuck, or even more critically, what systems would preempt a young person from even ever getting stuck?

So this became the second phase of our research. We interviewed young adults who identified participation in an out-of-school program as being a support as they negotiated those post high school years. And so I'll just sort of end by saying that the things that we learned are being mounted into an action campaign for us right now. We're going to be speaking with program leaders and executive directors of youth programs that have identified wanting to support young adults.

And there's a set of findings that are very powerful and plausible. Number one, build a sense of belonging focused in on the young adult years. Run programming that emphasizes specifically envisioning the future and starting that early in high school. Skill development focused on college career and decision making.

One of the things that we heard were that colleges – that high schools – were very invested in getting young people accepted into colleges, but not necessarily the right fit

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college, or not necessarily supporting them in all the myriad of other components that go into being successful in college.

Intensive social capital and social capital-building and networking, and having an alumni system that provides a landing spot for both regular check-ins, but also those urgent check-ins when help is needed. This is still work we're continuing to do. And it's been extraordinarily gratifying to work with such a diverse and energizing team, so thank you.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Sam. Now we'll pass the baton to Jodi and Noorya.

NOORYA HAYAT: All right. Hi, everyone. My name is Noorya Hayat. I'm a senior researcher with CIRCLE, which is part of Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University.

JODI BENENSON: And hi, I'm Jodi Benenson. I am an assistant professor in the School of Public Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Noorya, do you want to provide the--

NOORYA HAYAT: Yeah, next slide, I can--

So we're going to talk about two complementary studies that we did with AmeriCorps. The first study that we did was a correspondence study to examine the impact of AmeriCorps on employment outcomes. And we applied to about 2,000 real jobs between 2016 and 2017, and we sent fictitious resumes to gauge whether AmeriCorps made a difference or not in getting a callback from a real employer.

The second study was a parallel supplemental study that we did that was looking at the importance of national service network. And this was a mixed-method study, so we did a survey, interviews, and a small correspondence study with the importance of national service network to look very closely at AmeriCorps service experience. Next slide, please.

JODI BENENSON: I can take this one. So one of the reasons that we were really interested in kind of conducting this research was because of a lot of research that has come out in the past arguing that young people should have multiple pathways for success and achievement in civic and professional life. And the belief that, and the curiosity around, whether national service really could be one of the pathways for young people to acquire skills and experience along the way.

And so in that first study that Noorya just talked about, the correspondence study, we do not find that there was a significant difference in the rate of callbacks between applicants that, as you can see here, had national service experience on their resumes and cover letters, and those that did and did not. And it was interesting, because what we did was



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we actually buried these resumes and cover letters by a whole host of other factors, like race and gender and educational level, and resume quality and occupation.

And we looked at two different metro areas. And so it is interesting that there was not a significant difference specifically when it came to the national service. But when we looked, and you can kind of see this in that upper right-hand, I guess, figure here, when we did include education, we did see that a college degree was the major predictor of receiving a call-back for a job application.

You actually see on the bottom here, in the blue, there are the high school, individuals who had high school on their application materials, and the top people who had more education, a college degree on their application materials, which as you can see, that's kind of where the largest gap lies, not necessarily when it came to having national service. And we found that combination together, though, was quite powerful.

And in the second study that Noorya mentioned earlier, we had an opportunity to dig in a little more deeply. We were really kind of curious about whether or not there were people who had strong social networks, like employers of national service, who have committed to hiring individuals with national service backgrounds. We were curious about whether or not if they knew or understood AmeriCorps, they were likely to take it into account when it came to hiring decisions.

And it turns out the answer was yes. We actually found that there was a difference for people who were employees of national service when it came to the hiring decisions that they made. They were more likely to hire individuals with national service experience. And a lot of that after kind of talking to them and doing some follow-up interviews was really because they had a better understanding, specifically that kind of depth of understanding, of AmeriCorps, specifically how it provides opportunities for building specific skills.

And we can talk a little bit more about this later in the discussion. We asked about skills like accountability, leadership, responsibility, collaboration, communication. And these were skills that individuals who were familiar with AmeriCorps were interested in when they were, I guess, thinking about their employment decisions and acknowledging AmeriCorps as a value-add to applications. Next slide, please.

NOORYA HAYAT: So as Jodi mentioned, one of the first findings that we saw was that college degree was really important to a lot of employers in both studies, and was used as a signal for implicit qualities like professionalism, like experience, like trying to achieve a goal, or writing experience, or some level of competencies in both studies. So it was used as a signal for a lot of employers.

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We also found out that there were very few job opportunities that are visible in an online search for non-college youth or just those that have a high school degree or less. And we really have to manage that on our end a lot in this study during the two summers that we were doing this. Building familiarity with national service through employers of national service really opens up employment pathways.

So in our parallel study, we saw that employers and hiring managers that were familiar with how AmeriCorps worked, either had been in the program themselves or worked very closely, really had an enormous amount of experience and understanding on what skills they were bringing. And those stood out immediately to them. But in talking to them, a lot of them were, like, a colleague of mine was not familiar with this would probably not know the nuance and the depth of skills and leadership and communication experiences that they're bringing in to the job.

So we did want to explore around why and who national service really boosts employment prospects for. We do know there's a bias towards a college degree. And within those that hold a college degree, those that have service experience are more likely to get a callback or an interest from an employer, but further research in this is needed. Next slide? I think this is our--

MELISSA GOUGE: All right, thank you so much, Noorya and Jodi. Laura, we'll hand the baton to you.

LAURA SCHLACHTER: Hi, everyone. I've got a special guest with me. I'm actually – I'm, oh, she just woke up. I'm on maternity leave right now. So this is my nine-week-old daughter. We'll see if she goes back to sleep. And actually, this slide is incorrect. My name is Laura Schlachter. I'm a research analyst, actually, with the Office of Research and Evaluation at AmeriCorps and also a researcher at the University of Wisconsin Madison Center for Cooperatives and 2017 grantee.

Hi, sweetie, you know what? Andrea, do you think we could switch order?

PRESENTER: Absolutely, we can do that. That's no problem.

LAURA SCHLACHTER: I will be back.

PRESENTER: That sounds great. So, Kim, you are now up next.

Kim, you may be on mute if you're already speaking.

KIM BENDER: I am. I said a bunch. I said I'm happy to jump in. And I remember those days of balancing kids and work, and I appreciate that we're all trying to do that together here in this space. My name is Kim Bender. I use she/her pronouns. I'm a faculty member at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver. And I'm representing a team of practitioners and peer workers and graduate students who have been working on a

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project examining social capital, civic engagement, and peer work among young people experiencing homelessness. Next slide, please.

So I'll just talk a little bit about our aims of our project. And I'm saving really some of our findings to some of the Q&A and questions that I think Melissa has for us. So I have studied and worked with young people experiencing homelessness for quite a long time. And several years ago, members of the Coalition for the Homeless in Colorado came and met with me. We met at this tiny little coffee shop near campus.

And they said, we are developing this really innovative peer program. And peer program, for those that are less familiar, is the idea that folks with lived expertise, similar experiences – in this case, having had a past history of housing instability, addiction, or mental health challenges – could be paid and employed to provide support to young people who are currently still struggling with some of those challenges.

And that work's been done for a long time. There's a long history of that work, mostly in the substance use and mental health fields, but it hadn't really been done much in youth homelessness service provision. So they were starting this work. They were struggling through it as best they could. And they were looking for a research partner who could help them understand the best way they could do that work and then share some of those learnings with other folks who are trying to start peer programming in youth homelessness services.

So our questions are really centered around how young people experiencing homelessness perceive mutual aid by their peer worker, so what did it feel like to have a peer support specialist working with you? What was it like to be a peer worker? What was it like to be in that role, including both how they benefited and some of the challenges and needs that come up when you're sort of positioned in this in-between space of a provider and having also been a service recipient.

And then more broadly, beyond peer work, how do young people think about social capital and civic engagement? Next slide, please.

So we began with individual interviews with the peer workers and their supervisors and their administrators. We had the peers doing some journaling in real time during their day of providing peer work, so they would stop at the end of their day of meeting with young people and answered some structured journal activities that they had helped create themselves.

And then we, with support from these grants, we're able to expand to two photo voice projects, where we gathered young people still experiencing housing instability and asked them first about the idea of experiencing peer support and secondly, about social capital more broadly.

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And I think today, and I think I can answer these in more detail, what we discovered were that both peer work and participation in these PAR projects were unique ways to engage young people in social capital and pathways towards employment. And I could talk a little bit more about what that looked like in the Q&A. I think that's my last slide.

PRESENTER: Yeah, all right. Thank you so much for hopping in, Kim. And Laura, we'll be pivot back to you.

LAURA SCHLACHTER: OK, thanks, everyone for your flexibility, and thanks especially for jumping in. Great. OK, these are the right slides. So yeah, I appreciate everyone at ORE and the team at ICF for organizing this gathering. And I also up front just want to thank Kristen Marr of Duke Kunshan University and Jane Lymph of the University of Wisconsin Madison for their contributions to this research.

So our project explores how civic engagement shapes and is shaped by the organization of work. Scholars have long theorized that experiences in the workplace spill over into the personal and public spheres. And so according to the civic spillover hypothesis put forward by Carole Pateman, Sidney Verba, and others, participation in work begets participation in civic life. That is, under the right conditions, we can think of employment as a pathway to civic engagement.

In particular, these scholars have hypothesized that workplaces organized in more democratic ways foster more personal and political efficacy, and thus more civic participation off the clock. And worker cooperatives, which are firms fully owned and democratically controlled by workers, represent a rare but extreme case. And so in our paper, titled "Spillover or Enrichment: Workplace and Civic Participation in Democratic Firms," Chris and I utilized original survey and interview data.

I collected in partnership with a nonprofit think-and-do tank called the Democracy at Work Institute to critically examine underlying assumptions of the civic spillover hypothesis and then propose an alternative hypothesis we call "civic enrichment." And so essentially, we find that workers in these cooperatives are indeed more civically engaged than those in conventional firms. We also find that workers who self-selected into economic democracy volunteer at significantly higher rates if they're also active in workplace governance.

But rather than simply attributing this to a spillover effect, which is what previous research has done, we use a mixed-methods approach. And our analysis of the interview narratives suggests that the social processes underlying this trend we see in the survey responses are actually much more complex.

And so in many cases, we find that people engage in collective action by opting into or creating workplaces that more closely embody their civic ideals. I would imagine many of us in this room are doing something similar at work every day in your participatory

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research. And as one interviewee said to us, “what I like most about worker cooperatives is that they allow you to live your values in the workplace instead of working against your values on the job and then trying to undo the damage in your free time.”

And so we refer to this phenomenon as civic enrichment. And one important implication of civic enrichment is that this boundary between work and civic engagement is actually much more porous than previous research has often assumed. The civic spillover hypothesis sees employment as a pathway to civic engagement, but the civic enrichment hypothesis sees civic engagement as a pathway to employment that is more participatory, fulfilling, and just. Next slide, please.

And so the next phase of our research will go beyond the unique context of worker cooperatives to examine civic enrichment among workers in conventional firms. So with generous support from Mary, and Andrea, and others on the ORE team, Chris, Jane, and I actually had the opportunity to write two new questions about the civic dimensions of work. And those will be in the upcoming current population survey, civic engagement, and volunteering supplement funded by AmeriCorps, and that will be fielded this coming September.

And so these questions ask whether employers promote civic engagement by encouraging employees to volunteer, for example, by participating in an employer-sponsored volunteer day. They also ask about the extent to which employee respondents feel a sense of pride and life satisfaction in their work and how it contributes to the community. And so we're hoping these questions will provide a valuable source of new data on ways in which the general population is or becomes motivated to pursue civic and democratic ideals in all parts of their daily lives. Thank you.

PRESENTER: Thank you so much, Laura. And thank you to everybody for this really invigorating, exciting panel, and really digging in on the relationships between civic life and employment and stability for folks, the things that we've learned, and things that we'd like to know a little bit more about. So I have a couple of questions for the panelists. And as we can, we'll go in the same order in which folks presented.

I'll go to the original order, but if we need to have flexibility again, that is absolutely no problem. So I'll start with Carlin and Emily. And we'll make sure to put the questions in the chat so you also have them. Research has demonstrated that strong ties and networks can lead to an increase in social capital with a variety of positive outcomes. Can you give us one or two examples from your research on how civic engagement or being civically involved can lead to stability or employment?

PRESENTER 2: Hello, I'm going to answer that one for our group. Can you hear me?

PRESENTER: Yes, we can.

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PRESENTER 2: OK. And I'm going to focus a little bit less on our research outcomes and more in our research process in terms of this question. So as you all know, social capital and social networks are really important outcomes of community-engaged research. And I've been working with several community university partnerships, so, and my experience in this kind of spans different contexts and different projects, but one example is having worked with a community university partnership since 2011 in Richmond, Virginia.

And we've seen a lot of interesting outcomes for the members of our team as they participated in these projects. Starting out, we had a team that had a number of people on it who had kind of no or low levels of employment, and over time moved into careers in community nonprofits, at the university, and elsewhere. And we also had people who enrolled in higher education programs for the first time.

And going into this CBPR work, we emphasized that everybody was an expert on their community. But we saw that being involved with these projects, they really began to embrace that role. They really enjoyed using data to become more familiar with their community, and to communicate about the community, and becoming advocates for their community. And from the research side, they really took advantage of new ways to learn from others in their community, which was really great.

And when it came to action planning, some of them took a really personal role in implementing the action items that had been, that had come up. So for example in one of our projects, we identified mental health as a priority area for the community, and one of our team members became a trainer in mental health first aid, and, as a result, hundreds of people in the community have been trained to do mental health first aid work.

And in our opioid work that Carlin discussed earlier, many of our team members were already employed by local agencies that were service providers in this area. And so the action plans that they developed actually had a concrete influence on their own jobs, in some cases, implementing new services and programs that actually came out of the process.

PRESENTER: Wow, Emily. Thank you for sharing that. And Sam, the same question to you. Sam, you may be on mute if you're speaking already.

SAM INTRATOR: There you go. Can you hear me now? There we go. Great, thank you so much for the question. And for us, social capital is, like for everybody, is about the web of relationships and the connections that people have, both in their, within their local group but also how it extends beyond.

And one of them the kind of key moments and understanding that evolved in our project was during an interview where, when we asked about connections and we asked about networking, one of the people that we interviewed said, you don't know what you don't

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know. And that became sort of an operative sort of framework or metaphor for how we thought a lot about both the research that we were doing, but also some of the action programs that we were developing.

And I'm just going to share one aspect of how we tried to address what we kept on hearing about as a particular need that young people identified. And what they said is that, first of all, they didn't understand the importance of networks in their life, and how networks could be a force for sort of helping them mobilize forward movement and momentum in their life. So there was a sense that the idea that social network capital and social networking were not at top of mind.

The second thing that we heard is that they didn't know how to do it. They didn't know how to sort of move forward and create that capital that was going to be an affordance in their life. And so the solution that we came up with is, we piloted something we called the Springfield Young Leaders project. And that was about 14 young people from Springfield who were identified either by themselves or nominated by others as being an individual who had made civic contributions.

And what we tried to do was we tried to intentionally introduce the power of social networking and give them a set of tools that were enabling them to sort of forge forward, and to make connections, to have constructive conversations. And so as I sort of pull into the final phase of this research with our team, what we sort of identified is, to come back to that question, you don't know what you don't know.

It became an emphasis for us in how we want to imagine programming and how we want to talk about the ways that young people need support going forward. All right, I'll turn it back to the group here.

PRESENTER: Thank you so much, Sam. And Jodi and Noorya, same question for you.

PRESENTER 2: Thank you. I'll take this one. So our study, especially the parallel study that we did on hiring managers, this was from the employers that we heard a lot from, particularly in our interviews. Who are like, they really value – those who knew about AmeriCorps or our service opportunities really valued knowing other people or themselves in the network. And even when in their interviews we had them look at a resume of a fictitious candidate, they made a lot of references to network.

So, do we know someone who was there, or I know someone who's done this and was really good at XYZ, and that I really valued. I really value that they're part of AmeriCorps. I know the kind of skills they get, the networks they build, and they know how to have, say, customer experience. So one employer and hiring manager I was talking to was, like, you can teach a lot of skills on the job, particularly – this was a nonprofit, so they needed a hard skills, like Razor's Edge or something.

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But you can't teach customer focus or how to talk to people. I know a lot of that I know get from such experience that you show on their resume. Another employer was also part of the employers of national service network was like, you know, I think this is a huge asset in the resume, and I have a bias towards a program, because I know it's a phenomenal opportunity for people to come and explore and then decide what skills they have and go from there.

So these were more entry level jobs, but even in that, employers also valued networks and where young people came from, and what kind of opportunities or experience they had coming into the job.

PRESENTER: Thank you so much, Noorya. And Laura, same question to you.

LAURA SCHLACHTER: Let's see here. Yeah, I would say – I mean, what's interesting in our project is that rather than focusing on employment as a binary outcome valuable, do people get a job or not, is that job stable or not, the idea of the civic enrichment framework is really that we recognize there is substantial heterogeneity in the organization of work itself. And so we ask, how is the variation in kind of job quality associated with civic behavior?

Or put another way, we posit that civic experiences can shape the sort of civic-ness the work itself.

PRESENTER: Thank you so much, Laura – and Rowan for your input as well. I think she wholeheartedly agrees with everything you're saying. And Kim, if you don't mind addressing the last question as well?

KIM BENDER: Sure. You know, the young people that we work with who are unhoused, they described to us just a real lack of the social capital that many of us needed in order to achieve the pathways that we did. They talk to us about how, as kids, they remember being asked in school, like, what do you want to be when you grow up, but then there wasn't anyone there to help them with the information or the introductions or the skills and opportunities that they needed in order to get there.

And so they kind of developed the distrust that social capital could be there for them, and that it would kind of come through for them in the ways that they needed. And our systems haven't done a great job of providing that for them, so they often fall through the cracks of schools or other employments. And even the services set up to help them once they're unhoused typically are – they're pretty rigid, you know, it's kind of a standardized one size fits all, where young people kind of come in, and you sort of assess what we think they need, and we tell them we think they need, and we send them off with a list of providers to connect to. And that often doesn't work for many young people, because they don't really feel seen as individuals, and few people are kind of asking them what they've experienced than what it is that they want to achieve in life.



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And so our project, I think, has discovered really two exceptions to that. And one is this idea of peer support as an employment opportunity, so if you are hired because of the adversity that you faced and how you've come through it, you really center that experience rather than trying to hide it or overcome it. And peer work tends to be really flexible. It's a flexible entree into a social service field where your expertise is central rather than your credentials.

And you're given a lot of agency in that role to sort of make decisions and help people in meaningful ways that feel authentic to you. And typically, if it's done well, peer work involves a lot of support from supervisors and other peer support specialists, so relationship and support is built into the employment itself. So we found peer support to be really a unique way to move from having experienced quite a bit of marginalization to being employed as a contributor where you're trying to help other people in a meaningful way.

The second place we've seen that is just in the young people who participated in our participatory action research. So we ran several photo voice groups over time, and young people who join those groups were given a chance, sometimes a rare chance, to share their voices and their experiences in order to create change and inform the field. And in doing that, they had to figure out how to work as a team. They had to figure out how to listen to one another, and how to share their perspectives, and how to make decisions together.

And so there was some skill building that happened, but there was also a lot of connection. So both the young people that participated on our PAR project, as well as the peers who are more central to our team, have used the networks that were developed through participatory action research to seek employment opportunities. So I've been asked by several to provide a letter of reference, or I've introduced them to other researchers who are doing work and looking for youth input.

So it's been a bridge, a sort of informal bridge, into employment, through either peer work or PAR-work.

**PRESENTER:** That's so great to hear the different ways that the work has benefited the folks who've been involved with the team. And for the second question, we'll go around in a similar fashion and address this next question. And then we'll go into our breakout room. And in the interest of time, we'll probably just do a quick close-out and address some of the issues that we chat about in the breakout session.

So the next question, that we'll go first to Carlin and Emily, is what are some lessons learned from your research that you'd offer to other organizations or communities who may be working on similar issues as yours?

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PRESENTER 2: Hey, I'm going to take this one again. And just briefly, I would say that one of the most important lessons is to really think broadly about who the stakeholders are for the issues that you're trying to address. And I say that largely because people are used to working in a certain way, so they may have a cadre of usual suspects that they work with on different types of issues.

But the opportunity to bring people together with different sectors and with people with lived experience can really change the way that they do things. So it widens social networks, brings in new resources for the work that they're trying to do, and can generally improve cohesiveness around the issue that they're trying to address. So just again, thinking broadly about who the stakeholders are and working to bring those together.

ERIN DECOU: I'm going to field this question for our group. My name is Erin DeCou. I've been working with Sam on our project in Springfield, Massachusetts, through Smith College for the last couple of years. And in thinking about the takeaways that I think can inform other organizations and projects working on similar things, I have two things I want to talk about. One is, we're really focused on this the transition out of high school and into young adulthood, and that could mean going into higher education or into employment. And as Sam said, just to build on a couple of things he was talking about, one is, as people leave high school, really, all of those support structures that people are so used to, really, for most of their lives in school, fall away. And so thinking about one of the themes that just kept coming up and kept coming up was around relationships and how important it is to have a person or people who are there to support the process in some capacity.

And I remember one of our team members, just a couple of weeks ago, as we were reflecting on some of our interviews, talked about how starting this project, they really were hoping there was going to be one thing that would fix it, one kind of process or method that could kind of really support this transition. And I think what they came to was really, it's a lot of really small things over a long period of time.

And this idea of authentic relationships and mentorship being very important, whether it's formal or informal, in supporting individuals through this transition. And we're hearing that in a lot of other ways, other panelists sharing that as well.

The other thing is, actually, as I think it was Kimberly just talking, about the process of participatory action research itself has seemed really transformational for the team members in the project. We've worked with probably close to 25 young people at this point, and most of our work has been having those young people interview other young people about their own experiences moving through this transition.

And just the potential for – and it's kind of this peer to peer connection – but the potential for young people to be hearing from other young people about their own experiences, what they went through, the challenges maybe they faced, the obstacles, but also how

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they moved through it and got through it has been really – it's powerful to witness the impact on young people of just hearing those stories and connecting with others who have been through it.

And so I would say thinking of ways that we can support social capital and social cohesion through kind of fostering those kinds of conversations and connections between your peer networks can really be a powerful way of supporting that transition.

PRESENTER: Thank you so much, Erin. And Jodi and Noorya?

JODI BENENSON: Yeah, Jodi here. I'm going to take this next question. So in thinking about the lessons learned, they are best – best lessons. And I want to talk about two things in particular. The first is that we conducted a correspondence study, a really large-scale correspondence study, and we would not have been able to do this without an amazing team.

So I just wanted to make sure to give a shout-out to our fantastic team of individuals who both led the design and thought through a lot of the ethical implications of conducting a field experiment, as well as our fantastic graduate students who played an integral role, and as Noorya recently noted to me, served as the backbone of our project. We wouldn't have been able to complete this without them.

But with all correspondence studies, audit studies, field experiments, come ethical considerations. And these are things that we've been thinking deeply about, thinking about things like cost, practicality, validity, alongside ethics, especially when thinking about the role of the specific study design that we used in the study, and specifically applying for real jobs using fake resumes and cover letters in the private and nonprofit sectors.

And so we actually recently wrote a piece about this really reflecting on the ethical implications of this work, specifically in the nonprofit sector, which kind of gets to the second point and things that we've been thinking about, especially as we dove into the employers of national service part of the study, which was really exciting and revealing in new ways, as we talked about a little earlier.

But first of all, it was a challenge to actually hear equally from private and nonprofit employers. In fact, the majority of individuals in our sample were nonprofit organizations. And so really kind of thinking through, especially building a little bit on what Laura was sharing earlier, kind of the civic-ness of the work of the nonprofit sector, and how findings related to thinking about the relationship between civic-ness and employment might vary as we look across different sectors.

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And so we've been spending some time, and as we're kind of moving forward with this work, really thinking about the variations that might exist across different sectors, and being careful about oversimplifying the signaling effect that something like national service might have, and recognizing that it might need to be considered alongside other important factors as others on this panel have graciously shared. So I just wanted to make sure to mention those things.

PRESENTER: Thank you so much, Jodi, for those very practical considerations that are very— I'm glad you raised those as well. And Laura, do you have some thoughts on the second question as well?

JODI BENENSON: Yeah, are you going to wake up again? Of course. Yeah, I would just say – so I'm a sociologist, and at least in my field, many researchers assume that work and civic life are really conceptually distinct. But as Jodi was just saying, in fact, a lot of people see their work and their civic ambitions as one and the same, because their professional lives are a way to pursue those civic ambitions.

And so I think this has really important implications for how we understand the relationship between employment and civic behaviors. And so, for example, one measurement question that we've been discussing with an ORE, that again speaks to the project at CIRCLE, is whether Americans conceptualize national service as a form of volunteering, or is it a form of professional development?

So I think it's an open question. How do national service participants, who are paid for their time, if they were to be a respondent in the current population survey, civic engagement and volunteering supplement, how would they answer that question about whether they had volunteered in the past year? Do they consider that national service to be a form of volunteering, or do they see it as kind of an investment in their future resume?

And the current instrument for the CPS really doesn't allow us to differentiate between national civic service participants and others, but I really think it's worth doing some cognitive interviewing to explore this issue. And I'd love to connect with Jodi and Noorya and others who are thinking about this sort of porous boundary between the spheres as well.

MELISSA GOUGE: Yes, absolutely. And let's make sure to use the few minutes we'll have in the breakout sessions to really think about building out some of these connections and relationships. I think that would be great. And for the second question, Kim, we'll hand it over to you before we head to the breakout session.

And just a heads up. In order to honor your time, and especially honoring your break time that you'll get between this panel and the next panel, when we come back from the 10

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minutes that we'll have in the breakout session, you'll probably each just have about one minute to just give a quick wrap-up or close out thoughts, perhaps a reaction to the breakout room or whatever comments that you may have to close out. So, Kim, I'll hand over the second question to you.

**KIM BENDER:** Great. Thanks, Melissa. As far as those of us that are considering employing folks with lived expertise as peer support specialists in some form, our team has developed some hiring suggestions for organizations and advice for those that are interviewing for those positions.

And these tools focus – some of the key pieces are that we should be seeking applicants in unconventional places, so we should be advertising for these roles in AA circles, on bulletin boards in local libraries or cafes, on social media, through other peer networks, so that we can create and reach out with this opportunity to folks, since it's such a unique pathway to employment.

And that organizations, as they're considering bringing folks with lived experience into their employment and as colleagues, should really be doing some readiness assessment about how ready they are to truly integrate lived expertise into the work that they're doing. So rather than only direct service providers, we found that peers offer really important insights into how programs are provided, and policies that guide the programming, and organizations that are open to and integrating that feedback will benefit most and provide the most open and welcoming environment to folks with lived experience.

We found that when you're interviewing folks, it's important to be as transparent about the process as possible, and to make it really clear that it is some of your struggles and challenges that are valuable in this role. So when you think about applying for sort of regular jobs, you are often trying to hide some of those struggles, and instead inviting folks to share those and how they've navigated them as assets to the work.

As far as opportunities for using PAR as a way to sort of build social capital and potentially lead to employment or other goals, our team has been thinking a lot about how to intentionally navigate power on PAR teams. And this work is led by Danielle Litman, who's one of our doctoral students. And so she developed a tool, I'm actually going to post it in the chat if that's OK, that really helps PAR teams think about what values are guiding their work, what learning edges we each have, what assets we're bringing to the team.

And it helps to focus more on how we can strive for equity rather than equality on these teams. Our team has struggled and processed through how it's not that everybody has to do everything on a team, but that we're all showing up as our true selves, and offering what we can, and growing in ways that feel meaningful to each of us. So I encourage

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folks to check out that tool. It's been really helpful to our teams, and it's embedded on Danielle's portfolio page.

And then lastly, our team is really, I guess I would give some suggestions that we try not to get too proscribed in what we think of as employment or what we think of as a pathway to employment. So a lot of young people that we've been working with have really shared with us, it's the social capital in itself is one of the main goals. Like, if I could have a community of folks who have my back, who are behind me and figuring out what it is I want to do and helping me get there, that's really the ultimate goal.

And I will find my way to the thing eventually. And so that came out for us, we created this one-and-a-half-minute animated video to share about peer work. And the animator, who was lovely, wanted to put it in as, like, it's like a young person, and they're leaving home, and they're homeless, and they're struggling, and they need a peer worker. And they wanted to sort of symbolize, like, success and achievement and growth. And the animator had put like a cap and gown on the main character.

And our team was like, oh, I don't know. I don't know if that's the only symbol of success. And so we revised that animated video. And I'm going to share that, too, because we're kind of proud of the work and how it's portrayed, but we ended up changing it to really portraying a young person surrounded by other folks who could help them figure out where they're going and what they wanted to achieve in life. So I'll share both of those, and thanks for the chance to share.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you, Kim, so much for sharing that. I will be certain to take a look at it during the break. So I think our colleagues at ICF are going to drop us into our breakout room. And we'll come back for a quick wrap-up so we can let you go at 1:25.

PRESENTER: OK, yep, here we go.

MELISSA GOUGE: All right, as we are all coming back together, I'm seeing lots of faces pop up on the screen, which is very nice. And being mindful, again, of the time and trying to honor your time, and in particular your break time before we hop into the next panel, I know we had a really nice conversation during our breakout session and discussing the panel, right, on employment and stability.

And there seemed to be this really beautiful theme, undercurrent and theme of connections and meaning-making, if you will, for many people, that kind of was woven throughout the entire thread. So in an effort to go ahead and release you from break time, I will close out this session with just some of those quick thoughts, and see, hopefully, see many of you back at 1:35 for the next panel.

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And want to thank all of you panelists for your wonderful presentations. And thank you for the engaged discussions during the breakout session. And this is just the start, right? We're all going to be able to continue to make these connections going forward. So thank you for everything, and we'll see you in another 10 minutes.