

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

MARY HYDE: It's great to see everyone. Welcome to our 2021 Grantee Dialogue. My name is Mary Hyde. I am the Director of the Office of Research and Evaluation at AmeriCorps. I'm a community psychologist by training, and we are very pleased that you're taking some time out of your day this afternoon, or this morning depending on what coast you're on, to learn about all of the exciting research that's been underway here.

We're excited for this series, and we sincerely hope that, through this dialogue today, tomorrow, and Thursday, 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. The ideas and research our panelists will share today and over the next couple of days 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 a 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 Academy of Sciences. The National Research Council convened a panel on measuring social and civic engagement and social cohesion in surveys. This consensus study report, titled "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 key panel recommendations was to conduct research using methods and measures capable of capturing a more contextualized understanding of civic engagement and community change. The report suggests 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. Thank you, and I'll turn it back over to you, Connor.

CONNOR: Thank you very much. Appreciate that. Sounds like we had something going on. All right. So, at this point, we'd like to kick off the first panel dialogue. Still working on getting the slides up and running, but Andrea is going to be hosting the first one on Civic Engagement and Racial Equity. Andrea, I will turn things over to you, and thank you again.

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

ANDREA ROBLES: OK. Well, thank you, everyone, for taking the time to be with us today, and it is such a pleasure to have the panelists all in one panel. My name is Andrea Robles, and I also work at the Office of Research and Evaluation. And I am a sociologist by training and been working on civic engagement and economic and community development for a while.

These panelists have all been studying civic engagement with different populations. The first three grantees on this panel have been conducting participatory research, which is the video you just saw, and working with co-researchers, and that's comprised of students, community members, parents, and others. The last two of our panelists have been working on analyzing civic engagement of African American youth and national service alumni. Although these studies are different, all their work has included thinking of racial, ethnic, and economic equity.

So, in terms of the panel, we will first hear from our panelists, and then we will put everyone into breakout rooms, so we can hear from all of you, the audience. And finally, for the last 10 minutes, we will come back to the full panel to finish our discussion. We will begin by having the panelists introduce themselves and give some background on their studies, as soon as the slides are ready.

So where are we with that? They're up. OK. Great. So, I think I'm just going to pass this over to Anita. Anita, please, just introduce yourself and the team, and then everyone can follow. Thank you.

ANITA CHIKKATUR: All right. Hi, everybody. My name is Anita Chikkatur, and I'm an associate professor at Carleton College, in Minnesota, and I'm sharing here today for on behalf of me and Brian Coleman who's one of my community partners. So, in October 2018, Carleton College in collaboration with the Faribault public schools, Somali Community Resettlement Services, and Community Without Borders received a grant from AmeriCorps to design and implement a persecutory action research project. The town of Faribault, which is located in Rice County, Minnesota, has a population of approximately 22,000.

In the past decade, Faribault's population has gone through a rapid demographic change. According to data from the Minnesota Department of Education and the 2009–2010 school year, 19% of students in Faribault were identified as Latinx, and approximately 7% were identified as Black. This school year, 28% of the students are identified as Latinx, and 26% were identified as Black or African American, with the majority of the Black population coming from an African refugee or immigrant population, mainly Somali. Like many small towns adjusting to such changes in the racial and ethnic makeup of their communities, Faribault has been facing challenges and ensuring that all students complete high school and pursue higher education.

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

So, over the past few years, the AmeriCorps grant has funded multiple community research groups that have worked closely with staff and faculty from Carleton College to learn about research methods, ethics, and to implement various ways to collect information about the experiences of Somali and Latinx students and parents in Faribault. So today, I'm presenting with Brian Coleman who is the Career and Equity Coordinator at Faribault High School, and he was the facilitator for this year's high school youth participatory action research team. Next slide, please.

So Brian, Emily Oliver, and I co-created a curriculum for the YPAR team, which helped the students learn about research and explore topics that was of interest for them as students of color in Faribault High School. Next slide, please.

So, this year's team included four Latinx students and four Somali students, ranging from ninth graders to 12th graders, with a range of academic experiences at the high school. Brian met with the team weekly, initially focusing on building community among the eight students and then moving onto learning about research. And he would meet with me and Emily every other week and as needed to discuss next steps and debrief meetings with the students.

Given the context of the pandemic, the YPAR team decided that they wanted to focus on their peers' experience this past year with distance learning and to conduct short interviews with 40 of their peers to collect information on that topic. They are currently in the process of analyzing their data, and they plan to disseminate their findings through three videos, in English, Spanish, and Somali, aimed at their peers, teachers, administrators, parents, and families. So, so far, some of their most important findings include, one, the need for schools and families to understand why students' motivational levels dropped and mental health suffered during distance learning, which affected their grades. The team really wants the community to be educated about how students were feeling this past year.

Two, without the structure of going to classes, many of the students and their families ended up seeing school as optional. Programs such as the RISE program at their high school, which is also supported by this AmeriCorps grant and Promised Fellows, which focus on providing academic support played an important role in keeping students on track, especially for students whose parents were not as familiar with the U.S. school system. And finally, the students they interviewed noted that their parents did not understand that distance learning was actually harder. And as one of the student researchers put it, homework didn't just disappear during distance learning, but many of the students were asked to take on other responsibilities, such as taking care of their siblings, which made keeping up with distance learning difficult. So those are some of their initial findings, and I look forward to seeing their videos, where they'll talk more about their findings. Thank you.

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

MARY HYDE: Thank you very much. Anjali?

ANJALI DUTT: Hi. Thank you so much for having me here today. My name is Anjali Dutt, and I'm an Assistant Professor of Social and Community Psychology at the University of Cincinnati. I'm somewhat regretting that I don't have my other team members' photos on this. So, they were unable to be here today, but this was a project that I've been doing predominantly with Dr. Farrah Jacquez who's also a Professor of Psychology at the University of Cincinnati, Bryan Wright, who is the director of our community partner which is called Cincinnati Compass which is an organization that was designed by the city and the local Chamber of Commerce as a welcoming initiative for immigrants and refugees into the city. And as already shared, we used a participatory research method involving co-researchers, and our project has been co-designed with 12 members of local refugee communities here in Cincinnati. Next slide.

So, over the course of the past 2 and 1/2 years, we've been meeting regularly with, like I said, 12 members of local refugee communities. The members come from seven different countries, including Bhutan, Guatemala, Syria, Burundi, the DR Congo, Iraq, and most recently, Mauritania. We've been working to develop various ways of learning more about the local refugee community and the concerns that they have about life in Cincinnati.

Cincinnati is considered a non-traditional immigrant destination city, which means that this is not a location that is known for having a lot of immigrants and refugees. However, there are actually over 20,000 refugees living in the city and the surrounding communities, many of whom move here as secondary migrants so don't necessarily get tracked in the same way that traditional refugees—or in the way that cities that are considered traditional destination cities get tracked.

So many people move to Cincinnati as refugees, because of the low cost of housing, the availability of jobs. However, a lot of the infrastructure that is sometimes needed to integrate into life is not as readily available here. So our research has had many different phases, but it initially started with conducting a survey that was focused on learning specifically about the civic life and goals that refugees in the region have, followed by a series of focus groups to learn more about what exactly do the refugee communities want to see in our city, and how can we play a role in making life better for refugees and immigrants in the city. Next slide, please.

So we were able to, through analyzing our survey, our first survey, and our focus groups, we were able to develop three specific actions geared towards addressing concerns and actualizing goals of refugee communities in the area. The first thing that we did, or aimed to, do was have a social gathering aimed around building community among refugees. A number of refugees noted that they had community amongst people from their own background but not as much with other refugees from other countries and other regions.

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

So, our goal was to have an in-person social gathering. However, this was scheduled for March 2020. We had started a lot of planning around it, but I'm sure it's a surprise to no one that we had to cancel it. And instead we used the resources that we had allocated towards that to conduct a survey that was about learning about how refugees in the region were impacted by COVID.

We also learned that there was a desire to have more tools to learn about navigating life in this area, and so we developed a series of videos and resources on how to navigate life in Cincinnati. For example, we have a video now on how to rent an apartment and interact with landlords that goes over both your rights and obligations as a tenant. We're working on one right now related to mental health, and others will be developed related to language acquisition.

And then the third thing that we did was we developed a Refugee and Immigrant Civic Leadership workshop series. This is a five-week series that is going on right now. We did an initial cohort that was a much smaller group to test it out, and right now we have our first group of about 30 refugees and immigrants living in the city that are going through a web-based, biweekly leadership workshop. Next slide. And I'm looking forward to discussing more about those projects with you all. Thank you.

MARY HYDE: Thank you. So next, we have Jenna and Pang.

JENNA CUSHING-LEUBNER: Thank you. So my name is Dr. Jenna Cushing-Leubner. I'm an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater, and Pang Yang is also here, and she is our lead community member on this project, and she's also the executive director of Minnesota Zej Zog. Our work for the last three years has been a participatory design research project that brings together Hmong educators across the three states that have the largest and densest populations of the Hmong diaspora in the United States, and that is in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California.

So, since the early 2000s, Hmong schools have begun to open, and also Hmong heritage language programs have been developed across these three states in order to reclaim and sustain Hmong languages, literacies, cultural practices, and knowledge systems outside of the Eurocentric and English-dominant U.S. school systems. The work of these Hmong language educators are to intervene and enact collective healing in response to complex intergenerational and historical traumas that are impacting the community in myriad ways. Our three cohorts over the last three years have brought together over 60 Hmong language, literacy, and culture educators, K-12 and higher Ed, and this also represents mothers, parents, siblings, elders, artists, and leaders in the Hmong language reclamation community. Can you switch the slide? Sorry. Thank you.

So, the work that we've done can be found at the Hmong Language Resource Hub. So, this is an open access website, where all of the work that's being done by the Hmong

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

Language Educators Coalition community is being placed. And the goal of this is to make sure that the knowledge that is grown and disseminated and shared across the community is always available and accessible and owned by the Hmong community.

What you can find there right now reflects the work of the last three years. So, there are 18 community-based learning units that were created in partnership between Hmong language educators, elders, artists, and youth and community developed teaching and learning standards for Hmong language, literacy, and cultural knowledge. There's also in development is the Hmong Ethnic Studies curriculum, which will include trainings for educators and Hmong Njua curriculum and training, which is an additional language variation of Hmong that is less commonly taught in the school systems but used across the Hmong language-speaking community.

The work also involves licensing Hmong language teachers. This came out of our second iteration of our participatory project, where we're bringing up Hmong educational leaders across the community and also in order to sustain these community-developed and driven curricular materials and learning opportunities. There are also nine Hmong youth educator and community member authored books that have been published or are being published through one of our committee partners, her publisher which is Hmong Educational Resources Publishers. And we've also in this year began partnering with Somali heritage language teachers in Minnesota in order to find resonance across the community participatory design research project that we have been engaging in to see how this could also support the Somali language reclamation work of similarly displaced less common taught language in refugee-oriented community or refugee-backgrounded community. Next slide.

This work is also in support of increasing Hmong scholars who are representing Hmong knowledge and language scholarship and increasing the amount of scholarship that's produced by participatory and community-engaged Hmong scholars. So, we are working closely with Thong Vang, who's a graduate research assistant at University of Minnesota, and Dr. Vicky Xiong-Lor,] who is a community researcher with our project and a lead facilitator on our Hmong ethnic studies design work. Together, we have been working on multiple articles, presentations, and we've been creating infrastructure-focused research, looking at complex community-engaged research and change projects and what the infrastructure from within the community and in relationship to other institutions might look like. And we're also focusing on what youth, elder, and teacher collaborations for community-driven educational transformation can involve, and we're also developing scholarship around critical Hmong studies at Heritage Language Curriculum development in order to increase the access to doing this sort of work across other displaced and refugee-backgrounded communities. Next.

MARY HYDE: OK. Thank you, Jenna. So, Laura, we'll turn it to you.

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

LAURA WRAY-LAKE: Hi, everyone. It is so great to be here on this panel. My name is Laura Wray-Lake. I'm an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Welfare in the Luskin School of Public Affairs at UCLA. I want to acknowledge my other team members. We have a large multiracial team of graduate students and faculty on this project who were very instrumental and collaborative in all the work that we do. Next slide, please.

I'm excited to present to you today some findings from our Young Black Changemaker study, which was a supplemental project funded by AmeriCorps. We also have a website. So please, feel free to check it out to see our other team members and some of our reports to community partners.

The key questions of this study focus on how do Black youth become civically engaged, and what helps Black youths sustain their civic engagement? The reason that we did this study was we really wanted to challenge the dominant narratives of Black youth. So, the vast majority of research on Black young people focuses on a deficit approach, and we wanted to instead focus on the strengths of Black youth, elevate their voices, and really examine their civic leadership and where that comes from, how it develops. And we think that these findings are important for informing organizations that work with Black young people and for strengthening investments in communities of color.

So, the way that we did this study was we interviewed 43 Black young people in Los Angeles. They ranged in age from 13 to 18. They identified as Black, and they identified as highly civically engaged. And we really wanted to focus on young people who were civically engaged, so we could understand what got them into engagement and what kept them engaged. An interesting dynamic of this study is we collected the data from February to August of 2020, and as many of you or all of you know, that was a very tumultuous time for our country. There was the pandemic, but also there was a lot of racial injustice.

Yes, it was incredible timing. There was the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, many others, police violence, and uprising related to the Black Lives Matter movement. So, these young people, we interviewed half of them before George Floyd was murdered and then half afterwards. And then we even went back and interviewed some of the earlier ones to get their other thoughts and experiences during this moment of uprising. So next slide, please.

Our findings, I want to focus on a few findings that really speak to this theme of civic engagement and racial equity. One is that the Black youth that we talked to described feeling a duty to make lasting change for the Black community, and they really focused on future generations and wanting there to be racial equity for those future generations. And that guided a lot of their every day and sustained engagement in the racial justice movements.

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

Another thing, though, is that a lot of these Black youth, their racial justice work was everyday racial justice work. So, the Black youth talked about the need to educate non-Black peers at school, on social media about racism, and often this entailed correcting negative misconceptions about Black youth or explaining racism to their white peers. They felt like this was a very important role that they played but also very burdensome and exhausting and had a mental health toll on them.

The other piece was larger participation in racial justice movements through mostly community-based organizations that support Black youth and civic engagement and organizing. Some youth challenged racial inequalities in schools through Black student unions as well. And in this work, many youth felt empowered, and then some youth also talked about their voices being disregarded and not often heard. So, there's a lot of different experiences for Black youth that are both positive and negative, as they're fighting for racial justice. And I look forward to talking more with the other panelists and people here about racial equality. Thank you.

MARY HYDE: Excellent, Laura, and Matt, you'll be the fifth person on the panel. Go ahead.

MATTHEW HUDSON-FLEGE: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Matthew Hudson-Flege. I'm a Research Assistant Professor at Clemson University. That is one hat that I wear. The other hat that I wear is program director of a small AmeriCorps program, Furman College Advising Corps, here in Greenville, South Carolina, as well. So, my research interests really both, as far as my research and my professional experience, are around AmeriCorps programs and other year of service programs, who serves, and why they serve. If you can go to the next slide, please.

So, in AmeriCorps world, I think those of us who are involved in the programs and in leadership roles, we tend to have this impression that all people who serve in AmeriCorps do so in order to save the world or make this positive impact in their community. And while that's certainly true to an extent, there's also a lot of diversity in terms of who serves and why they serve, as far as their age, their education level, and their motivation to serve. And better understanding who these people are and why they serve I think can help us to better recruit AmeriCorps members, better support members while they serve, and better retain those members.

So, over the last few years, thanks to this grant from the Office of Research and Evaluation, I've been able to look at a few data sources on the AmeriCorps Longitudinal Study, which is tracked about 2,000 AmeriCorps members and 2,000 people who were interested in AmeriCorps but didn't serve over an eight-year period, in the early 2000s. I've looked at data from the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcome Survey, which interviewed a little over 1,000 AmeriCorps alumni from the last six to eight years. And then also, I've done some recent qualitative interviews with small groups of AmeriCorps alumni from a

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

few different programs around the country, and then just my own experience currently running an AmeriCorps program myself.

So, what I have found is that there are four distinct profiles of AmeriCorps members. One is who I call young idealists. These are recent high school grads who have a very high level of public service motivation.

The next group is who I call wanderers. These are young people who may be a year or two out of high school. They may have gone to college for a year or two or worked for a year or two but are really struggling to find traction with their studies or a professional career and are joining AmeriCorps less about public service motivation but more so finding some sense of direction.

Next, I would say, the third group is called public servants. These are recent college grads who have a very high level of public service motivation, and they're joining AmeriCorps to really kick start a career in the nonprofit sector or the public sector, and then finally gappers. Gappers are also recent college graduates, but they have more of a low to moderate level of public service motivation and are joining AmeriCorps to have some time to reflect and find direction for where their professional career will go after college.

So, the findings and understandings of these groups, it has a lot of implications for both how AmeriCorps service impacts these individuals and how we as AmeriCorps program leaders can better target recruiting and member retention efforts. But in the interest of the topic of this panel today being racial equity, I did want to talk just for a moment about some of the findings and implications in that area. So, I did find that amongst these four different profiles, there are some definitely significant differences in the racial and socioeconomic diversity within these four groups.

The two profiles of young idealists and wanderers who are AmeriCorps members that are non-college graduates have much higher levels of racial and economic diversity than the profiles that consist strictly of college graduates. And in particular, that group that's gappers, who are college graduates, who are really doing AmeriCorps to find a sense of direction for where their career will go next, that group was overwhelmingly White and from higher-income brackets, which may suggest that this concept of a gap year is something of a privilege that is not available to all groups.

And furthermore, research that I've done has found that in recruiting, programs that have the diverse members are typically those that paid more towards the upper end of the living stipend in AmeriCorps, that AmeriCorps allows, and also have a very clear direction to how this year of service will connect to a career in the future. So again, as with the others, I look forward to talking more about this research and its implications. Thank you.

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

MARY HYDE: Thank you. These were great presentations, and I know I asked you to talk only for four minutes, when all of your work could expand on several hours. So, in the next I'd say 20 minutes, I'm just going to ask two questions that I'd like all of you to answer, and we could go in the order that we started with. So, the first one is can you give us one or two examples on how your research can be used for, or could contribute to, racial, and I would say, economic equity? So Anita, your group?

ANITA CHIKKATUR: I was going to actually ask if Brian could jump in on the question.

MARY HYDE: Sure. Go ahead, Brian.

BRIAN COLEMAN: Hello, everyone. I'm Brian Coleman here at Faribault High School, and in relationship to that, did you want to answer both of those questions or just one? If not--

MARY HYDE: Yeah, just the first one. Can you give us--

BRIAN COLEMAN: Oh, OK.

MARY HYDE: One or two examples...

BRIAN COLEMAN: So that's an example of how the research can be used to contribute to racial equality?

MARY HYDE: Yes.

BRIAN COLEMAN: OK. So in relationship to that, I think the first thing that I guess we found is that, during distance learning, that helping students find a safe place to get the support they needed, the academic support that they needed, when they needed it, what we found is that a lot of our minority students didn't have that support at home, and a lot of our White students were getting support from family. So, I would say that this can help us create more of that space, like Anita talked about earlier, the RISE space, where students were able to come in and get some academic support. That's one way. Oh, another example is through home visits and our visits with families, just helping the minority students' families understand the school system and what those expectations are during distance learning, and just a better understanding of what it was.

MARY HYDE: Thank you, Brian.

BRIAN COLEMAN: You're welcome. We'll come back to you in the second question in a minute. And I just want to mention to everybody, if you'd like to have put any comments in the chat, please do so, and we'll get to them later. So, Anjali?

ANJALI DUTT: Thank you, and thinking about racial equity has been so central to our entire project. So, two ways that this has shown up in concrete actions are the first is that our initial survey, where we surveyed members of many different refugee communities, because we were

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

focusing on about seven different communities, we were able to look at differences in the experiences of refugees based on the communities that they're a part of. And so, Cincinnati is an incredibly segregated city. It's about 50% White, about 45% African American, and then a number of other communities make up the remaining 5%. But if you walk around the city, it won't feel like that. You'll either be in a neighborhood that feels predominantly White, predominantly Black, or predominantly Asian, et cetera.

And so what we were able to find in our survey was that refugees who come from African countries, and therefore have dark skin and are viewed as members of the African American community, reported less satisfaction with life in the city. And through focus groups, we were able to connect that, we were able to dig a bit deeper, and find out that a lot of it has to do with the added racial discrimination and exclusion and racist hostility that members of African refugee communities were experiencing.

We currently have a paper under review that explores this, that kind of connects the experiences of Black refugees in Cincinnati to the racist history of the city. But we're able to share that and document that there are overlapping racial injustices that are happening here. And we were able to have conversations that really pushed for solidarity amongst all those who are experiencing racial discrimination. Because we can show that the racist history of the city has implications for incoming refugees and immigrants into the area, and that these communities can be working together. And that we can use the numbers to really push the city to expose how these inequalities are shaping the space.

And then the second way that we have really centered racial equity is in our civic leadership program that we developed—so this is a program that is for—the first iteration was just for refugees, and now we've opened it to refugees and immigrants based on some generous funding from AmeriCorps. And so in this, pretty much everybody who participates in this identify as members of racially disempowered groups in the United States. And in Civic Leaders Program, we're connecting members of city council.

This year actually is a mayoral election in Cincinnati, and we're inviting the mayoral candidates to come and to just give a platform to hear the concerns of refugees and immigrants in the area. As well as creating... The ultimate goal of the Civic Leader Program is to create more opportunities for members of racially and ethnically marginalized communities, to gain the leadership skills, and gain the networking skills, really be connected with people who can make it possible for, to make it more possible for immigrants, refugees, and members of racially devalued community members to have more leadership opportunities, to really be shaping the trajectory of Cincinnati. And I very much hope that is a long-term outcome of our project. Thank you.

MARY HYDE: Thanks. Jenna?

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

JENNA CUSHING-LEUBNER: Yes. Thank you. So, when we're talking about racial equity, we're looking especially at communities who have experienced historical and current invisibilization. So especially within the Asian-American community, without the desegregation of data, refugee-backgrounded communities, such as the Hmong community, are oftentimes really erased from the reality of their experiences in the United States. And that includes negative racialized experiences but also extreme efforts for self-determination and collective self-determination and healing that are being enacted by the community and across the communities.

So, in this situation, when we're looking at racial equity, we're looking at work that really looks at the Hmong as a displaced people who also represent a stateless, less commonly taught language. And so within the United States, because of the Eurocentric schooling system, really the English-dominant and English-only schooling system, the work that we're doing is really, really highlighting what community determination of major, major educational questions and educational research might actually look like. So questions like what do teachers need to know and be able to do? That's a primary question in teacher education research that is really almost never answered by communities who are multiply marginalized, such as the Hmong community.

What is a curriculum that is culturally sustaining and promotes schools' success, and who should develop and design and answer the question of what that curriculum should include and should look like? Who should be the teachers, and also what does it really, really mean to have linguistically accessible and linguistically sustaining educational environment? When these questions are answered from communities who are multiply marginalized and almost never part of the voicing of the answers of those questions, what we see is a shift in not only educational attainment and school success, community leadership and involvement, but we also see an intervention in historical traumas and intergenerational traumas that impact mental health and other health and wellness outcomes that are major, major disparities across racialized communities with refugee backgrounds.

MARY HYDE: Thank you. Next is Laura.

LAURA WRAY-LAKE: Yeah. So, in our study of Black youth, it's clear that Black youth are civic leaders in the fight for racial justice, and they're doing this work in their schools, with their peers, in their communities, on social media, and as part of national movements. So, I think one implication for what does this mean for society to move towards racial equality. It means that we need to invest in these Black youth and their efforts, and part of that is investing in community-based organizations that serve Black youth and focus on skill building, related to organizing, offering support systems for Black youth to form communities. And also, these organizations we find are primary sources for Black youths to learn the history

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

of Black history, because it's not taught in schools, and so those are powerful investments that we could make.

The other sort of larger point is that, obviously, Black youth are doing amazing work for racial equity, but they really shouldn't have to. That it's really the job of all of us, and the Black youths in our study spoke to this quite a bit in talking about the importance of multiracial and inter-group coalitions on racial equity and having allies who are non-Black and the importance of this but also how it can be positive and negative for them as civic leaders. So, it's important for non-Black allies to be thoughtful about how they engage and not overtake or overstep in the movement and seeing Black youth as the leaders for racial equity. Thank you.

MARY HYDE: Thanks, Laura. OK, and Matt?

MATTHEW HUDSON-FLEGE: So there's definitely a huge interest among AmeriCorps program leaders in recruiting diverse AmeriCorps members who represent the communities where our programs are serving. And so I was asked by folks here in South Carolina that help to support various AmeriCorps programs on how this research that we've been doing can better support recruiting of more diverse members. And really what I found from the interviews and our experience is that, again, for someone who maybe comes from a wealthier background that has family support when they graduate from college, there's not an immense financial pressure to make a lot of money right out of college. They can take a gap year of doing AmeriCorps and figure things out.

But for somebody who's maybe a first-generation college student or doesn't have that financial support of the family, they need to ensure that the time they spend when they graduate is, A, they'll be able to pay their bills, take care of their student loans, et cetera. And B, that it's going to be intentionally teeing them off on a positive foot for a career. So, by promoting those aspects of AmeriCorps from student loan forgiveness, to the direct connections and benefits that can happen from a career, and also then as program leaders, ensuring that we can provide a living stipend that's competitive with entry-level work in similar fields. We've had a lot of success at Furman College Advising Corps with recruiting more diverse members, and I think other programs are seeing that as well.

MARY HYDE: Thank you. Thank you all. So, moving onto the second question. I know a number of you talked about this already, but again to be more specific, can you provide examples of how civic engagement—and I know it's being defined a little differently depending on your community and your study—but how that may contribute to social cohesion, since this is a topic that we hear a lot about? How do we unite the country? How does civic engagement work towards that, and again, from your own research, can you give us some examples? Thanks. Anita, let's start with you,

BRIAN COLEMAN: Brian, but yeah. In a relationship--

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

MARY HYDE: Brian, sorry.

BRIAN COLEMAN: That's OK. In relationship to civic engagement more on a local level, I think that it's the key to—I mean, whether that's through participation in activities or service learning or groups such as YPAR—to create that environment, especially for students, can formulate those relationships and create those relationships to help promote that trust over time. I think that we assume that it's going to happen instantly, but we as people know that it's going to take a little bit of time to build that trust. And then using that, they will take a sense of pride in their school and their community, and also I think building on the relationships to work together to make the changes within the school or within the community are essential. I think that it's all going to be relational. It's going to start with the relationships, and once those are formed, and they have a solid group, then they can work to make changes and better their community all together.

MARY HYDE: Thank you, Brian, and thanks for allowing this program in your school. We visited actually. So, it's great. OK. So, Anjali?

ANJALI DUTT: Thanks, again. So, one of the things that wasn't necessarily explicitly intentional when we were designing, when we were applying for this grant really, but has become such one of the biggest gifts of the project has been this emphasis on solidarity. Oftentimes, participatory projects, and most of those that I've been involved in prior to this project, have centered on one or two communities, and of course, there's tons of diversity with any particular community. But in this place, we decided that we are going to just open this up to anyone who is a member of refugee communities, both when we were searching for co-researchers, and as we were making all of our decisions as a team.

And one of the things that has just been profoundly beautiful to me is the way that communities have really been focusing on the overlapping injustices that they experience, as well as overlapping goals and desires for community. And so we've seen a ton of solidarity being built. Just last week at our civic leadership program, we had someone from the Mauritanian community who was presenting at the program. And she was talking about—her focus was on community organizing, and she was talking about things that people in the Mauritanian community were doing. And this person who was presenting happened to live in Columbus, so about two hours away from us.

And a number of the people who are in the program, only one of whom is from Mauritania, were highlighting that there's just so much overlap in the concerns that people have and the power that they have as a group, when they come together to support each other. And so I'm seeing really the beauty of social cohesion regularly, even though that wasn't an explicit intentional goal. But when you bring people together and realize that you're part of the same community, that the same structures that inhibit your well-being inhibit other people's well-being, and that if you work together, you can really

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

create change, those values have just become so clear. And I have a lot of optimism for what will come as a result of the solidarity that's being built. Thanks.

MARY HYDE: Thank you. Pang and Jenna?

PANG YANG: All right. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Good afternoon. My name is Pang, and I am a Hmong language teacher working with Jenna the last three years. And in thinking about this question, civic engagement is key to social cohesion, and I can give you three examples from what we've had happen in the last three years.

So being a Hmong language teacher, I don't have all the knowledge that the experts in the community have, that the elders have, that the artists have. And so bringing them into the classroom has been one of the favorites of my students and being able to bring those voices into the space, into the classroom space, have really created this bond or this bridge to really help deepen the knowledge systems of our students and really connect them with different generations of folks in the community and also have given me myself professional development as well.

Another example is building trust with our Hmong language teachers nationally. That was something that was super important. In order for them to believe in our work and to get them on board, building that trust was so important and then removing all the politics that comes along with it. And so now, teachers are no longer working in a silo, but we're all working together for a better future with Hmong language preservation.

And then the third example is the mental health of our students are so important, even more so during COVID. We know that, and as a matter of fact, the number one cause of death for Asians, Asian adolescents 16 to 24 years old, is suicide. And so, after losing a student to suicide, in 2019, it was time for the Hmong community to wake up and start talking about mental health and start doing it in a way that was culturally relevant to them. So, engaging in artists and professionals and getting them to wake the community up and have these conversations.

And so out of that, a beautiful project called Project Shandu came out of it, and so far in the last two years, we've had the three very successful in-person and virtual events to wake up the community in that. And so the results of this brand, this brand really has transformed the Hmong community across the United States and really creating new avenues to civic engagement that didn't exist before. And as a result, Jenna and I started the nonprofit Minnesota Zej Zog to continue this work, as it is very important to move the community forward. Thank you.

MARY HYDE: Thank you so much, and thanks for all your work. I have attended one of your virtual celebrations, I would say, and it was wonderful. So, let's see. Laura?

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

LAURA WRAY-LAKE: Yes. I resonate with so much that all of you said. So, it's great to be on this panel and hearing from everyone. For example, a lot of our work speaks to what Brian said at the beginning of the importance of civic engagement for young people in establishing relationships and building trust over time. So that echoes in our work too.

But one thing I'd like to add is that our findings with Black civically engaged youth really show that racism and discrimination are barriers to social cohesion, and that's not going to be a surprise to anyone. But one way to combat that is anti-racist civic engagement. So really advocating for racial equality in multiple spaces is a way to create welcoming spaces and spaces where Black youth feel heard and valued and treated the same as other young people. So, for Black youths specifically, anti-racist civic action of everyone is really key to social cohesion.

Another finding we have related to this is that Black youth really benefit from Black-centered spaces. So having opportunities to spend time and be in community or be in organizations with other Black youth and adults is very important for a sense of safety, for Black identity development, for feeling a sense of belonging, and also for having joy and pride in one's Black identity. So those spaces are very important, and sometimes, that feels contradictory to social cohesion of having affinity groups that are specific to a particular race. But especially Black student unions and high schools, the youth in our study really talk about how central they are as safe spaces and spaces of identity development and solidarity, in addition to multiracial spaces, where people are advocating for racial equity.

MARY HYDE: Thank you, Laura. Matt?

MATTHEW HUDSON-FLEGE: Great. Thank you. So, in thinking about this, I think that participation in national service programs, like AmeriCorps, can really provide some great opportunities to promote social cohesion. So, I actually I want to give an example from the distant past, then an example from today, literally today.

So, one of the forbearers of AmeriCorps national service is the triple C, or the Civilian Community Corps, back in the Depression era. And I'll read a quote from someone who was in the triple C, and they said, ask a triple C veteran what he got out of the experience, and invariably, his first response is that he learned to, quote, get along with other people. But this doesn't mean an appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity. It means something much simpler.

This was often their first exposure to life beyond home, farm, village. 30 farm boys, city boys, mountain boys, all work together. I was a farm kid. I didn't know how other people lived or what other people thought about the world. In the triple C, we didn't have a choice. We had to work together and get to know each other.

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

I think today, there's similar trends, but some of those differences might be along different lines. So, in my work with Furman College Advising Corps, we place AmeriCorps members in high schools in very rural areas of South Carolina. And one school in particular that we place advisors is a very rural area, overwhelmingly White, overwhelmingly conservative. I was told a very racist school personnel, but having got to know those people, I had a different view of it.

And this year, I actually placed a member there who is multiracial, is a member of the LGBTQ community, but who has a really good sense of cultural humility, understanding, and strong relationship building. And this AmeriCorps member was able to really integrate well with this school community, form strong relationships with the school counseling staff and students who are very different from her, and I think has really made a lot of progress for both her own views about others in our country and for the people in that school and community really expanding their views as well. So, I think that there's certainly a danger of just throwing people into different situations, but with the right training and preparation and the right sense of cultural humility, both among AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps service sites, national service has a great potential to put people together who might not otherwise be in close proximity and really allow them to learn from one another.

MARY HYDE: Thank you, everyone. So, I hope the audience has heard—again, these were just a few clips and some examples, but we'd like to hear from all of you. And so ICF is going to put us into some chat rooms, hear from everyone, and then we'll come back as a group for the last, I believe, 10 minutes. For the next—let's see, what time is it? We don't have that much time, but what we'd like to do is just, if there's some major impression that came out of your group, we had interesting discussions on trust, on participatory research in general, on intergenerational issues and how that is a form of diversity in and of itself, the differences in terms of AmeriCorps members.

So, anything in particular someone wants to mention? We only have a few minutes left. From any of the panelists? So maybe what I'll ask, if as panelists you could just maybe respond to something you heard in one of your groups, and just close with your last impressions or something you wanted to mention. And we'll just start with Anita.

ANITA CHIKKATUR: I think I heard just a lot of resonance in terms of the kinds of work we're doing and in our little small group, we talked about how we hope that, even though our particular brand is ending, that we can build on the relationships of the community but also maybe across projects, particularly regionally, and kind of thinking about how to build on that energy. And also honestly shout out to the AmeriCorps Research Office staff for allowing us to do like truly community-centered work.

MARY HYDE: Thank you. Yes, and one of the things we hope-- and we hope there's a lot of regional folks joining us in the next few days, because we do want for the regions to know that all of

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

you are working in different universities and have inroads with different communities, and we'd like to definitely keep those relationships going. Thank you, Anita. Let's see, I think it's Brian.

BRIAN COLEMAN: Hi. Oh, I think that we had a lot of great conversations, especially small group, and just suggestions. Obviously, the families came into play a lot about making it a safe space in relationship to who's invited to the table and opening that up to entire families, when you're having discussions around changes or things that of people would like to see within the community and really getting everybody in the same space and make it an inviting space. We also talked about student voice, including making sure that there's a platform for students to be heard.

There was something-- and I'm probably going to get it wrong-- but in relationship to the language that youth use, and I don't want to say be intolerable. But accepting of the fact that their language is much different, and we need to be open to that and be OK with the fact that their language might be different. Those are some of the things that stuck out to me.

MARY HYDE: Thanks. Anjali, any closing comments or something to react to?

ANJALI DUTT: Yeah. Thank you. There were so many really insightful and brilliant questions and comments posed in our small group, but one of the things that I thought might be a valuable one to end on was a comment that somebody else made about how do we take some of the insights that were gained here and around participation, around inclusion, and use—some of us, in myself included, are AmeriCorps alum—and so how do we use that not to just be like a resume builder that is accessible, thinking about the research that Matthew shared, not just to be a resume builder but really about setting society up to have a more just and inclusive set of people who are really eager about being leaders in civic domain and society. So really not just being about those of us who are in more privileged positions to take a really low salary for a year, but rather how do we make this so that like what participatory and inclusive decision-making skills have been gained to push America in that direction, to then set up society to have a more diverse set of leaders for us. Thanks.

MARY HYDE: Thank you. Jenna and Pang? I don't know if you were in the same room or different rooms.

JENNA CUSHING-LEUBNER: We were in different rooms, but Pang had to go back and teach.

MARY HYDE: OK.

JENNA CUSHING-LEUBNER: It's the last week of school, so I'll speak for both of us for this [AUDIO OUT]. So I think Brian talked about an aspect of this, but I'd really like to keep the conversation focused on language around this. I think the work that Anita and Brian's

ICF Transcription
Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

project has done to create that space, to provide resources for participatory and community engaged and community-led research in multiple languages, Somali, Hmong, and Spanish, is so, so huge, and we have also been trying to do that. So like what does that mean? If we really want community members to engage in this work, what does it mean to be able to provide resources that are accessible in the languages of elders and in the primary languages of communities that are recently displaced or experiencing immigration or migration.

And there is increasing resources for participatory work in English, and even though Spanish is the second most commonly used language in this country, there's almost nothing in Spanish, until Anita and Brian's website came out. And we are trying to create some of that in Hmong to piggyback with them, but that is a major, major focus. Like what is the question about social cohesion and societal and community cohesion, if it's only through English? I think it's a non-starter.

MARY HYDE: Thank you. OK, so Laura?

LAURA WRAY-LAKE: I might be at risk of repeating, as I was in the same session as Jenna and Brian. But I'll just end on the note of one thing our group resonated with was the idea of anti-racist civic engagement, and we talked about what that meant, like Jenna talked about. It means language, justice. It means inclusion of all community members having a voice at the table, and I think the participatory work really shows that powerfully.

It means giving young people voice, as Brian's work and my work talks about. And the piece we ended on I think is powerful too, in that AmeriCorps members also need to be diverse and representative of different groups. So we need people of color as AmeriCorps members in these spaces, as an important piece of the puzzle for building racial equity.

MARY HYDE: Thank you, and Matt, any last thoughts, either from the group or just from something you've heard?

MATTHEW HUDSON-FLEGE: Yeah. So in our group, particularly towards the end, there was a lot of discussion about how young people today are definitely very vocal and want to talk about racial equity and these pressing issues that we're faced with today. But a lot of times, sometimes, those are productive conversations. Sometimes, they're not productive conversations and formats. And so I think those of us who are involved in civic engagement work in national service, really have an opportunity to help to facilitate and promote positive, productive discussion between different groups. And the more that we can do that, I think the more hope there is for better social cohesion and progress today.

MARY HYDE: Thank you so much. Well, thank you all for taking the time and giving us a brief summary of your work and examples of the work you're doing towards cohesion and civic

ICF Transcription

Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue Civic Engagement and Racial Equity

engagement. Just to let everyone know, we do have some research grantee profiles that will be live on our website soon, so you can reach out to any of these folks. Also, again, we're really trying to think about how to promote regional networks with everyone, and so that's something to look forward to as well. For those of you coming back at 1:35, we're going to do a civic engagement and environmental stewardship, and look forward to—hoping that some of you could join us.