ANDREA ROBLES: So, welcome back for those of you who have attended our last panel today or yesterday's panel. I just want to say I'm very excited to hear about the research being conducted by these panelists that you'll hear from today. They have all been studying civic engagement in different contexts. So that means local communities, rural and urban settings, civic-based organizations, and through social networks. We are eager to hear how these different settings might be incubators for civic engagement and volunteering.

But before, well, the way we've been working it, there's a lot we do in an hour-and-a-half, but we will hear from our panelists. Then we will go into breakout rooms so we could hear from all of you. And then in the last few minutes, we'll come back and finish our discussion. So we will begin by having the panelists introduce themselves and give some background on their studies. And we'll follow that up, like I said, with a few questions that they will answer. So I will just turn this over to Brad.

BRAD FULTON: Great. Welcome, everyone. My name is Brad Fulton, and I'm working with Matthew Baggetta, who's also a professor at Indiana University. And so our research, we are doing observing civic engagement using a method where we send RAs into civil society organizations to basically sit there and document and observe what happens in these meetings and gatherings of community-based organizations. And how do I advance my slide for this one? Or should I post my slide? OK, perfect.

So a quick little snippet of what I might share in the next three minutes is an observation that we had that when we were observing these organizations in terms of racial diversity and gender diversity, we found that civil society organizations that were comprised of organizational members where they bring together multiple organizations tended to be more diverse, more racially diverse and even gender diverse, in terms of leadership than individual member associations that you join as either as an individual or as an organization.

And so we wanted to test this on a larger sample of organizations, so we worked with Candid Together, their diversity and demographic data. And we did an analysis which basically tests whether civil society organizations that are structured as having organizational members are more diverse than organizations that are structured with individual members. So, the next slide.

So again, we looked at approximately 15,000 nonprofit organizations. We looked at their gender composition and racial and ethnic composition of their board members, senior staff, and full-time staff and then controlled for other characteristics, like size of the organization, their budget, how many years they've been around. And the fascinating results for us in regards to being incubators of civic engagement is that consistently, across the board, organizations that have an organizational member structure where they pull together a bunch of other organizations to become members of the organization, like

a coalition, tended to be more racially and ethnically diverse and marginally more gender-diverse.

And the main takeaway from this is that voluntary associations are supposed to be places where you can have greater diversity, the bridging social capital. But it actually doesn't happen. Most voluntary associations tend to be homogeneous. But this is what we would call, I think – if you take it to the next slide, one more slide – OK, yeah.

So what this means, what we discovered, through this is what we call the diversity layer. So the social sector as a whole isn't necessarily particularly diverse. But what we find is this layer where you have coalitions and large groups of multiple organizations working together is where you actually experience the social-bridging benefits of the social sector and the voluntary associations. So that's just a soundbite of some of the research that we're engaging in in Indiana. Thank you.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thank you, Brad. I can't wait to hear more. So, Carol Cutler White.

CAROL CUTLER WHITE: Hey, yeah. Well, good afternoon, everybody. You can go to the next slide, please. So I'm really glad to be here. And thank you, Andrea and Melissa, for inviting me to share about our project in Mississippi. I have two partners who couldn't be here today. One is the Woodward Hines Education Foundation. They are a statewide organization that conducts college access work in Mississippi to help students and families fill out the appropriate paperwork. And so when I was listening to Sam's presentation in the previous panel, I was remembering when we met in November of, what, 2018? Three years ago. And our projects were very similar in intent.

So to bring you up to date for where we are – oh, my second collaborator is the city of Greenville. And Greenville is – their byline or their tagline is, we are the heart of the Mississippi Delta. So they are the north-south, they are the midpoint of the delta in the state of Mississippi. And so as you can imagine, it's very high poverty. It's very high unemployment. It's very low college-going rates, very high minority populations, all of the indicators that would seem to say that this is not going to be a good outcome. But I have other news to share.

So my incubator is really focused on college access. That's the work that I do. And I also work with community colleges. But for the last two years, or three years, I guess, by now, I conducted or we conducted, some action research with PhotoVoice. That was our baseline data, we called it. And I had 10 students – six high school students, four college students – and then I had four adults who were working with me. And they documented, more or less, challenges to getting information about going to college in Greenville, Mississippi.

And the reason being, if you're not familiar with this work, is that most college information is, well, I would say the majority and by and large all college information, is likely passed through high schools. And so if you are in the minority community, there is good research that says that even in a high-minority community, you may not still receive adequate information. You may not receive the support that you need to fill out those paperworks and follow through on your aspirations.

So most students aspire to go to college, but they don't know how to get there. So our project. First we did PhotoVoice, and then we did a methodology called Q-methodology. It is a way to gather a common-consensus perspective on an issue. And so our research question was, how can Greensville increase the college-going rate through trained community volunteers to assist residents with college and financial aid processes?

And Mary and Melissa and Andrea were – we were glad to have them join us for that Q-methodology community meeting. Approximately 52 people came and did our activity. And what resulted from that was an action plan. And then my four adult volunteers carried out that action plan. They have been taking that action plan, and they recruited volunteers from the community – not paid volunteers, but real community volunteers, grassroots volunteers – to learn how to help students with these applications.

So my partner, the Woodward Hines Education Foundation, trained all of the volunteers, and they have been working ever since. And my next – I guess I'll save my next findings for the lessons learned. That was my four-minute warning. But I'll just close with, there was, like I said, they have the action plan. They are carrying it out, and some really good results from it so far.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks, Carol. So Mary.

MARY OHMER: Good afternoon, everybody. It's great to be here. I'm here with my colleagues, Katie Holler, who was an MSW student, intern, working with us, Donnell Pearl who is a resident at Homewood and a community researcher with our project. Shannah Tharp-Gilliam is our partner. She couldn't be here today, but she sends her greetings. We began our project in October 2018. And the name of the project is Research for Equity and Power.

So it's a partnership between our Pitt School of Social Work and Homewood Children's Village. And it came about because of the community's interest and goal to achieve equitable development and prevent displacement and gentrification that was occurring in other neighborhoods. The goals of our project are part of Homewood's comprehensive neighborhood plan. And we're important not only to Homewood Children's Village, but to the rest of the community.

And so we really have been working since 2018. And really, in 2019 is when we engaged over 30 youth and adults in trying to increase civic engagement and influence of

residents on equitable development issues. And through our program, the important thing is that we're trying to increase residents' knowledge and understanding of what civic engagement is and equitable development, strengthening their ability to influence neighborhood change, and engaging with policymakers city-wide, and local organizations and developers, along with residents, to create partnerships and ability to influence change.

So some of the initial results after our community conversations showed really strong levels of agreement that both the youth and adult participants in those conversations felt their voice was heard. They learned more about the organizations that influence development and equitable development in their neighborhood and how to influence people who make decisions about equitable development. They understood equitable development. Many of you have never even heard of it before. And they knew how to influence it. And they understood the importance of civic engagement in their own community. Next slide.

So basically, our project is to engage the community-based participatory research process all through, and still does do that. So it's community-based participatory research in that we have a community advisory board and a Pitt researcher that are all Homewood residents that we are continually meeting with and sharing our results and refining what we're doing.

Community conversations, which I just mentioned, with youth and adult residents, and a playbook that we created, actually, to improve the conversations with our participants and our CAB members on how to influence equitable development. We will be doing this project in a neighborhood called Hazelwood throughout this year, and hopefully into next year, replicating this process with 30 youth and adults there and with two community-based organizations to create a Hazelwood-specific equitable development playbook. And many of the same goals are in Hazelwood's comprehensive plan. Next slide.

Oh, I thought I had a picture of the – sorry. I think I sent you updated slides. I was going to show everybody the actual equitable development playbook and the picture of all of us. But I can actually put that in the chat. Thank you.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks, Mary. Yeah, definitely put that in the chat. And I don't know if we could show the photo when you're talking in a bit.

MARY OHMER: OK, great.

ANDREA ROBLES: So next is Rebecca and Laurie.

BECKY NESBITT: Great. Thank you. Yes, I'm Becky Nesbitt from the University of Georgia. My colleague, Laurie Paarlberg, who's working on the project with me, couldn't join us today. So I'll just fill you in a little bit on what our project is and what we're doing.

So on this next slide, you'll see our main research question for our project is about, how does community context affect volunteering? So if you could advance the slide, whoever is doing that. Great. And so what we're really interested in – there's been a lot of research that looks at volunteering that investigates how individual-level drivers affect volunteering, so individual motivations, demographics, et cetera. We're interested more in the context of the community and how that affects volunteering. And specifically, we're really interested in differences across rural and urban places.

And so one of the things that's unique about our study, we're actually using the current population survey's volunteering supplement to do the research, but we've gone through the process to get permission from the Census Bureau and all the people that have, all the organizations that have some kind of tie to these data, we've gotten permission to access the data in a secure Census Bureau facility which allows us to access confidential-level data. So in the publicly available current population survey, about 40% of the county FIPS codes are masked in order to protect respondent confidentiality. We have access to all those FIPS codes in this secure Census Bureau facility, so we can merge in county-level characteristics for these communities to try to understand how those affect volunteering.

And we think that this is important research because we know that communities in the United States are changing rapidly. We know that there are disparities between rural and urban places and that those disparities really increased, especially after the 2008 recession. Rural communities just have not recovered as quickly, or some even at all, since that time. And we want to understand how the characteristics of these communities affect civic engagement, specifically volunteering, in our study.

So on the next slide here, you'll see I have a couple of bullet points about some interesting things we found and some things that we are currently working on. Volunteering rates, the likelihood of volunteering, is higher in rural places than in urban places, but those rates have been falling. And the likelihood of volunteering in rural places is falling even faster than it has been in urban places, to the point that those rates are starting to converge. And so that's one of the things under my future directions here that we want to investigate, is what's driving this cliff, this downward direction of these volunteering rates, especially what's causing the difference between the changes in the rural likelihood of volunteering in rural places versus urban places.

One of the interesting things that we found in one of our first papers out of this study is that personal resources and community resources, so things like education, your personal level of education and the level of education in your community, those things

affect volunteering differently in rural places versus urban places. They actually have more, a greater effect, in rural places. So even though people that have a bachelor's degree in general are more likely to volunteer, the worth of that bachelor's degree for volunteering is even greater if you live in a rural community. So that's one thing that we've found that's been really interesting.

We're currently working on trying to understand how pathways into volunteering are different across rural and urban places and how that affects how much people volunteer in terms of the hours that they give to volunteering. And another set of analysis that we're working on is we're looking at how community age structure affects volunteering across rural and urban places. So if you're an older person living in an older community, or a younger person living in an older community, how does that affect your volunteering, and is it different across rural and urban places? So we're really excited about these things that we're working on and hope to have a lot more results to share by the end of the summer. So thank you.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks. Thank you so much. Jim.

JIM WITTE: Yes. Good afternoon. I'm Jim Witte. I'm director of the Institute for Immigration Research at George Mason and also a professor of sociology. My three colleagues, three co-PIs, couldn't be here today. But that's Amy Best, John Dale, and Shannon Davis, who all worked on the project throughout the entirety. If we go on to the next slide, I can show you a little bit about our division of labor.

Shannon and I are both quantitative researchers, and Amy and John are primarily qualitative. And so we integrated the two pieces together into this project. And we started out with an online survey of 4,000 immigrant professionals in six cities. And that was based on our community partner, which is called IMPRINT. That stands for Immigrant Professional Integration, which is a coalition of a number of groups. And actually, one of the positive outcomes of this project is we are now a partner in the coalition with IMPRINT. It's primarily funded by World Education Services, which helps with credential and transcript evaluation so that immigrant professionals – and we define those as people who have gotten some degree of higher education outside the US before coming to the US – that they're able to use the skills and talents they have.

And so as part of that, we were given access to a database of immigrant professionals in six particular cities we focused on. You can see them there. And the idea was many of these cities, the original survey focused in part on economic success, but also, we included questions about civic engagement. And that's because four of these six cities are actually what are known as Knight Cities where the Knight Foundation has invested a fair amount in looking at how to encourage civic engagement in the different cities.

And then Amy and John did follow-up interviews with 68 of our survey respondents. And we also had some supplemental funding that we did some pretty interesting stuff with, using graduate students. One of them, who has a degree in computer science, was working on using IRS-990 data to locate our immigrant-serving nonprofits located where the immigrants are. And then he did a fantastic – and we're happy to share with anyone – it's a Qualtrics-based set of survey questions that integrate Google Maps so you can begin to, if people don't remember their exact address, they can get as close as they can recall to where they're currently living.

And that's really important because throughout the immigration literature, we learned that there's a fairly high degree of mobility once immigrants rely, once they land in the US, that they begin to disperse and move to different areas. And a long, comprehensive literature review was done as well. If we go on to the next slide, I can show you that this is one thing that's not so much tied to civic engagement, but we tease some things out of it. It's really astounding to me, at least, how many – 37% of our respondents – said that when they arrived in the United States, they did not have anyone that they could rely upon for support. So this degree of dis-attachment or disengagement from the community when they arrive is important. But then we see that it picks up fairly quickly in between the time when they arrive and their current situation.

If we go to the next slide, our quantitative findings. One of the things that Shannon and I have been working on most recently is the extent to which civic engagement and economic success, both in the quantitative and qualitative findings, they're tightly intertwined, and that they're gendered. And so that economic success – it probably comes as no surprise that our male respondents were more successful than the female. And we can go into the question and answer if you want to know how we define that.

But then also, the volunteering patterns, the types of organizations they volunteer with, are gendered as well. And the male respondents tend to be tied to business and community groups that then also help them in their professional careers. And so if we go to the next slide, the last one I've got here summarizing the qualitative findings. Again, we've heard some of the same messages about the extent to which professional success and civic engagement were intertwined, but then also, we learned a lot about the extent of mobility so that, again, these professionals are – they're really global citizens, and they're moving around, at least prior to, this data was collected before the pandemic, but they were highly mobile within the United States, but then also around the globe.

And the ways they participate are very varied. And that's something that we think we have to learn to do and pick up better, is that the new forms of civic engagement that you find among immigrant professionals and immigrants more generally are very different than what's captured by traditional survey instruments. So I will stop right there.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thank you. These are all really interesting. And again, want to hear more, so hopefully these questions will elicit more conversation and more findings from all of you. So you are all conducting research on civic engagement in different contexts, as I mentioned, in different spaces. And you alluded to this already, but how does your particular context enable civic engagement that could lead to positive community change? So I will get off camera. And Brad, why don't we start with you?

BRAD FULTON: OK. Somehow, I am unable to put my video on, because the host has stopped it. But I can go without a video. Either way.

ANDREA ROBLES: Can someone put on Brad's video, please?

SPEAKER: Yep. I will look for it. Sorry.

BRAD FULTON: The first time I stopped my video. OK. Gosh, usually people are telling me to turn on my video.

So what Matt Baggetta and I are doing is wanting to understand the mechanics of how civic engagement is enacted and how leaders are developed in civil society organizations. And we're doing this by deploying several RAs into community-based organizations, to their gatherings, to their convenings, to all their activities, and basically documenting what goes on in these meetings. What are the actual internal dynamics of these meetings?

And so you can have a master list of who's a member or who's involved, but actually going to the meetings and seeing who comes, who's leading, who interacts with who, what decisions are made, and getting this type of data at scale across multiple organizations and across multiple convenings of those organizations. And really, the product of that is to have a better understanding of what dynamics work to foster greater civic engagement and also to help develop leaders within these organizations or within these contexts.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thank you, Brad. Carol?

CAROL CUTLER WHITE: Yeah. Thank you, Andrea. I would say that in Greenville, Mississippi, that the project is catalyzing civic engagement. And so we're just beginning to see the community engage, and so I don't have a real answer to the question at large, what are the outcomes. But I will say that in thinking about Greenville and whenever I even mention that I'm working in the delta, people go, "Ohhh." And so I would push back and say, but the delta is rich in culture. It's rich in history. It's rich in cohesiveness amongst the community. And I think that those factors or those characteristics of the community really will, in the long run, set the stage for the civic engagement and really buying into what's going on.

Everybody that we speak with in the community really wants to see Greenville do better. And so because of that, there is a lot of support from the city government, from the fraternal organizations and other organizations. There's a community foundation. So they want to see Greenville do better, and they see this as a way to do that. And so it's really a catalyst, my project has turned into a catalyst for creating civic engagement to then have students get to college and complete college and then become engaged in civic engagement themselves. So it's really creating a cycle of civic engagement in the community.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks. And I couldn't help but to think of our AmeriCorps programs as you were describing that. So Rebecca. Oh, I'm sorry. I missed, I just went over Mary. Donnell, I think you're going to present.

SPEAKER: I'll be taking that question.

ANDREA ROBLES: Sorry. Yeah.

SPEAKER: So our particular context is that we work within the Homewood community. It's a community that has a long history of working with community organizations. And, I'm sorry. Hold on one second.

MARY OHMER: Donnell Pearl is our community researcher, who is a Homewood resident. So hopefully he'll come on. Here he is.

DONNELL PEARL: Sorry about that. Someone's phone was ringing. I had to go turn off the phone. Sorry. Our particular context is that we've been working with the Homewood residents. They have a long history of working with community organizations. And we put them in charge of some of the decision-making in the project, and we gave them a leadership role in it. So it helps us to help them engage the community issues and engage with organizations and engage with the city around issues, particularly around equitable development and preventing gentrification. A lot of the residents who live in Homewood own homes, and they are reacting to gentrification they've seen in other neighborhoods that are a part of the Homewood neighborhood system.

MARY OHMER: So I think, Donnell, why don't you tell them about the recent meeting with the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure, where our residents who were trained and really engaged in this project really started to influence some decisions the city were making about mobility and infrastructure in the Homewood community?

DONNELL PEARL: Yeah. So we had several residents at this meeting. It was called [INAUDIBLE]. It's a pilot program that is trying to bring transportation options and infrastructure changes in the neighborhood. And we basically talked about a lot of issues, but we also came with information pre-prepared. So there was a lot of things that they said that didn't quite gel

with people because they had already been said in other programs or platforms. And they were prepared to call people out for reneging on agreements that they had made previously or talk to them about extraneous issues. One of the locations they wanted to do has a high crime rate, and they needed to work with the police and work with organizations instead of just doing things unilaterally.

MARY OHMER: They wanted to put all these bike lanes in and scooters and all this stuff. And they're like, did you look at our comprehensive plan? The residents spoke up and said, did you look at our comprehensive plan? We have a mobility section and infrastructure section. We don't have anything in there about wanting scooters and more bikes. But we do have these other things that Donnell just brought up, examples of where infrastructure could be improved to promote safety, for example. So I think it's a really good example that they spoke up, and they actually used their influence with the city government department. So thank you.

ANDREA ROBLES: And I'll be looking forward to hearing what happens with that. OK. So I don't know if, Rebecca? So in terms of your particular contexts and how that can enable civic engagement and lead to positive community change.

BECKY NESBITT: Yeah. So I mentioned that we're looking at how community contextual factors affect volunteering. And we found when you put all the individual factors and the community factors together in one statistical model, that the power of the community contextual factors is much stronger than the individual-level demographic predictors of volunteering. And in particular, a few that were really important, and especially for volunteering in rural places, are the percent of people in the community, the county, that have a bachelor's degree, the density of nonprofits in that community, and also, the number of religious adherents in the community.

So religiosity, nonprofits, bachelor's degree – so this speaks to opportunities for community leaders and policymakers in order to support rural volunteering, that supporting community education and community organizations would be really important. And also, working with religious organizations is an opportunity to get more volunteers and really bolster the pool of volunteers, especially in rural places. So we thought that was something that's really interesting, is that these community institutions make a real difference for volunteering in rural places. So there's a lot of implications for community leaders and policymakers.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks. Jim?

JIM WITTE: Yes. I'll just follow on with what Rebecca just said, because we find the same thing in urban areas. We picked on these six different metropolitan areas and found each had a unique culture of volunteering, and that there was a pretty large range. And this is not just

immigrants. But if we look at all residents of Seattle, 40% of them report volunteering in the last year. And then we go to Miami, and it's 30%.

Again, this is survey data. There's always a bit of measurement error. But a range that large indicates that there are things similar to what Rebecca was saying about the opportunity structure for volunteering as well as individual inclination. And that's one of the things that we really have been playing with throughout the project, is looking at the structure and the places where people can get engaged, along with individual characteristics that we know are positively or negatively associated with volunteering, and see how those two things interact with one another in different cities. So I think that was, in terms of the context, that's one of the things we find most important.

And also, because so much of what we did looking at civic engagement was tied to economic success and economic participation, and their crosscutting, that there are different economic climates in different cities. And just as a quick example, if we look at entrepreneurship and starting businesses, probably the most dynamic – and again, this was pre-pandemic – of 100 metropolitan areas in the U.S., the most dynamic in terms of startups and new small businesses is Las Vegas, and the least dynamic is Pittsburgh.

But then when you look at the continuity and small businesses that have persisted for at least five years, it flips 100%. So Pittsburgh is where the businesses are enduring and providing that degree of continuity. And as you would expect, in Las Vegas, it's a very volatile place. And so though they have a lot of startups, they also have a lot of failures. And so this is the context within which individuals – there are varying contexts within which they civically engage but also pursue an economic path and career.

ANDREA ROBLES: Great. I hope the two of you end up in the same breakout room. So we're hearing how much place matters. We're hearing about social networks and cohesion and these individual versus social context variables that are important. So can you give us a few examples of lessons learned in your work for others trying to engage communities or settings or places similar to your own context?

BRAD FULTON: Sure. Great question, Andrea. So I think one of the fascinating things for us is once we look at variation across organizations and across their different convenings, we begin to notice patterns in some ways that you wouldn't necessarily notice if you were just visiting one organization or visiting one particular convening. So one takeaway that we've discovered is the importance of physical space for where convenings occur.

And so physical space is everything from – whether it's indoors or outdoor, the convening is indoors or outdoors, what the entrance of the convening is. Is it a closed door or open door? Is it through a double door to get into a convening? Is there someone at the entrance of the convening welcoming people or acting as a bodyguard, or in a sense, someone, not a bodyguard, a bouncer to prevent unauthorized people to come in?

And so there's all these different aspects of the physical space in which civic engagement convenings occur. And then even in the actual space, is the furniture movable in a sense? Can you move chairs around? Can you move tables around, or is it like auditorium seating? And you would think all of these things, in and of themselves, are fairly mundane. But when you then take that data and compare it with the actual social interactions and the social composition of the people at the convening, we see some striking patterns of things that either foster and encourage across gender, across racial interaction, or things that deter it.

And so our most recent paper on this is looking at the relationship between the physical space of a convening and the social composition and social interaction that occurs in these spaces. And so the biggest thing is the factors related to the entrance. How welcoming is the entrance? If I'm a newcomer, and there's someone standing at the door that's not a greeter, but more of a bouncer, the convenings tend to be less socially diverse. And then other things, when you're having a convening in a space that doesn't have any type of movable furniture, there tends to be less social interaction between participants, and especially between cross-gender and cross-racial participants or cross-racial interaction, cross-gender interaction.

Other factors where how accommodating the physical space is to people with disabilities and how that affects the social composition and social interaction across different categories. So that's just one lesson, one takeaway, that you wouldn't necessarily find if you're just observing one organization or one convening. But when you observe over 100 convenings, you see these patterns. Thanks.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thank you. And things to keep in mind when we start interacting again, right? Given where we've been for the past year. All right. So now I'll pass it on to Carol.

CAROL CUTLER WHITE: Yeah. Thanks again, Andrea. So I think the lessons learned from my project would be to engage the community early in the process. And so I think of that in two ways. I think of the co-researchers that I had, the high school students, the college students, and the parents of the community. They were really the face of this project. I don't think that people in Greenville would know me from anyone. Plus, I don't look like them. So it was really important for my project to engage, to work, to have the community solve their problem, which is what all of our projects were designed to do.

But I also think that making the project known to the city leaders was really important so that they knew what the project was, what the outcome was, and they followed it. They followed it along for the two years of the two different parts of the research. And as that time went on, they had the chance to, or the project and myself had the chance to, build trust with the city leaders. So by the time we came with this action plan to them two years later, two years in, it was presented by their own residents. It was presented on behalf of the community. And they were familiar with it, and they were already brought in before we

even made the presentation to the city council, which then adopted a resolution of support for the project.

So I think those are really important things. I also think that, finally, I really like Rebecca's work and the findings about the bachelor's degree. Those were the volunteers that we found in the community, well, I didn't find them, my co-researchers found them in the community when they went out to recruit volunteers, they found the people who had already completed a bachelor's degree. And that was not a directive that I gave them. That was what they intuitively knew would be effective, because they wanted people who had accomplished that goal to be the volunteers and mentors that were helping the students and families coming up behind them.

And then I think the last thing was, for a project such as mine and a community such as mine, is find the moms in the community, the parents. The co-researchers have just taken the ball and run with it. And they were the three moms, and you can't stop them. So I would find the moms.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks, Carol. OK. So next, I see Mary and Katie.

KATIE: Yes, hello. So I just have a couple of lessons that I wanted to share about engaging with communities. And the first one is an echo of what's already been stated, which I think just highlights how important it is, and that's that community members can be your greatest resource and your greatest partners throughout the process. They have a deep knowledge of community history and assets and true needs. And then they also have a strong commitment and a strong investment in what's going on within their community, obviously. And so they're willing to put in the time and to be present.

And then additionally, they have a wider reach into the community to connect more people into the process. And I think that's something that we've greatly seen through our community advisory board, is that our members are able to reach out to other people or to reach into meetings that we otherwise wouldn't have had access to. So they're definitely your greatest resource and your greatest partners, so that's the perfect place to start.

And then secondly, it's OK to let connection take priority over efficiency sometimes. And this is something that I've seen, especially during the wild year-and-a-half that we've had, is that while you want to be respectful of everyone's time, sometimes people need to just talk about what's happening around them and process it with a group of people who understand and respect them. And so while sometimes this means your agenda gets pushed back a little bit in time, it can lead to a stronger trust and connection and understanding within the community members and within the research partners. So it's definitely worth it to increase that connection when necessary. Thank you.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thank you. And that's very valuable for all of us to remember when we are trying to build connections. So I'm going to move on. Thank you, Katie. Rebecca.

BECKY NESBITT: Yeah. So I would say even though we don't necessarily have the data in our dataset to be able to test this, our results really seem to indicate the importance, again, of social ties. And so I'd say as far as implications for communities, not only do these institutions matter, but social ties really seem to matter. And as our rural communities are changing and diversifying and maybe struggling, there are implications for civic engagement from that.

So as community leaders, policymakers, people who are in these institutions, thinking about how to strengthen and build upon current social ties and really trying to foster more social ties among people, I think, is really important, especially in these rural places that have been struggling and where it seems like their civic engagement, at least in the form of volunteering, is decreasing. It does seem to point to the fact that, as these communities are diversifying, that the social ties might be struggling in those areas, or they might not be coping as well with diversity and figuring out how to handle that and how to connect with people that are different from them that are coming into their communities. So for me, I'd say that's one of the big lessons learned here is, again, the importance of social ties along with the community institutions.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thank you. And Jim.

JIM WITTE: Rebecca keeps setting me up with good things to respond to because our work seems to fit so closely together. But the social ties, it's really interesting, because one of the things we found, and I showed that graph about social capital people had when they arrived in the US and how much they had later on. And what we found is having a large number of people in your network, strong social ties that you could rely upon for help, in the current situation, that was a strong predictor of economic success. And we're still trying to tease out which direction the relationship goes.

But then when you look at social ties, social capital that you have when you arrived as an immigrant, it was actually negatively associated with economic success. And what it was saying is that in some ways, when you arrive in a new place, and you're forced out of your comfort zone, then you're forced back into the mainstream. And our indicators of economic success were very much mainstream-oriented – that you were using your education, that you were earning above a certain threshold, that you had a certain type of job title.

But I think this is what Alejandro Portes describes as the double-edged sword of social capital. That it can provide a support system, but it also then can be a constraint in moving into the mainstream economy or mainstream society. And we've seen that in the

same way with our work. We've been using American Community Survey data to look at immigrant entrepreneurship.

And what we see there is that in cities – and there's a great group, if you don't know the New American Economy, that has put out a really interesting set of policy indices for different metro areas. And what we found was that in the cities that were particularly immigrant-friendly in terms of their policies, there was actually a reduced rate of immigrant entrepreneurship. And it probably goes to the fact that they could get jobs, that thanks to the policies that were in place, they were better integrated in the mainstream workforce. But it's thinking about how these different environmental factors, whether it's policy or social capital, that those interact with individual characteristics.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thank you. I'm just thinking that this is something that – all of you have mentioned the importance of social ties or how to increase some relationships, such as space, that Brad mentioned and the physical space. So we're going to have breakout rooms for 15 minutes. And so I would love to hear more in the chat, examples of this, but also from our AmeriCorps, our national community family that's on. What examples have you seen in terms of your projects, or what did we hear that we could incorporate into some of the work we do? And so let's leave it at that.

Mary Ohmer mentioned how social ties have been strained during the pandemic. I think we could all agree to that, but that it's become more important as well in terms of connections around equity. So anyway, it would be great to talk a little bit more about that and then come back to the discussion. So Larisa, could you put us into rooms? OK. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Hey, everyone. Feel free to stay on camera, and we could do some civic engagement.

SPEAKER: [INAUDIBLE] engagement.

SPEAKER: Video is civic engagement.

SPEAKER: I like [INAUDIBLE].

ANDREA ROBLES: Hey, [INAUDIBLE]. Hey, did you hear our Spanish?

SPEAKER: What?

ANDREA ROBLES: [SPEAKING SPANISH]

SPEAKER: Oh, really? In Spanish?

ANDREA ROBLES: Yeah. You missed it.

SPEAKER: Oh, my God. You don't give that choice to me.

ANDREA ROBLES: I know. We should have. You are the reason we, Mary, actually, said we should start it that way.

SPEAKER: Oh, perfect. Yes. I missed that one. My congratulations to [INAUDIBLE]. And you, for you all too.

ANDREA ROBLES: So are we – I don't know if all the rooms are back. Can someone let me know?

SPEAKER: Yes. All the rooms have been closed.

ANDREA ROBLES: OK. Fantastic. Well, we had – it was just great to be able to be in a smaller room and chat. I think this has just been a really great panel, and really thinking about issues around space. And we were thinking about time, what it takes to build these type of social networks, and trust, what it means to have – what does it mean now in terms of space when you can't actually come together, but you have the virtual settings and people moving based on work being anywhere and so forth?

So I'm going to stop with that. And what I'd like to do is – everyone was in a different chat room. If you all, I'm looking at the time, 2:58. We just have a few minutes, about seven minutes. So if you all could just, and we could start with Brad. Brad, some last-minute thoughts on maybe something you heard and anything else you want to say to wrap up, and then we'll go in order.

BRAD FULTON: Yeah. I would say probably the general sentiment is not only the communities that we observe and research and work with, them coming back together in person, but I'd say also us as researchers and community scholars getting more connection together to recreate that synergy that we seem to have lost over this past year. So that's probably the thing that I'm most optimistic and most hopeful about.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks. OK. Let's see. Who is, Carol?

CAROL: Yeah, thank you. So in our group, we were really diving into the whole idea of the bachelor degrees and building off Rebecca's research and James's research as well. And we were just saying how it's cyclical. If you have this low educational level, you're going to have low civic engagement. So how do we increase that?

So I guess I'm taking that away and coming to my project with a renewal of energy to close it out really strong. But we also wanted to thank you for, the ORE office staff, for all of your good efforts on our behalf in this last year. We know it wasn't easy, but thank you all.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks, Carol. And I just want to give a shout out to the agency because of COVID and the work we do, just really having that flexibility to allow people to continue their work and knowing how important it is, especially during this time. So let's see. Mary and Katie and Donnell.

MARY OHMER: Thank you, yes. We appreciate being able to do this work even though it's changed during COVID significantly. But we're hoping to be in person gradually as things open up. But really, our group, and Donnell can chime in here, Carlos also was very integral to our conversation. We talked about how American society tends to be very individualistic, and so civic engagement is about what you do – your vote, your engagement in a neighborhood. When we began to talk about in Mexican society, obviously, that's very different. It's a much more communal society. I actually lived in Mexico.

And anyway, so Carlos said, well, what is civic engagement then? How do we [INAUDIBLE] about the community, community engagement? It's about coming together. And I talked about how, in our playbook, we actually – and in our conversations, we taught organizing skills to people, community organizing skills to find common interests, to find common ground, to bring people together. It's not just about your interests, it's about the community's.

And how do you begin to engage not only the community, but other external stakeholders who you could potentially find common interest with maybe to actually negotiate for change and influence change? So how important that is and how important that we focus on that. And I don't know if anyone else wants to say anything, but it was really key to what we did, at least. And I think it takes away – it's not an individual problem. You have to make individual problems public problems, communal problems. And that's how change happens.

ANDREA ROBLES: [INAUDIBLE] want to mention something?

MARY OHMER: [INAUDIBLE] you have a final thought. Go ahead.

DONNELL PEARL: I was going to say, you actually just killed that.

MARY OHMER: Oh! [LAUGHS] Thank you.

ANDREA ROBLES: Donnell, any last words? Any closing words? OK. Katie? Kate? I shouldn't call you Katie.

KATIE HOLLER: I don't think I have anything else to add other than I really enjoyed hearing from everyone else. And it's really great to have been in this space, so thank you.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks. OK. Rebecca?

BECKY NESBITT: Yeah. So I also want to echo everybody's thanks to the agency for the research grant and for being flexible and working with us through obstacles and difficulties, especially this past year. But it's just amazing to have some money to dig into some research, and that's a really – it's been really great.

I'd say my takeaways from today are basically three C's – context, community, and connection – that those are things that all really, really matter for civic engagement. And those are things that are shifting and changing and that we might need to be rethinking, rethinking what we mean by community, rethinking connection. But just the importance of those and the context that we're in and how that really does shape our civic behaviors.

And the more we understand those things and the more we understand how they do affect civic engagement, I think that gives our communities a lot more power to be able to empower themselves, empower the people that live in that community to really come together in all these different forms of civic engagement. So that's what I'm left thinking with through this panel.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks. Jim?

JIM WITTE: Yeah. And again, thank you for your patience about our final report. We got it done, but it took a little time. And I think our breakout room was pretty well summarized, the interest in thinking about the three C's. That's important. And how the pandemic really is, to me, it was bad. But for social science, it was good. It really gave us a chance to think about the way a certain exogenous shock hits the globe, and how is it played out, and how much variation there is based on context.

And I saw Mary Ohmer, that you do a lot of international work, as do I. And to me as a sociologist, the cool thing is that's where you get variation in social structure. And that's where you're able to see how much it matters. And I think that's an important thread, at least in my work, going forward.

And I would encourage people – civic engagement is a theme that's vital. We learned about it in the pandemic, how vital it is. And to understand how it plays out, I think, in different contexts is important. In our room, we talked a little bit about micro versus a grander scale, whether you're talking about a room that you're in or a city you're in, and then thinking about that middle level, the meso level, where the organizations are involved.

And they translate what's being made in terms of policy to things that have implications for individual lives and vice versa, that individual lives, so individuals let these organizations know where their shoes are too tight. And that hopefully gets translated up to policymakers. But different organizations are more or less effective at that. And trying

to understand which ones are doing it best, I think, is going to be a key thing moving forward.

ANDREA ROBLES: Thank you. And so well said, I have nothing more to say. So thank you all for such a great conversation, and I hope you all can come back tomorrow, including all the participants. And if there's anything more you want to add in the chat box, please do so. And I will just turn this over to Mary for some closing comments.

MARY HYDE: Thanks, Andrea. And thank you, everyone, for taking the time to share with us and learn with us today. As Andrea said, hope you can join us for at least one of tomorrow's conversations. Tomorrow, we have the first panel will be "Rising Up to the Challenge: Civic Engagement in the Time of COVID." As many of the ideas expressed today were related too, we could continue that conversation.

The second panel will be about mobilizing and managing volunteers for positive community change. I would just also like to be sure to thank our ICF partners for their invaluable support for this convening so far. Thank you to our colleagues in the Office of External Affairs for helping us to get the word out. Thank you to our AmeriCorps colleagues for taking time to learn with us. We know how busy you are right now. And of course, thank you to all of the panelists today for sharing what you're discovering with all of us.

And certainly, if you enjoyed today's conversation, please feel free to invite a colleague tomorrow. I think my last, final reflection, just following some of the themes, was it struck me today how this virtual reality that we've been living in because of the pandemic, in many ways, creates a level of intimacy that we didn't have before. We're seeing each other's homes. We're meeting each other's babies. We're seeing our kitty cats run across the screen.

But yet it's somehow not a level of intimacy that really facilitates genuine human connection, which I think is what we're all craving, and which is what I think is central to the work that you're all doing. So those are my final reflections. I hope you have a great afternoon, and I hope we see you all tomorrow. Thank you.