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Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue
Mobilizing And Managing Volunteers For Positive Community Change

ANDREA ROBLES: Thanks, Connor. So, this is our last panel of the six. And I want to thank everyone for taking time to be with us. The panelists for this session are comprised of our 2015 and 2017 research grantees. And they all specialize on civic engagement and volunteering and have published widely on these topics. I know I look, and we look, very much forward to learning from you and how we, as an agency, can incorporate some of your findings.

For those of you who are on for the first time, in terms of our format, we will first hear from our panelists. We will about their study and they will answer a few questions. And then we will go into breakout rooms and then come back to finish the discussion. And so, I will allow the panelists to just introduce themselves as they go. And then we'll come back to questions. So, thank you. So, we start with, I believe, Peter Levine and Kei.

PETER LEVINE: Hi, everyone. Thanks for having us. So, I'm Peter Levine, the information is up there.

And Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg is joining me for our team. I think I'm going to make sort of our introductory comments. And she'll be available for the conversation, I hope. And I should also say that, from our team, Jodi Benenson and Noorya Hayat presented the actual results of the research that was funded by the corporation—what, the day before yesterday? I was on the call, but I don't remember which day.

So, we've already presented our detailed results. So, I wanted to make a much broader comments about the state of things. And one more prefatory comment is I'm going to speak in the first-person singular. It's just what I think, because I want to make sure that I'm not presuming to speak for anyone else. And I don't know whether everybody agrees, and Kei may not, and she should speak up. But at the same time, I owe so much to my colleagues. I've gotten these opinions from other people from listening and learning from other people, including Kei. So, but still, this may not be what she would say.

So, stepping way back, I wanted to say that I think what we need people to do in America today and in the world today is to ask the question, "What should we do in functional and reasonably diverse groups that can actually do what the people decide to do?" We need people to ask, "What should we do in functional and reasonably diverse groups?" And there are a lot of other good questions to ask, like "What should Joe Biden do, or what should America do about racism, or structural racism, or lots of good questions that are—or what should I personally do in my own life?"

Those are good questions. But the question of "What should we do where the group can actually act?" is the core civic question. It educates us and enriches us to ask that question with people who disagree with us. So, it benefits us. It makes us better people. And it leads to better outcomes because groups that ask that question—what should we do?—and do so collectively and actually act, they make the world better. And when many different groups are asking that question in a society at the same time, power is shared and distributed and that is the basis of democracy, actually.

So, then I think people in all sectors of society and all roles can be part of asking that question. So, you can ask that question and be part of a group that asks it, as the

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employee of a private company or as a civil servant, such as our colleagues here from AmeriCorps, or as a student, or as an unpaid volunteer, or as a retiree. You can ask that question in many different roles. And it's good that people can ask that question from many different roles because we need everybody. And I think each sector in our society has both special assets to contribute and also limitations.

So, you can ask the question—what should we do?—if you are a bank manager and so you're representing a bank. But there are some limitations, too, because the company has its own needs and agenda. And so, there are some limitations. So, they're strengths and weaknesses each sector. So, in that context, I think AmeriCorps offers, and other government-supported national community service programs, state, as well, have some particular advantages. They really are spaces for people to get together and ask, “What should we do?”

Though I also think we have to keep our eye on some limitations that always emerge in these programs, not just now, but over their whole history back to the 1930s. Are the groups reasonably diverse so that different perspectives are really being raised and considered? And are the people in these groups really able to ask, “What should we do?” and then do what they decide to do, instead of being told what to do? So, are they implementing someone else's plan or are they making a plan and implementing it?

So that's always an agenda keep in mind when I think about AmeriCorps. But then the main point I want to make now is that AmeriCorps and other kinds of national and community service programs are part of something bigger. Because what we want people to do is to ask the question, “What should we do?” in all kinds of settings. So, as we recover from the pandemic and as we address racial injustice, and climate crisis, and other crises, we need people asking questions about what they will do about these things in many different settings.

And we need to see ourselves as working together to address these crises, all of us. I think it's important to say because the last time we recovered from an economic crisis and there was a Democratic president in the Oval Office, the recovery from the recession was not framed as the American people are rebuilding our country in different configurations and different groups that we, the American people, are rebuilding the country. So, it wasn't framed as the public work of a people. It was generally presented as a set of governmental policies and interventions that would either work or not work.

And the person we were supposed to evaluate to see whether it would work or not work was Barack Obama. So, the message that got transmitted to the American people was the government is going to try to rebuild the country and you should decide whether the government's doing that or not. And I think that was a great source of weakness. I think it was a political source of weakness because it wasn't an inspiring message. And I think it was inaccurate, false actually, because government played a role of course in changing spending, and taxation, and other things, but the actual work was being done by people in all kinds of different configurations, including civil servants, including federal

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government officials, but also including everybody else. After all, most of the recovery money then and in this recovery goes to corporations or nonprofits, or states, or schools, to a bunch of entities, but it's not the federal government that actually spends the money.

So, in that context, I think it's really important to frame the recovery as public work, as all of us asking, "What should we do?" in a whole variety of contexts, across sectors, meaning that the federal government is part of it.

And federal government employees are a really important part of it. And AmeriCorps volunteers and participants are a really important part of it, but part of something that needs to be much more distributed and shared. That's the point, I don't know, that's the point I was hoping to make as a part of this conversation, and I'm looking forward to questions and comments, including from Kei and everybody else, later in the session. Thanks.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you so much, Peter. Those are good words to start this off and actually this entire dialogue and where we are at right now. Kei, do you want to have do you have some words you want to say now, or would you like to wait for the questions?

KEI KAWASHIMA-GINSBERG: Really one quick thing that really resonated, Peter—thank you so much for this—and that is related to some of the work we have been doing supporting educators, who often come as a volunteer to things like professional learning experiences, just to improve their skill or they are volunteering on a committee or some kind of decision-making board. And whenever we are really working with teachers who really need to do something but have some emotional block. For example, we have to actually think about the power to make decisions and where that power sort of transmits from, say, federal government to state government to school district superintendent to teachers and then to students.

So, we often think about if we think about students or educators as stakeholders, the kind of people that need to stay engaged in some endeavor that we're doing together, I try to think about where the power sits and how to make sure that each chain of command, so to say, have the power and agency to be able to also give and share the power with those who are behind them, in terms of that power change. And I think it applies actually to the volunteer management. So, I'll stop there.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you. And we look forward to hearing more in just a few minutes. So, I'm going to pass it to Mark Hager.

MARK HAGER: Thank you. Do you all see me yet? I think I've started my video.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: We have your slides. We have your slides.

MARK HAGER: OK. Well, I would say welcome to my living room in Phoenix. Maybe my video will pop up here in a minute. I'm want to take my three to five minutes here just to really introduce the scope and purpose of the study. And then I have a variety of observations I want to branch out into. But I'll save those for the Q&A that we'll have after our initial

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presentations here. I titled this “A Volunteer Management Capacity” because that's how we sort of refer to this particular study.

And by we, I mean the two people that you see in the picture here. I'm on the right. I'm Mark Hager. I'm a faculty member at Arizona State University. On the left is my long-term co-author, Jeffrey Brudney who started working on this topic with me back in 2003. And we looked like we were getting about to push the work through to completion when about

two months ago, on Easter day, Jeff Brudney died. So, I'm left to try to promote, get the outputs of the research out into the world without the help of my long-term friend, and mentor, and co-author on this project, Jeff Brudney.

So, let me show you a few of the things here that we've come up with on the next slide here. I will say that it has a long history. You've got to go back to was at the 2002 State of the Union Address when then-President Bush, the younger President Bush, gave his address to the nation that included a call for more people to be engaged in their communities. And the field liked that a lot. It's not every time that a sitting president really encourages people to get out and volunteer more in their communities.

We also got a bit of push-back from the field, in saying that it's nice to get the promotion but a lot of nonprofit organizations can barely have the capacity to give the good experiences to their volunteers now, let alone having a new army of Americans come marching to their door. So, much to their credit, the federal government created a White House Office. They engaged what we call the Corporation for National Community Service, now AmeriCorps, to get a better handle on the readiness of nonprofit organizations to engage their communities.

They got some funding from the UPS Foundation and went looking for a research partners that a research partner. That ended up being me at the Urban institute, at the time, where we surveyed U.S. nonprofit organizations and congregations to try to get a good snapshot of what the readiness was of our community organizations to engage volunteers. That ended up being fairly influential. A lot of people referred to the work, even in fairly recent days. I can hear people pointing to it, the factoids that we got back in the day about the readiness, the volunteer management capacity of nonprofit organizations to engage their volunteers.

The thing is, it got older every year. I remember in 2013, we tried to get going to a sort of 10-year retrospective on what volunteer management capacity looked like. We weren't able to mobilize at the time. It was more along 2016, 2017 when we see that the CNCS—now AmeriCorps—is looking to fund research that looked like it was right up our alley.

Could we use that opportunity to return to the volunteer management capacity study and get a more current snapshot of what was going on? Next slide, please.

That work is done. We collected all of our new round of survey data of nonprofit organizations, all in 2019. We can call it sort of a return to the U.S. to see what the

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readiness was to engage volunteers. That's great. I love that we're able to do that. And there's now a brief that I will put a link to in the chat right here for those of you that want to get to this 15-page public brief. I'm still working on a landing page to promote this more widely.

A shortcoming here is that it's all collected pre-pandemic. We collected this data in 2019. And then in early 2020, the field changes quite a bit. We learn some interesting things about what was happening, though, in this more current snapshot a volunteer management capacity. You see a couple of bullet points here on the slide. One, VMC—we call it Volunteer Management Capacity—hasn't changed a lot since 2003.

Organizations are still, to a large extent, using the same practices to the same extent, engaging their staff members in the same ways in order to promote volunteering. It's good when you see it. But there's just not enough of it.

A second thing we see that is changed from 2003 is that more and more volunteers are interested in episodic or periodic assignments or short-term assignments. And this introduces new, or at least greater, challenges about how our nonprofit organizations and our volunteer managers are going to best engage volunteers that have a different appetite for volunteering than we've had in the past.

Thirdly, we see that electronic tools and social media have been rearranging how we interact with volunteers. And this is something we would have, I think, found anyway. But we start seeing it in different ways, and new ways, and increased ways as the pandemic came along. And luckily—I guess we'll say luckily—CNCS, now AmeriCorps—gave us a supplemental opportunity to engage this question. So, we had a separate second project—and let's go to my last slide here—to look at how nonprofit organizations are using technology in order to engage their volunteers.

Now, when I proposed this, I didn't know COVID was coming along. It was just—I should put this in quotes—"lucky" that we had a pandemic really crystallized how nonprofit organizations needed to use technology in order to engage their volunteers. So, this third-year supplement, now in its fourth year because we couldn't really do this data collection in the throes of the pandemic, really provides an opportunity to focus on technology responses to the pandemic. We call this TEVA, or Technology Evolution in Volunteer Administration.

I've done this work mostly this year now in collaboration with a international organization called the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration. They have certified about 900 professionals in the United States and Canada in volunteer administration. So, these are our most serious professional volunteer administrators and in the United States and Canada. We were able to survey about 60%—60.7%—of these people, 546 cases regarding how they're using technology through the pandemic and, particularly, the challenges they've had in engaging using technology to engage volunteers.

The thing we're doing now at ACU—the data collection was done at the University of

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Chicago—but this summer, I have five graduate assistants who are conducting online focus groups and transcribing those focus groups with 100s—I mean, the response has been amazing—hundreds of CVAs, those professionals with a certification in volunteer administration. But they're just providing detailed, vibrant illustrations of the promise—and this is important point—the perils of technology adoption. I'll talk a little bit more in the Q&A about the challenges that we have in using technology and social media in order to best engage our volunteers. Thank you.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Mark, thank you. And we really look forward to, as always, what you're finding through TEVA and your other study. So, we will get back to you in just a little while. So, I'm going to turn it to Pam.

PAM PAXTON: Great. Hi, everybody. I'm Pam Paxton. I'm at the University of Texas at Austin. And what I want to do today is talk to you about just one project that came out of the funding that my research team received from AmeriCorps, specifically a project that was asking the question, “how do nonprofit organizations succeed in increasing donations?” and more importantly for this panel of volunteers, amid widespread, frankly, competition for these resources?

So, in this project, the team worked to better understand how nonprofits attract donors and volunteers by connecting to their emotions. And this was a little unusual because prior research has largely focused on the financial characteristics of nonprofits, with the idea being that donors are rational. Their very cognitive in their approach. They think about a nonprofit's finances quite a bit. But we need to recognize in most nonprofit, most philanthropists, and foundations, and nonprofit staff and fundraisers recognize there are other factors, of course, that people weigh when making the decision to donate to a nonprofit, either financially or through their time.

And that, put simply, is at the heart. It be as important as the head. So we, in this project, wanted to see whether nonprofits that took a more emotional approach to their mission would then induce emotion in individuals, yielding a higher number of volunteers and also more donations. We consider whether that varies based on the type of emotion, positive or negative. And we also considered for types of nonprofits. For example, arts organizations versus health care organizations versus youth development, et cetera. So, you can go to the next slide.

So, for this study, then, we're making use of what is a incredibly significant new source of administrative data on organizations. And this is the release by the Internal Revenue Service of machine-readable nonprofit reporting forms—the Form 990—from about 2011 to the present. Now I think here I don't need to go over the 990 and what it means, and all the financial information that's available on nonprofits. But what I do want to point out, I'd like you to note the text data that is available in the 990s.

Here, for example, you can see the brief description of the nonprofit's primary exempt purpose or mission. On a later page, there's the full board-approved mission statement of the nonprofit. So, we have a way to understand how the nonprofit views its work in terms

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of its mission. And we use computational text analysis to measure use of emotion, positive or negative, by nonprofits in these mission statements. And then we examine the relationship between emotion, and volunteers, and donors' donations. And like I said, we're considering different types of nonprofits, arts, health, et cetera.

You can go to the next slide.

So, this is just a slide to help you see the nonprofits really do use emotion in describing their work. And they approach it differently, right? So here, what I've done is paired the mission statements for two nonprofits working in the crime and legal-related area, specifically protection against abuse, exploitation, and consider the first nonprofit that is really using a lot of negative emotion to describe its work. The Abused Women's Fund is

helping women who have been abused, battered, underestimated, unloved, shunned, afraid, crying out, a lot of real negative emotion.

A different nonprofit is approaching the same type of work in a much more positive emotional way. The Vanessa Behan Crisis Nursery is improving lives, is providing safety, support in an environment of unconditional love. The same pairing I'm trying to illustrate here in the agriculture, food, and nutrition area. One nonprofit is approaching its work with negative emotion, providing food to organizations that are feeding poor, distressed, underprivileged, versus positive emotion, providing food in a caring and respectful manner to those—and preserving dignity.

So very different ways of approaching work. What I don't have here are the nonprofits that are really using much emotion at all to describe their work. Very rational, very cognitive, scientific, using a lot of numbers, we serve this many people, et cetera, so not emotional. You can go to the next slide.

So just to briefly go over a couple of the things that we find. We do find that use of emotion varies quite a bit across nonprofits and types of nonprofits. So certain kinds of nonprofits, arts organizations, tend to use more emotion in describing their work.

Some use more positive emotions. Some use more negative emotions. Some use combinations of positive and negative emotion. What we find is that using positive emotion can increase volunteers. And this is especially true for nonprofit organizations that work in areas that tend to kind of bond people together, arts and culture, recreation and sports, youth development. Use of negative emotion does not generally increase volunteers, however. There are a couple of exceptions, nonprofits focused on health care and nonprofits focused in the civil rights area.

We also find that the combination of positive and negative emotion can be particularly powerful for some types of nonprofits. So, this is just one example of a study that we're doing here at Texas, trying to understand volunteering and nonprofits. I thought it was particularly interesting to share with you since it has fairly easy application for nonprofits who are interested in engaging and attracting volunteers.

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PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you, Pam. And I know you have some results with business and maybe I'll come back to that.

PAM PAXTON: Oh, sure.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Or other people in the call might. So, I'm going to move to Jennifer.
JENNIFER CRITTENDEN: Hi, everyone. I'm Jennifer Crittenden, Assistant Professor of Social Work and

Associate Director at the University of Maine and University of Maine Center on Aging. And I want to acknowledge—so the grant them going to talk about, the project I'm going to talk about it, is a Dissertation Award. And I do want to recognize my dissertation advisor, Dr. Sandra Butler, who helped me in the early phases of this work. And it has continued past the dissertation phase, I am I'm pleased to report.

And I also want to acknowledge the graduate students who have helped on the project that I'm going to talk about, including Rachel Coleman, who is still working on the project today and has joined us in the virtual audience. So, thank you, Rachel, for being here.

So, the title of my project is called “Juggling Multiple Roles, an Examination of Role Conflict among Older Adult Volunteers.” So, I want to just give you a little bit of context about why I decided to pursue this topic.

So, in the field of aging, we have seen a lot of demographic shifts in terms of workforce participation and caregiving and informal helping among older adults, with those activities increasing over time and increasing across our lifespan. And this raises some interesting questions around to what extent those activities compete with formal volunteering. So, we know that formal volunteering decreases as we get older, and partly that has to do with a variety of factors. But partly, that could be due to the competition of these other social roles that we fill.

So, I wanted to further unpack that and find out to what extent does role conflict or the stress and strain that we feel when we don't have the resources to manage all of our obligations, to what extent does that conflict impact our ability to engage with formal volunteering, really with an eye for making this an applied research project so that these findings could help the field to better engage our older adult volunteers. So, the reason we want to engage older adult volunteers is that the literature has really firmly established that there are multiple benefits for older adults.

So, those who volunteer tend to have better health outcomes, mental health ratings tend to be higher. Older adults who volunteer have higher ratings of life satisfaction. They also are more likely to engage in health behaviors, and they tend to live longer than those who do not volunteer. So it's clearly a sort of health benefit activity that we want to encourage older adults to be involved in. So, next slide.

So, the project was a multiphase study with three distinct phases. And we're now currently in the dissemination phase. The first phase, which was really the focal point of

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the work, it was an RSVP volunteer survey. So, RSVP is an older adult volunteer program administered through AmeriCorps seniors. And through that survey, we've reached close to seventeen hundred older adults throughout the country, representing 55 RSVP sites. The survey collected data, both quantitative and qualitative data. I'm going to give you just a 30,000-foot view. And then I have some specific results that I'll share during the question portion of today.

So, the research questions for that particular phase of the study were, "Does role conflict predict satisfaction with, participation in, and/or intention to leave the volunteer role?" And also, explore the compensatory strategies used by older adults to navigate world conflict. And then also, really look at what benefits older adults accrue in their volunteer roles that then can counterbalance that role conflict. So not just to the extent that it impacts volunteer work but how are older adults managing that role conflict.

In phase two of this study, we surveyed RSVP sites to understand their perspective from an organizational level, how this shows up. So, when they are engaging those volunteers who also work in paid employment and those that are engaging in caregiving activities and those who are helping in the community: how does that role conflict shows up and then how do they, as organizations, help to mitigate that role conflict? And then the phase

three, we took that broad-level data and we really wanted to dig down deeper. So, we invited programs to give us really a strategy-level overview of the things that they are doing, so the practices that they're putting into place in their programs that are helping older adults to manage those multiple role commitments. And then through the dissemination phase, we really try to translate those findings into materials and information that the field can ultimately use to support older adult volunteers. Next slide. So, the findings for this study—I'm going to give, again, just these broad principles. The first is that volunteer outcomes are related to health and role. So, what we know is that health is an important intervening factor that is related to volunteer participation and satisfaction. So, those with poor self-rated health also had reported lower levels of volunteer participation and satisfaction with that volunteer arrangement. And those who had higher numbers of roles that they were juggling, so if they were caregiving, or working, or otherwise helping in the community, they tended to report lower levels of RSVP participation. And those who experience conflict or that stress and strain related to those multiple roles reported lower levels of satisfaction with their volunteer experience. So, we certainly see that the roles that we hold in life do impact our formal volunteering. What we do know, though, the good news is that volunteers were able to identify the benefits that they received from volunteering across those other roles that they maintained. We also heard from both volunteers and programs that there are ways that they work together to manage conflict through volunteer practices, volunteer management practices, as well as individual volunteers having their own strategies that they used to help mitigate that role conflict.

And then for programs—we heard this, again, both from programs and from the volunteers themselves—using practices that really provide empathy and a flexible

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approach are really critical to helping older adult volunteers to remain engaged in that volunteer work. Next slide.

So, I want to just make sure that folks know how to find—there's a wealth of information because we have qualitative, quantitative data from 1700 older adults, and then the organizational level data and findings. There is a web page that I've set up to share the white papers that have come out of this work, presentations, and then we've also taken that work and translated into tip sheets for volunteers and volunteer managers so that they can understand those practices that they can put into place. And the final piece that we're working on is a much more like a manual-style publication so that programs can understand how they work these types of practices into their recruitment strategies, into their policy manuals, and those sorts of things. And we currently have some academic manuscripts under prep that will go in the summer. So that is it for my broad overview.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you, Jennifer. And I just want to tell you the new director of Senior Corps is very interested in hearing more of the RSVP findings. So, I'll circle back with you. All right, so we heard different aspects of volunteering from our speakers. And the first question is, as an agency, we hope to increase volunteering, national service, and civic engagement in order to strengthen communities and improve lives, which, as you know, is our mission statement. What do you see as some positive impacts for volunteers or organizations who sponsor volunteers, or at the community level? So, I'm going to start with Peter and Kei.

PETER LEVINE: I want to hear what Kei says. The one thing—I was sort of about to type this in the chat is—I was hoping to, a little bit, challenge the distinctions between volunteering and work and between the nonprofit sector and the other sectors. And so my question would be, “To what extent are the very interesting findings about nonprofit managers, mission statements, and nonprofits, and elderly volunteers, how much do they generalize about just people doing public work?” For example, employees of AmeriCorps on this phone call, or researchers at universities, or bank managers. And I think this is relevant to the question you just asked because it's a question about whether we should be focused on the nonprofit sector, and if so, why?

KEI KAWASHIMA-GINSBERG: Oh, it's a great question, Peter. I think that's actually true to folks like us that CIRCLE at Tufts University, which is an institution that focused exclusively on young people's civic development, engagement, and learning. And so when we watch young people and today's ways in which young people contribute to public life, there's, I think, far more diverse ways than what we call volunteering, at least historically. And so, some examples may be producing really meaningful and substantive political opinion posts on social media that goes to thousands of friends. Or you could think about spending a lot of time organizing protests so that they can improve the police force in the city the way they want to see the police force to be. So, there are all kinds of things that young people do and spend a lot of time, if not dedicate half of their life at this moment, that is not considered volunteering because it's not attached to a nonprofit organization. So, I think

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there is some really big questions, especially when it comes to young people's innovation around that.

However, when I can define volunteering in that broad terminology, if you will, because we don't just study nonprofit volunteering, if I think about spending time with others, deciding what to do as a collective to make positive change in society as a definition of what volunteering, we do see lots of benefits on young people's development. So, for example, really thinking about how that can connect to a broader career network because that can really bring career options for especially young people who may be in internships. That's an opportunity, we find, is at each college, to really explore what the career choices are and whether they really want to go into that career. So for young people, that's extremely important.

The other thing that we see is I think that idea that the young people, often in a volunteer role, are challenged and inspired and stimulated by diverse opinions and perspectives because they're often going out of their regular comfort zone to a larger community, with regards to how much power the person that you're speaking to. They're not just your friends, right? They're sometimes a bridge to the professionalized world. I think some of us are arguing that rich should be gone and it should be just public work, no matter what we do or whether we're paid or not. But I think when I think about internships, that's often

the case. They're really, especially for I think about high school and college students, they're going on an internship to be exposed to a totally different world of professional expectations, more diverse perspectives than they're used to in their own network. And I think the idea is that they can become more informed and thoughtful civic actors as a result of what they're self-studying.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you. Whoops. Something's just going off in my house. OK, I will hand it over to Mark.

MARK HAGER: Thank you. Is my video jumping in there yet? No? OK, people will listen to my disembodied Mark Hager, I guess, here. I reflected on Andrea's question and came up with sort of two very different kinds of answers. The first one really didn't come out of the study, but maybe the study causing me to focus more on the question of sort of civic engagement and engagement of volunteers. And that's just the observation that our engagement pathways are changing and have been changing for a long time.

Robert Putnam traced the big changes back to post-world World War II. So, we're the better part of a century in some sort of sea changes in how we engage our communities. And that was more than 20 years ago that we got that Bowling Alone thesis. And I don't think our disengagement has really improved since that work. I think we like to think and build with our grandparents' America in mind rather than thinking about where we're at now or what our children's America is going to look like.

So, the result is that we're always a little bit out of step in terms of what we're building in order to best engage our nonprofit organizations and thereby, engage our communities.

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And the problem is that people are perfectly content to binge Netflix alone in their living rooms rather than talk to neighbors or otherwise engage their community. So, I think AmeriCorps can be a leader in creative thinking about how best to engage today's masses and the problems that we have in trying to engage our communities.

I think we—and by we, I mean academics, and general practitioners, and AmeriCorps—we kind of crowd about the minority of people that we do engage. And we think less about those people that we don't. And there's a lot of people out there that are holed up in their living rooms, and they're the ones who can benefit most from civic engagement. I think we need new and improved ways to engage everyone in a changing America.

A second observation I had was what came more from the study that I talked about earlier. And that is that we can benefit from more of a focus on field development. And by that, I mean the professional field of volunteer administration. The VMC II study that I talked about where we reported out 2019 results recently. It tells us, again, because it's reinforced what we learned back in 2003, that only about a quarter of nonprofits have a staff person who spends at least half their time on volunteer administration.

So, to a large extent, a volunteer administration, it's avocational. Nonprofit organizations don't take a professional approach to volunteer administration. So that finding is sort of a poor reflection on the readiness of U.S. nonprofits to provide good experiences for volunteers or to maximize the benefits from volunteers and their organizations. So, I'd say

we have a long ways to go in developing the infrastructure of volunteer support. I think that AmeriCorps can be a leader on that front.

And when we put out those 2003 results on the original VMC study, AmeriCorps, or Corporation for National Community Service, was saying maybe we can use national service volunteers to be more involved in volunteer administration. Well, they did. And they're still doing that today. I think we can do things like that. And I we can do a lot more to lead in developing infrastructure and doing field development so that we can best use volunteers to engage our communities and provide better experiences for those volunteers.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thanks, Mark. And I'm sure people will have lots of questions for you when we split up into groups. Pam?

PAM PAXTON: Sure. So, in thinking about what are the positive impacts of, say, AmeriCorps on communities, I was thinking about a different piece of research I did for AmeriCorps, which was looking at the influence of civic infrastructure, specifically, again, nonprofit organizations on community subjective well-being. So, we used Twitter to measure subjective well-being and looked at positive emotion, and engagement, and positive relationships, as well as negative emotion, disengagement, and negative relationships. And what we found was that nonprofits buffer against negative emotion and disengagement. And only in the case of engagement do we see positive effects—that nonprofits are affecting engagement. But generally, in communities, if you think about

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subjective well-being, which we view as very important, like happiness, gross domestic happiness, and those various things, nonprofits and civic infrastructure are really helping buffer against some of the negative, against negative emotion and disengagement, et cetera.

And so things that support civic infrastructure—nonprofit organizations, et cetera, like AmeriCorps—that's an excellent public policy lever to influence communities by supporting civic infrastructure and protecting communities' subjective well-being.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you. And I don't know if you want to put in the chat the article?

PAM PAXTON: I should say, all of these are published at this point, I think. And so, I'm happy to provide links to any of these studies, yes, absolutely.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you. Jennifer?

JENNIFER CRITTENDEN: All right, so I'll start with the societal piece, which has not so much grown out of this research, specifically, and then I'll point to a couple of research findings. So, I think in the field of gerontology, one thing that we're really talking about right now is the impact that COVID has had in increasing ageism in the United States. And so, the more that we can engage older adult volunteers in really meaningful and public ways, I think that we will combat, potentially, that ageism that has kind of been left behind or will be left behind in COVID's wake. So, I encourage volunteer managers and nonprofits to think about their role in that particular issue.

And then kind of on an individual level, the data that was collected from the RSVP volunteer study really shows that, even though we define these sort of boundaries around

life roles—caregiving, working, volunteering—the benefits are fluid across those roles. And so, I think volunteering offers benefits directly to those volunteers with things like socialization, personal growth, positive emotional benefits, cognitive benefits. These are all things that volunteers discuss in their survey responses. They also talked about what we would call kind of role-specific benefits.

So, for caregivers, in particular, they talked about how volunteering brings a sense of respite. So, if we think about the tremendous growth that we've seen in family caregiving, volunteering has the potential to be a caregiver intervention, if you will. It's a chance for folks to connect with other people outside the home, a chance for them to get away, and a chance for stress relief, which is sort of interesting, because we think about caregivers as being a really busy, sort of stressed-out cadre of people. But in fact, those that have connected with volunteering reported really positive experiences from that work.

Folks also talked about gaining new skills that they use either in their caregiving or in their paid work. So, as we look at whether that's re-entering the workforce or remaining within the workforce, volunteering has the ability to give older adults those skills or help them to retool for those opportunities. So, those are some very specific examples of what's grown out of the research piece.

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And then of course, we hear from the RSVP programs and other nonprofits that older adult volunteers have been a mainstay of their volunteer work. And that's important that they continue to recruit and sustain that volunteer workforce. So, I see that as a key driver, perhaps, with this work.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thanks. And just moving on to the second one, we have about six minutes before we go into our groups. So, can you give us, and again, thinking of your research, whether it's what we've sponsored or other research you've done, can you give us some examples from your research on how you would better mobilize and sustain volunteers, and if you have anything to say about how you think that might have changed before and after COVID? And again, we'll start with Peter and Kei.

KEI KAWASHIMA-GINSBERG: Is it okay to go first, Peter?

PETER LEVINE: I think we'll start with Kei between the two of us.

KEI KAWASHIMA-GINSBERG: Am I going? OK. So I saw with my work—I think I mentioned this a little bit earlier—has been a lot with engaging and sustaining teachers and educators who are coming, again, unpaid to learn something, and I've learned quite a bit about how to sustain people engaged in a specific mission, which again, I think is why it applies to volunteering management. One of the things that we learned quite a bit—because we worked before and through COVID and partly in the digital learning environment. And what we learned a lot in that was, essentially, the importance of relationship and, again, the power sharing.

So, the part of the relationship part really has to do with how people that are doing the same kind of work but through a different context and have different identities and priorities can really bond on the idea that you are not the only one doing the work. It was especially important in the digital environment, where teachers often felt very alone. They didn't even see their students, which is why they teach. So they're often talking to Zoom. It's a really difficult time. It's really important for the teachers to really feel like, I'm not alone trying to improve this thing.

It's really hard, especially in this political climate, to teach social studies and civics. And that was really important. The other part that I emphasize on agency is this idea that the teachers, like some of the bosses and managers that work with volunteers, are in the position of authority. But at the same time, the context in which they worked really mattered. So, if the teachers or volunteer managers are not feeling like they can make some decisions or they have a voice or agency within their own workplace or in a particular context, they also have a hard time sharing that power.

So, when Peter asked, what should we do together question, the teacher also needs to be able to ask that question in an authentic way and then have that question asked of them by the people that they're working with or for. So those are two things I'll just lift up.

PETER LEVINE: Great. I guess along similar lines but in a different sector, I might just mention that, at

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least the strategy of cities at service has been to try to convert sort of episodic service, defined as not getting paid, as doing work that you're not paid for, into more intense problem solving. So in which the city officials in the cities of service and the volunteer, the contributors of free time, see themselves as working together on the same project. I mean, I think this is consistent with what Kei was saying about teachers.

And so one change there is to hold everybody really accountable. Too often, you think of the volunteer as somebody who just should get a sticker on take home because they showed up for a few hours. But if the volunteer is there because they think that the streets are dangerous and they want to help, then are the streets getting less dangerous? And what are the means you would use to make them less dangerous? And are the volunteer hours actually helpful?

I did some work—strategic planning work—and a little evaluation in cities in service. I can't speak so much to what data would show about the results. But I think, at least in conception, the idea would be to shift the person who just thinks, I'll give a few hours of time to help, into somebody who's sort of sharing an responsibility for problem solving, and potentially bringing their whole life into it too. So if the person has a day job, that maybe their day job can be part of solving the problem, as well as just their after-hours work.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thanks. Mark?

MARK HAGER: Andrea asks, "What can we say about mobilization of volunteers in a COVID world or a post-pandemic world?" And I want to give a pretty brief answer to what I think is a really exciting question. Because that question has sort of been front-of-mind for me in this sort of supplemental project I'm working on. It was the primary project that brought me back to AmeriCorps, where we were doing that sort of that snapshot of what volunteer management capacity looked like in the pre-pandemic age. But it was this supplement, thank you, AmeriCorps, that allowed me to sort of take advantage of the pandemic and see where we're at.

My starting point with this sort of second project is an observation that the future for the country and for nonprofit organizations, and especially engagement of volunteers, is a technological one. It'll have more virtual and remote connection than we've seen in the past. And COVID really brought that to a head. This is an opportunity for volunteer administration, but it's also a challenge. And we need to confront that and see how we can best take advantage of that.

So, this TEVA study that I'm working on right now—we had a survey and now we're doing focus groups—it's documenting how volunteer administrators engaged in technology when the pandemic hit, but also, and I think probably most importantly, the challenges that they faced in using and adapting the technologies. Sometimes the available tech is bad. Sometimes tech support in organizations is bad. Sometimes, too often, our managers, who are mostly not digital natives, are just not adept in using technology.

So, if our technology if our future is a technological one, then I think we need to seriously consider how to

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smooth the marriage of computer applications and social media to volunteer administration. We really need to do it. Thanks.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you. Pam?

PAM PAXTON: Sure. Well, as for the question of how we could better mobilize or sustain volunteers under U.S.—Rita mentioned the Vista study—so I'll say VISTA. We did look at VISTA and used some data that we got from AmeriCorps to link to those 990s, the administrative data. And we did a match design. So we looked at organizations that had VISTA and very similar organizations that did not. And we looked two years out and we found that, I mean, VISTAs are doing what they're supposed to do, right?

They're building capacity at the organizations that are increasing volunteers, a little evidence for increasing donations. I won't go into this in great detail. I did do a webinar, an AmeriCorps webinar on this, so I'm sure that recording is available somewhere. And it goes into a lot of detail about the study. But I do think VISTA, like I said for the last question, AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA has an important role to play here in thinking about volunteering and civic infrastructure in communities, and certainly, I think, in terms of recovering community after COVID. So, yeah, I'll put a link to the study in the chat as well.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thanks. Jennifer?

JENNIFER CRITTENDEN: Yeah, so I'll emphasize two points. The first being one key takeaway is to emphasize how volunteering can help to translate into the paid work environment, so how can we help people transition or retool. Again, I think that will increasingly be important, especially for older adults who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-related layoffs and job impacts. So I think that will be a key piece. And to echo some of Mark's points I think technology will be important as well.

So we've heard from volunteers—this was pre-pandemic when the survey was conducted—but we need to really change the how, when, where of volunteering if we're going to be flexible and engage people who are working, or caregiving, or doing other things. And so one of the ways that we could do that is through virtual volunteering, and I don't know that we have any solid strategies for doing that. There are certainly some promising models and things that have cropped up. And certainly, as the RSVP programs have had to adapt during COVID, I think there's a lot to learn there as well. But I do think that the future will be shaped by technology and flexibility, and how and when we do our work. And that includes volunteer work.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you. You all bring up some great points, and I've been jotting them down. I do want to give everyone an opportunity to be able to speak with all of you. So I will ask to put us into our breakout rooms. And we'll head back at 2:45. So, Larisa? OK, thank you. If everyone could just join the room, we'll see you soon.

Everyone's been participating. I also want to make sure, if we're not looking at the chat and I haven't

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answered some specific questions, just know that ICF is recording these, and I'd be happy to send them to the speakers and have them respond.

But I was just wondering, we've been placed in just a couple of different rooms. I'd like to give you a chance to just respond to something you've heard today, either from the panelists or from the chat room, and just your takeaway from that, but also maybe next steps that you find interesting in terms of volunteering research. And we'll start again with Peter and Kei.

PETER LEVINE: I was just actually sort of typing something in the chat kind of in response to something Anneliese from Virginia said. So maybe I'll just use this space to say it. Well, we were talking about ways of addressing—in part, we were talking about ways of addressing young people's reasonable and well-grounded concerns about volunteering, savior complex and whether they are really the right people to address social problems or whether volunteer service is a way of addressing social problems.

And I don't want to speak for anyone else, but Anneliese brought up that they were learning it from kind of the environmental movement, which offers some other models. And I was just thinking, riffing off her thought, that the environmental movement often demands a lot of scientific rigor in the investigation of the problem, which we sometimes don't do with social problems in volunteering. So we don't say, well, why aren't kids reading, in the way that environmentalists would say, why is this ecosystem failing.

But the other thing is it's got a different model of stewardship instead of service, which might be pretty powerful. I don't know if that's where Anneliese was going. We were in the middle of that conversation when the breakout time ended. But that was just my response. I can yield my time to Anneliese if he wants to add anything.

AUDIENCE: No, I think that was a great kind of way to think about that thought, of like, how do we look at volunteers in a stewardship.

PETER LEVINE: It would be stewardship not just of nature but of the social community as well.

KEI KAWASHIMA-GINSBERG: I love that. I am really processing a lot of what I heard today. So I'm actually going to yield my time.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: OK, Mark?

MARK HAGER: Thank you. I don't have concluding remarks prepared. What I'll say, I guess, is that I'm excited—I said that earlier—about this supplemental work that's going on because it really allowed me to take advantage of a very contemporary, dare I say, hot question of how we engage our volunteers in a pandemic and in a post-pandemic world. So I have this great data, of survey data now, hundreds of people in focus groups that will allow me to work through a fall sabbatical semester on a book on this question. So I hope to be able to make some big and hopefully influential contributions on this question of technology engagement and how we work with our communities and with our volunteers. Separate from that, though, is an opportunity now to talk more with our practice

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communities. There's half a dozen good outlets alive, CCVA, regional volunteer administration organizations, to talk with about what we're finding. So I'm excited to move more into a listening mode, saying, here's what I found. Let's hear what you tell me about what I'm saying. And so I can get that much smarter by sharing what I can with the world and hearing what they have to say back.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Thank you. Pam?

PAM PAXTON: I also didn't really have any closing remarks. So I think I'll just take the opportunity to thank AmeriCorps for funding research like this because I think not only the very policy relevant research and the extremely relevant—but also the basic research kind of undergirding our understanding of pro-social behavior and civic infrastructure and social capital and declines, like Mark was talking about earlier. And there's a lot more that we need to know. And I mean, I care passionately about this, obviously. I've been studying it my whole career. But I just think it's really wonderful that you're funding research that is relevant, both to your agency, but also generally. And so, yeah, so I just thought I'd take the time to say thank you.

PETER LEVINE: [INAUDIBLE]

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: And thank you to all of you for taking it on. [LAUGHS]

PETER LEVINE: And it builds a community too, which has been great.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Yes, it's been great. It's been great. I wish I could see you all in person. And so Jennifer, I don't want to leave you out.

JENNIFER CRITTENDEN: Just to echo all that's been said, I am, of course, still processing. There's so many great ideas. I'm curious to see where volunteering goes in a post-pandemic world. I know we've lost many older adult volunteers during the pandemic because of safety concerns. So how do we re-engage those folks that we've lost or people who may have some initial trepidation about re-entering volunteering? So I'm very interested from that angle. I'm interested definitely in the technology, to see where that goes and see how organizations build their capacity and how volunteers are engaged through virtual volunteering.

And echo the thank you to AmeriCorps and to Senior Corps, in particular. I will put the link to my study there in the chat box. So, I really hope that volunteer managers, if you are one or you know some, feel free to share that. There is some tip sheets that are really meant for folks who are doing that day-to-day work.

PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: And I just want to close with Peter, your call to action and what should we do as, not just an agency but as a community, as a country, as a global world.

And I think we will be thinking of that for some time to come. So I don't know if Mary can get on because she's in that middle of a storm. Mary?

MARY HYDE: We'll see how long I last. Can you hear and see me?

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PRESENTER [ANDREA ROBLES]: Yes, we can.

MARY HYDE: OK. Let me please say this before I lose everything. Really, thank you for taking the time to learn with us and to share with us today. I know I appreciated the opportunity to transcend the echo chamber of my own mind and to tap into the collective wisdom that I feel has been represented here today and over the course of the last two days. I also want to thank ICF for their invaluable support for this convening. And thank you to our colleagues in the Office of External Affairs for helping us get the word out.

Thank you to our AmeriCorps colleagues for taking time to learn with us. And of course, thank you to all of the panelists for sharing what you are learning with us. I think, not only to Pam Paxton's point, will the agency benefit, but it is my sincere belief that our country will benefit from the knowledge you're building. So, with that, thank you. Have a great weekend, everyone. And I'm going to close my window before the electricity goes out.