

CEV Dataset Technical Recording Webinar Transcript

Laura Hanson Schlachter: Hello everyone, thank you for joining us for this introduction to the Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering dataset also known as the CEV. My name is Laura Hanson Schlachter and I'm a Research analyst in the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation. Our team furthers the AmeriCorps mission by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs in civic life in America more generally. And I feel very fortunate to serve as the technical lead for the dataset we'll be talking about today. I actually first began working with CEV data as a doctoral student in sociology when AmeriCorps generously supported my dissertation research about the relationship between work and civic life through our research grants program. And in my current role, I now get to work with our partners at the U.S. Census Bureau, AmeriCorps colleagues across the agency, policymakers, and researchers in a variety of institutional contexts to analyze CEV data and make it available to the public.

So today I'll be sharing an overview of the CEV including how the survey came to be, how it takes the pulse of our nation's civic health every two years, and examples of how CEV data supports evidence-based decision-making and efforts to understand how people make a difference in communities across the country and over time. Then I'll walk you through how to access CEV data and top-line findings from 2017, 2019, and 2021 at data.americorps.gov. And then I'll conclude with just a few words about what's in store for the CEV moving forward and how you can learn more. With that, let's go ahead and dive in.

Following 9/11 there was a renewed interest in systematically studying civic engagement in America. By civic engagement I mean the constellation of activities individuals engage in to make a difference in their communities. This includes participation within and beyond electoral politics at all geographic levels. Volunteering through organizations is, of course, a prominent example of civic engagement, but this also includes things like attending public meetings, belonging to organizations, and neighbors simply doing favors for each other. AmeriCorps entered an agreement with the U.S. Census Bureau to conduct a nationally representative survey about volunteerism attached to the current population survey, and the first round of data collection took place in 2002.

Now, for those of you who might not be familiar with the CPS, the Current Population Survey ... CPS is the large federal survey that's been the source of key labor force indicators like the national unemployment rate since the 1940s. Each month the Census administers a core set of questions about labor force participation to a nationally representative sample of American households. Then these households are asked a set of rotating supplemental questions about a variety of topics. So that might be about education, it might be food security. Supplement sponsors are typically federal agencies interested in understanding trends relevant to their mission but in the general population. As you might imagine, AmeriCorps has focused on sponsoring CPS supplements

related to our mission to "Foster civic engagement through service and volunteering." As I mentioned, we first launched the CPS volunteering supplement in 2002, and then in 2008, we introduced an additional CPS supplement about other forms of civic engagement such as attending public meetings, getting together with neighbors to do something positive for the community, voting in local elections, things like that.

Shortly thereafter, AmeriCorps convened a panel of experts to really think carefully about how to leverage the strengths of the CPS to inform researchers, policymakers, and the public about civic engagement trends across the country and over time. And a key recommendation from this National Academies of Sciences final report was to merge the volunteering supplement and the civic engagement supplement into a single survey administered every two years. AmeriCorps and the Census launched this new CPS Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, CEV, in 2017. And since then the Census has fielded the CEV every other September, delivered the data to AmeriCorps for internal analysis, and then coordinated with us to release the dataset and documentation to the public. Typically, that happens around the fall of the following year.

Now that you have a sense of how the CEV came to be, how exactly does it take the pulse of our nation's civic health every two years? The 2021 CEV includes measures of 17 different civic behaviors. And as you can see here, it captures a wide variety of ways that people make a difference in their communities. Per Census policy, most measures are behavioral, meaning the survey questions ask respondents whether they've engaged in a particular activity or not. Although recognizing the increasing importance of work as a site of civic engagement, in 2021 we were able to add four attitudinal measures about how people perceive the civic dimensions of their work. You can see those here under economic engagement.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, to date, the CEV has been administered in September of 2017, 2019, and 2021 so we have three rounds of data collection with this new merged instrument. The measures have remained fairly consistent over that time, but if you'd like to see the very specific wording of each question and which year each of these measures is available, I'd really encourage you to check out this table on page three of our frequently asked questions about the CEV document. That FAQ document, I'll show you in a moment it's publicly available at data.americorps.gov, includes a lot of the information I'll be covering today along with some other helpful details about the dataset.

For example, people new to working with CPS supplement data might find the discussion about which weights to use for their analysis useful. As I mentioned earlier, the CPS is a nationally representative survey of American households. About 50,000 American households participate each month so response rates are very high, the sample size is very large. But in order to generate reliable estimates from CEV data, it's really crucial to apply the appropriate supplement-

specific weight to account for the random selection of individual respondents and missing data due to non-response. If you're using the analytic version of the dataset from data.americorps.gov, that means you'll use either the SUPWGT, S-U-P-W-G-T or the S-S-U-P-W-G-T weight variable. You can read the details here in the FAQ.

Another question we often get is whether CEV data is appropriate for examining civic engagement trends say at the county level or the census tract level. If you go to what is the smallest geographic unit I can analyze in the CEV? On page eight of the FAQ, you'll see that CPS sampling and weighting procedures are designed for estimates to be reliable at the national level, at the state level, and for the largest 12 metropolitan statistical areas which are listed here. Unfortunately, that means the CEV can't tell you much about say, the volunteering rate in my hometown of Madison, Wisconsin, or the informal helping rate in a particular census tract. That is unless you have access to the microdata which is possible through an application with the Census Bureau specifically. The public release version of the dataset does not include those more granular geographic indicators.

Okay. So now that you have a sense of how the CEV came to be, how it takes the pulse of our nation's civic health every two years. Now I'd like to go through some examples of how CEV data supports evidence-based decision-making, and efforts to understand how people make a difference in communities across the country and over time. Perhaps the most prominent example is volunteering and civic life in America which is the comprehensive research about civic engagement trends in the United States that AmeriCorps produces every two years. In a moment I'll introduce you to the Volunteering and Civic Life in America landing page which includes top-line findings from 2021 as well as links to CEV data sets and other findings at data.americorps.gov. Now, as you might imagine, conducting the CEV in September of both 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, and 2021, at the height of the pandemic, was really important for policymakers, researchers, and the public because it allowed us to examine how civic engagement changed during the pandemic. Here I want to show you a clip of our CEO Michael Smith talking about some of the things we learned.

- Speaker 2: Michael D. Smith is CEO of AmeriCorps and he's here to give us details from the latest report. Thank you so much for being here this morning.
- Michael Smith: Thank you for having me. Good morning.
- Speaker 2: Well, I want to go ahead and get started with, can you tell us the key findings of the report and what the state of volunteerism is in the country?
- Michael Smith: I would love to. Well, AmeriCorps is a federal agency, we're the federal agency for volunteering and service. And in addition to having about 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps senior volunteers serving in Alabama and all across the country, we're also responsible for the state of service and

encouraging service across the country. And so one of the things we do every two years with the Bureau of the Census is we go deep on volunteering and civic life. We study both formal volunteering, people that say they volunteer with an organization on a regular basis, as well as informal volunteering. A cause for concern is a cause to celebrate. This was actually the period during the pandemic. On the concern side, we actually saw a dip in the number of Americans who said they volunteer with a nonprofit on a regular basis. On the celebration side though, we saw staying strong and steady with the number of Americans that helped their neighbor and made that real difference for folks that are in their immediate circle.

Speaker 2: And how did this year's findings compare to previous year's data?

Michael Smith: Well, I was a little concerned knowing that during the pandemic ... And I was concerned about what we would see. I know during the pandemic a lot of nonprofits had to close their doors or change the way they do business. A lot of Americans, for instance, volunteer at schools, and schools were closed. For the first time in the history of doing this research, we saw a 7% drop in that formal volunteering number. But I was so happy to see what I saw in my own life. Folks went and got groceries for their elderly neighbors, they created learning pods so that those folks that were mission-critical working at grocery stores or that were our first responders, so that their children can learn. And so we were happy to see those numbers being strong.

Speaker 2: And talking more about what you've seen over the past couple of years, has volunteering changed over the past three years due to the pandemic?

Michael Smith: It had to change. It had to change in these past few years because everything else changed. One, we want to make sure we do research like this so we can learn to do more of what's working and to stop doing things that aren't working. We need to make sure that this stays a blip so that in the next two years when we do this survey we can see that folks are going back to volunteer at strong records with the nonprofit organizations that so critically need volunteers to complete their mission. But I think there are things that we can learn from. The innovations like virtual volunteering. I just met one of our foster grandparents, for instance, who taught herself how to use an iPad because she wasn't going home during the pandemic. She wanted to make sure she could stay in touch with her students to do her tutoring work. So we want to learn from the innovations and we want to make sure that these numbers continue to go in the right direction.

Speaker 2: So much important information there. And if our viewers want to find more of that how can they go about doing so?

Michael Smith: Well, if you are interested in learning more about the research, or if you want to figure out how you can volunteer a couple hours a week, or if you want to think about becoming an AmeriCorps member ... AmeriCorps members get a little

cash in their pocket, a living allowance, they also get money for education. You can go to americorps.gov and you can be pointed in the right direction for any of those pathways to service. And all of them are critically important.

Speaker 2: They definitely are. I want to thank you so much for being here this morning, Michael. And as always, we're going to have all of that on our website in case you want to join AmeriCorps. That's going to be on Fox10tv.com under the Studio 10 tab. Again, thank you for joining us this morning, Michael.

Michael Smith: Thank you so much, have a great day.

Laura Hanson Sc...: So here is our Volunteering and Civic Life in America landing page, I'm going to come back to this in a minute, but here's where you can find all of the research going back for the last several releases of this critical report. Our CEV data is really the foundation of our Volunteering and Civic Life in America research which is really critical about ... Critical for informing the national conversation about the civic fabric of America and how that changes over time. And researchers also use CEV data to conduct a variety of applied and academic studies. So, for example, in 2014, AmeriCorps published a study that found that formal volunteers, people who volunteer through an organization had 27% higher odds of finding a job than non-volunteers. And this report made waves across the policy world because it really cemented a link between volunteering and employment.

Scholars also use CEV data to conduct academic studies. For example, many of our research grantees have published articles and peer-reviewed journals using data from the CEV or from our previous volunteering or civic engagement CPS supplements. And I am actually currently in the process of drafting an academic manuscript with some colleagues at AmeriCorps about how measures in this CEV cluster together. And this slide shows some of our findings. Essentially what you can see here, that I think is really fascinating, is that there's a very close relationship between our forms of organizational engagement, things like volunteering through an organization, charitable giving, those are the dots in yellow, and informal social interaction, especially when it's frequent.

So things like just talking to your neighbors on a regular basis, or just talking to your friends and family, whether or not it's about political issues, those are closely intertwined with the kinds of civic behaviors that we know matter for the health of our democracy. We actually plan to submit this paper to a journal later this year so stay tuned. We'll also be publishing a policy report later this summer trying to understand these findings through the lens of AmeriCorps mission and programmatic goals.

All right. So with that, now I'd like to actually walk you through how to access CEV data and top-line findings yourself. As I mentioned, we have data from 2017, 2019, and 2021 all available at data.americorps.gov along with some key figures that may be helpful to you in your own work. So if you're following along

on your own computer, your first step is to go to data.americorps.gov and you're going to find this page, there will be sort of a government disclaimer, "Hey, this is a government website, it's official." And what you want to do is click on this little picture down here that says, "Civic Engagement and Volunteering CEV Supplement." Okay. So I'm going to walk along with you here.

All right. So when you go to data.americorps.gov you're going to see this terms of use disclaimer, click accept, and then you're going to see The Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Okay. So click on that link and it will automatically load everything in our open data platform related to the CEV. And you can see there's a lot of different tags in the ODP that you can use to search different data sets. All of our CEV findings are tagged consistently so that they're really easy to navigate.

So the first thing I want to show you is some of our top-line findings. Okay. So all you need to do is ... Let's start with 2017 to 2021 CEV findings. National Rates of All Measures For the Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Okay, so click on that. And it's going to pull up to a page that looks like this. I'm going to make it a little bit bigger here. There we go. Okay. Okay. So you'll see here, here's a description about the CEV, I would encourage you to take a look. It's sort of about the CEV. The findings on this page are based on data collected in September of 2017, 2019, 2021. These are all weighted estimates. You know how earlier I mentioned it's really important to apply the appropriate weight? These are all weighted estimates actually, that I generated and posted up here. And these all reflect national rates of 17 measures of civic engagement. These are the behavioral measures that I mentioned earlier.

And then a spreadsheet with all of these figures is provided as an attachment along with additional resources about the data, okay? I'm going to show you that in just a second but that's really critical to know. And then again if you want the full CEV data sets, it directs you back to that link. And then we also have a link back to our Volunteering and Civic Life in America landing page.

All right. First, so we've got sort of an introduction to what's going on up top on the page. Here we have just some other things that may be of interest to you. So again, this is a link to our Volunteering and Civic Life in America research. Here are some other top-line findings, state-level rates of CEV measures, and then we also have some findings that are national rates of all of these CEV measures broken down by demographic subgroup. Here are links to just a couple of things you might find useful that are related to this data set. We've got our link to the Volunteering and Civic Life in America landing page, our state-level rates of all of our CEV measures, and then our national rates. And we'll come back to these in a second.

And then this section has a lot of useful information about the dataset. So we've got a recommended citation. It tells you who published, when the data was

collected. Really critically, click on this show more button, and that is where you're going to get down to the good stuff and that is the attachments which I think are probably the most useful things on these page. One attachment you'll find is our FAQ which I mentioned earlier. So if you just click on that it'll download, and you'll have all of the information that I reviewed earlier. Things like what's the smallest geographic unit I can analyze in a CEV? There you go.

We also have here a dataset fact sheet for 2021. And so if you download that you'll see it's just a one-page overview that has some useful information about specifically the 2021 dataset. We also have that in that awesome infographic about the different measures and constructs that we have in the CEV, in a PowerPoint format. So let's say you wanted to give a presentation with your own organization and just explain what measures are in the data, you could use that graphic. You download that then you'll get this slide. You're welcome to use that in any presentations you give about the CEV data as long as just please cite AmeriCorps. And lots of other useful things.

But here I would really recommend downloading this attachment which is the National Rates of All Measures spreadsheet. This is the key findings all laid out in this really nice format. So you can see here, for example, we've got 17 different measures here across the top so things like volunteering through an organization, what was that rate nationally in 2021, 2019, 2017, learning about issues through the news, informal helping, posting views online, voting in local elections. You can have all the measures here. These are all weighted, all accurate. You can use them in your reports or in your research paper or whatever you'd like. Again, we do request though that you use this recommended citation.

All right. And then if you scroll down a little bit, here is just sort of a preview of that Excel spreadsheet I showed you earlier. So what are all of the different measures included in this data set? And then this is a preview of the table. But again, I really, really strongly recommend just going ahead click show more and then download that table as an attachment, it'll probably be a little bit easier to navigate. Okay. So there's our findings in terms of national rates of all measures.

We have something very similar if you go to state rates of all measures. That's the exact same thing essentially but by state. Again, you've got information about what's included here, we have some useful links, some additional information. Again, click on this show more to see the attachments. And here again, if you download this spreadsheet ... So I live in Madison, Wisconsin, let's say I want to know okay, what was the national rate of working for an employer who asked or encouraged employees to volunteer or contribute to a specific charitable cause? Okay. In Wisconsin, in 2021 that number was 37% of Wisconsinites. Let's say I want to know in 2019 ... 2017, 2019, 2021, how many people in Wisconsin got together with their neighbor ... Or got together with people from their neighborhood to do something positive for their community in the past year? Okay. We can see that that was 19.7% of Wisconsinites 16 and

older in 2017, and then it remains steady actually during the pandemic. Interesting. Okay. We have this again for all 17 of our behavioral measures.

Okay. And then the last sort of key findings I want to show you is we also have national rates of all of our measures by demographics. And so again, the page is set up exactly the same way. You've got a description of what's included, we have some helpful links. And then if you click on again, show more you can find a spreadsheet that has tables in a more user-friendly format. Here, these are all again, at the national level. But let's say you were interested in, what are the characteristics of the people nationally who attended public meetings in the last year? So you can see for 2017, '19, '21, by age what was the rate of people who did that. Younger versus older, by generation, by sex, by educational attainment, military service, whether or not they have a child under 18 in their household, race, ethnicity, and then also family income. In all of these tables we have some detailed notes about okay, well, we have this broken down by generation, how do we define those generational thresholds? What do we mean by child and household? Just some interesting, some helpful notes.

One other thing I want to just call your attention to, with all of these findings spreadsheets, is that if you go to the measures tab at the beginning it'll tell you upfront what is the measure, what's the shorthand for it, and then what's the description of what that measure means which is basically telling you exactly what the question wording is. All right. So there we go. Those are our three sets of key findings in the CEV. Now, let's say you want to go a little bit deeper. Let's say you actually want to download the data set yourself and do some deeper analysis. In that case, what you're going to do is go back to our home page. Again, click on CEV, and the data set will load. And we have one entry you'll see here for 2021, 2019, and 2017. They all look very similar so I'm just going to go through 2021.

Again, we have a description of the dataset, we have some links to the top-line findings. I want to really call your attention to this explanation which is a guide to the attachments. Because if you're working with a dataset itself you're going to want to make sure you really understand what's in that data set, how to make sense of the variable names, how to apply the weights, things like that. And so again, to access all of those attachments you're going to go down click on show more. This is really a key tip. It's tempting when you first go on this to just think "Oh, okay, I'm just going to export the data." You can do it that way but the file formatting is not going to be compatible with most statistical programs, okay? I would really recommend, if you want to download the data set ... Again, we have the fact sheet, we have the FAQs. I would really recommend going to this analytic data and setup files zip folder and opening that up. Okay, so if you click on that it'll download, it might take a minute.

Essentially what we do at AmeriCorps is we receive the raw data from the Census Bureau, we read it into a statistical program called Stata, that's just the program we happen to work with, and then we format the data, clean up the

variable names, label all the variables so that it's just a little bit easier to work with for a first time user. We've downloaded the zip folder, we're going to unzip it, and you'll see a few things in here. So we're going to extract and all these files, extract all. Okay. All right, we're going to look at all these files. Okay.

And there are a couple key things here. Let's say that you work with ... In a different statistical program. Let's say you work in SPSS or you work in R. Typically, CSV files are compatible with any statistical program. So if you'd like a version of the analytic data set in CSV you can use this file here. I personally work in Stata, and so that's how this data set is formatted. I will say that if you'd like it converted to a different file format, SPSS or SaaS, just send us an email at americorpscev@cns.gov and I'm happy to convert it for you just to save you a little time on your end so you're not manually coding.

But when you click on that file you're going to see the Stata file, the DTA file, come up. And you can see here ... So we've got the names of all the variables. And you can see here that we have a lot of variables and everything relate ... Everything that's specific to the CEV supplement is labeled, is renamed with a little bit more intuitive name just so it's a little bit easier to use, along with some of the key demographic variables, okay?

Now, if you wanted to say understand what it was that I did to format all of the data, if you want to look at the code, this is the file that ... This is the due file that explains what exact ... What changes have we made to the raw dataset so that it's a little easier to work with. So you can see we've renamed some variables, we've defined value labels, we've recoded some variables to be used for analysis so recoding missings, recoding some variables as dummy variables or binary variables, recoding some of the frequency variables, all of that. So if you want to go back to that sort of source code you're very welcome to.

And then another key resource in this analytic data folder is going to be the code book. And so this is the analytic data code book produced by AmeriCorps. Here's a little bit of an explanation. Essentially this is your guide to all of the variables in the analytic dataset. So again, we have renamed all of the variables so that they're a little bit more intuitive or easier to type in. So, for example, the census variable for the first question in the CEV questionnaire is called PE1. Now, maybe you can remember that means the frequency of talking with friends and family, I personally can't remember that and so I renamed the variable FF talk. And you've got some details about it. You can see it's a categorical variable. The format name in this column corresponds with the formats in this so you can see sort of what does a one mean, what does a three mean. And then we also have our missing value labels if you want to understand what we're doing there.

So we've got, this is how the variable's labeled in Stata, here's the full question text, and then it also tells you which years the variable's available for. And then for a couple of the variables we have specific notes. So, for example, this is the

weight to use for these specific variables, this is the weight to use for these specific variables. This variable, number of volunteer hours, is top coded at 500, things like that. Okay? So this code book, I would really encourage you if you're working with the analytic version of the dataset to take a close look at it because that's going to be your guide to what's in there.

Okay. A couple other things to direct your attention to. We've got here a PowerPoint that summarizes some top-line findings from the 2021 CEV. Again, that fact sheet and FAQ I pointed you to earlier. This technical documentation is produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. If you're really doing serious analysis with this dataset I would really encourage you to read through this. It might feel daunting at first but there's some really valuable information in here that tells you about the CPS itself, about the supplements, about the rationale behind the waiting procedures, allocation flags, things like that.

And then the other thing to call your attention to is the non-response analysis. This is only attached to the 2021 data set. Any time that a CPS supplement response rate falls below a certain threshold ... And response rates have been declining in the past few years during COVID. Then the Census Bureau conducts a very thorough and statistically robust non-response bias analysis, and you can read all about it here. Just lots of really useful nuts and bolts, technical details about the dataset.

And then if you want to actually go back to the raw data that the Census Bureau posts on their website and see, how did I write the code to read that raw data, which is in ASCII format, into Stata format, writing a data dictionary file, all of that source code is all in here in the raw data and read-in files. So if you really want to geek out or if you think you found a typo, please download that and take a look. I'm always happy to answer questions. Again, the table preview, this is a very, very, very large dataset so I'm always going to encourage you to click on show more and then download the dataset from this analytic data and setup file folder rather than just clicking export because the formatting is going to be preserved from the attachment. Okay. So that's sort of a guide to what the data set looks like, and it looks very similar for the other years.

Let's say you wanted to look at the 2019 data set. Again, very similar. The attachments are a little bit different. For example, we don't have a non-response analysis for 2019 but the principle is the same. When you open the data set you're going to see ... So let's go to 2019. You're going to see a description at the top, you're going to see a description of the attachments, and really encouraging you to check those out. You're going to see some links relevant to that particular data set, and then click on show more. And if you want to download the data set, the code book, that's all in this analytic data and setup files folder. Okay.

The last thing I'll point out on data.americorps.gov is that if you want to reach out, if you have any questions about the dataset, one option is to just click on

this link, contact dataset owner. That email will go to whoever is serving as the technical lead for the CEV. Currently, that's me. I monitor that email inbox every day so I'm always happy to answer any and all questions you might have.

Okay. That concludes my tour. And I'm going to just end on a final note here. Again, thank you so much for your interest in the CEV. We are always really excited to work with folks who are interested in the data. Just to give you a sense of what's coming up. So our next round of data collection will happen in September of 2023. We typically get the clean dataset from the Census Bureau the following spring, and then do our internal analysis for our Volunteering and Civic Life in America research, and produce the analytic version of the data set, things like that, and then release that to the public the following fall. So you can expect to see the 2023 version of CEV data available to the public likely in the fall of 2024, along with the next round of our Volunteering and Civic Life in America research.

So in the meantime, if you'd like to stay in the loop about what's happening in the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation, we encourage you ... You're very welcome to subscribe to our newsletter, the link is here. And if you have any questions at all about the CEV please contact us at this email address, AmeriCorpscev@cns.gov. Again, I monitor that every day, I try to be very prompt. I'm happy to answer the smallest and most basic question to big questions, and also happy to set up demos. I sometimes have professors who contact us and say, "Hey, I want to do a 101 on the CEV data, could you talk to my students?" I'm always happy to do things like that. No question is too small. Thank you again for your attention and we look forward to hearing from you about what you're learning as you dive into the findings and the data. Thank you.