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Day 2 - 2022 AmeriCorps Research Grantee Dialogue

HUSSEY-SLONIKER: Welcome to the AmeriCorps Research and Evaluation Dialogue 2022. My name is Katy Hussey-Sloniker and I'm the Learning Officer for the Office of Research and Evaluation. Before we begin Day 2 of the Convening, we'd like to cover a few housekeeping items. First, thank you all for your patience as we get started with Zoom events. If you have any questions or experience technical difficulties please us know using the chat box feature.

This session will be recorded and posted online on the AmeriCorps Impact Webinar page within two weeks of the close of the session. Each session will be available on the AmeriCorps YouTube channel under the Research and Evaluation playlist as well. There is no dial-in phone line for our Zoom event today. All audio is broadcast over the internet using your computer speakers. All participants have been muted to avoid background noise and to allow for greater engagement.

You will be in listen only mode throughout the session. You can ask questions at any time during the

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presentation through the chat box. Select Everyone when submitting your questions. A member of our ORE team will be compiling the questions and reading them during the Q&A portion of the session. Finally, closed captioning is available. To activate captions please select the Live Transcrip's icon on the Zoom menu and select Show Subtitles.

That takes care of our housekeeping items and now for today's agenda. Today's Dialogue session is focused on foundational research for fostering civic participation for refugee communities. We'll hear a brief welcome from Dr. Andrea Robles, AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation. Watch a three minute video discussing how AmeriCorps translates research into action. Followed by introductions and later a facilitated discussion on the presentations by Doctors Emily McDonald and Victoria Narine. And finally, reflections from our senior leaders on applying and translating this research into practice.

As a reminder, we have one more day of speakers presenting their research to inform actionable and

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meaningful change from national service. Thursday will focus on African American youth and civic engagement. If you have not already done so and would like to register for the final day of the dialogue, please see the link in the chat box. And now our research dialogue Embracing the Diversity of Civic Engagement will start. Here to welcome us is Dr. Andrea Robles.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you, Katy. And welcome everyone. We're so excited to have you join us and to hear another wonderful day of great speakers. These are our research grantees that we have funded and do research around our mission statement of civic engagement, volunteering, and national service. And we fund a variety of different methodologies and research methods. And one that we do fund, and especially with the 2018 grantees, is participatory research. And this type of research is working alongside and with communities.

And you'll hear about two projects today and we also have a video that we're going to show right now. So

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after the video we will start with our speakers. So thank you and let us know if there's any trouble on the chat or any questions or comments as well. Thank you.

[video plays - music]

DR. RIVERA: The trust of gaining the trust of the community is the biggest part of this particular kind of research.

HARGROVE: I guess the best way to build trust within the community is to be totally engaged with them, to have them really talk about what it is that is important to them and to address for their community. To also think about that it's really not a top-down communication, it's a bottom-up. So being able to listen and be there authentically.

DR. OHMER: We actually spent the first six to eight months of the project ingraining ourselves in the community, going to community meetings, recruiting a

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community advisory board, having them and other residents inform how we do everything.

DR. RIVERA: Participatory action research requires that the community feels that the information, that the decisions, that the whole process are there, they are a researcher as I am a researcher.

[music]

VALENTIN: Doing this type of research, which is participatory action research in my community specially, is very, very different and a lot more personal, you know? Instead of us just being people on the outside that are like collecting surveys or things like that, you know, we're actually in the community doing interviews and events in the North End and this is where I've spent my entire life.

ABRAHAM: To see a lot of times how community organizations don't have the numbers, or the like hard facts, or the research sort of backing to be like, listen, our community has need and this issue

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that we're trying to address, but without that support of like research, especially like legislators or policymakers who look the other way, because at the end of the day like numbers talk.

DR. CHIKKATUR: And so when we work with community researchers I would say that I'm, you know, I know some things about research, right, and I can teach about methodology, but you know your community in a way that I don't.

[music]

DR. INTRATOR: And so, you know, in some sense the participatory action frame gives them a way to organize and it gives them a system and a practice to begin to sort of move through a process by which they identify a problem, collect data, speak to a broad range of constituents inside of a community, and then take that and synthesize it, and from that begin to develop real action-oriented solutions.

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DR. ZIMMERMAN: It's really about engaging stakeholders and it's about engaging stakeholders to explore the issues that are impacting their community in order to be able to come up with solutions that, not only reflect the reality of what's going on in their community and what they think is needed, but to generate community action and buy in for those solutions as they move forward with the process.

[music]

DR. WILLETT: It's really fun, it's rewarding, it's impactful, it's different than other types of research. So when we do other research projects that aren't community-based or have an action component, sometimes it feels like we publish and we're moving on with our careers, but what is really happening with this stuff? With this project I know that we're trying to make a difference in people's lives and we are making a difference in people's lives. So I feel like that's what we're supposed to be doing with our research, research to action, and the community-based

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participatory model just naturally lends itself to that.

[video ends]

DR. NARINE: Thanks, Andrea. And I loved watching that video because it highlights all of the great work that our research grantees are doing to engage communities and produce actionable solutions connected to national service and civic engagement. If you all want to watch that video again and learn more about participatory action research, you can check out the link in the chat.

So now we're going to hear from our first speaker, Dr. Bryan Wright. Dr. Wright is the Executive Director of Cincinnati Compass, a collaborative that brings together local, state, and federal governments and community partners to promote and celebrate the cultural and economic contributions of new Cincinnatians, as well as connect individuals and organizations to resources and to each other to build capacities and opportunities.



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Dr. Wright is a dedicated connector and collaborator committed to inclusion, equity, and community building. His work focuses on creating a more welcoming and inclusive region for immigrants and refugees. Working alongside another of today's speakers, Dr. Anjali Dutt, Dr. Wright used grant funds provided by AmeriCorps to help advance their work by putting immigrant and refugee voices, actions, and assets at the center of the frame in all they do.

Dr. Wright is travelling right now, hopefully for him, to somewhere tropical, but he sent us a recording describing his work.

DR. WRIGHT: Good morning everybody. I hope you all are doing well. My name is Bryan Wright, I'm the Executive Director of Cincinnati Compass and I'm very happy to be here with you all this morning, at least in a recorded sense. My future self or present self is probably walking around an airport right now trying to find the terminal and hopefully getting on

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the phone to join this call, and what promises to be a exciting and lively conversation and series of presentations. So I'm thankful to AmeriCorps, the Office of Research and Evaluation, and to Melissa, Andrea, Jenelle, Larissa, and the many others recording this event and for helping me be able to participate by recording.

And so what I'll talk a little bit today is really setting the stage and talking about refugees to the United States and I want to focus on three things. I want to focus on, what do we mean by refugees? And, you know, just like the overall immigration system in the U.S., there's not one clear pathway, despite what many people say, you know, to get in line. There are numerous lines that could take many, many years and there's many pathways. And within the immigration system we have employment-based, family-based, and humanitarian-based kind of immigration practices and policies and pathways.

And I'll be talking about that third one, the humanitarian. And when we talk about refugees, we

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mean it has many different meanings and we'll talk about different ways of getting here. The second thing we'll talk about is the current situation and economic data. And then third, you know, get into what our project really gets into is leveraging assets and broadening the bench of representation of refugee communities. And I think that's one of the key values that programs like this bring is helping to broaden the bench of representation of immigrants and refugees.

And so starting off, what do we mean by a refugee?

And there are several different aspects under immigration law and policies where there's many ways where people who are facing persecution, violence, war, other types of threats and oppression arrive at our borders, or even before arriving at our borders, apply for some kind of humanitarian protection and wanting to admit as a refugee. Someone who is located outside of the United States, is of special humanitarian concern to the U.S., and then demonstrates that they were persecuted or have fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality,

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political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and they are not firmly resettled in another country and admissible to the United States. And is admissible to the United States, I'm sorry.

Another pathway we talk about is asylum. And that's someone who arrives in the United States and is present in the United States, and either presents themselves lawfully, or at a port of entry, or crosses the border unlawfully and then applies for asylum. Either way we know that asylum is protected by international law and is an ethical and moral thing to do. And as we know, and I'll talk about a little bit later, how it's not ethically accessible to individuals who present themselves at the border or anywhere in the U.S. to apply for asylum.

But, again, asylum is someone who is here in the United States seeking protection because they have suffered persecution or fear that they will suffer persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and political opinion. So we have refugees, we have

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asylum seekers, we have asylees. And some more are humanitarian parolees and that's a designation that we're seeing more with, particularly with folks arriving from Afghanistan and more recently from Ukraine.

And so there is a new program coming up or that's actually in place now Uniting for Ukraine. And under that program, people will be eligible for humanitarian parole. And then the difference with humanitarian parole is that while it provides work authorization and some kind of protection, it is not a pathway to citizenship as say an asylum or refugee status provides.

But, it does provide protection and then it really, whether it can or cannot lead to a pathway, a more permanent pathway really depends on kind of administration X, and that's being examined for both the recent groups coming from Afghanistan and Ukraine. And some other statuses are TPS, temporary protected status that we've seen with individuals from Syria as well as more recently from Cameroon.

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And then other groups like special immigrant visas and even special immigrant juvenile visas that we're seeing again with community members from Afghanistan and other places as well.

So there's a lot and I think what I can do is I can provide some resources, some links to some really good guides from American Immigration Council that helps to explain a lot of this. And so for our project, and my colleague is here today and she'll go into more detail about it, Dr. Anjali Dutt, but for our project, Civic Action for Refugee Empowerment, CARE Cincinnati, we didn't limit it to these kind of legal terms because we understand that the immigration system is complex, and difficult to navigate, and doesn't always see people's experiences.

And so for participation with our group, regardless of their immigration status, if someone fled a country and came to the U.S. to flee that persecution in search of a better, safer, we shall say, a safer way of life then we opened that opportunity for them

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to participate in the program. So from that standpoint, the status didn't matter, but it matters in a way where when we're looking at access to benefits, particularly around social services and then also looking at the different ways of civic participation as well, where if someone wants to serve on a board or a committee immigration status plays a part in this, and so it matters then, and then also around voting where you have to be a U.S. citizen to be able to vote.

There's many, many ways, as we know, to be engaged civically in our neighborhoods and across the U.S., but we're not limiting it to immigration status. So what we've seen with some of the recent numbers here, we've seen a very stark decline. While there are numbers increasing across the southern border, and applications for asylum, and people being turned away, and then with programs like Title 42 that is actually being debated now, which is not an immigration policy but is a tool used to really kind of curb immigration, and so that's being hotly debated now.

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And then other programs like Remain in Mexico, which are really problematic policies that limit one's ability to apply for, to present themselves and apply for asylum. But, within the refugee resettlement process we've seen those numbers dwindle significantly to where, looking at 2018, the number, the cap was at 45,000, and only 22,500 individuals were resettled in that year here in the U.S. In 2019 the cap went down to 30,000, 2020 down to 18,000, 2021 it did go back up to 62,000, and this is where we see a change in administration where the previous administration was really trying to close down the refugee resettlement process, decimated the system across the globe and here in the United States.

And actually where the cap was, say for example, in 2020 at 18,000, only 11,800 people were actually resettled in that year, and then it actually went down lower in 2021 to 11,411 because of the impacts of the previous years of really dismantling the system. So the current administration actually increased the numbers to the cap in 2022 to 125,000,



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but we've only seen about 10,700 people be resettled in the United States to that point. So it is a system that is being redeveloped, I should say, and then more resources are being added to it.

But, we know there's a huge backlog with USCIS with some of these other immigration statuses, asylum applications, temporary protected status, humanitarian parole, special immigrant visa, and others. And so there's many different ways and so probably with the work that you're doing, you may work with refugees that are traditional refugees that have applied for protections outside the U.S., and we know that globally there are many, many displaced persons and there are roughly 25.9 million refugees worldwide that have actually the status and they're looking to be resettled. And I can share some more data.

And locally we're seeing refugee communities coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Burma, Syria, and Bhutan. And actually Bhutanese refugees make up the largest refugee population in

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the state of Ohio. And so one of the powers of and the benefits of this project, that Anjali and I have been working with community members over the last several years, is that it really centers the lived experience and voices of refugees communities, not in a way for people to share their trauma, but to really share their experiences and advocate for better policies, and that's one of the strengths.

And so we start from a point of the assets, and the knowledge, and the skill sets that refugees bring to help change, not only immigration, but also broader civic challenges that we have. And we know that, you know, when refugees come they not only bring assets, but bring economic power. So, for example, and this is kind of dated, but in 2015 refugee households earned \$77.2 billion dollars and contributed more than \$6.4 billion dollars to state and local taxes with \$14.5 billion going to federal taxes. And this leaves them with \$56.3 billion in spending power.

So economically, refugees are a strong power in driving the economy in the U.S. And also we know that

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refugees are entrepreneurial, start businesses, and then hire individuals. And we know that the investments that are put in, in the initial refugee resettlement, that there is a long-term gain where refugee communities are putting back into the economy and are key economic contributors to the U.S. and to our local economies, as well as in areas of civic engagement.

And that's one of the things we're trying to do is to help broaden the bench of representation, not only in boards and councils in the private sector, but also in the nonprofit sector and also in government. We want to see more refugee representation on our city councils, on our county commissions, on our parks board, and so on different elected boards and commissions and neighborhood communities so that we can help shift policies and workforce and economic development spaces, that we can have more inclusive startup policies and practices as well.

And so, again, that's really I think one of the key powers of this program and the work that we've been

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doing is to, not only gather data that is gathered and centered, but centering the experiences and the voices of refugee communities so that the work of Compass becomes just a platform to elevate those voices and center the experiences of refugee communities to really help shape inclusive practices and policies.

And I think these kind of things will come up later on during the day, which I'm hoping I'm able to join you, and I just want to kind of set the stage of kind of where we are, and hopefully I'll be able to join and answer some questions later. So thank you for your time and I hope you all have a good morning. Thank you.

DR. MCDONALD: Thank you so much, Bryan, for sharing your deep knowledge with us and for helping us to ground our conversation today. So next we're so thrilled to be joined live by Dr. Anjali Dutt. Anjali is an Assistant Professor of Social and Community Psychology at the University of Cincinnati. Her research focuses on psychological processes that are

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associated with resistance to oppression and increasing the wellbeing of marginalized communities, particularly in the context of globalization.

So she's here to share with us how, with AmeriCorps support, she's been able to work collaboratively with refugee communities to connect research findings with actions to support refugee civic engagement. Anjali, this is -

DR. DUTT: Thanks so much for having me here today. I really appreciate having this opportunity. And I just heard from Bryan, as you can see and can tell from the previous talk that he and I have been working together on this. Bryan just texted me and said that he's still in security, so he hasn't been able to join yet, but hopefully he'll be able to join eventually, but it was great to have him starting us on off in the way that he was able to.

And on this first slide you see that there's a photo of me and Bryan, and those photos are there today because we were two who are speaking today, but I

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really want to emphasize that everything I'm going to be talking about was a team effort. The beauty of participatory research is that you're bringing together the perspectives, insights, ideas, goals, etc. of people from so many different contexts. And so, like I said, those pictures are of us because we're the ones talking today, but there will be other pictures that showcase everyone who came together to create this project. So I can't underscore enough that this has been something that's been profoundly collaborative and for me that's been one of the biggest gifts of this project and experiences.

And also, I really can't thank AmeriCorps enough for giving us this opportunity to do this work. I think it's hard to find funding that truly lets you do something really profoundly participatory where we collectively even creating our research questions together as a team. And so I feel so grateful to have had this opportunity so far. Could you go to the next slide, please?

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So what I'm going to do today is talk about the study that we've been doing since 2018. Myself and Bryan, as well as another colleague, Dr. Farrah Jacquez, who is also a community psychology at the University of Cincinnati, found out about this funding opportunity. We've been working on different things related to refugees, immigrants, and civic participation in different capacities, but after we found out about this funding opportunity, it really solidified our desire to work together.

So after being awarded the funding, we were able to come together as a team, at the beginning with just the three of us, and reach out to several different refugee communities in the Cincinnati area and think about what we might be able to accomplish together. So we had contacted, at the time that we were applying, several different refugee support organizations that exist in Cincinnati, specifically Catholic charities, which is the main refugee resettlement organization in the region, and then two smaller organizations that do support for refugees in the area.

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But, really importantly, all three of these organizations are run by people who are not refugees or immigrants themselves. And so what we were really interested in, when we were doing this work, is doing something that really centers as much refugee and immigrant, at this phase, refugee voices as possible. So we reached out to those organizations to ask if they knew of anyone who might be interested in partnering with us who were members of refugee communities and we had several people who were recommended to us, I personally cold called them and asked if they might be interested in connecting.

And back in 2018, a group of about, I think initially we had about 15 people who came in the beginning and we ended up solidifying into a team of 12 people from the refugee community, myself, Farrah, and Bryan. We all kind of came together and started to share, we were really interested in increasing civic engagement opportunities for refugees in the area, but when it comes to what exactly are the questions we want to ask, we have a few ideas, but we're really interested



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in collaboratively coming up with what these questions might be.

And so what we did, initially, is we met, we had a meal together. I've been doing participatory research for about a decade at this point and I've learned that bringing together people over a meal can really help facilitate kind of the casual conversations that eventually become the more meaningful, more exploratory conversations. So we initially did that, talked a little bit about what we might do, and then setup a schedule of repeatedly meeting for several months, basically.

Within a couple months, a couple meetings, really I think by our third meeting we had a solid plan. Through our initial conversations it had become really clear that although there is some support for refugees and their transition to life in Cincinnati, that support goes to very specific people. And Cincinnati is a city that has a lot of secondary migrants and what that means is that people are resettled in the United States as official refugees

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in a different city and then move to Cincinnati for a number of reasons, largely the availability of jobs and the low cost of living, and there are some established refugee communities here that make people want to come to this area.

When you're a refugee and you come to the United States things will vary dependent upon your circumstances, but the average is that you get 90 days of support from an official support organization and they will assist you with things like enrolling your children in school, finding you an apartment, helping you find employment. Somebody might pair up with you for a day and teach you how to go to the grocery store or just things about navigating life in the United States.

But, as I said, that support usually exists only for 90 days. I've lived in Cincinnati for five years, I'm from the United States, I speak English, and I still think I have difficulty sometimes navigating life in the city because I'm not from the city. So I know that 90 days often isn't enough. And that was

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something that was coming up repeatedly in our conversations that people wanted not just that initial support, but a deeper understanding of how to navigate life and really, truly, and deeply engage in the community.

So over time, and the vast majority of refugees, as you can see on the slide, that we have over 25,000 refugees in the greater Cincinnati community, the vast majority are people who move here as secondary migrants. So they don't even get any of that support. And if you move to another city, after being officially resettled, you don't have any of that guaranteed support as you might if you're an official refugee being initially resettled.

So kind of through learning about what life was like in the initial phase of transitioning to life in Cincinnati, it became really clear that it was really challenging and we came up with this idea of anchoring our initial research questions and determining how we can identify what the initial barriers are to participation and wellbeing that

refugees experience as they're initially moving into this area.

And then, as Bryan shared and as the previous video has been sharing and I think why everybody is here, as you all know, that a core component to this work is not just the research but really pairing it with actions. So from that point on we knew that by gaining insight into some of these initial questions we'd get some insight into actions we could actually do to promote change. Can we go to the next slide?

Thank you. So we ended up doing a multi-phase research project and action project. Because I only have 15 minutes, we do have several publications at this point, and I'm always happy to elaborate on anything I'm going to talk about, but I decided that it might be more optimal to talk about all the phases we went through and kind of share an overview of different aspects of the projects, but please ask any questions and I'd be happy to expand upon anything that's written here.

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But, so what we initially did is we decided to do a survey to learn about how many refugee communities are experiencing life in this city. And I forgot to mention, so here you can actually see our whole team. And just to tell you a little bit about the people who ended up forming the CARE Cincinnati team, and CARE stands for Civic Action for Refugee Empowerment, we have refugees from seven different countries who spoke six different first languages. Our members included people from Burundi, Iraq, the Congo, Somalia, Guatemala, Syria, Bhutan, and the first languages included Kirundi, Arabic, French, Somali, Spanish, and English.

It was roughly half female, half male, and our age range was also to me quite impressively diverse. We had people ranging from 16 years of age, as core research members who are really interested and committed to being involved in this project, all the way up to 75 years old at the start of this project, so he's now almost 80. Having this age diversity was such an added source of connection and wisdom and

really challenged our capacity to think about how do we ensure that everybody's voice is equally heard.

And I will also note that people ranged from the time spent - So the most recent person who had moved to the United States on our team had been here for three years, the longest was twelve years. So relatively recent but nobody was brand new, so everybody had had some time to really think deeply about this process of transitioning and what that meant, and those experiences really contributed I think to the reasons we went with our initial research design.

So through a series of conversations, given the question that we had, we decided that the best thing to do would be to try to find out from as many refugees as possible about what their life had been like during this period of transition, what challenges they faced, what things had worked really well for them, and what kind of changes they wanted to see in the future, how might they want to engage, etc. So we were able to do a survey where we could reach 291 local refugees.

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We collaboratively designed the survey. I'm a psychologist and often in psychology we really prioritize using established psychometrically sound surveys, but we decided what was more important was capturing the perspectives that were most important to refugees. So we actually worked collaboratively to create a survey that could be interpreted and keep the same meaning question by question across all six languages that the survey was going to be administered in.

And just to share some of the findings. And questions included things like, do you have trouble with transportation in the city? Do you feel safe where you live? Is there a person you can count on at any time in Cincinnati? Are you able to use your education and skills here in Cincinnati? Have you been able to get the healthcare you need? Do you ever feel like you don't know the rules of life in the United States or in Cincinnati in particular? Are your children happy with the life they have here in Cincinnati?

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So we kind of worked together to create what we felt was a pretty comprehensive survey that included 22 questions and gave us insight into several different domains that we kind of worked together on over a series of several months to come up with the optimal survey.

The majority of the people who completed the survey were Burundians - Sorry, not Burundian, 42% from the Bhutanese community, 8% from the Burundian community, 10% from the Guatemalan, 10% from the Congolese, 13% Somali, and 17% from the Arabic speaking communities, which is how that group tends to connect. And so I just share that because we were able to somewhat closely approximate the communities that are in Cincinnati. So we have a majority Bhutanese community in Cincinnati, but it continues to be a fairly diverse refugee community in the area.

We compensated people with a \$10 gift card to a local grocery store chain for completing the survey. And our co-researchers were compensated for all of the



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surveys that they administered as well. And we were really excited by what we found, to be honest. We found that there was a lot of positivity about people's experiences in Cincinnati. Most people shared that - More than 50% strongly agreed with statements like they like their living situation, that they felt safe where they lived, that they were happy with the amount of time they had to spend with family, they had friendships here and people that they can count on, and that they felt welcome in the city and wanted to be more involved in the city life.

So we were thrilled to hear that, but also a little bit surprised. It was a little bit more positive than what we were expecting based on the discussions we had been having. There were also areas of concern. The largest areas of concern had to do with employment. A lot of people who were from the refugee communities are highly skilled, have advanced degrees, have professional careers, and then when moving to the United States don't have the opportunity to use the education and skills that they've gained and experience that they gained.

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In our area the largest employer of refugees is Amazon. And so a lot of people go from being teachers, dentists, doctors, architects, many other things to being pickers at Amazon, which is not always the most fulfilling experience for people.

The other area where we found consistent lower levels of satisfaction with life in Cincinnati was, do you ever feel like you don't know the rules in the United States and do you feel like you don't know how to get through the system here? So there was a lot of people saying that they were grateful for many of the experiences they had had here, but knowing how to really navigate life was an area that they wanted more support and that ended up informing a lot of the actions we did next.

So then phase two we, because we were kind of surprised by the level of positivity and because we wanted to use participatory methods to learn more about how people were experiencing life rather than just the survey, we decided to do focus groups. So

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where the survey we were predominantly looking about the experiences of refugee groups as a whole, in our focus groups we had people-led focus groups with their own communities. And what we did is we took the findings from the surveys and made some charts that were really easily digestible, just kind of frequencies of what people said, and then asked folks to give us more understanding of why people responded the way they did, so to give us deeper insight into what those survey findings meant to the people who were in attendance of the focus groups.

And from that we were able to get some really interesting insight. So although a lot of people said they were really happy, that they felt safe where they lived, and that they were happy with their life here, often times when in the focus groups they shared that that was in comparison sometimes to living in a refugee camp. So, for example, with the Bhutanese refugees, many of them had been living in a refugee camp in Nepal for 20 years prior to coming here. So the comparison that they were making didn't necessarily mean that they were living the life that

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they truly wanted to be living in Cincinnati, but rather that compared to what they had been experiencing before, this was something that was more positive.

In these focus groups we also heard repeatedly this desire for skills to be more recognized. Specifically they talked about specific poor treatment that they had experienced in specific domains. And repeatedly this frustration with not knowing how to navigate the rules and norms of our communities became really apparent. So after talking about the specific frequencies and kind of asking people to elaborate on why they felt people responded this way and what did these questions really mean to them, we also asked people about actions they wanted and what could we do as a team to really work to improve the experiences of refugees, and that became our third phase. Could you go to the next slide?

Thanks. And so then the last thing I wanted to talk about is what we were able to do. And again, it was incredible to have funding from AmeriCorps to be able

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to actually, not just find out insight into what's going on, but use that insight to create programs and create things that would actually address some of the concerns. One of the things that had come up repeatedly, as you know at this point, was that people had difficulty understanding like, how do we go beyond that 90 days of support and really understand how to live in this region?

Some of the people on the team had said that they previously lived in Chicago and there was this "How to Live in Chicago" manual that they were given. And we talked a lot about, how could we do something like that? It was a community organization that had created this "How to Live in Chicago" guide and we felt like it could be something that we could do that was similar.

And we ended up talking a lot about, should we create a manual like that that's written or should we do something more, something else? And so what we came up is videos because that we could do in multiple languages and we could make shorter videos, we could

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make longer videos, we could respond, it's something that could be ongoing, and I think it's something that will live on for a long time. So far we have made a few, one, for example, about landlord-tenant rights, another one about getting support around mental health. We're working on one around education.

And one thing, much to my surprise because I don't particularly like social media typically, we have actually talking and prioritizing making TikTok videos because they're quick, and people really like them, and they can answer questions quite easily. So that's one of the things that we're - We have some that are totally complete and some that we're still working on and I think it's actually something that will hopefully live on for a long time because TikTok videos, for the youth on our team, are really easy to make, amazingly so.

Another thing that was really powerful for us was the creation of a refugee and immigrant civic leadership program. So we've so far had three cohorts go through this, but we created a multi-week program in which

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refugees and immigrants were meeting with us, unfortunately over Zoom, because this was post-pandemic, but to talk about - We had guest speakers from the city, people from city council, people who were involved in county government, people involved in different local organizations, and other refugees who had been involved in community engagement, and we created a program that people were given a stipend, if they completed, that gave people the opportunity to learn more about like, how do you engage in civic leadership?

Including things like, how do you report that you need a stoplight on your street? How do you report that something not great is happening in your neighborhood or that you want another bus stop? Like, what is the process for doing that? And then all the way up to things like, how do you get involved in city council? So we had cohorts that met every other week for ten weeks. The program was about ten hours total. And we did a pre- and post-assessment of folks who were involved in that program and my graduate student, Christine, she is currently working on

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analyzing the findings to see the impact that it's had, and although she's not done with the official analyses, we can already tell that people feel like they've gained a sense of efficacy in navigating life through that.

The last thing that we did, we initially had planned - One of the things that had come out of the focus groups is people wanted to have an opportunity to connect with each other more in the refugee community across communities. Because as it stands, there's opportunities for people in like the Bhutanese community to connect with each other, there's an organization for the Bhutanese community, there's an organization for the Congolese community. In the Mosque a lot of folks from Iraq and Syria connect with each other.

But, there isn't as much opportunity to connect across groups and that was something that folks shared that they really liked about CARE Cincinnati. So we had this plan to have a party for about 300 people and we were going to have like a fair



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included. We started planning quite a bit and this was scheduled for, I think it was March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020. I'm sure you're all not surprised to hear that we had to cancel that. The most humorous thing to me is that we were like, oh, we'll postpone it till the summer. We didn't initially think about the fact that, you know, this would be an ongoing pandemic.

But, we were able to divert that funding and do another survey to find out about how immigrants and refugees are - Actually, I'm sorry, just specifically refugees at that time. How refugees were experiencing COVID, which was really insightful and really to us highlighted the precarity because a lot of that positivity that we heard about experiences prior to COVID decreased quite substantially. And because the team was already really skilled at doing the survey from the previous study, we were able to do that quite quickly, reach out to almost 200 people.

And then, via Bryan, we were able to share our findings with city government. And we were able to actually have a voice to say like, this is what's

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going on for the refugee community, which is a group that is not particularly well-represented in city government in Cincinnati at this moment in time. So we were able to actually get them to earmark, for example, funding to prevent evictions or loss of housing specifically to refugee communities at that time. So although we were very disappointed not to be able to have that party, I think we were able to do something really meaningful with it.

And although, you know, this era of the project is slowly coming to an end, I think there's a lot that I think will continue on for many years and I can't express enough gratitude for what we've been able to do because of AmeriCorps. So thank you all so much. That's all I had.

DR. NARINE: Thank you, Anjali. The work you're doing with Cincinnati Compass is so important to creating a diverse civic engagement infrastructure and also fostering a sense of belonging among new Cincinnatians. So, again, thank you. So our next two speakers are Doctors Jenna Cushing-Leubner and Pang

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Yang. Dr. Cushing-Leubner is an Assistant Professor in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin Whitewater, where she teaches in the Bilingual and Multicultural slash ESL minor program and coordinates the Heritage Language Education professional development program, and the World Languages licensure program.

She has spent over a decade working with teachers, youth, and community educators to create high school Spanish and Hmong heritage language and ethnic studies programs that emphasize community knowledge, identity work, multimodal literacies, social justice, youth research, and transformative teaching. She is currently co-director with Pang Yang of the Lub Zej Zog Hmong Educators Coalition and Minnesota Zej Zog, a community-driven organization committed to reclaiming and sustaining Hmong language, leadership, and cultural knowledge through intergenerational language, culture, and arts education.

Dr. Yang is a dedicated multilingual veteran teacher, the mother of seven children, and the lead

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practitioner researcher of the Zej Zog project for Hmong Language and Ethnic Studies Education. Her 20 plus years of K through 12 classroom experience include the teaching of English language learners and Hmong heritage language learners. And taking on the roles of a counselor, cultural navigator, parent educator, grant writer, event coordinator, and an advocate for students of color. She's the Co-Convener of the National Coalition of Hmong Teachers, the Co-Executive Director of Minnesota Zej Zog, a visionary of Project Shaw New, the 2019 Minnesota Languages and Cultures Teacher of the Year, and serves on several school and community committees. Dr. Cushing-Leubner and Yang, the floor is yours.

DR. CUSHING-LEUBNER: Thank you so much. We're so happy to be here. My name is Cushing-Leubner, just a little pronunciation difference. So can we go to the next slide?

We're going to present about our multiyear project, this is a participatory design research project which is kind of a cousin to participatory action research,

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which people are a little more familiar with, but participatory design research brings community researchers together to design teaching and learning materials and environments in order to change and do transformational, in this case, educational change through the participatory research process. So I'm actually going to turn this over to Pang to talk about our starting point and the heart and goals of Lub Zej Zog Project.

DR. YANG: Thank you, Dr. Jenna. I am just so privileged to be a part of this project with Dr. Jenna. It's just been - I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but the results are priceless. And so I wanted to begin a little bit about who the Hmong people are, as outside the Twin Cities they may not be very well known. But, the Hmong people are refugees from Laos. In the mid-1970s we were involved with the CIA in the Secret War in Laos.

And so because of our involvement and the turnover of the country over to communism, we had to flee for our lives. And so that's what hundreds of thousands of

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Hmong people had to do during that time period, to flee to Thailand, and eventually those who were sided alongside the CIA were likely able to go around the world to immigrate to different countries. And so my family, along with lots of other Hmong families, came to America. And the majority of the Hmong people today live in California, dispersed throughout various cities in California, but the Twin Cities in Minnesota has the highest urban concentration of Hmong people in the United States and so forth.

So like I shared, I came to the United States as a 1.5 generation Hmong person and I came when I was about three years old. And in the 80s and 90s, even myself along with my siblings and many other Hmong students, we eventually ended up losing our language. I was very, very fortunate that I still was able to hang on to some of the language, but most students growing up during that time lost the language because of the English only policies like, speak in English in school and don't speak your language and so forth.

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So eventually that loss of language led to the loss of our identity. I think growing up in the United States I've struggled with my own identity into adult life in figuring out who I am, what is my story, that missing story that I have not been able to find. It took me years and years and decades to be able to find it. And then the intergenerational trauma that came along with it.

Because of the war, a lot of our parents had PTSD, which was not dealt with and so that also, in turn, ended up passing it on to like myself and my own children, that intergeneration trauma is so real. And so moving forward, in the 2000s, you know, a lot of parents were like, oh my gosh, now I'm parent age and I don't even have the language anymore. I'm so lost in life, but I need to have my children to know who they are. And so that's when a lot of the dual language charter schools in Minnesota started popping up and across the country to reclaim that language piece because we were seeing large gaps, academic gaps.

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There was just large differences between within the Asian ethnic groups and so we were very worried about the future of Hmong youths and the future of the community. And so a decade after the startup of various heritage language programs in the Twin Cities, Jenna and I finally got connected through, when I started the Hmong language program at my high school at Park Center High School in the school district in Brooklyn Park.

And so when we finally got together, we were, you know, I was telling Dr. Jenna, I'm like, oh my gosh, there's so many obstacles and everyone is kind of working in silo, there's not really much out there in terms of curriculum, and there's not even licensed Hmong teachers, and oh my gosh, I'm not even as fluent as what I want to be as a Hmong teacher. And all the trauma that I've gone through and the healing that needs to take place, I was still on that journey.

And so when this opportunity came about, we took all the obstacles that existed within the educator, the



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youth community, the Hmong community itself and we turned them into opportunities to help us grow and thrive moving forward. I'll turn it over back to Dr. Jenna.

DR. CUSHING-LEUBNER: Thank you, Pang. Can we move to the next slide, please? So I'll share a little bit about our research design. So as I said, this is a participatory design research project. We think of it as a garden for community-driven educational change. And we think of that garden really intentionally when we think about, not only, you know, elements of like nutrients in the soil and the mycelium network of the soil that support the growth of different plants that become both nourishment of food products, but also medicine that grows from these gardens.

But, also the sun, the water, but also that in order to keep that soil strong and well-nourished, to grow those medicines and foods that we also need to change over, you know, what is happening in that soil that keeps the soil vibrant and able to nourish these growing plants. So our participatory design research

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project is really driven from that. We have multiple interconnected projects. So the participatory aspect of our design research also says that this is community-driven participatory design research. And community-driven here means that the directions that our projects take in these cycles or these participatory cycles may go in directions that we did not anticipate, but they are grown out of the cycle that we're in.

And so this has gone in several directions we did not anticipate originally and that helps to keep our project strong and our participatory researchers growing through their participation in the project, which is really, really their own. So what you can see here are some of our participatory researchers. Our participant design is a combination of - we start with Hmong educators who are also parents, elders, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and children within the Hmong community.

So there are multiple layers of identities within the Hmong community of our participatory researchers. And

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we have for each participatory project that interconnects together, we have lead community researchers who are mentored up through the research experience and earlier phases, and then take on roles of lead researchers depending on their expertise and knowledge keeping that they bring to the project. And then we also have community design research teams that are often times smaller teams.

So our entire team is quite large. At this point we have 120 participant teachers and community educators. We have about 40 active participant research members. And then at any given time we may have teams of 5 to 9 participants researchers and those are led by 1 to 3 lead community researchers.

Our community aims bring our design research and our action and findings all together. So this has looked like the development of curriculum, materials development that represents culturally sustaining approaches and language reclamation through Hmong cultural knowledge and ethnic studies education, professional development for teachers across a wide

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range. This is culturally sustaining mental health and wellness intergenerational trauma healing and responsive teaching. Language reclamation across a heteroglossic, that means the dialects are quite unique, and so teaching Hmong language reclamation through multiple dialects in order to keep both dialects that are most common, or the three dialects that are most common in the United States strong.

But, also growing those language and dialect abilities within the teachers and growing the reclamation of cultural knowledge. This also leads to the program growth and stability of our availability of Hmong language reclamation education in the United States K-12 public schools. And we also then develop teacher leadership within that and the formation of Hmong educational scholars from within the community research group.

So I'm going to turn it back over to Pang to talk more about some of the shape of our findings. And Pang is going to talk about the community-driven findings and then I'm going to talk, if we have time,

about some of the scholarship that is growing out of this right now.

DR. YANG: Alright, can you go the next slide? I'm not going to read everything that's on here just because I know that you can also read it, but we went through several phases through the last three years and each one of those phases had different ways of working with our teachers, or elders, or youth, etc. I wanted to say that by the end of year two, a lot of - Well, actually, at the beginning of the project a lot of our teachers were very skeptical about what we were doing, not necessarily skeptical of Dr. Jenna, but more skeptical about my place.

Like, what was your hidden agenda? And really I told them, I don't have a hidden agenda, I don't even know what I'm doing. But, Dr. Jenna is leading this work and we are going to hop on and we're going to do this together because I know that whatever is going to happen is going to be beautiful. And by the end of the year two, phase two a lot of our teachers are

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like, Pang and Jenna, when the funding is gone, what's going to happen to us?

We started this beautiful, this beautiful work together and now we're all working collaboratively, and we're all figuring out what kind of opportunities can come out of all the obstacles that we've gone through, so out of that came out of the - now we have a nonprofit, Minnesota Zej Zog, which continues the work and it continues to find other grants source funding to help support teachers and help support youths, help support the community so that they can grow and thrive.

And so this work has really transformed, not just the Minnesota Hmong community, but the Hmong community all over the country because people are invested and are interested in this work. I'm going to throw it back to Dr. Jenna.

DR. CUSHING-LEUBNER: Yeah, thank you, Pang. So, again, the work that we're doing is really rooted across three states because the Hmong community has been,

their refugee resettlement program followed a fractured resettlement design intentionally spreading the community across the United States. And so one of the first acts that the Hmong community then did was to resettle themselves into some of these clustered communities. And they look very different, but our main groups that we're working with are located in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, so really across many places.

But, we're talking about many of our participant researchers who may be located in Minnesota or Wisconsin are talking to their cousins who are located in California. So really the family of the Hmong community is interconnected across the geographical distances and there's a lot of deep knowledge and understanding within the community of how to maintain family and kinship connections across forced space.

And so one of the ways that also, in addition to all of the findings that are really actionable resources that are created within the community spaces, we also

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are in our phase right now of developing some of our research and scholarship. Sorry, not developing our research, but developing our scholarship for academic dissemination. And that has looked like also cultivating a group of educational researchers and scholars. So over the last three years, going on four years now, that has included growing up, we have one of our lead community researchers, Dr. Vicky Xiong-Lor, who has been doing incredible work with Hmong language reclamation for years, she is shifting now into academic spaces for teacher education to bring this directly into the teacher education spaces.

We also have teachers who are entering into MAD programs and now PhD programs as well. And we've tapped into and supported Hmong education PhD students to bring them into our work to support the growth of our understandings and for them to find a home, often times Hmong PhD students who are interested in this sort of thing are very isolated in their programs.



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So some of the exciting scholarship that is coming out of that. Over the last three years we have published with a community, a Hmong community publisher, her publisher. We have published over seven books that are a combination of community and youth authors that includes a guide book for Hmong ethnic studies and youth participatory action research that is bilingual in Hmong and English, coauthored by Hmong youth who have participated in YPAR projects because they've learned from educators from the participatory design research how to do YPAR. And they're doing community and school action research projects for transformational change.

We also have been developing some very exciting scholarship connected to Hmong teachers who are engaging in what we're calling Hmong mother work. So these are teachers who are not just coming into education because of their love for education and teaching, they're coming into their work always connected through that they are mothers and parents, right, and in some cases, now grandparents who are

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teaching their own children and families in culture reclamation environments.

And so we are developing some scholarship to identify the power and insights of these parent and grandparent teachers from within the Hmong community. We're also engaging in what's called sub-alternate linguistic studies. So this is community sub-alternate linguistic study exploring and bringing to light linguistic understandings, language understandings that are not represented in the literature to this point that understand the complex nature of the Hmong dialect and language, which also allows for these programs to grow and thrive, and creates a community-driven research agenda and scholarship production agenda to also grow the representation, the accurate and in community representation of Hmong language and knowledge in the literature, which right now is really very limited and historically has been developed by people outside of Hmong community.

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So that's just some of the exciting. Oh, I'm sorry, and then one other piece here is that the way that we do some of this research is also through methodologies that come from indigenous language reclamation. And in these ways one of the methodologies we use is called story work. And this is where we do story sessions that also act to reclaim the language. So as community members and participant researchers share their stories of their experiences, whether it's their journey stories of their work as educators and teachers, their journey stories of becoming researchers and participant researchers, they are doing that then through the Hmong language and dialects, and that creates then an environment for language reclamation through doing their own theorizing of their experiences and processes.

So all of this stuff is really interconnected and very exciting and just really scratches the surface of what we're seeing as very possible when community-driven participatory research is at the heart of reclaiming the collective power within refugee

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communities. And that's it. That's where we're going to stop.

DR. MCDONALD: Thank you so much. A big thank you to all of our presenters today and giving us a little picture into your communities. We're going to circle back to them in the Q&A section in just a minute. But first, as an Office of Research and Evaluation we of course not only value meaningful research, but also how the research and findings can be utilized including international service programs that we serve in our office. So we're thrilled to be joined today by some of our agency and program leadership to share some of their reflections about the research they learned about today.

So Sonali Nijhawan, Director of AmeriCorps State and National is joining us. Jacob Sgambati, Deputy Director of AmeriCorps NCCC, and Jackie Dulude in Recruitment at AmeriCorps. We've asked them to give some reflections on the speakers and presentation. Sonali, we're going to start with you.

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NIJHAWAN: Great, thank you so much to the Office of Research and Evaluation and our incredible research partners for the opportunity to join you all today and just to hear about the incredible work that you all are doing to really elevate the voice to empower community and to give us an insight and a reminder of the importance of the work that we're doing, but more so the importance of the voice of those that we are serving. And so I'll just share very quickly, there are a handful of words that I heard that really resonated for me.

So the elevating of voice, of refugee voice. The empowerment of folks who have come to this country and to give them the opportunity to own the path forward. The valuing of the skills that they bring to our country economically, as Dr. Wright shared, or just the value and knowledge that they bring from where they come from. The highlighting of authenticity and the celebrating of the unique culture and identity that everyone carries and helping to bring that forth.

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The building of community through these research studies. The way that connections are made for folks and how they can find connection and unity with one another I think is really powerful and meaningful. The way that this research is not just responsive, but action-oriented to take the research and to think about how it can be utilized to take action and how it can inform policy, how it can empower someone to want to make sure that they are represented.

So I think the big pieces that really I think resonated significantly for me was the value of representation, right, and having refugee voice determine direction for a population. And to develop and create understanding. And I think this was something that was just mentioned by Pang, to be seen, and how being seen can help with healing. And so I think I just want to say that all of this research and all of these words that resonated for me are also things and ideals that resonated for me are things that we think about in our service.

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How do we elevate the voice of our members and our community members? How do we empower them to create change and get things done to support their community and communities beyond? And how are we really shifting the power dynamics so that policy is determined by people who are approximate, people who have lived experience, and people who can share their story and help folks understand?

And so I think this is really just a wonderful opportunity. I think this just continues to help us in our work and truly resonates with what we do with AmeriCorps State and National. So thank you so much for allowing me to join you all today.

DR. MCDONALD: Thank you so much, Sonali. Jake?

SGAMBATI: Yeah, hi, thank you. And good afternoon. I'm Deputy Director for AmeriCorps NCCC or the National Civilian Community Corps. I think just like Sonali said there at the end, we highly value the research, the effort, the outputs that we're getting from projects like this because we have a limited and what

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we believe is an extremely valuable resource for community development. And knowing how to utilize it in the best way and most effective way possible for creating sustainable and effective community development work is critical.

And so we've not only seen success through other participatory research grantees, but we continue to hope to see new things emerge in partnerships with the grantees and with the communities that are doing this type of work in the AmeriCorps NCCC program. We know sustainable development isn't easy, so this is really important for us to make sure that we're doing the best we can with the limited resources as possible.

There was some talk earlier about isolation within communities. One of the things that I think I heard in that too and the alignment with the national service is the way in which AmeriCorps service can bring people together. We see further and further divide across the country, but through service we actually see diverse communities, diverse people,



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diverse groups come together and just exceed the amount of success that their counterparts or colleagues that are not participating in national service are reaching.

So we've known for years how the impact on community development is strong within national service, but now we're understanding how it's sort of stitching some rips across our communities. You know, the refugee conversation is relevant to us too at AmeriCorps NCCC when we were asked early on by the Department of Homeland Security to be - the whole agency was asked to be engaged. It was actually a very good fit for the AmeriCorps NCCC program model for our members to be engaged with Department of Homeland Security and with resettlement agencies very early on to support Afghan refugees.

So we had members serving around the country both within the safe havens at military bases as well as in communities with resettlement agencies supporting refugee work. I think we really see AmeriCorps NCCC being best utilized when there are either planned or

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unplanned surges in work and surges in need that won't have ongoing sustained efforts. So that's where we fit in really well with the safe haven in the early activities with Operation Allies Welcome. So we were really excited about that.

And then as we heard about some of the challenges in the whole infrastructure for refugee resettlement, refugee support, we also see AmeriCorps NCCC and National Service being a good pathway to employment to help rekindle and refoster some of those resources. Several of our members who have worked on refugee projects in the last year have been offered jobs for fulltime employment post-service. So we hope that the AmeriCorps NCCC model will also be a continued good way to not only help develop leadership competencies in civic engagement and in community development, but also help sort of highlight and illuminate new pathways to employment as well.

DR. MCDONALD: Thank you, Jake. And last but not least, Jackie.

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DULUDE: Hi, everyone. Good afternoon and thanks so much to the Office of Research and Evaluation for allowing me to join and for the presenters, you all did a fantastic job. Thank you so much. This research is enormously important, as my colleagues have mentioned and super fascinating as well in thinking about how the work can be applied to our roles. So I just wanted to say thank you at the top and I really appreciated the framing provided at the beginning as well. I think two things kind of stand out there to me.

First, thinking about how complicated this system is for refugees versus asylum seekers and the different classifications. And if it's confusing to us, just imagining the state of overwhelming nature of the process for our new Americans coming in, and just kind of thinking about that and framing it in that way makes learning about the research I think a bit more digestible as well.

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And then also thinking about the - Secondly, thinking about just the huge contribution that refugee populations are making to this country whether it be economically, as Dr. Wright mentioned, or through language and just richness of experience, as our presenters touched on as well. So just wanting to kind of mention that the framing I think definitely helps us look through the lens of refugee civic engagement in that way.

So how does it relate to recruitment or how can civic engagement opportunities for refugee populations be applied to our recruitment work as they build the centralized recruitment model for the agency? This is something that you definitely want to keep in mind. So I think there's three kind of main themes that run through these presentations that come to mind for me.

The first is project development. So thinking about recruitment from that work model. And what are the projects that are going to inspire people to action that are going to make folks of all backgrounds in this country want to get involved with service? So

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how can we kind of identify the opportunities with organizations like CARE Cincinnati or the ones that our other presenters were mentioning as well? And what opportunities can we provide to folks?

We know that a lot of our younger generation folks are very tuned into the refugee and asylum seeker situation, and that headlines and what's happening topically in this country oftentimes inspire folks to action. So figuring out how we can connect people with these really meaningful opportunities to engage with refugee populations on the ground is certainly top of mind. And then how do we tell that story and elevate the voices? As Sonali was mentioning as well. And make sure that folks kind of have that platform and that we're celebrating the diversity of the constituencies that we're serving.

The second piece is, where possible, targeting those folks that are eligible to serve in our programs for AmeriCorps member and AmeriCorps seniors volunteer opportunities. I heard Dr. Dutt talking about the sort of lack of engagement or lack of ability to find

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the full work opportunities among highly skilled refugees in Cincinnati. That I think connects really well with opportunities to get involved in service, whether it be through a formal AmeriCorps opportunity or through more episodic volunteering in their communities as well. So connecting the skills that they bring in and all that they have to offer with the community needs, and also their need for connection.

And then thirdly, this is sort of tangentially related, but I think it kind of connects with some pieces that we were talking about yesterday as well with our older volunteer models, and just kind of a nice reminder to approach our management of our communities that we're serving of our AmeriCorps members, of our AmeriCorps seniors volunteers as holistic people, and just keeping their backgrounds, their traumas, their needs in mind as we manage them and work to foster that community strengthening model that is so important.

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So fostering the connection. I definitely heard themes of challenges around affordable housing, around mental health, around isolation that a lot of our members and volunteers also are affected by, of course in much different circumstances and much different degrees, but I think it's just important to kind of keep that whole of wellbeing in mind when talking about and thinking about running AmeriCorps programming and that feeds into recruitment I think in a really big way. So, again, I just wanted to thank you all and I appreciate the presentations.

DR. MCDONALD: Thank you so much to Sonali, Jake, and Jackie for joining us today. It was great hearing from our program leadership and how that all connects. So we're going to start now with the Q&A session. Some of you have already been typing your questions, but please continue to ask questions in the chat. We can also provide comments or resources by typing it in there.

Our first question is for Anjali from Shane. He asked, did participants in the civic leadership

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program demonstrate or show any indication that they'd carry their connections they made beyond the program itself? And did the program create sustainable relationships?

DR. DUTT: Thank you. That's a really wonderful question. And I may not have made it really clear. So we have the core team that's like the CARE Cincinnati folks and they have been involved in the research process and everything we've done ultimately. And then we have the separate civic leadership program for immigrants and refugees that some of the same people have participated in it, but the core researchers also help design what that program was going to look like.

So I'll answer the question for both scenarios. There has definitely been a lot of relationships that have formed amongst the core CARE members. And we started meeting back in 2018, so there was quite a bit of time pre-pandemic I think to develop in-person relationships. Some of us have actually continued with another project that we're working on around



refugee youth mental health. And I think there's just some real relationships that have developed through that process.

And then with the Immigrant and Refugee Civic Engagement Program that we developed, that was one of our actions that come out of the research. It's harder for me to know to what extent real relationships formed because it was virtual and because it was on Zoom and there just wasn't as much opportunity for some of the community building that I think could be so powerful and so meaningful.

So in terms of the relationship parts, I'm not entirely sure. But another thing that has come out of all of it is that we have a WhatsApp group that folks can - and so the last cohort finished in the fall that we were able to do with this funding for the Refugee and Immigrant Civic Leadership Program, sorry. But, what's continued though is a lot of dialogue like, every single day practically I have messages that come through WhatsApp that people from the Civic Leadership Program are responding to,

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sharing postings about jobs that become available, about fairs that are happening, about issues to be concerned about.

And so there's a lot of continued serious engagement that I think is really phenomenal and then we have lots of anecdotal examples of ways that people have continue to be engaged including somebody who did end up running for city council, which was amazing, he didn't end up winning unfortunately, but he's just starting a political career I think and will get more and more engaged over time.

But, then there's also smaller things like, people talking about how they have actually reached out to their local city council people to report concerns that they have in the city. And yeah, it's a really active WhatsApp group. And often, I rarely am the one actually posting in it at this point and Bryan posts more than I do, but at the end of the day, it's the people who are the program participants who are communicating with each other about how to engage.

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So there are some smaller things that we've noticed already and I look forward to staying connected to the communities that we've been connected with so far and to see what manifests over time. Thanks.

DR. MCDONALD: Thank you. Next we have a question for all of you. So Jenna, we can go ahead and start with you. Many of you mentioned kind of sharing your findings in many places. Jenna, you kind of said you had some academic findings coming out. So could you share specifically where your results have been shared both in academic spaces and outside? And one participant wanted to know specifically if any of these results were shared with government. So maybe to Homeland Security, Congress, the White House to sort of inform the immigration policy. So yeah, where have your findings been shared?

DR. CUSHING-LEUBNER: Thank you for that. I'm going to put a link into our chat, but I think it's just the host and panelists, so if somebody could move that. So we have a few different places that we shared our findings. So for instance, one of the things we did

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in our first year is we worked with a Hmong graphic designer and web developer to create an open access website, it's called the Hmong Language Resource Hub. And everything that is developed is placed into that hub space and everything is free and open to use and access and adapt.

So all of the curricular materials, all of the professional development is recorded, all of the standards and guidelines that is created from community experts, all of that is placed into that website including links to community organizations and one of the things that will be growing out from there now will be policy documents, white papers, and then published research as well. It's archived sort of and disseminated for the community for anybody to access.

So one of the ways that has also reached a wider audience is we've begun working also with a Somali population in Minnesota in particular, who are developing their language reclamation and ethnic studies programs as well. So they were using and

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sharing a lot of these resources. So there's that community site.

We also do a lot of community-based events in order to do conversational sharing of information and sharing resources there. We work together with a - like I mentioned before - a Hmong community publisher to publish resources bilingually and multi-dialectally so that anybody can buy these books and use them in their classrooms, in their libraries, and their families.

And we also have created quite a few videos that are also shared on YouTube and social media sites. We have social media sites, but these are shared out as well. These are bilingual videos in Hmong and English and in multiple dialects of Hmong sometimes.

In terms of academic dissemination. We present at conferences that are practitioner focused conferences and also community, there's a Hmong National Development Conference that's sort of an interdisciplinary conference, we've presented there,

we've done workshops there. We also present at practitioner conferences specifically for educators. And some conferences that are designed for kind of community members, families, and educators together working for transformational change of our educational systems in our schools.

And then we also present at conferences, more like typical academic peer reviewed international conferences. So we've done those at education focused conferences and linguistic conferences. And also conferences that focus on Asian American and Asian studies. And then we also have a number of manuscripts that are either in press or under review or in process. So we have two that are in press, three under review, and we have seven that are in process with our kind of Hmong scholar research team that has grown out of this project as well. And those are for book chapters and academic journals.

We are hoping to also put together a book prospectus in about a year and a half, probably, that'll be - if I get sabbatical - my sabbatical project. So I'll

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work on that. So those are the shapes. We think about dissemination as being community-driven first. And academic dissemination, because it takes so long, is sort of a second and third tier, but always happening. And really because of the kind of collaborative approach of our participatory design, you know, that becomes the work in the second and third phases of our design cycles that I end up leading up.

Because Pang has always been our community leader and now we've grown up and mentored up kind of a large collection of community leaders from our research team. And so then in our second, third, and ongoing years together the academic dissemination work has really been able to take off because that process just takes a lot more time, you know.

DR. MCDONALD: Absolutely. I loved how you're thinking about community events in that way as a form of dissemination, that's really awesome. And we'll be rooting for your sabbatical.

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DR. CUSHING-LEUBNER: Thanks.

DR. MCDONALD: Anjali, would you like to take that question as well? Sort of where you've disseminated your results and how you're kind of thinking about that in your project.

DR. DUTT: Sure, thank you. Jenna's responses were really inspiring for me to think about some other ideas, so thank you. So far, I'll talk about some of the community ways that we've disseminated our results as well, some of the academic things that we've done. And I had seen that question earlier, we haven't gone so far as to share this with like the national or federal government in any way, but I would love to. So as I think through what might that look like, I'm certainly inspired by that suggestion.

So at the completion of each phase we've created handouts that we were able to disseminate to refugee communities and just to kind of like briefly summarize all of our findings. And we also created one pagers that we could give to local organizations



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that support refugees and immigrants. And so that was the most important thing for us to do right away. Get the findings to the people who are providing direct services or having a lot of engagement with refugees and immigrants initially and get these findings into the community so that the community is armed with like, here are the issues that our community is facing and here are the strengths that our community has.

So that was always our first phase. We've also presented at a number of different local opportunities. And whenever those opportunities arise, we try and - I think actually we've always prioritized having refugee members of the CARE team be the ones who present the findings. So, for example, there's a group called the Refugee Empowerment Initiative, that's for a number of different social support organizations that work with refugees and immigrants. We had folks from our team share a PowerPoint that they created that goes through what the main findings were.

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There's also an opportunity to share some of the findings on a local radio station that Bryan had setup. And again, we had refugee team members present those findings so they could talk about what was most important to them and the findings. And that's been a huge priority amongst our team.

And then because Cincinnati Compass is really a branch of city government in one way or another, we have a direct line to the mayor's office and to city council. So our findings have been shared with our local mayor, our local city council, and I think that that has influenced some of the ways that our local government is perceiving the experiences of refugees and immigrants because at the end of the day, despite the numbers, they're not exactly the most well acknowledged community that exists in Cincinnati.

And we're always excited to think about more ways to do this. So hearing suggestions and ideas is really inspiring. And then from an academic perspective, we have a few published articles and a few more that we're still working on. I think we have three that

are out in the world at this moment and then at least two more that are currently being written and completed that will hopefully go out quite soon.

And I'm a psychologist, we've been publishing predominantly in psychology outlets. But, one thing that I want to share is that we were able to get a paper with these findings in *The Journal of American Psychologists*, if there's any other psychologists on this team, that's a really high impact, from the traditional ways that researchers measure these things. And I wanted to share that because I think a lot of the times people are nervous about doing participatory research because it feels like it's marginalized within many fields at this point in time, but we were able to get into one of the top journals doing participatory research and I think there's just growing acceptance in the fields that we can do this.

And then one of the publications I was most proud of is one that we're looking at the experiences from a decolonial perspective. And so we were able to get

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that out there in a special issues that's on decolonial psychology. And I felt really proud of what we were able to create for that one. And in all of our publications we've included members of refugee communities who have been involved in all phases of this as our coauthors.

DR. NARINE: Thanks, Anjali. I am also a social psychologist, so kudos to getting published in a high impact journal, good for you and the community you're working with, very impressive. So another question that we got is, what are some best practices for working with refugee and immigrant communities interested in civic engagement? And this is for both Anjali and Jenna. Jenna, why don't you go first.

DR. CUSHING-LEUBNER: Sure. So best practices, could you repeat it? Best practices for what?

DR. NARINE: Best practices for working with refugee and immigrant communities interested in civic engagement.

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DR. CUSHING-LEUBNER: Sure. I mean, I'm not sure that this is particularly unique to refugee communities, although I think that there is like an augmented thing here. But, I would say starting with - I mean, I think we talk a lot about relationships when we talk about participatory research. And often times relationship is kind of like an outcome. So like, belonging, being known, and growing relationships is an outcome of the research, but we really see a best practice around engaging in participatory research being relationship building through a trust model and a critical trust model, which means trust that recognizes, not only current power dynamics and differentials, but longstanding power dynamics and differentials.

So that starting with trust building and relationships has to come first, which I think this is a very important best practice that our funders of research and our academic institutions that value this sort of research or want to value this sort of research really need to recognize. One of the benefits of this particular grant was that it was a

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multiyear process that recognized that in terms of your product outcomes, that relationship and trust building needed to be part of the process of participatory research.

And that sort of understanding of that best practice was really instrumental for us to be able to do anything. So Pang mentioned that there was some skepticism within the community at the beginning. Part of that skepticism was because, you know, like, for instance, I'm an outsider and I was invited in through an existing relationship with Pang, but I personally needed to grow and have the benefit of growing real relationships over time with many, many people.

And until that trust began to be sewn, you know, we really couldn't do very much. And there shouldn't be very much done. And part of that also is because there are many, many, many histories of institutions doing quite a bit of harm by coming in, making short-term promises, maybe even following through on those very short-term promises, and getting out, you know?

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And even in the form of that this is community engagement, you know. Once people don't need it or the funding runs out, it's gone.

And that anxiety, that well-founded anxiety was part of our conversations from the very beginning. And saying like, well, what happens when your funding is gone? Where will we be? What are we really doing here? Are we doing favors or are we doing transformational change? So best practices have to, I think, first and foremost have a theory of change that recognizes the historical understanding of trust formation that really also recognizes current and longstanding power differences that need to be attended to and that's the first part.

And the second piece of that, and this was a real learning experience for me personally and professionally, was to approach this work through an abundance, a theory of abundance as well. So it is very, very easy to approach things through like recognizing what the limitations are and the scarcity of funding, and resources, and trust, but being able

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to say when we were doing participatory research we have to find spaces of abundance in order to really grow the possibilities that the community has within them so that our role in the research, from the institutional side, isn't limiting what is really possible within the community.

DR. NARINE: Great, thank you. Anjali?

DR. DUTT: Yeah, thanks for that question. And I couldn't agree more, the first thing that popped into my head when I heard the question was about taking the time to build meaningfully trusting relationships. When we first started we tried to be as transparent as possible with folks who were involved about what could we do, what were the stipulations, what were the guidelines of this grant essentially, and what would the university kind of impose as barriers related to IRBs and things along those lines?

But, we tried to share as much as possible. We shared our budget, we shared everything that we could possibly share that we could think of. And



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simultaneously talked about we don't have a research question. We have some ideas, we have some curiosity, but being really transparent that the goal here was to work together to create something from the beginning. So all of that was laid out at the beginning. There was no misleading people that this wasn't something that was related to research or something along those lines.

But, we met for several meetings in a row that was really just about getting to know each other. Deciding, do we all trust each other? Do we actually think that this is something that would be a meaningful experience for us? And to begin, we had dinner at all of our meetings initially. And we tried to prioritize refugee and immigrant owned restaurants that would cater the dinners. And we would just talk about, why are we here?

And I think sometimes when we talk about that we kind of forget that the researchers want to be building trust with each other and with - and by the researchers I mean the faculty and the people on the

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grant officially. We needed to build trust amongst each other too and we need to make it clear like we're not here just because we're researchers. I mean, I do have to publish papers to keep my job, but why do I study the things that I do? What are my own connections to immigrants? My father is an immigrant, I have my own connections to that, and kind of sharing some of those stories about like, why does this mean to something to us? Is it just like a job, is it just a paycheck, or is there something deeper?

And so we had that time to connect with each other and determine is this something that folks really want to do. And I think that that set this tone for us to really have, to create a culture amongst each other, and decide what we want to do. So that part I think is critically important, and I couldn't agree more with everything that Jenna said, and the importance of that particularly in the context of the exploitation that's happened to marginalized communities by researchers over and over and over again, repeatedly. The University of Cincinnati has its own history of oppressive research practices that

have occurred with marginalized communities. So our transparency and how we're going to work past.

The second thing that was really powerful to me was that we worked with an intentionally diverse group of refugee community members. Obviously refugees are an incredibly diverse group of people and even within an ethnic or racial community there's quite a bit of diversity, of course, that's really obvious. And prior to this project, any community engaged project I had been involved in worked explicitly with one community. And I found that really enriching and we can develop really deep and meaningful relationships and it was something I was really proud of.

This time though we intentionally wanted to connect with refugees across communities and that was something I was genuinely intimidated by because of the linguistic challenges, because of refugee communities don't always - You know, there's no guarantee you're all connected to each other. And yet I was, you know - We had our reasons for why we felt like that should at least be our first attempt. And I

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was so blown away by how meaningful that connection was to everybody. That's something that we ended up writing about.

I didn't share this before, but we did have interpreters. When we were initially bringing together our team, we did ask that people have some degree of comfort with English language, but that wasn't a requirement for really being engaged, but just given how many communities we were working with, it was necessary to really think deeply about how meaningful is our communication going to be and our ability to connect with each other. So everybody had some degree of comfort, but we had interpreters for French and Arabic at all of our meetings.

And when I think about best practices, I don't know how exactly to phrase it and I think it does require a lot of time, a lot of ability to get to know each other, but I wouldn't ever be afraid again to do a more, to shy away from putting limitations on who can be involved based on the communities that you're a part of. Because everyone on the team, we did

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interviews with everyone who was on the team at one point and we published about that, talked about how powerful it was to hear about other people's ways of navigating life, of dealing with the same challenges, but coming up with their own creative community-oriented solutions to it, and those experiences of connection I think were so powerful and so inspiring that to me it was really valuable.

DR. NARINE: Thank you. Thank you both so much. Before we wrap our webinar, I'm going to pass the mic to the Director of the Office of Research and Evaluation, Dr. Mary Hyde.

DR. HYDE: Thank you, Victoria, and thank you everyone for your participation today. I joined the conversation late today because I was giving remarks at my mentor Dr. Ken Maton's retirement party this morning. I'm also a community psychologist, Ken was my mentor as a graduate student, he continues to be my hero. And I have to say that listening to your presentations and your work today is really feeling like a full circle moment for me.

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I was in a physical room and in a Zoom room with all of his students that were able to participate, and he was at UMBC for 38 years, but I was in a room of community psychologists who talked about preserving their cultural heritage in the Philippines, who talked about being an immigrant from Turkey and coming to this country to study with Ken, and now he's in Sweden doing work on integration of immigrants into different communities, and access to different aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

I was in the room with a former classmate who has been working on research that promotes educational access in countries like Haiti and Madagascar. I was in the room with former students and colleagues of Ken who are doing trauma-informed clinical work because of intergenerational violence. And it was just a reminder to me that this work, this community-based research, this community-based community development has been a theme of my career and clearly your careers. And I think that dialogues like today,

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dialogues like yesterday, and the dialogue we'll have tomorrow really do speak to the power of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.

We heard about research with older Americans in rural communities. Today we heard about refugees and immigrants. And these are all communities that often do not have access and who are not included, as you all well know. The power of being seen, and being heard, and having a voice at the table, and a seat at the table leads us to creating spaces and places where all can contribute to their community. And I haven't had a day in a long time like today where there have been so many reminders and so many concrete examples of the critical importance of promoting and protecting the inclusion of everyone.

I think Jenna said the theory of abundance, the strength based approach, that was also a theme I heard all morning long, as different community psychologists talked about their research and their practice. And I think that that cannot be overstated without the promotion and protection of creating an

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inclusive place for everyone. We risk weakening our social fabric, we risk diluting the potential of community solutions, and fundamentally we put democracy at risk.

So I can't thank you all enough for the work that you're doing. I can't express what a privilege it is to be a part of this work in even the most remote ways. I thank my colleagues at AmeriCorps for the reflections because we feel that national service is such an important part of this story, this social fabric of inclusion. And I thank my team for facilitating today's conversation. So thank you for being here. Thank you for the work that you're doing and I appreciate it very much. So with that, I'll pass it back.

DR. NARINE: Thanks, Mary. So before we end day two of our research dialogue, let's hear some final thoughts from our wonderful speakers. I will go to Jake first. Jake, any closing thoughts?



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SGAMBATI: Just once again, thank you all for letting me participate and listen in to a lot of the great work that's happening. I just know that the work that's happening here through your research, through your engagement, through your strengthening communities, just consider how we can help from AmeriCorps NCCC to continue to enhance that work, expand that work, deepen it. We've seen some successes through similar projects happening in Nevada, but hope we can continue to build on your successes to help us better utilize our resources here at AmeriCorps. So thank you all. It's been great.

DR. NARINE: Thanks, Jake. Jenna, any closing thoughts?

DR. CUSHING-LEUBNER: I actually want to piggyback off of something that Anjali talked about which, you know, there are lots of reasons why people can feel very isolated today, not today, but like in general, today. And that isolation can also be felt acutely within our displaced communities and I'm trying to represent what's been shared with me from our Hmong team because Pang is back teaching. But, creating

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opportunities and space for constellations of refugee, and immigrant, and asylum seeking communities to really find community with one another while they do their own work is really, really powerful.

And having the opportunity to be able to say like, what are we doing together? And how can what we're doing resonate with other groups of people who are also trying really hard to find a space of thriving? Is really so powerful and I think things like this can really have a huge, huge impact when we think of how to talk across sometimes very wide distances and disciplinary distances too.

DR. NARINE: Thank you. And finally, Anjali.

DR. DUTT: Thanks. When the question was posed, one of the things that just initially popped into my mind is that there are more refugees now in the world than there have ever been since we started counting the number of refugees who exist and there's even far more internally displaced people, people who are

deserving, according to many, the title of refugee but haven't gotten the political label yet.

And this number is growing. And I think there's so many reasons that I think a lot of understand that the world is getting increasingly precarious and that we're going to see more refugees in the coming years from the crisis in Ukraine, the crisis in Afghanistan, and whatever will unfold related to climate justice. And so I think beyond even just thinking about the research, I just think it's incredibly important for us to be thinking about, how do we create a just world?

Most people don't want to be leaving their homes of origins, but they're forced to do so. So I think there just needs to be something where we're really collectively thinking about how can we try to create just environments for folks when they're leaving such atrocious realities. And we just really as - I think it's fantastic to see how many people are here today to learn about what we've been doing. It's really wonderful and inspiring, but we all I think know that

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we are up against so much and we need to be really working together as a team.

And thinking about Jenna was just saying about this isolation, that so many of us have experienced in the past two years, and how displaced communities know that probably in a deeper way than I can possibly imagine at this point. We need to be keeping each other afloat and encouraging each other to think more deeply, and expand and grow our capacities to create a more just environment for refugees and all marginalized communities. That's I think the challenge of our contemporary era.

DR. NARINE: Thank you. Yeah, I think I speak for everybody on the call today that we all loved your presentations and we are completely inspired by the work that you and your community partners are doing. So thank you so much. And I'm going to pass the mic to Katy to close us out.

HUSSEY-SLONIKER: So thank you very much for attending today's session. We want to thank our speakers for

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their presentations and reflections to our audience today for a great discussion. We cannot forget to thank our webinar facilitation team for their assistance, that would be ICF Next. Their staff Larisa Crewalk, Alexandra Owens, and Jenelle Azore, and their colleagues for their technical support and coordination. Tomorrow we will focus on African American youth and civic engagement. Please click on the link if you would like to register for the next day's events. Thank you and have a wonderful rest of your day.

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