

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

MELISSA GOUGE: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to those of you who are just joining our research dialogue this afternoon for this panel on Civic Engagement and Environmental Stewardship. I'm Melissa Gouge. I am an analyst in the Office of Research and evaluation at AmeriCorps, in our headquarters office in D.C. I'm also a sociologist. I want to thank all of you for taking the time to be with us today and we are just absolutely delighted to have all of you panelists together today.

For the audience, these panelists have all been studying both the natural and the built environment broadly and are part of our 2018 Community Conversations portfolio of participatory research work. The first three who will present today focus more on civic engagement in communities experiencing a natural disaster or slow violence from climate change. And then Penn will discuss civic engagement, specifically as it pertains to housing and community development.

All of these grantees have been working with different folks, students, seniors, community members, youth researchers, a really wide variety of populations and stakeholders. And a word to the wise on how this panel will proceed. First, we'll hear from the panelists. They'll introduce themselves and the order on today's agenda. And they will do their presentations. They are somewhat short. They're about 4 minutes. And then we will circle back with a couple of questions, answered one at a time by each of the panelists as well. And then we will be put into breakout rooms so we can hear from both the audience and the participants.

And then, finally, for the last 10 minutes, we'll come back to the full panel to finish up our discussion. So, we'll go ahead and get started. And the panelists will introduce themselves and give a little background on their studies. And I will hand this over to Dr. Carlos Vázquez Rivera.

CARLOS VAZQUEZ-RIVERA: Hello, Melissa and to all. [NON-ENGLISH] Like Melissa said, my name is Carlos Vázquez-Rivera. I am a social community psychologist. I work in the University of Puerto Rico at Macao.

The next slide, please. I will be presenting our project. Our project name is INARO, [NON-ENGLISH] Community and Participation in a Socio-natural Disaster Scenario. [NON-ENGLISH] would be translated like "lots of will transforms realities." The INARO project is developing participatory action research with the *Montones* community in Las Piedras town in Puerto Rico. Despite the suffering and stress that Hurricanes Maria and Irma brought to this community, they also experience a continued threat of earthquake and living with the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

Next slide, please. Next slide. OK.

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

In a strange combination of events, the houses which protect the families dealing with hurricanes, now the same houses represent a danger facing an earthquake. And the people in the community who embody solidarity and support now suggests a risk of illness because of contagious by the coronavirus.

Despite all those changes, our research questions still are what community characteristics act to prohibit or promote active civic engagement. And the second one, what will be the community cohesion after the experience of a natural or socio-natural disaster. The INARO project goal is to create a community action plan to establish practical solutions to deepen civic engagement and strengthen community cohesion. We held seven focus groups, 63 participants, administered 86 questionnaires, and have 11 in the interview, for a total of 160 existing participants. As the next step in the participatory action research to deepen our understanding of the power of civic engagement, tracing back-to-back socio-natural sector in the *Montones* community, we need to obtain new information of the involvements and happenings through this pandemic, specifically with the burden lying on the community while still dealing with constant threats, like I said, of earthquakes and the quarterly hurricane season that starts now in June.

As we confirmed over the past two years, the power approach has its challenges. But also the curve of learning for all the people involved has been extraordinary. Power is the way to link knowledge with transformation and work with people who usually have been left out, kept down, or excluded, especially with everything related with knowledge construction.

Using a strength-based approach that we call [NON-ENGLISH] combined with the respect of the community wisdom and culture and knowledge, we built a community research team in order to participate in equal condition of the discussion, decision-making, and implementation of all the phases of the research. As an example, the community research team proposed our own definition of power according with our experience. And I quote, "a mental focus into a reciprocal horizontal research in which the people involved in the investigation [NON-ENGLISH] re-strength, if you like-- one another and encourage change around the issues." Stop, end quote.

Our work is based around the concept of [NON-ENGLISH]. By [NON-ENGLISH] we mean a strategy for transformation and action, which started with a debate with the empowerment theory and prevention models.

We propose a necessary change from a deficit and weaknesses paradigm to a power relationship of [NON-ENGLISH] or strengths, one. From the [NON-ENGLISH] point of

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

view, we see persons or people, not individuals, connected and socially constructed as a web of relation. And you will see why we stand by this [NON-ENGLISH] concept. That will be all for now. Go back to Melissa.

MELISSA GOUGE: Oh, I was on mute. All right, Suzanne Pritzker and Danae King are up next.

SUZANNE PRITZKER: So thank you for this opportunity to share our work. I am presenting today on behalf of Dr. Danae King, our community co-researchers, our community partners, and our incredible team of graduate assistants.

So next slide. So, our community-based participatory research project is in partnership with four communities in the Houston area that were affected by Hurricane Harvey, a category 4 hurricane that hit Texas and Louisiana in August 2017.

We sought to understand how the experience of Hurricane Harvey, and therefore natural disasters more broadly, impact civic engagement within communities, both in their aftermath and up to two years later, when we started conducting this work. Using a CBPR design, we partnered with these four community partners—OCA of Greater Houston, Houston ACTS, the Westbury Area Improvement Corporation, and Avenue—to form a research team comprised of two representatives of each community who served as community co-researchers, guiding the research process, including identifying questions, recruiting and conducting focus groups and key informant interviews, and conducting preliminary data analyses. Our co-researcher team engaged just over 200 community members across these four communities through focus groups and interviews.

Next slide.

So, we are still working together to analyze the really rich qualitative data that emerged from the study but wanted to share 13 themes that have emerged around community members' civic experiences after Hurricane Harvey. And these themes, as we continue with the data analyses, are the co-researchers will be bringing these back to their communities for further discussion and work in terms of how the communities can respond to these.

But some of these themes that we identified are emotional upheaval and continued long-term unresponded-to needs. This idea of so much neighborly help that happened with immediate needs and opportunities to jump in to help, but then this helping spirit reverting back to pre-disaster norms after a while. In these themes as well, what we see is a struggle around accessing trustworthy and understandable information, both about the disaster itself and then about recovery support. Feelings from community members, both of deeper connection to one's community, but also a

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

sense of neighborhood decline, and substantial skepticism about government leaders and resource distribution both in responding to and preventing disasters beforehand, paired with a desire among some of our community members to speak up and hold elected officials accountable.

Across these, some of our key takeaways are that clear information is needed before, during, and after a disaster. And kind of consistent with a discussion point in an earlier presentation, language justice is critical here. Information, we found, is needed in diverse languages, in the many diverse languages spoken in the Houston area. While our research questions focused on Hurricane Harvey, we repeatedly saw community members make references to prior natural disasters that form a sort of cascading disaster experience. They spoke about Tax Day flooding the year before, Memorial Day flooding the year before that, Hurricane Ike, tropical storm Allison, and so many other flooding experiences that these communities had experienced. And our other major takeaway is that there's really deep distrust in elected officials related to disaster prevention response and recovery assistance, which is still present years post disaster. So, I look forward to further discussions about this. Thank you.

MELISSA GOUGE: And Jennifer and Jennifer, you are up next.

JENNIFER WILLET: Hello, everyone. For some reason, I don't see my video. My name is Jennifer Willett, and I'm representing the Research for Change team in Nevada. We've been working on documenting slow violence and environmental injustice in working-class communities in Northern Nevada in order to find solutions. The Research for Change team includes me—I'm an assistant professor at the University of Nevada Reno, Jennifer Sims, who is here and is the assistant director at Upward Bound, and our main co-researchers are the youth scientists and project leaders. We have 17 youth scientists who are an amazing group of high school students who live in neighborhoods most likely affected by environmental injustice and collect the data and disseminate findings. And we have three project leaders who are former youth scientists who are in college now. So, we have two youth scientists here today who would love to answer questions. And the rest are taking high school finals and offer to meet with anybody at a later time.

Next slide, please.

We focus on documenting slow violence, which are hidden environmental injustices. Slow violence is hidden for a couple of reasons. Some environmental injustices, you just can't see on a daily basis, like climate change. Others are hidden because they happen in hidden or undervalued or under-resourced communities. So, because these problems are hidden, we need to make them visible to work on. We did that

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

with Photovoice, which is photography for data collection. And the youth scientists took all of the photos.

So far, we've documented climate disasters, which include floods and wildfires. We also documented related unjust infrastructure problems, like lack of flood protective measures, lack of sidewalks, lack of street lighting. We also documented extreme levels of illegal dumping, such as cars, in their neighborhoods. And we are currently working on connecting all of these issues to other contextual things in our community, like the housing crisis, homelessness, and food insecurity. All of these issues go together with lack of services. We need controlled burns, we need better waste management, and we need better services for the homeless community.

Last year, we worked with our AmeriCorps partners, including NCCC and Nevada volunteers and other partners to get an NCCC team to Reno to work on solutions. But unfortunately, they were scheduled to come in April 2020, which coincided with the COVID shutdown. So, we're working on rebuilding our actions.

Our other current supporters are really strong. And they include the school board, the sheriff's office, Red Cross, disaster management, and local churches, all of whom the youth scientists presented to and asked to join us in our work. Next slide.

So, one of the things that we do is disseminate our work in appropriate ways in the community. So I'm going to leave with a 30-second song about how climate change has impacted one of the youth scientists' community. Could you play that?

PRESENTER 1: I'm trying to get it to work right now. Let's see. It's not playing. But we can distribute it afterwards for everybody if that's OK.

JENNIFER WILLETT: OK. Thank you.

MELISSA GOUGE: All right, well, we're all looking forward to seeing that video, Jennifer. Sorry about the technical issue.

Next up are Franchesca Cifuentes and Sophia George at Drew University.

FRANCHESCA CIFUENTES: Hi, good afternoon, everybody. Can you see me? And hear me? Good. OK, my name is Franchesca Cifuentes. I'm the program manager, evaluator, and researcher with Drew University CBPAR Neighbors in Need project. With me I have Sophia George, who's our student researcher. And I'll talk a little bit about what we are and what we've done. And Sophia is going to talk about accomplishments.

Next slide.

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

So the Neighbors in Need project is three years in the making. We are working in Morris County, New Jersey, which is the area where Drew University resides in. And we wanted to further explore the county's 10-year plan to eliminate homelessness. One of the challenges that was encountered was that we have a seven-year waitlist for a housing voucher, which is a very inefficient system. And so the county really wanted to understand how do we improve the system, how do we improve efficiency, how do we serve more people who are in need of these vouchers.

So, we teamed up with, of course, the faculty at Drew University along with 19 other diverse stakeholders. That's including housing agencies, community-based organizations, and most importantly, as a CBPAR project, with housing voucher recipients. And they were really at the forefront of this work because they are our community researchers.

And so, where we are right now, after 2 and 1/2 years of the research, is that we've developed a—well, Sophia will talk a little bit more about this, but we've developed a landlord support program. And this is coming straight out of the research that we found, which is really looking at how do we support landlords, address some of the needs that they expressed that they have when trying to accept or one of the reasons why they don't accept housing vouchers, and then also how do we address some of those biases because there were some real biases that were expressed from landlords that were part of our research around why they don't like to accept voucher recipients or tenants who have vouchers.

We are closing out year three. And so now one of the key things that we're looking to do is how do we keep this project living in the community. So, it's been a really amazing endeavor to not only be part of this work to work closely with the researchers and with the students, but with the community stakeholders who are now really kind of teaming up to kind of take this and have it live in the community and continue on this work even after our funding is ending and the project itself, the three-year project—research project, is ending. So I'll turn it over to Sophia to talk a little bit more about accomplishments.

SOPHIA GEORGE: Hi, everyone. So some of our accomplishments that we've done over the past three years, the first being our pilot intervention program, which is our landlord incentive program. For that, we are partnering with Monarch Housing. In our research, we found that landlords have little experience working with vouchers outside of section 8. And more than a third had no experience working with vouchers at all. So, our landlord incentive program hopes to incentivize landlords so they will rent to voucher tenants. And we are hoping to launch that next year.

We also engaged multiple stakeholders from different sectors around Morris County, like Franchesca mentioned, including Family Promise and Atlantic Health Systems, to

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

further support our tenants and have a diverse, united group working to aid the most vulnerable population.

We developed a public engagement campaign in which we reached out to faith-based organizations, local officials, and health organizations to further disseminate our research findings and gather support. Within our public engagement campaign, we also launched a corporate webinar series during summer 2020 to answer questions for both voucher tenants and landlords about the pandemic and the support available for them.

During our third year, this year, we designed a digital curriculum to it about our CBPAR research for future replica projects in order to have some groundwork that they can rely on to how to best fit their needs for their projects. We have also held trainings led by our Community Action Team—our CAT team—members around diversity, equity, and inclusion. And lastly, we are disseminating our research through our social media and website.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Sophia and Franchesca. And Penn is up next.

PENN LOH: Great. Again, my name is Penn Loh. Thanks for having me. I'm on a project that has been partnering with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, DSNI. I myself am with Tufts University. And I guess I should say that this project that we're working on right now is really an extension of something that DSNI has been doing since the '80s. And I myself started working with DSNI when I joined another community-based environmental justice organization back in 1996. So really we're talking about this project really extending how civic engagement and civic infrastructure, if you can sustain it over decades, really can remake the community and the built environment to promote justice and sustainability.

For those of you who don't know, DSNI is an organization, a community planning and organizing group, that came together in the early 1980s in Boston's Roxbury and Dorchester neighborhoods. Well known for establishing community control over development to counter disinvestment and white flight that had gone on for decades. It won the right of eminent domain from the city and started its own community land trust back in the late 80s, and now owns over 30 acres of land.

If I could go to the next slide.

So, for this project, which we've been working on for since 2018, we are trying to support DSNI's efforts to establish more community control over the development process in Upham's Corner, which is on one edge of DSNI's area. This is a historic commercial district that has the Strand Theater, which was Boston's first movie house. And there are a number of really key sites that are up for redevelopment.

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

Since about 2017, DSNI and the city of Boston have been co-facilitating a planning process to turn Upham's Corner into an arts and innovation district. And for most cities and most neighborhoods, when you hear about an arts and innovation district, it's kind of a formula for gentrification and displacement.

But in this case, it's different, because the city and DSNI are actually partnering to facilitate the process in the first place. That's possible because DSNI actually owns one of the development sites, a former bank building. The city acquired another bank building across the street and promised to build another branch library and pledged \$17 million towards that. It is going to revitalize the Strand Theater, which it already owns, as well as redevelop a municipal parking lot. So that's the sites that you see on that map on the right.

The process over the last few years has involved both a multi-stakeholder advisory group process that our team has been embedded in and working with DSNI on, as well as a series of broader meetings to develop the resident vision for development and to draft a request for proposals to redevelop these sites.

If I can go on to the next slide.

Just a few highlights, and I'll just touch upon these very quickly right now. First is that, in summer of 2019, we supported a group of nine youth leaders that were in DSNI's summer program to activate the building that they own around their vision of redevelopment. So, you can see some of the photos there. They put in their own koi pond. They put in their own bowling alley, mocked those up.

The team at Tufts has conducted stakeholder interviews with all the major players in this advisory process and have come to a number of findings that we can talk about later, about how creative engagements and the arts were actually used in this community planning process to reach more people and to have more effective and meaningful engagement.

And finally, our team has been part of the process to help train residents to review proposals that have been coming in around these developments and to help support their decision-making around how they want to see development proceed. So, I'll stop there and turn it back to you, Melissa.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Penn. So that wraps up our short presentations from each of the panelists. And now we'll do round robin of a couple of questions. I'll ask the same questions of each of you. And we'll go in the same order in which you presented. So, we'll start with Carlos, with one question, and then we'll do each of them and we'll come back.



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

So, Carlos, could you give us one or two examples from your research on how civic engagement positively affects or improves the built or natural environment?

CARLOS VAZQUEZ-RIVERA: Sure. One example could be that the people open up to new experiences, such as learning citizens' competencies, involving other leaders of the community, increasing the participation of more and more people at the time, getting involved in government decisions, being more active in monitoring the use of COVID resources. That's some of the examples that the civic engagement has positive effects in the community.

We can mention also that the people are learning to dialogue instead of arguing or debating. Maybe we need to explain a little bit about this concept. But let's have it for now. I can also mention to connect the *Montones* community with the struggle of other community regionally or nationally. They need to create emotional structures to deal with the diversity. Because the people are different between them, even among the same community. Let's start with that.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Carlos. And the same question to Suzanne. Can you give us one or two examples from your research on how civic engagement positively affects or improves/develops our natural environment?

SUZANNE PRITZKER: Sure. I'm going to go ahead and provide an example or two, and then pass it along to Denae King to add an example of her own. But so, I think, first of all, it's important to note that our work, in a lot of ways, focuses more on how the natural environment and then the built environment responses or lack thereof affect civic engagement more than the other way around.

However, I think some of what we see are, first, the immediate neighbor to neighbor support that came in the form of civic actions focused on homes and infrastructure, including checking and clearing each other's sewer drains to make sure water is able to flow through them and not into houses, helping each other muck and gut, literally helping neighbors clear out their homes and their community institutions, working together to repair them, helping elderly and disabled neighbors get out of flooded homes and supporting them to move into safer living situations.

Also, we saw community members talked a lot about getting involved in efforts to speak up for infrastructural needs and communities, systems of drainage, flood prevention, infrastructure, and acknowledge in some cases where efforts had been finally made after years of repeated disasters. But I think it's important to emphasize that, even as they talked about speaking up, this was always paired with continual deep feelings of being abandoned, feeling ignored by officials as regarding built environment responses or preventative approaches to disasters. And also with community members really express deep feelings of inequity around these

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

preventative infrastructure actions where things that could be addressed in built environment to try to prevent the disaster impacts aren't happening. Denae, is there anything you wanted to add?

DENAE KING: No, I think that's it. Sounds good.

MELISSA GOUGE: All right. Thank you. And Jennifer and Jennifer. [CHUCKLES]

JENNIFER WILLETT: I'm going to actually pass it over to a youth scientist.

MELISSA GOUGE: OK, great.

VICTORIA GOMEZ: Hello, everyone. My name is Victoria Gomez. I'm a junior in high school currently. And I am a youth scientist, part of the Research for Change.

To answer this question, I'd say that volunteering improves our community because we are able to show our community members the problems that are within our community that they might not see. And with this, we've been able to work with AmeriCorps when it comes to different projects and bringing these projects to life and showing them to our community of what we need.

When it comes to building sidewalks this past couple of months, we've been able to see that they've started to build these sidewalks as this was a project that we continue to work on to bring to our social media platforms and show our community that there was a problem because our students, walking from schools, our community was walking on dirt. And there's many ditches. So, when working with AmeriCorps, we've been able to show them that this was a problem. And we've seen that, throughout the past couple of months, they began to build these sidewalks throughout our communities. And we saw that this awareness was brought through our social media and working with AmeriCorps. And I'll pass it on to Diana.

DIANA: Hello, everyone. My name is Diana. I'm a junior at Hug High School currently. And I'm going to be answering our second question, which was based on, how can we help our community with slow violence better? And so, first of all, it would start with being aware of it. We continue to do it through our social media platforms. This whole time, throughout COVID, that's what we kind of were doing. We were working with the local news stations who have interviewed some of our youth scientists previously.

And as Jennifer mentioned before, we mostly focus on showing our work through Photovoice, which we take a lot of pictures around our community, documenting what is wrong and what we are seeing around there. We try our best to show a situation and not just talk about it so that people can be aware of what's specifically happening, not just visiting.

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

So, we can see the slow violence happening in our community. We also believe that our community needs to be more engaged. We try to engage our community more by informing them through our social media accounts. So, we post a lot of our Photovoice pictures. And informing the community of what's wrong and how it can be fixed and why it's dangerous in that situation.

We also previously wanted to start on creating events that would help our community see and make a difference, such as back before COVID, we were having events such as a cleanup day such as in Sun Valley and getting our whole community involved. But that got postponed because of COVID. And we've also tried to do other things. But right now, we're just working on trying to get our community as a whole again and making a change.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Victoria and Diana, for sharing those really important specific examples from your own community. And next we'll turn it over to Franchesca and Sophia.

SOPHIA GEORGE: So, for our examples for our research, for our CBPAR research, one example that we have is engaging the voucher tenants and having them as well as other Drew University students being directly engaged with the research. And by pulling together this united, diverse team, you recognize the community as one unit of identity and you give voice to those who have not previously had the opportunity to share their experiences and to conduct their research.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you, Sophia. Now we'll move on to the second question that will be posed to each of our panelists as well. And I will be sure to post it in the chat as soon as Carlos gets started. Carlos. from...

PENN LOH: Melissa?

MELISSA GOUGE: from your research--

PENN LOH: Melissa?

MELISSA GOUGE: Yes?

PENN LOH: I think you skipped me.

MELISSA GOUGE: Oh, I am so sorry. I'm so sorry, Penn. Go ahead. Thank you for stepping in. Thank you, thank you. I apologize for that.

PENN LOH: No worries. Yeah, so I was going to say, in general, DSNI's story is an example of how the built environment can really be shaped by civic engagement over the decades. And I didn't say that they had overseen the development of over 200 units of permanently

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

affordable housing, parks, a community greenhouse, as well as urban farms on their 30 acres of land. So that's an incredible achievement. I did want to draw out how the arts and creative engagements as part of civic engagement can make a big difference in the process of getting people engaged.

So the Strand Theater, as I had mentioned, was having a workshop about what its future vision would be. Several hundred people showed up. And DSNi and the city designed a meeting that was very interactive. But then, at the end, they invited in a theater troupe called Red Sage Stories to come on stage. And these four actors had spent the entire workshop talking to folks and observing what was happening in the meeting. And then they spent 10 minutes at the end performing back what they had heard, dramatizing the hopes and fears that people expressed around being displaced, around experiences of racism, about being mistreated by the city. And one of the people we interviewed said, when they performed, you could hear a pin drop it was so quiet. Everybody was listening.

The city... apparently a lot of the folks from the city were a little bit uncomfortable with what happened, because things were being expressed potentially in a negative way. But what we learned later was that folks felt like this was the most powerful community meeting ever, because residents who came really felt that they were heard, that the experiences that they had were validated and acknowledged, and that the tensions that that may have created with the city were actually diffused. And so they started to come back to the other meetings. They felt like this was not going to be the same old type of meeting and process that had occurred before. So, a creative engagement like that was able to get more people engaged and to stay engaged because they felt like it was a real process.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Penn. Now we'll start with the second question. And that will go first to Carlos.

From your research, can you share some successes or some solutions that you have identified collectively that can lead to community resilience?

CARLOS VAZQUEZ-RIVERA: Thank you again, Melissa. I can start with saying combining power tools with citizen competences and the values and principles of social community technology has provided us with a basis for collective work. This was very important because, since the beginning of our project, we put a special effort to share a common view of what we will be doing the next. That does not mean we are in agreement, but at least we put together a common view with all the community research team.

Then, I can add, we need to clarify concepts that we work with, such as resilience, empowerment, community, participation, and even civic engagement because what

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

we are meaning up here with that concept, maybe it will not be the same as the people that we are working with.

Another thing could be change the mindset from a spontaneous response to a planning approach because the community tends to work as a spontaneous response to deal with disasters. And putting them into a planning approach has been quite a challenge.

We also need to continually assess our practice to not replicate paternalism, assistentialism, and clientelism. Those three concepts become key to assess our work also from the beginning.

Lastly, but not less important, we cannot start our work with a predetermined definition of what a community is. We cannot even say that there will be a consensus of what community means in a certain place, area, or sector. We learn that from our research. So, in the case of *Montones*, we can affirm that, more than a definition of community we obtain the experience, the practice, the praxis, if you will, of the community that prompts us to come together.

So, from our part, we also share with the community and the community research team that the [NON-ENGLISH] one of the tasks from the [NON-ENGLISH] approach is to stimulate the power relation aimed at the design of strategies that push in the opposite direction to the existing individualism that we live in, resuming and working the will to come together.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Carlos. And I'd like to thank you all for presenting as well as for responding to these questions. I think very honestly pointing out some of the tensions between communities, sometimes, and institutions, as well as pointing out many of the interconnections between issues around the environment, the built environment, and civic engagement.

So now ICF is going to put us into breakout rooms where we can have a little bit more discussion. And after that they'll bring us all back together so we can wrap things up and close out this afternoon's session.

MELISSA GOUGE: All right, it looks like we've been brought back to the main room. And I should start with an apology. I guess I had such a moving experience in my first breakout room, I was overly enthusiastic to move to the breakout rooms. And there were a handful of panelists who did not have an opportunity to respond to our second question.

So let's go round and wrap that up. And then we'll talk a little bit about how the breakout rooms went and close out the presentations.

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

So Suzanne and Denae, I'll remind you of that second question. From your research, would you mind sharing some successes or solutions that you identified that can lead to community resilience?

DENAE KING: Thank you. So actually we talked a little bit about this in our breakout session. And one of the important, I think, solutions is to make sure that you engage community members and ensure that you have partners. One of our panelists said that it's trusted by the community. And I think it was Jen that said that gives you street cred. So, we found that to be very important. Our co-researchers were actually members of the community. And they did all of our focus group facilitation. And so that allowed for community members to feel comfortable to share and give, I guess, very valuable information.

And then I think some of the successes include some of our communities developed disaster plans following this work. And so they are working to engage local officials on disaster plans that include how to prepare for the disaster, where they're going to evacuate or shelter in place, and also still working with local officials on what the recovery process looks like and how recovery dollars are being spent. Some of our co-researchers are serving with me on a task force that are focused on flood resilience now. And so that built capacity of the community to be able to respond in disasters. And I think the other thing is to really help communities to understand what are their priorities and how to develop projects that are targeted to their interests.

And so, in one of the communities that we worked with, the library was destroyed during Hurricane Harvey. It was flooded. And it's taken a while. So Hurricane Harvey was in 2017. And they're just getting to the point where they're now going to focus on rebuilding that library. And so the community organization that we were working with is now really focused on getting residents together to look at what does the rebuilding of that library look like, where will it be located, which communities will it serve.

So this work has really led to some recovery kinds of successes. And so we're hoping to see more of that in the future. Suzanne, you want to add anything?

SUZANNE PRITZKER: No, that's great. Thanks, Denae.

MELISSA GOUGE: Yes, thank you. And I'm so glad to hear that some of those same topics came up during your breakout session. And Jennifer and the Nevada team, could you also share some successes or solutions that you identify that can lead to community resilience?

JENNIFER WILLET: Yeah, I'll echo what the youth scientists reported out. I think that we found a lot of work that we can do as community members and together. But we also found that some neighborhoods need more development and more infrastructure.

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

Like the youth scientists were saying, they need sidewalks, they need better flood ditches, they need more protective measures against wildfires. And that could be part of the work too. So we can't do that ourselves, but our work as a community-based group can be to develop the relationships with authority figures or decision-makers or funders to try to figure out how to get those resources and infrastructure needs addressed within the communities.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thanks, Jennifer. And to the Drew University team.

FRANCESCA CIFUENTES: I'll share. I also mentioned this in the smaller group discussion. So one thing I didn't share, actually, is that we've been able to—and I'm sure other folks too have been able to continue to do this work remotely, despite in the middle of a pandemic, which has really spoken to the strength and resilience of our team and also the strength and resilience of the community partners that we've brought around the table to do this work in Morris County, New Jersey.

Because we the pandemic hit last year, and we've still been able to continue the work and now are completing the project. And that gives us a lot of hope in terms of how this work and the research findings and the pilot program will continue to live beyond the three-year study that we've done at Drew.

And so the other thing I mentioned too is that one of the community researchers wants to continue to take the flag and be a director of the program. So, we're providing that individual with the assistance and the coaching and support so that this work continues to live in the community. Because even though it's been three years—three years is a lot—but to actually be able to see the impact of our work and to see results and to build a nonprofit and continue this work, it's going to take more than three years. So, it's really important for the individuals that have been part of this work to feel true ownership. And we see that in the work that we've done here at Drew. And that's been truly because of the people at the table.

MELISSA GOUGE: Yeah, thank you so much. And Penn, at Tufts, if you don't mind answering this question as well, please. Thank you.

PENN LOH: Sure. Also did share some of this in our group. But I think, for us, looking at what community resilience actually is, for me, anyway, it really is a social capacity for collective learning, adaptation, and decision-making. And all the ways that community can build its muscles for this type of democratic engagement and participation will lead to strengthening resilience.

And I think that, with our project partner, DSNI, and the neighborhood that it's in, really the way that people there talk about it is that, over these three-plus decades that they've been doing this work, that they've really accumulated neighborhood

## ICF Transcription

### Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue Civic Engagement and Environmental Stewardship

power, and that compared to even other neighborhoods in Boston that are similarly situated in terms of their socioeconomic status, people just who have been involved there have a different approach. They really do feel like the place is theirs, that they belong. And when they go into a process of working with the city on this commercial development process, that they own the table, and not just trying to get a seat at it.

So, it takes a long time to build this up. And it involves a lot of trust building and relationships. And it's easily lost. But it can accumulate. And I think one of the lessons we're learning from the process that's been used these past few years is just that engagement has to be authentic and meaningful and happen at multiple layers so that it's not just the same old kind of city meetings where somebody gives a PowerPoint and then asks for comments and input.

You have to make things fun and inviting. The creative engagements I talked about really are about getting people to engage with all of their senses, not just one dimension. And going to where people are at, finding out...I was saying that DSNi had an AmeriCorps member, actually, one summer, to go and do a lot of engagement with people through pop-ups. So, they'd set up a little table at the basketball court and use it as a chance to engage with some of the youth that would be using the court in the daytime.

So engagement, there's so much to do with how: how engagement happens. But if you can do it meaningfully and authentically, it can build up and accumulate over time to achieve incredible things.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you so much, Penn. So, we'll open the floor to some questions as well. I think you all brought up some really wonderful themes, and I can speak from our breakout session. We talked a lot about this kind of interconnectedness of some of the issues that you're looking at across space, geography, time, and perhaps seeing some connections that maybe we didn't expect to find.

So for the panelists or attendees as well, what are some of the important takeaways, getting back to some of the material you discussed, perhaps, in your breakout room, some of the important takeaways or things that really struck you from this afternoon's presentation? You're welcome to drop information in the chat or to unmute yourself and make a comment or answer a question.

For example, I will bring up one question that came up during our breakout session. And this it to the panelists. And anybody can hop in. People alluded to, in a couple of presentations, to COVID and their work being impacted by COVID. But if you would like to perhaps mention specifically how your work was impacted by COVID, we'd love to learn a little bit more about that. If you had to change things, add things to



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

your work. And unexpected findings/challenges, perhaps, that were presented would be great to learn more about.

VICTORIA GOMEZ: I can share a little bit about what we did as youth scientists in Research for Change throughout the pandemic. So, we were used to meeting in person and meeting biweekly. And we would take pictures in between those weeks showing slow violence in Photovoice. And then we would go back, speak about those pictures, and then have an interview about how these pictures have to do with our projects and how we would work with them, creating projects and stuff like that.

So, once we had to move to Zoom calls and everything got shut down, we had to definitely communicate with our group what we wanted from this group and how we could best continue working on this. So, we moved to social media. It was a lot of posting pictures on there and getting other people's voices and for them to see what we were doing with our projects.

So, then we continued to work with these projects. But since we couldn't take pictures or anything, we continued to develop our group using the information we had and then continue that research. But it was more online based than going out there and being able to take those pictures.

And now we're working on going back to normal, hopefully in the next couple of months, going back into meeting in person, being able to go out, taking those pictures. And we're looking forward to Art Town, which is an event where we're able to show off these pictures that we are taking for our environmental injustices. And we'll be able to explain to our community what they mean and for them to learn a little bit more about what we're doing.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thanks so much, Victoria. Does anyone else have any response to how COVID specifically, perhaps, impacted your work in unexpected ways?

OK, well, then we'll just go ahead, and I'll open the floor to any last comments from any of our panelists so we can go ahead and wrap up for the day. And we can go in the order in which you're presented as well, or just hop in. Carlos, do you have any closing comments before we wrap up today?

CARLOS VAZQUEZ-RIVERA: Why are you making me suffer? [CHUCKLES]

You know, I think many of the panelists and the other participants stressed the need to be coherent with our position of change and diversity. And we need to develop in other languages, in my case Spanish, to express better our self and our experiences.

I always struggle with if I am communicating accurately in English my thoughts or our experience in the project. So, it's always a [NON-ENGLISH], a learning process for

## ICF Transcription

### Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue Civic Engagement and Environmental Stewardship

me trying to share you know this experience in another language. But we need to make the effort to integrate this diversity, as others are sharing. We need to bring this diversity to our projects. And we need more and more the capacity—or like I write down in the chat, we need to build our emotional structures to deal with diversity because no one shares enough how our emotions impact our project or our learning or our process as a human being. So we need to integrate that part a little more, way more. Thank you.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you, Carlos. And Suzanne and Denaë, Houston and Texas Southern, do you have closing thoughts to offer?

SUZANNE PRITZKER: Yeah, so I'll jump in here. Actually, I think, thinking about what Carlos just shared, you know in Houston, like in Puerto Rico, like in many other communities across the Gulf Coast in the United States, we're seeing not just a single disaster but repeated cascading natural disaster experiences, even for us, as recently as the winter storm in February. And even as community members talk about, post-storm, they help each other, they feel anchored to their communities by the connections they're experiencing with each other, they also talk so much about how these disasters leave them feeling uninformed, unheard, un-responded to by the institutions and officials that are supposed to serve them. And that, I think, comes across so clearly.

One piece of that is around the language justice that Carlos and others have talked about, that communication-- I mean, in Houston, communication coming in English only is so problematic. And I think what we're hearing is preparedness, response, recovery information needs to be in Spanish, it needs to be in Vietnamese, it needs to be in Mandarin Chinese at least. And people don't know what to do. And they're finding themselves lost at how do I even-- what am I supposed to do to prepare my home, or where do I go, without that kind of information, and that they're really completely relying on their own tight communities and each other in spreading that information while these larger institutions are letting them down in terms of this information.

And that it's continued that this happens over and over and over again, I think is really critical for us to consider. And it's so important that I think just the critical need for community voice and really hearing what communities are experiencing and how these disasters are shaping themselves and their communities as we think forward in terms of prevention, response, recovery with disasters.

PRESENTER 2: Just want to highlight a little bit of what Carlos and Suzanne have said in terms of just becoming increasingly aware of how these issues are connected. You know, we work with the homeless population. And people who are Spanish-speaking and immigrants are more vulnerable. And whenever there's been any kind of a crisis, both who gets hurt the most and what the resources are for housing them and how that's connected

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

to environment. So that intersectional kind of entanglement issues that says that you can't touch one issue almost without getting consultation with other people who are working on a range of other issues. And so the kind of thing that Penn was doing in terms of neighborhoods and communities. So I like this kind of consultation and kind of sharing. And hopefully there's opportunities for more of that in the future.

PENN LOH: I was just going to say something quickly about the language justice because I feel like, in some ways, that was a small silver lining in moving to a lot of virtual space. A lot of the work-- and this happened in our work with DSNI. They always do translation into English, Cape Verdean Creole, Haitian Creole, and Spanish in all of their meetings. And when they held community meetings that were virtual, they could actually do simultaneous interpretation because Zoom has the interpretation feature. Of course, they had to pay interpreters and people who are professionally trained. But I know that other community efforts that I've been involved in have been able to do the same when they, in fact, hadn't been able to do that in person as much.

So I found that to be interesting and hopefully something that people will figure out a way to continue in some way as we move forward. But really appreciate the opportunity to share and hear from all the other panelists.

MELISSA GOUGE: Thank you all so much. This has been absolutely fantastic. And this collective problem-solving here at the very end has just been really nice way to, I think, perhaps close out this afternoon. Put a pause on this, because we're going to continue, perhaps, this larger discussion tomorrow. For those of you who can join us, we've got two more days of meeting with folks to learn about what they are doing and how it connects to these larger institutions and how we can perhaps work on some of these issues together.

So, thank you so much to all of the panelists who came here to talk about civic engagement, environmental stewardship, and had a really much larger conversation, I think, in particular here at the end. Look forward to continuing to work with you all. And hopefully we will see you back online tomorrow afternoon.

And we'll open the floor to Mary to close things out for today.

MARY HYDE: Thanks, Melissa. And thanks to everyone who shared today. We really thank you for taking the time to learn with us, to share what you've learned. We hope you can join us for at least one of tomorrow's conversations. Just as a little reminder, tomorrow's two panels, the first is Civic Engagement and Pathways to Employment, the second is Incubators for Civic Engagement. And if you have enjoyed today's dialogue, please invite a colleague to join us tomorrow.

## ICF Transcription

### Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue Civic Engagement and Environmental Stewardship

And I was thinking of Margaret Mead's words most of today. So, I will close with this last thought. "Never doubt that a small group of fully committed citizens can change the world. And indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." So, with that, have a lovely afternoon. And we hope to see you tomorrow.