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Civic Engagement as a Catalyst for Community Change: 2021 Research Grantee Dialogue  
Civic Engagement In The Time Of COVID

MARY HYDE: Hello, and welcome to our grantee dialogue. Our third day, and we are so excited that you've all decided to join us today. My name is Mary Hyde, and I am the director of the Office of Research and Evaluation at AmeriCorps. I am a community psychologist by training. We are excited for this series, and we sincerely hope that through this dialogue, we can all broaden our perspectives, find shared meaning, find places of agreement, allow for and invite differences of opinion and experience, and challenge our own and others' preconceived notions.

And just as we did yesterday, before continuing with my remarks, I would like to invite two colleagues to introduce themselves and to translate what I've just said in their languages. With that, I'll turn it over to Lily.

LILY ZANDNIAPOUR: Thank you, Mary. Hi, everyone. My name is Lily Zandniapour, and I'm going to say a few words in Farsi, translating what Mary said.

[SPEAKING FARSI]

Thank you. Hoodah

HOODAH HAMDAN: Yes, thank you, Lily. My name is Hoodah Hamdan. I am a sociologist and research analyst with the Office of Research and Evaluation and I'll be translating what Mary just said in Arabic. [SPEAKING ARABIC] Thank you.

MARY HYDE: Thank you, Lily and Hoodah.] The ideas and research our panelists will share today are a culmination of two decades of systematic inquiry into civic engagement sponsored by this agency. Following the tragedy of 9/11, the agency initiated a survey research program in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau. Surveys on volunteering and other forms of civic engagement generated national statistics on the percentage of Americans who report participating in the civic life of their communities. These nationally representative statistics remain a cornerstone of our research program. After a decade of administering these national surveys, the Agency partnered with the National Academy of Sciences. The National Research Council convened a panel on measuring social and civic engagement and social cohesion in surveys. The consensus study report, titled "Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion, Measuring Dimensions of Social Capital to Inform Policy," included several recommendations for advancing scholarship in this field of study and increasing the utility of research findings for improving community conditions. One of the panel recommendations was to conduct research using methods and measures capable of capturing a more contextualized understanding of civic engagement and community change. The report suggests that the need to supplement survey research with additional approaches for understanding this constellation of behaviors and their implications for transforming lives and communities. In response, the agency launched a research grant program in 2015 to do just that. The panelists assembled for this week's dialogue, including today, will share what they've learned through this research grant program. The panels represent academic and citizen expertise. We invite each of you to share your expertise and lived experience so we can collectively create research-informed and innovative solutions for some of our toughest

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community challenges. I again invite Lily and Hoodah to translate my last remark in their languages.

LILY ZANDNIAPOUR: Thank you, Mary. [SPEAKING FARSI] Thank you. Hoodah?

HOODAH HAMDAN: [SPEAKING ARABIC] Thank you.

MARY HYDE: Thank you both, and thank you all for joining us today. So, let's get going.

KATY HUSSEY-SLONIKER: So thank you Mary, [? Hoodah, ?] and Lily for the wonderfully inspiring introduction remarks. My name is Katy Hussey-Sloniker, and I'm the learning officer for the Office of Research and Evaluation. Unfortunately, Melissa is having technical issues and is unable to moderate. I have the pleasure of kicking off the first session today focused on the Office of Research and Evaluation grantees: rising up to the challenge of conducting research and civic engagement in the time of COVID.

Our session will begin with each of our four panelists presenting their work, followed by Andrea Roble s moderating discussions on two additional questions, and then break out into smaller group settings where you as participants can meet and ask questions of the panelists.

So let me introduce our four panelists for today. We have Dawn Jacqueline Murphy from Fielding Graduate University, Rachel Wenrick from Drexel University, Marisol Clark-Ibáñez from California State University, San Marcos, and Maren King State University of New York. Let me introduce our first panelist, Dawn.

DAWN JACQUELINE MURPHY: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for this opportunity to share what our project has done. The Fielding Graduate University part project was called Leading from the Roots, and it is a partnership with the U.S. community-based folk schools. Many people are not familiar with folk schools, and I'll just give a brief explanation of folk schools in North America at this time.

There is a new wave of folk school founding, and folk schools are adult—generally adult ed or intergenerational community-based organizations that provide instruction based on community need and interest. The majority of folk schools in the new wave of folk school founding are looking at traditional skills, heritage arts, and culture-bearing and are alive with music, and dance, and craft, and those sorts of areas. And there has been almost a nine-fold increase in the number of folk schools in the U.S. since the early 2000s.

The research and the project of Leading from the Roots was looking at these folk schools as centers where craftspeople and culture-bearers could come together and look at civic engagement and social action through their particular and unique skills and connections within the community. The two questions that we were asking in this study were, How can place-based traditional artists and craftspeople make a positive impact on the regional concerns of reducing dependency on external economic drivers and economic vitality and resilience in rural communities?

So the schools that are being founded are generally in rural communities, and looking at that was a really important aspect. For the first portion of the study, we looked at a specific school in the Pacific Northwest, the Arbutus Folk School in Olympia, Washington, and its connection to a five-county economic development region called the PAC-5. It is a

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7,000-square-mile economic development region, and we defined our community as the craftspeople in this region.

And that, the project really started out as a collective cooperative process, where we had plans on surveying and having large gatherings of craftspeople to do focus groups and to gather stories on need and capacity within the arena of economic development. And that changed dramatically, as many of the projects probably will share. If you could go to the next slide?

So when COVID hit, we had just put out our plan for our research and gotten IRB approval. And all of the large gatherings of artists and craftspeople for singing and dancing and et cetera were no longer viable options. And so we transitioned to more of a co-op, or a collective process, where the individual craftspeople that were involved in the project wrote their own plan of research and action within their communities.

And we started with autobiographies of the craftspeople or culture-bearers in their locations. And this process was imbued with a sense of loss but also a sense of urgency with the needs that were being identified by the craftspeople and culture-bearers within their communities. As a result, specific to the Southwestern Washington, we ended up with 10 community-based participatory action research plans and projects that were led by our heritage artists and craftspeople in their communities. And there, those ranged from action research developed around healthy foods and security, an indigenous language revitalization project that went online and also was sharing information about COVID through these online platforms that didn't exist before there was an Art for Immigrants' Rights Project, where normally they would do a march, and they did it virtually, which resulted in a direct aid project that raised over \$90,000 to help our immigrant workers in the area.

We had herbal care projects, including a BIPOC-led community effort around getting medicines, herbal medicines, out to our indigenous folks. Crafts survey and directory looking to locate craftspeople in the area, and intergenerational mountain dulcimer education to fight social isolation that was put online. All of these projects were led by the craftspeople, and many of the findings are still coming out.

And we tried to encourage and to provide space for the community members to share their findings through participatory video. And so we have a film festival that is coming up where the findings and the results and outcomes of the projects will be shared. One of the most significant did a 20-minute mini-documentary around the Art for Immigrant Rights March and the Solidarity Beyond Charity project that was a result of this.

So the Washington State project was the first phase of this, and the second question that we were asking within the research was, What impact does engagement and dialogue about participatory action research and, specifically, community-based participatory action research, have on the expansion of new folk school scope of service to broader civic engagement actions? And so through a third year, we were able to recruit additional folk schools around the country, eight different states with nine different schools that are currently running participatory action research projects and participatory video processes.

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Again, they're doing this through—they're going to be reporting out their findings through video and a participatory video process, and all of those videos are forthcoming. I have, I think—I'm not sure if she's here with us today—but we have one of the site coordinators for a folk school in Minnesota, which is Marine Mills Folk School, and they have been doing a project that is looking at organizational survival as a volunteer-run organization, both in the time of COVID and beyond. And I'm wondering if she is here with us today. Kirsten, are you--

PRESENTER: Hey, Dawn, I'm sorry. If she could answer the questions, because we'll need to wrap.

DAWN JACQUELINE MURPHY: OK, sure, sure, sure. So I mean, that is the essence of our project, with findings still coming in. It's a very distributive effort, and it has been from the very beginning with a large geographic area that we were attempting to cover, and then expanding to the other schools around the country.

PRESENTER: Thank you, Dawn. Now we'll turn it over to Rachel from Drexel University.

RACHEL WENRICK: Hi, everyone. Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

PRESENTER: Yes, we can.

RACHEL WENRICK: OK, great. All right, wonderful. Wow, guys, thank you for putting our headshots on there. I had opted not to do that so that we could have-- I was trying to represent our team a little bit more. But I appreciate how you were able to economically use space. So, Ayana Allen-Handy, our fearless leader and the PI of this project, is on a plane right now. Otherwise, she would be with us, but I'm very happy to represent the team. My name is Rachel Wenrick, and I'm the director of Writer's Room, and I'm the co-PI on this project, which is called Anti-Displacement: the Untapped Potential of University-Community Cooperative Living.

And just very quickly, I will tell you about Writer's Room. We're a university community literary arts program, so that means our writers are 18 to 80. It's not an outreach program of the university, but everything we do is co-created with our neighbors living in the Mantua and Powelton neighborhoods of West Philadelphia, which is a Promise Zone community.

So that means we are high school kids and retirees and AmeriCorps service members, and we're diverse in just about everywhere you could imagine—age, socioeconomic status, religion, sexuality, gender identity. And together, we engage in creative placemaking and art for social justice. And all of that means, really, that we use story to spur the actions required to create a more equitable world. OK, next slide. Thank you.

So, our CPAR study is investigating gentrification and displacement in our community in West Philadelphia, but what we've learned will likely resonate with many people on this call regardless of where you are in the country. We learned that gentrification and displacement of Black residents is happening at faster and higher rates than we had hypothesized at the onset of the project. For example, in the past 10 years, the white population has increased 73 percent in Mantua, compared to only 17 percent in the neighboring Powelton Village.

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Affordable housing options are much needed in our community yet are scarce and decreasing. Many of our residents are cost burdened. An example of estimated renters in a Mantua block group: only 21 percent are considered to be living in affordable housing, with their rent being less than 30 percent of their income. The rest are cost burdened—rent is more than 30 percent, or extremely cost-burdened—rent is more than 50 percent of their income. This is also a marked increase from earlier years.

And the last thing that we are taking a look at, which I'll talk about more in the Q&A, is the sharing of stories as a vital connector and source of data during life in lockdown. And you'll see here about our project being co-designed. It actually was born of one of our founding members being displaced when a developer bought her building and sold it to—and it was sold to be flipped to student housing.

And we knew immediately that we were implicated in each other's stories. This was in our first season in 2014. And it was wonderful to create art together, but if we were able to act to create a community together through story sharing, we wanted to act as a community. And this anti-displacement project was born from there. Next slide.

So, in addition to this, more as part of the CPAR study, we are really working on collective action as well. And this has been part of—we know the story, basically. As universities expand, developers displace residents to rent to students.

And what we're doing is developing a model that offers a different story. It's students, recent graduates, and AmeriCorps service members are renting from homeowners and become part of an anti-displacement solution while building a stronger community. This concept preserves homeownership for long-term African American residents and creates opportunities for intergenerational connection. We also see the opportunity to create new homeownership through this model.

And so, during the pandemic, we moved into our new home at Ross Commons, which is an ADA-accessible building that's located at the edge of our university's campus and on the border of our neighboring communities. This is the hub of our public programming we'll be launching in the fall, and it will be the anchor house of our cooperative living network.

And so, this fall, at the end of our three-year study, we'll be launching the pilot of that network. I'm really thrilled to share—I put it in the chats with Melissa—but I'm really thrilled to share that just yesterday, we found out from the Bair Foundation that they've approved our grant request for \$300,000 to support our pilot houses, to support the creation of the accompanying arts programming, and also the business plan to scale the project with our partners.

And I cannot stress enough how much our CPAR AmeriCorps work helped demonstrate the possibility of actionable, equitable solutions that can benefit the larger community. I'm getting all emotional; I'm sorry. [LAUGHS] And we really—we hope to work with our partners to create a manual for national replication. And a big part of that will be examining how place-based art strategies and civic engagement act as drivers of social cohesion in our local context and beyond. And I want to end by saying how grateful we

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are to AmeriCorps for supporting this work and supporting our team and our community. Andrea and Melissa and everyone at AmeriCorps, thank you so much.

PRESENTER: So I'm not sure, Rachel, if you're looking at the [INAUDIBLE], the chat that's going on around you, but everyone is sending you tons of congratulations. It's been incredibly exciting, incredibly.

RACHEL WENRICK: We can't thank you guys enough. The support from AmeriCorps has been wonderful and only increased throughout this last year. And we're so grateful. Thank you.

PRESENTER: You are welcome. All right, the next presenter is Marisol from California State University, San Marcos.

MARISOL CLARK-IBANEZ: Thank you. I'm here on behalf of our team from the National Latino Research Center and my wonderful colleague, Arcela Nuñez-Alvarez. So, I wanted to first, just like others, I feel like we're the OGs, old grantees—that we are grantees from 2017, and so we have, maybe, a slightly different focus. But I just want to do a big shout-out and thank you to the Office of Research Evaluation, because the 2017 grant was inspired by findings from a 2015 grant, and it's just really served to transform what we do and how we do civic engagement in the San Diego North County region.

And I just want to also say that it is so cool to know what everyone has been up to [LAUGHS] from the other grantee meetings. So OK, so I don't want to—I know we have precious time, but I just needed to just share that. Next slide?

And I just want to also let you know that we have—I have Arcela's contact information and a one-minute video on our program that I'll share as we end the session. I don't want to distract from all the panels. But we'll share that.

OK, so what are we about? We were funded to ignite and engage a population in San Diego County that has been virtually ignored, and that is the elderly immigrant low-income Latinx community members. And this is, like I said, an offshoot of a curriculum that was already established, actually, now 10 years ago. Arcela is the one who truly is the founder of what is called Universidad Popular, or the People's University, and then, it has had different generations. And this iteration that we're going to talk about today is really geared towards elders.

And we brought in social gerontologist, a Chicana colleague, who that is her specialty, and it really elevated our project to focus on elders. And the cornerstones of our project is that culturally and linguistically appropriate pedagogy. We really relied on the Paulo Freire popular education model, because as you're going to hear very, very briefly, most of our population, most of our program participants are not English-speaking as their first language—sometimes as their second, even. Sorry, Spanish is their second language, and they have very, very low formal levels of education.

However, we know that they have this wealth of what Yosef calls community cultural wealth. They come in with a lot of their own experiences that we seek to transform as in true capital. And so, our goal was to offer a program that led to a more—igniting more of the civic education and civic behavior and attitudes about where they belong and how they can connect. So next slide?

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All right, so just to give a quick overview of the program itself, we actually—over the funding of the program, we've enrolled over 300 unique elders, and they came from all over. Even though we're in North County, San Diego, neighbors brought them. Word of mouth spread, and people showed up, for a Thursday morning—Thursday morning from kind of eight to noon class.

The classes started with breakfast and movement, because all the participants brought a potluck to share. And then, there was always a little mini Zumba, Zumba Gold type of a class. And then there was the charla, and that's the talk, and the guest speakers and all that, where everyone is together and listening and participating, and being active in areas of civic engagement of all kinds. And I'm happy to talk to you more about some of those presentations and activities.

And then they split up into classes. And this, by far, was the best part of the morning, it seems. Because sometimes, the program participants were the students, and sometimes they were the leaders. But we did assess from our initial grant, what were the things that they were needing most help with to connect and also just feel validated for what they bring to the table.

And so, you can see the classes were technology for computers, also separate one for smartphones and tablets, crafting literacy in Spanish—as in how to write and read Spanish—and then multilingual literacy, which is Spanglish, English, Spanish, all blended into one, and then a number field trips that we managed to pull off before COVID.

And then, what are the methods we use? Well, this program had been running in different iterations, and different methods used, depending on the populations that we had. So, we had photo ethnography, pre- and post-surveys that were very, very long, and that required an engaged, long storytelling approach to doing surveys, qualitative interviews, photo elicitation interviews, and oral histories.

So, throughout the time of our program, Cultivando Sabiduria, which is "Cultivating Wisdom," we engaged in one or more of these methodologies, and as we reported along, we described each. So, I was reviewing all of the methods we used. It's like, oh, yeah, this is a lot. OK, next slide?

So, we wanted to just share some of the findings that we have wrapped up, on the one hand, and then others that we have, right now, a no-cost extension to finalize a couple more intensive analysis. And that is—on the survey data, we have districtive data that shows strong voting practices, a very strong desire to serve. So, if any AmeriCorps folks feel like, I can't get our Latinx, or Spanish-speaking, or immigrant communities to show up, I think we have something to share with you. [LAUGHS]

So, we've got something that kind of ignites that, and to connect the knowledge and with the larger regional problems that we want to address with community members. And we also saw a slight increase in the knowledge of political issues. So, this is around the pre- and post-test, especially the local. And I think this directly relates to, who came into our space? Who did our program bring in so that our participants could really understand what was going on?

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And for me, the most compelling finding—I'm a sociologist; I do sociology of education—is we actually have quite a really compelling finding with the voices of our elders about their dream that was deferred, and that is to go to school. Because many had to leave very, very early on their education and work, essentially. And so, what did that mean, to be going to school and to be feeling like they're learning and they're participating in this formal way?

But also, we were able to capture the types of leadership and volunteer opportunities that our participants had by being in this space. And we really feel like that's the power of the social capital that was created through the curriculum. And then, finally, another unexpected finding or unexpected—it's so unexpected. We have a big, big written discussion about it that we're working on now for publication, and that is the key of literacy and civic engagement.

So, it's a little bit different than going to school finding. This is literally about someone learning to read. And the schooling was about learning and technology, and there's different elements to that. But there's literacy—we had two simultaneous programs going on, and that's Thursday morning, and this was really leading to some exciting self-discovery but also empowerment discoveries of, like just because I don't speak this way, or I don't speak all the way this way, I matter, and I have a lot to contribute.

So those literacy findings were among, I think, the most compelling. And that wraps it up for the start of the major findings. And I'm very happy to share more of it later when we do our panel discussion. Thank you.

**PRESENTER:** Thank you very much, Marisol. And now for Maren from the State University of New York.

**MAREN KING:** Well, hello, everybody. I am so pleased to be here and want to also add my thanks to AmeriCorps and CNCS for all of the support and funding that you have provided for our project and for the teenagers and other people who will come after them as a result of our project. So, I am an associate professor in landscape architecture at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse. I think I'm the only landscape architect in our cohort here, and I'm representing our team that includes Leah Russell of the Syracuse Peacemaking Project, my colleague and co-PI, Dr. Christina Limpert, the team members of our research team, who you'll see photos of in just a minute, and our current student assistants.

And our project is called Raising the Next Generation of Community Leaders. It is a youth participatory action research project within Syracuse's Near West Side neighborhood that engages neighborhood teenagers as co-researchers. The Near West Side neighborhood has a very diverse population of Latino, Black, and white residents. It's primarily low-income, and many people are living below the poverty line. People in the neighborhood have multiple health issues that the Peacemaking Center, in their earlier research, has found are due to a number of issues, which include lack of exercise and outdoor activities related in part to and concern for their personal safety and fear of crime.

One of the aspects that this project has allowed me to do and pushed me to do was some subsequent research, and I've come to understand that the Near West Side and



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several other neighborhoods in the city of Syracuse—and, perhaps, in places where you live and work—possess the characteristics that contribute to high rates of violent crime, including poverty, segregation, inequality in education and employment opportunities and troubled relationships with the police, and I'm sorry I don't know why I'm getting so emotional

In response to these underlying issues that are affecting the community health, the Peacemaking Center had formed a community impact team to promote community engagement, and they developed a program called Take Back the Streets, which has over the last five or six years organized activities and programs that bring people together in different places around the neighborhood. Next slide, please.

But one of the groups that they were not able to reach were the youth and the young adults. And so, our project emerged from an existing goal of the community impact team to create a youth impact team that would provide opportunities for teenagers to engage and understand their neighborhood and to nurture their leadership capacity through natural mentoring, skill development, and civic engagement, and through a participatory research process, tap into that natural curiosity that is part of how we all learn.

So, the teens, as part of our team, were aged 13 to 19, and they were the core members of our research team from the very beginning of the project. So, they were just—they were not research subjects; they were actual participants. And as co-researchers, the team members were introduced to research as a way of understanding and addressing issues.

So, after our team-building an ethics training, IRB requirements, and introduction to various youth-oriented methods, they went through a process—we with them, of course—a review and discussion of issues that they had identified when they were first recruited as part of the project. And they developed an overarching research question of, How does crime and violence affect the lives of people in the neighborhood? They split into three teams to investigate several different questions—the effects of crime and violence on quality of life; the impact of social media on spreading news of that violence;; and the characteristics that influence the sense of safety. They use multiple methods, including mapping, brainstorming, interviews, and storytelling, to engage 45 other community members as research participants in seven different focus groups. Next slide, please.

So, there have been a number of findings from our process and analysis related to the team research questions, and this includes that the neighborhood has many strengths, such as organizations and services that provide support, and are places where people feel safe. And the team wants to highlight these and other positive attributes, because they want others to know about the good things that are happening in their neighborhood. And they found, though, that crime and violence does affect the lives of everyone in the neighborhood, causing fear and trauma, lack of trust, and social and physical isolation. As in many poor urban neighborhoods, there is also what YPAR researcher Alice McIntyre calls environmental violence, exhibited in the form of many poor physical

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conditions, including abandoned houses, broken up and absent sidewalks, trash, absentee landlords, and a lack of care in many parts of the neighborhood. And as you all know, the root causes of these many forms of violence have a long and deep history, and addressing them will take multiple actions at many levels, both top-down and bottom-up. Our team believes that our project will contribute to making positive change.

In addition to providing the foundation for a youth impact team, a primary action is communicating to the neighborhood and the city-wide audience, including city government, the team's findings and the value of youth and community in this type of participatory process. Other important findings are related to the development of skills, including teamwork, research methods, analysis and synthesis, and communication. And I did have the voice of one of our teams, but I don't think I have time for that. I've put it to the side. But right now, the team has been working on getting the word out about finding partners in residents and the broader community through a narrated presentation, a series of engaging posters that are created, that were created with landscape architecture student mentors, where the team members provided the content, and landscape architecture students actually help them do the graphics. And they developed—they're developing social media platforms to disseminate their findings and that illustrate that social media can be used for good. They also created a gathering garden, a safe place for people to get together outdoors that I'll discuss in more detail during the questions that are related to the impact of COVID on our project. Thank you.

**PRESENTER:** Thank you so much. And I don't want to start the question and answer without thanking all of you and your teams for all the amazing work you have done. I really know how much effort this takes, and when we started this research grant competition, we didn't know where all this would go. And so, it's astonishing to us how much impact this has had. So, thank you so much for sharing all your work and your findings.

And so, this panel was not—all your work did not start out COVID-focused, so I wanted time for all of you to explain your work. But we are interested in knowing how COVID has impacted how you do your research and how you have adapted and pivoted because of COVID. So, I'm looking at the time. We have 15 minutes, and I'll just throw out both questions, because you may want to merge them.

The second question was, How has community engagement or collective action in your communities and the work you're doing been impacted by COVID? So how have you pivoted, and how have you seen community engagement and collective action impacted by COVID? So, we will just start with Dawn and move down.

**DAWN JACQUELINE MURPHY:** I think I jumped ahead in my presentation earlier, so I've already said a little bit about this. But that really, we had a cooperative process with a larger study happening across a large region. And what COVID did was really break us into more of a collective, where individual projects happened within community. And I'm really happy with the results in terms of how the action of—participatory action showed up and helped during a really dramatic time period.

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PRESENTER: Thanks, Dawn, and we'll come back to you. [LAUGHS] Did you want-- you had another team member. Did you want them to say a few words?

DAWN JACQUELINE MURPHY: Kirstin, did you want to—

KIRSTIN: Sure, I'm here.

DAWN JACQUELINE MURPHY: Hi, Kirstin.

KIRSTIN: Hi. I don't know if you can see me, or if I'm doing something correctly, or not.

DAWN JACQUELINE MURPHY: We can see you.

KIRSTIN: You can see me? OK, cool. I am Kirstin, and I am from Minnesota. And I work with the Marine Mills Folk School, which is located approximately 45 miles away from downtown Minneapolis, so pretty close to the metro area. And we got involved with the Power Project, and we got hit all at once with this whole project, because, first of all, we started in October of 2018.

We learned about the PAR Project, and we were kind of like, it's kind of slippery. We're not exactly sure how it goes, and how it works, and how PAR is. And most of us, including myself, it was our first real experience with participatory action research. And we had to figure out how to do it online and using Zoom and teaching everyone or doing—and I bet that even my study group was—one of my study groups was the board of directors. And I bet if you asked them today what PAR is, they would be really hard pressed to tell you exactly what that is.

But it came at exactly the right time. We had to improvise. We had to innovate. We had to work around. And what I'm really amazed at is how ingenious everyone was to be able to incorporate all the things that needed to happen in order to do the study. And in fact, yesterday, I was asked to go to a meeting, and they wanted me to come in person. I'm like, oh, that is so weird to be in person, because I'm so used to doing everything online because of the fact that we have done things during COVID.

We did a lot of classes online. We waited. We listened. We decided we did not have to jump in feet-first. So, we studied all of that, and we really studied how other people were doing things before we jumped in. We do not have to be leaders at Marine Mills Folk School. We decided that.

But we did have to do a lot of community outreach, and we had to develop and make community online. And we got pretty good at it. So, we had to be much more intentional. We weren't able to use all of our fancy camera equipment that we wanted to use, but we did get really good at Zoom. And I think we learned so much looking back. But in the middle of it, we didn't know exactly what we're doing or if we're doing anything right. So, with that, I will stop.

PRESENTER: Thank you. Thank you for that very honest comment. OK, so Rachel?

RACHEL WENRICK: OK. Yeah, I appreciate, Andrea, what you said about merging the two questions, because I found myself thinking, does it go here, or does it go here? But really, bottom line, our work is about being responsive to our community, and the pandemic, of course, intensified that. And it put disparities under a really glaring and ugly light. But we had created a space already where we could talk about those disparities together, and we

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saw them playing out in our own group. And we could grieve and rage together and, eventually, express joy, and love, and gratitude for coming through it together.

We did expand our research goals to meet the needs of our community during the pandemic. That looked like things like volunteering to distribute food and supplies, providing project-sponsored gift cards for community members who participated in our community connection events. We developed a fundraising website for our community partners. But it also looked like things like porch visits and stoops sits and grocery drop-offs and continual phone calls and text messages and Zoom Hangouts when we actually didn't want to hang up because the FOMO was so real. And I can talk a little bit more when we get to the next question. Thank you.

PRESENTER: Thank you. Marisol?

MARISOL CLARK-IBANEZ: Hey, yeah, thank you. And thank you for sending these questions in advance to us, because even this morning, I was like, oh, there's another element. But we—as you've heard our program, we have a population that has already limited access to health care, and we had very strict shutdown, stay-at-home orders in California. So, we were a state that is just taking everything very seriously, which, for me, that's good, but for our program and our elders, not good.

And so, the impact of COVID was especially felt by them and, also, to be honest, our team members. Because our team members are from the community. Our team members have multiple responsibilities. So, we're not outside of the challenges and the exacerbation of not only what was going on with COVID, but of course, the Black Lives Matter. So much protest and violence, and you can talk about civic engagement.

So, our team and the elders were really impacted on a variety of levels. But one of the things that we had to flip around is doing phone. So, from March to June, we created a protocol to call into the participants, which, to be honest, it became—I think a couple of folks said it was just more about, what do you need? Or, they had a lot of questions. And so we had several people on the team to just keep checking in. But by June, the students didn't really—it's not like everything was solved. They just didn't have much more to check in about. We got resources, food, rent assistance—we had a lot of initiatives in our region. But they just wanted to know when they could come back to class. And it was like, we can't. We can't do it in-person.

And not to go on—I'll have more to share, I guess, in our breakout rooms—but the Wi-Fi for our elders who are living in all sorts of different conditions was pretty shaky. So, the Wi-Fi is that digital divide. The technology equipment, what little that they did have, was actually being used, we found, of course, for household members who had to switch to virtual work or, more importantly, to virtual school. When the elders in our program were taking care of or were looking out for the younger kids—they're not in school anymore, and they're at their grandmother's house.

And so, life just became pretty impactful. But on the other hand, our own grant was winding down, in one sense. And so, like others said, we just shifted to the phone calls

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and to following through on what was going on with the participants—a bit more of a triage.

And the final thing I'll add is that we were so grateful for so many of the collaborators who had a big infrastructure—whether it was the county, whether it was health services, or even a larger nearby senior center who could pivot, who had that infrastructure to pivot, and we could plug in our students into to their programs while our campus shut down all community work, just to be honest, from March. And they're barely, just, maybe, this last month, allowing for field work to resume. And even then, it's you had to go through big loops.

So, I wish I had more things to share about this question, but it was a severe impact. I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

PRESENTER: Thank you. Maren?

MAREN KING: OK. I can speak primarily from our relationship with the teenagers, and I wish that my colleague Leah Russell from the Peacemaking Center could speak about what else was going on in the neighborhood, because it was significant. For the teens, we were fortunate that all of our data collection had been completed by the time COVID started, and so we were well into the coding and analysis of the data. But it did have a significant impact in terms of how they were working as a team.

And I've talked to the team members about it and gotten their thoughts on it in preparation for this, and they were honest in saying it was really much harder to be productive, and how they engaged with the project and with each other online. And they were so used to working in small teams and writing on flip charts and Post-It notes and brainstorming. And even though those things were accessible online, and we could set them up, it's difficult when you're working from home, and there's lots of noise and background noise and other activities going on.

And for me, that was something that really brought back the fact that many of these teens are living in homes where it's multigenerational. And you were just talking about, Marisol, that the elders, while they're living, potentially, with elders, and they had to be very careful about where they're going and what they're doing. And it did have an effect on our schedule and what we were able to accomplish. It's taken longer to get things done.

And for them, sitting in one place makes it really hard, because we're used to getting up and walking around. I mentioned when I was talking to one of the teens the other day, I said—and you don't get your snacks, right? We were feeding them, essentially, a late afternoon meal. And she said, oh, it was OK. She said, I just got up and got my own during our meeting.

So, they definitely have some resilience and flexibility. But honestly, they were doing all of their schoolwork and classes online. They are in different schools, even though they live in different neighborhoods. And so, they were facing many of the challenges that some of us were, with teaching and being online, with meetings that seemed to expand exponentially, right? So many more meetings. And so, it was tough for them.

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One of the ways that we adapted was last summer, actually, for about eight weeks, we met outside at the Peacemaking Center. And what they decided to do was an action project related to improving the space outside of the Peacemaking Center to create a safe and welcoming space. And through their work, they had started to understand, well, what does that mean? Why is it important that, in our neighborhood, we have a place where people can come gather and feel safe being there? And they could talk about those characteristics.

And so that project is kind of a phased project, but they were able to go and select the plant material. They helped with the design. They've selected wood for a bench that's being made by a local artisan. And so that type of action project, that physical working outside, was really important to the teens who were able to participate. And I can talk further about it and in our breakout groups.

PRESENTER: Thank you. Thank you all for your examples. And so, we are going to go into breakout rooms. Something to think about is, I mean, all the AmeriCorps programs have also faced some of the things that you are mentioning. Maybe thinking about what would be next, in terms of how we go from a COVID time to a non-COVID time, and what are some of the lessons learned? You mentioned the outdoor space, making safe spaces. This is something we need to think about as we move into, maybe, face-to-face, maybe keeping some of the online work that we've all been doing.

So, I'll leave it at that, and Lisa, can you just put everyone in some groups? And then we'll come back, in about 15 minutes. Thank you.

CARLOS: Basically.

PRESENTER: Hey, Carlos. OK, so again, looking at the time, we have 10 minutes. So, what I'd like to do is just ask our—please, write in the chat box. I mean, again, everyone was probably talking about different things in your rooms. But I find it interesting in terms of where we've been and where we're headed, in terms of not just the research, but also our programs. How do we take some of our lessons learned? What do we keep in terms of engaging people moving forward? What are the things that we're happy to leave behind and lessons learned in that way?

But I'd like to hear, if we could start with Dawn, and what are some of the things from a take-away that you heard from the chat, from the breakout rooms?

DAWN JACQUELINE MURPHY: Well, one of the things that was mentioned is that COVID really changed the perspective from what we thought a project would be to really meeting the needs of the communities and the people that we were involved with. And so—and to some extent, what impact we thought we might have had changed dramatically and possibly even deepened the community connections and the ways that civic engagement was made possible through the structure and the co-learning that had happened prior to the shutdown.

PRESENTER: Thank you. Kirstin, anything you learned?

KIRSTIN: We just talked about—one of the things for Marine Mills Folk School and also in Marisol's community, we deal with older individuals. Our demographic is older. And just the

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sensitivity to how we learned very quickly how to do the outreach, how we had to listen to people, how much teaching we actually had to do to get people to use technology, and the sensitivity to knowing that those folks really want to connect with each other. It's just how you do that with all of the different kinds of things that they're up against with multigenerational home life and lack of communication devices and that sort of thing. We at Marine Mills really did a lot of reaching out to our community and to teach how to use the technology. That was probably the biggest thing that we had to do in order to get any of our research done, was to be able to teach them how to use that. And now, going forward, we'll probably always have an online format in one way or the other. So that's kind of exciting.

PRESENTER: Thank you. Rachel?

RACHEL WENRICK: Hi. I just wanted to say real quickly, my note in the chat was because we were getting—we were being sent back, and I wanted to hear what Jennifer was about to say in Spanish to the group. And I'm wondering if we could do that now really quickly.

PRESENTER: Sure.

RACHEL WENRICK: Do you think that's possible?

MUJER: [HABLANDO INGLÉS] *You know Jennifer who?*

[RISA]

PRESENTADOR: Dos mujeres de Puerto Rico.

MUJER: Oh.

HOMBRE: ¿Están ahí?

MUJER: [HABLANDO INGLÉS] *Yes, thank you, please.*

PRESENTADOR: Jennifer, si nos estás escuchando, puedes compartir tu experiencia como investigadora comunitaria, lo puedes decir en español.

JENNIFER: Buenas, buenas tardes. Soy Jennifer, una de las investigadoras, una de las líderes comunitarias del proyecto INARO. Mi experiencia como investigadora, pues, aparte de que estamos en el--

HOMBRE: Habla suave para que pueda traducir Andrea.

JENNIFER: Ah [RIENDO]. OK, OK.

ANDREA: No, está bien. Hágalo y después podemos hablar, ya.

JENNIFER: OK. Este, como parte del proceso, como ha pasado con todos los proyectos, verdad, nosotros llevábamos en el trabajo y al entrar pues la situación con el COVID, este, eso nos cambia totalmente la dinámica de trabajo, de cómo llegar a la comunidad. Así que, tuvimos que asumir también unas responsabilidades adicionales, que era, pues, orientar a la comunidad con relación al COVID, las medidas de protección que debían asumir y cuando ya había una persona diagnosticada con COVID, pues, darle, este, [HABLANDO INGLÉS] *support* a la familia.

El trabajo que nosotros hemos hecho, pues, es un trabajo que ha sido fuerte por los pasados casi tres años que hemos estado trabajando en la comunidad. Pero ha sido gratificante. Nos ha permitido que la gente se acerque más, que sean más participativos en los procesos de la comunidad.

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Adicional, pues, expandimos lo que eran los líderes comunitarios, ¿verdad?, porque hemos allegado. Ahora, pues, hay variedad, desde 20 años hasta 50 que estamos cubriendo ahora mismo los líderes comunitarios y que son parte del proyecto. Tenemos un reto bien grande encima porque aunque todos somos de la comunidad donde se está llevando a cabo el proyecto y la gente nos conoce hemos sido nacidos y criados en la comunidad.

Con el proyecto hemos asumido una responsabilidad mayor porque la gente ve en nosotros esa figura como si fuera de, que tuviéramos poder, que pudiéramos transformar. ¿Y qué es lo que nosotros queremos? Transformar la mentalidad de las personas, de no depender de que, nosotros usamos la palabra refortalecimiento, de que se dé un proceso de refortalecimiento y que no tengamos que depender 100% de, del gobierno, de lo que es el gobierno.

Así que, sí hemos tenido nuestro impacto, verdad, dentro de todo lo arduo que ha sido el trabajo, hay una gran satisfacción porque la gente ha apoyado el trabajo y ha compartido sus experiencias y vivencias y nos ha permitido, pues, un poco llegar a gente en la comunidad que no habíamos podido llegar, incorporar gente al trabajo comunitario que jamás habían participado en los procesos en la comunidad, así que--

ANDREA: OK.

JENNIFER: --que ha sido bien reconfortante.

ANDREA: OK. Déjame tratar de traducir, ¿OK? Muchas gracias, Jennifer.

JENNIFER: Gracias, Andrea.

ANDREA: OK, muchas gracias.

[HABLANDO INGLÉS] *There's a lot there, and this is why I love different languages, and it just does take more time but it allows for a richness, and so...*

And so, Jennifer was saying that they did need to pivot quite a bit with COVID. And part of that is just letting people understand what it meant to be safe in COVID time. But she said that one of the things that this allowed, also, is to people to become closer and to actually have different leaders in the community that would not have been leaders come out of the woodwork. So different age groups from 20 to 50, and it became just much more community-focused in terms of trying to survive this time.

And she said one of the things that they have also learned is that the community could depend on each other during this time. And that is something that she's learned. And she's from the community, so she's been able to see how people look at her a little differently and looking at the leaders a little differently in terms of being able to think about how they can change things in their own community.

So, I know I didn't say that perfectly, but that's what Jennifer had to say. Thank you, Jennifer.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE] Perfect.

PRESENTER: Thank you, Thank you. So, Marisol and Maren? Marisol?

MARISOL CLARK-IBANEZ: Hi. Well, I was in with Kirstin. We were in a group together. So, she summarized some of the issues that we talked about.



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One other thing is just about our staff, the staffing for the research project itself. And Connor had a good question for us. What would you keep—even though it was pretty intense and detrimental on many levels? And we had staff who—I think we all appreciated having the Zoom technology to keep going, but we also—if you remember, we have—there's massive unemployment.

And so not necessary for the folks who are funded by our project but their partners and family members, and so we had people, especially in San Diego County, who had to move away or who just couldn't keep their homes. And so that was another way that we could pivot. It's not necessarily about the delivery of the programming but, actually, one of the things that happened in our staff.

And there were some great ways of—I think we'll continue to meet on Zoom, because we can all do editing together at the same time of things. And so that was—I know, Andrea, you had asked if anything had worked well during COVID. Well, on the research team, I would say there was some good silver linings on that—and for the whole campus, to be honest, but--

PRESENTER: Thank you, and Maren?

MAREN KING: Yeah, I think a lot of what we talked about has been discussed. But one of the things that we did talk about was similarities and differences in the age groups. Dawn was working more with older adults. I was working with younger teenagers. And I would say that there were similarities in terms of the challenges that they were facing, but also thinking about, as we move forward, what's their capacity?

So, the teens are terrific. They were teaching me in terms of social media and how to do things. Whereas I think the older adults, as was being discussed, they need, maybe, a little bit more skill development in being online. And so being sensitive to what the different needs are.

And the teens actually—in the beginning, they had really bad internet. But through their school, eventually, they were able to get the internet they needed to do their schoolwork. And so, they had that capacity starting to be built into their world that maybe a lot of people didn't. So that whole broadband and access to internet, if we're going to continue this, will continue to be an issue.

PRESENTER: Well, thank you very much, and I know we have to come to a close. But some people have put their links up if you want to contact them. We also have a research grantee profile that will be live soon, and it will have the links to our researchers, as well as to some videos and websites and other material that they've created. Anyway, thank you all for joining, and I hope for those of you who are staying on for the second one, you don't have to get off. You just stay on, and we'll see you in about eight minutes. Thank you so much. Bye.

MARISOL CLARK-IBANEZ: Thank you.