Katy Hussey-Sloniker:

Welcome to the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Evidence Webinar series celebrating AmeriCorps' 30th anniversary through our evidence story. Today's webinar is putting civic engagement into context, exploring data trends, uses, and actionable insights. My name is Katy Hussey-Sloniker and I'm the learning officer for the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation. Next slide. Fostering civic engagement is central to AmeriCorps mission.

Today's webinar will help us understand how data-driven approaches on national service and volunteerism can give us broader context about civic engagement in America. Our presenters today are Dr. Mary Hyde, director of the Office of Research and Evaluation joined by staff from the office, Dr. Laura Hanson Schlachter, Shane Dermanjian, and Dr. Barry Goodstadt. We're also joined today by Analise Gammel, statewide engagement officer and Kathy Spangler director, both from Serve Virginia.

Next slide. Our learning objectives are twofold today, explore how AmeriCorps leverages data for policy and practice insight and highlight AmeriCorps data application and use by partners in the field. The session will be packed, so we're encouraging participants to place questions in the chat that will be compiled and answered in our panel Q&A discussion towards the end of the webinar. Please be sure to place your questions and comments you might have in the chat throughout the webinar. And now, I'd like to introduce Dr. Mary Hyde, director of the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation.

Mary Hyde:

Thank you, Katy. Hello and welcome to today's webinar on putting civic engagement into context. Today's webinar is the fifth in our evidence webinar series, which as Katy said, is celebrating AmeriCorps 30th anniversary and our evidence story. Our last webinar in the series will be this summer and we invite you to join us for that one as well. If we have not had the opportunity to meet before, I am Mary Hyde. And as Katy said, I'm the director of the Office of Research and Evaluation. I am a community psychologist by training and I've been with the agency for 11 years.

Next slide please. AmeriCorps mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and learning. Given this mission, our vision in the Office of Research and Evaluation is to systematically assess the extent to which AmeriCorps contributes to lasting and sustainable impact across four domains of intended influence.

As you can see by the visual on your screen, the agency seeks to influence national service participants or those serving in AmeriCorps programs, national service partners or the organizations that engage AmeriCorps programs and community volunteers to help advance their missions, the community served by AmeriCorps programs and ultimately civic engagement in America.

Civic engagement is at the heart of AmeriCorps mission. Through its national service programs and the volunteerism they catalyze in communities nationwide, AmeriCorps strives to improve community outcomes by engaging everyday citizens in the effort. Our office conducts research and evaluation on civic engagement among the general population as well as on the national service participants and programs that foster civic engagement.

More specifically, the Office of Research and Evaluation identifies national service and volunteering trends, conducts research and builds scholarship on civic engagement, measures national service impact, and promotes evidence-based models and program expansion. Building evidence for civic engagement is critical. Using this evidence and supporting a culture of learning to advance our mission and to ensure we are effectively tackling the nation's most pressing social issues is even more critical.

As such, AmeriCorps and the Office of Research and Evaluation strive to use the knowledge we gain to improve the member and volunteer experience, strengthen the organizational capacity of our partners,

support a community in their localized solutions, and contribute knowledge to the civic health of society. I invite you to check out the agency's learning agenda and our recent state of the evidence report to learn more about how we are building evidence for national service and civic engagement and what we currently know about the impacts of both.

Today, we will share evidence that engaging in community life can transform individual lives and a community's ability to thrive. The data and findings that will be shared today show that formal volunteering, including the formal volunteering opportunities that national service programs provide, as well as informal helping and participating in community life in general, are all essential components of our country's social and civic fabric.

Next Dr. Laura Hanson Schlachter will describe in more detail the various ways that we build evidence for AmeriCorps mission of fostering civic engagement.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for that context, Mary, and we're so glad to have you all with us today. Next slide, please. Recognizing as Mary said, that civic engagement is at the heart of our agency's mission and the work ORE, the Office of Research and Evaluation does to generate actionable insights across the four domains of our impact framework. I want to spend just a moment unpacking that term civic engagement a bit more. If you talk to a dozen people about what civic engagement means to them, you may very well hear a dozen slightly different answers.

In fact, I did just this when I was serving as a nonpartisan poll worker in my hometown of Madison Wisconsin on Tuesday night. One person told me, "Oh, I think of civic engagement as giving back the community." Another said, it's about a duty to serve the greater good. And these answers reflect the fact that the term civic engagement really has no standard definition.

And in fact, recent research by philanthropy for active civic engagement pace finds that about 5% of Americans are unfamiliar with this term in the first place. So given the civic engagement is central to our agency's raison d'etre, it's really important that we are intentional in articulating what it means in the context of our work and our mission. Next slide, please.

AmeriCorps uses the term civic engagement to describe the constellation of activities individuals engage in to make a difference in their communities and promote the common good. This definition recognizes that people imagine community and the common good in various ways, including and beyond geographic boundaries and formal institutions. For example, some people find community in their neighborhood, whereas others find it online. Some people serve in a 501c3 nonprofit, whereas others make a difference through informal acts of kindness like shoveling a neighbor's driveway, at least here in Wisconsin.

Volunteering through an organization is a prominent example of civic engagement, but it also includes activities like participating in a national service program, attending public meetings, and neighbors simply doing favors for each other. In other words, AmeriCorps has a pretty expansive definition for what counts as civic engagement and uses multiple strategies to build evidence about the variety of ways people make a difference in their communities and promote the common good. These all tie back to our vision and our mission in the Office of Research and Evaluation. Next slide, please.

For example, AmeriCorps builds our understanding of civic engagement in society by tracking civic engagement trends in America. Since 2002, we have partnered with the US Census Bureau to take the pulse of our nation's civic health through the most robust national survey on the topic. I serve as the technical lead for this data set, and you can find all of our current population survey, civic engagement and volunteering supplement or CEV data at data.americorps.gov.

In service to our mission to measure national service impact in the participant domain, we also examine how national service participants make a difference in their communities and promote the common good. At the end of service, for example, AmeriCorps invites each member to take what's called a member exit survey, which Shane will talk more about in a moment, and this includes questions about their civic engagement. Do they volunteer? Do they informally help their neighbors? And ORE has also conducted several evaluations that suggest participating in national service has long-term impacts on the civic engagement of members such as the NCCC longitudinal study.

Ore also funds scholarship on national service and civic engagement through our research grants program that touches on all four domains of our impact framework. In 2018, ORE funded a cohort of research grantees that use participatory research methods to engage communities in identifying priority challenges and developing actionable solutions from the ground up. And this cutting edge methodology is really built on three pillars, community, research and action. So by cultivating participatory research, AmeriCorps also helps foster this unique form of civic engagement through the research process itself.

Finally, ORE conducts robust evaluation research that demonstrates how AmeriCorps national service programs benefit society, communities, partners and the participants who serve both quantitatively and qualitatively. From a program standpoint, ORE evidence demonstrates that members and volunteers have a measurable impact. Our evidence also shows that members and volunteers themselves benefit from participating in AmeriCorps programs.

So taken together this body of work helps reinforce the value of national service, and you can read more about it in our state of the evidence report. With that, I'm delighted to begin our discussion of three specific research projects that paint a more holistic picture of civic engagement in America. After a few words from Shane on the MES, Barry will share an analysis of motivations to serve among AmeriCorps members. Then Shane will highlight another analysis based on MES data about civic engagement among AmeriCorps members as they're finishing their term of service.

And finally, we'll welcome Analise from Serve Virginia to learn about an index that allows Virginians to benchmark their community engagement at the local, state and national level. I was really honored to serve on the advisory research team for this effort, and I'm so glad that ORE has the opportunity to spotlight Analise and her colleague, Kathy today. So thank you so much. And with that I will pass it on to Shane.

Shane Dermanjian:

Great. Thank you, Laura. So my name is Shane Dermanjian, research analyst with ORE. And as Laura said, I'm here to talk about the member exit survey. Next slide please. So I'll just quickly give some background info before I hand it off to Barry, and then I'll come back in and talk about some of our thematic analyses. So again, as Laura said, there is both the impact on community serves that AmeriCorps has, but there's also the impact on the members themselves, right? It's that inside circle of that graphic that Mary had shown, right, where members enter service and then they leave very different than how they started. Next slide please.

So to that extent, we try to take a look at where members are at when they leave their service, how they feel about their service, how they feel about themselves, how they feel about just general attitudes about what they just did for the past however many months that they were serving. So the member exit survey meets these members when they leave, and that's either when they finish their service outright as they signed up for or if they leave early.

And the survey began in 2015 and it's about 108 total questions covering a wide variety of different topics with a variety of different question types. And we'll essentially just compile the data on fiscal

year, but it's rolling. Basically, whenever a member leaves service, they're provided the opportunity to take the member exit survey and they have up to 180 days to take it.

Most of our analysis will just be of those members who started service 18 and up. And at this moment, the member survey is not provided to AmeriCorps senior volunteers, though I will talk more about that in a little bit down the road. Next slide please. So looking at completion rates, we do have a fairly substantial completion rate for members regardless if they left service early or completed their service.

So down at the bottom of this table we're always in that 75 to 80% range across the board for all members in a given fiscal year that completed their service. The percentage of members who left early that also completed their survey did increase around 2020. Largely, we are guessing probably because of COVID and more people were leaving service than years prior.

But nonetheless, even in '21 and '22, the completion rate of the member exit survey has still been fairly high, consistently high across all programs. Members are taking this survey and giving us some really great insights into the overall member experience and how they feel about their service. Next slide please.

So also, additionally, I should say that the top level statistics and summary tables of the member exit survey at the national level and then at the programmatic levels are uploaded to the open data platform on the AmeriCorps website. Currently, we have 2016 through 2022 and 2023 will be available very soon.

Next slide please. So underpinning the MES is the AmeriCorps Member Theory of change. Next slide, please. So what AmeriCorps hopes to achieve is the development of members that feel empowered and prepared as they enter the workforce. They go to college for the first time, they go to graduate school. They do literally anything else after AmeriCorps, but we hope that they will be more civically engaged, that they'll want to strengthen their communities and that they'll be dedicated to improving the lives of others. So along that theory of change, we have these four different pathways that we measure this by. Next slide please.

And they are civic engagement, which is just participation in civic life. Just by metric of being an AmeriCorps member, you are civically engaged. It's not every person in America does this act of service just by even signing up and showing up. You are doing that extra level of being civically engaged, but it's also looking forward, right? Do you take that civic engagement and that aptitude and competence for civic action with you?

We have life and career skills and that is developing skills for the workplace and your personal skills. A lot of these skills are developed for the first time and many of our members because this is their first job or their first, quote-unquote, real world position that they may have after high school, after college. Some people find themselves in a variety of different environments for the first time. And for many people for the only time, some people wield a chainsaw when they go to work or serve with AmeriCorps and then they work at an office afterwards.

I've been there, that's me. I've done that. And then we have getting things done. And that is sort of that grit, that self-determination and self-confidence to be able to persevere through a variety of challenges. AmeriCorps service isn't the easiest thing in the world, but being able to persevere through that develops characteristics that can guide these members through whatever challenges may come their way down the road. Then we have bridging differences, which is being able to just work with folks different from yourself. It's being able to appreciate and respect those differences.

For many members, it's the first time that they're in contact with individuals different from themselves. So AmeriCorps provides such a unique experience for so many members where they are given the opportunity to determine who they want to be and what skills they want to develop and take with them. Next slide please.

And then just quickly, we have these other domains that take a look at how members feel about what they did during their service. Specifically, do you feel that you were connected to your program? Do you feel that you were connected more so to the general AmeriCorps banner? How would you describe your experience more or less? And then are you satisfied by what you did? Can you look back fondly? Can you look back and say that AmeriCorps service was a defining moment in your life?

We ask, "Why did you join? What brought you to signing up for AmeriCorps and spending those 1700 hours as an AmeriCorps member?" And then we have post-service plans, which is what do you plan to do with your education award that you earned after service? What do you plan to do as far as a job goes? Do you want to go in the private sector, the public sector, do another AmeriCorps service term, do a peace corps service term. You name it? And then do you feel that your training was adequate enough to prepare you to succeed in your role as an AmeriCorps member? Next slide, please. So I'm happy to hand it over to my colleague, Barry Goodstadt. And I'll see you in a bit.

Barry Goodstadt:

Thanks, Shane. What I'd like to do is tell you a little bit about what I call generational analysis of AmeriCorps members. And as part of that analysis, what we did was to analyze the motivations to join the same items that Shane just talked about. Next slide, please.

Now, people join AmeriCorps for a variety of reasons as you well know. Some of them include gaining general skills or competencies that would be helpful in school or in work to have a chance to work with people who share their ideals to fulfill your duty as a citizen. Again, we're getting back to what it means to be a citizen, to receive an educational award, to make friends and meet new people, to gain direct experience in a specific career or in a future profession, to help in solving community needs or particular challenges in the community, to do something while enrolled in school or to do something during a break in school. Respondents answered these questions on a five-point Likert scale, which is they very much agree with these items as reasons for joining. Agreed, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, disagreed or very much disagreed. Next slide please.

Now, the definition of generations is something that has been developed over the past number of years, specifically focusing on a generation definition that was developed by Pew research, and specifically they did it by birth year. So anyone who was born in 1945 or earlier is known as the silent generation. The Baby Boomers began from 46 to 1964. Gen X'ers were from 1965 to 1980. Gen Y, or Millennials were born in 1981 to 1996. Gen Z'ers are 1997 or later. Actually, I don't know what the next... Maybe it's gen alpha that comes next. I'm not sure. That's something we'll soon see. Next slide please.

Now, the data set we used to carry at this generational analysis was a portion of the data Shane discussed a couple minutes ago. And basically, we had close to 300,000 members in the total data set. This was a covered period from calendar year 2018 through calendar year 2022. And in this 300,000 members we took a subset that actually completed the member exit survey, and that's how we got the data on how different folks had different motivations to join.

Those who did not complete the MES were excluded from the analysis because they didn't answer the questions. So we had no way to really ascribe to them why they joined America in the first place. This smaller file was 236,000 members who ended their service between the end of calendar year 2018 and the end of calendar year 2022. Next slide, please.

Now, what we found was that there's a changing mix of generations serving in AmeriCorps. If you look back over the years, you find that there's very few silent generation members. No surprise there. A small number of Baby Boomers, a number of Gen X'ers, lots of Gen Y'ers, and plenty of Gen Z'ers. Now, what this means is that the silent generation, Baby Boomers and Gen X'ers represent less than 10% of overall

AmeriCorps members. And beginning in 2019, Gen Z members reflected the dominant share of folks who were joining AmeriCorps. So that's an interesting thing. That means it's changed over the last several years.

In 2019, that wasn't the case. But beginning or rather prior to 2018, it was not the case. It was not Gen Z'ers, but rather it was Gen Y'ers. So we've seen a shift and that shift will probably make a major difference in how recruiting ought to take place and how we attract new members to AmeriCorps. Next slide, please.

So when we looked at the data on specific questions, which I laid out for you a little earlier. Lots of folks are interested in gaining skills and sharing ideals. Duty as a citizen is still pretty prominent. If you look particularly at Gen Z'ers, they seem a little less concerned with duty as a citizen, and they are equally concerned with direct experience. They're worried about solving community needs. So that's clearly something that everybody shares in common. They are interested in making friends and are concerned about trying to do things while they're enrolled in the school. So some of these things may be changing over time. That's one of the things we're going to try to do is to watch that. Next slide, please.

Basically, Gen Y and Gen Z now constitute the bulk of members with 90% who joined AmeriCorps over the last few years, but a deeper look for their reasons. Joining between 2018 and 2022 suggests that there have been some changes in that period of time. Millennials and Gen Z'ers are most concerned with solving community problems and obtaining a direct experience in the workplace, and they are less concerned, I think, with issues of trying to serve during a break in school. And that may be a difference that we're going to have to watch over time because these things may change. Next slide, please.

Generational analysis revealed that within non-senior AmeriCorps, again, the member exit survey is not administered to AmeriCorps seniors, but only to ASN, NCCC and VISTA members. Only 10% of the members belong to the silent Baby Boomer or Gen X. Prior to 2019, the majority of AmeriCorps members were Millennials. But since then, the majority of members now come from generation Z.

Examining the motivations for joining AmeriCorps across generations reveals that some questions were based based on the member exit survey were less relevant for members of the silent generation, Baby Boomers or Gen X'ers. Obviously, they're not so concerned about what they do during school because they've very well past school and have demonstrated their capabilities in the workplace. Among Millennials and Gen Z'ers, there's a declining interest in making friends enrolling in school or serving in AmeriCorps during a break in school or work, but they still are concerned with serving the community and addressing community problems. Next slide.

The implication of this is that there's a need to update motives, their query in the MES for members of the silent generation, Baby Boomers and Gen X'ers. That suggests to us that some changes are needed. If we want to apply this kind of methodology to AmeriCorps seniors, we're going to have to change the questions. And actually we are in the middle of doing that right now in a project we're calling a pre-post-participant survey where we are updating the MES and where we are using existing MES questions, keeping them, but adding new questions to cover some other issues that we think need to be evolved, especially when it comes to dealing with seniors.

Several items in the MES such as joining AmeriCorps to fill a break in school or work whereas, or as a source of new friends apparently are less relevant for Gen Z'ers than in the past. So we may adjust those questions as well. Given that motives for joining AmeriCorps are changing among recent members who are Gen Z'ers, broad review of recruiting messages being used and advertising and promotional materials may well be in order, and we're hoping to pass that information on to the folks that do recruiting, both in various states and in our centralized recruiting operation.

And to the extent that AmeriCorps motivation to serve messages or assess an ongoing agency survey efforts, such efforts need to be coordinated with the work that we're doing on MES and tracking it over time. And we are going to be following that in the upcoming pre, post-participant survey. We're going to keep watching changes and make sure we identify those changes and the implications that they will have for recruiting and retention. Next slide. Shane, I'll turn it back to you.

Shane Dermanjian:

Thank you, Barry. All right, I'm back. So for this section, I'd like to talk through some of our thematic analyses that we completed related to those four pathways that I had mentioned earlier. Next slide please. So first up is the civic engagement pathway. So in this report, we took a look at members who finished service between 2017 and 2021 and we saw that members both think about their civic engagement in the present as far as saying whether or not they voted in the last presidential election.

If they think about social political issues facing the nation and their local community, how often they did it was often. And then we took a look at the future where it's do they plan to be involved in their community? Do they feel that AmeriCorps service made them more likely to donate their time or money or to volunteer if they felt that they were prepared to develop a plan to help change their community?

Or even just feeling personally obligated to help their community? And over three quarters of all of our members, closer to mid 80% of all the members surveyed between this time said yes to all of those questions that they are thinking of their civic engagement in the present. They feel civically engaged, and then they feel that they will continue to stay civically engaged. Next slide please.

Specifically when looking at voting in the last presidential election, which I should point out on this graph, the presidential elections are in 2017 and 2021, but that's just because of the fiscal year, November falling in the fiscal year rather than the calendar year. Nonetheless, when taking a look at the general population's voting habits for people aged 18 to 29 data coming from Tufts University, we can see that AmeriCorps members that are age 18 to 29 vote more in presidential elections than the general population.

And that those figures slide down over time just because members may not have been old enough in that given year. So it's every four years it spikes back up because members would've been of age to have voted. Next slide please. And then continuing just through the pathways, we took a look at the Bridging Differences pathway, which is again assessing the cultural competency of our members. And pretty much almost every single member here said that they respected the differences of others. They valued and enjoyed interacting with people different from themselves, and they felt confident about their interactions.

And moreover, we took a look at if members said that they served on a team or not, and those members that said that they served on a team did report higher levels of cultural competency than did members who said that they did not serve on a team as often. So sort of thinking back the idea of contact hypothesis where it's just simply being in the presence of folks that are in minority groups does change your perception and does bridge those differences and build those bridges. Next slide please.

For getting things done, this is the self-confidence and grit and being able to persevere through challenges. Majority of our members feel that they can handle whatever comes their way and stick to their goals and accomplish things. So overall, the challenges of AmeriCorps are not too difficult for our members, and they come out of it kind of feeling more capable and more confident in their abilities. Next slide please.

And then the life and career skills pathway, it did show that members both developed useful skills to use on the job in their own lives interpersonally, and they felt that AmeriCorps allowed them to make a lasting impact where they served and that they felt part of the community.

And moreover, AmeriCorps was seen by majority of the members over 80% that it was a defining moment in their personal, professional, and educational lives. So with that in mind, many AmeriCorps members have figured out where they would like to go in their lives after AmeriCorps. They had these experiences that they would not have otherwise had and they knew where they wanted to go from that. I can speak truth to that. I did two AmeriCorps terms. It got me to grad school.

It got me figuring out what I wanted to do, whereas just from undergrad, I didn't really have any experience in the world. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I just knew that I wanted to help. And AmeriCorps is, it's such a direct line between somebody wanting to make a difference and not knowing how to and then giving that person the tools and the opportunities to do so.

Next slide please. So just to conclude some things about the AmeriCorps member exit survey. Next slide please. We have many, many responses to this survey going back to 2015. Over 350,000 completed responses. The number is probably close to 400,000 now and we tend disaggregate this data by age, by race, ethnicity, gender. We can take a look at how different programs respond. We do do that already. We can take a look over time. We can cut it up in a lot of different ways.

And it does get to the bottom of how members feel necessarily about what they just did with their lives. It's hard to conceptualize for a member, but this survey helps tease out those impacts, how they feel and their sentiments and so on. And then the MES, what we see in that can be used to influence and improve the member's service experience. It's a direct line to boots on the ground members and thinking about how they feel and what they would wish things to be differently. Next slide please.

And then looking to the future, as Barry pointed out, we have a pre, post participant survey coming, which will replace the member exit survey because right now, as it's in the name, it is only an exit survey. We only get the post, but if we were to start asking questions at the pre, we can actually measure the impact of AmeriCorps on the members. We can track over the time, over the lifespan of the AmeriCorps service, how members change their responses, how they feel they've developed and so on, and can point to AmeriCorps service to do so. And most importantly, this will finally incorporate AmeriCorps senior volunteers into the mix. They'll be able to take the survey as well and see how they are impacted by this. Next slide, please.

For more information, feel free to send this email. Any questions, I'll be happy to respond. Throw it to the next slide and give it to Analise. Thanks.

Analise Gammel:

Thanks, Shane. I always love any experience or any opportunity to dive into the member X survey. I think it leads really well into talking about the Virginia Community Engagement Index, which is also really looking to get the pulse of civic engagement and better understand why folks are engaged and how they're benefiting from that engagement as well as making that community impact.

Hi, everyone. My name is Analise Gammel. I'm the statewide engagement officer at Serve Virginia, which is the State Service Commission [inaudible 00:34:57] Glad to be here today talking about the Virginia Community Engagement Index, which is a project that we introduced last spring and have been using over the past year to mobilize more Virginians and leverage the impact of service and volunteerism.

It might just be mine, but do you mind? Next slide. Thank you. Serve Virginia is the State Service Commission for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Like I mentioned, we help connect folks across our state

to AmeriCorps funding and service opportunities, as well as promoting opportunities for all Virginians to volunteer and get involved in making a greater impact together. You can check out more about Serve, Virginia at our website, servevirginia.org. Next slide, please.

As a part of our work, we partner with stakeholders across the state to develop a state service plan every three years. That includes strategies for ways we can leverage volunteerism and strengthen the state's infrastructure through service supporting national and community service opportunities for all Virginians. You can learn more about our state service plan on servevirginia.org.

In the most recent development process for our state service plan that we put into effect in 2022, we heard from stakeholders about a gap that they identified in understanding or demonstrating how the impact of their local volunteer programs created a larger impact and needing to cultivate more capacity to better leverage service and volunteerism as a strategy that we could leverage across the state.

There was a need to know more about how Virginians were engaging in their communities and better understanding the process from what they cared about to how they got involved. Go ahead and move to the next slide. As we worked with our network, we identified lots of great sources of data, better understanding community needs, service and volunteerism. A key source that we used for our foundational understanding of what civic engagement means in Virginia was our state's data from the CPS Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement or the CEV that Laura mentioned earlier.

The AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation has made the data about volunteerism and other civic behaviors available at the state and metropolitan service area level, and I highly recommend folks check that out as a great baseline for what service and volunteerism looks like in their state or area.

In addition to great sources of national data like the CEB, we looked at state level reports like the needs that we were hearing through our two-on-one referral line and the state of the nonprofit sector in Virginia. We even drilled down further into what was available at the local level, including things like community health needs assessments and local measurement, local measures of civic participation like voting levels.

While these were all really great resources, we identified the opportunity for something that connected some of these dots, a tool that would take a deeper look at engagement across volunteering and civic engagement and help connect what people cared about with how they may participate or show up in service in their communities. We realized that if we knew this, we could also use this data to better mobilize existing volunteers and find ways to get new Virginians involved or Virginians new to volunteering involved in their communities. Next slide please.

An early realization when we were looking at all the available data and determining where there was greatest opportunity was that we needed it to encompass more than just organizations that were serving volunteers. There are lots of great program evaluations and survey measures that are looking at kind of how folks are directly engaging in service. I think the MES is a great one to point to. When we get folks engaged, we can better understand their experience through service, but we really felt there was a larger cross-sector need.

So wanting to better understand how a service experience connected to the need at a community level or a state level and the source of where volunteers are coming from and how they're manifesting that and their purpose. So to meet this cross-sector need, we decided that we needed to build a cross-sector team. We gathered over 30 different organizations representing a wide variety of different sectors to design a survey that could look at what engagement means to Virginians and think through what we want to know and can't learn from existing data about civic or community engagement as a baseline in our state.

We also built an advisory team with deep expertise in measuring civic and community engagement with representatives from AmeriCorps, ORE, and Points of Light to help guide how we build this in a way that would leverage what we know already about measuring engagement and can start prodding into some areas that haven't been studied quite as much. Through this cross-sector team, we came together to build the survey that would establish a benchmark, gather data to help measure the impact of volunteerism and service, and then also really gather and build a set of insights findings that could help us better understand and inform how we continue to leverage and mobilize community engagement for a stronger Virginia. Next slide.

The survey was fielded January 30th through March 8th of 2023. We partnered with our core team over 30 organizations to do this. So we ended up receiving over 6,300 total participants in the survey and we're able to weigh the survey results accurately to reflect Virginia's geographic and demographic diversity.

We fielded the survey in partnership with the core team, so we heard both from respondents that we purchased through a research panel, but then also about half of our respondents came directly through organizations that had helped us design the survey itself. Because of the way that we did the sampling for the survey, we do know that our respondent population more heavily skews to an engaged Virginians, so folks that are more likely to be in contact or in communication with a non-profit.

But this really helped us better understand more about the on-the-ground experience of a volunteer in Virginia or somebody who might be likely to volunteer. And so we were able to really use this as a target population to understand that perspective. From the survey, we got a really good sense of what these engaged Virginians often care about, how and why they act and insights that can help us mobilize more folks in the future. Next slide.

The first section of the index was designed to really help us better understand what engaged Virginians care about and specifically how they might rank community needs both for their local community and for the state. We asked the respondents to share what they consider their top three priorities to be, both for where they live and for the state overall. These findings complement the great data that we found on a local state and national level about the prevalence or maybe the priority of needs, but this shows us more about the perception of needs and how people make hard decisions when we ask them to rank things.

For example, you'll see here civil and human rights and democracy scored higher when folks were considering needs on a statewide level than some of the more tangible, practical needs that they might see every day in their community. Things like housing, public safety, economic security in the environment. The state also helps us better understand what issues volunteers may prioritize in their activities and how we can take this into consideration for engaging more folks in the work or creating new solutions with public buy-in based off of this information.

So this is an aside, but just for organizations on the call to consider of how are we framing our needs or priorities and how can we connect to what folks might already care about, was a really important understanding for us to draw out of this part of the survey. Next slide.

Breach priority area. We also drilled down into more specific solutions or areas to address. Asking folks what they found was most important. After this question, folks were also asked what strategies they thought would be most effective overwhelmingly across the majority of the areas to address people, said community, education and outreach and policy change were the two most effective strategies in addressing these issues.

Knowing what needs folks care about and how they believe change will happen. We wanted to know if folks were actually investing their time and talent into the areas that they care about. So next slide.

Luckily we found that folks are engaged in volunteering. So from this EB data, we knew to expect that at least 27% of Virginians are reporting that they're formally volunteering. Because of how we fielded the survey through our partner network, we did expect that we were going to find a higher rate of volunteerism than is likely maybe for the average Virginian. This is where it was really helpful to be able to use national data to speak to the frequency of volunteering as it might happen for an average Virginian, and then compare that to our dataset to better understand the perspective of a more engaged Virginian. And then also I think to understand that the truth of exactly how many Virginians are engaged is likely in between these two numbers.

And so better understanding where we can start to draw conclusions and assumptions based off of the different sources of data that we're able to put in conversation with each other. We thought that was a really powerful experience when we were looking at the findings from the data. We also found that in general when people were asked if they volunteer or if they are volunteers, they assume a more formal definition of service than what we might use when we talk about service.

Laura talked about the definition of civic engagement and how widely it can vary. We found the same applies to volunteerism, right? So when we asked folks if they volunteer, a lot of folks said yes right off the bat. But we also found that there was a pretty considerable group of folks that said no. But then when we asked them, are you sure? And this was a strategy that we learned from the CEB, that they actually are involved specifically that they are volunteering and contributing their time and talent and treasure into different areas that they care about, but it wasn't something that they had initially identified as volunteering.

We also saw that among engaged volunteers, volunteering rates have stayed relatively consistent. Folks are providing regular and consistent support to their communities. That's not to say that there hasn't been a drop in volunteerism, but we do find that within folks that are already volunteering, their presence and contributions stay relatively consistent or increase, especially when we look at this subset of engaged veterans.

Next slide. And even more frequently than volunteerism, we find that folks are engaging in the civic infrastructure of their community through the way that they're acting through personal relationships. The majority of these respondents regularly show up to help neighbors, friends, family, and others in ways like helping each other with child care, talking about community issues, sharing resources, etc.

We don't do as much shoveling of snow down here in Virginia, but we do find folks helping to bring in the mail, helping to watch each other's kids or pets. And a lot of these ways were really important to folks in that they were able to stay connected to their community. Understanding how those already or likely to be engaged or already acting helps our partners understand how to leverage existing actions and better learn how folks might be learning through these activities. Organizations that already use volunteers might think about ways to ask their volunteers to promote service opportunities while they're out helping their neighbors or their friends or their family. Other stakeholders might consider how they talk about service and volunteerism and really casting that wide net to really get folks considering their engagement in a new way. Next slide.

When we looked deeper into folks' engagement, so we know that they're engaging and that they're engaging consistently, we also unsurprisingly found that they are engaging in the same areas that they identify as their community priorities. We know that there's not always a clean one-to-one comparison with where folks volunteer and what they care about, but we did find that there's a lot of alignment and that we know that it's important to consider where folks are already showing up.

So somebody might have a passion for the environment or disaster and crisis response, but in other times of the year show up consistently as a food pantry volunteer, right? And so thinking about how

some of these issue areas intersect and finding ways to help leverage community priorities in one area to where folks are already investing their time. Next slide.

Now thinking back to when we asked people what they think would be the most effective strategies for change, they said policymaking was the number one or two strategy that would be most likely to create an impact in an identified community issue. While we see that engaged Virginians are likely to engage in civic action, it is most frequently these low-touch strategies like voting.

Even engaged Virginians are less likely to go to a meeting or contact elected officials, even though they think policymaking is how we're going to create change in areas that they care about. I know this side can be a little bit hard to read, but the top two actions are voting and donating to non-political organizations. We then see less participation in activities like sharing materials or content, political donations, and even less participation in active strategies like marches or rallies.

We don't personally have a stance about if people should be regularly marching or [inaudible 00:47:11] for areas that they care about, but we are interested in seeing how people align their actions and what they think is going to be most effective. If policy action is the desired strategy to address a priority, what opportunities exist to leverage service and volunteerism as a way to engage people in creating the change that they want to see? Next slide.

We found that a core reason for this disconnect may be because there's a lack of trust in government overall. We asked specifically about who they trust to do what is right and found that government ranked pretty low. In another question I don't have pictured here, people also shared that they don't believe there would be a lot of impact or effect of them taking an issue before state or local government.

This lack of belief in self-efficacy combined with low levels of trust, identify an area for nonprofits and volunteer-serving organizations to consider, especially with a predominant belief that policymaking is important. Next slide.

However, there's an opportunity here overall. The reason why I say a lot of this is not to just say nobody believes the government can create a solution, but it's really to identify an opportunity for those of us that have trusted relationships with volunteers and those that are already engaged and finding ways to help leverage that as an opportunity to share information and share, maybe educate about community issues and seeing the impact of that as folks are then engaging in civic action in their communities.

I say this is important for nonprofits to consider because nonprofits are actually pretty trusted sources of information. As we think about how policy change can happen, there's often an important role for nonprofits and others that may not normally see themselves as a policy stakeholder and thinking about how they can impact volunteers as individuals outside of traditional lobbying or advocacy.

Other studies have looked more specifically at the nonprofit role in advocacy, but what we were most focused on here was looking at how trust organizations can leverage their role, maybe directly engaging in policy or civic action, but also more broadly to think about how communication strategies with volunteers, for example, can be leveraged to educate an overall audience.

Next slide. So what does all this boil down to? A lot of these are really interesting findings and we've taken them in a variety of different directions, really implementing them at the community level. But a core part of the index press was really gathering these insights around mobilization. I've highlighted a couple of interesting takeaways and how we've been able to use those findings with our partners, but we also specifically wanted to use the survey to better understand not just if and where folks volunteer, but what got them there and how they continue to stay engaged. So next slide.

When we ask people why they volunteered, we found that a motivating reason was the strongest connection to if they'd actually volunteered or not, and that relationship is much stronger than the barriers. Barriers are to whether or not somebody will or won't volunteer. While barriers don't come close to rising to this level, just meanwhile, barriers do not come close to rising to this level of statistical reliability.

This just means that barriers are not maybe the most important reason that impacts whether or not somebody is going to choose to volunteer or not. This correlation is simply that barriers do exist and that they're important to acknowledge and address as we can. Focusing on motivators just helps align with our overall guiding principle of embracing a strengths-based approach. We have strong knowledge around motivations and how they help to influence behavior, and that is strong knowledge of how those behaviors might create an overall influence of behavior.

I say that to say we found that there was a statistical reason to focus on why folks get into volunteering and the motivations for their volunteerism, and that barriers are something that we can work with folks after they've been activated. Next slide. So what keeps people volunteering? We found that themes of feeling fulfilled, useful, and believing in the work are all important to what keeps folks engaged in service.

We are partnering with organizations and communities to think about ways that this data can inform everything from volunteer recruitment and invitations to serve to volunteer recognition and incentives like campaigns where we recognize volunteers for their service, and then also specifically connecting all of us to community impact. If you're interested in more about what we found regarding how folks get into volunteering and what keeps them going and how barriers fit in, you visit our website for more of the deep dive on insights from mobilization.

Oh, next slide. As we dig into the insights, we're taking an action focus to make sure that we translate the information into strategic opportunities. For example, we used a segment analysis to look closer at how folks are engaging in ways we might be able to specifically leverage their engagement instead of just focusing on more volunteer hours overall. You'll see here that one way we're considering leveraging volunteerism is thinking about each type of volunteer and how we can help them feel fulfilled and empower them to create deeper outcomes through their service.

Another key finding that we're making sure to share is that the only barrier that did have an influence on whether or not somebody was likely to have volunteered or not was if they'd been invited. Thinking about how organizations and by extension are volunteers, are inviting others to serve as just an important consideration as we look towards goals for increasing and improving service and volunteerism to make a greater impact in our states.

Next slide. And then finally, we are bringing this out into places and spaces where it can make a difference from informing our training and technical assistance broadly as a state service commission to specifically advancing local initiatives, a partnership with our networks. We're using the VCEI as a tool across what we do. We continue to use the foundation of a cross-sector core team, a network of partners and unique insights to take the VCEI from being a great interesting data set to really creating approaches that can put insights into action.

We focus on leveraging this as a tool to apply across specific focus areas instead of focusing on service and volunteerism as its own topic. By cross-cutting focus areas, we can leverage more resources for the common goal than if we focused on volunteerism within each focus area as their own silos. Next slide.

And then specifically, we've asked folks that we partner with to consider different ways that they might engage with the work overall. We know that these aren't mutually exclusive, and we want to help folks consider how they might be able to use these insights on different levels to achieve the overall goal of

more Virginians, creating a positive impact. On a specific level, we're using tools like a new public dashboard for folks to be able to dig into the VCEI data themselves and see how findings play out for their region or specific audiences.

We're also widely engaging partners to look at this data alongside other sources of information to paint a more vibrant picture of engagement and see opportunities for leveraging service as an asset and as a solution. Looking at how volunteers are being used alongside source of information like the AmeriCorps CEV studies and Points of Light can start. Great conversations about how to increase service and volunteerism in communities. Next slide.

We introduced this tool about a year ago and have worked consistently since then to bring this to a larger audience. We've learned a lot about what works, and we are excited to share. Specifically about the VCEI, you can find more information about this data on our website, servevirginia.org. I think the links have been coming through in the chat. We can also attest to the importance and value of engaging stakeholders widely and broadly in these undertakings. Nothing about this project could have happened without the partnership of others.

From beginning the process with our cross-sector core team to sharing the VCEI with groups of folks like employers and government leaders, we found that it's important to connect service and volunteerism beyond those with a dedicated interest in engaging volunteers. Without getting multiple perspectives in every stage of the process, we would've missed nuances like discovering the difference between calling something civic engagement versus community engagement, and how individuals, organizations, and institutions are thinking about engaging their members or their audiences in service.

There are also lots of great resources that this has sparked an interest in thinking about service strategically for your organization. Community, region or state. State service commissions can be a great place to start if you're looking for state resources, but there's a lot of resources available nationally as well. I've plugged the CEV a couple of times, but if you don't hear me say it yet, check out the data.americorps.gov. There's a wealth of information, whether it's the CEV or the MES. That's available for folks to use for your program or for your state. Kind of perception on service.

Points of Light also offers findings and insights around civic and service behaviors alongside their civic circle framework to think about engagement in new ways. And this is also just a hot topic nationally, right? So projects like the Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement is digging into a lot of what mobilizes people to act and how we can leverage on that action and interest.

We're continuing to learn alongside everyone in the sector. You can stay up to date with us and the VCEI on serve.virginia.org and at Serve Virginia across the social channels. You can also join us for the Virtual Virginia Volunteerism Summit, May 15th and 16th to see some of those live and in action. Thanks so much to the office, the AmeriCorps Office on Research and Evaluation for their support and for inviting us here today to share about the VCEI. And thank you to you all for joining us in this journey. I'm excited to pass it off to, Kathy Spangler, the director of Serve Virginia, to share a reflection on the value of this work for the sector, Kathy brings over 40 years of experience with the public and nonprofit sectors leading a wide variety of state and national initiatives that have used evidence-based interventions and data to demonstrate impact and efficacy. So take it away, Kathy.

Kathy Spangler:

Thanks so much, Analise. Great work. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm so excited to join you today and really do want to thank the AmeriCorps Office and Research and Evaluation for this opportunity. Today is a date that I have been waiting for my entire career. I'm officially eligible for full security retirement

benefits, so my reflection may have some generational feel to it. My parents' generation saw their social security retirement date as the finish line.

As Baby Boomers, we just don't see it as an endpoint. Even if the government keeps pushing back the age eligibility date. I'm a bit surprised that today isn't really such a big deal because I don't feel quite finished with my work contributions as good things are happening. So as I look forward to the day when I and my fellow boomers will pass the baton to our colleagues that are waiting for us to move along into our next horizon, it is to offer this simple tone.

Let's get focused on the long game to prove our impact and strengthen our influence. I've worked in the human and community services field at the local, state, national, and international level for 45 years, and we keep redefining process points over and over just in time for the next priority agenda or funding source. I suggest it's beyond time to commit the same energy to proving our impact and influence.

At Serve Virginia, and likely all of you, we just don't have the resources to develop targeted approaches for everything we do. So we're committed to strategies that reinforce our unifying purpose and value. For example, our VCEI project, we used a collective naming convention with community engagement. We utilized insights from a national study that suggested that the term civic health was not well understood and created as we've heard this afternoon, and at least there are perceived barriers.

We wanted the broadest reach and activation possible and community engagement is what I call a simply elegant term because it allows focus or scale and can unify or galvanize diverse and sometimes disparate interests. We spend so much time and money on what we name things when we have such a universal purpose and value proposition. We also have a unique and dynamic capacity to articulate and visualize our benefits and calls to action through stories and images that are relevant in individualized contexts.

Singularly, you may see the VCEI as a data set that provides insights around what motivates individuals to serve or volunteer and what issues they care about. And it does. Strategically, however, we are intentionally building shared common purpose as an actionable pathway to apply the VCEI data for collective impact. As unique organizations across our sector, we like to say that we have common purpose, but we often keep our brand identity front and center when we try to advance the overall agenda.

Invariably it struggles to succeed. We should use data to design an agenda for sharing so that we can advance what we say is our common purpose. It is hard work to give voice to a group of stakeholders, but I can attest through unique experiences in every organizations I've worked, facilitating shared common purpose across multiple organizations who will each have to leave their proverbial brand identity at the door to accomplish something bigger is exactly where the magic happens.

The benefits are always unexpected, and it would be my hope that our sector can come together in this way intentionally for the long game to prove our impact and strengthen our influence. Here's why I know it can work. Our VCEI project was the design to provide data insights that would be actionable, not just to provide information. And because the data about why people engage in community is so compelling.

When reviewed, stakeholders who didn't know they were our partners in this common purpose have independently identified service and volunteerism is worth investing in as a strategy to improve, enhance, and address community needs. The data is compelling and now we are incorporating it into all of our grant-making to strengthen the probability for broadly supported and successful AmeriCorps programs working in concert with other initiatives.

What we are demonstrating is that when we are collective in our purpose and value, we can engage with community organizations, state and national organizations to design, develop, and contextualize

data, to develop frameworks that allow us to advance a shared common purpose and to evolve to the most important work that always seems to allude our sector. Proof pointing, impact and influence.

Process will always matter, but we can't get stuck there. Our sector does extraordinary work and has found the support to deliver incredible results for members and communities over time, and we have the greatest stories, but they are not enough to advance a shared common purpose that is worthy of comprehensive investment. What we haven't invested enough time in is building a data-driven performance framework to track impact and influence.

This is an area that I believe state commissions, national organizations and AmeriCorps should collaborate on aggressively so that as we come through the 30th anniversary, we know what proof points of impact and influence we plan to articulate. Three, five, 10 years from now. I'm so grateful to AmeriCorps and Points of Light for their partnership on the VCEI project. We used ARP funds and hope it is a huge value to the field. As I look at just my team at Serve Virginia with five brilliant AmeriCorps alums out of eight staff, I believe in possibilities around a future where we are operating with a shared common purpose and collective impact at our core.

We can do so much more on the data front to learn and leverage from each other to specifically build a shared common purpose for long-term impact and influence. As I reflect on my experience in this sector, I see an abundance of energy to lead in the moment and we need that. However, I believe there is a unique capacity in our sector as we pass proverbial batons to new generational leaders. I suggest we focus on what matters most in leadership, and that is to shoot for the ages.

Much like Harris Wofford, Ted Kennedy, and Orrin Hatch believed we could. To do that, we need to first rigorously affirm what our collective and simply elegant purpose and value proposition is and will always be. Second, intensely focus on doing the work to build a shared common purpose at all levels and through all our work, and finally lean into what has eluded us for so long, investing in the proof points that will quantify our impact and influence. Thank you. Now I'd like to invite Dr. Laura Schlachter back to lead our Q&A session.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Thank you so much for those remarks, Kathy. We are so grateful to have you here and I'm going to invite all of our panelists to come back on screen here and turn your cameras on so we can have some discussion. Kathy, I love that you picked up on this kind of idea of weaving in a generational perspective and building this shared common purpose because that really is the name of the game these days. And I'm curious for you and Analise, can you tell us a bit more about concretely how is Serve Virginia using the VCEI specifically with your AmeriCorps programs and members? You mentioned, for example, you've begun to incorporate that data into grant-making?

Kathy Spangler:

With our current planning grant cohort, and we have three, we are employing VCEI in terms of local convenings to share the data and to build community networks that would support this new opportunity for an operational grant. In our current formula round, which is currently in process of selection, it was part of the application process and we actually required that grantees, applicants would incorporate the VCEI into their thought process, both in the planning and the operational phase, that what they would use this data, look at it at a statewide and a regional level, and to begin to take that data and apply it to their quality program design.

They're relatable partnerships in community, and to really see that arc of how an informed quality program can look at how to recruit better, how to retain better, how to reach and support community

needs better. So we think that it independently has value to any organization across the Commonwealth that wants to dig in and benefit from it, but we specifically believe that having invested these resources that it has to permeate through our AmeriCorps portfolio such that it resonates and is a model for how to build strength-based programs in community that are supported and advance on meeting community needs. Analise?

Analise Gammel:

Yeah, I would just add that we're using it specifically when we think about member recruitment and retention as we start to think about what that invitation to serve looks like. So not only inviting folks to come alongside our AmeriCorps programs and the general quest for service, but also thinking really specifically how we can help train our programs on really successful evidence-based, data driven ways to help recruit a strong core that is motivated to serve. And so that's kind of the other way that we're implementing the data.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

I love that. And there are a couple threads I want to pull there. One, I'm going to invite Barry to come in and also Mary in a moment. So thinking about the way that you're leveraging VCEI data to inform recruitment efforts. Barry, I'm also curious if you have any reflections on what these differences and motivations to serve mean for recruitment and retention at the general level. And then Mary, thinking about given that incorporation of VCEI data into grant-making, any reflections on incorporating data at multiple decision points within an organization, if you have any reflections on that, but first Barry. Oh, I think you're on mute.

Barry Goodstadt:

Okay, there we go. I think it seems to me that the generational differences are... There are some differences across generations. I think there's some common core items that seem to be consistent no matter how old people are when they decide to serve. Obviously, helping people in a community to address challenges in a community is common. I think that's across the board. Some the things related to school or getting experience for working may not be so important for someone who's a little older. Although I take that... Maybe I shouldn't say that just now.

I'm working on a project right now for AmeriCorps seniors, and in fact, the purpose of the AmeriCorps seniors project is workforce development because some seniors have decided, "I had a career and now I'm looking back and saying maybe there's some things I could have done differently and I'd like to do it again. Take another shot." And we are seeing some people who want to do that, and I think we have to reflect on that but just because someone's a little older doesn't mean that they've given up and they're not going to work anymore and not going to try to work anymore.

Maybe not engage, maybe they still want to engage in the community. And that's a lot of what AmeriCorps seniors does anyways, engage with the community. So I think there are some common elements that cut across the board. It doesn't matter how old you are.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

So really thinking about how can we embed these evidence-based insights throughout the organization, throughout the member life cycle, for example, really building that culture of learning. Mary, I'm just wondering, as you listen to Serve Virginia talk, do you have any more general reflections from where you sit at AmeriCorps?

Mary Hyde:

I mean, I think there's some parallel examples of what we're doing here at the national level that is happening in Virginia, and I'm sure other states as well, to take directly the example that Kathy gave of integrating the VCEI data and in their formula grant application. We have for several years been asking applicants in the competitive grant process to share their evidence and to integrate data so that as a federal agency, we are able to prioritize investment in data-based, evidence-based program designs. And so I think that's the parallel example at the national level. And I think as we've all been saying, all of these efforts to build data is to use it in the service of insights and action.

It's not simply to have data for the sake of data. None of us are affiliated with an academic institution whose careers depend on building knowledge for the sake of knowledge. We're here to build knowledge for the sake of action. And so I think that that is a goal as everyone has been saying. I guess I'd give one last example of how we hope to generate a culture of learning, a culture of data-driven decisions at all sort of levels. And that is we have spent six years studying our NCCC initiative, and one of those studies was specifically to take a look at the reasons that people joined, but the reasons they stay and reasons why they leave early.

So that is hopefully giving us insight into what that might look like for other programs. And I think that not only did we use the design of those studies, but we're also I think learning similar things with the new public health and AmeriCorps initiative and the national evaluation of that. So we're using these strategies of generating evidence and generating data both in the short term and the long term to do, as Kathy was saying, develop these proof points to develop points of inflection where we might be seeing challenges.

So let's use that data to either pivot or to stay strong on a course that seems to be working, but it's all in the service of innovating and improving and not just simply to have data for the sake of data and ultimately to demonstrate our impact. To Kathy's point, we all are here to try and demonstrate the value of service, volunteering, community engagement so that people understand its value and its contribution to addressing community needs.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Absolutely. Yeah. Thank you so much for that reflection. I saw a lot of nodding. I just want to give the opportunity if any other panelists want to jump in on that. Okay. Another point I was really struck by is Shane, as you were just describing the enormity of the MES data set and the really exciting opportunity to build that out into an enterprise survey, thinking about actionable insights contained in that data. I'm really curious, I noticed you said that there are some members who take the MES because they are completing their term of service and others who exit early. I'm wondering how do those responses differ between those two groups and do you think that has any insights for thinking about retention of members?

Shane Dermanjian:

Certainly. So for members that leave early, and they can leave for a variety of reasons, some are deemed compelling, some are deemed non-compelling, right? So the majority of members that leave early are for non-compelling reasons. It's not a good fit. They found something else to do, whatever. But of those members of which there's 60% taking the survey still, even though they left early, the responses are still generally fairly pretty positive. Maybe 10 to 15 percentage point difference here and there versus those who completed service.

But it's still over half feeling positively about many metrics. Something coming to my mind specifically is how even though members leave early something, I think it's in the mid 60% of them still would recommend service anyway. So I think it's almost universal that everybody agrees this is a good idea, this is a good use of time. It's worthwhile, but there's a million factors play for every single life that sometimes serve as... It's a big commitment. It's not for everybody, but I think the idea is for everybody that AmeriCorps is a good... And I'm sorry, what was the second half of your question?

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

You answered it.

Shane Dermanjian:

All right. Great.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Thank you very much. Yep, you're five steps ahead of me. And the other thing I'm just really struck by sort of thinking about, okay, so today we've talked about what are some of the motivations that get people in the door, whether that's for volunteerism, whether that's for national service, and then what are some of the trends we see in the impacts of that service over their life course. I'm thinking also Kathy and Analise, you also talked about the long game and thinking about the longer term vision of building this common purpose.

I'm wondering if just... This is a question for the whole panel, if you have any reflections on this more expansive idea of civic engagement that includes things like volunteerism, but also as you noted, that term doesn't necessarily always make sense to people. And thinking about over the life course the real variety of ways that people are engaged, how do you see that in your day-to-day work?

Analise Gammel:

Yeah. I think that's a great question. And my brain immediately starts going to thinking about all the folks that the heart of the state service commission work is all around AmeriCorps and getting more folks engaged as service members and more folks engaged as program grantees. And so a lot of, I think my thinking kind of stems out from there because I think that you instantly start walking down that path of to have a great high quality AmeriCorps program, you need to have a great high quality AmeriCorps planning grantee.

And then to do the planning grant, you need to have somebody who's interested in using volunteers in really strategic meaningful ways. And so to have a great volunteer program, just you start walking down that path. Most often, I'm talking to folks that see a community need and want to meet it in some way. And so I think that as we start thinking really creatively about how service and volunteerism can be utilized, inevitably there's also the question of who are the people that we're engaging? And so I think that there's this really rich conversation about what do folks care about, what's motivating them into action?

And then I think that there's an endless sea of ways that we can receive that engagement of if somebody is willing to step up and say, "I want to join or I want to be involved," then I think that there's so many different ways that exist and that don't exist yet, but can exist that we can really engage folks. And I think that really just cultivating that interest and that passion for engagement is really what helps our sector from a foundational level be strong and be thriving because people know that they can get

engaged, that they have that opportunity and also that we're offering opportunities that meet people where they are.

I know something that comes along with a lot of this work thinking about how folks are engaging is also that how folks have the capacity to engage. And so I think the more we start digging into what opportunities folks have and are realistically able to activate on is a really great question as well. When we start thinking about cultivating that sense of spirit for civic engagement within folks.

Kathy Spangler:

Three years in with the state service commission and my observation and over experience is that the 20th century view is it's always been an either or. There's service and volunteerism. Instead of looking at how do we understand what motivates, and so the MDS, all this data is so helpful for us to do both and, right? If we can integrate this into a more simply elegant kind of value proposition for individuals to see pathways to contribute to community life, then we have lots of options for them to consider. We've been bifurcating ourselves.

It's a binary choice in how we administer our work. We've got to become the 21st century sort of both and give people pathways to contribute to community life. I think that's the transformation that data can help us evolve to.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Yeah. Thank you for that. And I see, Barry, do you want to jump in on that?

Barry Goodstadt:

One of the things I did a couple years-

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

[inaudible 01:18:42]

Barry Goodstadt:

One of the things I did a couple years ago was to do something very simple just look at LinkedIn. Lots of people have access to LinkedIn and you do a search on LinkedIn and search for AmeriCorps. And the listing of people that come out when you do that is phenomenal. Where these people go after they serve AmeriCorps, I don't know how to quantify it. It's huge. People are very well-positioned for all kinds of contributions to society, be it nonprofit, be it government, be it private sector.

They're incredible people. And maybe what we're really doing is selecting out incredible people who go out and do what they should do. And maybe AmeriCorps helps them shape that a little bit and figure out where they're going and finally give them some pathways to think about. But at the end of the day, after all these years, the 30 years of AmeriCorps, a lot of these people are doing all kinds of phenomenal things.

I'm amazed every time I look at it. I don't know how to quantify it. It requires AI to do what I think, but I don't know how to do it. But it's really something else. And I think that's a key thing we want to keep in mind. All these people are going to be somebody someday, somebody really important in our society.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Yeah. Thank you. And with that, I'm going to hand it off to Mary for the last word.

Mary Hyde:

I was just going to build a bit on Kathy's point. One of the things that strikes me about what's been done with the VCEI there is you've engaged all of these other sectors. And so you've created, you've identified in the state of Virginia, those who are engaged in all kinds of ways, not bifurcated by service or volunteering or whatever the term you want to use. And so I see the power and potential in that of, one, increasing awareness of formal national service to these pockets and sectors in a community, in a state that may or may not have been familiar with it before, but it also gives access in eyes into the needs so that service can tailor what they're doing in communities.

So it's this reciprocity, the power of reciprocity and a further integration and sort of blurring those boundaries, as you're saying, sort of making this more of a holistic collective effort where it's not either or, it's all of it. And so how do we strengthen all of the spokes of that wheel as a result? And that's what I think the power of your approach is. And I know other states have done things like this or other smaller entities have done things like that with that framework, but I think that's the real potential and power of what's happening there in Virginia.

Laura Hanson Schlachter:

Yeah. Thank you all again so much for joining us today. I'm going to hand it off to Katy and our webinar support team to wrap us up.

Katy Hussey-Sloniker:

Thanks, Laura and panelists. We're now at the close of our webinar. We'd like to thank each of our presenters for making the time to share their work with you today. We hope we hit our mark on our webinar objectives and that you walk away from the session with a greater understanding of AmeriCorps and our partner's work in civic engagement applied research. Our final webinar in the 30th anniversary series will be in June. Please connect back to our evidence webinar page on americorps.gov to find out more about the topic, the date, and the panelists' discussion.

I'd like to extend a thank you to our guardians of honor colleagues for their technical support and coordination. This webinar recording and support materials will be posted on our americorps.gov website under evidence and impact webinars within the coming weeks. Please feel free to share with your colleagues and networks once the recording and support materials are available.

We will also be sending out a post webinar survey, so please let us know your thoughts on this webinar and any ideas for future webinars. We hope you all have a wonderful rest of the day. And thank you very much for attending.