Introduction: Community Conversations
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Background: CNCS

- The Mission of CNCS to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.
- CNCS has helped to engage millions of citizens in meeting community and national challenges through service and volunteer
- CNCS Programs:
  - AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and the Volunteer Generation Fund,
Background: Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE)

• We engage in knowledge building, sharing in use that support the agency’s mission

• Three major components:
  – Evaluate Agency Programs (i.e., AmeriCorps, etc.)
  – Build Evaluation Capacity (i.e., for staff and grantees)
  – Research the Country’s Civic Infrastructure
Focus: Researching Civic Infrastructure

- Volunteering and Civic Life in America (VCLA)
  https://www.nationalservice.gov/vcla

Volunteering and Civic Life in America

Let's build on what we did this year:

62.6 million volunteers
7.8 billion hours
$184 billion - est. value

Find out where your city or state ranked!

National, State, City, and Demographic Information
Example of City VCLA data

District of Columbia

Trends and Highlights Overview

Overall, in the District of Columbia in 2015:

- 31.1% of residents volunteer, ranking them 14th among the 50 states and Washington, DC.
- 173,526 volunteers
- 38.5 volunteer hours per capita
- 20.55 million hours of service
- $502 million of service contributed
- 52.4% of residents donate $25 or more to charity

Civic Life in America (2013 data):

- 87.5% frequently eat dinner with other members of the household
- 85.7% frequently talk with neighbors
- 48.6% of residents participate in groups and/or organizations
- 64.3% of residents engage in "informal volunteering" (for example, doing favors for neighbors)
VCLA Next Steps

• National Academies of Sciences Report* made several recommendations
  – One included researching community engagement and social capital at a subnational/community level
• To address this recommendation ORE launched
  – Research Grant Competition to Universities
  – Community Conversations Pilot

Community Conversations

• Focuses on engaging residents, leaders, universities, non-profits, and national service to learn more about:

1) civic engagement and volunteering in a local context;
2) the methods and types of questions that are most appropriate for tapping into civic engagement and volunteering with different demographic groups and local contexts
3) how to incorporate a participatory research approach into this work

• Four pilot communities, 2016/2017: San Marcos, CA Richmond VA; Flint, MI; and Washington DC.
What does research mean to you?
Three legs to the stool

“Community” Participation + Research + Action

Ideally, the “community” is actively and authentically engaged in all of the research and action steps.

Information about an issue, problem, is “systematically” gathered.

“Community” takes action based on research findings.

Collaboration/Community Engagement, Teamwork, Skill and Knowledge Building
Iterative and Continuous
### Community Engagement within the Research Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional Research</th>
<th>PR/CBPR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whose interest and choices?</strong></td>
<td>Outsiders; academics, “experts”, on their time schedule</td>
<td>Insiders; community members, “local experts”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What is the purpose?</strong></td>
<td>To add to existing knowledge; papers and articles</td>
<td>For communities to gain knowledge and use information to plan and take action to improve conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community action?</strong></td>
<td>Not expected; an indirect consequence</td>
<td>An essential piece</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What is learned?</strong></td>
<td>• Researchers learn about the community or an issue and gain research skills</td>
<td>Community members learn skills, gain knowledge, and use knowledge for community change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community residents do not gain any direct skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnerships formed?</strong></td>
<td>Not expected; usually to gain access</td>
<td>An essential piece</td>
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Ideas for WAVE

• Opportunity to dig deeper on issues from the survey
  
• For example, learn about facilitators/barriers to volunteering in different villages
  – Teams can represent a few villages; facilitator is an experienced researcher
  – Concentrate on a few villages of interest (strong vs. weak or emerging)

• From information gathered, team members can make presentations, reach out to other villages, implement any action from research
Benefits

- Knowledge building
- Skill building
- Collaboration/Relationship building (internal, external)
- Learn respect for different knowledge/perspectives
- Increase in civic engagement
- Short term work for team members
Possible Challenges

• A time commitment
• Resources
• Increased involvement from members and other stakeholders
• Others?
Questions and Next Steps?
Thank you!

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