eJournal of Public Affairs

From the Editors

Andrew Lokie
Missouri State University

Darrell Hamlin
Fort Hays State University

Our work to publish this special *eJournal of Public Affairs* issue during the Independence Day season brought focus on our responsibilities as citizens. Separately, we may each have a private or professional identity – a merchant, a medical or legal practitioner, sales or management, for example – but we also each find ourselves functioning as citizens of a particular place. That locality is only a place until we accept responsibility for engaging in the work to preserve and improve it, and then it becomes a true community for us. Our shared civic responsibility, however, increasingly seems to be weighed down and complicated by the shared frustrations of public life, particularly at the state or national level where partisan politics dominates even our best intentions. Yet, the local level remains remarkably available to individuals who desire to solve the problems they have in common as a community. This is an issue about just such effort, and we are proud to elevate it.

Colleges and universities, like individuals, also work to balance their professional roles – scholarship, education, training -- with the role the institution plays in the civic and communal life of their bricks-and-mortars place in the world. This has often been simply referred to as part of the "town-gown" relationship. To explore this special relationship with a focus on local solutions to local problems, we are fortunate that Greg Burris committed his expertise, experience, and time as Guest Editor for this issue. After retiring from Missouri State University, Greg accepted the work and responsibility of City Manager in Springfield, where the university is located. In this capacity he implemented an approach that reflected well MSU's mission for public affairs. After ten years in city management, Greg "retired" again, this time into his current role as President & CEO, United Way of the Ozarks. It is impossible to overstate how much the final product of this issue has benefitted from his across-the-board experience.

Greg Burris embodies the energy and wisdom of public-spirited individuals who take on the responsibility of community life with purpose, expressing with his own commitments the issue's theme of *community ownership*. As Guest Editor, Greg recruited articles from individuals involved in projects that offer examples of impact and success within a community. We hope this special issue can amplify our call to the privilege of opportunity and responsibility as citizens.

Andrew P. Lokie, Jr.
Editor, eJournal of Public Affairs

Darrell A. Hamlin
Managing Editor, eJournal of Public Affairs

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Introductory Essay

Greg Burris
United Way of the Ozarks

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this essay should be addressed to Greg Burris, President and CEO, United Way of the Ozarks, 320 N. Jefferson Avenue, Springfield, MO 65806. Email: gburris@uwozarks.org

This special issue of the *eJournal of Public Affairs* demonstrates why we should care about "community ownership," or an internalized feeling of responsibility for the success of one's community and those living in it. Community "owners" accept responsibility for learning about and improving their community. They talk and listen differently about their community, they see problems, and they want to be part of the solution. Community ownership works to prompt an entire community—not just nonprofit agents—to engage with common purpose.

Communities that build this sense of responsibility within their citizenry will more successfully address social challenges—which cannot be accomplished by simply issuing a memo. (I know because I tried that.) Communities also cannot expect nonprofit actors to solve local problems on their own; complex issues can only be addressed by deploying talented, creative citizens who understand those issues and who want to be part of the solution. As Rev. Mark Struckhoff once said, "Ignoring these problems in our community is like saying, 'There's a hole in *your* end of the boat.'" We all determine whether the boat sinks or stays afloat.

However, most citizens do not know where to start or which direction to face before they take the first step. I believe there are two essential components for building community ownership: (a) informing/educating the citizenry about their community's issues and challenges, and (b) providing access to civic engagement opportunities. As readers engage with the ideas and research in this special issue of the *eJournal*, I encourage them to consider the following questions:

- Is some degree of community ownership necessary to trigger involvement in civic engagement opportunities? Does one need to care before one acts?

- Are people who feel greater ownership of their community more likely to get involved in their community's civic volunteer opportunities (e.g., strategic planning process)? Does getting involved in civic volunteer opportunities trigger greater community ownership within the participants? Can both be true?

- Does one's higher level of empathy trigger greater ownership and thus increase their likelihood of civic engagement?

- Does age matter when building community ownership? Can community ownership be enhanced in youth, high school and college students, adults, and older adults? Is it more effective when multiple generations are involved together?

- Do we have a moral obligation to help the most vulnerable among us? Can it be true that volunteers benefit more than the organizations for which they volunteer?

Amy Blansit's article, "Income Predicts Federal Poverty Guideline, but Food Security Is the Mediator," reports on a study of Reaching Independence through Support and Education (based in a Springfield, Missouri, neighborhood) which revealed significant improvements in participants' self-sufficiency as a result of program participation, along with other benefits.

Highlighting another programmatic success, Bradley Fisher and Gloria Galanes's research note, "Give 5 Gives Back: Assessment of a New Civic Matchmaking Program for Older Adults," describes a Springfield initiative designed to teach older adults—mostly retired or retiring baby boomers—about social challenges within their community by introducing them to hundreds of volunteer opportunities focusing on these social issues. Give 5 graduates have

indicated consistently that the program increased their "sense of responsibility to help improve the community."

Keeping with a Springfield focus, Christina Ryder provides insight into community-based participatory research (CBPR), through which a university works with community stakeholders to conduct research and develop strategies for addressing problems specific to the area. Ryder describes a project involving Missouri State University's Department of Sociology and Anthropology, which gathered data on residents' perceptions of poverty in their midst. She also provides a list of best practices for universities pursuing core elements of their mission through CBPR.

Similarly, in "The Importance of Missouri State University to Springfield," Clif Smart, president of Missouri State, argues that a university with a statewide mission in public affairs should naturally involve itself in building community ownership.

Phyllis Segal's essay, "Intergenerational National Service By, With, and For All Ages," covers significant territory regarding intergenerational activities and policies. She offers specific recommendations for expanding intentional intergenerational service as a pathway toward increasing community ownership.

Brian Fogle's review of *Unbound: How Inequity Constricts Our Economy and What We Can Do About It*, by Heather Boushey, provides a perspective on inequity that is both timely and necessary. The ideas expressed by Boushey, who now serves on President Biden's Council of Economic Advisers, add considerable value to the issues that Fogle explores.

Tyrone Bledsoe, Sr.'s essay, "We Invest in What We Care About," describes the Student African American Brotherhood (also known as Brother-to-Brother), a program working to instill community ownership in young men of color as they progress through high school and college.

In "For the Love of Cities—2020 and Beyond," Peter Kageyama simultaneously departs from and reinforces his generally positive outlook on cities and the emotional connections people can have within their communities and takes a sobering look back at the challenges of the previous year. Cora Scott's article, "Coming Together While Standing Apart: Encouraging Community Ownership During the Isolating Days of the Pandemic," outlines how one city responded to COVID-19. Scott describes a variety of civic engagement and communication initiatives launched at a time when civic engagement was never more difficult. In "Engaging the Community in Strategic Visioning," Mike Mowrey shows how community strategic planning can increase civic engagement and build community ownership. And Hrishue Mahalaha's "Time to Throw Away the Old Economic Development Playbook" provides specific guidance to communities interested in looking differently at economic development strategies, namely in a manner that increases community ownership.

Finally, Amy Neugebauer's article, "Children Are Undiscovered Community Assets," explores one strategy for building community ownership in children. The Kids for Kids Fund is an innovative program that helps children learn about challenges in their community in order to work toward investing in one of them.

I hope the contributions to this special issue will encourage readers to tilt their head and look at their own communities a bit differently—to not stay in their lane. What could be accomplished by a variety of citizens who have raised their hands and said, "This is my community, and I want to help make it better"? The difference between citizens saying, "This is

a community" and "This is *my* community" is enormous—and suggests that at the local level, committed citizens who say the latter can do almost anything. I also hope readers will see this issue as a springboard from which to further consider the role that building community ownership can have in all of our communities. I remain convinced this is a strategy that successful communities will use (or continue to use) to make progress on a variety of critical community challenges.

Author

Greg Burris served as the City Manager for Springfield from September 15, 2008 – the day the Great Recession started – through June 30, 2018. In that capacity, he had the privilege to lead the most functionally diverse organization in southwest Missouri, with direct responsibility for 2,300 employees, a $366-million annual budget, and over $1.3 billion in assets.

Greg was the recipient of the 2008 O. Franklin Kenworthy Award for Outstanding Leadership, Leadership Springfield's highest honor, Missouri State University's 2012 Alumni Award for Excellence in Public Affairs, and was inducted into the Missouri State University "Wall of Fame" class of 2018.

After an eight-day retirement, Greg joined United Way of the Ozarks. He currently serves as President & CEO of that organization, and also serves as Executive Director of the Give 5 Program, a first-of-its-kind program that matches retired and retiring Baby Boomers with key volunteer opportunities in their community.

Greg married up, was born on Halloween, is a recovering computer programmer, pole vaulted for a high school that had neither a pole nor a pit, and enjoys French Silk chocolate pie (typically, alone in a dark corner).

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Income Predicts Federal Poverty Guideline, but Food Security Is the Mediator

Amy Blansit
Missouri State University

Author Note

Amy C. Blansit, Department of Kinesiology, Missouri State University.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Amy C. Blansit, Senior Instructor, Department of Kinesiology, Missouri State University, McDonald Arena 206, 901 S. National Avenue, Springfield, MO 65897. Phone: (417) 836-5209. Email: AmyBlansit@MissouriState.edu

Abstract

The research discussed in this article sought to study the Reaching Independence through Support and Education (RISE) pilot program and stability factors of low socioeconomic groups. Self-sufficiency programs like RISE focus on households moving from crisis to empowerment, no longer relying on subsidies; however, gaining employment and securing housing alone do not create socioeconomic stability. It was therefore determined that the RISE program should be evaluated to determine its effectiveness at ending dependency. Thirty-four individuals, representing 30.6% of RISE participants, were included in this evaluation study, which used logistic regression techniques to explore 16 items on the RISE Self-Sufficiency Assessment (RSSA). The study results showed that RISE participants derived significant economic benefits from the program and indicated that food security was the greatest mediator of increases in the federal poverty guideline (FPG). The slope of the overall RSSA revealed that for every one increase in the total RSSA score, there were 24.01 increases in %FPG. Participants who had increased food security saw significant increases in %FPG of 25.25. These findings suggest that participants' perceptions of improved food security is the best mediator of increased federal poverty guidelines.

Keywords: self-sufficiency, poverty, food insecurity

In April 2016, the Community Foundation of the Ozarks commissioned a 5-year pilot program, the Northwest Project, to address poverty in Springfield, Missouri. The project initiated an asset-building program called Reaching Independence through Support and Education (RISE), which was designed to encourage self-sufficiency through the development of human and social capital. Eligible participants in the RISE program had at least one dependent and fell below the 200% federal poverty guideline (%FPG, described in the following section). In addition, participants had to have already achieved the following: stable housing, access to transportation, and employability with a high school education or equivalent. The RISE Self-Sufficiency Assessment (RSSA) was used by RISE staff at baseline and every 6 months to determine if participants were experiencing improvements in self-sufficiency while in the RISE program. The RSSA was also developed to determine which RSSA items could predict upward mobility in socioeconomic status. Results revealed significant improvements in overall self-sufficiency and for items relating to employment, education, income, quality childcare, legal resolution (criminal), and food security. Furthermore, the RSSA was used to determine if these improvements impacted participants' %FPG. Though the terms *poverty*, *food security*, and *self-sufficiency* are often used, they are less frequently defined by those who employ them. Typically, these terms are conceptualized as a continuum; however, for this research and the work with the RISE program, quantifiable measures were defined.

Percent Federal Poverty Guideline

The percent federal poverty guideline was created by the Social Security Administration in 1963 to determine an individual's or household's eligibility for federal assistance programs. The qualifications for assistance were developed based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's assessed average dollar value of food. Further assessment of family dynamics found that for a family of three or more, the total cost of food was about one third of their net income. Today, the %FPG is frequently used to determine access to most federal programs. Since the standard for determining the federal poverty threshold does not consider inflated costs of housing, utilities, or medical care, most federal programs have inclusion criteria of household income below the 185% FPG but some as high as 200% FPG (Dinan, 2009). To better understand income levels based on 2020 income, a family of three would have the following income and %FPG: $21,720/100%; $29,322/185%; $43,440/200% (ASPE, 2020).

Self-Sufficiency

The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program grew out of the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, which intended to improve self-sufficiency through education, skill development, case management, and referrals to resources (Silva et al., 2011). Although a national standard does not exist, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires public housing authorities to administer family self-sufficiency assessments to predict household self-sufficiency. HUD suggests that all FSS tools should include questions that address the following: family demographics, education, employment, finances and assets, and barriers or needs. Some FSS tools include a 5-point Likert scale, while others use a 10-point scale. Though most include 15–18 questions, others include 100 questions (HUD, 2017). Organizations that use FSS tools typically help households increase wages by building social and human capital. Human capital is improved through education and skill development, with a focus on higher paying jobs. Social capital is developed by expanding networks and access to resources. Therefore, poverty prevention programs must address issues beyond budgeting since many low-income jobs are volatile and developing stability below 200% FPG has proven difficult. As a result, for over 30

years, state and federal assistance programs have been using between 125% and 200% of a poverty guideline as an eligibility requirement (Dinan, 2009; Fisher 1992).

RISE Program

Once participants are accepted into the program, personal development managers interview participants to collect data and assist in setting short- and long-term goals. Participants agree to a minimum of 24 months of personalized coaching, weekly small-group classes, and job training, skill development, or education tailored to their abilities and goals. These agreements require participants to reach objectives toward attaining their goals by specific dates, with the overall objective of becoming financially self-sufficient within 2 to 5 years of program entry. Personal development managers provide referrals to counseling and resources. Weekly classes cover a variety of topics that include developing self-efficacy, asset development and credit counseling, and homebuyer education. Referral resources include childcare, job openings, legal resolution, and food resources, to name a few. Completion of 1 year of the RISE program includes three college credits of coursework toward achieving an education goal. RISE participants also earn incentive dollars and receive free bus passes as well as free tutoring. The RISE program and the support provided by the personal development managers, class facilitators, and community resources are similar to those found in most comprehensive self-sufficiency programs. The primary difference in the RISE program is the weekly classes around specific topics that help improve self-efficacy while helping participants create and reach goals with weekly accountability and support of the facilitators and their peers.

Food Insecurity

The USDA monitors food security annually. Most households (85%–88.5%) report being food secure—that is, having dependable access and funds to provide enough food for a healthy lifestyle. However, within the last 7 years, between 10.5% and 14.9% of households have reported periods of food insecurity as a result of lack of access or finances during the year (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020; Feeding America, 2015). Several socioeconomic factors are correlated with food insecurity, including unemployment and underemployment, poverty rates, and educational attainment (Furness et al., 2004; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013). Other circumstances leading to food insecurity include stagnant wages in combination with increased housing and food costs (Gundersen, 2013; Holben & American Dietetic Association, 2010.) As poverty rates and stagnant wages in the United States remain unchanged, food insecurity continues to be a national concern. From 2011 through 2013, approximately 49 million households (14.9%) reported they were not able to meet basic food needs at some point within the year. During this same period, rates of food insecurity were significantly higher in the state of Missouri (Barker, 2015; Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020; Feeding America, 2015). Prior to COVID-19, food security had decreased slightly between 2013 and 2019. According to the USDA, 10.5% of the general U.S. population reported food insecurity at some point in 2019, representing a modest decrease from 11.1% of the population reporting food insecurity in 2018. However, Coleman-Jensen et al. (2019) found that nearly 30% of low-income households (i.e., those at or below 185% FPG) reported food insecurity. Although poverty is related to food insecurity, it is important to note that individuals at or below federal poverty guidelines can be food secure (Gundersen, 2013). To understand this, food security must be clearly defined.

Food security is influenced by more than access to food. The United States does not have famine; thus, the limiting factor of access is more than scarcity. Access can be limited by

physical factors, like food deserts, or financial factors, such as increasing food costs and stagnant wages. Food security is also subjective. One household may not have the quality of food it desires for nutritional health and consider itself insecure, while another household may actually have no quantity of food and experiences physical hunger. True food security comprises the ability to physically possess nutrients and have the economic means to access food with nutritional value which promotes health (McDonald, 2010; Webb et al., 2006). According to the Rome Declaration on World Food Security (1996), the following definition, developed at the World Food Summit of 1996, encompasses these constructs: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritional food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (p. 1405S). This definition is most widely accepted because it considers availability, access, and utilization (Webb et al., 2006).

Food insecurity is often linked to unemployment and increased food costs. During the 2007 Great Recession, food costs increased, as did unemployment—and food cost increases have continued since the recession ended. By 2012, many households had recovered; however, food insecurity rates remained elevated, leading researchers to suggest that food inflation was the cause of unchanged rates of food insecurity. This conclusion was supported by research conducted with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, who reported that the greatest cause of food insecurity was high food prices (Nord et al., 2014). According to Coleman-Jensen et al. (2020), households with a median income spend an average of 24% more for food than same-size households that rate themselves as food insecure and that include government assistance in their total food cost.

Methods

The aim of this study was to determine if the RISE program was effective at moving individuals out of poverty according to changes in household income and self-reported self-sufficiency measures. The Northwest Project began on April 1, 2016, and continues presently to provide services to participants. The results of this study represent data collected between April 1, 2016, and December 31, 2019. The program provides the following services to participants: weekly group education classes; one-on-one personal development meetings; and community connections that provide financial literacy and banking resources, education and job skills training, and legal resolution.

Participants

Twenty-nine females and five males (n = 34) participated in this study. Initial mean annual household income was $22,358, with an average %FPG of 82.92%. In the follow-up measurement, the mean annual household income was $30,357, with an average %FPG of 116.65%.

Data Collection

The Northwest Project is an ongoing study that was originally a grant-funded program, as described in the introduction. The program collects information related to demographics and socioeconomic characteristics of participants and their families. Data for this study were collected by project staff every 6 months from 2016 to 2019. Data were gathered using verbal questionnaires and entered into a HIPAA-protected online database; paper copies were also used to compare for accuracy. Intake focused on a broad array of outcomes, including employment

status, financial health, physical health, emotional wellbeing, skill development, academic achievement, social relationships, and community engagement.

Measures

The Northwest Project staff created the RISE Self-Sufficiency Assessment measurement tool to assist in case management, self-assessment, and goal setting by participants, and to gauge a household's potential to become self-reliant after enrollment in the RISE program. To develop the methodology for this measurement tool, HUD recommendations for self-sufficiency matrices were compared against national standards for measurements of self-sufficiency. For example, in the RSSA, a rating of 5 for a household was only achieved if the family was currently living in permanent adequate housing and the cost did not exceed 30% of family income in unsubsidized housing. Many self-sufficiency assessments do not consider the percentage of household expenses in relation to total household net income. The definition of *affordable housing* varies among communities; however, worldwide, conventional public policy indicates that housing expenses (i.e., rent/mortgage and utilities) should be no more than 30% of household income. This indicator of stable housing evolved out of the U.S. National Housing Act of 1937. The measure began at 20% of household income but increased over the decades as households had difficulty achieving the American dream of homeownership. Thus, as housing costs increased, the disproportionate spending on homeownership led to the increase to 30% (Linneman & Megbolugbe, 1992).

The development of the RSSA tool was informed by the idea that self-reliance involves more than an increase in socioeconomic status and that a family's socio-ecological environment should be considered in its potential for achieving overall wellbeing. The RSSA includes quantitative measures like educational attainment, income, and transportation. Specifically, it consists of the following 16 items: Housing; Transportation; Employment; Education/Academic Attainment; Income/Budget; Health Insurance; Physical Health; Mental Health/Substance Abuse; Psychosocial and Environmental Stressors; Parenting Skills; Quality Childcare; Legal: Criminal and Non-Criminal; Support Systems; Food; Home Safety; and Community Involvement.

Each participant is interviewed, and a rating is assigned to each item in one of five categories: Crisis, Vulnerable, Safe, Building Capacity, or Empowered/Thriving. The RSSA was administered every 6 months and is designed to be objective, reliable, and valid while measuring small, incremental change as participants progress with their objectives and goals. Each item is not weighted—no item is more important than any other in reaching self-sufficiency. The scale itself is subjective, and each participant determines what self-sufficiency means for them. Organizations like RISE that use any version of a self-sufficiency assessment typically assist households in increasing wages by building social and human capital. Human capital improves through education and skill development, with a focus on higher paying jobs. Social capital develops through the expansion of networks and increased access to resources. Programming goes beyond simply budgeting as many low-income jobs are volatile and developing stability below 200% FPG has proven difficult. Therefore %FPG is just one consideration for self-sufficiency. The following is a sample question from the RSSA (with item ratings in parentheses):

FOOD SECURITY: Please select which of the following describes your family's food situation:

❏ No food or means to prepare it. Rely primarily on sources of free or low-cost food. (1)

❏ Household meeting most food needs with SNAP benefits. (2)

❏ Can meet basic food needs, but require occasional assistance. (3)

❏ Can meet basic food needs without assistance. (4)

❏ Can choose to purchase any food household desires. (5)

Statistical Analysis

Before the data were analyzed, they were screened for accuracy, missing data, outliers, and violation of assumptions. The data appeared to be accurate and consisted of 111 participants who had completed the RISE program. Of those participants, 48 (43%) were considered active participants, and seven were recent graduates who had not reached the 6-month second data collection point. Only 41 participants (36.9%) had at least two measures and were active members in the RISE program. An additional seven participants did not have complete points for post-data; thus, they were excluded from the statistical analyses. Additionally, missing data appeared random for other participants and were excluded pairwise. Difference scores from the pretest and posttest data were derived for each of the variables. Outliers and assumptions were evaluated based on the difference scores. One outlier was identified by obtaining z-scores above the absolute value of 3 and was removed. The violation of assumptions was also examined prior to performing analyses. Linearity, homogeneity, and homoscedasticity were all met. Normality was also met but showed a slight negative skew for average self-sufficiency and a slight positive skew for percent federal poverty guideline.

Two reliability analyses were computed to determine the reliability of the RISE Self-Sufficiency Assessment for the pretest data and posttest data. The reliability of the scale was assessed along with all the items as a whole. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0 to 1.0. Alphas for scales used in practice require an alpha above 0.7, and an ideal Cronbach's alpha in a reliability analysis is .8 or higher. The pretest was considered reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .76. Similar results were shown for the posttest ($\alpha = .80$). Additionally, the individual items were assessed by evaluating the stability and the Cronbach's alpha when items were removed. If an item was removed, the Cronbach's alphas remained consistent around .72 to .78 for the pretest assessment and between .76 and .81 for the posttest assessment. The lack of change in the Cronbach's alpha when an item was removed suggests that the items were reliable and that each item did not hold significant "weight." The means and standard deviations also remained moderately consistent, suggesting that the assessment was moderately stable.

Results

A series of paired-samples t-tests (Wilcoxon signed-rank tests when appropriate) were performed to assess the change in self-sufficiency for participants in the RISE program. Analyses consisted of evaluating self-sufficiency by using the self-sufficiency average and the individual items on the self-sufficiency assessment. Results revealed significant improvements in self-sufficiency overall and for the areas relating to employment, education, income, childcare, legal resolution (criminal), and food security. Participants became more self-sufficient overall, $t(32) = 5.86$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.03$. The childcare and employment self-sufficiency measures appeared to show the largest improvement from initial to current status. Moreover, when the p-value was

adjusted to control for a type I error ($p < .003$), education and criminal self-sufficiency measures no longer showed a significant improvement. Table 1 shows the results of the analyses for the individual self-sufficiency measures. Figures 1–7 depict the results for the significant t-tests.

Table 1

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Analysis Results for the Self-Sufficiency Measures

Self-Sufficiency Measures	W	p	Rank Biserial Correlation (r_{rb})
Housing	53.5	.724	-.11
Transportation	104	.182	.36
Employment	235	<.001**	.86
Education	135	.005*	.77
Income	218.5	.002**	.73
Insurance	154.5	.622	.12
Physical	106	.984	.01
Mental	69	.466	-.19
Psychosocial	224.5	.091	.38
Parenting	138	.065	.45
Childcare	159	.001**	.86
Criminal	28	.015*	.98
Non-Criminal	58	.392	.28
Support System	95	.385	.24
Food	140.5	.015*	.64
Home Safety	13	.17	.73
Community	26	.173	.16

Note. *p < .05. **p < .003.

Figure 1

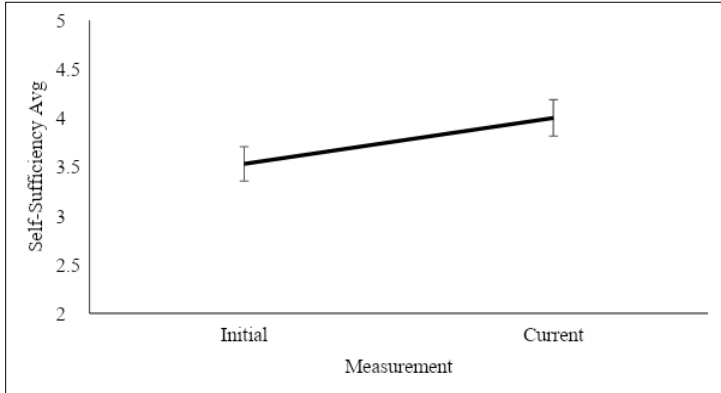*Mean Regression Slope of Total Self-Sufficiency Measure*

Figure 2

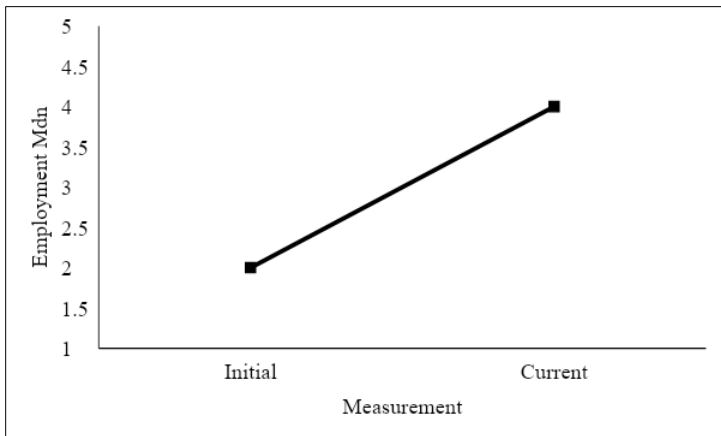*Mean Regression Slope of Employment*
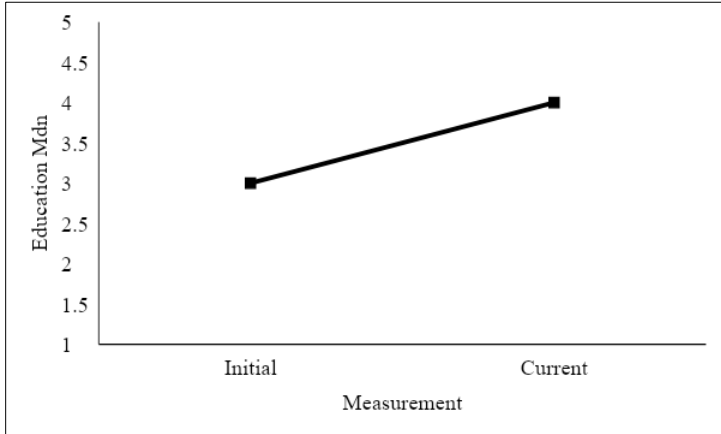
Figure 3

Mean Regression Slope of Education

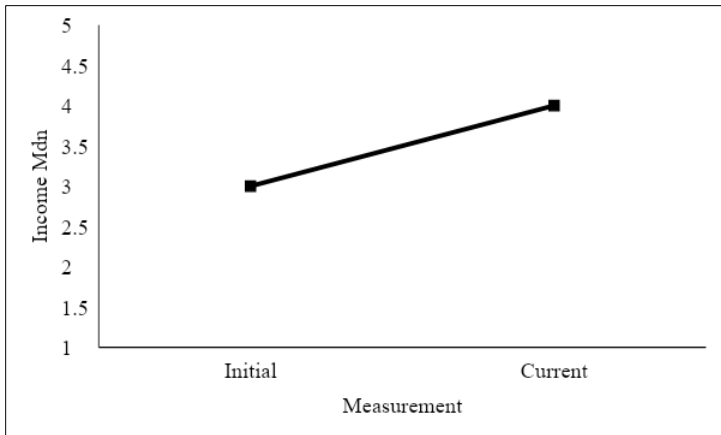**Figure 4**

Mean Regression Slope of Income

Figure 5

Mean Regression Slope of Legal Resolution (Criminal)
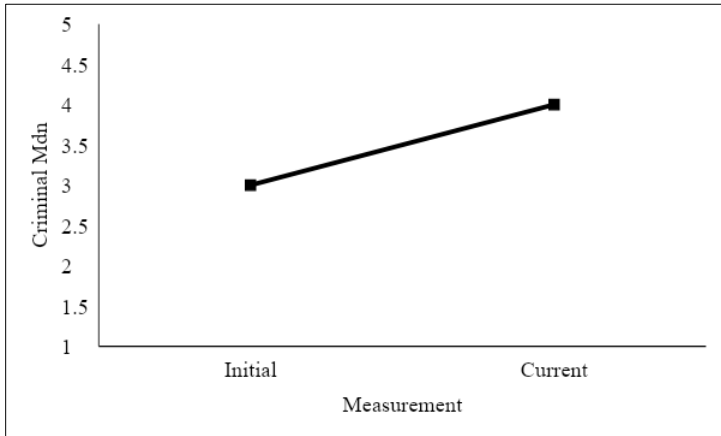

Figure 6
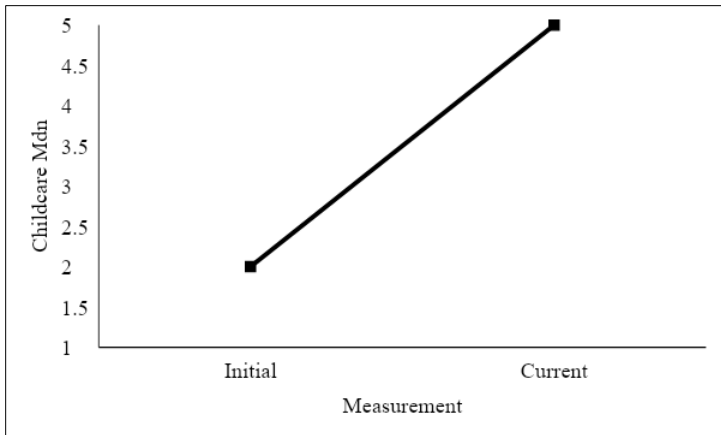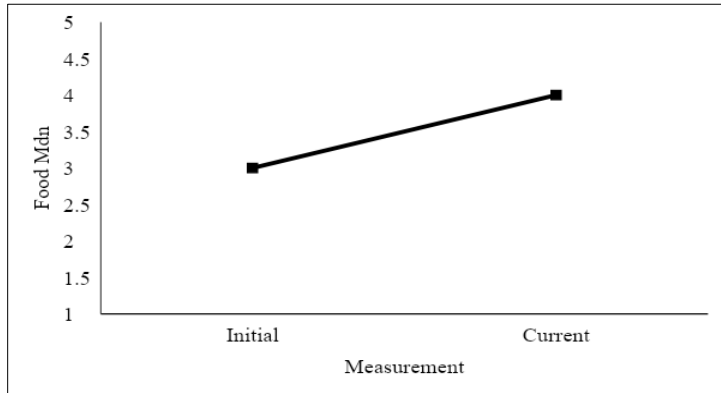
Mean Regression Slope of Childcare

Figure 7

Mean Regression Slope of Food Security

A series of simple linear regressions (SLRs) were performed to assess if the change in self-sufficiency predicted a participant's current percent federal poverty guideline. In other words, the SLRs were performed to help determine the measures that had an impact on participants' %FPG. Difference scores of the pre and post self-sufficiency assessment items were derived to measure the change for each of the variables. Also, difference scores were calculated for the self-sufficiency average scores. Results revealed that self-sufficiency overall (average difference scores) did not have an impact on %FPG. However, the slope was rather large; for every one increase in self-sufficiency, there were 24.01 increases in %FPG (see Figure 8 for a depiction of the relationship). When the individual self-sufficiency items were assessed, food security appeared to have a significant impact on participants' %FPG. Specifically, there was a significant positive relationship between the self-sufficiency food security item and %FPG; that is, as participants were more self-sufficient in relation to food, the %FPG percentage increased (Figure 9). In fact, for every one increase in food-security self-sufficiency, there were 25.25 increases in the %FPG. Therefore, as participants were more food self-sufficient, the higher their income per household member. While education and psychosocial factors were not significant predictors of %FPG, the slopes were rather large. Specifically, for every one increase in education self-sufficiency, there were 12.13 increases in %FPG, and for every one increase in psychosocial self-sufficiency, there were 8.24 increases in %FPG. Table 2 shows the results of the SLRs.

Figure 8

Relationship of Total RSSA Score and Federal Poverty Guideline
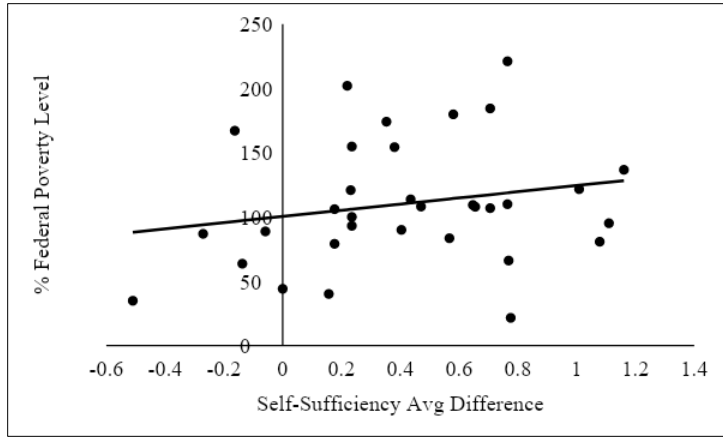
Figure 9

Relationship of Food Security and Federal Poverty Guideline
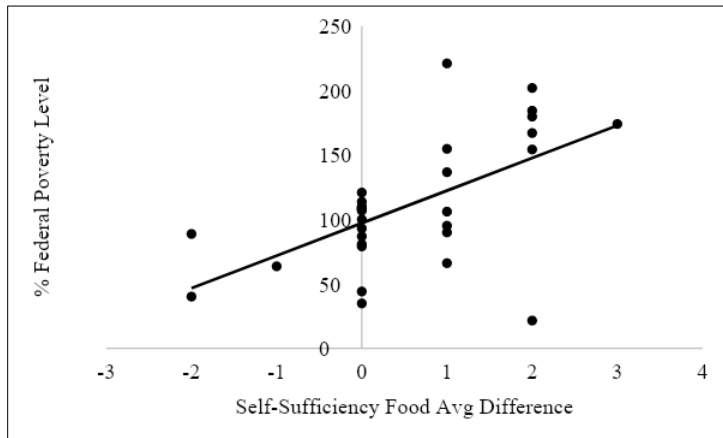
Table 2

Simple Linear Regression Results for the Self-Sufficiency Measures

Self-Sufficiency Predictors	*r*	*b*	*β*	*t*	*p*	*r²*
Self-Sufficiency Average	.2	24.01	0..2	1.16	.256	.04
Housing	-.02	-0.74	-0.02	-0.1	.922	.0004
Transportation	-.16	-6.42	-0.16	-0.88	.384	.03
Employment	.21	6.53	.21	1.17	.251	.04
Education	.3	12.13	.3	1.75	.09	.09

Income	.07	3.29	.07	0.39	.7	.005
Insurance	.07	2.06	.07	0.41	.683	.005
Physical	-.11	-4.43	-0.11	-0.59	.557	.01
Mental	.1	3.93	0.10	0.55	.583	.01
Psychosocial	.26	8.24	0.26	1.49	.145	.07
Parenting	.04	1.94	0.04	0.19	.850	.002
Childcare	-.003	-0.08	-0.003	-0.02	.987	.000
Criminal	.12	7.32	0.12	0.65	.518	.01
Non-Criminal	.01	0.53	0.01	0.07	.943	.0001
Support System	-.17	-5.86	-0.17	-0.98	.335	.03
Food	.56	25.25	0.56	3.88	<.001**	.31
Home Safety	-.16	-7.39	-0.16	-0.53	.604	.03
Community	-.08	-2.93	-0.08	-0.28	.788	.01

Note. *p < .05. **p < .003.

Additionally, a series of SLRs were performed to assess if the change in self-sufficiency predicted change in federal poverty guideline (ΔFPG). Difference scores of the %FPG were derived to measure the change in the %FPG. Results revealed that self-sufficiency overall (average difference scores) did not have an impact on ΔFPG; however, when the individual self-sufficiency items were assessed, food security appeared to have a significant impact on participants' ΔFPG. Specifically, there was a significant positive relationship between ΔFood Security and Δ%FPG; as participants were more self-sufficient for food, the FPG percentage appeared to increase. In fact, for every one increase in food-security self-sufficiency, there were 16.27 increases in Δ%FPG.

Discussion

This study revealed that the participants in the RISE program became more self-sufficient. Income alone is not enough to predict self-sufficiency; however, an increase in multiple RSSA factors leads to self-sufficiency. RISE participants experienced an annual household %FPG income increase of 35.78%, revealing that the RISE program did result in significant improvements in financial measurements. Self-sufficiency also increased significantly in areas relating to employment, education, childcare, legal resolution (criminal), and food security. Average participants joined the program with incomes that "[met] basic needs, but attained insufficient funds for emergencies"; however, their current income "[met] basic needs and allow[ed] for minor emergencies." A majority of Americans fall into this

category. According to the Federal Reserve (2020), in 2019, 65% of Americans did not have an extra $400 to cover unexpected expenses, such as a medical bill. The lack of savings for emergent needs (e.g., car repairs) means that many employees are often unable to get to work. Lack of transportation is a common cause of social exclusion, increased chronic health conditions, and employee absenteeism, creating a cyclical financial crisis (Agarwal et al., 2019). At the initial intake, the average participant reported that they were "unemployed for less than 3 months" but were currently "full-time employees with no benefits." Although the participants reported improved employment due to RISE participation, it is essential to note they did not receive benefits, putting them at extremely high risk for incurring unaffordable medical expenses. This risk, which can lead to financial catastrophe for many working Americans, has been well documented for more than a decade. Research has repeatedly shown that being uninsured is linked to increased morbidity and mortality rates, decreased quality of life, decreased work productivity, and overall lack of self-sufficiency (Finkelstein & McKnight, 2005; McWilliams, 2009; McWilliams et al., 2007). As a result of RISE participation, members saw improvements in income and employment; however, they remained at high risk for financial catastrophes since they could not secure the safety net necessary to recover from medical or other unbudgeted expenses. Additionally, at intake, participants reported that "childcare and subsidies were available, but the childcare provider did not accept subsidy or was unaffordable"; however, participants currently reported "childcare to be available, affordable, good quality and there is at least one emergency backup caregiver." Individuals with children have a significant barrier to employment if affordable and quality childcare is not available. An improvement in access to childcare increases an individual's capacity to be employed and to maintain employment—and access to childcare influences more than just the adult. Access to quality childcare influences the child's potential for upward mobility, having a multi-generational influence on self-sufficiency. Early childhood education has been shown to create upward mobility, decreasing the demand for programs like RISE later in life. Quality childcare reduces the achievement gap and improves cognitive function, and also enhances the social skills necessary throughout life (McCoy et al., 2017).

Education improved between intake and current measurements. The average participant reported initially that they "lack[ed] academic skills that limit employment or other goal attainment," but currently they reported obtaining some academic skills and now felt that these skills "only occasionally limit[ed] employment or other goal attainment." For participants who reported that they had unresolved legal concerns, the average response included that they were on "probation and had no new charges filed." Participants received assistance through the RISE program and currently stated "no criminal history."

Finally, at intake, the average participant reported that they "[met] basic food needs, but require[d] occasional assistance," whereas currently they reported that they "[met] basic food needs without assistance." These financial stability factors do have potential to increase an individual's capacity for stability. Previous studies have suggested that the development of human and social capital may help protect against food insecurity (Chhabra et al., 2014; Dean et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2004). Previous studies have shown significant changes in food security related to improvements in social determinants of health. Food security is understood to be a significant determinant of overall health and the potential for improved development. It has been well documented that food insecurity is one of the most influential factors on the overall health of individuals. Food insecurity affects 11%–14% of U.S. households and causes disproportionate chronic diseases among those individuals, representing a national health crisis (Coleman-Jensen

et al, 2020; Feeding America, 2020). Artiga and Hinton (2018) found that "healthcare costs for food-insecure adults were $1,834 higher than for food-secure adults—totaling $52.6 billion across all food-insecure households. These additional costs include all direct healthcare-generated costs, like clinic visits, hospitalizations and prescription medications" (p. 3). Desmond (2016) reported that public housing with rents set at 30% of household income increased the disposable income of individuals, who in turn spent more money on food. Long term, these individuals saw improvements in their children's health (Desmond, 2016).

Specifically, there was a significant positive relationship between the food-security self-sufficiency item and %FPG; as participants reported feeling more self-sufficient in relation to food, the %FPG increased (see Figure 9). In fact, for every one increase in food-security self-sufficiency score, there were 25.25 increases in the %FPG. Therefore, as participants felt more food secure, the higher their income per household member. Finally, while education and psychosocial factors were not significant predictors of %FPG, the slopes were rather large. This information can be used to predict changes in self-sufficiency. For every one increase in education self-sufficiency, there were 12.13 increases in %FPG, and for every one increase in psychosocial self-sufficiency, there were 8.24 increases in %FPG. RISE programming can assist participants in setting and achieving goals focused on items that have high slopes in order to improve self-sufficiency. One of the limitations of the study was its small sample size. As the program continues, these assessments will be revisited. Additionally, the number of months between the pretest and posttest were not consistent. Participants joined the program at different intervals. Some participants were in the program for 1 year, while others were in the program for 2 years. Also, the RSSA measurement is conducted in a single point of time, but household dynamics can change quickly. For instance, if a participant was laid off for a short period and the assessment was conducted at that time, the participant was considered unemployed.

Recommendations for future studies include repeating measures as additional graduates meet the 6-month post-measurement point. Future research is planned that will expand the comparison of each 6-month data measurement to determine when in the program RISE participants see the greatest changes in self-sufficiency and annual household income.

Conclusion

Recent research on family self-sufficiency programs, like RISE, has provided a more complete understanding of the components necessary to assist individuals in increasing household income and self-sufficiency. The purpose of this research was to assess if participants showed improvements in self-sufficiency while participating in the RISE program and to identify which measurements were effective in predicting increases in household income and self-sufficiency. Current findings suggest that food security plays a critical role in an individual's perception of household stability. Study results also revealed significant improvements in self-sufficiency overall measurement and for the areas relating to employment, education, income, childcare, and legal resolution (criminal). Furthermore, these improvements in self-sufficiency impacted participants' %FPG. According to the results, the food-security item on the self-sufficiency assessment appeared to have a significant impact on participants' %FPG. Specifically, there was a significant positive relationship between these two measurements; as participants were more self-sufficient in relation to food, the %FPG increased. Lastly, self-sufficiency overall (average difference scores) did not significantly impact %FPG. However, the slope was rather large; thus, for every one increase in self-sufficiency, there were 24.01 increases in %FPG. Overall, the implications of the findings suggest that self-sufficiency programs should

include services that lead to improvements in a participant's employment capacity and education, which influence household income, while also ensuring that childcare, legal resolution, and food security are met.

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Author

Dr. Amy Blansit is a senior instructor in the Kinesiology department at Missouri State University. Dr. Blansit focuses her research on methods for overcoming socioeconomic barriers to self-sufficiency in populations of low socioeconomic status. In collaboration with her work at MSU, Dr. Blansit is the program director for RISE, a poverty alleviation initiative in southwest Missouri. RISE provides opportunities for students to engage in service learning. The success of RISE is the result of a five-year pilot program in partnership with Missouri State, Drury University, and the Drew Lewis Foundation. She is chairman of the Drew Lewis Foundation and operates The Fairbanks, a renovated grade school that now serves as a center for community betterment in Springfield's Grant Beach neighborhood. Based at The Fairbanks, RISE uses a community-driven development model that couples education and support with neighborhood development and sustainability to help individuals overcome the challenges that have kept them living in poverty. As a result of her work and the collaboration of private and public resources, the community hub has been recognized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development as an EnVision Center. Dr. Blansit was honored as the Person of the Year by Springfield's magazine Biz 417 in 2017 and has remained on their Biz 100 list each year. She was also awarded the Missouri State Foundation Award for Service and has been recognized by Springfield Business Journal as 40 Under 40, 12 People You Need to Know, and 40 Most Influential Women.

Give 5 Gives Back: Assessment of a New Civic Matchmaking Program for Older Adults

Bradley J. Fisher
Missouri State Univsersity

Gloria Galanes
Missouri State University

Author Note

Bradley J. Fisher, Department of Psychology and Gerontology, Missouri University; Gloria J. Galanes, Department of Communication, Missouri State University.

Correspondence concerning this research note should be addressed to Bradley J. Fisher, Professor Emeritus, Department of Psychology and Gerontology, Missouri State University. Email: BradleyFisher@missouristate.edu

Abstract

The study discussed in this research note assessed participants' responses to the Give 5 program, a civic matchmaking program in which volunteers learn about and are encouraged to volunteer at local nonprofits. Study participants were also asked general questions about successful aging. Of the 83 respondents, who were overwhelmingly positive about the program, 95% had recommended it to others, 81% were volunteering 4 hours per week on average, and 57% had given money to one or more agencies. Respondents indicated that the most important characteristics of successful aging were having a purpose, positive interactions with others, good health, opportunities for personal growth, and self-acceptance, as well as staying active. Participants reported that they were aging successfully and perceived a clear link between successful aging and volunteerism. The survey results strongly supported continuing the program, which benefits not only the participants, but also the larger community.

Keywords: older adults, aging, successful aging, volunteering, civic matchmaking

There has been growing interest in the concept of successful aging and well-being in later life as the number of older adults continues to climb during the current "graying of America." Communities have begun focusing on how to harness the resources of older adults who are entering their retirement years, not just to benefit the community but also to help these older adults continue to feel integrated with and valued by the broader society.

The purpose of the study discussed in this research note was to assess whether there were benefits for retired individuals participating in the Give 5 program in Springfield, Missouri. This program introduces retired individuals to agencies that wish to recruit volunteers. This research explored the participants' perceptions of the Give 5 experience, the meanings that these older adults attached to the idea of successful aging, and what they perceived to be the essential characteristics of aging well. Since the Give 5 program is about connecting older adults to volunteer opportunities, this study also examined perceived links between successful aging and volunteerism.

The following video link describes the Give 5 program in detail: http://www.ejournalofpublicaffairs.org/video-gallery/. Briefly, Give 5 matches participants—principally baby-boomer retirees aged 60 or older—with volunteer opportunities in nonprofit organizations in Springfield, Missouri. Over 5 program days, 1 day per week from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., classmates meet, socialize, learn about their community, and then board a shuttle to visit 23 different nonprofit organizations over the 5-week period. Once participants learn how the nonprofit organizations operate and what volunteer positions are available, they are encouraged to volunteer their time—at least 5 volunteer hours per month—to one or more of these organizations. In the program's first year, organizers estimate that Give 5 participants contributed an estimated $300,000 in time value to area nonprofit organizations. As of June 2019, eight classes had participated in the program. This research note presents an assessment of the first five Give 5 classes.

Methods

This study, conducted in 2019, sought to identify the meanings older people attach to successful aging, links between successful aging and volunteerism, and perceptions of their experience going through the Give 5 program. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered through an online survey sent to all participants in classes 1 through 5 (each class had from 16–24 participants). Of the 98 people contacted, 83 completed the survey questionnaire, representing a response rate of 85%.

Individuals were sent an online survey questionnaire containing both open-ended and closed-ended questions which took approximately 25 minutes to complete. Respondents were asked questions designed to capture their understanding of successful aging, whether they perceived themselves to be aging successfully, perceptions of links between successful aging and volunteerism, and perceptions of the Give 5 program and its impact on their knowledge of community needs, sense of connection to the community, level of social interaction, empathy for under-resourced individuals, trust in nonprofit agencies, donations to charitable organizations, and the agencies where they volunteered. Qualitative data were coded by two independent reviewers who identified categories for each question and then assigned responses across those various categories. After independent coding of hundreds of responses, the reviewers attained an inter-rater agreement rate of 95%. In a subsequent meeting, the reviewers went over the data together, focusing on areas of disagreement, and resolved all differences in the coding of responses.

Sample Characteristics

For the 75 study participants for whom complete demographic information was available, 27 were men and 48 were women. Most (31) were in the 65–69 age range, while one was 55–59, 13 were 60–64, 19 were 70–75, 10 were older than 75, and one answer was unclear. Seventy respondents were Caucasion, one was Hispanic, one was Asian, and three preferred not to answer. The majority (44) were married or in a domestic partnership, 16 were widowed, 13 were divorced, and two were single (never married). Most (40) had lived in the Springfield and surrounding area for more than 30 years; five had lived in the area for 20–29 years, 15 for 10–19 years, and 15 for 9 years or less. Almost all (68) were retired; three worked less than 40 hours and one at least 40 hours per week, two were not employed and not looking, and one was not employed and looking for work.

In general, the study participants comprised a well-educated, fairly well-off group of individuals. Eleven were high school graduates, five were trade or technical graduates, five had associate degrees, 22 had bachelor's degrees, and 32 held graduate degrees. Most (62) were homeowners, eight rented, and five preferred not to answer. While 24 respondents preferred not to answer the income question, five reported having an income between $10,000 and $24,999; eight between $25,000 and $49,999; 17 between $50,000 and $74,999; 10 between $75,000 and $99,999; four between $100,000 and $124,999; two between $125,000 and $149,999; one between $175,000 and $199,999; and four at least $200,000.

Results

Successful Aging

The first three survey questions dealt with successful aging, as summarized in Table 1. The first question asked, "What characteristics do you think are necessary to experience successful aging?" Although respondents' answers varied, definite patterns emerged.

Table 1

Characteristics Necessary for Successful Aging

Category	Number of Unique Responses per Respondent (N = 265)	Percent (%) of Respondents (N = 83) Mentioning This Category
Purpose	50	60.2
Positive Interactions	47	56.6
Health	43	51.8
Personal Growth	34	42.2
Self-Acceptance	25	30.1
Staying Active	24	28.9

Autonomy	10	12 .0
Environmental Mastery	10	12.0
Faith	8	9.6
Finances	8	9.6
Staying Socially Active	3	3.6
Hobbies	2	2.4

The largest category of responses was maintaining a sense of purpose, which involves having goals, making a contribution, and feeling that one's life has overall worth. This was mentioned by 60.2% of respondents. Comments centered frequently on making a difference, giving back to the community, and feeling useful. The following quotations illustrate the range of responses: "Contribute time and attributes to the community. Make a difference"; "Volunteering helps you give back to the community"; "Meaningful work is the crux of it, even if that's just taking care of grandkids"; and "A person has to have a purpose or a reason to get up in the morning."

The second largest category of responses related to successful aging was positive interactions with others. This category stressed the importance of connections with others and staying involved with the broader community and was mentioned by 56.6% of respondents. Comments focused on friendships, contact with family, and meaningful relationships: "It's important to have good friendships and meaningful connections with others"; "People to interact with. Staying in close touch with family"; and "Spending time socially with friends and family. Sharing our wisdom, education, and life experiences with those who are interested. I want meaningful and enjoyable social interaction."

The third largest category was health or feeling that one is in reasonably good physical and mental condition. This was mentioned by 51.8% of respondents. In this category, respondents often commented on staying active, nutrition and exercise, and the importance of good health generally, as illustrated by the following examples: "Keeping an active body"; "Eating right and exercise doesn't hurt"; and "Stay as healthy as possible."

The next category was personal growth, mentioned by 42.2% of respondents. Respondents commented on the importance of learning new things and of growing and developing intellectually: "Try to learn something new as often as you can. Volunteering is a way to keep active and work your brain!"; "Having a desire to keep learning and exploring new interests and/or exploring long time interests"; and "I think a person has to keep a young mind and look forward to the future but live in the present and use your past as a reference."

Self-acceptance, which refers to accepting one's condition and circumstances and being at peace with oneself, was mentioned by 30.1% of respondents. Comments referred to general acceptance, making adjustments, and feeling confident about the aging process. The following quotations illustrate this category: "I accept where I am in life. Feeling comfortable in your own

skin"; "Enjoy each new stage as it comes. Appreciate that some physical and mental declines are natural"; and "To be happy with your life. Foster resilience as life changes."

The final category presented here was staying active and was mentioned by 28.9% of respondents. While the comments varied in this category, the most frequent comment pertained to the general importance of being active, with no further specification: "Stay busy"; "I am very active"; and "I am physically and socially active."

Other categories that surfaced included environmental mastery, or the ability to manipulate one's surroundings to meet daily needs, mentioned by 12% of respondents; autonomy, or independence, mentioned by 12%; having enough income, mentioned by 9.6%; and faith, or a spiritual life, mentioned by 9.6%.

Question 2 asked, "How would you rate your level of successful aging using the scale below?" The scale ranged from 1 (*aging very unsuccessfully*) to 7 (*aging very successfully*). Of the 83 participants who answered this question, only three rated their aging as moderately unsuccessful, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

How Successfully Are You Aging? (1 = aging very unsuccessfully; 7 = aging very successfully)

Response (N = 83)	Number	Percent
Aging very successfully (7)	29	34.9
Aging successfully (6 and 5)	44	53.0
Neither successfully/unsuccessfully (4)	7	8.4
Aging unsuccessfully (3 and 2)	3	3.6
Aging very unsuccessfully (1)	0	0

Respondents were asked to elaborate on their numerical answers to Question 2. In general, their responses reflected the characteristics of successful aging identified by Fisher and Specht (1999). Because each open-ended response could reflect more than one element of successful aging, Table 3 shows the number and percentage of respondents reflecting each element. The categories are arranged from most to least frequently mentioned.

Table 3

What Factors Contribute to Your Perception of Successful Aging?

Category	Number of Unique Responses per Respondent (N = 239)	Percent of Respondents (N = 83) Mentioning This Category
Health	44 total: 34 positive, 10 negative	53.0 41.0 pos/12.0 neg
Self-Acceptance	42	50.6
Positive Interactions	34 total: 32 positive, 2 negative	41.0 38.6 pos/2.4 neg
Purpose	28	33.7
Growth	23	27.7
Active	19	22.9
Volunteering	19	22.9
Faith	9	10.8
Environmental Mastery	8	9.6
Travel	7	8.4
Autonomy	3	3.6
Finances	3	3.6

The category most frequently mentioned for explaining respondents' ratings of successful aging was health. More than half the respondents (53.0%) mentioned health-related factors. Respondents who mentioned health made positive comments such as "My good eating and sleeping habits contribute to my health"; "I've been blessed with good health up to this point"; and "I don't take much medication, don't have many aches and pains." Respondents with health problems said, for instance, "[I am] in constant pain" and "I have encountered several health problems and recently lost the vision in my left eye." Respondents noted that health problems prevented them from participating as much as they would like.

The next category most frequently mentioned, again by half of the respondents (50.6%), was self-acceptance. Respondents commented, "I am feeling more confident and comfortable in my aging process"; "I am enjoying being retired"; and "This year that [i.e., good health] has changed and typical signals of aging have manifested. I am adjusting to these changes slowly and

deliberately, but my progress is taking time and deliberation." These responses show recognition of changes that come with aging and adjustment to those changes.

Having positive interactions with others was the next most frequently mentioned category. For instance, respondents said, "I have lots of friends," "I also value my relationships and try to nurture them along," and "I have lots of family and acquaintances [with whom] to interact frequently."

Purpose was the next category mentioned most frequently. Respondents commented, "[I] make a difference in the community," "I feel my contributions as a patient advocate have been very rewarding to me as well as my patients," and "[I] enjoy helping make our community a better place for all people."

This category was followed by personal growth. Respondents noted that "[I now have time] to engage in activities that are rewarding and interesting to me," "[I] keep my brain active learning new things," and "[I] am trying to grow myself into a better person."

The categories of staying active and volunteering at one or more organizations were each mentioned by 22.9% of respondents. Comments included, "I am physically and socially active," "I try to keep active," "I spend many hours volunteering," and "I feel fulfilled in my volunteer work."

The remaining five categories received fewer responses. Faith, environmental mastery, travel, autonomy, and finances, while important to those mentioning them, did not contribute significantly to successful aging for the overall group. The following comments typify those categories, respectively: "I strive to put God first in my life by honoring Him"; "[I have] a roof over my head, clothes on my back, and food in my stomach…. What more could I want or need!"; "We are traveling internationally"; "I am independent and can get what I need to have a good life"; and "I'm financially secure."

Question 3 encompassed 13 statements related to seven categories established in previous research (Fisher, 1992, 1995; Fisher et al., 1998; Fisher & Specht, 1999; Ryff, 1989) which have been found to be related to successful aging: purpose, positive interactions, personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, health, and environmental mastery. Participants were given two statements per category (with only one question related to health) and responded on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The means for two items comprising a category were averaged to produce the means shown in Table 4, which summarizes these responses by category, from the highest agreement level to the lowest. Clearly, the respondents agreed overwhelmingly with the statements. The lowest mean was for purpose, which, at 5.80, was still well into the agreement range.

Table 4

Levels of Agreement/Disagreement Regarding Factors Associated With Successful Aging

Category	Response Mean (n = 83)	Range of Responses
Positive Interactions	6.31	2–7
Environmental Mastery	6.30	1–7
Autonomy	6.19	1–7
Health	6.16	1–7
Personal Growth	6.08	1–7
Self-Acceptance	6.01	1–7
Purpose	5.80	1–7

Link Between Volunteerism and Successful Aging

Question 4 asked whether there was a link between volunteerism and successful aging; respondents overwhelmingly agreed that there was (97%, n = 81). From respondents' explanations, four categories emerged most often: sense of purpose, self-acceptance, positive interactions with others, and personal growth (see Table 5).

Table 5

Factors Contributing to Perceptions of the Links Between Volunteerism and Successful Aging

Category	Number of Unique Responses by Respondents (N = 181)	Percent (%) of Respondents (N = 83) Mentioning This Category
Purpose	67	80.7
Self-Acceptance	56	67.5
Positive Interactions	21	25.3
Growth	19	22.9
Distraction	5	6.0
Faith	4	4.8
Environmental Mastery	3	3.6
Autonomy	3	3.6
Active	2	2.4
Health	1	1.2

A sense of purpose was mentioned by 80.7% of respondents, with comments emphasizing a sense of contributing to others' well-being and sharing talents with others: "Everyone needs a purpose and helping others makes our community better"; "Sharing gifts and talents with others gives meaning and purpose to your life"; "Being of service to others keeps the vital energy of life flowing"; and "You must be useful and needed by others. Volunteerism provides us with a purpose that we might not otherwise have and provides a means to give back to our community."

The next category was self-acceptance, mentioned by 67.5% of respondents, who emphasized a feeling of satisfaction, self-worth, and increased happiness. Representative comments included, "Giving back or paying it forward, volunteering triggers a feeling of general well-being and satisfaction"; "Keeping current with the needs of the community lends to your self-worth. I have volunteered all my life so to stop with this activity would be detrimental to myself and my perceived value"; and "If what you volunteer to do is satisfying, you'll be happier."

Positive interactions with others, the third category, was mentioned by 25.3% of respondents. Individuals mentioned keeping socially active, meeting new people, and making friends: "Volunteering keeps you social and gets you out in the world being with other people"; "Volunteering lets you meet new people and make connections with others"; and "Working

together as a group you can tackle and solve problems that otherwise may seem insurmountable. I like to volunteer and enjoy the friends I've made with those endeavors."

The fourth category, personal growth, was mentioned by 22.9% of respondents. In this category, respondents commented on expanding horizons and learning new things: "Volunteering or just helping others gives a feeling of going beyond yourself. It gives you ideas you might not have thought of before"; and "Involvement as a volunteer expands your horizons and broadens your knowledge of people and situations. It offers personal growth and a sense of accomplishment."

Responses Regarding the Give 5 Program

The survey asked questions designed to assess the effect of the Give 5 program specifically on the respondents. Most responses to these questions were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); some were yes/no questions.

Respondents indicated that they enjoyed participating in Give 5 (average, 6.82; range, 4–7). In an overwhelming endorsement of the program, 98.8% of respondents indicated they would recommend Give 5 to others, with only one person responding "maybe." In addition, 95.2 % (N = 79) had actually encouraged others to participate in the Give 5 program or to volunteer their time. The majority (63.9%, N = 53) reported they had told 10 or more other people about the program; 13.3 % (N = 11) had told between seven and nine people; 19.3% (N = 16) had told between four and six people; and 3.6% had told one to three people. All survey respondents indicated they had told someone else about Give 5.

When asked whether they were volunteering with any organization(s) as a result of Give 5, 80.7% (N = 67) said they were, at an average of 4.19 hours per week. Moreover, when asked if they had donated money to one or more nonprofits as a result of Give 5, 55.6% (N = 47) reported that they had. Table 6 summarizes the responses to several questions asking about specific effects of the Give 5 program, on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Table 6

Levels of Agreement/Disagreement Regarding Give 5 (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)

Question: "To what extent has Give 5…"	Response Mean (N = 83)	Range of Responses
Increased my sense of responsibility to help improve the community.	6.31	3–7
Made me feel more connected to the community.	6.11	2–7
Increased my knowledge of needs in the community.	6.66	3–7
Increased my empathy for under-resourced individuals in the community.	6.27	2–7
Increased my level of trust in the work of nonprofits in the community.	6.06	2–7
Increased my level of social interaction.	5.34	2–7
Provided information that was new to me.	5.46	3–7

Respondents who reported volunteering were asked to what extent their volunteer work was similar to or different from what they had done in their paying careers prior to retirement. Their responses, summarized in Table 7, ranged from 1 (*very dissimilar*) to 7 (*very similar*).

Table 7

Degree of Similarity Between Volunteer Work and Paid Careers

Response (N = 67)	Number	Percent (%)
Very similar (7)	12	17.9
Similar (6 and 5)	17	25.4
Neither similar nor dissimilar (4)	12	17.9
Dissimilar (3 and 2)	18	26.9
Very dissimilar (1)	8	12.9

Table 8 reports responses regarding how the Give 5 volunteers believed their work affected the organizations for which they volunteered. Again, the scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*to a great extent or very meaningful*).

Table 8

Effects of One's Volunteer Work on the Organizations

Question	Response Mean (N = 67)	Range of Responses
To what extent has the organization explained the impact of your work? (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *to a great extent*)	5.21	1–7
How meaningful is your work to the organization? (1 = *not at all meaningful*; 7 = *very meaningful*)	5.91	2–7

Summary and Discussion

The results of this study paint a clear picture. In terms of these individuals' aging experiences, and despite the challenges of daily life circumstances, they were aging very well. Over the last 60 years, prevailing stereotypes about older adults as frail, senile, self-involved, and disengaged have undermined a recognition of the value of older adults. As the number of older adults grows both within and outside the United States, it is important that communities challenge the insidious aspects of these stereotypes and embrace the valuable resources available among their retirees.

The older adults in this study validated the importance of a sense of purpose, positive interactions with others, self-acceptance, personal growth, staying active, and health as key factors contributing to successful aging. Their collective comments gave voice to a deep desire to be engaged in the community to benefit themselves and, just as importantly, to feel needed by and useful to the broader society. These individuals sought out the Give 5 program to learn more about their community and find ways they could make a difference.

The study also demonstrates a clear link between volunteerism and successful aging. In later life, it is easy to become isolated due to widowhood, illness, or not feeling welcomed by younger members of society. Volunteerism is an avenue through which people can regain or maintain a sense of purpose and value, learn more about others in diverse circumstances, and make new friends as they work with others to solve the problems within a community.

The questions specifically addressing the Give 5 program demonstrate plainly its effectiveness in meeting the goals of the program as well as benefiting its participants. As noted

earlier, participants perceived an increase in responsibility to the community, connection to the community, knowledge of community needs, empathy for underserved populations, trust of nonprofits, social interaction, and access to new information. In addition, participants were so moved by the experience that 95.2% had encouraged others to go through the Give 5 experience, and all of them encouraged others to engage in some form of volunteering. Moreover, participants donated not only their time, but also their money to help area nonprofit agencies.

The results of this study suggest strongly that the Give 5 program has been a resounding success. It encourages people to get involved in the community and provides opportunities and benefits to older participants which will help them continue to age successfully.

While this study is representative only of the participants in the first five classes, there is little doubt that future classes will offer similar benefits. The Give 5 program can, and should, be marketed to other communities to harness the untapped potential of retired individuals who want to continue to be engaged and help improve their corners of the world. This is a program well suited to do just that.

Limitations

There are two principal areas of concern related to this study. The first involves the lack of racial and ethnic diversity of participants since only two respondents identified as non-Caucasian. While this reflects a general lack of diversity in Springfield, which was 88.7% Caucasian in the 2010 census, it is nevertheless important for Give 5 to represent genuinely the community it serves and suggests that modifications are needed in the recruitment of potential Give 5 participants. The second is that, although the survey response rate of 85% was excellent, there was likely a pro-Give 5 bias among respondents. Hearing from non-respondents would deepen understanding of the impact of Give 5 on participants.

Future Research

This assessment has suggested several areas for future research. For instance, it would be important to assess how the nonprofits perceive the Give 5 program and the volunteers who come to them through the program. In addition, because good health was deemed critical to the ability to volunteer, observing how declining health impedes participant involvement would be useful, as would understanding how a participant's health issues might be accommodated to keep them engaged. An important question to explore is, Is this a program only for relatively healthier older adults? It is important to consider how the program can be designed so participants can continue to volunteer and reap the benefits of doing so if one's health declines. Finally, follow-up with graduates at regular intervals would also provide valuable longitudinal data on how lasting the benefits are as a result of participating in the Give 5 program.

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Authors

Bradley Fisher is professor emeritus in the Psychology and Gerontology department at Missouri State University and was Coordinator of the Gerontology Program for twenty years. He has served on numerous advisory boards and task forces in the Springfield community. He served on the board and on several committees with the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education. He was instrumental in developing the AGHE Program of Merit which provides certification for gerontology programs in higher education. In 2019, AGHE honored him with the Hiram J. Friedsam Mentorship Award. He has been the recipient of the University Foundation Award for service and the Faculty Excellence in Community Service Award. He has published one book and several scholarly articles on topics ranging from the self-concept in later life, factors associated with successful aging, living environments for older adults, efficacy and empowerment in elderhood, and innovative teaching techniques. Since retirement, he continues to volunteer in the community and organizes the Annual Senior Art Exhibition for artists 60 and above.

Gloria J. Galanes is professor emerita and former dean of the college of Arts and Letters at Missouri State. Dr. Galanes was the founding director of the Citizenship and Service-Learning program at Missouri State and is the co-author of two small group communication textbooks and co-editor of ed a text on social constructionism. She especially enjoyed teaching graduate courses in applied research projects that benefited the community. Her classes have investigated such topics as the needs of youth in the community, the needs of older adults, and the perceptions of Springfield Public Schools on behalf of numerous community organizations in Springfield. Since retirement, she has worked on two projects related to the Give 5 Volunteer Program and analyzed data gathered by the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights and Community Relations regarding Springfield's inclusiveness.

Community-Based Participatory Research in Springfield, Missouri: Lessons Learned

Christina Ryder
Missouri State University

Author Note

Christina L. Ryder, Sociology Department and GO LEAD, Missouri State University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christina L. Ryder, GO LEAD Program Coordinator, Missouri State University, 901 S. National Avenue, Springfield, MO 65897. Email: CRyder@MissouriState.edu

Discussions around community-based partnership and advocacy have focused on how individuals within universities (whether professors or administrators) can work alongside the community and sectors of government and industry to promote community-based solutions to social problems. Community-based participatory strategies center on the collaboration of multiple community members, entities, and organizations working toward solutions to social problems which consider the specific location, language, and culture of a region and the needs and challenges that individuals in these areas may face, with the purpose of making the solutions actionable and attainable.[1] Missouri State University—with its public affairs mission (discussed in further detail below) and the orientation of many of its colleges and departments around that mission—has consistently valued and promoted community-based participatory research (CBPR) as a means of contributing to these efforts. CBPR utilizes methods that allow researchers to build trust with community members, encourage community participation at all stages of the research, foster cross-sector collaboration, and empower communities to create and implement measures for addressing shared challenges. CBPR also allows universities to share resources, including the research and professional expertise of staff and faculty, to support community projects that improve the quality of life of area residents.[2]

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[1]https://bellarmine.lmu.edu/media/lmubellarminesite/bclarandomforadminsonly/bcladepartments/psychology/psychologyimages/parc/08092018_PROOF%208_BP-PARC-hres.pdf

[2] https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/sdoh/4/research-strategies

Missouri State's public affairs mission comprises three pillars: ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement. The overarching goal of this mission is to develop students who will articulate their value systems, act ethically within the context of a democratic society, demonstrate engaged and principled leadership, recognize and respect multiple perspectives and cultures, and recognize the importance of contributing their knowledge and experiences to their own community and to society. This goal for students is accomplished in part as a result of faculty providing study-abroad programs and community engagement opportunities that allow students to work with their communities and gain valuable career skills. For faculty, Missouri State's public affairs mission emphasizes and incentivizes community service and contribution as an important part of tenure and promotion.

Within Missouri State's Department of Sociology and Anthropology, in alignment with the broader public affairs mission, all faculty are considered applied practitioners. The Sociology Department has specifically been designated as a "public sociology" program. According to Michael Burawoy, public sociology "endeavors to bring sociology into dialogue with audiences beyond the academy, an open dialogue in which both sides deepen their understanding of public issues." [3] Public sociology involves not only the application of sociological principles to address social problems or issues, but also comprehensive dialogue about the underlying social structures that contribute to such issues. As of 2014, collectively, Missouri State faculty in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology either chair or are active members of approximately 35 (non-university-affiliated) local community agencies, boards, committees, or collaboratives. These include various Community Partnership of the Ozarks boards and committees; city boards and committees; the Urban Districts Alliance; the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau; the Community Investment and Development Board; the Commercial Street Merchant's Board; the Minorities in Business Board; the League of Women Voters; the National Boone State Historic Site; the History Museum on the Square; the Forest Agency; and the Osage Nation, among many other local and statewide nonprofit boards and committees. The majority of faculty offer their own research and professional support to these entities, and many also involve student interns or incorporate direct hands-on research and service opportunities into course requirements. Over the past 15 years, this has resulted in various community reports and efforts that have involved Sociology and Anthropology faculty and students, including the bi-annual High Risk and Homeless Youth Report, the annual Homeless Count, and others that have provided information used by nonprofits, government agencies, and others to directly impact community interventions and policy. Most recently, the CBPR approach was used to conduct a study on community perceptions of poverty.

The Perceptions of Poverty Study

Over the past several years, significant private nonprofit and public-sector efforts have focused on reducing the high rates of poverty in the Springfield, Missouri, metropolitan area. In 2018, Missouri State's Department of Sociology and Drury University's Center for Nonprofit Leadership conducted a joint study to query local residents regarding the causes of poverty and what types of political or civic strategies residents believed would help address poverty. The survey used in the study was a shortened version of a survey administered by National Public

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[3] http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/PS.Webpage/ps.mainpage.htm

Radio, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government in 2000 at the height of public and political debate regarding welfare reform.

Of the over 2,000 Springfield residents surveyed, 98.3% indicated that poverty was a problem. Respondents identified low wages, being a single parent, drug abuse, mental illness, and the poor quality of education as the top five causes of poverty. A slight majority also believed that it was the government's role to address poverty. Of the proposed solutions the government could implement, a majority of respondents supported improving public education and expanding job training programs, as well as expanding subsidized daycare, increasing the minimum wage, expanding public employment programs, requiring public schools to teach moral values and work ethic, enhancing medical care programs, and increasing tax credits for low-income workers. Though age and race were not significant factors, gender, political ideology, and self-reported religiosity did influence both perceived causes of poverty and proposed solutions to addressing poverty.

The CBPR Model in Action: Lessons Learned

The purpose of large-scale attitudinal social/human-service surveys, such as the Perceptions of Poverty study, is to engage community members in conversations around social and health-related issues, with the hope of increasing community ownership of and engagement in future policy and public/private efforts to address such issues. Specifically, the researchers intended for the study results to highlight information about public perceptions of poverty and to inform the general community, community leaders, and public officials about public viewpoints, local interventions that might be considered desirable, and factors impacting those proposed interventions. In October 2020, the written results of the survey were released publicly in the form of a community report and included information on local poverty initiatives and opportunities for individual or group volunteerism. The full report can be found at https://www.thegwllc.com/blog/perceptionsonpoverty.

As noted earlier, the Perceptions of Poverty report was just one of many initiatives of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology (as well as other colleges and departments across Missouri State) utilizing a CBPR model. Many such reports have been used to direct policy or to raise funds in order to address community challenges. In utilizing this model, the department has identified several promising/best practices that have facilitated university involvement and participation. These include the following:

(1) Engagement in existing/established boards and committees: One of the ways that faculty and students have contributed their resources and talents has been by volunteering for nonprofit organizations and by participating on already established community-based boards and committees. Being involved in (versus spearheading) such efforts has allowed university students and personnel to collaborate with community members and community organizations within the larger community and within larger community efforts.

(2) Student and faculty incentives: Missouri States' public affairs mission, in tandem with opportunities for service and community contribution to count toward tenure and promotion, have incentivized community-based collaboration for faculty. Moreover, opportunities for students to earn course credit through community engagement have provided students with "real-life" knowledge related, for instance, to future careers. First-hand experience in research and community involvement has also given students

the chance to strengthen their resumes for future employment or applications for graduate school.

(3) Empowerment and buy-in: Faculty have often used the networks of the nonprofit communities they work with to gain access to study participants. In the poverty study, for example, connections with the local newspaper helped disseminate the survey to the larger community, and connections with area nonprofits ensured that the survey reached older individuals and those who may not have had access to online resources. In other reports, community agencies have distributed and collected surveys, while in other cases, community agencies have served as brokers, connecting faculty interested in conducting research with communities seeking solutions that such research could provide.

(4) Use of traditional media to disseminate study results and increase awareness: Engaging traditional media (television and newspaper mainly)—through the use of university-issued press releases—in both the data-collection and findings-dissemination process has given increased attention and visibility to the work of faculty, students, and community organizations (many of which may be too small to garner media attention). It has also provided the opportunity for community members and those from various sectors to gain awareness of community issues, community-proposed solutions, and opportunities to participate in advocacy or solutions-based initiatives.

The CBPR model can be employed in a variety of contexts. Depending on the nature of the social challenge being examined and the depth of the research and contribution desired, approaches to CBPR may vary in scope and length. The combination of best practices in participatory research, public support for the contributions of Missouri State, community collaboration, and university incentives for faculty and students has created a foundation for community-based problem solving. The buy-in of other industries (e.g., media) has also facilitated and promoted community awareness and participation in such efforts. Finally, the work of nonprofits and their connections with those they serve have allowed university personnel to participate alongside the community in already established efforts to address social challenges. This has resulted in significant benefits for all stakeholders. This includes not only professional opportunities for university personnel who also reside in the community, but also the chance for nonprofit agencies, community leaders, and policymakers to utilize data and research findings in strategic planning, goal setting, fundraising, and issue advocacy, with the goal of improving the quality of life for all area residents.

Author

Christina Ryder is the CEO of The Grantwell and is a former social worker, a current sociologist, and expert in federal and foundation funding requests, program development, and social science evaluation research. She graduated from Vanguard University of Southern California with a degree in Sociology and then from the University of California, Irvine with a Masters in Social Science with a concentration in demography and social analysis and course focus on social inequality. Throughout her professional career she has participated in various federal grant evaluations including program evaluations on behalf of the USDA, SAMHSA, HHS, and the DOJ. As a Certified Sociology Practitioner (CSP) and federally recognized statistician, she has also participated in, or authored, over 40 various social science research studies endeavors, journal articles, and community based reports.

She is a frequent speaker at professional conferences and has been featured in various publications for her grant and research efforts, and is a regular guest lecturer on grant writing. She is the author of two books: "Grant Writing 101: Your Essential Guide to Nonprofit Grant Acquisition" published in 2014 and "The Basics of Sociology: Developing and Applying the Sociological Imagination" published in 2017.

In addition to her role at the Grantwell, she is an Instructor of Sociology, former interim Director of the Center for Community Engagement, former Assistant Director of the Center for Social Science and Public Policy Research, and current GO LEAD Coordinator at Missouri State University. She is a member of, and held various leadership roles in, numerous international, national, and local professional organizations and committees that address poverty, public health, human rights, and violence and abuse.

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Intergenerational National Service by, With, and for All Ages

Phyllis N. Segal
Encore.org

Author Note

Phyllis N. Segal, Encore.org (a national nonprofit dedicated to accelerating intergenerational innovation).

The author is a former board member of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Phyllis N. Segal, Senior Fellow, Encore.org. E-mail: psegal@encore.org

Deep divisions existed in the United States well before 2020, but the risk they pose to American democracy brings new urgency to bridging them. We have entered a period that President Biden has called an "uncivil war." In addition, our country's current economic and social challenges, which also began well before this past year, have been inflamed by a pandemic that has already taken more lives than the two World Wars and the Vietnam War combined, and infected tens of millions more. Americans have witnessed the largest increase in poverty in six decades. School shutdowns are causing learning losses that could hobble an entire generation. Social isolation has exacerbated loneliness—most seriously affecting the mental health of younger and older adults.

Moreover, the pandemic has intensified the divisions that thwart social cohesion. One of these divides is between generations, as grief, fear, and instability have led people to hold someone responsible. In public and private discourse, young people have been blamed for spreading the virus, while older adults' vulnerability has been seen as causing shutdowns. Portrayals such as these, based on faulty thinking that all people born at the same time are alike, pit generations against each other. This sticky narrative—compounded by the divergent economic effects on older and younger people—in turn has fueled an outbreak of ageism adversely affecting older and younger alike.

Connecting older and younger people through national service can make headway on two fronts: easing community problems and bridging destructive divides. This connection combines the proven effectiveness of national service for meeting community needs and the power of shared common purpose for building social cohesion. Demographic shifts make connecting the generations even more compelling: For the first time, the United States has more people over 60 than under 18. In addition, as the country's White population grows older, the younger population is becoming increasingly diverse. In 2015, 22% of adults over 65 and 48% of youth were people of color, a gap that is likely to increase in the next decades. As intergenerational advocates Corita Brown and Sean Thomas-Breitfeld cautioned: "Those who fail to understand and address the interplay between race and age will fail to understand today's political landscape and miss a big chance to build alliances across racial and generational divides."

Over many decades, policymakers have encouraged intergenerational service that engages older and younger people to meet challenges facing the other's generation, and that brings older and younger people together to address community problems (including those affecting a particular generation). In this article, the former is referred to as *cross-generational* and the latter as *co-generational* service. As described later, policies promoting cross-generational service have been only modestly implemented by public agencies and practitioners. Moreover, intentional co-generational service is a largely unexplored frontier. In addition, this field has received minimal attention from researchers.

The imperative to rebuild social cohesion among generations gives new impetus to intentionally and significantly develop both forms of intergenerational service. The divide separating young and old is narrower than others, perhaps making it easier to bridge. Yet, doing so can still be transformational. As Berkeley Professor John A. Powell has explained, "only bridging can heal a world of breaking." Building bridges through service is a multiple win, bringing generations together while also mobilizing the civilian fleet needed to solve communities' most pressing needs.

This article is a call to action for policymakers, public agencies, community-based organizations, practitioners, and researchers to take on this challenge.

Defining Intergenerational National Service

As used in this article, the term *intergenerational national service* combines two concepts. The first, "national service," refers to "civilian participation in any nongovernmental capacity, including with private for-profit organizations and nonprofit organizations … that pursues and enhances the common good and meets the needs of communities, the States, or the Nation." Hundreds of thousands of Americans already do this each year, working to help solve social problems in their communities. National service is different from volunteerism and other types of civilian service because those in national service "commit to a term, typically greater than six months, of sustained and substantive service with an organization while earning a modest living allowance."

The second concept, *"*intergenerational," is a specific subset of national service wherein participants from different stages of life (1) engage in activities that address challenges facing the other's generation ("cross-generational"), and/or (2) serve together to solve those and other social problems in their communities ("co-generational.") These two types of intergenerational service are distinct but not mutually exclusive.

The periods in life when individuals are most likely able to make a significant level of personal commitment to service are when they are young, before taking on the responsibilities that come with adulthood (e.g., jobs, career, parenthood, mortgages), and later in life as they move beyond midlife responsibilities, retiring or searching for an encore. Research has shown that younger and older people are interested in making this commitment to the common good. As a result, recruiting and engaging these age groups—which include people in several "generations"—holds potential for tapping the largest talent pool for civilian service in communities.

In addition, it opens the door to meaningful intergenerational interactions that are typically hard to come by in our largely age-segregated society. As Encore.org CEO Marc Freedman and Eisner Foundation CEO Trent Stamp explained in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, this is a dramatic change from the 19th century, when every major aspect of daily life was age-integrated: "By the end of the 20th century, America had come to approximate what economics professor Andrew Scott, co-author of *The 100-Year Life*, describes as a state of 'age apartheid.'"

Intergenerational National Service Benefits

National Service Overall

Studies of federal national service programs have shown that the benefits far exceed the costs invested in these programs; a recent calculation found that for every dollar of federal and match funding invested, the return to society, program members, and the government is $11.80. Last year, the bipartisan Commission on Military, National and Public Service concluded, in its final report, that national service creates "more united, civically engaged communities … [and] improved civic health." As national service leader Shirley Sagawa has explained, "involving local residents in efforts to address challenges in their own neighborhoods can change attitudes and create sustainable solutions. When communities take leadership and are provided the resources to change their circumstances, the change can be lasting."

National service also strengthens social cohesion by bringing different people together for a common purpose. Historian Anne Applebaum, writing in *The Atlantic*, drew upon her experience with peacebuilding and conflict prevention to propose that the best way to bridge divides is to "drop the argument and change the subject." When people come together to do something constructive, they focus on their common purpose rather than their disagreements. National service programs, Applebaum wrote, "might not build eternal friendships, but seditionists and progressives who worked together at a vaccination center could conceivably be less likely to use pepper spray on each other at a demonstration afterward."

Intergenerational National Service

Research on intentional intergenerational service has confirmed similar benefits. The most studied cross-generational program is AARP's Experience Corps, an evidence-based high-dosage tutoring program discussed later. A Washington University-Mathematica study found that students who had Experience Corps tutors made 60% greater gains in two critical literacy skills—sounding out words and reading comprehension—equivalent to the boost they would have gotten from being assigned to a classroom with 40% fewer children. Research by Johns Hopkins University found that referrals to principals for classroom misbehavior decreased by half in schools with Experience Corps members.

Studies about the impact of the Experience Corps program on its tutors have revealed significant gains in physical and mental well-being compared to a similar group of older people who were not tutors. Those with arthritis had less pain, and others with diabetes required fewer medications to keep their blood sugar under control. Michelle Carlson at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health found that participation in the Experience Corps had a positive impact on members' cognitive functioning. Program co-founder Dr. Linda Fried wrote in *The Atlantic* in 2014 that most volunteers who spent 6 months in the program dramatically improved their ability to solve complex problems. Experience Corps members, she reported, felt the program dusted off the cobwebs in their brains.

In addition, a Washington University team led by Professor Nancy Morrow-Howell found that 81% of older tutors participating in the Experience Corps program reported that their views/outlook on public education had changed. An even higher percentage—86%—agreed *a lot* or *somewhat* that they were more likely to vote in support of public education. This supports the conclusion by researchers Harry R. Moody and Robert Disch that intergenerational service programs are vehicles for increasing support for public schools, raising awareness about the environment, public safety, and helping all community members live healthier lifestyles.

Studies of the larger cross-generational federal Foster Grandparent Program have documented that children in preschool classrooms with foster grandparents have increased language and literacy skills; improved reading comprehension and readiness to enter kindergarten; and improved behavior and self-esteem. There also are proven benefits for the older adults who serve as foster grandparents, including improved physical and mental health, and higher levels of life satisfaction.

Co-generational service has not been studied with similar rigor. However, experiences described by participants and evaluation data from small intergenerational program pilots show how attitudes change, understanding increases, service programs are strengthened, and communities benefit when older and younger people serve alongside each other.

- **Attitudes and understanding:** Older and younger people have described how serving together changed their thinking and attitudes. For 24-year-old AmeriCorps SBP member Emerson Jordan-Wood, serving on a team with an AmeriCorps member in her 70s, rebuilding homes destroyed by Houston hurricanes, was "an opportunity to break down some of my pre-existing stereotypes about older people."

  A similar shift was described by Sierra Barnes, who, as a 21-year-old just out of college, served as an AmeriCorps VISTA member with Bridge Meadows, a multigenerational affordable housing nonprofit in Oregon that supports foster families and older adults. Sierra explained in an interview with the author how that experience changed her "views about the capacity of older adults and the value of aging."

  There is relevant research about small intergenerational programs involving smaller doses of intentional interactions. Professor Maureen Tam pointed to "strong research evidence that intergenerational service-learning [programs] improve social engagement with, and understanding of, other generations." Tam found evidence of mutual change in a college-based pilot in Hong Kong. The students in the study completed 54 hours of "community service" in senior centers (in addition to attending lectures). At the end of the program, they had developed a better understanding of the older generation and better appreciated their life experience. In addition, the older adult participants (ages 60–75) reported that the interactions with students broadened their horizons and helped them stay connected with society.

  In another study, Professor Lisa Wagner and her colleague Tana Luger found significant positive change in the attitudes of younger students (ages 18–30) about older students (55 and older) who participated together in a semester-long intergenerational class at the University of San Francisco. Wagner and Luger incorporated what they considered conditions for "optimal contacts" in weekly 65-minute meetings between the older and younger students. Before and after the course, participants completed questionnaires designed to understand whether their attitudes had changed. Post-course, younger students showed "significant increases in affection, comfort, kinship, engagement and enthusiasm for older people, whereas older students' ratings for younger adults remained stable." In an interview with the author, Wagner explained that this finding that older adults' attitudes did not change may have been due to the difference in questionnaire timing since older students filled out their pre-course questionnaire after the first course day, whereas younger students filled theirs out at the beginning of the semester.

- **Service program effectiveness**: Co-generational service has been found to increase stability and reduce program costs. Generations Incorporated (GI), a Boston-area tutoring program, combined cross- and co-generational service. Mary Gunn, who led GI for 8 years, reported that disruptive and costly turnover was reduced when older adult AmeriCorps members served alongside younger AmeriCorps VISTAs. This is consistent with research reported by AARP Senior Advisor Heather Tinsley-Fix, showing that turnover goes down in age-inclusive organizations.

  Similar benefits were found in a Reading Corps program, where older adult AmeriCorps members tutor alongside others who are in their 20s and 30s. According to program director Audrey Borland, in addition to making great tutors, the older

adults bring consistency for the program and the relationship with the school because they "tend to stay longer and serve multiple terms."

A recent essay in *Nonprofit Quarterly* pointed out another way that programs are strengthened by intergenerational service: "When volunteers of all ages intermingle, an effective environment is created that supports the organization. Volunteers from different generations bring an eclectic blend of knowledge, skills, and experience to an organization." This echoes insights from private-sector workforce studies. Car manufacturer BMW found that age-diverse teams, combining the assets and experience of different generations, led to increased productivity. In addition, Professor Marcie Pitts-Castouphes and colleagues, writing about a pilot project involving age-diverse work groups in health care, technology, and food manufacturing companies, suggested that viewing "age-diversity as an asset rather than a deficit contributed to innovation."

Older and younger participants serving together share knowledge and support the team's performance—what Tinsley-Fix referred to as knowledge spillover. Sherilyn Larkin, a 66-year-old AmeriCorps/SBP member described how being part of an intergenerational service team in Puerto Rico meant "constantly learning each other's positions so we can all experience something different and support each other." This was echoed by retiree Charlene Young and recent college graduate Jordan Fong, who met through serving as AmeriCorps literacy tutors with Reading Corps. Charlene and Jordan described the serendipity of crossing paths and the valuable ways they have helped each other.

- **Community ownership**: VISTA member Sierra Barnes described (in an interview with the author) how co-generational service affected her views about public policy: "Working alongside older adults at Bridge Meadows, lovingly called 'elders,' opened my eyes to the inequity of our systems regarding age and the need for age-friendly initiatives across all sectors." As a result, Sierra came to see everyday things in a new light: "I had never before considered how our cities aren't built for all ages. Sidewalks are cracked, making it enormously difficult for folks using walkers, canes, or wheelchairs to navigate our streets."

A report prepared for Generations United in 1994 examined intergenerational service. In *Young and Old Serving Together: Meeting Community Needs Through Intergenerational Partnerships*, Tess Scannell and Angela Roberts described the "potential benefits" of this "expanding field." When this report was revised and published digitally a few years later, the characterization of benefits as "potential" was still apt because little research had been conducted on this subset of national service. Since then, the relevant knowledge base, as described earlier, has increased but is still largely undeveloped.

Professor Matt Kaplan understood the importance of research when he was asked in 1977 whether "intergenerational programming" would "stand the test of time as an integrative human services 'field' rather than another fad or catchphrase." Kaplan forecast that the likely answer would "be linked with the effectiveness of efforts to document the value and significance of intergenerational initiatives." The studies and stories about intergenerational service recounted previously offer insights but fall short of the documentation Kaplan understood would be needed. In addition to more research about the value and significance of intergenerational service, a

deeper inquiry is needed to understand the optimal components for building social cohesion. Ramping up documentation and evaluation seems essential for closing the gap between policy and practice around intergenerational service.

Federal Policy on Intergenerational Service

Over the past century, consistent with America's strong tradition of service, Congress enacted an alphabet soup of service programs. Echoing the age segregation that emerged in the 20th century, many of these programs limited participation to defined age groups; others were age-integrated. Intergenerational service was incorporated to a small extent in the former and more significantly in the latter. However, none of the intergenerational provisions were ever funded at levels needed to reach their potential. With this chasm between policy and practice, America has not come close to realizing the vision set out by President John F. Kennedy when, two years after he asked all Americans to "ask what they could do for their country," called for a National Service Corps that would include young people and older citizens.

Age-Siloed Service: Eligibility Based on Age

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was the first national civilian service program that limited participation to a defined age group; that is, only 18- to 25-year-olds (later expanded to 17–26) were eligible to serve. Created in 1933 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal to combat the Great Depression, the CCC further limited service—for a small wage plus food and shelter—to unemployed single men. Nearly six decades later, when Congress established the American Conservation and Youth Corps in 1990, the age restriction was retained, with participation limited to all young adults ages 16–25. Three years after that, Congress enacted the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), limiting eligibility to young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 (eventually raised to 26). Modeled after the Roosevelt-era CCC and the military, the NCCC began as a demonstration program to explore the possibility of using post-Cold War military resources to help address national challenges. Because Congress did not establish any age limit for becoming an NCCC team leader, the program opened the door to some intergenerational service.

At the other end of the age spectrum, Congress created three service programs in the mid-1960s limiting participation to older adults. The Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), Senior Companions, and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) were part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society anti-poverty initiatives to tap the skills, talents, and experience of older Americans. The first two provided stipends to low-income older adults. All three, which later expanded eligibility to those 55 and older, were combined as the Senior Corps in 1993 and recently renamed AmeriCorps Seniors.

One of these programs, FGP, is explicitly cross-generational. Low-income adults serve as foster grandparents in early childhood centers, schools, and other settings "to give each child attention, love, care, to soothe them when distraught, to help them in their struggles." The adults are provided purpose and a paycheck in the form of a small hourly stipend. FGP's informal motto—"every dollar spent twice"—captures the cycle of benefits to old and young.

Also created in this era, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) similarly limits participation to low-income older adults. Part of the Older Americans Act of 1965, SCSEP places adults who are 55 or older into on-the-job training programs in public and nonprofit agencies. Although not generally considered "service," SCSEP includes key elements

of service programs, combining anti-poverty, workforce development, and civic engagement goals into one.

Age distinctions (though not eligibility) were incorporated in the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which aimed to "renew the ethic of civic responsibility" and "expand full-time and part-time service opportunities for all citizens, particularly youth and older Americans." This statute distinguished between two types of national service: one by students and out-of-school youth, and one by adults aged 60 or older. The former "perform meaningful and constructive service … where the application of human talent and dedication may help to meet human, educational, linguistic, and environmental community needs, especially those relating to poverty." The latter, named "special senior service members," were defined as those "willing to work full-time or part-time in conjunction with a full-time national service program."

In the Serve America Act of 2009, Congress sought to increase service by adults 55 or older, with four age-defined provisions. First, it authorized Encore Fellowships for individuals 55 or older. These 1-year stipended fellowships would enable fellows to carry out service projects in areas of national need and to transition to full- or part-time public service. Second, Congress authorized a 3-year "Silver Scholarships" pilot to "incentivize" service by older adults. Under this pilot, adults who are 55 or older and serve at least 350 hours in a year would receive a $1,000 educational award. This scholarship was modeled after the larger educational award established in 1993 for AmeriCorps members who serve at least 900 hours of service in an approved national service position. (Neither Encore Fellowships nor Silver Scholarships have ever been funded.) Third, Congress provided that eligible recipients of both Silver Scholarships and AmeriCorps Education Awards who are 55 or older (before beginning their term of service) could transfer their award to a child, foster child, or grandchild. Finally, Congress encouraged states to recommend policies to "increase service for adults age 55 or older, including how best to use such adults as sources of social capital, and how to utilize their skills and experience to address community needs."

Age-Integrated Service

Beginning in the 1960s, Congress also established civilian service programs without any age restrictions. There were no upper age limits for participation in either the Peace Corps or Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Indeed, from the beginning, the Peace Corps tapped what President Kennedy described as the "reservoir of talent" of "those who have retired in the formal sense but who have many, many useful years ahead of them." The first group of 24 VISTA members ranged in age from 21 to 71. Both programs continue to have no age restrictions.

Thirty years later, the National and Community Service Act of 1990 envisioned an age-inclusive program. Although, as mentioned earlier, this statute distinguished between young and "senior" service members, Congress further specified, in "Subtitle D," that at least 25% of funding would go to programs engaging "special senior service participants (aged 60 and older)."

In the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, Congress encouraged the newly created AmeriCorps programs to include both age-integrated team-based and intergenerational service. Age-integrated team service was first on the list of program models eligible for funding. The act defined such a model as

> a community corps program that meets unmet … needs and promotes greater community unity through the use of organized teams of participants of varied social and economic backgrounds, skill levels, physical and developmental capabilities, ages, ethnic backgrounds, or genders.

In addition, intergenerational service was one of four qualification criteria for national programs eligible to receive funding:

> National service programs eligible to receive assistance or approved national service positions … to establish, if consistent with the purposes of the program, an *intergenerational component* [emphasis added] … that combines students, out-of-school youths, and older adults as participants to provide services to address unmet human, educational, environmental or public safety needs.

Congress expanded age-integrated service in the 2009 Serve America Act. In addition to creating the age-specific initiatives described previously, this legislation included two provisions to encourage generations serving together. First, the law provided that competitive grants to service programs should be made with "an effort to allocate not less than 10 percent of the financial assistance and approved national service positions … to eligible entities proposing to carry out encore service programs," defining the latter as programs that involve a "significant number of participants age 55 or older" and take advantage of their skills and experiences in the design and implementation. Second, Congress added a new eligibility requirement for states to receive national service funding. Specifically, states were required to include recommendations in their state service plans for multigenerational activities and to encourage "the development of Encore service programs in the State."

The Gap Between Policy and Practice

The preceding review of federal legislation shows how Congress has repeatedly encouraged intergenerational civilian service. Unfortunately, implementation has been limited. In many cases, Congress did not follow the authorizing legislation with funding, and executive actions have fallen short of operationalizing legislative provisions. Also, interest in developing the field of intergenerational service has been dampened by minimal attention to documentation and research.

Data about the ages of service members illustrate the gap: Despite the 2009 provision encouraging a 10% target for Encore Service Programs—that is, programs with a "significant number of participants age 55 or older" and that take advantage of their skills and experiences in the design and implementation—the overwhelming majority of participants in AmeriCorps programs have been young adults. In 2018, 84.3% of participants in AmeriCorps direct service programs (known as State and National Programs) were 29 or younger; only 5.4% were 50 or older. Although there is no age ceiling for joining the Peace Corps, the median age of Peace Corps volunteers in 2018 was 25; only 3% were 56 or older. In addition, programs in which intergenerational service is intentional (e.g., FGP) have been held back by inadequate funding.

Even with this gap between policy and practice, the potential of intergenerational service can be seen in programs where it has thrived.

Cross-Generational Service: Serving To Support Each Other

The Foster Grandparent Program is the largest cross-generational program in which older adults support children, their teachers, and caregivers. Low-income adults serve as foster

grandparents in schools and community-based settings, helping children learn to read, providing one-on-one tutoring, mentoring troubled teenagers and young mothers, and caring for premature infants or children with disabilities. The age for eligibility, originally set at 65, is now 55 or older. In recent years, foster grandparents have served an average of 20 hours per week, year after year, bringing stability to the children's lives and the programs. In return, they find purpose, connect with others, receive a modest, tax-exempt hourly stipend, and are reimbursed for some of the costs of serving.

Findings from studies (described earlier) confirming the positive impacts of this program have been reinforced by what parents, teachers, children, and foster grandparents have shared about their experiences. For example, the following comments are from recent participants in a Foster Grandparent Program in Missoula, Montana:

- **Kindergarten teacher (about the foster grandparent in her class):** "I know her presence has been a significant support for the kids socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. Having a second set of eyes in the classroom has been invaluable (especially watching for a few kids with specific behaviors/medical concerns).… Her flexibility and willingness to help in any capacity has provided peace of mind to me, too."

- **Parent of a 6-year-old**: "I don't know what you're doing with my daughter, but she's a different person! She loves to read now! She says, 'I'm going to show Grandma Nancy how I can read.'"

- **Five-year-old preschooler (about the foster grandparent in her rural classroom):** "It's nice she's here every day."

- **Grandma Mary, who had served for 15 years as a preschool foster grandparent:** "The greatest thing for me was helping children through the years in many different areas. I gave them light, positive love, joy and I helped many children to be successful. The positive for me was caring for and loving the children and helping them learn. They are coming back to thank me." (A. Hopkins, personal communication, February 13, 2020)

Despite FGP's effectiveness, the size of the program has been essentially frozen. When it was established in 1965, there were 10,000 foster grandparent positions, each paid an hourly stipend set at the federal minimum wage (which was then $1.40). More than 55 years later, the number of foster grandparent positions has only doubled, to 20,000, and the hourly stipend, raised to $3.00, has not kept pace with either inflation or changes in the federal minimum wage. This relative stagnation is surprising given the significant research findings around how FGP has benefited children in preschool classrooms with foster grandparents, as well as the older adults who serve.

While FGP is unique as a cross-generational federal program for older adults to help children develop, it is not the only one that connects older adults to support children. AARP Foundation's Experience Corps, for example, is an evidence-based, high-dosage literacy tutoring model developed 20 years ago as an AmeriCorps program for older adults. Now located in 22 cities across the United States, more than 2,000 Experience Corps members, aged 50 or older, help 30,000 children in kindergarten through Grade 3 improve their reading fluency and comprehension. On average, they tutor 10–12 hours each week, some as part-time, stipended

AmeriCorps members. In addition to the structured tutoring, the mentoring relationships encourage learning and confidence. When the pandemic disrupted in-person tutoring, many Experience Corps members pivoted to remote tutoring.

As summarized earlier, extensive studies of Experience Corps have shown the positive outcomes for both the children who participate in the program and the older adults who serve as tutors. As with FGP, experiences recounted by Experience Corps participants have supported the research findings:

- **Parent of a child with an Experience Corps tutor**: "She wasn't reading to me at all before the tutoring. She would read 'cat' and 'dog,' only words that are so common. I was extremely worried. I really didn't know what was wrong. Now she reads with the other kids."

- **First-grade teacher**: "My Experience Corps member is incredible. She knows exactly what to do with the kids I send her. Sometimes she'll notice something and be able to articulate it even better than I could because she's spent time working one-on-one with a child. Having her as my own personal volunteer is making a huge difference in the academic performance of my kids. Almost every student in my class has benefited and has improved at an accelerated rate because of her."

- **Experience Corps tutor**: "I have a reason for getting up in the morning, knowing that I am going to help a child. When they say, 'Miss Bell, I need some help,' or 'Miss Bell, will you help me,' it gives me a feeling that I am needed. You cannot imagine the joy that it brings me. I now have a purpose to get up in the morning, knowing that there are children waiting for me."

Cross-generational programs also connect older and younger adults. Encore Physicians, for example, engages retired physicians as mentors to young clinicians while also helping address doctor shortages at health clinics in underserved communities. The experienced medical professionals take care of patients in the clinics and via telehealth. In addition, they mentor younger clinicians, such as nurse practitioners, during their 1-year residence—which retired Kaiser physician Dr. Ethan Daniels described as "one of the best parts of the job."

Other programs foster meaningful intergenerational connections as younger people support older adults. Generation Tech, for instance, connects high school volunteers to teach tech skills to isolated older adults. In addition to providing transactional "geek squad"-style tech support, this program is a two-way intervention focused on mutual discovery and learning. Student volunteers are trained to develop sustained one-on-one relationships over time, through weekly visits. Co-founder Simar Chada explained that, "while I may be there to help older adults adapt to newer technology, those same older adults are able to provide me with information that I couldn't get anywhere else. When I leave a center, I am always walking away with more knowledge and experience."

A second example is Big & Mini, founded by college students in Austin, Texas, to combat loneliness and loss of connection. This virtual platform matches college students and older adults in meaningful, mutually beneficial conversations by video—decreasing the isolation both experience and providing mentorship support. Started as a simple Google form and landing page making matches manually via email, today Big & Mini is a robust platform with 1,500 active users across eight colleges, 14 organizations, and 25 countries. Here is how 19-year-old

Daniel describes his relationship with 74-year-old Alva, with whom he talks weekly: "We had a lot of things in common but we also had a lot of interests not in common…. We were able to learn from each other's experiences and stories enough to form what I think is a genuine friendship."

Co-Generational Service: Serving Together to Solve Social Problems

Meaningful interactions also occur when different generations serve together, either on age-integrated teams or as part of an intergenerational cohort that comes together for training and community-building activities. The common purpose that unites these participants can be supporting the needs of each other's generation or, more broadly, meeting a wide range of community needs. As mentioned earlier, the National and Community Service Act of 1990 envisioned intentional age-integrated service, especially for grants made under Subtitle D. This grant making to "test" national service models was the responsibility of the Commission on National and Community Service. Seven out of eight grants reported by the commission went to programs designed to engage participants across the age spectrum. The commission's report, *What You Can Do for Your Country*, described five grantees that intentionally brought older and younger people together—that is, in co-generational service—addressing community problems.

In the decades since those five pilots were funded, the field of intentional co-generational service has not been developed. There are, however, oases where this has happened unintentionally, what Encore.org CEO Marc Freedman calls "naturally occurring." The good news is that even when co-generational service is not deliberate, age diversity can lead to benefits for the individuals who serve and for the community.

Team-Based Co-Generational Service

The Georgia Peach Corps and the Urban Schools Service Corps were two of the Subtitle D programs designed with teams composed of older and younger adults. As described by the Commission on National and Community Service, the Georgia Peach Corps was a 3-year pilot to engage 100 youths, aged 17–25 and working at minimum wage, with 20 older men and women on selected public-works and human-service projects in two rural counties. The *New York Times* quoted the pilot's director, Lynn Thornton, who explained that the program differs from other service projects by emphasizing "intergenerational cooperation" and socioeconomic diversity. "We're trying to revive an old idea that goes back to Thomas Jefferson and F.D.R.," she said, "that you can't just be a taker, that everyone owes something back to their community."

In the Urban Schools Service Corps (later renamed the National School and Community Corps [NSCC]), teams working to "change and strengthen schools … were assigned to some of New Jersey's poorest inner city schools … [to] address both the educational needs in the school and the related needs of students and their families." The teams included adults living near the school, some of whom were older adults, along with nearby college students and recent grads. NSCC founder Marty Friedman explained in an interview with the author that diverse teams—by age, gender, race, and educational level—were considered a core element of the program. Including older community members emerged naturally from local planning teams on which grandmothers participated.

Roughly 25% of the NSCC members were in their 20s, and the same percentage were 50 or older—some of whom were retired teachers and principals. As Friedman recounted, "We just wanted a set of mostly community (indeed, neighborhood) based teams of people invested in

improving their local schools." At NSCC's peak, there were 500 team members, about half serving full time and some staying with the program for 3 or 4 years. The duration was important for developing relationships with the students and families. According to Freidman, independent evaluations of the program documented significant impact on academic performance (e.g., higher rates of homework completion, higher standardized test scores) and behavior (e.g., fewer suspensions, reduced truancy).

A more recent example of intergenerational teams illustrates how this can happen without an intentional design. SBP, a national disaster recovery organization, rebuilds homes after disasters in the United States and the Bahamas. Although SBP did not set out to recruit AmeriCorps members from different age groups, roughly 5% of those serving on teams are 50 or older, and they work alongside younger members. The experience on age-diverse teams reveals the value resulting from this integration.

As described earlier, a 24-year-old who worked with an SBP team member in her 70s found that the experience broke down his preexisting stereotypes about older adults. Another SBP member, 64-year-old Melanie Rudolph, described serving on an intergenerational team "twenty-four-seven" to rebuild homes destroyed by hurricanes:

> We've all been so open and what we've shared together just bonded us, like, unbelievably. I would do anything for them, just like they would do anything for me. We're like a well-oiled machine. You know, everybody has their gifts and skills, and we recognize that and support each other. There's nothing like it.

Melanie's previous experience in the Peace Corps gave her confidence that this intergenerational teamwork could forge long-lasting relationships. She had served 7 years earlier in Palau, a cluster of islands near the Philippines, and recalled,

> I was 56 at the time, and the oldest in my group by a few decades. But I was used to working with younger generations, so it felt like a natural transition for me. I'm still in touch with many of the young people I met through the Peace Corps. When you're doing that kind of service, where there is such a deep commitment, it creates a very specific kind of bond. They're all over the world now, so we keep in touch by phone or online. We like staying up to date on each other's lives.

Co-Generational Service Cohorts

Individual (rather than team-based) service assignments offer opportunities for participants to come together as a cohort for training, professional development, coordination, and community-building activities. When the service cohort is age-diverse, the experience can open the door for meaningful intergenerational interaction.

Three of the Subtitle D grants illustrate this approach. The Delta Service Corps placed individuals of diverse backgrounds and ages in singular community-based service organizations in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Three to five of the participants were organized to meet together weekly and carry out a group project. Each group had a mix of full-time, part-time, and "senior citizen participants," as well as a team leader.

Fast forward to the present: Approximately 25 out of 100 members of the Stockton (CA) Service Corps (SSC) are adults 50 or older. The corps members are placed in individual assignments with five community partners to improve educational outcomes and address social inequities in Stockton. The age diversity was not deliberate; it resulted from the way one of the

SSC partners recruited individuals to serve. Most of the older corps members serve individually as tutors for California Reading Corps and California Math Corps, helping young children achieve grade-level reading and math proficiency. They were recruited through targeted outreach to local churches, libraries, and community centers. By contrast, the other SSC partners recruit applicants through activities less likely to reach an older population: internal program pipelines, university outreach events, and posting online via Handshake, university career boards, and Service Year.

The full corps comes together periodically for training and professional development. SSC, supported by an Encore.org Gen2Gen Innovation Fellowship, is developing ways to bring meaningful intergenerational interactions into these gatherings. SSC's former director, Sonali Nijhawan, explained,

> By committing a year of their lives to serve as an AmeriCorps member in Stockton, our Stockton Service Corps Fellows are committing to empowering the young people they serve and the individuals they serve alongside. Service has long been a way to bring people of different backgrounds and life experiences together around one common purpose. In Stockton we are proud that our service community is committed to building a community across race, ethnicity, gender, and generations.

> By investing in the development of an intergenerational corps, we are creating a unique opportunity for our Fellows to find commonality and build perspective from their cross-generational counterparts. In our first year of programming, we found that Fellows across generations would find pride and commonality in each other's desire to serve and commitment to community—highlighting how the power of coming together under a common purpose can truly build bridges and long-lasting connection and impact.

Charlene Young, a retiree, and Jordan Fong, a recent college graduate, were both tutors in the SSC Reading Corps. Fong described how "getting to know Charlene on a personal level and understanding how she looks at things has been great. If I hear about something positive she's doing with her students, I'll try it out and see if it helps me, too." For Fong, it was mutual: "We just clicked," she said. "We help each other out." Reading Corps Executive Director Audrey Borland recognized another benefit to having older adults in the tutoring mix: "They tend to stay longer and serve multiple terms, and that consistency is good for the students and the relationship with the school," she explained. "Plus, they're good at recruiting their friends and I love the feedback and guidance they give us."

Two intentionally intergenerational national service initiatives were launched in the past year to meet community needs caused by the pandemic. The first, in Colorado, provided surge capacity for COVID-19 case investigation, contact tracing, and referrals. The state's COVID Containment Response Corps (CCRC) has mobilized AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors (RSVP) volunteers, blending funding from both national service programs. By the end of 2020, nearly 800 national service members had served or were serving with the CCRC. In December, 28% of the active participants were AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. This intergenerational initiative has already served more than 43,000 individuals, contacted 99% of COVID-19 cases within 24 hours, and delivered 33,904 lab results to people tested by the state lab. Intentionally connecting multiple generations was key to that success. For example, tech savvy NCCC members helped AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers learn how to use Chromebooks,

Google Suite, and hotspots to serve remotely. With that support, the AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers were able to effectively reach 97% of their contact-tracing calls.

Intergenerational CCRC members working within particular regions meet virtually. To spur additional meaningful intergenerational connections, AmeriCorps members and RSVP volunteers participate in regular cohort meetings and are invited to also join small groups outside their service locations through an innovative "League of AmeriFriends." In interviews with the author, participants in the CCRC described their experiences interacting with service members from different generations. Here's how Kaitlin Logan, an AmeriCorps member who recently graduated from college, described her experience:

> It's changed my views drastically about interacting with people outside my age range. I'm happy to admit my huge misconception that everyone older than me was working against me is wrong. Short sighted …. They shared my beliefs about COVID … rather than a generational divide. Through a program like this you can see things shared in common regardless of different ages and where you come from.

In March 2021, a second intentionally intergenerational corps was launched by Encore.org to support vaccinating underserved populations at federally qualified health centers in Northern California. With a demonstration grant from AmeriCorps Seniors, the Encore Intergenerational Vaccine Corps is engaging retired medical professionals and older and younger lay volunteers in six counties, and developing material for other health centers to replicate this model. This demonstration project is designed to bring the medical and lay volunteers together to foster meaningful intergenerational interactions.

Five Ways to Expand Intentional Intergenerational Service to Increase Community Ownership

Intergenerational national service connects people of different ages to learn about social problems, work to solve them together, and foster meaningful interactions. This strengthens communities by engaging a windfall of human capital with complimentary skills, and bridging generational and cultural differences. Federal policies have repeatedly encouraged cross-generational service programs that engage older and younger people to meet challenges facing the other's generation, as well as co-generational programs that bring the generations together to serve with each other. Yet, implementation has fallen short, and there has been limited research or documentation. Nevertheless, evaluations of intergenerational service programs, and participants' experiences, point to positive outcomes for individuals who serve, those who are served, programs, and communities.

The following are five actions that leaders in all sectors at the national, state, and local levels can take to close the chasm between policy and practice, and realize the promise of intergenerational service.

1. **Think intergenerational**. Age-siloed service is the default today, just as age segregation continues to be typical throughout America. This default was illustrated at the beginning of 2021 in proposals to meet the urgent need for COVID-19 vaccination. On January 1, Senator Mitt Romney (R-Utah) called for enlisting retired medical professionals to administer vaccines. A few days later, University of Massachusetts leaders Dr. Michael Collins and Martin Meehan, formerly a seven-term Democratic Congressman, proposed a "vaccination corps" made up of college

students and recent graduates. Both are great ideas, but as Dr. Gerald Bourne and I wrote in *Newsweek*, it would be even better to combine the two, bringing retired health care workers and lay volunteers of all ages together to "create an intergenerational service corps that can quickly and efficiently vaccinate millions of Americans."

As described earlier, this age-integrated thinking is what Colorado did in its COVID Containment Response Corps, and it shaped the Encore Intergenerational Vaccine Corps, which operationalized the idea proposed in the *Newsweek* article. Recruiting and placing retired medical professionals, nursing students, and younger and older lay volunteers, the corps is working at federally qualified health centers in six Northern California counties to vaccinate people of all ages in low-income and ethnically diverse communities.

2. **Implement existing policies**. Policies already in place encourage and enable intergenerational service—what is missing is implementation. Federal funding is needed to operationalize some of these legislative enactments, like the Encore Fellowships and Silver Scholarships authorized in the Serve America Act. Others— for example, requiring state service plans to include intergenerational components— can be implemented through executive action. One specific idea for executive action by AmeriCorps is incentivizing state service commissions to support intentional intergenerational service. Another is including intergenerational service as a criterion in notices of funding opportunity.

   If federal funding lags, states and the private sector could spark intergenerational programs. One foundation has shown how the two can be combined to expand national service as a pathway for young people. The Schultz Family Foundation recently created a $1 Million National Service Challenge, offering matching grants to AmeriCorps state service commissions. An example of private sector investments in intergenerational service is the Encore Fellowship Program which, with private corporate and philanthropic support, has operationalized the fellowships Congress authorized but never funded. The program has placed thousands of Encore Fellows in 25 cities to strengthen community-based organizations. Colleges could demonstrate the value of Silver Scholarships and variations (e.g., fee and credit waivers) to incentivize older adult service and add age diversity to their student body. States could encourage intergenerational service in their programs—for example adding this approach to legislation recently proposed in Massachusetts to establish a Coronavirus Recovery Corps.

3. **Age integrate national service programs.** The recent rebranding of federal national service programs is a step toward their integration. Senior Corps (FGP, Senior Companions, and RSVP) is now named AmeriCorps Seniors. The next step is to move beyond branding to programmatic integration. Intergenerational service can be expanded by combining different AmeriCorps programs for a holistic approach to meeting community needs. For example, RSVP, NCCC teams, VISTA, and AmeriCorps state and national programs can collaborate in particular interventions— as they have done in the COVID initiatives described earlier. In addition, cross-service recruitment can call on people of all ages to serve.

4. **Invest in intergenerational innovation.** At the turn of the 20th century, America's innovation disrupted the country's largely age-integrated society. As Freedman and Stamp have explained, this restructuring of society by age "was driven by well-intentioned public policies and social innovations aimed at achieving greater efficiency and solving major problems." They point to how universal education and child labor laws led to schools putting same-age students together in classrooms. And how Social Security and mandatory retirement helped dislodge older employees from the workforce in the midst of high Depression-era unemployment.

   As the 21st century grapples with its unique challenges, including demographics and disunity, it is time for a new wave of innovation to upend the age-segregated society that resulted from those well-intended measures. Intergenerational national service is a good place to start. The Corporation for National and Community Service (now named AmeriCorps) is authorized by Congress to fund demonstration projects. That is how Experience Corps and other successful cross-generational programs were started; it is also making possible the co-generational Encore Intergenerational Vaccine Corps. Such grants, as well as funding by private-sector philanthropy, are needed to disrupt age-siloed national service.

5. **Develop a robust research agenda**. Intergenerational relationships have been studied by academics and practitioners across the globe. For example, the *Journal on Intergenerational Relations* "publishes research on intergenerational relationships, integrating practical, theoretical, familial and policy perspectives on intergenerationality." The Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education hosts an Intergenerational Learning Research and Community Engagement group. However, little attention has been devoted to the specific field of intergenerational service. While some cross-generational service programs (e.g., Experience Corps) have been rigorously studied, more research is needed, and the study of co-generational national service programs is uncharted terrain.

   A starting point is to identify intentional and unintentional intergenerational service programs already underway. The research methodology to be applied should include measuring participants' attitudes about each other's generation and community problems, before and after the service experience, to reveal the extent and sustainability of change resulting from the intergenerational connections.

   Comparative research could assess the efficacy of intergenerational service activities. In addition to increasing understanding, efforts like these would inform best practices for designing new intergenerational service programs.

Conclusion

Nothing can be done to restore the over half million lives lost to COVID-19 in our country. It *is* possible, however, to reduce the pandemic's impact on future generations and rebuild the social cohesion our democracy needs to thrive.

"Community ownership" is the thread connecting the articles in this issue of the *eJournal of Public Affairs*. In his introductory essay, Greg Burris defines this as an internalized feeling of responsibility for the success of one's community and everyone living in it. Intergenerational

national service is an approach to turn this idea into a reality, by bringing people of different generations together for the common purpose of meeting community needs.

Federal policies developed during the past decades have encouraged national service that connects different generations. Despite the lack of wide implementation, there is ample experience showing that intergenerational service benefits participants and communities. In addition to making progress on pressing social challenges, engaging community members across the age spectrum to serve together increases understanding and empathy across generational and cultural divides. As with all forms of service, it builds a sense of responsibility for solving social problems to strengthen communities. Bridging divisions among different generations, along with other divides that separate Americans, is an essential step toward unifying our country.

We do not need to look far to realize the importance of unity to American democracy. In a memorable intergenerational moment, Amanda Gorman, our nation's first National Youth Poet Laureate, made this point in her poem "The Hill We Climb," delivered at the 2021 inauguration of the oldest president to be sworn into office:

> We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,
>
> we must first put our differences aside....
>
> So let us leave behind a country
>
> better than the one we were left with.

Author

Phyllis Segal is a Senior Fellow at Encore.org, where her work is all about solutions. This article is part of her focus on advancing intergenerational national service as a powerful new way to meet community needs and bridge the generational divide. Other activities on this front include co-founding Encore.org's Intergenerational Vaccine Corps. As Vice President of Encore.org from 2007 to 2020, Phyllis spearheaded many groundbreaking initiatives, including the Gen2Gen campaign, research to understand encore talent as a resource for meeting society's most pressing needs, and programs to offer pathways for people in later life who want to transition to new work in nonprofits and government. She is a Trustee of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation and on the Advisory Board of the Eli J. and Phyllis N. Segal Citizen Leadership Program at Brandeis University. Phyllis previously served on the Board of the Corporation for National and Community Service (appointed by President Obama); Chair of the Federal Labor Relations Authority (appointed by President Clinton); Board Chair of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence; founding Legal Director of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund; and in other government and nonprofit leadership positions.   She earned her J.D. at Georgetown University Law Center, B.A. from the University of Michigan.   Phyllis can be reached at psegal@encore.org.

eJournal of Public Affairs

Book Review: Unbound: How Inequality Constricts Our Economy and What We Can Do About It, by Heather Boushey

Brian G. Fogle
Community Foundation of the Ozarks

Author Note

Brian G. Fogle, Community Foundation of the Ozarks.

Correspondence concerning this book review should be addressed to Brian G. Fogle, President and CEO, Community Foundation of the Ozarks, 425 E. Trafficway, Springfield, MO 65806. Phone: (417) 864-6199. E-mail: bfogle@cfozarks.org

I must admit that I felt a bit hesitant when I was invited to write a book review for the *eJournal of Public Affairs.* It has been—what?—4-plus *decades* since I was asked to compose a book review, and I still have a recurring nightmare in which I am forced to complete a final exam for a college class I had never taken—and I feared that writing the review might trigger another. Yet, the invitation was for a public-affairs mission that I am deeply committed to and grateful exists at Missouri State University, and the review gives me a chance to share some information about a subject I thoroughly enjoy—economics—but rarely have an opportunity to discuss.

I was asked specifically to review *Unbound: How Inequality Constricts Our Economy and What We Can Do About It*, a book I have recommended to many others, including friend and colleague Greg Burris, who is also the guest editor of the *eJournal*. The book is authored by Dr. Heather Boushey, the executive director and chief economist at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, and a former economist for the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee. Her book joins several others written in the past few years addressing economic inequality, such as Oren Cass's *The Once and Future Worker*, Isabel Sawhill's *The Forgotten Americans*, and Thomas Picketty's *Capitalism in the 21st Century*. Even the billionaire hedge-fund founder of Bridgewater Associates, Ray Dalio, has called income inequality the most pressing issue of our time, though it received little discussion in the latest election. Unquestionably, the topic ties into the notion of "community ownership" and who really comprises *community*—that is, just certain segments of the population that happen to have the majority of the wealth and power, or indeed everyone who should have access to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"? In this year of the COVID-19 pandemic and a presidential election, these latter events have certainly overshadowed income inequality, but both have been tremendously impacted by it. Those falling into the lower income quartiles have been disproportionately impacted by both the health and economic jolts caused by the pandemic, and, during the campaign, the anger and bitterness felt by so many still recovering from the last economic downturn were intensified by their belief that they were "left behind."

To use the oft-quoted Mark Twain line, "There are lies, damn lies, and statistics." Numerical facts, however, are a good place to start, and the numbers related to how the U.S. economy has changed in the past 50 years are, in this case, irrefutable. From 1963 to 1979, gross domestic product (GDP), the most widely used measure of economic growth, increased at an annual rate of about 1.7%., and distribution—the economic term for who gets what is produced—roughly followed that same pattern. In other words, family income grew roughly in proportion to overall economic growth. However, since that time, as Boushey highlights, that pattern has changed significantly. From 1980 to 2016, roughly 90% of households experienced an income growth rate that fell below the overall growth rate of the economy. The bottom 40% of income earners averaged wage increases of just 0.3% annually. Adjusted for inflation, this means that average household income grew from $26,400 to $29,800 in the past 4 decades for this group.

Income inequality is even worse depending on race and ethnicity. Today, 30% of White households make over $100,000 annually, compared to just 16% of Black households. At the beginning of the "roaring" 1920s in the United States, the top 1% held 51% of the country's wealth. That chapter did not end well, with the start of the Great Depression closing out that decade. By 1978, the top 1% of the population controlled just 23% of all wealth, a much more equitable distribution. Although we are down from the second peak in this century's first decade,

which ended with the Great Recession, it is worth noting that, currently, 42% of all wealth is held by the top 1%. Boushey points out that corporate and tax policies have contributed to this disparity over the years. In the mid-1970s, Fortune 500 CEOs made about 25 times more than the average employee of their respective company; today, it is 270 times more. Income mobility has likewise suffered. Stanford economist Raj Chetty's research showed that, for those born in 1940, nine out of 10 ended up making more than their parents; however, by 1980, only one half made more than their parents. The trend has continued to decline since then.

Boushey places part of the blame on supply-side economics, first adopted as public policy during the Reagan years. Proponents of this economic theory promote tax cuts, which, in turn, will produce more spending and, therefore, more overall tax dollars in the long-run and greater economic growth. (More recently, we have seen the failure of a supply-side experiment in our neighboring Kansas, where the Republican-led legislature finally overturned the governor's veto and raised taxes after public education and other services were decimated by lower revenues caused by earlier tax cuts.) Boushey observes that there are very different spending habits within different income levels. Lower income households spend a much higher percentage of their income on meeting basic, day-to-day living demands. Former chair of the Council of Economic Advisors Alan Krueger's research has shown that about $1.1 trillion in income shifted to the wealthy between 1979 and 2007. Because of household spending behaviors, had that $1.1 trillion gone to the bottom 99 percent instead of the top 1% of Americans … aggregate consumption would have been 5 percent higher each year. That adds up to about $480 billion in lost economic gains annually…. These calculations make clear that the economy would be in better shape and aggregate demand would be stronger if the size of the middle-class had not dwindled as a result of rising inequality. (p. 148)

We have seen similar patterns during the pandemic, as savings have risen among middle- and upper-income households since March 2020, while many lower income families remain in a crisis situation.

The evidence in *Unbound* is clear: Rising income inequality has harmed the nation's overall economy and population. How to "fix" the problem is not simple, however. Boushey identifies early childhood education as one of the best public investments. A Duke University study showed that individuals who, at age seven, had reading scores in the lowest quartile made 26% less, on average, than those in the highest quartile by adulthood. The author advocates for universal pre-K, citing research findings that "it would take just eight years for the total annual benefits of such a program to exceed the costs, and within thirty-five years, the surplus would total $81.6 billion—more than double the costs" (p. 56). Noted author and sociologist Robert Putnam visited the Springfield community several years ago to promote his book *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisi*s, which addresses the question "What has happened to the Land of Opportunity?" and promotes universal pre-K as a way to once again provide low-income families a chance to pursue economic opportunity.

One of the other key areas of focus in *Unbound* is simply how we count economic growth. GDP has become our bellwether measurement for determining "how the economy is doing"; yet, such a broad aggregate misses the actual health of the majority of the population. Boushey strongly emphasizes disaggregating data to focus on how most households are doing. As she argues, we have been measuring the wrong thing. "Measure what matters," she writes. Robert Kennedy spoke eloquently of this need when he talked about what was called "gross national product" back in the 1960s. His words are worth quoting at length:

Too much and too long, we seem to have surrendered community excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our gross national product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for those who break them. It counts the destruction of our redwoods and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and the cost of a nuclear warhead, and armored cars for police who fight riots in our streets. It counts Whitman's rifle [in 1966, Charles Whitman killed 16 people and wounded 32 in Austin, Texas] and Speck's knife [in 1966, Richard Speck raped and killed 8 student nurses in Chicago], and the television programs that glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

And it tells us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans.

Boushey suggests adopting a more equitable fiscal and regulatory policy that "support[s] sustainable and productive investment by encouraging savings toward public infrastructure and climate change." There has been a great deal of bi-partisan support for such policy, yet the U.S. legislature has been unable to develop, much less pass, legislation that addresses in any meaningful way our deteriorating national infrastructure. As the new administration comes in, this is certainly an important area in which to find common ground and move forward.

In Boushey's concluding chapter, she reaches back to the founding father of the dismal science of economics:

More than two hundred years ago, Adam Smith transformed how people thought about the economy, giving us the idea of dynamics pushing the market as though with an invisible hand toward mutually beneficial outcomes. If the desires for wealth that inspire the butcher, brewer, and baker guide free, competitive markets toward outcomes that are generally socially beneficial, then they act as forces for good. During the latter half of the twentieth century, however, Smith's ideas were stripped of nuance and turned into a widespread faith among policymakers that, if they left markets to their internal logic, the nation would see broadly-shared improvements in well-being. The evidence is in: That barebones framework doesn't work. (p. 191)

To this, I would add a footnote. Before Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, he penned *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. One of his foundational sentiments was that what benefitted a neighbor would benefit the individual. Smith saw sympathy as a "natural state" in humans. Thus, one might deduce that, when taken together, people matter more than markets, with the latter serving what is best for people, not the other way around. Many seem to have lost sight of that in the past several decades. The dismal science, then, does not have to be so dismal after all.

Author

Brian Fogle is President of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks. Prior to joining CFO, he spent 30 years in banking in Springfield.

Brian's hometown is Aurora, MO, where he is a graduate of Aurora High School. He has his B.B.A. and M.B.A. in banking and finance from the University of Mississippi.

Brian has been active in numerous civic and non-profit groups. He currently chairs the Good Community Committee and co-chairs the Healthy Living Alliance, and is on the board of the Every Child Promise, the Downtown Council of Champions, The Missouri Scholarship and Loan Foundation, and the Missouri College Access Network. He previously served on the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education, and the Federal Reserve Board Community Advisory Council. He was awarded the O Franklin Kenworthy Leadership Award in 1990, the National Community Leadership Award in 1993, and the Springfieldian Award in 2010, and received and honorary doctorate of humane letters from Drury University in December, 2011.

His motto in life is "Often wrong, seldom in doubt."

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EJOPA

The Importance of Missouri State University to Springfield

Clifton M. Smart, III
Missouri State University

Ryan DeBoef
Missouri State University

Allen Kunkel
Missouri State University

Wes Pratt, J.D.
Missouri State University

Author Note

Clifton M. Smart, III, Office of the President, Missouri State University.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Clif Smart, President, Office of the President, Missouri State University, 901 S. National Avenue, Springfield, MO 65897. Phone: (417) 836-8500. E-mail: CliftonSmart@MissouriState.edu

It has always been a benefit to a community to have a large public university located within it. Thousands of students live there and spend money in the local economy. The university is a major employer; it hosts athletic contests, concerts, and various arts events; and it brings in engaging public speakers that community members enjoy.

Today, however, the role and importance of a large university within its community has expanded beyond these traditional benefits. This is in part due to the decreasing role of government in providing support for public schools, driving economic development, and performing other public functions. As a result, universities have partnered with local governments, school districts, other universities, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector to take on new responsibilities. In this essay, I describe three examples of how Missouri State University—an organization comprising more than 24,000 students and 3,500 employees located in Springfield, Missouri—has done just that with surprising results.

The IDEA Commons Initiative

For the last 15 years, Missouri State University has been committed to economic development. This commitment includes creating higher wage jobs, assisting in creating new companies, developing new technologies, and providing students with experiential learning opportunities.

Missouri State University's economic development efforts are largely concentrated in IDEA Commons, an innovation district located in downtown Springfield which was established in collaboration with the City of Springfield, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, City Utilities, and other local organizations. This district in anchored by the Roy Blunt Jordan Valley Innovation Center (JVIC), the Robert W. Plaster Free Enterprise Center, and Brick City. JVIC opened in 2007 after a 2-year renovation and repurposing of the former MFA feed mill, and includes two research centers that focus on high-tech research and new technology development by partnering with private business and federal agencies. The unique JVIC model allows corporate partners to collaborate with the university to create new high-wage jobs for the community, retain Missouri State University graduates, and provide tremendous experiential learning opportunities for students.

The success of JVIC has led to an expansion project, which involves demolishing the last portion of the former feed mill and constructing a new three-story facility. This project would not have occurred without the university's community collaboration and strong relationships with the City, the Chamber of Commerce, City Utilities, and the State of Missouri. JVIC is also collaborating with the Missouri Cybersecurity Center of Excellence to develop a cybersecurity operations center to train students and professionals for nationally recognized certifications. The operations center will also provide cybersecurity services to small businesses and nonprofits to ensure that their systems are secure. This is more important than ever, as businesses utilize more online and virtual services, as well as remote work for employees.

The Robert W. Plaster Free Enterprise Center opened in 2013 in its initial phase. The former poultry processing facility is now home to the efactory business incubator, the Cooperative Engineering program, and Missouri State University's printing and postal services. The efactory is a multifaceted business and entrepreneurship center, operating an incubator, co-working facility, and accelerator program, in addition to the Small Business Development Center and Management Development Institute. The efactory focuses on startups, small businesses and workforce development training, new business and job creation, capital formation, and engaging

students for experiential learning opportunities. The Small Business Development Center also works closely with the College of Business and other academic departments to connect students to business projects.

The efactory collaborates with a significant number of organizations to support startups and small business. It has over 45 startup companies onsite, 19 corporate partners that provide professional service expertise and other services, and over 30 other organizations that are either located onsite or utilize the facility for user group meetings. The efactory is the hub of entrepreneurship for the Springfield region.

Economic development is about creating opportunities, and Missouri State University is committed to growing these efforts for the community, students, businesses, and other organizations. This would not happen without the relationships and partnerships of so many people and organizations. Most universities develop programs and facilities like JVIC and the efactory solely to benefit the university. Missouri State University has created programs that support and benefit the community, region, and state.

Public School Partnerships

Missouri State University has long partnered with area K–12 schools and nonprofits to lead the greater education community in the Springfield area. Most recently, the university partnered with the Darr Family Foundation and Springfield Public Schools (SPS) to build an agriculture magnet school for elementary and middle school students on the university's agricultural campus. This effort builds on the success of SPS and the university's existing partnership to house the business and entrepreneurship strand of SPS's profession-based learning GOCAPS program at the efactory. Missouri State University also provides college credit for participants in five of SPS's GOCAPS programs and hosts the annual Southwest District FFA contest, the annual Children's Literature Festival of the Ozarks, middle school and high school writing workshops, and the Ozarks Writing Project's annual summer institute for K–12 teachers.

As in the economic development arena, Missouri State University serves as a leader in education for the entire state, partnering with schools and organizations throughout Missouri. The university hosts state high school basketball and debate championships, and has developed an impressive array of camps, conferences and other pre-college experiences—such as the Missouri Fine Arts Academy, the Missouri Public Affairs Academy, and the World Languages Showcase—directed at enhancing educational opportunities for high-performing high school students throughout the state. The university also partners directly with K–12 school districts and teachers throughout the state. For example, through its Bear in Every Building program, Missouri State University works to ensure that all schools in Missouri have teachers committed to promoting college attainment.

In recent years, Missouri State University leveraged its reputation and partnerships to dramatically increase college access for students with limited financial resources. The university made the bold move to provide free dual-credit classes to high school students receiving free and reduced lunch. This cost the university substantial revenue at a time when finances were very tight. However, university leaders knew the free classes would have a massive impact on the degree and career attainment of high schoolers with limited means. Free dual-credit courses provided these students the same advantage their counterparts with greater wealth already have—proving that they are able to perform college-level work, earn college credits before they

graduate high school, and shorten their time to graduation when they enroll in college full-time. The project started with a partnership with SPS and then expanded statewide.

Leadership Values the Inclusion of Diversity

Missouri State University is a predominantly White institution in a predominantly White community. As the underrepresented student population has grown, the university has dedicated itself to providing those students the same kind of experience as the majority students have. That meant leading our community and region to become more welcoming to those students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds.

The first step was to establish a chief diversity officer position to lead those efforts. Now, most local large organizations have followed the university's lead. The next step involved working to improve the campus and community climate through professional development and training. Missouri State University has trained its own administrative, academic, and student leadership, as well as many community leaders. One very successful program is the Facing Racism Institute, which more than 500 community, public sector, business, faith, and nonprofit leaders have completed in the last 5 years.

Campus and community climate is a critical area of focus. After Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri, and subsequent demonstrations and uprisings, the university began holding "Tough Talks" for students to share their experiences and emotions related to those events. Recently, this program expanded into the community as people expressed interest in wanting to understand each other better after a series of racially charged national events occurred last summer. Missouri State University's public affairs conference theme in 2020 was "The Power of Voice" (https://publicaffairs.missouristate.edu/conference), with many of the sessions focusing on race relations, civil interaction, and law enforcement reform.

The hiring and retention of a diverse workforce is critical to the success of serving a diverse student population. To achieve this, Missouri State University's employees of color must be able to identify with and enjoy living in the community. Connecting employees of color with each other, assigning new employees of color to mentors, creating affinity groups, and hosting special activities have helped the university make progress in this area. While much remains to be done, the university's commitment to inclusive excellence and valuing the inclusion of diversity has inspired other individuals, groups and organizations to undertake similar initiatives and make the community more culturally conscious and welcoming.

Twenty-five years ago, Missouri State University attained a statewide mission in public affairs. At the time, it was contemplated that students graduating from such a university would be citizen scholars. Later, the mission was expanded to reflect the university's commitment to producing citizen scholars who would become engaged in their communities, were ethical leaders, and were culturally competent. The university community calls these our three pillars of public affairs.

Missouri State University must exemplify these same values. We believe we are up to the task. Through this work, the university community and the City of Springfield have become intertwined. The success of one is now the success of the other, and both are thriving at a level neither would have attained independently of the other. Moreover, many citizens of Springfield now identify with and support the university even if they attended college elsewhere or nowhere. Likewise, many Missouri State University employees and students have taken ownership of

Springfield as they have seen the city change for the better as a result of the kind of partnerships described herein. Thus, the profile of the university has been raised, and university leadership has a seat at the table when major community decisions are made.

Authors

Clifton M. "Clif" Smart III was named interim president on June 27, 2011, and served in that role until he was named the 11th president of Missouri State University on Oct. 16, 2012, after a nationwide search. He served as the University's general counsel from December 2007 until being named interim president. In recent years, Smart has served as the president of the Council on Public Higher Education in Missouri, on the NCAA Division I Board of Directors, on the Mercy Health Springfield Communities Board of Directors, on the Board of Directors for the Hawthorn Foundation, and on the Board of Directors for Missouri Partnership. Prior to joining Missouri State University, Smart practiced law for 15 years with the Strong Law Firm. Smart and his wife, Gail, have two sons: Murray, who along with his wife, Amy, both graduated in 2012 from Southwest Baptist University and live in Rogers, Arkansas with their six children; and Jim, a recent graduate of Knox College in Illinois.

Ryan DeBoef has been Chief of Staff and Assistant to the President for Governmental Relations at Missouri State University since July 2014. He is responsible for facilitating the university's achievement of its state and federal legislative agendas and coordinating the governmental relations activities of the university. Prior to becoming Chief of Staff, he served as legal counsel for Missouri State University from almost 4 years. Before coming to Missouri State, he was an associate at Husch Blackwell, LLP and a law clerk for U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr. DeBoef received his law degree from the University of Missouri - Columbia in 2005, where he graduated at the top of his class. He received his Bachelor of Science degree *summa cum laude* in 2001 from Evangel University with majors in government and public administration.

Allen Kunkel is Associate Vice President for Economic Development and Director of the Jordan Valley Innovation Center at Missouri State University. He is responsible for helping guide the Innovation Center in its mission of supporting businesses, coordinating the resources of the federal, state, and local governments with the resources of Missouri State University, and engaging the University in economic development activities, including the development of IDEA Commons and operation of the University's entrepreneurship center, the efactory. Allen has a Bachelor of Science degree in Community and Regional Planning from Iowa State University and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Missouri. Allen is a 2003 graduate of Leadership Missouri, recognized by the Springfield Business Journal as one of the 2014 Men of the Year, and recognized by BIZ417 Magazine in the BIZ100.

Wes Pratt, J.D., is a lifelong public servant who started making a difference as a student community activist. He served as a San Diego City Council member; a state director of the California Conservation Corps; an attorney in private practice, and as deputy director of the Maryland Job Corps. Since returning to his hometown in 2007, Pratt has worked at Missouri State University (MSU) in various roles including Coordinator for Diversity Outreach and Recruitment, Director of Institutional Equity and Compliance/Equal Opportunity Officer, Title IX Coordinator, and now Assistant to the President/Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). Pratt serves the general community as a co-founder and President of the Minorities in Business (MIB); is a member of the NAACP-Springfield Chapter; Co-founder of the Gathering; a Bridge Springfield:"Brother2Brother" advisor; co-owner of Pratt Consultants, and many others. He is married to Francine M. Pratt and is a father, grandfather, and mentor who believes in and lives the motto that "Public Service is the Noblest Good!"

eJournal of Public Affairs

We Invest in What We Care About

Tyrone Bledsoe, Sr
Student African American Brotherhood

Author Note

Tyrone Bledsoe, Sr., Student African American Brotherhood.

On behalf of the thousands of young men and many other key stakeholders within the SAAB national network, I am very appreciative of the invitation to submit this article.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Tyrone Bledsoe, Sr., Founder/CEO, Student African American Brotherhood, National Headquarters, P.O. Box 1961,

Springfield, MO 65801. Phone: (419) 837-3650. E-mail: tbledsoe@saabnational.org

During the mid to late 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr., paid several visits to my small hometown of Grenada, Mississippi, about 100 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee, to promote African American voter registration and to help desegregate Grenada's public schools. I was one of the young people profoundly influenced by those life-changing visits.

There is a direct line leading from King's time in our rural town of Grenada during the contentious civil rights era to the new location of the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) headquarters in Springfield, Missouri, more than 50 years later. In the aspirational group I founded, SAAB, or Brother-to-Brother, is an organization devoted to helping young men of color finish high school and get into college, ensuring that they graduate, and encouraging them to extend a helping hand to others and give back to their community. SAAB embraces an ecological framework recognizing that the fate of young men of color is not solely in their hands. We teach our young men that they are a part of a larger community that must be conscious of its capacity to change the systems and conditions of which it is a part, and they must take ownership as they promote practices, policies, and behaviors for improving opportunities for themselves as well as for others.

Like King, I believe that, with the help of organizations like SAAB, we can make a breakthrough in solving the quandary of how best to address the social and educational ills—especially those of young men of color—that have bewildered educators, researchers, sociologists, practitioners, and community stakeholders for decades. My belief is supported by real-world, data-driven results. As an initiative that I began in 1990 with one group of students, SAAB has now impacted thousands across the United States.

To solidify our participants' continued engagement, SAAB formally launched an Alumni Association in July 2018. This robust network of past and present members ensures that SAAB fulfills its mission: to create and foster a supportive brotherhood in which young men help and care about one another to achieve lives of purpose and success.

Our Idea

SAAB's main objective is to shape young men to become contributing citizens who will serve as current and future leaders. Given that service is the cornerstone of our organization, we encourage our members to embrace a shared commitment to service with their respective community while, at the same time, espousing SAAB's four core values: accountability, self-discipline, proactive leadership, and intellectual development. Our organizational ethos echoes the philosophy of "giving back," which many powerful civic organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, United Way, and many others share.

Despite the historic challenges we have faced this year related to COVID-19 and social injustices, many nonprofit leaders and social entrepreneurs have deemed SAAB a game changer in providing the type of healing needed for our country, especially young males of color. Over the years, SAAB stakeholders have been awed by our students, who continue to rise to confront challenges appropriately, peacefully, and head on for their respective community, with a goal of shaping a caring community while valuing and validating everyone. We continue to grow in the face of converging and entrenched winds of injustices and a global pandemic. Our efforts to mobilize a generation of diverse, compassionate, and engaged young males of color are vital.

We maintain that in order to succeed in college and in life, young men of color need more than affirmative action and financial support. SAAB provides the guidance, encouragement, and

social support that young men need to define, pursue, and complete their higher education objectives and advance into promising careers. This is no small challenge. Among students who enter college, research has shown that only 33% of Black men earn a bachelor's degree within 6 years, compared with 57% of White men. SAAB was established to directly address such disparities.

We feel that young men of color, like others in their community, must develop an understanding of what it means to support and be members of that community. Our students drive their own experience. We challenge them to be a part of the solution within their schools and larger communities by manifesting a "brotherhood" of young men committed to lifelong leadership, community service, and civic engagement. We challenge school and institutional administrators to ensure that efforts are increased to educate SAAB participants about the privileges and obligations of citizenship, as well as the importance of tolerance and civic responsibility. Our young men take responsibility socially, and they hold each other accountable to being exemplary members of their community. Through experiential learning opportunities that increase their connections to the community and their understanding of the common good, they create a positive peer community of upwardly mobile males of color committed to caring. Our research has shown that caring is vital to the SAAB experience in that one must care about one's "self" before one can genuinely and authentically care about others.

SAAB distinguishes itself from other similar groups (e.g., fraternities) in that to become a member, one must willingly accept the charge to be a role model in the community. Our members are deemed polite, sincere, hardworking, and encouraging because they realize that these characteristics are counter to the popular but inaccurate and offensive image of young men of color in America. Furthermore, our members are strongly encouraged to tutor and mentor middle and high school students as a way to impart the same caring spirit that SAAB seeks to instill in them.

Our Challenge

Colleges and universities around the country are trying an array of approaches to helping students persevere and achieve their goals. Some use intensive advising to help students choose the courses they need to stay on track for their majors and to complete their degree on time. Others offer robust academic support to ensure classroom success, while others focus on keeping students' financial woes at bay.

Males of color experience such a cacophony of social ills that in SAAB's earlier years, civil rights leaders began openly referring to them as *at-risk* and *endangered*. SAAB targets young men of color directly to create a comprehensive social support system built on the values of service, discipline, leadership, and accountability. Our young men model success and make it okay to look, speak, act, and dream differently. Through our efforts to teach them the importance of being responsible change agents in their community, we build networks at individual colleges and schools, and provide a national structure linking students while they are in school and keeping them connected to one another and their respective community after they graduate. We even reach into high schools to activate those students' aspirations to attend college and to get involved in the community. We are known for having the audacious ultimate goal of changing the national conversation about race and diversity. We are explicit in our belief that guiding young men of color to higher educational attainment and subsequent career success will help erase the divide our society has suffered for so long.

The "SAAB effect" on high school and college persistence has been substantial and sustained. While, on average, 40% of all Black students attain a bachelor's degree in six years or less, SAAB members have an 80% persistence (i.e., retention) rate over the typically fraught first to second year, and that same group has an impressive 6-year graduation rate of 86%.

These same students experience a special type of social isolation because they are raised with continual social messages that suggest they are undeserving and/or dangerous. The media is replete with stories about "unidentified black and brown males" committing crimes. This criminalization of these young men ostracizes them in ways that breed a resentment of their own identities and a narrative that perpetuates negative stereotypes about them. A clear and tragic consequence of these stereotypes is a sense that no one cares about them. Thus, the primary reason these young men tell us they join street gangs is that "the gang cares about me."

While some social programs focus on secondary education, preventing gang adherence and ensuring graduation at the high school level, there is an acute need to ensure college graduation and success for the few who do attend since they will become the role models and the hopeful social entrepreneurs for the next generation. The social system must aim higher given that college graduation rates are only slightly higher than high school statistics. SAAB guarantees our participants emotional and academic success compared with similar groups that only fulfill a social role for them. We maintain strict membership requirements unrelated to entertainment or sports in light of our primary focus on academic excellence and degree attainment.

Our Strategy

Almost 15 years ago, we established our national headquarters in Toledo, Ohio. Now nearing our 30th year, we have more than 350 chapters in 40 states, with over 12,000 college and high school student members. As our efforts have expanded to develop a stronger system of community support for our participants, we have added elements of service, not only to the chapters' home communities, but also to making the chapters thrive by linking to and building on community strengths and accessing resources and abilities that can be deployed. We are more bottom-up than top-down. Each chapter writes its own strategic plan—in collaboration with its university, college, or school advisor partner—to realize individual goals and recognize what works best for its members. Running the chapters is part of training for success beyond college, especially as it relates to preparing participants for the workforce.

SAAB is one of the most venerable, culturally sensitive organizations of its kind and aims to increase the number of Black and Latino men who graduate from college by creating a positive peer community based on a spirit of caring. SAAB is now at a critical juncture as it prepares strategically for the next era of work, particularly as we continuously seek to challenge the status quo of traditional models by finding ways to innovate and develop creative solutions to addressing one of our country's most pressing problems as it relates to preparing males of color for the postsecondary educational experience. SAAB's overarching goal is to improve retention and graduation rates of its participants in order for them to gain successful entry into the 21st-century workforce.

In the country's current landscape, national attention on the development and support of males of color is at its highest levels. This interest is reflected in campaigns and organizational efforts across educational institutions and nonprofit/philanthropic and governmental sectors. Such efforts are coupled with a shifting focus in the educational sector from the admission of

diverse populations to more robust efforts to increase retention and graduation rates among the population. In addition, educational institutions, in particular, are actively seeking to support efforts that increase educational attainment and expand economic opportunity for underserved and low-income communities. These focus areas reflect a desire to advance national competitiveness in the global market and improve the standard of living for individuals and communities across the nation. There is a particular focus on improving these areas by building the capacity of educational institutions to adequately support low-income and underrepresented students, and by creating effective and successful educational pathways.

Having learned significant lessons of resiliency over the past 9 months, SAAB is in a unique position to capitalize on current trends, given our mission to help young men excel academically, socially, culturally, professionally, and in the community. One influential philanthropic professional described SAAB as one of our nation's "top 5" males-of-color-focused organizations. While there are questions about the sustainability of current national efforts to support males-of-color initiatives in general, the current sociopolitical climate represents an opportunity for SAAB to raise its organizational profile and influence the institutions that recognize and value the assets of males of color across sectors throughout the country. We have come to recognize that SAAB students must engage other community members, leaders, and students through community education, awareness raising, and engagement efforts centering on coalition-building activities like town hall and civic organization meetings, and connections with local churches.

SAAB engages young males of color as a community of concerned stakeholders committed to teaching one another social responsibility through peer mentoring, mentoring younger students, and belonging to an intentional community of empathetic and contributing citizens who own and exemplify social responsibility and commitment to their community by amplifying our motto: "I am My Brother's Keeper, and together we will rise." The first part of this phrase is a reversal of a biblical betrayal. In the story of Cain and Abel, Cain kills his brother Abel and is asked of the latter's whereabouts by their father. Cain replies carelessly, "Am I my brother's keeper?" SAAB members declare that they are, in fact, responsible for one another. We have found that it is important to instill a sense of community ownership within the infrastructure of our organizational culture to drive the type of cooperation from our students necessary to yield a willingness within them to go above and beyond on a daily basis.

This positive sense of belonging is emotionally stabilizing and inspiring as well. The second part of our motto is an affirmation of that togetherness and a denial of the death knell sounded against Black and Brown males during SAAB's early days. The metaphor of rising is synonymous with achieving true freedom, which can seem unattainable in the current culture. SAAB members live out this creed through regularly scheduled teachable moments and by working collaboratively with community service projects to directly address ills that are impacting them and are affecting a culture that is bereft of leadership and positive peer pressure.

Our graduates/alumni are active and empowered citizens with the capacity to share their powerful gifts of caring and responsibility with others. They are our future and continuously represent the promise for a community that is starving for their leadership. As we often ask our young men at different stages throughout their SAAB experience: Who will benefit from who you are destined to become? Or, in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "What are you doing to help others?"

Author

Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe is an educator with 34 years of high-quality postsecondary education experience. He is the founder and current CEO-President of the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) Organization----a national organization with over 355 chapters in 41 states that endeavors to instill a "spirit of care" and enhance the experiences of young males of color in our country.

He is the co-author of the book "African American Men in College". In 2001, he was invited to serve as guest lecturer at the Oxford University Roundtable Institute in Oxford, England. Former President Bill Clinton invited him to participate in the "Clinton Global Initiative" (CGIAmerica) in Chicago (June 2011) to help shape discussions on how the U.S. could strengthen its workforce. In 2015, he invited to the White House and recognized by President Barack Obama to receive the President's Volunteer Service Award.

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For the Love of Cities—2020 and Beyond

Peter Kageyama
Senior Fellow, Alliance for Innovation;
Independent Author

Author Note

Peter Kageyama, Senior Fellow, Alliance for Innovation; Independent Author.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Peter Kageyama.
E-mail: peterkageyama@gmail.com

I am known as the "City Love Guy," and it is my job to be relentlessly positive about cities, towns, villages, burbs, exurbs, etc. So, it is not typical for me to lead with a negative, but here goes. 2020 sucked. Let's just say it. By any objective measure, it was an awful year: The pandemic, the senseless deaths of George Floyd, Breona Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery (and many others), job loss, economic turmoil, stress, isolation, and political divisions that run so deep they seem to draw blood. When something is awful, human nature wants to move quickly past it and try to forget it. However, I think it does us all a disservice to simply brand 2020 an "awful year" and move away from it as if it were a bad smell.

This past year has been hard—and things will likely get even harder before we find a new equilibrium that feels "normal" again. While it is hard, now is the time to think about what trends and opportunities have come out of 2020 and what lessons we have learned.

"Fleeing the City"

In 2020, there emerged an idea that cities were receding and that suburbs and rural areas were going to see major population growth. Some believed that the pandemic would unleash an anti-density wave that would move more and more people away from bigger, denser cities. Certainly, there was short-term evidence of this movement during the pandemic's height in 2020, as story after story highlighted people moving out of cities like New York to suburban locations. Indeed, New York was one of the hardest hit areas during the early days of the pandemic, so it makes sense that many, especially those with the economic means, sought to move elsewhere.

Even before the pandemic, the popular rise of urban living that began at the outset of the 2010s had significantly slowed, especially in large metropolitan areas. The Brookings Institution noted that population growth in those major metros slowed to a low of 0.55% in 2017–2018, down from a high of 1.01% in 2011.[1] Growth in highly dense urban cores also fell from a high of 0.8% in 2015–2016 to 0.1% in 2018–2019. The pandemic further fueled this trend and, in many cases, accelerated the process.

Some, such as author and "suburbanist" Joel Kotkin, have suggested that this trend will be enhanced by the option for many to telecommute, as people leave urban environs for suburban areas. Though the pandemic and remote working are significant factors, Kotkin and others have argued that the middle class has exited these cities because of its inability to deal with issues such as homelessness, quality schools, and crime.[2] As Kotkin described, "The politics have gotten crazier and crazier."[3]

Because the urban–suburban divide in the United States has a long history related to race, it is hard not to see this narrative through a racial lens. Couple it with President Donald Trump declaring, in the summer of 2020, that he wanted to move affordable housing and affordable housing requirements out of the suburbs[4] so that suburbanites would "no longer be bothered or

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[1] https://www.brookings.edu/research/even-before-coronavirus-census-shows-u-s-cities-growth-was-stagnating/
[2] https://reason.com/video/will-new-york-ever-recover-from-covid-19/
[3] https://reason.com/video/will-new-york-ever-recover-from-covid-19/
[4] https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/29/trump-housing-policy-low-income-suburbs-386414

financially hurt by having low income housing built in your neighborhood,"[5] and we see the racism and fear mongering laid bare.

All this led to the emergence of a popular narrative about people "fleeing" the city for suburbs in the wake of the pandemic. There has undoubtedly been an upswing in people moving from the largest cities, and I believe we will see a general loss of urban population once the latest census data have been sorted out. Yet, to suggest that people are fleeing cities vastly exaggerates the trend and I believe misapprehends a more obvious factor: They are running from the expense of urban living.

Unemployment and economic uncertainty will nudge some to look for less expensive housing options, or they simply will need to follow jobs out of urban areas where many companies are downsizing their office-space requirements and encouraging more telecommuting. Others, such as families with kids, will decamp to suburbs and rural areas. However, families with kids or families on the pathway to having kids were *already* on the road to leaving the city. Families with children move from urban to suburban areas for multiple reasons—space, access to what they perceive as better schools, and, the most basic reason of all, cost. Kids are expensive, and urban living is expensive, too. Something has to give, and most conscientious parents will choose their kid over their loft every time.

Elderly populations more susceptible to health issues will similarly look to less dense options. However, the forces that drove them into the city after they became empty nesters—too much living space, walkable communities, less housing maintenance and upkeep, and more social offerings—will likely lead many (perhaps even most) to stay in place.

The net result is that some will leave, cities will get a bit younger, and they will become more equitable. The economic pressures of reduced office-space requirements for companies and increased availability of housing will make some, maybe even most, cities more affordable. *More affordable* is synonymous with more open and more fair—a very good thing. This influx of new residents will bring new ideas, new talent, and new opportunities to cities. They will also bring new demands on their cities and communities as the tectonic shifts of 2020 play out in urban design, development, and investment.

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[5] On July 29, 2020, Donald Trump tweeted, "I am happy to inform all of the people living their Suburban Lifestyle Dream that you will no longer be bothered or financially hurt by having low income housing built in your neighborhood." https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1288509568578777088

Lessons Learned

Design Matters

One of the key lessons learned during 2020 was the importance of quality design and planning. We realized that no matter how well designed and decorated our homes and apartments are, they are not ideal for long periods of enforced isolation. "Third spaces," ranging from coffee shops, restaurants, libraries, retail districts, arts venues, and parks, make our personal spaces work, more so than homes or offices. Historically, these spaces have complemented and interacted with our personal space as we have moved seamlessly from place to place. When all the coffee shops, restaurants, malls, gyms, and civic buildings are closed, the importance of the remaining spaces becomes even more obvious.

Green Spaces Matter

When we started the initial pandemic lockdowns, the first thing we did was clean, then we organized, and when we could not do any more of that, we went outside to find some areas that were not closed. In doing so, we rediscovered the importance of our local neighborhood and our parks and green spaces. Passive parks, often overlooked and taken for granted, became essential infrastructure for people all over the world.

People not only walked but also rode bikes. Bike shops and the bike industry saw record sales[6] and depleted inventories for 2020. Cities invested in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and turned some temporary changes into permanent elements[7] as people realized that we can design for something other than the car. I saw more people, couples and families in particular, riding their bikes than ever before. Certainly, having fewer cars out on the road helped make that feel a bit safer, but people who had not ridden a bike in years dusted off that old cruiser and found something fun, healthy, social, and cheap.

Emotional Infrastructure

Not only was there a run on bikes, but also there was a literal run on dogs. Dog purchases and adoptions were at all-time highs, with shelters and breeders having to set up waiting lists for dogs.[8] This came as no surprise to me since, as I wrote in my last book, dogs have for a while now been filling the gaps in our emotional infrastructure, serving as a cure for so many of the negative aspects of our communities. They are companions against loneliness; they are personal trainers that get us off the couch to go for a walk; they are the external locus of our attention when we get too self-centered; they are social ice breakers that help facilitate connections with other people (oftentimes other dog owners); they are a source of the unconditional love we all need; and they are a fantastic excuse to put down our phones, close our computers, and go play.

I learned a new word in 2020: *enochlophobia*, the fear of crowds. The pandemic made many of us fear each other. Who has the virus? That person is not wearing a mask! A sneeze has become an act of aggression. Past crises have made us fear things like air travel, certain ethnic or religious groups, or even sex, but we could manage those fears with some accommodations. This crisis of the pandemic, however, attacked the very roots of our social system, and rebuilding our

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[6] https://www.npd.com/wps/portal/npd/us/news/press-releases/2020/cycling-industry-sales-growth-accelerates-in-april/

[7] https://sdotblog.seattle.gov/2020/05/07/2020-bike-investments-to-accelerate-including-20-miles-of-stay-healthy-streets-to-become-permanent-in-seattle/

[8] https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/08/12/adoptions-dogs-coronavirus/

sense of community will take time. In a year that challenged our physical, psychological, and emotional limits, it is no wonder that our parks, bikes, and dogs became even more important to our overall health and wellness. Moving forward, we are going to demand better emotional infrastructure—dog parks, trails, bike paths, and bike lanes. Cities need to recognize the importance of these often-marginalized elements of our communities, support those connections with meaningful policies, and invest in this necessary emotional infrastructure.

Cities Carried On

In the midst of all the madness of 2020, cities, for the most part, carried on and got stuff done. Trash got picked up. Parks got their lawns mowed. Police and fire services were not interrupted. Christmas decorations were put up. In my home of St. Petersburg, the city took advantage of less traffic and did some much-needed maintenance on city streets. Under ordinary circumstances, those repairs would have been disruptive and angst-inducing to drivers and to local businesses where they were occurring. Some new streetscaping also happened in St. Petersburg's downtown area. Medians and flower boxes appeared, and several stoplights were replaced with stop signs. Work continued on our major downtown project, the new Pier, which had a successful "soft launch" on May 30, 2020. The city did not stop.

At the state level, governors were in tough positions, forced to enact sweeping statewide policies that were far more likely to be overreaching for certain areas and even insufficient for others. Cities had the advantage of hyper-local responses that were tightly tailored to their populations and their circumstances. I have heard from friends and colleagues around the country (and even around the world) how pleased they were with how their respective cities handled the crisis. Even those who grumbled about lockdowns and stay-at-home orders were ultimately complimentary of their cities. After all, cities do not have the luxury of being partisan and not getting stuff done.

The same is not true for federal and state government. Sadly, it seems that many state responses fell along partisan lines, which truly damages and further divides the nation. If we cannot agree and work together on priorities as vital as health and safety, our confidence in higher levels of government will continue to erode.

In 2020, the winner in this was the city because it was the entity that actually mattered when the shit hit the fan. While state and national leaders bickered and held press conferences, mayors, council members, and city managers rolled up their sleeves and got to work. Our relationship with our places was brought into sharp focus and tested this past year. I believe that relationship is better and stronger because of it.

We Are the Community

While our cities did their best to carry on, we learned another corresponding lesson: We are inextricably connected to each other. We use the word *community* a lot; it becomes a catch-all phrase that sometimes means *us*, sometimes *them*, and sometimes *all of us*. In 2020, as we divided ourselves into polarized political camps, we were faced with the overwhelming realization that we could not separate ourselves, no matter how hard we tried. The pandemic, the virus, knew no distinctions, and while some fought mask mandates and lockdowns, they could not escape the overriding reality that we were all connected and responsible for each other. My actions impacted others, just as theirs impacted me. That is, by definition, the nature of community.

In ordinary times, we tend to think of the idea of community/city/town as an external construct. We obey the law, spend our money, and pay our taxes, and in return the community/city/town provides an overall framework that allows us to not worry about police, fire, sewer, or trash pickup. In ordinary times, we have the luxury of not having to think about community. The past year has been nothing like ordinary, resulting in a stress test on ourselves and our communities. We have seen how fragile it all can be. An invisible threat brought life on Earth to a near standstill. In that collective pause, we slowed down, and our world got smaller. I believe that was a good thing. We talked to our neighbors (albeit at a distance), we rode our bikes, and we walked our dogs. We discovered or rediscovered our neighborhoods and our role in them—that we are part of those small communities. We are the caretakers and owners of the neighborhood, and what we do matters. Our actions make or break the community in small ways. The city is the overarching construct, but the neighborhood is us. Let us not forget that as things return to a semblance of normal and the daily demands of life once again require our attention.

The lasting gift of 2020 is the realization that hard lessons make us better, stronger, more appreciative of the small, ordinary things, and hopefully more patient and appreciative of each other. Some say hard times makes for hard people. I suppose there is an argument for that. My challenge for all of us is to not use the excuse of hard times to become hard-headed or hard-hearted. Tough is OK; tough gets us through challenging times. But a hard, closed heart does no one any good—not you, not your family, and not your community. Let's take a lesson from our dogs and live and love unconditionally. Let's play when we can, nap when we are tired, bark less, sit and listen more, and remember that just being able to be with each other is the greatest gift of all.

Author

Peter Kageyama is the author of *For the Love of Cities: The Love Affair Between People and Their Places,* the follow ups, *Love Where You Live: Creating Emotionally Engaging Places* and *, The Emotional Infrastructure of Places.* In 2021, he released *For the Love of Cities REVISITED*, a revised and updated version of the award-winning book. Peter is a Senior Fellow with the Alliance for Innovation, a national network of city leaders and a special advisor to America In Bloom.

He is an internationally sought-after community development consultant and grassroots engagement strategist who speaks all over the world about bottom-up community development and the amazing people who are making change happen.

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Coming Together While Standing Apart: Encouraging Community Ownership During the Isolating Days of the Pandemic

Cora Scott
City of Springfield

Author Note

Cora Scott, Public Information and Civic Engagement, City of Springfield.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, City of Springfield, Busch Municipal Building, 840 Boonville Avenue, Springfield, MO 65802. Phone: (417) 864-1009. E-mail: cscott@springfieldmo.gov

Abstract

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the future feels difficult and uncertain, and few of us have much control over it, beyond doing our best to keep ourselves informed and those around us safe. The result is a lot of unhappy people. Gallup survey data have shown that pessimism about the future of the pandemic in the United States is rising and is infecting the general outlook of most Americans. This article describes how one local government and health department communicated successfully during the pandemic—and even increased community engagement— by encouraging a sense of community ownership.

Keywords: community engagement, communications, pandemic, ownership, truth

On March 13, 2020, I received a text message from my friend and colleague Lisa Cox. Lisa and I had worked together at Mercy Hospital in the aftermath of the Joplin, Missouri, tornado, and I later convinced her to join me at the City of Springfield, where she had served as the public affairs officer for the Springfield Police Department for several years. I was in Branson on a rare day off, shopping with my husband and daughter, when her text came in.

"Here we go," Lisa texted. As the chief communications officer for the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, she was notifying me of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Greene County.

It seemed totally unfair that it had happened so quickly, but though I felt anxiety about the events that were seemingly predestined to follow, I did not panic. Only 7 days prior, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department had convened its first multidisciplinary, multi-organizational taskforce meeting. Having spent 18 years at Mercy Hospital communicating about important health issues, including the H1N1 virus, and nearly 8 years communicating on behalf of the City of Springfield, I felt a sense of comfort knowing the players, understanding the medical science, and believing that there was no other county health department in the United States that I trusted more than the Springfield-Greene County Health Department.

Lisa's follow-up text perplexed me, though: "It's like the Joplin tornado is hitting us again, but every. single. day." I thought, "What has happened to Lisa? Why is she being so dramatic? Together, we had helped our communities come to grips with, and ultimately heal from, many tragedies, and we did so by remaining calm, being straightforward, honest, and empathetic. This would surely be just another one of those times." It would be several weeks before I could understand Lisa's comments and grasp that this was and is *nothing* like any of those previous times. At the heart of it, for me, was teaching others that a pandemic is not only a medical crisis, but also a communications emergency.

Since March 2020, the City of Springfield, for which I serve as the director of public information and civic engagement, and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department have made communication a priority in every sense of the word. Yet, I am not going to lie: It has been difficult. The fight against misinformation has felt personal to me. If I am not doing everything I possibly can to inform and educate citizens, I feel like I am putting their lives at risk. That is the heaviness of it. Janet Dankert, CEO of Community Partnership of the Ozarks, cried with me on the phone one night, terrified that a lack of funding would put highly vulnerable homeless people back on the streets, with little protection from COVID-19. Hers is the heart of a nonprofit leader—a community leader.

From hosting more than 100 live news briefings, to facilitating dozens of heated public City Council hearings, to broadcasting four virtual town hall television specials, my communication team at the City of Springfield and I have been front and center during the biggest public health crisis of our time.

Admittedly, I am an emotional person, but I do not think I, or any of us, should feel ashamed of that. In fact, I think we should embrace it. These days, emotion is oftentimes in short supply, and the last thing we need are leaders who cannot feel. In a crisis, the importance of acknowledging emotions caused by uncertainty cannot be overstated. While decision making is based on a consideration of facts and a thorough analysis of consequences, communication must occur with an understanding of the impact of decisions.

Despite the high level of fear associated with the pandemic—and the very real concerns about the future—I believe that the default position we should communicate is realistic optimism. This is the tone I have tried to strike in all of my communication work throughout this crisis. As Arthur Brooks described in *The Atlantic*, "Humans like to feel optimistic about, and in control of, where life is headed. The pandemic has made it very hard to feel that way."[1]

Nonprofit organizations, local governments, and service providers in general (both public and private) are entrusted with protecting the collective soul of communities. Across the nation, communities are struggling not just to survive the COVID-19 outbreak, but to look optimistically at possible changes that could permanently alter the world as we know it for the better. Nonprofits, municipalities, and service providers fulfill life-saving functions, but unfortunately they are faced with shrinking revenues, increasing demand, staff cutbacks, the fog of uncertainty, and the added trauma of the negative impact of short- and long-term social isolation on the people they serve.

Because of the pandemic, the future feels difficult and uncertain, and few of us have much control over it, beyond doing our best to keep ourselves informed and those around us safe.

The result is a lot of unhappy people. Gallup survey data have shown that pessimism about the future of the pandemic in the United States is rising and is infecting our general outlook.[2]

Yet, there is a silver lining. As David Brooks of the *New York Times* reminds us, "This is a time to practice aggressive friendship with each other—to be the one who seeks out the lonely and the troubled."[3] It is also true that character is revealed at times like this. People look deeper into themselves, learning bravely what pain can teach us. Hopefully, through the stoic response to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the long-needed response to the devastating pandemic of systemic racism, we will all become wiser and more compassionate as a result.

Going into the pandemic, I knew that trust had already been eroding: trust of institutions—governmental, religious, educational—and the media. We have even become more distrustful of one another, a major problem that has led to confusion and division, making coalition building and positive change extremely difficult. One answer lies within increased civic engagement because when people are engaged, they feel more ownership of their community—which is key to community partnership. In southwest Missouri, we are known for collaboration and for having a very strong level of bonding social capital, but what about *bridging* social capital? Community leaders tried to continue focusing on how to improve our relationships with those who are very different from us and building trust among us in a way that helps prepare people for months to come.

I was shell-shocked to learn in a recent meeting that, for some, *unity* has become a trigger word. As a communicator, I pride myself on my careful use and placement of words because, despite what some say to the contrary, words matter. Thankfully, the friend and colleague who shared the latter sentiment was willing to unpack their thoughts for me: "The word *unity* can be misused and speaks loudly to me that there is a nuance telling me I must compromise my

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[1] Brooks, A. (2020, September 24). What to do when the future feels hopeless. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/09/what-do-when-future-feels-hopeless/616448

[2] https://news.gallup.com/poll/313415/assessment-covid-situation-increasingly-bleak.aspx

[3] Brooks, D. (2020, April 9). The pandemic of fear and agony. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/opinion/covid-anxiety.html

political values and cross lines that my religious beliefs and ethos simply cannot accept." I had never thought of it that way. "That's not what we mean by unity," several people in a recent community conversation responded. This was an eye-opening moment to say the least, and it reminded me of another important piece of advice, so simple that many of us forget it: Listen first, speak later. By listening to this comment, the misunderstanding suddenly became clear, offering me insight for future coalition building.

I believe there are certain actions that will help all of us build trust: telling the truth; trusting the local media; connecting in news ways that build community ownership; and keeping showing up.

Tell the Truth

When faced with a crisis, we have two options: We can offer false reassurance, draw hard lines, and scold one another for believing one way or the other, hoping that reality does not prove us wrong down the road; or we can prepare ourselves and one another for an uncertain future with candor, empathy, humility, and honesty. Through the latter option, I believe we can earn back trust.

In my communications work addressing not only the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the interrelated pandemics of systemic racism, economic distress, and impending mental health crisis, I am part of a team that comprises multiple City of Springfield departments and disciplines, including my Department of Public Information and Civic Engagement, the Health Department, the Police Department, the Planning Department, the Office of Emergency Management, and the office of the Mayor. The team also has a very close partnership with the local hospital systems, mental health providers, secondary and higher education institutions, faith-based organizations, the business community, and, of course, the nonprofit social services sector.

A main tenet of our communications strategy has been telling the truth—and telling it often—across multiple platforms in many different ways. Providing access to accurate information has been an obsession of ours. The national stage scared me to death, so initially I tuned it out, focusing on what local and regional experts, whom I knew personally, had to say and needed to share—a health department I had trusted my entire life and doctors I have worked with for decades. I knew that *they* depended on reliable sources for information on which to base decisions. I felt I could take that information to the bank—and to the public.

Our former county director of public health, Clay Goddard, and current acting director of health Katie Towns have become reluctant high-profile public figures during the pandemic and continues to be an important voice in our region. I think the single most common crisis-communication mistake is issuing overly reassuring messages. For fearful people, especially those whose fear pushed them into denial, Clay struck the right tone, somewhere between gentle and matter-of-fact: scary realities presented without scary theatrics. Although this approach is not universally accepted, it almost universally works. This may seem to contradict my earlier advice to default to optimism, but remember: We are going for a *realistic* optimism. Some believe that bad news should be downplayed. I disagree. Telling bad news does not always mean one's organization or community will be perceived negatively. Levelling with the public offers strength for recruiting help and building trust and coalitions.

Trust the Local Media

In Springfield, we have a great local news corps, and the local media have been an absolute godsend. Having a relationship with them for over 30 years continues to pay off for me and for the efforts of the City and Health Department. My advice is, *Do not wait until there is a crisis* to develop relationships with anyone. There is truth to the contention that our media habits and the response by national media outlets to address our insatiable need for instant gratification and entertaining news have contributed to our divisive culture. However, there has been no more important time than *right now* for us to seek out and support unbiased and reliable journalism.

Drury University professor Dr. Jonathan Groves defined *media literacy* as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and act using all forms of communication. Now more than ever, media literacy is so incredibly important. People are generally confused by and get lost within the divide between fact and fiction. This threatens our democracy. The Institute for Media and Public Trust (https://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/mcj/media-public-trust/) at California State University, Fresno, is a solid informational resource dedicated to finding solutions to the "fake news" crisis and helping to bridge the trust gap between news consumers and media outlets.

I have spent a fair amount of time correcting misinformation online and pointing people to known objective media sources related to COVID-19 and systemic racism. Of course, I hope my efforts are helpful, but I warn others that standing up to this phenomenon is not for the faint of heart. I have received complaints and at least one anonymous letter (written to my boss) questioning my integrity and threatening me for simply pointing out objective news sources and answering people's questions with facts. I believe this hostility stems from an insidious information virus to which we are all susceptible: confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the inclination to digest information and news that already fits into one's current point of view, reinforcing attitudes and beliefs that one already has, at the exclusion of open-mindedness.

Early on in this crisis, Clay emphasized that we are all in this for the long haul, that the pandemic, or its impacts, would not be over by the end of the summer, the end of the fall, or even the end of the year. These words were very difficult to hear back in March 2020, when we had to issue stay-at-home orders to help slow the spread of the virus and buy time for area hospitals to scale up. Yet, it was the truth—the hard truth, based on sound medical science.

In our briefings, the communications team reported warnings about the likely long duration of the pandemic because our public deserved the truth. This reminded me of a historical situation: In 1942, just after the British defeated the Germans at Alamein, driving them out of Egypt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill said famously, "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

At that time, we were beginning to realize that there was a way to combat the virus. We were gaining a little more clarity. We knew what we were fighting: a deadly virus and misinformation, both of which could cause illness and death. The public does not need fearless leaders; it needs role models of leaders bearing their own fear. People can handle the truth, and they deserve it. Leaders get criticized no matter what they do. In my experience, however, people also rise to the occasion to meet expectations when calls to action are clear and they serve the common good.

When the communications team elicited empathy from viewers (on social media and through mainstream media), appealing to their sense of community, we noticed this also shored up support for compliance with necessary safety regulations. Hearing stories directly from people via testimonials about their loved ones elicited the most empathy. These were stories of

people whose loved ones had suffered or died from COVID-19 and also stories about interviewees themselves who has contracted and fought the virus.

Connect and Engage People in New Ways That Build Community Ownership

People crave connectivity more than ever, perhaps because we have been forced into at least partial isolation, with the traditions around gathering that we have come to love stripped from us because they are now a potential source of sickness. I hope we are truly realizing the pain of social isolation, particularly for senior citizens, who are too often forgotten and devalued.

The communications team created weekly opportunities to interact and engage with us virtually and went to extreme lengths to advertise these opportunities. This included working with the media to promote programs, producing public service announcements in multiple formats, and leaving information packets on residents' doorsteps. At the heart of our messaging was a call to action to do the right thing, be part of the greater good, and own *our* community. Despite the chaos at the federal and state level, we believed rightly that we control our own destinies. We received help at every turn from people who "owned" their community and were subsequently more invested. That helped to build resiliency—a fortress of fortitude.

It really is up to *all* of us to come together and make a conscious decision to be resilient together. Central to this are creativity and flexibility. For example, I do not think any of us would be as videoconference-savvy if we were not forced to rethink how we can do things to involve more people across technology platforms. This constraint also showed us how difficult it can be for people with disabilities to fully participate in our community.

I am the proud co-creator of the Give 5 Civic Matchmaking program with Greg Burris, president and CEO of United Way of the Ozarks and former Springfield city manager. Pre-pandemic, we realized the extreme level of social isolation right here in our community. We went virtual in the fall of 2020 and were not surprised that so many people have wanted to connect with volunteer opportunities—just safe and socially distanced ones. During the pandemic, we were able to reach out to our Give 5 graduates, specifically querying our database of alums, finding those who had medical, public relations, or call center experience. Indeed, the alumni made for very good call center operators.

Keep Showing Up

We live in a world where technology can connect us in the blink of an eye, and yet, too often, we do not see. Despite having more ways than ever to hear one another, we too often do not listen. Without seeing and hearing one another, it is hard to build trust, and without trust, it is easy to retreat to our bubbles or tribes: us versus them; red versus blue; men versus women; church versus state. Instead, we should unite in the truest sense of the word: come or bring together for a common purpose or action.

In this social-media era of TikTok, Snapchat, and "fake news," the work of addressing our multiple pandemics is difficult, with few immediate improvements. Moreover, as David Brooks aptly described, it is all boring, dogged work that is more C-Span than Instagram.[4] It is about building relationships and helping everyone understand that, although it sounds clichéd, we really are all in this together. Our individual actions, or inactions, affect the trajectory of the

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[4] Brooks, D. (2020, June 25). America is facing 5 epic crises all at once. *New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/25/opinion/us-coronavirus-protests.html

virus's spread. It is a reality that is both inspiring and frightening. A fundamental tenet is that any successful communication regarding the virus *must* ignite feelings of community ownership. This became increasingly difficult, however, as national rhetoric claimed the virus was a "hoax," stoking fear across the country.

Yet, life is sometimes mysterious and full of pleasant surprises. Throughout the craziness of the pandemic, there has been one constant in my life: a man named Erik Richards. He is one of the City of Springfield and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department's most vocal critics, mostly because of our masking requirements. It is no exaggeration to say that, over the previous 9 months, I would go to bed each night after reading angry messages from Erik and wake up to them again the next morning. He posed a lot of questions that I think we faithfully answered to the best of our ability.

Then something happened. He read a newspaper story about the death of former Springfield city councilman Tommy Bieker. The newspaper account shared that Tommy had reached out to me in July, wanting to help create awareness about the importance of masking and social distancing. Tommy did not think that the issue of masking should be political and believed that it might be helpful to show how someone like him, a self-described staunch conservative, could support a masking requirement. We were not able to finish the PSA we had started working on together because he began losing his battle with leukemia. However, in the days before his passing, he felt such a strong sense of ownership of his community that he texted me again, apologizing for not finishing the PSA and sharing his love for the community. He remembered the good times he and I had together and asked me to share his wish:

> (1) I ask everyone to [#maskup417](#) and (2) love each other, it's the little things that count and finally, (3) we are literally the best community ever and you are what makes it great.

> Love you Cora, going to miss the hell outta the team!!

I did share Tommy's final message with the community he loved.

Erik said he and Tommy had similar views on politics, and although they did not know each other, they had gone to high school together. When he learned that Tommy had tragically died and read in the news report about his wish for everyone to mask up, Erik thought there was no better way to honor him than to do something so easy as to put on a mask ("even if I disagree or do not like it"). So, he started thinking and talking to his wife. "Honey, what do you think about us masking up for 100 days." She was stunned. "I tried to take down all the anti-mask crap and changed," said Erik. "Had I not seen that story on Tommy, then I probably would not have tried to change."

Erik hopes this challenge will take off like the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, with people agreeing to mask up for 100 days and to nominate 15 people they think will mask up, too. His challenge became [#MaskUpForTommy](#).

Erik still does not agree with the City of Springfield's passage of an ordinance requiring masking, and he is worried about backlash from other anti-maskers, which started immediately and was just as hateful as his own earlier posts. He has apologized profusely, and I believe he is sincere. His connection to Tommy and his remorse that his actions could possibly have hurt others and our community at large led him to embrace a sense of ownership and responsibility. He now believes that it is important for all of us to come together, despite our differences of opinion. He has done a 180, saying he now sees the bigger picture and wants to do something to

help his community and fellow citizens, despite his own discomfort and personal objections. I am 100% sure that this is *exactly* the kind of thing that Tommy Bieker would have wanted to happen—and that makes Erik Richards very happy.

Author

Cora Scott is the Director of Public Information & Civic Engagement for the City of Springfield. She leads a 12-person creative staff in designing and implementing strategic communication and civic engagement strategies for the wide-ranging services of the City of Springfield – including City Council activities and departments, such as Planning & Development, Police, Fire, Public Works and Building Development.

Cora serves as the chief communicator for all City operations, overseeing crisis communication responses and also designing, developing, and implementing civic engagement strategies and programs to increase citizen participation with, and ultimately trust in, City government.

Her proactive work with community leaders and organizations to build social capital has led to successful increases in positive engagement between citizens and their local government. Cora and her team of creative communicators work with social and private sector partners to co-creates meaningful public education and awareness of key issues.

Cora joined the City in 2012, after serving 18 years in similar roles at Mercy, a St. Louis-based integrated health system.

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Engaging the Community in Strategic Visioning

Mike Mowery
Leadership Development and Training,
Strategic Government Resources.

Author Note

Mike Mowery, Leadership Development and Training, Strategic Government Resources.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Mike Mowery, President, Leadership Development and Training, Strategic Government Resources. Phone: (817) 223-7320. E-mail: mmowery@governmentresource.com

Abstract

Local government leaders seek to engage residents and stakeholders as they plan for the future. However, these leaders often struggle to find ways to elicit positive and helpful information from community members. Oftentimes, they fear that open meetings will become a venue for negative-minded people to voice their unhappy feelings. This article describes a way to engage the community in helping to develop a strategic vision for the future which guards against this kind of negativity. This approach opens the ways for stakeholders to have civil discussions about strategic decisions that a municipality faces. While allowing for large numbers of people to offer input, the process provides a governing body with "ingredients" they can use in crafting a shared vision.

Keywords: vision, community engagement, communication, leadership

Strategic Government Resources (SGR) has developed a tool that we call the Cycle of Strategic Visioning, and it is built around our belief that there is a difference between a strategic vision and a strategic plan. A strategic vision answers the question, "Where are we going?" A strategic plan answers the question, "How do we get there?" It is mainly a governing body's responsibility to develop its strategic vision, while it is primarily the organizational staff's responsibility to develop a strategic plan that aligns with the strategic vision. The vision must precede and "govern" the plan; however, the group responsible for developing the vision must first receive quality input from stakeholders. Said another way, the governing body may bake the cake, but the stakeholders must provide the ingredients. All local government leaders seek input from residents and stakeholders in order to know how to more effectively serve their constituents. I have led hundreds of workshops for elected officials and local government leaders, and not one time has anyone said, "We don't care what citizens say." As a chief of police once said to me, "We govern by the consent of the governed." This, then, raises the question, "How can local governments receive input in a meaningful way so that they are creating a vision that will resonate with community, both residents and other stakeholders?" This article discusses one way that SGR has found to be very effective in engaging citizens and stakeholders in the process of creating a strategic vision.

Citizen surveys can be useful tools for receiving input, but when they are the only mechanism used to gather community feedback, citizens can feel that their input is being limited and therefore undervalued. Not only do citizens want to give more, but leaders *need* them to give more. Surveys cannot create the synergy needed to develop a shared vision, and both citizens and governing bodies sense that more is needed. Though constructive meetings with stakeholders are essential, many leaders fear that animosities will get stirred up in open meetings. This is an understandable concern, especially at a time when we, as a society, seem to be bitterly divided about almost everything. No one wants to host a meeting that is dominated by divisiveness. The problem is that, often, government leaders' concept of a community meeting centers on one-way communication. That is, we format meetings so that we share information with constituents and they respond, or, similarly, constituents voice their opinions about volatile topics while leaders merely listen. The problem with the latter format is that it easily drifts toward angry speeches instead of helpful solutions. Many times, constituents speak about issues that are not related to the strategic questions that must be addressed in order to develop a shared vision of the future. Local governments need an approach that creates dialogue among a cross-section of the community which reflects the community's diversity. Cities must find ways for elected leaders to listen respectfully to people without surrendering the agenda to negative-minded parties. We must ask the question, "How can elected officials create a strategic vision that relies upon the contributions, rather than complaints, of the community?"

Authentic Collaboration

One option is to engage community members at the beginning of the strategic visioning process, allowing them to contribute key ingredients to the vision. This process sends the message that, while having no vision is not an option, elected leaders also do not consider it an option to create a vision apart from citizen input. Relying upon residents to contribute substantively to the vision is critical, but it requires local government leaders to carefully communicate that the purpose of providing input is to look forward together, not to complain about what someone does not like or about what someone else is doing wrong. It is for the purpose of working together toward a shared vision that everyone creates collaboratively.

This is very different from the traditional process of a small group of leaders creating a vision and then "selling" it to the larger group, nor is it the same as developing a vision and testing it with a focus group. Rather, this process is designed to promote genuine collaboration with all residents so that the finished project feels for the participants like they are looking into a mirror. Ideally, when a city council creates a strategic vision, those who have participated in the process should be able to see themselves in that vision. They should see some of their own aspirations, preferences, and insights. Indeed, their "fingerprints" should be all over it. If someone who has participated in the process looks at a strategic vision and cannot see any of their own hopes in it, then that represents a colossal failure.

Creating a collaborative process that engages the community in strategic visioning is an important expression of servant leadership. The desire to serve motivates many to run for a council seat or to work in local government. I often hear both elected officials and local government professionals say that they want to make a difference. Citizens appreciate that attitude, but it is easy for the average citizen to feel disconnected from what is happening in local government. Many do not know how to engage with decision makers, and often they are not familiar with the strategic issues that city governments are contemplating. While it may be tempting to say, "They should become informed," it is also incumbent upon servant leaders to provide an effective way for citizens to become informed and get involved.

Servant leaders attempt to lead in a way that allows everyone to feel included in the community. Their sense of stewardship goes beyond giving a report and practicing transparency, as important as these responsibilities are. When the organizational culture is marked by servant leadership principles, the leaders feel an obligation to activate the gifts, knowledge, and dreams of the widest possible segment of the population. In addition, they have the foresight and awareness to appreciate the positive impact of engaging the community and the negative impact of not. In short, *good* community engagement is not an option; it is a necessity for great servant leaders.

When a large number of residents know they have played a significant role in developing their city's strategic vision, it creates a deeper sense of community ownership. They are more likely to embrace and defend the vision if they have participated in the process. I have listened to many city councils discuss creative ways to market their vision to residents. However, these marketing efforts always have severe limitations: They must overcome people's natural skepticism; many people have a persistent desire to resist change that they feel the government is trying to convince them to accept; and they are also reticent to easily agree to conditions that they may not fully understand. A better way to gain support is to develop a process that builds people's sense of ownership because they have actually collaborated with formal leaders in developing the vision.

Fostering a process that builds community ownership has some very practical benefits. It is much easier to educate citizens about difficult and complicated social issues when they are engaged in addressing the problems rather than merely critiquing the solutions. This is a crucial part of countering what in many communities has become a chorus of negativity on social media platforms about local government decisions and activities. That negative refrain is often driven by a tendency to perceive complex issues as being one-dimensional. One effective way to counter this perception is to educate a large segment of the population on the issue, not through staff reports, but by working to solve the problems together with the city's formal leaders. These citizens become the raving fans that offer a different perspective because they have seen for

themselves how complex issues can be. They champion community-building virtues, such as empathy and inclusion, because they have had the experience of listening to a variety of viewpoints in an effort to determine the best way forward.

A vision can be defined as a preferred future that inspires commitment and elicits excitement. The benefit of engaging citizens in a strategic visioning process is that the very nature of a vision appeals to the positive aspects of their personalities, and it makes them excited about their city's future possibilities. Visions are aspirational. People do not create visions of gloom for a city they love and to which they feel connected. However, it is much easier to create a sense of community ownership around an aspirational vision if residents have had a key role in determining what that vision should be. If they are asked to merely consent to what has already been created, they are as likely to resent as consent.

There are other practical benefits to using an approach marked by authentic collaboration. One benefit is that the more residents who participate in the process, the more likely it is that the city council members will hear ideas they may not have considered on their own. Some of those ideas will relate to the need to address systemic injustices. Other ideas will focus on ways to alleviate the suffering caused by inequities. Both are necessary, and the city can create a more compelling vision of the future by drawing upon the wisdom of "both/and" thinking instead of the limitations of an "either/or" orientation. As the saying goes, "*We* is always smarter than *me*."

Another benefit of a process built upon authentic collaboration is the increased likelihood of voter support for bond campaigns. Cities like Gladstone, Missouri, and Plano, Texas, have illustrated the connection between participation in the strategic visioning process and success at the ballot box. Gladstone has developed a comprehensive strategic planning process that the city has used for almost a decade. It involves a significant number of citizens participating in several cycles that have resulted in people seeing their dreams become tangible realities. It has also led to voters approving bond measures by overwhelming majorities. Similarly, in the early 1960s, Plano was a small city of approximately 10,000 people which desperately needed to add infrastructure to prepare for the inevitable growth moving toward them from Dallas. The City of Plano adopted the strategy of always having more people on its Bond Committee and sub-committees than would be required to successfully pass each bond election. City leaders knew that participation created a sense of ownership: People tended to vote for certain measures because they felt a sense of ownership in them.

A Genuinely Collaborative Process

This shared visioning process can be adapted to fit the needs of different cities. In this article, I reference how the City of Shawnee, Kansas, used this approach to help the city council develop a strategic vision. Shawnee is a thriving suburb in the Kansas City metro area, with a growing population of over 50,000 and a desire to balance growth and economic development while continuing to protect the quality of life for residents. While citizen satisfaction surveys have shown a high level of satisfaction with the local government, the council was also aware of a wide diversity of opinions about what the future should look like for the city. This led the council to select SGR to help guide members through the strategic visioning process, with heavy emphasis placed upon community engagement.

Community Steering Committee

With the Shawnee City Council's approval, the management team created a steering committee that comprised a few council members and a cross-section of leaders from various stakeholder groups, including business leaders, educational leaders, members of commissions, and other volunteers. Approximately 15 people served on the steering committee, the purpose of which was four-fold:

- provide oversight to the process;

- champion the process among members' various constituencies;

- participate in community engagement meetings and focus group meetings; and,

- help synthesize the results of the community engagement meetings and focus group meetings.

During the steering committee training meeting, this group began to coalesce around the idea of creating a process that would allow citizens to discuss—thoughtfully, thoroughly, and civilly—pressing issues facing the city. The steering committee chose a theme for the process—"Imagine Shawnee"—and created its own statement of purpose: "To imagine a shared vision for Shawnee's future." The committee members hired a graphic designer to create a logo for the group which was used on T-shirts, signs, social media, and all communications from the committee about the process.

SGR worked with the steering committee to create the questions that would be explored at the community engagement events and held some mini-sessions that followed the blueprint for the meetings with the community. The committee decided to name these meetings "Imagine Shawnee Meetings," though not everyone was confident that this title would be effective. Several committee members worried that the discussions would devolve into negative accusations and angry outbursts. However, the committee agreed that attempting to create a strategic vision without gaining real community input would not work, either. Therefore, the committee planned four Imagine Shawnee Meetings that would be open to anyone. In addition, the committee members planned to hold several focus group events that would allow specific groups to offer input from their particular perspective. The focus groups included senior adults, educators, downtown businesses, teenagers, and chamber of commerce members.

Steering committee members took the initiative to personally invite people they knew and interacted with on a regular basis. In addition, the city made use of social media and newspaper announcements to advertise the meetings. The steering committee suggested holding the Imagine Shawnee Meetings at different locations in the city, rather than hosting all of them at city hall. One meeting was held at a park, one at a tavern, and others in places that could accommodate groups of at least 50 people. Over 600 different people attended the Imagine Shawnee Meetings or focus group meetings. Shawnee City Manager Nolan Sunderman noted that the vast majority of the 600 had not participated in any kind of city governance event in the past. They had never been to a council meeting, nor had they ever previously attended city-sponsored informational meeting of any kind.

The decision to hold the Imagine Shawnee Meetings away from city hall was a successful strategic move by the steering committee. Many residents do not feel like city hall belongs to them, even though elected officials and city employees would argue that it does indeed. For many citizens, events held at city hall make them feel like they are "playing on the road." They are visitors in unfamiliar territory. This can undermine the sense of community ownership in the

vision that the leaders wanted originally to create. Holding the meetings in other locations was a way for formal leaders to say that they were giving up "home field advantage." Making themselves accessible on others' turf, without a fixed agenda, tempered people's skepticism and increased their willingness to engage. It made it easier for people to see that the vision for the city's future included all aspects of the community, not just formal city government.

Effective Engagement

The steering committee created a series of open-ended questions that people could wrestle with in small groups. The steering committee used small-group discussions rather than allowing individuals to address the entire group. SGR has found that most people do not like to speak "to the front of the room" unless they are true extroverts or terribly angry. Additionally, these individuals often overestimate the number of people who agree with them, and because they are so forceful, they often discourage others from expressing their points of view.

The steering committee decided to present one or two questions at a time to be discussed in the small groups, which were usually made up of approximately six to 10 people. The groups were given 10 to 15 minutes to discuss their answers, and then one person was asked to summarize to the large group how their small group had answered the questions. Though this would seemingly have created the same dynamic as asking a person to give a speech into a microphone, there were some important distinctions. First, we asked individual speakers to summarize what the group said, not just give their opinion about a matter. We have found this to be effective because there is usually enough invisible peer pressure to keep most people from going "off script." The presence of the group holds the spokesperson accountable to what was actually said. However, another subtle reality is that the person with an axe to grind rarely volunteers to be the spokesperson. As they gave their summaries, the spokespeople wrote down the key points on a flip chart. At times, the facilitator would ask for come clarification, and some group comments were not uncommon at the end of each small-group report, but the facilitator was careful to keep things moving.

Each time we introduced a new set of questions, we re-formed the groups so that people were able to interact with a variety of other participants throughout the meeting. Not only does this build community by creating new relationships, but it also helps minimize negativity. Unless someone is very bold, people tend to practice more self-restraint when they are in a group with others they are just getting to know. With their best friends, they may be unrestrained, but in a group of strangers, they usually tone down their rhetoric. However, that is just one outcome of small-group meetings; we have frequently observed several results associated with this process:

1. Good ideas keep coming to the forefront over and over. It is easy for the entire group to see themes as they emerge.

2. Outliers tend to self-identify as outliers. I have noticed that when a person who thinks initially that everyone agrees with them on controversial issues begins interacting with other community members, they usually discover, much to their surprise, that not everyone feels the same way about these topics. This becomes apparent not only to the outlier, but also to everyone else. Extremely vocal people can create a mirage suggesting that the whole city is "up in arms" about this or that. However, when the issue is discussed in a less passionate, more civil manner, it often becomes clear that this is not the case.

3. New voices are discovered and new relationships are built. Over and over, I have watched as people connect with each other, enthusiasm swells, and the city discovers new leaders as a result of a 2-hour meeting. The value of focusing collectively on solutions rather than complaints cannot be overstated. It creates positive bonds.

4. Respect for leadership goes up, not down. Sometimes, leaders do not want to have meetings like this because they do not want to be attacked by people who do not agree with past decisions or new directions. I understand this resistance, and I do not blame them at all for it. However, I have noticed that when citizens start wrestling with strategic questions, they realize that doing so is difficult work. While this is not a reason to have a community engagement event, it is a positive byproduct nevertheless.

All of these things happened in Shawnee. By the time all of the Imagine Shawnee Meetings had been held, it was easy to discern what citizens were asking for, and there was a genuine excitement within the steering committee that they were going to have useful information to share with the city council. It is likely that the sense of community ownership that grew out of the process will result in more leaders volunteering to serve in the future. Not only can more volunteers be expected, they will likely volunteer with a positive attitude because of the goodwill created from the Imagine Shawnee Meetings.

Questions Used

The questions used during a community engagement meeting must address the specific needs of each unique situation, but in order to be most effective, they should meet three criteria. First, they should be open-ended (i.e., not yes-or-no questions). Second, they should be aspirational. Third, they should be strategic in that they focus on the bigger issues facing the community. The following are the questions used during the Imagine Shawnee Meetings:

1. Why did you move to Shawnee?

2. What do you like the most about living in Shawnee?

3. What's one thing you would like to change about Shawnee?

4. What's one thing you hope stays the same about Shawnee?

5. What are the strengths of Shawnee that you can build on for the future?

6. What are the weaknesses of Shawnee that should be addressed for the future?

7. What are the opportunities Shawnee can take advantage of in the future? What are the threats to the future that Shawnee should prepare for?

8. What most needs to be added (or improved) in the City of Shawnee?

9. Where would you like your city council to focus its future efforts?

Helpful Guidelines

If you are planning to hold a community engagement process as a part of creating a strategic vision, the following are some helpful guidelines:

1. Use an outside facilitator. The facilitator should keep things positive and upbeat, but there may be times when they have to interrupt people as politely as possible. Most of the time, this can be done without offending people, but if people do get offended, it

is better for them to get angry at a facilitator than at the mayor, city manager, or other city leader.

2. Do not be defensive. Ninety-five percent of what will be said during a community engagement meeting will be positive, but there is always the possibility that someone will make a remark that is out of place or downright rude. As unfair as it seems, it is better to allow the facilitator to simply say "Thank you" and move on, rather than taking time to "set the record straight."

3. Do not campaign. Nothing can ruin a community engagement event faster than an elected official who starts making campaign promises. We have asked people to come to give their opinions about the future, so it is important that we let them do that. No bait and switch.

4. Do not overreact. It is important to keep the purpose of the engagement event in focus: to hear from the community about what they want for the future. If the meeting generates some great ideas and some common themes, then it is a success. In the process, there will be some things that may not sit well with leaders who are heavily invested in the community or the process. It is easy to overreact to those things. However, my experience is that the best response, including after the meeting is over, is to merely move on.

5. Do not label people. Just because citizens have ideas that may carry notes of criticism does not automatically make them negative people. Great leadership is always focused on building a coalition of the willing. Give every person every opportunity to be a part of that coalition until they make it clear they are unwilling. Being too hasty to label someone runs the risk of making them a martyr, and it sends distancing signals to perceptive observers.

Aftermath

After we conducted all of the community engagement and focus group events, SGR met with the steering committee again to collaborate on synthesizing the results. Our three goals were to categorize the responses, identify the main themes, and present them to the city council in a way that made it easy to see which ideas were mentioned the most often. We also tried to present conflicting points of view in an honest way so that the council could see what the outlier opinions were.

The steering committee's role is very important at this point. If you use an outside facilitator, they may not be as familiar with the nuances of your local situation, but the steering committee will be able to interpret the data in light of your city's unique setting. The facilitator needs access to the raw data even though they may be creating the initial report. This is important because, if the facilitator inadvertently under- or over-emphasizes something, the steering committee is likely to spot the discrepancy if it can compare the report with the raw data. Ideally, the steering committee and the facilitator work together as a team.

Once the steering committee collaborated with the facilitator to create the report, that report was shared with the full governing body. It is helpful if one or two members of the governing body have served on the steering committee, but it is also important for the steering committee membership not to be overrepresented by elected officials. It is important to note that the report is not the strategic vision and is not meant to replace the work that the governing body

must do in developing a good strategic vision. Rather, it is one data point for the governing body to consider when they begin their work, but it is an important element that can serve as a "north star" for the work they do on the strategic vision.

When the report is shared with the governing body, it is important that it comes from the steering committee, rather than the city management team. It is likely that residents will attend the meeting at which the report is presented, and if they attended one of the engagement events, their perspective on how much one item ought to be emphasized can be unduly influenced by what they heard at that particular meeting. If the report is perceived to be coming from the management team, it places the city in an awkward position. However, if it is clear that the report comes from the steering committee, even though a citizen may not agree with how the report is worded or what it emphasizes, it leaves the management team out of the argument. Also important, the steering committee is not making any recommendations to the governing body; the report simply highlights what was said at the community engagement and focus group meetings. The elected officials are free to consider some, none, or all of what is submitted.

When the Imagine Shawnee Steering Committee presented its report to the city council, the council members asked a few questions and suggested a minor change to the planned process. The suggestion was to have another community engagement event after the council had created the strategic vision but before it had been formally adopted. The goal was to ensure that citizens had every opportunity to say, "Yes, that's in alignment with what we want." The steering committee agreed and scheduled those meetings after the council had completed its work.

Closing Observations

This process worked very well for the City of Shawnee. It gave citizens a clear opportunity to speak about the future, and it provided the council members with the ingredients they needed to develop a shared vision. A similar process may be helpful for other cities as well. While this kind of approach has many positive attributes, it is important to manage expectations. The city must be crystal clear about what the community engagement events are and what they are not. The parameters and purposes must be stated simply, clearly, and repeatedly. There is not a way for the council to escape making hard decisions about priorities, budgets, or directions. Citizens should be told clearly that, just because they suggest something, there is no guarantee their suggestion will become a part of the strategic vision. There are many factors to consider beyond community input, though the latter is important. Everyone should be aware of the reality that this process will have some messy elements. Some people will say things that would have been best left unsaid. A few people will have some criticisms, some of which will be valid. However, providing healthy leadership requires a certain level of maturity, and volunteers, city employees, and elected officials have to display their maturity, especially when they feel justified having a less mature response.

Jennifer Fadden, president of executive recruitment at SGR, often says, "People support what they have helped to create." That is the most important reason to develop a robust approach to community engagement. As the city council creates the strategic vision for the future and the management team develops the strategic plan to make it become a reality, both groups will need the support of the residents and stakeholders. By going back and saying, "This is in alignment with what the community told us," you can dramatically increase the chances of having a long walk in the same direction, and it is most often the cities that have a long walk in the same direction that also have the most success.

Author

Dr. Mike Mowery is the President of Leadership Development for Strategic Government Resources (SGR). He has been with SGR since 2011.

 Mike has studied leadership for over 30 years and is experienced in guiding local governments in strategic visioning, building effective teams, and overcoming obstacles to improve and enhance organizational health. He has led over 500 Workshops on Leadership for local governments.

He is a graduate of Baylor University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. His doctoral project focused on developing a process to help leaders create a strategic vision for a larger organization. This has become the foundation for SGR's approach to Strategic Planning which is being used by more and more City Councils.

 Mike is the creator and presenter of SGR's Next Generation Leader training program and leads other workshops and classes including Building Better Leaders, Building the Great Workplace, and Overcoming the 5 Dysfunctions of a Team. Mike has helped develop and redefine SGR's Strategic Visioning Process used in city council retreats around the nation. He was also one of the developers for SGR's Mentoring Program, used to help emerging leaders reach their potential.

Mike has a passion for seeing leaders grow, excel, and provide outstanding leadership to their organizations. In addition to having earned several certifications in facilitation methods, he is in the process of becoming a certified coach with the International Coaches Federation.

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Children Are Undiscovered Community Assets

Amy Neugebauer
The Giving Square

Author Note

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Amy Neugebauer, Executive Director and Founder, The Giving Square, 5237 River Road, Suite #244, Bethesda, MD 20816. E-mail: amy@thegivingsquare.org

The Giving Square partners with schools and organizations to develop children's philanthropic skills, identities, and tools. The Giving Square's flagship program, the Kids for Kids Fund, engages third to fifth graders in an experiential philanthropic journey focused on empathy, humility, and impact.

"People always tell us young people will save the world, but there is simply not enough time to wait," warns Greta Thunberg. There is indeed a strong sentiment that "children are the future." People write songs about it, print bumper stickers, and use the phrase in speeches. Yet, though they say the words, most do not act as if they believe them to be true. If they did, they would value children as the ultimate community owners.

The contributors to this issue of the *eJournal of Public Affairs* are all exploring the concept of "community ownership," of people taking collective responsibility for improving others' lives. This article considers why kids should be treated as community owners, how adults get in the way, and how we can all nurture children to be agents of change—now, just as Greta urges us to do.

Children Are Ideal Community Owners

We at The Giving Square know that children can be community owners because we have seen it. Through our Kids for Kids Fund program, we have engaged hundreds of third to fifth graders in an experiential curriculum designed to deepen their civic and philanthropic dispositions, skills, and behaviors. The program helps kids develop an empathetic and expanded understanding of the needs of their respective communities. We explore where life is not fair and help them see their responsibility in making it more fair for others. Finally, we assign them the responsibility of giving away $1,000 to a local child-serving organization in their community (think of this as a "kid-advised fund," or KAF).

Children participating in the Kids for Kids Fund program have opened up about their experiences being immigrants, battling cancer, having siblings with special needs, witnessing parents battling depression, losing family members, and dealing with racism. Throughout the program, children talk about hard stuff because they have seen it and experienced it—and want to do something about it.

Our program reframes how kids can help. Specially, we validate their capacity to work together to make important decisions about how to allocate resources in their communities through the KAF deliberation process. We also emphasize the many different ways kids can take responsibility for helping others in their families, neighborhoods, and communities. We encourage them to think about the myriad ways they can be philanthropic every day, validating such community-ownership efforts as,

- "I taught my brother how to read";
- "I sit with my mom when she is sad"; and,
- "I helped the old lady pick up the tomatoes she dropped at the store."

Though larger child-led fundraising activities or canned food drives attract attention, it is also the everyday acts of community ownership that add up to significant impacts.

Ninety-four percent of participants who have completed the Kids for Kids Fund program have reported wanting to help others more, and 88.24% have reported seeing themselves as philanthropists. Before participating in the program, less than 50% of children polled reported feeling important in their communities compared to 100% after the program.

The Kids for Kids Fund works for a few reasons. First, it is evidence-based, built on research related to service, empathy, giving, character development, and child development. Second, we constantly test and evolve our curriculum and practices in order to adapt to rapidly changing social challenges in our communities and to maximize impact. Finally, our program meets kids where they are—in relation to both their social concerns and their philanthropic capacities. It works because children are capable of and interested in being community owners. We unleash power; we do not generate it.

Adults Get in the Way

In order to engage kids more broadly as community owners, adults need to break their own thinking and practices about how best to engage kids in giving. Here are a few of the patterns adults need to break:

1. Treating kids as future contributors. Foundations traditionally give kids responsibility once they are "of age." Families give kids token roles in preparation for the future. Without considering kids to be important for who they are, children do not feel connected to acts of service.

2. Using extrinsic motivation to drive kids' engagement. When my son was very young, he came home one day motivated to make a $50 donation to a giving campaign at his school for a national nonprofit. When I asked why he had made this decision, he shared that, with a $50 donation, he would get the t-shirt. Children are often engaged as fundraisers and incentivized through prizes. Just because they go through the act of raising money does not mean that they are more likely to see themselves as community owners.

3. Avoiding talking to kids about difficult things. Whether the issue is homelessness or racism, adults often avoid talking about important community and societal challenges because they want to protect their children from them. Kids are constantly receiving information about what is happening around them. If adults do not help them process what they are experiencing, they will create their own meaning.

4. Letting the desire to market children become the driver of giving and service. Wanting to market kids and help them get into college sets adults up to brand their children as superheroes for superficial acts of service. By contrast, wanting to nurture the humanity of kids leads to very different activities and conversations.

How to Engage Children as Agents of Community Change

Rather than focusing on single acts of service, such as lemonade stands and canned food drives, we adults should focus on building a philanthropic disposition in children that will set them on a path of lifelong giving. We should treat kids as the community owners they are. Here is how we can do it:

1. Engage kids in the art and science of philanthropy, not just kindness and "doing good." First, start with the true definition of *philanthropy*: giving of oneself for the

good of humanity. Make it clear that everyone can be a philanthropist, no matter one's age or income. Explain that there are many ways to be philanthropic—for instance, doing research, speaking up for a friend or an issue, being a good listener, sharing one's resources, helping someone do something, or teaching something new. The possibilities are endless.

2. Have the hard conversations. Have real conversations about difficult topics, such as structural racism, homelessness, the pandemic. By seeing and exploring the challenges, they will be better equipped to figure out how to be helpful. If we fear the conversations, we should start with our own personal education and exploration.

3. Spend time with first-person narratives. Explore issues through personal narratives in books, movies, and photos. Find ways to develop an empathetic connection to the needs and experiences of others by hearing their stories. This helps kids understand both why and how they might help.

4. Expand kids' understanding of issues through data and research. Kids will respond to facts about various challenges—hunger, homelessness, disabilities, and so on. We should not jump into solving the problems until we have done the research. This step is critical to ensuring that we fully understand the problem (i.e., causes vs. symptoms) and are actually helping.

5. Introduce potential role models. Learn more about philanthropic kids such as Greta Thunberg (using her voice and brain for the good of the Earth), Mikaila Ulmer (using her writing and resources for the good of bees), Milo Cress (who used his voice to challenge a restaurant about its use of straws, triggering a national movement), or Belen Woodard (who launched "More Than Peach" to ensure that children have crayons in a variety of skin tones). Adults can be role models, too. In pre-surveys of participants in The Giving Square's programs, most kids report that their parents are their role models. While we know this changes over time (alas), we should recognize that this is true for a time and that we should act accordingly.

6. Help kids define issues that are important to them. One potential starting point is kids' own lived experiences, that is, their own talents, interests, and obstacles that may link to larger social issues. We have seen many children withdraw once parents (or grandparents) push their own agenda about what kids should care about. Let kids explore their ideas. Do not tell them what they should care about.

Adults need the help of children. We need their authentic voices, fresh ideas, and positive thinking *now*. We need children to have a sense of responsibility to their communities *now*. We need them to feel like they matter *now*. Imagine how different the world would be.

If you would like to learn more about The Giving Square's methodologies and programs, please reach out to info@thegivingsquare.org.

Author

Executive Director and Founder, The Giving Square Amy is a professional, with over 20 years in philanthropy, community development, and social change, with a vision for how to engage children as community builders. Amy Neugebauer is the Founder and Executive Director of The Giving Square. Throughout her career, Amy has worked in the fields of community building, international development, philanthropy, and social innovation. Most recently she served as Deputy to the President of Ashoka. At Ashoka Amy drove several initiatives and country expansions, including Ashoka in Japan, Korea, and Western Europe. Earlier in her career, Amy ran the College Park City-University Partnership, a community development corporation responsible for designing and implementing strategic collective impact initiatives, including a multi-million-dollar affordable housing program. She also founded an integrated youth-led community center in Estonia, which was recognized as a model for youth empowerment and community integration. Throughout her career Amy has advised a number of nonprofits and foundations globally around various programmatic and organizational challenges. Amy has a Masters in Community Planning from the University of Maryland and a Bachelors in International Relations from the University of Washington. She lives in Maryland with her husband, two kids, and COVID dog.

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Time to Throw Away the Old Economic Development Playbook

Hrishue Mahalaha
Innovation Economy Partners

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Hrishue Mahalaha, Chief Economic Advisor, Innovation Economy Partners, 6500 Summit Circle, Cleveland, OH 44141. Phone: (216) 272-7655. Email: hrishuem@inoecp.com

Abstract

Rural communities in the United States are struggling to establish a sound economic footing in the age of globalization. The author suggests that community leaders should consider a more expansive view on recrafting a community "north star." Based on work the author has conducted over the previous 5 years in various rural communities in Missouri, the article also outlines a set of key learnings and practical steps that local leaders can take to catalyze positive change.

Keywords: economic development, collective impact, leadership sustainability

Question to the reader: What is economic development? If you ask a dozen individuals this question, you are likely to get two dozen responses, ranging from a simple blank expression to detailed technical answers. Some of the technical responses may even include the definition found after a quick Google search: "Economic development is the growth of the standard of living of a nation's people from a low-income (poor) economy to a high-income (rich) economy. When the local quality of life is improved, there is more economic development."[1]

What I have often found perplexing is how loosely community leaders, business leaders, and politicians throw around this term—and how economic development is often interpreted as the effort to attract businesses to a community and to create new jobs. If this is, in fact, your interpretation of what economic development is, then the following question is worth considering: Hypothetically, is there a finish line, which, when crossed, allows a community to claim collectively that they have achieved their economic development goal?

What would this finish line look like, and how would a community define it? Perhaps you hold that the goal of economic development is to create new and perhaps good-paying jobs that equal or exceed the local unemployment number. If you agree with this, then I raise one final test question: If a community of 10,000 working-age residents has 50 unemployed and 100 underemployed individuals, then would creating or attracting 200–300 new good-paying jobs be sufficient? Could a community then claim economic-development victory?

I begin by posing these questions because, across the United States, this very pattern has emerged. Communities that have ample "good" jobs available continue to push incentives and tax breaks to attract new businesses. Yet, I challenge this fundamental assumption, which community and economic leaders often make.

Another point of reference. Allow me to highlight a few simple facts to contextualize where America stands in the great global economic development race:

- Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020: $83 trillion

- U.S. GDP in 2020: $21 trillion

The U.S. GDP is approximately 25% of the world GDP, and this country is winning the economic growth war by a large margin. It is also worth noting that (1) China's GDP is $15 trillion and (2) the current U.S. population—about 331 million—is approximately 4.25% of the global population (whereas China's is 1.4 billion).

How can America be so far ahead of the rest of the world in terms of economic productivity and still face deep economic woes—in the form of inequity, homelessness, adult and child poverty, etc.—at the local level in every community, from Silicon Valley to Springfield, Missouri?

Myopic Economic Development vs. Pursuing a Holistic Community Ownership Agenda

I challenge the fundamental assumption that what is broken in communities is the lack of jobs and lack of businesses, that the path to economic prosperity is simply the creation of "better jobs." Instead, I propose that what is broken in communities is not access to employment and jobs, but rather the enablement of every local citizen to create a path toward personal and communal prosperity. I believe that, rather than needing a fishing job on the trawler, people need

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[1] https://www.toppr.com/ask/question/what-is-meant-by-economic-development/

the ability to learn how to fish so they can apply their own creativity in pursuit of opportunities of their own making.

I will take my case one step further. What makes humans the most unique creature on this planet? Is it our opposable thumbs? Our communication and language skills? Yes to both, but I argue that what makes humans most unique is that, unlike other creatures, we have the ability to decide who we are going to be, every single day of our life. Dogs, cows, and horses have a very limited ability to shift their capabilities in fundamental ways. Within very finite constraints, other animals can excel in a particular domain; perhaps a horse can learn how to run faster or a dog can learn a new trick or two. Yet, only humans have the ability to learn professional skills, from laying brick to transplanting a living human heart.

Community leaders must recognize this basic fact and begin to develop pathways that enable local citizens to achieve their greatest potential. Leaders must begin to foster a broader view of their whole community. Rather than seeing citizens as merely consumers and workers, they must view the community as an enabler of economic energy that is often lying dormant and underutilized. To tap into this potential energy requires a fundamental shift in thinking, which can then prompt the community to better integrate elements of its talent and economic supply chain together.

What Is the Path Forward for Communities? Where Can Communities Begin Their Journey?

Over the last 5 years, I have had the opportunity to work on a program called Growth in the Rural Ozarks (GRO). This program was designed in conjunction with Rural USDA and the Community Foundation of the Ozarks. The core premise behind this program was to evaluate whether small rural communities in the Ozarks could positively impact the direction of their local communities and economies. Over the course of the last few years, our team, Innovation Economy Partners, has often stumbled; however, we have also learned a tremendous amount about what it takes for communities to progress.

It turns out that there is a lot that communities can do to help unshackle their potential. Though much of this work is not intellectually complicated, communities often need help organizing so that they can better align themselves with a common set of priorities. Often, community leaders desperately seek to change the trajectory of their community but lack the tools to move forward. While there is much that could be discussed regarding where to begin, I would organize our learnings into the following critical "buckets." Here are our top five lessons learned related to where communities interested in taking greater ownership can begin their journey:

(1) Strong and credible convening leader: The most critical element of the effort is to have a strong leader who can help initiate the process. The desired characteristics of this individual are as follows:

- Community first: The individual has a strong orientation to helping improve the lives of local citizens.

- Checking the ego at the door: The individual works well in a team because they know how to compromise and find the middle ground. They recognize that sometimes the best ideas will not be their own, and they are willing to make decisions that sometimes may counter their own beliefs.

- Listening more and speaking less: We like to think of this as the words-to-value ratio. We want individuals who can use as few words as possible to convey their thoughts.

- An orientation toward learning: The individual recognizes that the realm of economic and community development can sometimes be a very complicated space. As such, individuals who come to the discussion with a spirit of learning will do quite well in their position. Part of this attribute also involves the ability to reflect on what has been done and the willingness to have a healthy degree of critique, so that learnings can be garnered and improvements implemented.

- Time commitment: While the amount of time needed to commit to the efforts will vary, the leaders should estimate approximately 2–5 hours a week. There will be more time required in the first 6 months, and then the efforts should stabilize after this initial period.

(2) A non-local Sherpa: While this point may seem self-serving, the reality is that communities where individuals have long histories and longer memories sometimes carry a lot of baggage that prevents conversations from progressing sequentially. The other challenge that communities looking to self-organize will face is that they may not have an individual who is able to challenge a community's basic assumptions about what is and is not feasible. Long-time residents often take for granted that certain aspects of the community cannot be adjusted. In one community where we have been working, there happens to be a manufacturing plant that creates unpleasant odors at certain times of the day. The first time I experienced the odors, I was truly shocked. However, when I brought this up to the community, they seemed completely at ease with the situation. After all, it had been like this in the community for over a decade and, as such, was not even seen as a pressing issue. Communities need a fresh pair of trained eyes to help them navigate their own inexperience and blind spots.

(3) A team of diverse doers: Communities striving to take control of their destiny must ensure that a handful of critical partners are part of the effort. The five most critical organizations will be the following: city hall, the school district, the chamber of commerce or local economic development organization, philanthropic leaders, and a selection of key business leaders. A number of community resources are embedded within these entities. As a community looks to drive more outcomes, these entities can help bring personnel and resources to ensure that the work gets done. Typically, these entities are also involved extensively with the residents of the community, which makes gathering voices from various pockets of the community much easier.

One final point worth noting is the importance of finding diverse stakeholders. While rural communities tend not to be very ethno-racially diverse, it still helps to have a diversity of individuals with varying backgrounds (e.g., socioeconomic, age, and gender) at the table. Diversity of experiences among the leaders selected to support the community and economic development efforts is helpful, if not critical. This diversity helps bring distinct voices and innovative energy that may get overlooked if the group is too monolithic. For communities striving to create greater local citizen ownership of the future of their town, it is important to include the voices of those who sometimes get left out of such communal discussions.

(4) Importance of investing in the process: Data, objectivity, team building. The next focus should be on developing how the community will work together. What are the facts? What is actually broken? What is fact and what is fiction? How will the community make decisions? What behaviors are acceptable and which are not? Laying some basic groundwork helps the group develop a more stable foundation upon which it can build longer lasting programs.

(5) Generating and communicating wins: Too often, communities are not able to get past the planning and conversation phase. It is crucial that communities think about what goals they are going to set for themselves, how they will communicate these goals to all community members, and how they will recruit more leaders and secure more resources for the movement. Too often, communities do much heavy lifting but then are unable to inform and engage the community succinctly and consistently. This effort is of critical importance if the work is to gain long-term traction in the community. For further reference, we encourage readers to visit the GRO portal and learn how the GRO communities monitor their progress (https://www.GrowOzarks.org).

In conclusion, the future of economic development is no longer a discrete function. Local communities do not need to "create jobs." Instead, communities need to take ownership of themselves and ensure that economic access is available to all of their members. The future of community and economic development is fluid, and it must help unleash the collective power of all of its citizens.

Is your community ready?

Author

Hrishue Mahalaha is the Chief Economic Advisor at Innovation Economy Partners. Hrishue supports an array of domestic clients and helps define, assess and deliver solutions that help improve and develop economies for communities across the country. Hrishue has more than 14 years of experience working with the management consulting firm Accenture. During this time, Hrishue worked closely with a variety of domestic and international, public, private and governmental organizations. Hrishue also has launched a variety of entrepreneurial ventures that spanned from medical devices to a restaurant. Hrishue holds an MBA from Columbia University and a B.A. in Psychology and B.S. Business Management from Case Western Reserve University. Hrishue lives in Cleveland with his wife and three children.