

TRANSCRIPT From:
**Engaging the Poor and People of Color in Organized Service:
Challenges and Opportunities**

An Immersion Learning Session of the
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I. Welcome

Good afternoon. My name is Jim Hyman and I want to welcome you to our Immersion Learning Session, *Engaging the Poor and People of Color in Organized Service: Challenges and Opportunities*. As most of you know, the six Immersion Learning Sessions taking place today represent an innovation that is being inaugurated for this Annual Meeting. Each of these sessions is being offered as an opportunity for you, our conferees, to engage in deeper exploration and exchange around a topic of priority interest to the field.

By your attendance in such large numbers today you provide living testimony to the importance of today's session topic and validate its selection as a matter of great importance to our gathering and to the field. And so, we want to thank you again for your presence and extend to you our hope that you will emerge from our discussions more energized, better informed, and better prepared to pursue the challenge of engaging the poor and people of color in organized service.

Before proceeding though, let me ask that we take a moment to acknowledge and applaud two persons who provided the leadership to the planning and preparation for our session – Merlene Mazyck, the Director of the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps and Jennifer Faust, Senior Director at the Points of Light and Hands On Network. Thank you.

So Why should we care about Engaging the Poor and People of Color in Organized Service? Most of us are in this room because we see volunteering and service as powerful means of providing valuable human resources to needy peoples and communities. But a new AmeriCorps Longitudinal Study verifies what most of us also know – that is that service creates opportunities and

benefits that accrue to the individuals who serve. Findings show that AmeriCorps has:

- **Implications for Civic Leadership.** One year of service in AmeriCorps created long-term positive impacts on the civic outcomes of AmeriCorps alumni eight years after they joined AmeriCorps
- **Implications for Public Service.** AmeriCorps made people more likely to enter into public service careers in the government and nonprofit sector (60%)
- **Implications for Careers:** 80% of members reported that their service exposed them to new career options and over two-thirds reported that their service was an advantage to them in the job market.

But in addition to these general findings, the new research clearly demonstrates that there are extensive and specific benefits that accrue to members of disadvantaged minority groups when compared to their comparison group counterparts. For example, the study shows that:

- **Impact on the career choices:** Minority AmeriCorps members were significantly more likely than the comparison group to choose careers in public service (44% compared to 26%). AmeriCorps members from disadvantaged circumstances are 20 percentage points more likely to be employed in a public service field (46% compared to 26%).
- **Impact on Civic Participation:**
 - Hispanic AmeriCorps members: are significantly more likely (56 percent to 35 percent) than their comparison group counterparts to report the importance of neighborhood participation.
 - African-American AmeriCorps members were 10 percentage points more likely than their comparison group counterparts to have an understanding of how to meet the community's needs (77% compared to 67%) and 79 percent of indicated they have the ability to make a difference in their communities, compared to 71 percent of the comparison group.
 - AmeriCorps members from disadvantaged circumstances were significantly more likely to have contacted a government official in the past 12 months to express an opinion on a local or national issue.

These findings suggest that, in addition to their community benefits, volunteering and service have immense value to the human capital development and future civic engagement of members and particularly so for the poor and people of color. Our task over the next few hours will be to explore issues that may impede the participation of the poor and people of color and to formulate at least a beginning set of ideas and strategies to remedy those impediments and extend the benefits of service to these populations.

II. Overview: three papers

In preparation for our discussions, we have produced three papers that most of you should have received by email.

- John Foster-Bey: uses data (Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Volunteering Supplement for 2005-7) to show that race and ethnicity and socio-economic status are each predictors of voluntary participation. Whites and people of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to say that they “volunteer” and they engage in the other civic activities measured in the CPS.
- A second paper by James B. Hyman and Peter Levine draws on a wide variety of surveys and published studies to set a broader context. Their paper summarizes historical trends since the 1970s and provides hypotheses about why we may see different rates of participation in various specific forms of civic engagement by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status. This paper finds that race is a differentiating factor, but in complex ways. Groups may participate at differing rates by type of civic activity. An important example can be drawn from survey questions on community projects. For example, data suggest that African Americans are more engaged than all other racial/ethnic groups in working on “community projects.”

We suspect that these findings reflect the strong attachments to faith traditions in the African-American community. Many of the norms and networks that connect African Americans to these community projects originate within a church. Research has shown that African Americans have higher church attendance than any other racial and ethnic group in America.

Ironically, although whites are less likely than blacks to be involved in community projects and other local civic work, they are much more likely than blacks (and Latinos) to report “volunteering.” It may be that whites are more likely to choose forms of participation – for example, “service” activities such as serving at a soup kitchen or tutoring a child – that are classically *labeled* “volunteering” by the Corporation and other service institutions, whereas African Americans are more likely to participate in processes that involve organizing for social change. Such processes are more naturally described as “working on community projects” or “addressing community problems.” So, a major lesson we learn is the need to clarify the language of volunteering in ways that truly capture the civic activities and energies we intend.

- Finally, a 2-page cover paper was prepared to put these materials in the context of this session and to offer six questions that should be the focus of our learning experience.

For those who haven't had a chance to review those papers, we hope you will and that you will find them useful. And for those who didn't receive them, we invite you to visit the conference website where you will be able to access them.

Now, let me briefly review our program for today.

III. Format: three segments

A. Panel Discussion: (1 hr., 15 min.)

Merlene Mazyck: Director, National Civilian Community Corps will briefly present the Corporation and discuss the challenges she sees working with disadvantaged populations in NCCC.

Byron Amos: CEO of Capacity Builders, Inc will present from his experience as a community resident/organizer in Atlanta and give a perspective on: who the people are; what they care about; and what that suggests about how they might be engaged (what works?).

Armando Rayo: Director of Hands On Central Texas, a program of United Way Capital Area will share his experience working in the Hispanic communities around Austin, TX.

Dorothy Stoneman: President and Founder YouthBuild USA will discuss her experiences and lessons learned.

Michael Carmona: a Member of National Community Conservation Corps will offer a youth perspective.

Garland Yates: Senior Fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation will discuss the need for volunteering and service opportunities to speak to community-building/community-change agendas, strategies and approaches that often characterize engagement in disadvantaged communities.

John Jackson: President of the Schott Foundation will discuss the correlation between education and civic engagement and the role education can play in establishing an "ethic of participation

B. Table Discussion (45 min.) Instructions at each table

C. Comment and Q&A (1 hr.)

WE WILL BE RECORDING THE SESSION TODAY TO ASSIST US IN PREPARING A "REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS" ON THIS ISSUE SO PLEASE BEAR WITH US AS WE ATTEMPT TO MOVE MICROPHONES AROUND AND COLLECT THE NOTES FROM YOUR TABLE DISCUSSIONS.

LET US BEGIN.

MERLENE MAZYCK: The mission of the Corporation for National & Community Service is to improve lives strengthen communities and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. CNCS acts as a leader, partner and grantmaker in engaging non-profits, corporations and state and local governments to address local programs through volunteering. Points of Light is a very important partner in all that we do around service.

CNCS was created by Congress in 1993 to merge the work and staff of two predecessor agencies, ACTION, and the Commission on National and Community Service. President George H. W. Bush created the Commission and later President Bill Clinton consolidated the two agencies. The Corporation's Strategic Initiatives includes a focus on supporting and engaging minority youth and youth from disadvantaged communities. It is an explicit recognition that, if service is to offer a venue for affecting change in this country, then the participants in these programs have to look like America – reflecting every group in our population and at all levels of program operation, local, state and federal.

The Corporation is primarily a grantmaking organization providing grants to a highly diverse set of organizations and institutions to accomplish its goals of engaging a diverse population. AmeriCorps NCCC is a team-based, residential program administered by the Corporation located on four and soon-to-be five campuses throughout the United States. NCCC campuses are located in the cities of Sacramento, Denver, and Perry Point, MD with a new campus that just opened in Venton, IA and another that is planned for Vicksburg, MS for spring of 2009. The program engages about 1200 youth, ages 18 to 24 years old each year in full-time service for 10 months. NCCC is modeled on the military in that it is highly structured with strong service learning and leadership development components. NCCC deploys to local communities for short term projects in the areas of disaster services, environment, youth development, low income housing development, and other unmet needs. Right now about 60 percent of our resources are committed to the rebuilding effort in the Gulf Coast region.

One of the new initiatives of the Corporation is the Summer of Service Program. Last year the NCCC engaged a diverse group of 300 youth, ages 14 to 17 in three cities--New Orleans, Denver and Charleston SC, in a summer of service experience modeled on the full time program. Almost all of the young people were from disadvantage backgrounds and were people of color who had never been engaged in organized team based service or any other service for that matter. No one had ever offered them an opportunity to give back to their community.

So why national or community service? In a 1910 essay entitled, *The Moral Equivalent Of War*, William James described the benefits of national service and proposed that "American youth be conscripted into work according to their choice to get the childishness knocked out of them and to come back into society with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas." Margaret Mead argued that national service would provide "an opportunity for young adults to establish

a sense of self-respect and responsibility as individuals before making career choices or establishing homes.”

So does national service actually shape those who serve? In many ways, it can be a powerful rite of passage. How national service shapes the participant depends on where they are when they enter service and the type of service experience in which they are engaged. Young people in NCCC train and work in communities different from their own and through that experience gain an appreciation of what life is like in those communities and a better understanding of what works for those communities and why. It helps them inculcate a sense of responsibility for the greater good. The NCCC allows members to build alliances where there were none before. It reminds us that each one of us has something to give. Through service we are able to provide future public servants with a frame of reference that will make their public service roles more relevant and more effective.

I believe that these benefits should be more equally distributed among the diverse populations of this country. The NCCC does not look like America in the truest sense of the word although the young people that service represent highly motivated and committed young people in general – tremendous assets to the program. Engaging a truly diverse Corps is a top priority for NCCC. We are getting better at recruiting a diverse corps but we need to do a better job of educating our influencers, our gatekeepers, and a lot of other people who are not telling our young people about these programs and encouraging them to take a year off, put off making a lot of money and fully immerse themselves so they can contribute to their communities and become more effective for their communities, for their families and for themselves.

As we move through this conversation, I ask that you consider why we have difficulty engaging African-Americans and Hispanics in these programs and particularly programs with national structures; whether it is essential that the national programs need be as diverse as local programs; how we can ensure that young people from all communities don't miss out on opportunities to derive even greater benefits from serving; why national service programs should must look like the communities in which young people serve in order to be the most effective; and the value added of diverse Corps that enrich everybody's experiences.

We are at an important crossroad in this country and developing national service and other civic engagement initiatives are shaping how the millennial generation will lead this country. We owe it to them to make sure that all young people are engaged in that process. Programs like NCCC and others must become more diverse. We have to do better outreach but communities of color also have to promote these opportunities as important and necessary personal and professional development experiences that will help prepare young people for future leadership and personally enrich their lives. **001-006**

MICHAEL CARMONA: I am from the Sacramento campus of AmeriCorps NCCC. I am 22 years old now and was one of four children born to a single parent in the Bronx, NY. As a kid and young adult, I struggled a lot – being one of four with a single parent who was always working and nobody was constantly on my back about what’s right and what’s wrong. I thought I knew what was right and what was wrong.

School was always a struggle for me. I had too much energy to be sitting in a classroom. I just wanted to be “out there” and be a part of all that was going on around me. But with the right people “having my back” and my mother constantly being on my back, I overcame that. And I am a high school graduate.

Shortly after high school, I moved to Florida to go to college. At first, it seemed like a great idea. I thought it was going to work out well but, as some of you might have experienced, some people like to party when they get out of high school. And so did I so once again I found myself at the wrong place at the right time. But, once again, I did it for a while but things weren’t falling into place like they should have so I quit working. And I got a phone call from my mom asking what’s going on? You’re not doing what you’re supposed to be doing. I am trying to help you but, if this is how it’s going to be, you might as well just drop out and come back home because I am not going to continue to support you while you’re out there when you’re not doing the right thing.

So, shortly after I started, I ended and went back home to New York. And for a while, I was back and forth between finding a job, being in the streets with my friends and acquaintances – people that I grew up with – looking for some source of income, looking for a good time, being a rebel. I was doing that for a while and I had family members asking, “why are you doing that? You’re better than that.” And I always believed that I could do something great and be a part of something great. I just didn’t have the right motivation and the right support. By that time, I was too caught up in everything else that I was involved in.

I’ve tried other routes. I tried Job Corps. That didn’t work out well because it was a lot of people who were on their last step before they were either locked up or something. It was basically people who were headed in the wrong direction. So me being surrounded by people like that – considering that that’s how I was – it wasn’t a change for me. It was like being in the same environment but just in a different location in New York. I was in the mountains instead of in the city but everybody was still a gangster or something or other. So, that didn’t work out either. I wasn’t successful in Job Corps.

A few months before my 21st birthday, I went inside and my mom was sitting at the computer and she called over and said, “Michael, I found this program on the internet.” She was always looking for something for me to get into. She never gives up. I thank her for that and, if she were here right now, I would say,

"Thank you." She said, "There's this program called AmeriCorps NCCC. I think it's great. I want you to read about it and see what you think."

So, I read it and thought, "wow that sounds good. You get to travel and do a bunch of things. My mom was very supportive and my stepfather, who came into my life when I was about 13, was too. He always "had my back." But my mom said that the time comes when you have to move on and get out. She told me her parents would have never let her stay in the house this long. So she said either I join this program or shortly, I have to leave and go out on my own because she couldn't support me anymore. Eight months later, here I am now. It probably was the best decision I have made in a long time – maybe anytime to be honest with you.

AmeriCorps NCCC has definitely shown me a brighter future. I've been up and down many times probably more down than up but now I am able to look past what's next to a future. It's not just "what am I going to do next?" AmeriCorps has broadened my horizons. We live in communities that are very different from where I grew up. I have been in two different communities where the Hispanic population is 1.5 percent and I was that. Actually, me and another teammate of mine – we're both Puerto Rican and we made up the 1.5 percent.

It was a struggle and I found myself learning not to stand out. I didn't want to stand out. I wanted to be accepted as a member of the community. In one state, Arizona, I ran into a problem. I was out at this saloon and this was one of the oldest towns in Arizona. And I'm thinking, "what am I doing out in this saloon?" But I went anyway just to go out and have some fun with my team.

There were a couple of guys – white males – and they started making racial remarks and comments directed at me. And I was upset but I didn't fight back for the first time. And I think it's because of AmeriCorps. I just walked away. At first, I wanted to leave. I didn't want to be there anymore. And then I thought to myself, "it's not about just me. I'm here to help other people in the community – not just those guys who live there. It's about other people too. And, in respect for that, everywhere I have been so far, I have focused my energies on the community and everything that I have to offer them.

So thank you to AmeriCorps. I'm going to go places. I want to stay a part of community service and probably work for a not for profit in the future. I believe that everyone has something to give when presented with the right opportunity. In the right atmosphere people are going to help. Luckily, AmeriCorps NCCC was the right atmosphere for me and I was able to change and change for the best. **008**

Comment/Question: Hello, from one Puerto Rican to another from the Bronx, I am very proud of you. A lot of our youngsters don't get out. I am a product of that also. A single grandmother raised me. I didn't have AmeriCorps when I was growing up – I am in my 40s. But I am so glad that the program is available. We need to reach out to more youngsters in the Bronx and other similar places in the

United States because there are so many youngsters who are in trouble and they really need our help.

Comment/Question: Michael, thank you for your inspiring story. You just took me back about 12 years. I came from Kenya in 1995 to go to school. After my first semester, there was a story in the local paper in Delaware where an eleven year old boy shot a woman because the woman made a comment about his bicycle. Reading this story as a new immigrant to the US, I was surprised because where I come from it is rare for people to see guns. I tried to seek answers on why this was happening. My brother who had been here longer just told me, "welcome to America." That wasn't good enough for me.

When I went back the fall semester, I spoke to my advisor and she told me about teen violence in America. But at the end she told me that, "you can make a difference." She told me about the Boys and Girls Club and things like that. And I remember that I started volunteering at a local chapter and through that chapter one time we were raising funds through March of Dimes for children born with deformities. Once I walked into a room with three white men and heard a racial remark directed to black people. And after that I wanted to tear up my sheet and forget about service but I knew that this was the beginning of something good and from there I kept doing it. Then I went on to do AmeriCorps and I am glad that I did. So, keep on.

Question: I am a two-term VISTA alum and Michael, I am so proud of you. I think the last three speakers have said what we've been trying to say. I am one of 30 change agents here at the conference supporting increased national service for everybody. We all need to go into our communities and take action. We've got power in this room. We can change America.

BYRON AMOS: I am Byron Amos, CEO of Capacity Builders, Inc. – a community based organization here in Atlanta that is dedicated to helping create, and more importantly, help implement community-driven projects. I am a native Atlantan who still lives in the neighborhood where I was born and raised.

Why are we here? *Engaging The Poor And People Of Color In Organized Service* – and before we can move forward we need to examine the key words in this topic: "poor, people of color and organized." Then we can start to talk about what works and how to get them engaged. Well, the words I just repeated should put this session right up there with religion and politics – topics that we're not supposed to talk about in public. These are topics that we are supposed to be afraid to discuss with each other because one of two things might happen: we may find out the truth or we may wind up throwing away everything we ever thought we knew and accepting something we never even knew ever existed. So with so many people in this room who are willing to make a real difference and a real change, I say let's not waste this opportunity.

So who are the people of color and the poor whom we want to engage? Well, allow me to go a little farther into who I really am. I was born and raised in the

neighborhood of Vine City here in Atlanta, GA just four lanes and one block away from a multi-million dollar complex called the Georgia Congress Center and the Georgia Dome. The population was about 2500 people with an average annual income of roughly \$19,000. And I say "roughly" not because I am unsure or I am guessing but, I am sure we can all agree, it's "rough" surviving on \$19,000 a year.

My neighborhood has an unemployment rate of about 10 percent. The average age of a mother in our neighborhood is about 18. And our real estate base is about 85% rental properties. So, if you ask the question, "Who are the poor and people of color?" My answer would be, "Me, Byron Amos." But at this time, I must ask for your forgiveness because I have fallen victim to what I am here to help all of us change and that is the problem of preconceived notions and the fatal flaws of assumptions. So please forgive me if some of my words may sting or if I step on a few toes but, as I said earlier, given a chance to create real change, I will take it every time – because I speak not from practical applications of what one might learn in college but from the time I spent in my community – the community that we are here to learn how to engage.

I submit to you, before we ask the question, "Who are the people we need to engage?" we need to honestly ask the question, "Who are we? Who are the people who are doing the engaging?" If we really stop and take a look at the leadership of some of the largest nonprofits and the people who are offering the community service opportunities, what we see are single, upper-middle to upper class, educated, white females. We live and form the directions of our organizations by best practices structured on what worked in other communities.

These facts alone are enough to make the mission of engaging the poor and people of color impossible because we have not taken the time to understand whom we are trying to engage. And then we go about the business of going into these communities and telling these communities what they need. But don't get upset because it really isn't any one person's problem nor is there any one person who should take the blame.

Dennis Kimbrough once said that we see things not as *they* are but as *we* are. Our perception is shaped by our previous experiences. We enter these communities with the preconceived notion that help is needed – that service projects can help create a better life for these residents but not once do we ever stop to understand or educate ourselves about these communities. We speak about the poor and disadvantaged, although we may be poor in stocks and bonds, we are rich in culture, in history, and in civil movements that have changed not only the face of this country but the world. Although we are poor in wealthy families, we are rich in big mamas who have the natural remedies for illnesses and the great great grandmothers who can tell about the days of old to help us avoid the mistakes of old.

We make the presumption about our Hispanic brothers that they really need help to get all of those cars out of their front yards. But never do we stop to

recognize that all of those cars go into the making of one car that can transport the provider of that family to an average job paying below average wages trying to survive in an above-average society. So don't get offended when we get upset because you think we are looking for a hand out, when, in essence, we're only asking for a helping hand up.

So you ask, how do we engage the people that I call my residents and my friends? First and foremost, we must understand that our approach is all wrong. We must be willing to be flexible and stray away from best practices and understand the culture of the community that we're in. We have to understand that in our communities we care about the small things. When Tip O'Neill stated that "all politics are local," I would go a step further and say, "so are service projects." Let me explain.

In 2005, along with help from the Mayor's Office of Weed and Seed, we started the Vine City Parent Patrol. We placed ten residents on the streets to watch our children go to and from school. We created safety routes for our youth. We gave them radios and reflective vests so they could be readily identified. To this day, the Vine City Parent Patrol is a group that we can call upon for any service project as well as for neighborhood advocacy.

The secret to the success of this program is that the parents who participated were the ones who were already walking their kids to and from school. The only thing we had to do was to organize them on *their* level so they could continue to do the things that they have done daily. And now, they have been featured in several magazines and web cast specials and they have been recognized by the federal office of Weed and Seed as, that's right, you guessed it, a "best practice."

So, it's easy to get residents out to a community cleanup and let me tell you how. The best practice will tell you that as long as it is organized and you have the trash bags and a little food to eat and keep them refreshed, you will succeed. Well, I think all of us know that that doesn't work. My success has come from using best practices as the exception and not the rule.

In 2004, along with Weed and Seed again, the Enterprise Foundation and Hands ON Atlanta, we created the Vine City Sector Program. We divided the neighborhood into six sectors. Each sector has a sector leader and block captains. Now this is not a new concept but allowing the sectors to have their own autonomy is. And having one main organization offering technical assistance only to them is what's new. We have empowered residents to walk this path on their own.

In 2007, once again with Hands On Atlanta, Vine City was blessed to hold service jurors. We had over 850 people from the legal community in our neighborhood doing more than six projects simultaneously. Things went flawlessly because of community participation. We painted murals and elderly residents' houses, created the first-ever chess/checker park in an overgrown, vacant lot in the

neighborhood. We placed trashed receptacles and lunch benches in a pre-existing park. All of these projects were put on the table by residents and, because the projects came from them, they took ownership of them.

In conclusion, I think all of us are on the right track but it would really be interesting if we could see just how successful we could be if we could lose all of the pre-conceived notions and stop falling victim to the fatal flaws of assumptions. I think the former CEO of American Express said it best, "People are more effective when given principles rather than procedures, strategies rather than tactics, whys rather than wants. Thank you. **011-1:18**

Question: I had a few questions about community sustainability. Do you feel that communities are better build if we bring back to our home communities the lessons we have learned after participating in AmeriCorps service projects elsewhere?

Response (Byron): Yes, for two reasons. The community you serve will be better off. For example, I have hosted two AmeriCorps teams in Vine City and the people that the teams engaged and were able to give information to are still active in the community. But, as Michael was suggesting earlier, whenever you do service, it always feels a little better when you go back home.

People ask me all the time, "Do you still live in Vine City?" And I answer, "Yes, why would I leave?" Because I recognize that I wouldn't be here today if someone else who had, what we call, "got it" hadn't stayed to make sure that I "got it."

Question: Michael, do you think you will want to return to the Bronx when you gained enough experience out in the service world?

Response (Michael): Yes, I would gladly return. Home is where the heart is. I have been home during my term at NCCC and I just try to be an example of what making the right decision can do for people. And I want to continue that when I am finished – helping people find new avenues and make changes for the better.

Question (to Byron): You mentioned the characteristics of the non-profit leadership structure across America. What do we do, after we all leave and go home, to make the point that we have to attract more diverse young people like Michael into leadership positions in the field?

Response (Byron): That's an interesting question and my first answer is not to wait until you get home. Start sending your emails out to your CEOs and Board Chairs today saying you believe that your efforts to engage people in the community would be greatly enhanced if there were more people *of* the neighborhood leading the efforts *in* the neighborhood. One way to recruit people *from* the neighborhood is to walk up to them and engage them. People in the community don't know that these opportunities are there.

Over the years, we've tried the traditional approaches to recruitment – announcements, flyers, etc. And the truth is that most of our flyers ended up on the ground. Most of the people we have working on the ground have come from relationships – I've "given them the fire" and told them this was the opportunity to make a difference. So, we, as leaders, have to do more by way of people to people engagement and stop relying on the easiest and remote way to communicate. So the best thing to do is: not wait until you get home; start building a strategy today for people to people engagement.

Question (to Byron): I am from the Mayor's Office in Philadelphia. You mentioned a spirit of ownership amongst the people you have involved. How do you go about developing that?

Response (Byron): The answer is either they believe or you must convince them that this project is theirs. You have to instill something that has been lost to the neighborhood for some time – pride – where people come to understand that, if we clean up this vacant lot, it can become a park where our kids can play or we can throw a barbeque for the neighborhood or just hang out. We need to give people something that they are missing and see the value of. Put out the project idea and let them develop it. Allow them to interact with you to say what they need in their neighborhood instead of the reverse, as usual, of you telling them what they need.

ARMANDO RAYO: Who has aspirations out there? Has anybody ever asked you that when they engaged you? Well, that's the problem. Byron said it well. We have all of these models out here and we get frustrated when we try to implement them and they don't work. That's because we're not asking people what they want. What are their aspirations for themselves, for their kids, for their schools, or for their neighborhoods? So, today I want to talk about that a little and share what we're trying to do at Hands on Central Texas in Austin.

Hands On Central Texas is a program of United Way Capital Area in Austin, TX and an affiliate of the Points of Light Hands On Network serving the Greater Austin Area. Beginning about five years ago, we began to examine who we are. We looked at our board, at our staff, at our leadership teams and concluded that 90 percent of the people who have been helping us pursue our community change over the past 75 years have been the same people.

This forced us to step back to think about how we can be more strategic in the ways we engage people out in the community? United Ways are mainstream institutions that have been doing the same things for a very long time. We wanted to get out in the community with an effort that showed that we wanted to be intentional about our outreach to these groups. We started a program called Culture Connections to engage African-Americans and people in the Latino community.

The point was to begin to change how we do business. Yes, it's about engagement. Yes, it's about volunteerism but it is also about drilling down to issues important in the community. For example, it's looking at drop out rates. 40 percent of the kids in our school district are entering kindergarten 18 months behind. That's a problem. A third of the kids who enter the 8th grade don't make it past the 12th grade. That's an issue. And this is not just a funding question. We have to get our residents to get personally involved as part of solving this problem.

There are three core elements that we put forward when attempt to engage on this or any other community issue. First there is authenticity. This means engaging with and listening to neighborhood residents – building real relationships that can propel and sustain the work. It's not about bringing a bunch of volunteers into the neighborhood from outside. It's about bringing the community itself together around its concerns and mobilizing them to address them.

Another element is innovation. We have to be innovative in our approaches. Best practice literature can be helpful but we need to be deliberate about adopting only those practices and lessons that can be adapted to our communities. Programs that are effective in the Bronx are not guaranteed to work in Austin.

This raises the question of readiness. You have to be sensitive to where your community is if you hope to have an impact. We have learned this approach from The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation which is a national organization that helps people imagine and act for the public good. Their work looks at community rhythms – where communities are in relation to social organization and social cohesion and how they move forward together around issues. And if your community is not in a place where it can move this needle forward, then it's not going to happen no matter what model you use or how hard you try.

The last element I want to discuss is collaboration. Community work needs partnerships not only with mainstream nonprofits but also with the faith community. For instance, churches have constituencies and in poor communities these are neighborhood folks. We can look at church fundraisers and engage neighborhood people who have already demonstrated their willingness to volunteer by being there every Sunday working at the lunch. If we don't get into the community to engage these kinds of people in these settings, we will lose a lot of opportunities.

Finally, I want to return to where I started and remind you of aspirations. We, as service organizations, have to aspirational about our communities. It's not enough for us to meet all of our metrics in our organizations. It's not about me engaging 10,000 or 20,000 volunteers. It has to go beyond that. It's about what we need to assure that the community will prosper. For example, for us, it's about getting more kids to graduate. And we need to rally the community around an authentic strategy, not necessarily around models and best practice,

to mount an effective effort to engage this issue and make a difference. Thank you. **014-0:05**

Comment/Question: Hello, I am from Volunteer Macon, GA and I can attest to what you're saying about the neighboring. Back in the 70s HUD was practically giving away houses and I bought a 14-room brownstone for \$1,500. The block I bought it on was blighted. Garbage was up to the sky. The people on one end of the block didn't know the people on the other end of the block and they had been there 30 or 40 years. But I saw the potential.

So, I went in there and met my neighbors. And I thought this neighborhood needs to be cleaned up. I got acquainted with people who used to head the neighborhood block club but they discontinued it because people had stopped participating. So, the first thing I did was to engage the children. We started by sweeping the block – with brooms, bags, gloves, etc. Older people would be watching out the window but they would stay in their houses. So, I would say, "come on down, come on down, join us, join us. We're going to clean up the block." And eventually they did and we started having block association meetings. We were able to engage young men in the neighborhood who helped us paint the facades of our houses. We won awards for beautification and the block became a community. And through our renewed level of organization, we were also able to stop the crap games that were going on down the block. Unfortunately, I moved too soon because all of those homes are now worth \$1,000,000.

Response (Armando): That's a good example of what we mean by community rhythms. The community you entered seemed to have lost some capacity overtime but you were able, through your authenticity and innovation, in engaging with the young people, to rekindle that community spirit and reconstitute that capacity.

Question: I have a follow up to your story that struck me. There are actually two parts to that story. One part was the work you did, but the other part is that HUD provided you with the opportunity to live there in the first place. And I think we are only paying attention to one side of the story in this discussion. We focusing only on innovation and change initiated in and by community but it seems to me that we need both – community initiative and government intervention. And I wonder if we can address that.

Response (Armando): I think you're right. Community service will be even more effective if/when coordinated with government policy and programming. And I think we need to do more with elected officials and with government agencies to find that "sweet spot."

DOROTHY STONEMAN: 016-0:00 Well, we're really talking about community organizing here and I must say here, in response to Byron's comment that we have to look at who we are, that well, I am that white, upper middle class,

privileged, women who runs a national nonprofit. And I first found out who I was really when I joined the civil rights movement back in 1964 – when I moved out of my comfortable environment and I moved to Harlem and stayed there for 24 years. I learned more about the United States than I ever knew before and it changed my perspective.

One of the things we need to do in the movement is to find a way to merge the civil rights generation and the service generation because the service generation really hasn't had the experience of immersing themselves in a community where they learn to be accountable to the people who live there and that process of listening is not only integral and essential to that but, if you don't do it, you get kicked out.

I started YouthBuild in 1978 in East Harlem. I had been a teacher in the neighborhood. When I started YouthBuild, I began by asking teenagers I knew, who were idle on the streets, what would you want to do to change the community if I and other adults would back up your ideas and bring resources into the community to support your ideas? As Michael said earlier, if the opportunity is presented in the right atmosphere everybody wants to help. And that's true of all of the young people that we have despaired of – the young people who've dropped out of school, those that have been in prison, those who are standing on the corner, those who are dealing drugs. If we ask them what are your aspirations, what would you really like to be doing, and what would you like to do to improve the community if we had the resources to help?

Youth have big visions. They want to do big things and what they said was that they would want to fix up all of the abandoned buildings in the neighborhood. We had 300 abandoned buildings in East Harlem at that time. We had hundreds of homeless people and hundreds of idle young people hanging out in the streets. They said we want to eliminate crime and we want to build parks for the homeless, and we want to fix the elevators in the housing projects so the old people don't have to climb the stairs and we want to have leadership programs and fix the schools because the schools are lousy.

So, we set out to do a whole lot of community improvement projects designed by the young people, one of which became the national YouthBuild Program. We took 5 years with a group of 300 young people and renovated an abandoned building. And when we finished that in 1984, they said, "we want to spread this around the world. We want to spread to Brooklyn and to the Bronx and to Queens and to New Jersey." So, we organized a coalition in New York and went to City Hall. We formed a coalition for \$10 million and they only gave us \$5 million so we formed a coalition for \$20 million and they gave us \$10 million – because they always only give you half of what you ask for no matter how well organized you are.

So we began to spread the program. We had people coming from all over the country who wanted us in their community because they had young people who wanted to rebuild their neighborhoods and build houses for homeless and

low income people while they go back to school and complete a GED and high school diploma. So, it became our role to get the money.

We formed the National YouthBuild Coalition and we found national champions led by Senator John Kerry and now John Lewis and passed legislation to put money into HUD to pay the young people to rebuild their communities.

And here's a lesson. If we want to pull the youth who are out of school and out of work and disconnected and disaffected into service, it has to be a pathway for them out of poverty. It has to be a way for them to fulfill their own aspirations while giving back. It has to include education. They have to go back to school. They have to belong to something that they can believe in. They have to get paid because a lot of them are hungry and a lot of them are homeless and a lot of them have obligations to their families. And there has to be a positive peer group on this entity that can compete with the lure of the streets. There has got to be a sense of safety. And most of all, when they walk in the door, they have to feel respected and they have to feel that someone cares about them – maybe for the first time.

And we know we're on track when the young people say, "I came here because my mother told me to." Or, "I came looking for a job or for a GED and, when I got here and looked around and saw my enemies and friends here and realized we were all here for the same purpose, and saw that you were treating us like leaders rather than like hoodlums and telling us we could become heroes, and understood that you cared about me, then I began to care about myself. And once I began to care about myself, I began to care about everybody else and I really wanted to make a difference. That energy is so exciting and so reliable because it always rises when we provide young people with that context – the opportunity and the atmosphere, as Michael suggested.

We have no problem recruiting low-income, disconnected youth to YouthBuild. We have two to six times as many applicants as we can accommodate in every community where we are. We turn away 14,000 each year. We have 1,000 organizations applying to the Federal government to start YouthBuild programs. Why? Because Michael is going to go back to the Bronx and tell his friends, "Hey, I've got a good opportunity for you, NCCC, you should try it. It was great!" Similarly, the young people in YouthBuild are bringing their brothers and their cousins.

That's how it goes. The young people are looking for something but it has to have these elements – the power of love coupled with the power of opportunity in a safe and caring environment that gives them a chance to believe in something. You know, they don't believe in us. They think we're in this for the money. They think that the world is corrupt. They've seen too much on television and in reality. And so we have to demonstrate that we are pure as the day is long – that we're willing to stay up all night writing the proposal that will give them the opportunity; that we're willing to care more than they ever expected; that we're willing to sit by their side when their mother is in a coma in the hospital; that we're willing to go to court with them and bring the entire program

to court with them and everyone is going to come in a suit to demonstrate that the whole community is connected to them.

We've brought \$700 million into 226 of America's communities and 76,000 young people have built 17,000 units of affordable housing since we got our first federal money in 1994. But we've been stuck for the past several years. We can't seem to get above \$60 million per year. We need \$1 billion per year because there's 50,000 young people who want to come into YouthBuild. So, another thing we need to do is to help each other with these advocacy efforts.

We talk about the change we want to make. Well, what's the change we're talking about. We want to end poverty, to eliminate extreme inequalities. We want to save the planet and promote peace. It's about peace, planet and poverty. Part of our emphasis is leadership development so we engage the young people in developing platforms for change on public policy because they don't just want to build a house, they don't just want to clean a neighborhood. They want to change the world. There is love and intelligence in our neighborhoods that need to be liberated and doing that is our job.

Let me read a poem. A young person, one of our graduates, sent it to me anonymously a while back.

Imagine a child captured in his rage.
Anger, violence – it seems to be the only way.
When he feels down, it's as if no one's around.
When the world closes in on him, he only breaks down.
To live in a world where ignorance nourishes a baby
Death is given by the handful and sanity seems to be crazy
Searching and search. It seems to never end.
For what? No one knows until it is found my friends.
That's why I'm glad that YouthBuild is made of family and friends.
In an unstable world, it gives me stability.
YouthBuild, my extended family. I'll love you until infinity. **018 – 3:29**

Comment/Question: I just want to commend you on your comments because it's true that you can't ask something from people without giving them something back. People want to know, "What's in it for me? What do I get if I help you?"

Right now, poverty is affecting people who are black, white, Hispanic – it really doesn't have a face. But you can't go into a community that is disenfranchised, saying that, "Hey, I can show you a better life if you agree to participate in a certain program," when I am already fearful about why you're coming into my community in the first place.

I'm from Washington, DC and there's a community there called Berry Farms. Folks came into

Berry Farms and said, "Listen, we have this window of opportunity for you. You can also be on our board and be a sounding board in terms of what's going on in your community. They told them they were going to rebuild the community and offer them a better life. "But first, we're going to move you out of this community. We're going to put you over here. And then, once we rebuild it, we're going to bring you back." But what they didn't tell them was that there were dynamics at work that wouldn't allow them to go back. And the first of them was that now their homes are worth \$300,000.

Response (Dorothy): I think there may be something to that. The policy makers seem to be headed in the direction of breaking up and dispersing low-income communities and eliminating them and having only mixed income communities. I think that's worthy of a pretty robust discussion because my feeling is that, if we are willing to invest in low-income communities so people would be able to rebuild and recreate and organize their own communities, we wouldn't have a problem. The problem is that we are reinforcing poverty on about 10 different fronts so to expect that we can just disperse the people and that that somehow eliminates poverty is just not true.

GARLAND YATES: First, as a proud 1966 graduate of the Job Cops Program, let me say to you that, in my view, the Corporation for National and Community Service with all the programs it supports and all of the work that all of you do, rank up there with Social Security as among the best thing that we have ever done in national policy in this country. I know that there has been a lot of debate over recent years about social programs -- the failed war on poverty. Wherever you come out on all of that, it makes me proud to have benefited from those programs and to now be in this room with all of you.

I was born in 1947. That was the year that major league baseball was integrated -- the year that Jackie Robinson began in the major league. So, I have seen a lot of change in this country and I am blessed to have been an integral part of the struggle for change -- in the beginning because I had to; I had no choice; but more recently as a privilege -- working with communities and being a part of that change.

A lot has been said and while, I don't want to repeat it all, some of the comments deserve underscoring -- the importance of ownership of initiatives, the importance of relationships and power of collaboration, issues of readiness and the need for community organizing. One of the issues that has not been addressed directly to this point is that people in poor communities of color also need power. They need to be able to change their circumstances both internally and externally.

And anything that comes into communities to help them address their struggle needs to start there with an attempt to build a power base that can change things. And the ways in which the services, programs and opportunities that we offer connect to that power base is a key question. We can call it community

organizing or advocacy or whatever but the real dilemma of these communities is that they are powerless.

My professional background has focused on community building and community change –working with change agents at the community level who are committed to engaging with neighborhood residents and others to build, increase, stabilize and sustain the social capital infrastructure of community. This community social capital – the relationship assets that are contained in groups of community residents on which consensus and collective action are built – is the foundation of a community’s capacity to affect change. It is also at the heart of the community’s ability to be resilient in the face of the challenges that may come being poor and being powerless.

The other thing I would say about community building and about my work is that it has focused on encouraging and supporting efforts in communities to make long-term sustainable change – not just temporary or episodic improvements but long-term changes that can create positive nurturing environments for children and families – where young people have a better chance of growing into roles as productive citizens.

I want to make several observations about our discussion. First, we use language like volunteerism in this work but we have to remember that the people like us who are out here promoting these things are all getting paid. That’s not to say that that’s bad but we’re getting paid to go out and talk to people about how important it is for them to volunteer and get involved. Think about that and think about what impact that has on the people we’re talking to. We ought not feel bad about what we do but we should recognize that there is distinct difference between talking about volunteering and service as an intervention strategy and trying to get people engaged when it is our paid profession.

What I have found in my work in communities is that the notion of volunteering and service often gets bogged down in two types of baggage. On one hand, especially over the last few years, we have talked about volunteering in the context of what many people see as an abdication of our collective responsibilities to each other and to each other’s welfare. It is volunteerism instead of what we ought to be doing with and for each other as a matter of course. Secondly, and at the same time, many would say that over the past two decades, there’s also been a government abdication for its responsibilities in domestic policy – characterized by a push for smaller government and a call for volunteers and the private sector to step up. The point here is that these issues are “in the mix” and we should be aware that our calls for volunteerism in some corners of poor communities may be met with cynical reactions connected to either or both points of view.

Another thing that is worth noting is that poor people and people of color volunteer because, beyond getting something done, they want to change things. They are less motivated by the notion that volunteering and service are worthy pursuits and ends unto themselves. Instead they are more receptive

when they see these things as part of a strategy of opportunity to make permanent and sustainable change.

I also want to emphasize the issues of authenticity and ownership that have already been discussed but I want to highlight it with a poignant story that shows what can happen when residents react to strategies and improvement efforts that are not based on what they think should happen in their communities. I have been working with people in New Orleans and if anybody would expect that people anywhere in the world people wanted and needed help it would be in the wake of disaster. But, believe it or not, in the aftermath of Katrina, there were many people in New Orleans who were organizing to keep relief efforts out.

People woke up one morning, saw lots of trailers and heavy equipment and they saw people digging and rebuilding things but they didn't have a clue about what was going on. Someone else had decided what to rebuild in their neighborhoods and how to rebuild it and had assumed that the residents didn't have the capacity to participate in those decisions. And so everybody was shocked when these residents started organizing and saying, "get this stuff out of our neighborhood."

In closing, my sense is that very often we approach communities with the notion of a cup that is half empty. And we provide for community needs in a very silo-like way – with a collection of distinct, unconnected and limited purpose programs and services and we leave it up to the people who need them to connect them. But people in communities see jobs and joblessness, high crime rates, poor education, poor housing, and inadequate political representation as different parts of the same problem and hence as components of one solution. And it is hard for them to connect to a strategy that says, "well, we just want to teach kids how to read. We think that will solve the problem. Or, we just want to build a house. We think that will solve the problem. Or we just want to do something that will help people connect with jobs better. That will solve the problem."

What I am trying to say is that when we go into communities it is imperative that we figure out how what we want to do connects with what the communities are doing already and/or how our notions of community needs connect with the communities' own agendas for change. We need not be the experts on what ought to be done or carry the banner of self-righteousness. But instead, and with great humility, let us offer to become a part of their efforts, help strengthen the community fabric, and help people in the most authentic ways that we can.

021-3:24

JOHN JACKSON: I think we should remind ourselves, as we speak of getting the poor and people of color involved in this work, that historically, they have always been involved in this work. Following the New Deal, if you look at many of the social movements that have occurred since, it was the volunteer efforts of the poor and people of color that led to those movements. The efforts of Mexican Americans, in Orange County California, in 1945 led to Mendez v. Westminster a

1946 anti-school segregation case that preceded Brown vs. Board of Education case of 1954. In 1956, the efforts of a number of individuals in Little Rock, AR, led to a 1957 federal court decision to desegregate Central High School. On "Bloody Sunday," March 7, 1965, hundreds of peaceful demonstrators walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL and were attacked by armed police officers. None of these people received a dime. They were volunteers who organized campaigns to bring about the changes we desired.

So, we have to recognize that there has been a shift in how we identify volunteerism and it's a political shift. I am not suggesting that it is related to one political party or the other but we have to recognize that there has been this shift. The question is how to do the work that we need to do within a political structure that is not talking about the issues of the poor or people of color and do it in a way that if the work becomes part of a systemic change those that are a part of that political movement will disavow any knowledge of the work that you do.

I think someone said that you are change agents and yes you are change agents and in many respects we have been given a mission that seems impossible. So, how then can we do this work in that political framework when issues of the poor and people of color, on the democratic and republican side of the isle, are not at the top of the agenda? Instead, our political focus is on the middle class and strengthening the middle class. So, this work will not come with strong political backing but rather mostly as a result of your work as a change agent. I'll tell you in the words of Gil Scott Heron. Don't expect to see your name in lights because you do this work because "the revolution will not be televised."

We also need to recognize as we enter communities that there is already a wealth of assets there. There is a lot of community pride there. I grew up on the South Side in Chicago and there were individuals who had community pride and who did a lot of mentoring. Now the brothers said, "this block is my block. And I understand that you're down and I understand that you don't feel like anybody loves you. I understand that you don't have money. Here, I'll mentor you, now let's steal a car." There's mentoring occurring but it's being done by gang members. There's community pride there but it's based on the colors you fly and on street lines. So, there are assets there but the question is how do we give AmeriCorps or NCCC "streetcred" or as we say in a scholarly way, how do we build the cultural capital of AmeriCorps and NCCC in the community in which we want to serve?

If we're serious about this work, we have to be part of a systemic movement toward change which I believe means connecting the key resources within the community and the role of our volunteers is to help manage aspects of the key services to our community. For example, any service strategy that does not include making an impact in our schools would make me question that theory of change. In New York alone you have over 1 million students with a 50 percent

drop out rate. That's a huge number of young people for whom we will never find enough mentors to make a systemic change in the outcomes for children.

We need to focus on strategies that will help us use service to augment the process in schools in ways that will change the outcomes for children. And we know that change in those outcomes is not related to race or ethnicity. A number of studies have indicated that, regardless of race and ethnicity, genetically we are 99.6 percent the same – that there are more genes to explain variations in our eye color than in our racial or ethnic differences. If we're 99.6 percent the same than any variances that occur in educational performance are not caused by racial or ethnic differences but by social policies and practices.

Our challenge is to address the social practices that lead to those outcomes. That has to be a part of our service strategy and the schools have got to be included among the key resources and "capital" that our volunteerism effort must help manage in our effort to impact the community.

Another part of our key community resource is the faith community. People of color, and particularly African-Americans, give. In fact, they (African-Americans) tend to give at higher rates largely for two reasons: because they have higher rates of church attendance than other groups; and because collection plates in church are the most prevalent vehicles for individual philanthropy in the U.S. The challenge is tapping into those churches to create community service opportunities. If we attempt to go into poor neighborhoods without connecting with the faith communities that serve them, we'll be neglecting important resources.

Between the schools and the faith community, there has to be some triangulation that occurs that actually creates a sustainable service unit so that you have the structure to do not just the service delivery but the policy advocacy as well. So, the service strategy has to focus on organizing a community in such a way as to empower them to deliver the indigenous services that are needed but also in a way that allows them to take on the systemic challenges that are necessary.

I hope we view our challenge as larger than just creating service programs and opportunities. I think it's great that Michael is up here but Michael told us the story about how he found out about AmeriCorps – from his mother. He didn't walk outside the house and run into a couple of AmeriCorps members. He didn't see it right on the corner. But there are individuals who are organizing in those communities. And our question is how do we get into those communities before there is a disaster because, after the disaster, everybody's there. And now they're suspicious of you. "Why are you here and what do you want." But we can already identify 50 or 60 communities, across the country that are disaster zones before a storm even hits. And if we want to be more strategic in going about this work, let's identify them ahead of time and get in there to do the work

to mobilize them. Our service strategies, our triangulations, need to be connected to systemic outcomes that lead to policy change.

You know there were two men walking along the side of a river and one of them noticed that there was a baby floating in the middle of the river. One of the men decided to jump in to save the baby and just as he did that another baby came floating down the river. The other man jumped in to save that baby. And when they brought the babies to the side, they saw still another baby. And they kept seeing and saving more babies minute after minute, hour after hour, until a third man came along. And he asked them, "do you need me to jump in and help you save these babies?" And they answered, "No, we need you to go upstream and find the suckers who're throwing these babies in the river and get them to stop." We need a strategy that both saves the babies and prevents society from throwing them away. **024-2:45**

Question (for Armando): You mentioned having done an effective needs assessment in Austin. What method did you find works best? Are you doing surveys or door knocks? What are you doing?

Response (Armando): We used to do a lot of focus groups and surveys with service providers and service recipients and that's how we started. But later we focused on doing more engagement. We went to the churches and to community events. We had an online survey or you could call in to take the survey. And we created teams of advocates for our surveys. For instance we were doing one in the Latino community where we wanted to get over 1,000 respondents so we put together a team of advocates to go out and engage people (Hispanic professionals, immigrants, youth, parents etc.) in the survey. The most important piece is that we are going to the people.

Question (to John): I was thinking about the phrase "it takes a village to raise a child" and after listening to each of you I was wondering whether maybe it takes a village to hire and expert to raise a child. Maybe that is the model that I am hearing expressed here. Schools have succumbed to that model. They have become the experts. We send our children to schools that hire teachers straight out of college who in turn tell our kids, "here, just take my curriculum and learn it because I know all that you need to know." So, to your point about needing to include schools in the process, what role do we have in helping the schools make the change. Clearly if you've got a 50 percent dropout rate, the schools aren't quite expert enough. So, what do we have that can help guide schools in a new direction?

Response (John): Part of the challenge is that teaching is a profession and people in the profession ought to be required to meet certain professional standards.

At the same time, children are only in the classroom for 8 hours each day and the problem with education policy is that it assumes that the disparities that exist

can be fully explained by what does or doesn't happen in the classroom. But Richard Rothstein's research indicated that 60 percent of educational disparities are related to health and healthcare – children with asthma, eyesight problems, etc. And those are service delivery issues.

Also, we should ask, what are our children doing after school? Are there adequate programs for youth development and the development of leadership skills? We know what works in education and there is a role that the service community can play without treading into the space of professional services offered by the schools.

So, I wouldn't say it's so much an issue of bringing in experts but it is bringing in groups that can help manage a movement to fulfill the aspirations that a community might have. Those aspirations are quite high but the question is, how do we make them real? How do we manage relationships between schools, parents, and the faith community into a network that can achieve the outcomes we desire? That's where I think the service community can play a huge role.

Response (Garland): The best run school system in America is the one run by the Department of Defense. The one thing that permeates their approach to education is the role of parents. DOD sees parents as the experts and as the essential ingredient in the education of their children. Given that example, I think a fundamental role we can play is to help our community schools better appreciate the importance of parent participation and make better use of parental resources in the educational enterprise.

Response (Byron): I think we have people power. We're going through a situation here in Georgia right now where the state administered a test – the CRCT – to determine whether our kids were prepared to go on to high school. When the test was administered there was a lot of grumbling. People were asking, "what will this test do to a child who has scored As and Bs on all his tests during the school year but who got to the test and had a cold or a bad test day and doesn't do well? Now you tell the child that, because you failed this test, you can't go on to high school.

Well, there was a glitch in this system where over 50 percent of 8th graders failed this test. So, our school system says, "well, we're just going to throw the test out." But if we'd had an organization that could have empowered that small group of early grumblers we could have influenced the policy.

Question: I just read some recent research suggesting the more diverse a community is – the larger the number of racial/ethnic groups in the community – the less engaged people are in the community. And I sense that in my neighborhood with a wide variety of people from formerly a Jewish community and Irish community to now Cape Verdian, Honduran, Montserrat, Vietnamese, Upsouth Black, Jamaican, Trinidadian. You see all of that and all of us are somehow disconnected a bit from each other and less engaged than we should

be. My questions are: first do you see that? And second, do you have ideas about how to overcome that?

Response (Byron): Let me address that from my perspective in Vine City. We have white residents who come in and buy property at very good prices and think that because the area is in decline, the residents must not care. Then we have black residents who think we have all these new people coming in and why are they coming here buying up all this property. No one has stopped to talk to each other because the truth is that the only people running the neighborhood are the criminals because they're playing both sides against the middle. So, my first recommendation has to do with neighboring. Communication is foremost – taking time to go next door or stop in the neighborhood to say hello to people and talk to them about your common concerns. This is not my neighborhood or your neighborhood but our neighborhood. We're all in this together. My door gets kicked in today; your door can get kicked in tomorrow. Let's get together and talk so we can make sure that no doors get kicked in tomorrow.

Response (Garland): I just read something about this issue as well. I think Robert Putnam's latest book addresses this. His analysis of the problem is dominating the conversation and we're missing what he later says about what needs to be done about it. The reason this is such a big question is that it is happening in every city in America. Our nation and the cities in particular are becoming more diverse by the moment. And where the big cities used to be the places that were overwhelmed by diversity of language and culture, now it's everywhere. One of the states with the fastest growing immigrant population in the nation is Arkansas, for example.

So, where this increasing diversity exists, the big challenge for volunteerism and service is finding ways to help the neighborhoods function as communities. It is really important for us to dig in on this question because it follows a long line of dialogue about the evils of diversity and the warnings associated with too much tribalism and how that threatens democracy. So, this isn't a new conversation although Putnam's may be a new voice weighing into it. But again it is important because it has immense implications for the future of the communities that we live in and serve.

Question: Our question here is, how do we recruit people of color into service? And the first thing is that in the inner-cities there is no trust. We have ABC, CBS and NBC telling our kids how bad they are – telling them what they're doing wrong not what they're doing right. Our youth look at the schools and don't get inspired. They look at the police and feel that they are against them. So, how do we get our young people to trust that we can bring them into something positive and that we have their best interests at heart?

Response (Dorothy): The first thing is that we have to be trustworthy. We have to tell them the truth and not over promise. And we have to create opportunities according to what really is in their best interests. So, if they need to finish an

education we need to make sure the opportunity makes provision for them to reclaim their education. If they need job skills that it includes that. If they need to be paid a wage then the stipend should be at a sufficient level. If they need a pathway to college, then the education award has to actually be available to them. Young people will recruit each other if they find all the things they are looking for in the opportunities we offer. And so we have to be sensitive to the things that they really want. If we give them the respect, give them the opportunity to make a difference and give them a comprehensive pathway towards success, they will gravitate toward it. But we have to produce it.

Response (John): I think it also links to the fact that we're often looking for sustained results without sustained effort. We're kind of new at this. Relationships will beat programming any day. So, it's not like we can swoop down with a program for 2 minutes and expect a level of trust. You have marriages that have been together a lot longer than that and you still don't have the trust. But it is a mistake to assume that there is no trust in our communities. There is trust there and the question is who are they trusting?

You know, politically, a lot of people are still wondering how a mayor in DC who was convicted of smoking crack on TV could get back into politics, run for city council and be elected. It was about the people trusting him because he had a relationship with them. He had delivered for them not just when they were at their highs but when they were at their lows.

Response (Armando): Another thing that is important is to just show up. Show up at their community meetings, at their parent groups and at things that they care about. It's part of that slow process of building relationships. One of the things we have in the Latino culture is we have platicas. Platicas are conversations. Do not come to ask me for something or to do something if you don't know me. They're not going to respond. You need to show up and focus on those platicas.

Question: We have a growing population of Hispanics here in Georgia but we have virtually no Hispanic participation in AmeriCorps. How do we go about establishing that contact and that relationship with the community so we can understand what the concerns are and where to focus our attention?

Response (Armando): It really is about building those relationships and having those platicas and that may mean going to those informal places where folks are hanging out – taco stands, anyone? I'm serious! You have to go where people are to start the conversations. Then too, if you're looking to reach a critical mass of people then go to Latin radio stations. Latin radio stations are the key.

Response (Garland): There are a few observations I have made about how we enter communities and about gaining their trust. One comes from a community we were working in in Seattle where there were about 27 different languages spoken. In that community, they came up with something that they called

“Trusted Advocates” – a group of people from the neighborhood that they decided to trust to come and learn about what we were doing so that the community’s understanding of our work and the connections between our programs and that neighborhood could be based on how those advocates saw it (not just on what we said).

And another set of observations comes from Denver, where I spent a lot of time working with Latino communities. Some of you may be familiar with the term “promotores.” In Denver’s Latino community, these promotores are community advocates/spokespersons – sort of promoters. What we learned in approaching the community was the importance and power of role of these promotores play in the Latino culture.

In both of these cases, we reached out to these community representatives and asked them to help us learn the culture so we could engage the relationship-building and conversations processes that would help us better understand what they thought should be done. And then we had to put resources behind them, learning about our interests so they could determine where our interests meshed and how we might best serve their needs.

Response (Michael): As a young person, let me add a different perspective about how to connect with me – parents. Parents are the key. Trust has been brought up many times in our discussion. I am not going to be responsive to someone who just blew into my neighborhood. I don’t know you. You don’t know me. And so, I don’t believe you can know what’s best for me. The person who really does know me, is the person who has seen me grow from a child to a young adult – a parent or close relative - someone who has been there all along.

Another thing is that I have been to Boys and Girls Clubs and to community centers. Those are the places young people go when they don’t want to be involved with what’s going on in the streets. We go there to escape that and to have a sense of freedom and a sense that you can be yourself. But opportunities are not advertised enough there. You have to reach those places and you have to reach parents so that you can help them do a better job of informing us that there are positive opportunities available to us.

Question: I am from Durham, NC and my company is a new grantee organization. I want to know if the Corporation has any organized or formal ways that current service members or alumni service members go back to recruit others? Mike had his mother but there are a lot of people who don’t have anyone who really knows them. If a young person could be approached by another young person who has had the service experience, it might help and it might encourage the youth to step out of whatever they’re into and go into national service. So, are there ways that this youth to youth recruitment happens?

Response (Jolene Harrell, Corporation for National & Community Service Employee): Yes, we do have an organized effort. We provide you with

recruitment materials and with contacts. I am here in Georgia working out of the state office and I would be happy to be of assistance to you and other people who would be interested in serving as AmeriCorps advocates for us. The AmeriCorps Alums Association also encourages alumni to go out and speak on our behalf and you're absolutely right, who better to sell the program than people who have served in the program?

Question: I have two questions. First, we all know that ownership is important and we want communities to take responsibility for themselves and accept the help of others. But it seems that now, with a lot of urban renewal projects going on, that ownership is being proscribed on those communities without them necessarily seeing themselves as owning the community. So, how can and when should community-base organizations take part in that community development process to make sure that the conversations that need to take place between the communities and the developers to make sure that schools are being taken into consideration and also the children, families and youth who are still living there are getting their needs met as well.

The second question is that it seems most of our conversation is focusing on at-risk youth of color. And I want to know how community organizations can better utilize young mobile professionals of color because, though most of us have graduated from college, we don't have the luxury of taking a year off to give service. But we still want to do something meaningful and give back to our communities.

Response (Armando): We actually reach out to young professionals of color in our work – like Young Hispanic Professional and African-American MBAs. And again, it's the same thing – going out to them and attending their meetings and building those relationships. We're part of a diversity task force that's basically a group of local, young minority professionals who get together periodically to discuss issues. From that we engage them in our work, in volunteer trainings and projects in different areas.

Response (Dorothy): I think there is probably a shortage of board involvement in these communities. So if someone could organize a pathway to get more young minority professionals involved in these community-base organizations at the board level, it would do a lot to strengthen the whole nonprofit network.

Question: Why is it that asset-based community development approaches and study circles are not so widely known? If AmeriCorps members and other service organizations are producing people who later go on to become activists in their communities, instead of letting them think that they always have to reinvent the process (not the content) part of it, why aren't we sharing with them about ABCD and study circles so they don't need to struggle with that portions of it?

Comment: I coordinate an AmeriCorps team in Olympia, WA – two comments. I want to respond to how we work with schools. We have a partnership going on with something called "Community Cafés." A similar effort exists in Illinois called

"Parent Cafés." The efforts go out into communities to engage parents. They create café-like environments where parents can get together with school officials or other community organizations. The groups look like the community. They are entirely parent-run and parent-led. They cook their own food and they focus on the five protective factors that strengthen families. It's had a "waterfall" effect in our community. It provides an informal venue to bring people together who normally don't interact.

Secondly, as a team coordinator, how do we maintain our commitment and balance our desire to create a more diverse corps with other types of standards before us for retention and for providing the quality of mentoring and support as a staff?

Summary (Jim): As we approach the end of our Immersion Learning Session, I would like to restate some of the major points that I have heard in our presentations and discussion.

The first thing I heard was that, in doing this work, we, that is the sponsors, need to know who we are. That means knowing what our limitations are and knowing who we are in relation to a community and being sensitive to what it is that we don't know.

Secondly, we need to be clear about what we mean by "Best Practices" – In what circumstances and for whom? And that suggests that we need to be clear about the extant circumstance in the communities we're proposing to work in.

We won't be able to do that, thirdly, without talking to the community and listening to their needs. We've talked about something called ownership which means involving the community in shaping our service strategies and our community improvement agendas. We've also learned the poor and people of color are more interested in pursuing opportunities than projects where the outcome extends beyond just getting something done but has longer term implications for themselves, their families and/or their neighborhoods.

Another thing is to be there – in the community – creating a presence through our participation in the community. Being there gives us the opportunity to do the next important thing which is to establish dialogue, relationships and trust.

We've also spoken about "being there" for the long haul which means getting in there, rolling up our sleeves, and working until we can see some success and build a critical mass of participation that, in turn, will give rise to the kind of positive word-of-mouth marketing that will help us get to sustainable levels of effort.

And finally, I heard that we have to find ways to include a focus on service in and for our schools given the dismal graduation rates and performance of certain students. A focus on improving the educational challenges in this

country will have a cascading effect and improve our communities and offer greater opportunities to our children.

Closing Comment (Merlene): This is not an easy conversation to have. Many people are uncomfortable talking about this. But this is the beginning of a much larger discussion and dialogue that we hope will allow us to be very deliberate and systematic in considering how we expand the universe of young people who are engaging in our wide range of service programs.

I want to thank our panel. I think what they have brought to our discussion was expansive and remarkably complementary. I think we should honor the work that our panelists have done in our communities because we wouldn't be here today if it weren't for the work you did yesterday and the work you will continue to do tomorrow.

So, thank you again. We urge you to keep doing what you're doing because our country is so much stronger because of the great work you have done with and for our young people.