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Research Objectives, Background, and Conceptual Framework

The research described in this proposal fits under the specified CNCS theme: the economic benefits of national service, volunteering and civic engagement. In particular, it focuses on the extent to which higher levels of social capital, civic engagement and volunteering among immigrants are associated with greater economic opportunity and success for individuals and communities. The proposal calls for in-depth quantitative analyses of an exciting new source of survey data on college educated immigrants. These analyses will then guide and be supplemented by a series of qualitative follow-up interviews with survey participants.

Previous scholarship has examined the connection between civic engagement and economic success (e.g., Verba et al. 1995; Putnam 1996) and a strong relationship has not always been found when the analysis has been conducted at the national level (Kenworthy 1997). More recent work, however, argues that the appropriate unit of analysis is the locality and here the evidence is more consistent (e.g., Rose 2013; Swartz 2013). Other work has looked at the importance of civic engagement for immigrant integration into community life (e.g., Ebert and Okamoto 2013; Mollenkopf and Hochschild 2009; Ramakrishnan 2005). What has yet to be specifically examined are the relationships among civic engagement and economic success among immigrants in different US cities. Where is there a positive association between civic engagement and economic success among immigrants? What factors are associated with immigrant participation in volunteerism and other forms of civic participation? Are pathways to economic success among immigrants partially paved through civic engagement? In what ways does economic success spur civic engagement?

This research we propose will use a mixed-methods approach to examine the extent to which higher levels of civic engagement in a community lead to greater economic opportunity among immigrants in seven U.S. cities. Our findings will be of specific interest to the policymakers in the seven cities and beyond as the findings will provide key insights into the pathways through which immigrant populations become engaged local citizens, economic contributors, and community stakeholders.

The IIR and IMPRINT along with IMPRINT's home organization, World Education Services (WES), a leading international transcription evaluation service, received funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to study how college-educated immigrant professionals integrate into the U.S. economy. In the fall of 2014 approximately 4,002 immigrant respondents in four Knight communities of Detroit, Miami, Philadelphia, and San Jose-- and the additional cities of Boston and Seattle, along with respondents who were living in the U.S. but outside the six targeted cities-- completed online surveys probing how civic engagement, social capital, English skills, higher

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education, workplace acculturation and other factors contributed to individual economic success. WES emailed individuals who had previously used their transcript evaluation services and had a mailing address in one of the six cities and asked them to complete the survey. Additional survey respondents were solicited with the aid of immigrant serving organizations in media outlets in each of the six cities. In the summer of 2015, the IIR, in collaboration with the D.C. Mayor's Office of African Affairs, is conducting this survey in the D.C. Metropolitan area, adding a seventh city to the sample. The seven cities in this sample not only vary as to whether or not they are Knight cities but also that they fall into five of the 6 categories outlined by Singer in *The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways* (2004).

Immigrant City Type

Former:

Philadelphia* "An Historic City Drawing Educated Newcomers;"

Detroit* "Rustbelt City Reinvents Itself through Foreign-Born Workers"

Continuous:

Boston "Newcomers Continue to Call a Historic Port City Home"

Post-World War II:

Miami* "A "Latin American Capital" in the United States"

Emerging: Washington, DC "The Nation's Capital, Home to a World of Immigrants"

Re-emerging:

San Jose* "From Farming Community to the Capital of Silicon Valley;"

Seattle "From Gold and Timber Port to Technology Innovation Hub"

Pre-emerging is the only one of Singer's types that is not a part of the proposed sample. As important as pre-emerging immigrant cities (e.g., Austin TX or Charlotte, NC) are for understanding the relationship between economic opportunity and civic engagement it may be premature to focus on such cities the processes of immigrant integration are in a nascent state. Instead the proposed analyses will examine cities from the five other types where patterns of the economic and civic

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integration of immigrants have an observable history and look for patterns of similarity and difference across the cities and the immigrants living in those cities.

Moreover, the questions underlying the IMPRINT survey and the proposed follow-up analyses directly relate to goals outlined in the Equity Issue Brief, *Immigrant Integration: Integrating New Americans and Building Sustainable Communities*, released as part of the Sustainable Communities Initiative. Under Goal 1 (i.e., increase economic mobility for immigrants, their families, and their communities) the recommended strategies, including English language instruction, validation of accreditation and licensure, are at the heart of the survey and proposed follow-up interviews.

Similarly the strategies outlined under Goal 2 (i.e., enhance opportunities for civic participation by immigrants), including engaging immigrants in community organizations and activities, as well as voter registration efforts, would also benefit from insights gleaned from the proposed research. Finally it is noteworthy that under Goal 3 (i.e., increase warmth of welcome towards immigrants and their families) a key strategy is to work with academic and research institutions to generate reports highlighting immigrant economic and social contributions. Efforts of this type are central to the mission of the IIR and would be carried forward with the proposed research.

Research Design and Work Plan

The IMPRINT project's final report will be publicly released in September 2015 and provides a broad descriptive overview of the survey findings, paying close attention to: 1) the extent to which the economic returns to higher education depend on whether or not the education was received in the U.S. or overseas, 2) the evaluation of foreign transcripts and licenses and 3) the importance of different types of barriers to immigrant economic success, including inadequate English language skills and a lack of U.S. work experience (Bergson-Shilcock and Witte, forthcoming). The report also provides evidence for high levels of volunteering among immigrants, with at least two-thirds reporting volunteer activity in the past year. Further the findings link voter registration to the strength of social ties. Less than one-third (32.3%) of those who said they currently had few family members or friends they could rely on for support were eligible to vote; however, more than half (55.1%) of those who said they had many such family members and friends were also eligible to vote. Moreover, the findings point to a significant relationship between the number of strong family and network ties and employment status and earnings for college-educated immigrants.

This proposal calls for further research into the nexus between civic engagement and economic opportunity among immigrants using the IMPRINT data and the project's final report as a starting point. Four broad themes will be stressed in order to examine the relationship between levels of civic

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engagement and volunteerism and economic opportunity and success. First, the proposed quantitative analyses will employ multi-variate techniques that go beyond the primarily bivariate and descriptive analyses conducted with the data so far. Second, the proposed quantitative and qualitative analyses will look at the sequence and timing of volunteer activities, social networks, and economic success to attempt to clarify whether community engagement and social ties are driving economic success or are consequences of success. Third, the analyses will build on the design of the IMPRINT project, which is made up of respondents situated in particular cities rather than a national sample to consider how the character of an individual city and its inhabitants may influence the relationship between civic engagement, volunteerism, and economic success. Fourth, the qualitative interviews will permit a consideration of the mechanics of the relationships between civic engagement, volunteering and economic success. The aim, here, is to examine the relationships identified through the quantitative analyses to specifically consider how, for example, volunteering translates into greater employment and earnings potential.

To initially understand the sequence and timing of volunteer activities, social networks, and economic success in the cities in the IMPRINT project we will first perform structural equation modeling of the IMPRINT data. Structural equation modeling (SEM) will allow us to clarify whether community engagement and social ties are driving economic success (as depicted in Figure 1) or are consequences of success (as depicted in Figure 2).

Figure 1.

Social Networks-->

Economic Success

Volunteerism----->

Figure 2.

Economic Success---->Social Networks

Economic Success----> Volunteerism

To consider how the character of an individual city and its inhabitants may influence the relationship among civic engagement, volunteerism and economic success, we will first perform SEM for each city separately. If the relationships under examination are similar across the cities, we will then perform hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). HLM will allow us to take into consideration that the participants are nested within cities and that the cities themselves may influence economic success

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and/or civic engagement and volunteerism as well as the associations among them. Specifically we will be able to assess quantitatively how city-level characteristics, including the patterns of immigration into the city as measured by decennial Census and American Community Survey data and policy-based community characteristics like per-pupil public school expenditures, may influence economic success and/or civic engagement and volunteerism as well as the associations among them.

Fifteen participants for the qualitative interviews will be purposively selected from each city's pool of individuals who said they were willing to be contacted for a further interview: Boston (N=196), Detroit (N=163), Miami (N=179), Philadelphia (N=224), San Jose (N=132), Seattle (N=169) and all other places in the U.S. (N=717). Interview guides for the qualitative interviews will be based on further statistical analyses of the survey data, but already several potential areas for inquiry have been identified. For example, if success is defined as receiving a salary of at least \$50,000 a year, while working in a professional or managerial position and making use of one's previous higher education, the IMPRINT project report indicates a significant relationship between volunteering and individual economic success: 21% of those who volunteered with a religious, educational, business, neighborhood or some sort of non-profit in the past year achieved success, as compared to 16% of those who had not volunteered in the past year. While we will attempt to model the possible causal direction of the relationship from the existing survey data, including the extent to which how volunteering translates into success, for example, the qualitative interviews will allow us to document the process through which volunteerism, social networks, and economic success unfolds in the lives of these immigrants. Further, we will be able to examine whether and how the cities themselves shape and mold the experiences of immigrant economic success. Attention will be given to clarifying how higher levels of social capital, civic engagement and volunteering among immigrants create greater economic opportunity and spur success for individuals and communities by identifying the distinct set of social processes that facilitate positive economic outcomes.

Interviews will be used to cross-check survey data, identify consistencies and discrepancies, enable the research team to capture the important role of locality, and deepen understanding of the context dependent mechanisms by which civic engagement and volunteering impact a broad range of economic outcomes, including earnings and occupational advancement. The strength of in-depth interviewing is the ability to capture in rich detail the subjective processes of meaning-making and motivation, clarifying the mechanisms by which social capital is linked to economic capital and probing participants' understandings of both the constraints and opportunities that have consequences

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for civic engagement and economic trajectories.

Interview participants will be recruited through purposive sampling, with the explicit aim to develop a diverse pool of respondents across cities, thus sampling for range, which will enable the research to broaden and differentiate across the cases (Small 2009). Interviews will be semi-structured with open-ended questions and lasting between one and two hours. Principles of theoretical sampling will guide interview procedures. Questions will be focus toward elaboration of employment trajectories, the extent to which employment and civic participation overlap, types and timing of volunteer activity, character and development of social networks, the strength of community attachment, the role of community institutions in likelihood to volunteer. Interviews will be taped, transcribed and coded for emergent themes following a model of analytical induction.

In the original six IMPRINT cities, the qualitative interviews will be conducted via Skype. The IMPRINT data were collected using a web-based survey design. Therefore, potential participants have already demonstrated a level of comfort participating electronically in the research process. At least some of the qualitative interviews with D.C. Metro area residents will be conducted in person taking advantage of proximity.

Project Timeline

Analysis of the existing IMPRINT survey data will begin in October 2015 and will be completed by May 2016 (Year 1). Using the findings of the survey data analysis we will construct the interview instrument for the in-depth interviews. The interviews will begin in September 2016 and will be concluded by December 2016. Analysis of the interviews will be ongoing, but should conclude by May 2017 (Year 2). Reports, publications, presentations will occur throughout, although the final analysis and resulting deliverables, including the policy briefs for the IIR and CNCS websites and brochures, will be produced September 2017 - May 2018 (Year 3).

Dissemination Plan

Our findings will be made available for distribution in two key forms. First, we will produce policy briefs to be published on both the CNCS and IIR websites and in brochure format, in a manner similar to the results of the IIR Mapping Immigrant Populations initiative (<http://iir.gmu.edu/research/mapping-immigrant-populations>). These policy briefs will be designed for use by the local policymakers in each of the seven cities to aid their understanding of, and outreach toward, immigrants in their locales. We will begin the initial distribution of the data that will inform these policy briefs in Year 2 through the IIR Colloquium Series (<http://iir.gmu.edu/iir-colloquium->

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series). These free, public presentations regularly draw immigration experts from the Washington, D.C. area as audience members and are filmed for distribution by GMU-TV. The final policy briefs will be completed for examination by CNCS by Fall 2017 with the expectation that they will be made available online and in brochure form to policymakers by no later than May 2018 (Year 3). Second, we will distribute our findings to the academic community as presentations and academic publications. Analysis of the quantitative data will be completed by May 2016. The PI (Witte) and one Co-PI (Davis) will spearhead the submission of papers based on these data for presentation at the 2016 American Sociological Association and Population Association of America meetings at the end of Year 1. The resulting papers from these presentations will be initially submitted to *Demography* and *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*. Analysis of the qualitative data will be completed by May 2017. At the end of Year 2, Co-PIs Best and Dale will spearhead the submission of papers based on the qualitative data at the 2017 American Sociological Association meeting and the 2018 Eastern Sociological Society meeting. The resulting papers from these presentations will be initially submitted to *American Sociological Review* and *Sociological Forum*. During Year 3, all four investigators will produce an in-depth examination of the relationships among civic engagement and economic success among the immigrants in the seven cities studied. The paper from the integration of the quantitative and qualitative data will be initially submitted to *American Journal of Sociology*.

Organizational Capability

The team for the proposed project includes four tenured faculty members in the GMU Department of Sociology and Anthropology (SOAN), all affiliated with the Center for Social Science Research (CSSR), which is the home organization for the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR). The IIR focuses on the economic impact of immigrant groups, with particular emphasis on the economic contributions of immigrant entrepreneurs with high level of education or skills. The IIR concentrates on economic questions while adding in a sociological perspective and is a joint venture between George Mason University and The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (ILC) of Massachusetts. The IIR was the lead research organization for the survey data collected as part of the study "Mapping the Trajectories of Immigrant Professionals in Six US Cities, which was funded through the IMPRINT consortium (Immigrant Professional Integration) and the Knight Foundation. Initial results of this study will be released in September 2015. The PI for this proposed project (Witte) was also the PI for the six cities study. The PI (Witte) and one co-PI (Davis) have expertise in quantitative methods and the use of survey data, while the other two co-PIs (Best and Dale) are skilled in qualitative methods including ethnography and in-depth interviews. All four are actively involved in the SOAN Ph.D.

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program, which emphasizes public and applied sociology. The graduate student (TBD) who will be involved in the project will be recruited through this program.

The PI (Witte) and one co-PI (Best) have extensive experience managing large research projects. Witte has been PI, co-PI or co-investigator on nearly \$4 million in Federal grants, including a U.S. Department of Education project headed by Best. Currently CSSR runs approximately \$750,000 a year in funded projects from a variety of sources. Administrative support for the proposed project would be provided by CSSR with oversight from the GMU Office of Sponsored Programs and staff from the Dean's Office in GMU's College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

The budget provides support for a GRA during Years 1 and 2. In Year 1, the GRA will, under the supervision of the PI (Witte) and Co-PI Davis will prepare the survey data for the SEM and HLM analyses (if warranted). Witte and Davis will complete the analysis of the quantitative data during Summer 2016 at the end of Year 1 and will attend the CNCS meeting in Washington, D.C. as representatives of this project. In Year 2, the GRA will, under the supervision of Co-PIs Best and Dale, collect the interview data from the participants in the six original IMPRINT cities via Skype and the Washington, D.C. participants in person. Best and Dale will complete the analysis of the qualitative data during Summer 2017 at the end of Year 2. All four investigators will produce the final deliverables to CNCS, complete the final paper integrating the quantitative and qualitative data, and participate in the final CNCS meeting in Washington, D.C. in Year 3.

Executive Summary

This proposal focuses on the extent to which higher levels of social capital, civic engagement and volunteering among immigrants are associated with greater economic opportunity and success for individuals and communities. The mixed-methods proposal calls first for in-depth quantitative analyses of an exciting new source of survey data on college educated immigrants in seven cities in the United States. The proposed quantitative analyses will examine the sequence and timing of volunteer activities, social networks, and economic success to attempt to clarify whether community engagement and social ties are driving economic success or are consequences of success. Further analysis will assess the influence of the cities themselves on the relationships among community engagement, social ties, and economic success. These quantitative analyses will then guide and be supplemented by a series of qualitative follow-up interviews with survey participants, permitting a consideration of the mechanics of the relationships between civic engagement, volunteering and

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economic success. The aim is to examine the relationships identified through the quantitative analyses to specifically consider how, for example, volunteering translates into greater employment and earnings potential, and how the character of a city shapes that process. Results will be distributed to policymakers and other constituents via online policy briefs, brochures, and free and public lectures as well as through academic conference presentations and publications.