>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: All right. We will go ahead and get started. How is everybody? Everybody good? You good?

>> Yeah.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Good? Okay. Cool.

(Laughter)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: It's good to see you. It's good to see you. My name is Shamichael Hallman, and welcome to Socioeconomic Mixing: Creating Public Libraries Where Everyone Belongs.

I was previously at the Memphis Public Library, and I served as the senior library manager under the direction of Keenon McCloy. I was tasked with overseeing the renovation and reimagining of the historic Cossitt Library in downtown Memphis. If you're ever in Memphis, you should absolutely check out the Memphis Public Library system, and you should go downtown to Cossitt Library.

I'm currently a Loeb Fellow at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University, which is a mid-career fellowship for practitioners who are shaping the built environment.

My research interests at Harvard and also at Memphis Public Libraries is in part seeking to understand the publicness of public libraries. Along the way I've started ponder a number of questions rooted in not only understanding how we might better serve those who are -- frequent our branches, but how we might also get an understanding of who's not coming through the doors, how we might reach them once they get in the door, and then how

we might grow social capital in our communities through the power of shared experiences, something that I think public spaces like libraries are uniquely positioned to achieve.

Underpinning this work has really been two guideposts. The first guidepost is the current strategic plan of the Memphis Public Library system, which has a number of objectives such as advancing the library's role as a community anchor, increasing community awareness of the library's offerings, and reaching beyond the walls with strategic outreach and innovation.

The second underpinning has been to reimagine the Civic Commons initiative, which you will hear more about as we go through this session.

I want to also note that part of our conversation today will focus on data collection. Protecting user privacy and confidentiality are critical work to public libraries. And embedded in our approaches, some of which you will see on the table there, has been allowing individuals to opt in, collecting need to know versus nice to knows, and a data management policy that limited who had access to that data.

Joining me today are Amanda Miller Amankona and Bronlynn Thurman. Bronlynn is the program officer at the GAR Foundation. In her role, she works to advance the foundation's strategic priorities through the assessment and review of grant inquiries and applications with a focus on equitable community development and arts in education.

As the Learning Network expansion manager for the Reimagine Civic Commons initiative, Amanda works to curate and design spaces for convening, shared learning, and connections across the Civic Commons Learning Network.

Our session goals today -- let's see here -- is that you will be able to identify and select principles and design strategies that will lead to creating spaces that welcome all. Oop. Go back. That you will be able to advocate for the importance of the public library as a space for shared experiences among people of all incomes and backgrounds, and that you will be able to demonstrate the value of socioeconomic mixing for a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

There are also some free resources on the table. If you did not get a copy of those, there will be electronic versions of those, which you will see a little bit later.

And, of course, we have carved out some time today for conversations at your table. We believe that this is a community of practice and that we learn best from each other. And as we share the things that are happening -- that we have seen happening, we are very curious to also hear what is happening in your libraries and in the work that you are doing.

I'll now bring up Amanda to talk about the Civic Commons initiative.

>> AMANDA MILLER AMANKONA: Thanks, Shamichael. So, hello, everyone. As Shamichael mentioned, my name is Amanda Miller Amankona, and I'm the Learning Network expansion manager at Reimagine the Civic Commons.

Reimagine the Civic Commons is a national initiative which was launched in 2016 that seeks to demonstrate the transformative public spaces such as parks, trails, and, of course, libraries, can connect people of all backgrounds, cultivate trust, and create more resilient communities.

All right. So today we're going to be talking a bit more about socioeconomic mixing, which is one of the four outcomes that guide our work. As we know, over the past few years we've seen the importance of face-to-face human connection to our daily lives and well-being, and it's made the urgency of a robust Civic Commons even more apparent.

Trends from over the past 50 years in the United States show that we are more segregated by income than ever, and in many cities racial segregation is still persistent and deep, and a full third of us, unfortunately, don't interact with our neighbors at all.

Trust is also in decline, both in institutions and each other. And, unfortunately, many of our civic assets, including libraries, have been overlooked and suffer from disinvestment, often at the bottom of municipal budgets or the first to be cut, seen as nice to have but not essential. We are now in far too many cities with a public realm that doesn't exist at the scale and quality that we need.

So as a collaboration of the JPB, Knight, Kresge, and William Penn Foundations, as well as local partners like those in Memphis and Akron, we're collectively working to demonstrate the multifaceted value of investing in our civic assets.

Reimagine Civic Commons is now 12 cities strong with a growing community of practice composed of cross-sector teams from demonstration cities with Akron, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, and Philadelphia and expansion cities of Lexington, Macon, Miami, Minneapolis, San Jose, Camden, and Cincinnati.

The focus of our team's efforts are centered around four main outcomes: civic engagement, which is building a sense of community that brings people of all backgrounds back into public life as stewards and advocates shaping their city's future; environmental sustainability, increasing connection to nature, and creating environmentally friendly places easily reached by walking, biking, or transit; value creation, encouraging additional investments in neighborhoods so that they are better places to thrive; and, of course, the focus of today's discussion, socioeconomic mixing, creating places where everyone belongs and that generate opportunities for shared experience among people of all incomes and backgrounds.

This outcome's orientation of reimagining the Civic Commons is what defines this work. Public space is one thing, and a robust Civic Commons, where we share space with people's whose lives are different than ours, is another. We are committed to these outcomes and believe that our civic assets can be and, in fact, must be a solution.

As part of this initiative, we have developed a National Learning Network that aspires to understand the impact of investments in the Civic Commons to support the innovation and collaboration required to achieve impacts and to increase broad-based support for investing in the Civic Commons across the country.

Housed at U3 Advisors, the Civic Commons Learning Network has three primary legs: research and impact assessment, elevation through storytelling, and cross-city learning opportunities.

Central to the approach is the belief that by managing our shared civic spaces as a portfolio of assets focused on four key outcomes, we can have more engaged, equitable, and resilient communities. And you can see a few publications that are available for download on our website on this slide.

To demonstrate impact, we needed more than a theory of change. So as Shamichael mentioned, we've also been considering how we measure. We needed this evidence and new data points that can demonstrate the importance of our civic assets and in particular speak to leaders that have many priorities and other

priorities both locally and nationally. We needed to measure
what matters.

    With a focus on four outcomes, the Learning Network developed
a universal metrics system to capture the social impact of our
civic assets and is being used to understand the work over time.
A full DIY toolkit is also freely available and can be
downloaded from our website. On the tables, you'll also see an
overview of our metrics system.

    In combination with this data, compelling stories are also
powerful tools for sharing knowledge and influencing others.
And I'm sure all of you are very aware of that. Through our
bimonthly meeting and publication and our Facebook, Twitter, and
LinkedIn, we elevate our team's work as well as advocate for the
importance of our civic assets.

    Finally, we support cross-city learning opportunities for
teams which promote interaction across communities, aspiring to
achieve similar outcomes through different strategies and
approaches within their Civic Commons. Teams borrow ideas from
one another all the time and find value in having cross-silo and
cross-city community of practice connected to their work.

    So that's -- I believe Shamichael and Bronlynn have both
visited their cities, and we visited Akron last summer, and
we'll be visiting Memphis again this coming summer. So we
continue to allow people to both be in person as well as making
virtual connections.

    Returning, then, to the outcome of socioeconomic mixing,
which is the act of generating interactions among people with
diverse economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and creating
valuable social connections between people who might otherwise
never meet, our teams have generated six insights. And so these
six insights are also outlined in more detail in the
publication, as well as that publication is available for
download.

    So these are to hold a high standard for civic assets with a
focus on quality across design, programming, and operations and
to create connections across neighborhoods to draw the most
diverse group of users.

    We also encourage to design for a variety of experiences in
one place that promote interactions among people who may not
otherwise meet, host programming that goes beyond events to

build trust, see connections, and focus on lasting and consistent impact.

Staff to intentionally welcome, meaning that you should reflect the diversity of your community in your staffing. And, finally, adopt the outcome of socioeconomic mixing and while doing so measure in order to understand your impact.

So I'm excited to then turn this back over to Shamichael and then Bronlynn, and we're excited to share the work that they are doing in Memphis and Akron, respectively.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: All right. So sticking to this deal, the work of Civic Commons, the principles and ideals of Civic Commons, we have essentially pulled in a -- let's see here. Let's get back for a moment -- a framework that we think makes sense for public libraries in terms of working towards socioeconomic mixing, that in order for us -- and I will say that I think that if we were to go around the room that most of us could tell a story about a time when we saw people from different walks of life who came to the library and did a thing together; that perhaps they were from different parts of the community, perhaps they thought very differently about religious or political ideology, but there was something about the power of shared experience. There was something about sewing together or knitting together or being in a book club together that really transformed the community; right?

And so that is the inspiration for us. That is what we are going -- that is sort of the goal for us. And so it becomes, well, how do we get to that place. And we think that essentially we've got to have conversations in each of these areas, that as we think about design, we have to think about not only the physical design of the space -- does it feel welcoming, does it feel like a place where you want to be, does -- sort of spatially does the color and the display evoke a sort of, man, I really want to hang out in this place; right? -- but, also, the design of the experience.

We also have to tackle outreach; right? That, you know, we talked about very -- at the beginning of the session, we talked about wanting to ask ourselves, well, who's not coming through these doors? What age groups, what demographics, what -- who are the people that are not making their way in? And for us, one of the groups that we saw that were not coming through the door were young black Millennial creatives, you know, people who were doing T-shirts and were doing jewelry and said, hey, you know, I would actually come to the library if there was an

invitation, if I felt like there was a space for me, if there was equipment there, if there was programming there, if there was a collection that reflected this; right? And so thinking about outreach and collection development.

Thinking about programming. Not only the types of programs, but in the ways that we do our program; right? I come from a church background, y'all. I'm from the South, so you got to go to the church. And when you in the black church, the pastor going to make you say something; right? He's going to ask for an amen. He's going to ask for you to get down and (Inaudible) [00:13:00] with people; right?

And one of the -- one of the most fun parts of church was what we call the meet and greet, which was a moment where the service stopped, and you got up and you went and found somebody who didn't come with you and who didn't look like you, and you reminded them of why you were there today; right?

And so as we began to sort of design our concerts and our outdoor experiences, we said, you know what, maybe we should just ask the musician that, hey, in the middle of your set, would you encourage people to get up and share a story of why they like coming to the library? Would you encourage people to get up and share the last book they checked out? Would you get up and ask people, why are you here today? And just (Inaudible) [00:13:41] tweaks like that do wonderful things in allowing people to meet one another, right, to have interactions with one another.

And we're not thinking -- we're not thinking that this is going to create Kumbaya moments. That is not where we're at, y'all. But what we are -- what we do believe is that those little interactions over time can spark conversations that can really transform our communities.

Also think about partnerships. That we don't have to do this work alone. That is, we think about the type of programming that it takes to draw in diverse audiences, that we can't do this on our own, that we might not have the staffing to do this on our own, but there are people in the community -- there are organizations in the community that are more than help -- more than willing to come alongside us and to join us and to help us.

We think about, of course, marketing, the language that we use; right? In Memphis we are a 63% African American community. And so for us to get language right to talk to particularly the group of people that we wanted, we brought in young black

marketers and said, hey, could we pay you for some of your time to help us get some of our messaging; right. Like what should we be saying to this group of people? And it worked, and it still works.

And then, of course, measurements and then staffing and development. So I'll talk a little bit about the work that we did at Cossitt Library.

Cossitt is the city's very first public library. It was built in the 1890s and was opened shortly after that. The city -- the library has a very rich history in the city's history, but it also has some controversial history. For the first 65 or so years, the library allowed very little access to African Americans in the city.

There was actually another branch down the street that was created that was the Negro branch that received some of the inferior resources and such. And so this library has always had a rich history, and for the -- and I would say over the last few decades there have been calls to close this branch. On a number of occasions people have wanted to shut this branch down.

And in 2016, due in part to the work of Civic Commons, we were able to begin the process of reimagining this branch, of thinking anew of what could this branch be and how could it meet the needs of the community. And a part of that is a foundational statement, which you will see to the right of the picture here. This says: In the heart of Memphis, the library is designed -- or being redesigned to adapt to the ever-changing needs of the community. The space is transformed to accommodate diverse neighborhood endeavors, creating unrestricted landscape for myriad social engagements, workshops, presentations, and artful installations. Local artists, professionals, and instructors, to name a few, gather to exchange expertise. In this way the community shapes and gains ownership of Cossitt, guiding its dialogue and rendering it uniquely Memphis.

And that statement -- that grinding statement was so important to us because it helped us understand that if we're going to do this work, it is going to take the whole of a community.

And so a few pieces of this work that we'll share, our measurements. And you will see on the table -- you've already seen some of the things that we measured. We tried to be very, very intentional about measurements, again, as we were looking to understand how public we were. Because we were looking to

sort of understand, like, does the library attendance measure up with the census data? Are the people who live in this community actually coming to this library? We took great care in trying to understand who was coming to our library.

And we did that in a number of ways. We did that both through having conversations with people as they were on site at the branch, but we also went out into the community, and that proved to be very helpful.

All right. And then, of course, we talked about the design of our space. Our space is a two-story space. And I want to highlight this one particular space. There are a number of -- we redid our branch to include a renovated courtyard, a café, co-working spaces, recording areas both for audio and video purposes. But this performance space I highlighted because I think it really speaks to the power. This is a multiuse space on the second floor of Cossitt Library. It's about 2300 square feet. And as we were going through the design of the space, we brought in just under 100 artists and arts organizations and said, hey, how might you think about using this space? What do you see about this space that could resonate with you?

And we heard something from the artists that was truly amazing. Artists in the community said that there was a lack of access to spaces that were accessible, inclusive, and affordable; that it had to hit all three of those things; right? That in some cases they could find spaces that were affordable, but they were not accessible and welcoming; right? So it's, like, hey, I could rent this space, but the moment I walk in this space as a black person, people are locking stuff up, and that doesn't feel very welcoming at all; or there are spaces that are very welcoming and that will allow me to come in, but the cost is so much that if I do this, I will have to pass this cost on to the library patrons or to the people -- to the patrons, and it would essentially cost them out.

And so using this space, we created a mutual aid and a co-op model, where artists and artist organizations could use this space not only at no charge, but in a way that allowed them to give back to the space. One of our -- sort of our key things that we put before artists was to say, hey, not only can you come and get something out of this space, but we also think there's something you can give to this space. There's some sort of time, talent, skill that you could give here; right? And so it created a sort of a mutual relationship.

And so what happens in this space now or what will be happening in this space now as this space begins to open is a number of different artists and different organizations that will be using this space in many different ways. And with each of these performances, these individuals bring in their own unique audiences, who now get to spend time in the space and begin to learn the space in different ways.

Talk a little bit about outreach and why it's so important to be able to get out into the community and find audiences. This is actually a pop-up that we did a little ways down from the branch. This is about 200 square feet. It's a food hall in which we went and put up bookshelves and signing and kids' activities. We did programming out of this space. We did some -- we tested some circulation out of this space. And you would have been amazed at the number of people who came to us and said, "I had no idea there was even a library down from my house." Right? "I've never come in the branch before."

And through this space we were able to engage folks in really, really interesting ways. We were able to identify new friends of the library. We were able to identify new programs that we should be thinking about. We were able to think about collection development in a way that we would not have been able to do so if we had simply just sat in the building and asked people to come to us; right?

And so as we think about trying to build diverse audiences, trying to create a space where everyone feels welcome, sometimes it's not enough for us to say come to our table. Sometimes we must figure out where the other tables are and go and sit at those tables.

Of course, we revamped our friends group. We made it a little more sexy. And so on the front of these shirts and sweatshirts, you can see a design of the building that became a way of identifying how people saw themselves as friends of the space; right? We really wanted to create this sort of approach that says, hey, you can also be a part this space; that we value your expertise; we value your passion and care for the library. And so we have now created a variety of swag, mugs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, that we've been getting kind of in the hands of influencers who are actually spreading the message in a whole new way, in a way that we might not have been able to do otherwise.

So those are a few of the things that have happened for us that we have found very, very crucial, very, very helpful in the

work of the public library. And I want to bring up Bron, who will talk about how this has extended into other public spaces, because I think that there's a lot that libraries can learn from parks, community centers, and other spaces about how they have achieved this as well. So, Bron, please come up. I'll get it.

>> BRONLYNN THURMAN: Thank you, Shamichael. I'm always inspired by what is happening in Memphis. Like Shamichael said, my name is Bronlynn Thurman, and I am a program officer at GAR Foundation, which focuses on education, workforce development, arts and culture, and basic needs within the Akron area.

Is everyone familiar with where Akron is? Most of the time I say, you know, it's where LeBron James is from.

(Laughter)

>> BRONLYNN THURMAN: And that everybody is, like, oh, yeah, yeah, that place. So I'm going to talk a bit about how Civic Commons has shown up in the public space realm and also how it ties to some of the work that a local CDC and the local library right up the road were doing.

So to set the stage, Civic Commons in Akron actually crosses three neighborhoods. So it is -- it spans from our downtown through what is now known as the Ohio and Erie Canal Park down to Summit Lake, and Summit Lake is this beautiful asset. It is a glacial lake that is located within -- in Akron.

So this -- the neighborhood is named after the lake, and it actually divides two neighborhoods. So it divides the Summit Lake neighborhood as well as the Kenmore neighborhood. And these neighborhoods are racially very different. So Summit Lake, the eastern side, is predominantly black, while Kenmore is a predominantly white neighborhood.

And so I'm going to -- to further set the stage, this is a bit of background on kind of Summit Lake. So Summit Lake, it had a thriving kind of beach area, amusement park/beach area, that had one of the most beautiful, like, crystal mosaic pools located at the site. And it was a place for recreation. It was predominantly used by white folks at that time.

And so as integration began to happen, disinvestment occurred, urban renewal. You know, we've seen this across -- we have seen across so many of our communities where highways just kind of blow through these neighborhoods, and it actually -- it

actually just tore through this neighborhood and created what is now Ohio and Erie Canal Park and the Summit Lake area.

In the 1990s, this Towpath Trail was developed, and it is a nearly 100-mile bike and hike trail that spans from Cleveland area on down to Zoar, Ohio. And about 2.5 million people use this trail annually. And so Civic Commons' focus was how do we uplift, revitalize the public spaces along the Towpath Trail within the city of Akron.

But, you know, before I -- before I kind of dive into some of our practices and talk about the library, I do want to talk about trust. This is -- working in Summit Lake is challenging. This is a neighborhood that is deeply disinvested. Public housing sits on -- along the side of the lake. This is a neighborhood that was left, forgotten.

And as the decline of the lake began -- well, I should have mentioned that Akron was once the rubber capital of the world, and so we had a lot of rubber industries. And these rubber industries needed water for their machines, and so they went to Summit Lake, and they created a pump house that went on to pollute the lake.

So when you have a deeply disinvested neighborhood that is predominantly black, that has been cut off by a highway, that has a lake that is polluted, you know, the people don't feel good about themselves. They don't feel like they're supported. So coming into that neighborhood, we had to build trust. We had to work closely with those residents. We had to show up and say -- you know, and do what we said we were going to do.

We had to talk to community leaders. We had to conduct neighborhood surveys. We hosted events. We created spaces for people to gather and just exist. We had to address some of the safety concerns that people had, because you couldn't even see the edge of the lake. There was one bench that was in this park, and it faced away from the lake. And it was just -- nobody feels good about that. And so nobody feels safe.

And so we slowly but surely began adding things that people said that they wanted. They wanted grills, they wanted places to sit, they wanted to know that the lake was safe for their children. And so we did a land -- an environmental assessment. So we did a land and water assessment, phase 1 and phase 2, and we found out that the lake was safe for recreational use. We shy away from swimming, but (Laughs) -- but boating, kayaking,

fishing, all of that is safe for that lake. And it is a great space for birders.

So -- oh, before I move on, we also -- one of things that I'm quite proud of is we worked with neighborhood residents to provide microgrants for programming that they wanted to see. Empowering residents to develop things that they felt they needed within their community was crucial in building that trust.

And this was not perfect. We failed a lot. We messed up a lot. But we came back and said, hey, this didn't work. We know that this didn't work. How do we work together to make this better?

And I mentioned that pump house. So in the early days of this work, Summit Metro Parks, which is our countywide metro park system, who was a significant partner that sat around the table with us, they did a pop-up nature center within the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority's Reach Opportunity Center that sat along the lake. And they also developed these programs. They had a nature kids club, things that this neighborhood had never seen. And they invited community members to be a part of this process. And it was so successful that they ended up working with the City of Akron to transform that pump house that was right down the way from the Reach Opportunity Center to create one of the only nature centers that is in the urban area in our county.

So I do want to talk a bit about the other side of the lake, Kenmore neighborhood. It is -- like I said, it's predominantly white. It was a former township that was annexed by the City of Akron. History of racial tensions. There was -- there were some friends of mine who were much, much older, who remember going to high school and having to be bussed to Kenmore, and they had horrible experiences. And so those stories continue, and so people don't feel -- didn't feel safe going to this neighborhood if they were black.

And so the Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance was established in 2017. It really didn't get its legs under it until -- 2016 it started. It didn't get its legs under it until 2017, but its focus was on revitalizing the commercial district and building some connectivity to the Towpath Trail.

And these -- it's not very -- this neighborhood is not -- like it's, like I said, right on the other side of the lake, the

commercial district is right up the road, and the library kind of sits in the center of that commercial district as an anchor.

And this is a neighborhood that has a history of music that kind of weaves throughout its fabric. It has some of the largest number of recording studios within a single footprint within our city. It has a guitar shop that brings in guitars -- they fix guitars from across the world, so music is a vital piece of their fabric.

And so Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance actually worked with their library to develop programming that leaned into that history. So they were partners on, like, music -- musical instrument rentals. They were an anchor partner bringing -- similar to what Shamichael said, about bringing the library outside of its doors, they developed a presence at the First Fridays, and they were a partner on the First Fridays events, which were these -- which most of you all probably know of a First Friday. It is an event that happens at the beginning of every Friday, and it's art and culture and a space for people to gather.

So they did a lot of work with that, and then they have a presence on the Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance's board. And I think that it is incredibly important. I see libraries as an important partner in kind of economic development in uplifting neighborhoods because of the fact that you have so many resources. You are a natural place for people to together. You develop programming that lean into what your residents need.

And so we're thinking about how do we bring some of that programming that the library is doing with the Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance on down to the Summit Lake area and vice versa, because since Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance started, upwards of seven black-owned businesses have opened their doors along the commercial district. And so how do we continue that progress? How do we continue to move things forward?

And I would be remiss if I didn't mention kind of -- you know, we're investing significant dollars into a deeply disinvested neighborhood, and, you know, there's always challenges with that. Summit Lake will get a $10 million face-lift on its north shore. And it's going to be adding pavilions, canoe and boat launches, pedestrian bridges.

At the same time, the Housing Authority received a Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant, which is a competitive grant to think about how to reimagine public housing within that

neighborhood. And then the City of Akron is thinking about a greenway within the neighborhood and also looking at its land uses throughout the neighborhood.

And all of this investment is fantastic, but we also have to be mindful that displacement can happen. And so we are in the process -- and this is still in the early stages, but we're in the process of thinking about, all right, we know a lot of organizations are looking at this neighborhood. How do we make sure that we are protecting the people who live there and they feel like they have a say in the future of their neighborhood? And with that, I will turn it back to Shamichael.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: So a couple things as we get ready to go to our breakout, a couple of things that I'll reflect on. You know, I'm always thinking about the conversations that are being had at Civic Commons and asking myself, okay, well, how do I drill this down a little bit more to the work that we're doing in libraries.

And a couple of things that have come out of that that have been very, very impactful for us, is I'm always listening to Bron and Amanda, saying, okay, well, what does that mean for us? One of the things that we tried that was directly influenced by Civic Commons was microgrants. She talked a little bit about this before. Through a partnership -- through our relationship with Civic Commons, we actually were able to do a microgrant in which we invited the community to share their ideas for programming, that they could get up to $250 to do a program, like whatever they wanted to do. And we got, I believe, 50 submissions from folks all over, and we ended up picking five of those folks.

We had someone who did a self-defense class for teens and kids, but they also combined it with a superhero theme. So kids got to create their own superhero and then learn self-defense skills, and they were empowered to go back to their community and think about ways they could be champions in their community; right?

Someone else did an outdoor chess event. They did like kind of a life-sized chess, so everyone dressed up as the pieces, and they moved themselves around, which was also really amazing.

And so -- and as we talked to these people, we recognized that many of them had never even attended a library or program before; it was just the ability to be able to say, hey, I think I could do something there.

And this, believe it or not, led to some really interesting things. Not only did it lead to new programs, but it also led to some new partnerships. One of the programs was -- that got the grant -- they actually got the max amount -- were five black women, who said, hey, we're going to all -- like we're all creatives, and we're all going to do something at the same time. And so there was one person doing a hip-hop yoga. There was one person doing a fire throw. There was another person that was doing podcasting.

And the podcast was so -- it was so successful that we said, hey, why don't we just keep you here. Like we can't hire you, but, like, can we find some way to keep you here? She said yeah. And so what we ended up doing was creating an Innovator in Residence program. And so she will be at the library now for four months. We gave her a little bit of a stipend. We gave her office space. And we said, hey, like, you can do whatever you would like to do in this space; right?

And that sort of thing now is bringing, you know, new people. There are now young black girls that are, like, oh, yeah, I want to be -- like I hear you on the radio. I want to be a part of this -- of this thing. And so it's really leading to some really innovative ideas.

I want to now move to a little bit of a conversation. And we need to ask you, as you have heard this presentation, what words or phrases come to mind as you've listened to the presentation? We've talked about a couple of things. We've talked about this idea of mixing. We've talked about this idea of outreach. We've talked about the power of programming. We've talked about shared experiences. What comes to mind as you think about this?

And we want to invite you in this interactive moment to either talk at your table or you can text in your responses. You can text the word "mixing" to 22333 any words that come to mind. And then we want to take a few moments beyond that to talk about that. Is there anything that excites you? Is there anything that concerns you? What comes to mind as you think about libraries and spaces that draw diverse crowds, that engage diverse crowds in various activities? What comes to mind to you?

And I believe our IT guy will put this on the screen so we can see some of the words that are coming to mind. Thank you so much, Mr. IT man.

>> AMANDA MILLER AMANKONA: Thanks, Dan.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: And we'll see if there are any -- hit "present" for us, and we'll see if there's anything that comes.

>> Can you repeat the phone number?

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Yes. It's 22333.

>> AMANDA MILLER AMANKONA: Yeah. It's on the top of the screen now.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Yep, yep. What words come to mind? What phrases come to mind as you think about opportunities or challenges in bringing diverse people together?

Ideals, new ideas, bringing in new faces to the library. Partnerships, collaborations, idealistic. Thank you so much for that. Challenging. Very good. Very good. Belonging. Yeah. Yeah, that's so important as we think about creating belonging. Who isn't coming to the library; right? Expectations. Good, good, good, good. Thank you so much. Resistance to change. Ooh, would love to hear more about that.

So now let's -- I want to invite you to step to the table, if you can, to hop at the table and talk about some of the things. If you submitted -- if you offered an idea, we would love for you to share why you offered that idea and what you think about that. So we want to take about the next maybe five minutes or so to invite you to have a little bit of conversation at your table.

(Discussion at tables)

>> AMANDA MILLER AMANKONA: Do these get saved?

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Yes, they will.

>> AMANDA MILLER AMANKONA: Okay. So we'll have, like --

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: We'll have them, yeah, absolutely.

(Discussion at tables)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: I think I'll go hop at a table.

>> AMANDA MILLER AMANKONA: Okay.

>> BRONLYNN THURMAN: Oh, yeah.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Five minutes; right?

>> AMANDA MILLER AMANKONA: Yes.

(Discussion at tables)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Let's take about another two minutes and we'll move on to the next part of the exercise.

(Discussion at tables)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Well, let's bring it in for a few moments here. I see there's really great conversation, and I certainly hate to end it, but let's bring it in just for this part of the exercise, and we'll move on in a moment. I'm curious, anyone just care to share just initial thoughts, things that came up at your table. Were there themes or ideas that emerged that you may want to share, one or two people would be willing to share before we move to the next part of this exercise? Yes.

>> One of the themes that emerged from our table is --

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: A mic's coming for you.

(Laughter)

>> One of the -- one of the themes that emerged --

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Oh, maybe not.

>> Dan, is that working?

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Dan, we're having some issues with -- oh, gotcha. Cool.

(Laughter)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: (Inaudible) [00:49:28] that's cool.

(Laughter)

>> One of the themes that emerged from our table is that we are experiencing issues in our community where people come to us for help, and we aren't necessarily equipped to deal with those issues in a way that maybe our community needs. Like homelessness is a primary concern in all of our communities.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Nice. Thanks so much for sharing. We actually did something -- I think that's probably a whole 'nother session, right, that we could -- (Laughs) --

particularly for those of us who find ourselves serving that particular group.

One of the things that we did, you know, as we went out into the community and began to ask, you know, people just kind of opinions, how they felt about the library, quite a few folks -- our library is in the middle of downtown, so not only do you have, you know, that group of individuals there, but you also have people that live there, that work there, often much more affluent folks. And a lot of people expressed to us fears and often very negative or false stereotypes and say, well, hey, have you ever even talked to any of these folks before? It's, like, no, no.

So we started doing -- we did three of these dinners, where we kept it intimate. We kept it less than ten. Like so ten, you know, unhoused individuals, people who were experiencing homelessness, and ten kind of of the other. We said, hey, can we just get you to come together in the library after hours and have a meal? And it was one of the most impactful things that I think I've ever done as working in libraries.

That was a really interesting -- there was a really powerful moment at the end of one of these dinners. One of the gentlemen who was unhoused, he'd been quiet the whole meeting, you know, like, you know, he'd been eating, but he'd been pretty quiet. And as we were getting ready to wrap up, he looked across the table at another individual, someone who worked downtown, and he said, "Hey, man, I know you probably don't want me to be here." And he was meaning in the library. He says, "I know that you probably say very mean things about me. You often walk by me when you go out of the office every day." He says, "But the reality is I'm just like you. I'm a book lover. I'm a knowledge seeker. And if you ever got time to know me, you might discover that we have a lot more in common than we don't," you know.

And, again, it's not like the Kumbaya moment, but at least in this moment this guy now knows this guy's name; right? He knows this guy. This is Tom. And Tom served in Desert Storm. And Tom went over there with a couple of friends, but he came back by himself, and Tom hasn't been able to get right since then; right? And Tom's not looking for sympathy; right? He's just looking to exist. He's just looking to be a space -- looking to be in a space where he can belong; right?

And so, you know, having, again, those sort of -- having those opportunities of shared experience is really, really

powerful. I thought I would just share that because it's something that really -- it was a gut punch to me. It was like, oh, wow, this feels really amazing, so I will share. Someone else was going to share.

>> I think this -- yes, this is working. So one of the things that we've been struggling with at our library is we're in what appears to be an affluent community, but we know that there are groups out there that we don't see, but yet we never leave the building. We don't have an outreach program at all in trying to convince management and staff that, like, we can make time for outreach and we should make time for outreach and we don't have to have, like, a specific outreach librarian. That's been one of the things that we've struggled with.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Yeah. And I think that actually leads very well into this next part of the exercise. So as we think about these sort of pillars as we're sort of building the scaffolding for how to create libraries where everyone is welcome and people are coming, as we think about design and outreach and programming and collection development and partnerships and marketing and measurements and staffing and development, I would like for you just to come back at the same tables that we were to go through these three prompts.

Number one, identify one area where you feel your system is doing really, really well in working towards achieving socioeconomic mixing. Maybe you've just got some really phenomenal programs. You're doing some dinner conversations or you're doing some town hall conversations where people seem to (Inaudible) [00:53:44] coming to these things.

And goal number two, where and how might you improve in light of today's session? Is there another area where you say, hey, I think that I'm really good here, but maybe in outreach we're not really doing that well, and there's some things that I think we could probably change there.

And item number three, because we really want to be of service to you, where might you need assistance? Is there some area where you say, hey, you know, I think we could really get good here, but I think we just -- man, we just maybe need some additional help, some additional resources.

So take some time at your table. We're going to take a little bit more time for this one than we did the previous one, maybe about ten minutes here, talk to these three prompts. Okay? Cool. We'll be back in a bit.

(Discussion at tables)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: All right. We'll take a few more minutes, few more minutes.

(Discussion at tables)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: All right. Let's bring it in. Let's bring it in. Curious to hear -- I love this activity. This is amazing. I love hearing great conversation. Anyone care to share? Do you mind sharing the -- your --

>> Yeah, no, I'd like to share.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Yeah, please do so. I thought it was just phenomenal.

>> AMANDA MILLER AMANKONA: And if you might share where you're from.

>> MELANIE: My name is Melanie, and I'm from Oklahoma City. And one thing that our public library system does is a mobile market. So every month they come out and they give fresh vegetables and fruits. Now, we don't do canned or bagged food because food pantries usually provide that. And we partnered with local farms. Oklahoma has a lot of agriculture. So some farms provide fresh vegetables and fruits, and we bag it up, and we provide two brown bags. And the limitation is we only do -- do you have a two-household family or a four. That's quite small. But it's helpful whatever groceries we do provide.

And that's something that I think that my library system is doing really well in working for just getting people to come out. And it's something that we do at our branch. So the market parks at the branch, and people are coming to the library and grabbing their food and hopeful that they get to come in. And you provided a really great idea of maybe providing them with, like, a handout. If they're getting potatoes this week, maybe we need to put a recipe for potatoes so they can learn how to cook it or use that food. Thank you.

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Yeah. I think that's one of the things that --

(Applause)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Thank you so much. That's one of the things that I'm hearing around the room is that, man, we're

doing a lot of outreach, and we're going to places, but there seems like there's an opportunity for us to tie that outreach back to our branch; that, you know, since we're doing this really valuable work and getting out into the community, how might we find ways to ensure that those people at some point might make their way back.

   And so since you're doing that thing right on site there, it's, like, hey, it just seems very natural to do a cooking program or how to store healthy food or, you know, book displays around that seems to be a phenomenal thing. And this is great. Yes, please, share.

   >> So I run a community center in addition to a library, and the community center has a gym, a commercial kitchen, classrooms, and it had a tiny library in it, a 600-square foot branch. And because it was in the heart of our Hispanic community, we've been able to establish a relationship with folks through programming primarily physical fitness, so Zumba and line dancing and all kinds of things. But we got an 8800-square-foot branch that is about to open in about three months.

   >> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Woo.

   >> And so right now the programming that is being proposed is just additional sessions of programming that the main library already does, but we have a great relationship with the community. We have a community garden. We have a drive-through food pantry twice a month and a lot of social programs that we wouldn't be able to -- that aren't traditional library programs through there.

   >> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Yeah.

   >> So what I really was excited about is the idea of microgrants so that I can get programming ideas for the library that in addition to the cloning of the regular programs are something that will be unique to that branch and really continue to bring people in, especially the other parts of the community, because that part of town was always scary. It was the west side. And, you know, that was where --

   >> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Yeah.

   >> -- scary things happened. So I really want to know more about how the microgrant program worked and how you got -- how you got applications, how you advertised for it, because I think

that would be something that would be transformational for this library.

    >> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: So I'll tell you something really quickly. With our outreach, we developed a survey, and it was a very quick survey, but the last two questions were this. Question number 4 was: What do you want to see in this branch? What sort of programs, initiatives do you want to see here? Question number 5 was: What can you bring to this branch; right?

    So what you had was in number 4 people saying, oh, yeah, I would love to learn how to code. I would love to learn how to knit. I would love to learn how to start a business. Number 5, people were saying, hey, I'm an entrepreneur. I'd have no problem spending once a week for a couple of weeks helping people learn how to -- right?

    And so we used that number 5 to give us the information to say, hey, well, guess what, we've got a program that you can apply for, that you can have this thing happen here; right? And it worked. It was really, really good.

    I am curious if anyone -- like we talked about measurements. And did anyone highlight any sort of thing you're doing around measurements to understand who's coming in your branch, what part of town they're from, anything like that? Anyone talk about measurements? I didn't suspect that we might, but I was just curious to see if anybody did. I think that's an opportunity for us. I think that's a huge opportunity for us to talk about that. Yes. What's -- yes.

    >> We didn't actually talk about measurements, but I will talk about a little bit, one of the things we are doing is some focused -- really focused and intentional focus groups this spring to find out why the people that we aren't reaching aren't coming in. So we'll be inviting folks to -- very specific groups that we've identified to talk to us about what we can do and what they need from us.

    >> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: Awesome. That actually sets up the last slide here. We've got some additional resources, as our time is up. Oh, was there somebody that's going to share? I didn't want to -- I'm sorry. I didn't want to -- okay. Cool.

    Some additional resources, you can take a picture here of civiccommons.us.resources, all the things that are on the table there, you can get those online. We want to invite you to

follow Reimagining the Civic Commons on medium, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

And then the last thing is I will ask you -- there's a QR code there at the bottom. I'm currently collecting stories. I believe that in this room we can build a community of practice of people who are doing programs and initiatives and events and marketing campaigns around making our libraries more welcoming and inclusive. And so I would ask you -- you don't have to fill out the entire thing today, but there's a brief form there, where we're trying to collect stories from the field.

And even if you don't have time to fill out the entire thing today, even if you just said, hey, here's my number, here's my email, call me and let's talk, that would -- I would be very, very appreciative of that. I'm looking to build a -- sort of a database of best practices that we can share out at the annual conference in June. So a tip to come back to the annual conference in June where we'll share out some of these stories. Okay?

Lastly, if you need to get in contact with us, here's our information. You can also take a picture of that. Amanda, Bronlynn, and myself happy to answer any questions, help sending resources to your library system. Happy to give talks. Happy to talk with whoever you might need us to talk to. We're more than happy to do so.

Cool. All right, friends, well, our time is up. It has been a joy being with you. I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.

(Applause)

>> SHAMICHAEL HALLMAN: I'll just leave up the QR code. I'll leave up the QR code. If you're willing and able to share a story, please do so. You can also just leave your information with me, and I'll be happy to reach out to you at a later time. Hey. How are you?