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Operation E Pluribus Unum

Grant Number | EMW-2016-CA-00087
Lead agency name | Alameda County Sheriff's Office (ACSO)

Location | Alameda County, CA

Award period of performance | August 2017 – November 2020



This document focuses on the work the Alameda County Sheriff's Office (ACSO) completed under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate grant award for its project, Operation E Pluribus Unum (OEPU). To understand the OEPU project, one must first look more broadly at the national climate and the local community.

Violent Extremism and the Creation of the Department of Homeland Security

The September 11, 2001, attacks dramatically altered Americans' perceptions about the threat of terrorism. The attacks also prompted major shifts in public policy, including the creation of the DHS in November 2002 as a cabinet-level agency. The new agency became one of the federal hubs for addressing the threat of terrorism under the 2002 Homeland Security Act. Early efforts focused primarily on intelligence gathering and analysis and the suppression of terrorism using military and law enforcement strategies, but over time, a shift toward terrorism prevention—or what became more widely known as “countering violent extremism” (CVE)—emerged as an important component of the federal response to this problem. As such, in 2016, Congress allocated \$10 million to fund the DHS CVE grant

award program to help local, state, and nongovernmental entities design and implement prevention and intervention strategies focused on the reduction of domestic violent extremism.

Alameda County: Reducing Jail Populations

Alameda County is the seventh most populous county in California, with a population of around 1.7 million individuals living in just over 800 square miles. The county borders San Francisco and includes the cities of Oakland (430,000 population) and Berkeley (120,000 population). As of 2018, the county had a higher percentage of Latin individuals than the nation at large (22% and 18%, respectively) and nearly the same percentage of Black/African American individuals (11% and 13%, respectively). However, it had more than twice the national percentage of foreign-born individuals.

Alameda County experienced a significant decrease in its jail populations over the past several years because of statewide initiatives (Propositions 47 and 57) that changed some felonies to misdemeanors and released nonviolent offenders. From 2013 to 2017, the number of jailed individuals per 100,000 population fell by nearly one-third in Alameda County. Although the jailed population in

Alameda County has included a smaller percentage of Latin inmates than the rest of the state or country did, since the 1990s, the percentage of Black/African American inmates has been greater than that in the state and country.

"Countering violent extremism" has proven to be a controversial term in Alameda County, stemming in part from concerns regarding racial/religious profiling that occurred during the War on Terror and a broader history of federal surveillance aimed at various political movements.

Alameda County Sheriff's Office and Santa Rita Jail

The ACSO, established in 1853, has a budget of about \$186 million and more than 1,500 staff members. The ACSO is responsible for both enforcing the law and operating the county jail, Alameda County Santa Rita Jail. The ACSO previously had two jails. The second and smaller of the two, Glenn E. Dyer Detention Facility, closed in 2019, but its detainees participated in the Mind Body Awareness Project [MBA] program before it closed. The Santa Rita Jail opened in 1989 and houses 4,000 inmates in 18 housing units. It is the fifth largest facility in the country and is accredited by the American Correctional Association.¹

Operation E Pluribus Unum: Project Development

In 2016, the ACSO submitted a proposal requesting grant funding from DHS to prevent violent extremism among Muslim inmates in county correctional facilities. The original program design involved a collaboration between the ACSO and Ta'leef Collective, a community-based private, nonprofit organization that, among other programs, offers support for the formerly incarcerated. Captain Martin Neideffer from the ACSO directed the project and initiated the partnership with Ta'leef with the idea that the grant award would be used to help the organization expand its support to include currently incarcerated inmates in Alameda County.

Ultimately, for reasons explored below, Ta'leef did not participate in the grant award and Captain Neideffer identified another partner, MBA, a longstanding community-based, private nonprofit focused on providing mindfulness programs to at-risk youth. It was determined that MBA's focus on at-risk youth translated to the

ACSO Focus Areas

MBA cohorts are curriculum-based modules formalized and implemented in county jail facilities, with the aim of introducing inmates to the mindfulness approach to cope with stress, resolve conflicts in a nonviolent manner, and reduce trauma.

The **Dig Deep Farms co-op farming program** offers job training for recently released inmates with the goal of developing life skills for employability and specific skills related to food co-ops and "urban farming."

Parents and Children Together (PACT), a program of the Oakland Housing Authority, provided recently incarcerated parents (mostly mothers) and their children with housing and various treatment services, including the MBA program added to complement PACT's existing services.

incarcerated population. As a result of the new partnership, the focus on Muslim inmates was omitted with the idea that all inmates determined to be at risk for violent extremism would be the target population. After consultation with CVE practitioners, Captain Neideffer learned that validated instruments to determine whether an inmate is at risk for violent extremism are underdeveloped. He thus expanded the project focus to include any inmates currently incarcerated in the county jail system without determining "at-risk" status. In this respect, the project became a more "upstream" approach to identifying broad-based and more generic risk factors (e.g., "criminal thinking"; histories of personal and collective trauma) and incorporating an approach (i.e., mindfulness) meant to mitigate these issues by offering individuals new ways of coping with trauma by reframing personal narratives.

¹<https://www.alamedacountysheriff.org/about.php>

Before the DHS CVE award, ACSO leadership had several other grant-funded efforts to develop a new model of community-engaged policing (Community Capitals Policing [CCP]) focused on developing the kind of social and economic infrastructure needed to establish and sustain healthy communities. The CVE award was intended to add to this existing and ongoing effort, with MBA and other community partners adding distinct but complementary pieces to the CCP model. Overall, the ACSO began viewing the problem of violent extremism as a public health issue. This approach is similar to the Center for Disease Control's framework for approaching violence prevention and intervention. The efforts described below reflect the ACSO's attempt to develop and implement a collective action that incorporated mental health, substance abuse prevention, psychological, and law enforcement practitioners to approach CVE in a nondiscriminatory and holistic manner.

Resistance to the CVE Grant Award

Opposition to CVE programs exists across the country; however, certain locales have experienced more resistance than others. In the California Bay area, where Alameda County is located, opposition to CVE is particularly strong in terms of concerns regarding federal government surveillance and distrust of local law enforcement. As such, the substantial CVE opposition culminated when the ACSO's original partner, Ta'leef, declined to participate after the grant was awarded.

Additional confusion regarding the CVE award arose from the fact that Alameda was not one of the initial sites selected. Alameda received the award after other organizations originally selected decided to decline their awards because of concerns about the new presidential administration that began in 2016 and opposition to CVE more broadly.

Activities Supported by the ACSO



**OEPU
steering
committee**



**MBA
inmate
cohorts**



**Dig Deep
Farms
internships**



**MBA cohorts at
residential treatment
program (Parents and
Children Together
[PACT])**



**MBA training
workshops for law
enforcement and
clinicians**



**Action Resources
International
(ARI) evaluation**

Areas Where the ACSO Acted



Local jails



**Residential
treatment
program**



**Deputy Sheriff's
Activities League's
(DSAL) Dig Deep Farms**

Key Partners Connecting with the Community

Under the CVE grant, the ACSO continued its work with multiple nonprofit partners. Roles of these partners included assisting the ACSO to build and manage the grant through the development of a steering committee; use of the DSAL Dig Deep Farms program; and the PACT residential treatment program. MBA, however, was the partner with the largest grant activities providing their curriculum to multiple inmate cohorts at both Glenn Dyer and Santa Rita jails and PACT residents, as well as offering MBA training workshops to various ACSO practitioners.

Dig Deep Farms, operated by the Deputy Sheriff's Activities League, is a community-based urban farm and food hub intended to provide reentry services for individuals recently released from local jails. Dig Deep provides paid transitional employment and internships as part of its reentry program.

ARI creates collaborative pathway models (CPM), a detailed logic model that depicts a visual network of how actions are connected to outcomes. ARI is led by Monica Hargrave and Gayle Woodsum. They supervised a local evaluator who helped facilitate the OEPU steering committee meetings and data collection and generally acted as a point of contact between the partners.

MBA is an Oakland-based nonprofit behavioral health provider that offers mindfulness and emotional resilience workshops and one-on-one coaching. MBA's curriculum draws on best practices in psychosocial education and helps participants identify and transform violent mindsets and behaviors and replace them with resilience and a more compassionate understanding of the world.

Parents and Children Together (PACT) is a residential reentry program. Kelly Glossup, LCSW, manages the Youth & Family Services Bureau's (YFSB) Behavioral Health Unit, which includes PACT. PACT is designed for parents and their children to receive a variety of services while living at the residential program in an apartment complex.

Mind Body Awareness and Inmate Mindfulness

The typical MBA curriculum is considered a cognitive behavioral intervention and has been identified as an evidence-based practice for effective reentry and recidivism reduction. It includes a 10-week series of modules with both group and individual sessions led by the MBA clinicians. The weekly 3-hour group sessions focus on transforming violent mindsets and behaviors and replacing those with a different approach to understanding the world. Sessions also include emotional awareness and literacy and involve a meditative practice component. The MBA clinicians describe the program as "demanding" and "difficult"; participation requires deep reflection and introspection. This kind of programming can be uncomfortable, and some retention issues are common. Approximately one-quarter of inmates who signed up did not complete the program.

The participants for the inmate cohorts varied based on location and decisions made by the jail's Inmate Services Unit. When developing a cohort, MBA staff were told which housing units were eligible to participate in the program and would be escorted to these housing units to give a presentation about the program. Inmates were given the option to participate or decline participation. The MBA team held cohorts in housing units designated to specific gangs as well as the protective custody (PC) units. The PC units were made up of inmates with various charges and criminal histories and often included former gang members or inmates accused of crimes that made them a target in the general population. When possible, MBA staff would enlist the help of a program graduate who would not only recruit people to participate but also attend the sessions along with members of the unit and act as a mentor.

Using Mindfulness to Change Views and Behaviors

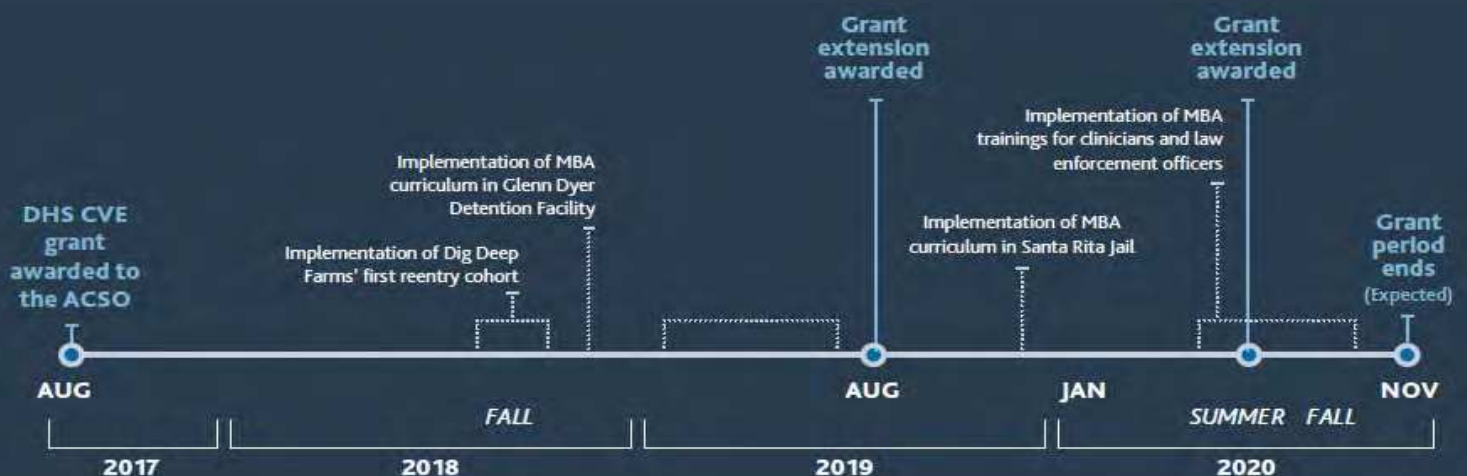
The following excerpt from a quarterly report (Quarter 9 Performance Report) provides descriptive information and related details regarding MBA's impact.

"MBA staff conducted video interviews with consenting inmate graduates about their experience in the program. These videos offered powerful affirmation that the sense of group connection, belonging, and group empathy offered through the MBA workshops has had a strong effect on participants' view of themselves, their view of others, and on their ability to express emotions and explore traumas in ways that they had not been able to before. Participants expressed surprise and deep gratitude that they were creating a 'sacred space' for connection and healing within the generally unwelcoming environment of a county jail.

"One inmate whose brother had been shot and killed the previous week shared that he felt the MBA workshops had changed his perspective so profoundly that he was contemplating how to manage and express his emotions and those of his family and friends to heal the effects of the violence, rather than planning revenge as his 'old self' would have done."

The descriptions provided in the quarterly reports involving MBA's programming with incarcerated individuals are consistent with the RTI evaluation team's observation of an MBA session at Santa Rita Jail. During the third site visit, the RTI evaluation team observed a portion of an MBA group session and were impressed by the depth of introspection demonstrated by the participants. It was also clear that the MBA practitioners had established substantial rapport with participants and were able to communicate effectively with individuals in an open and constructive manner. Feedback (both solicited and unsolicited) from ACSO deputies further enforced this observation of trust and rapport with MBA practitioners.

Timeline



Performance and Outcome Indicators

Circumstances Affecting OEPU

Throughout the ACSO's period of performance, the team experienced several external barriers and uncontrollable circumstances that disrupted or otherwise delayed progress toward meeting program objectives and goals. First, there were a series of challenges related to conducting a community-based treatment program in a correctional facility—for example, which, if any, individual inmates would agree to participate (the program is entirely voluntary); how long inmates were in the facility (which affected whether the inmate was able to complete all of the curriculum modules); or whether the inmate was transferred to the federal system (in those cases there was no capacity to provide any after-care services or other follow-up).

Second, as discussed above, the beginning of the project was marred by local and national resistance to CVE programming, and this specific project was challenged by multiple organizations that were concerned about an exclusive focus on Islamic extremism and broader issues related to anti-Muslim bias. Third, the Glenn Dyer Detention Facility was unexpectedly closed, and its entire

portion of the project was forced to relocate to Santa Rita Jail. This change resulted in substantial time and resources to seek clearance for MBA's presence in the new facility, find appropriate scheduling for the MBA sessions, and introduce Santa Rita staff to the new program and the grant project more broadly. Last, in March 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a shelter-in-place order was issued by the state of California. All inmate programming was immediately suspended. MBA has since adapted the program format to include virtual sessions.

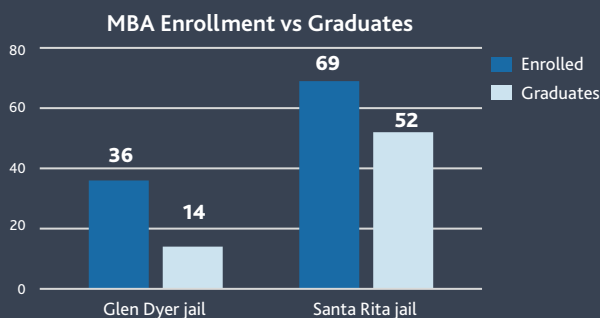
Action Resources International Collaborative Pathway Modeling

As part of OEPU, Action Resources International (ARI) was hired to create a collaborative pathway model (CPM) describing the activities of the project, as well as the breadth of outcomes resulting from these activities. The CPM is a "method of designing and tracking theories of change that reflect the voices and expertise of those most greatly impacted by challenge and oppression" (<https://www.actionresources.ngo>). ARI's CPM will be used as the OEPU's final report submitted to DHS at the end of the period of grant activity.

Maximum Participants in MBA Jail Sessions

According to outcome indicators, 63% of participants graduated from the 10-week MBA cohort. Examples of the reasons given for not graduating during the first set of cohort groups in Quarter 7 included the following:

- 9 inmates were transferred to federal prison to serve out their sentences
- 4 participants were released
- 1 participant was unable to complete the program because of court attendance
- 1 had medical reasons for not continuing
- 6 lost engagement or interest



Outcome 1.4: Support the successful reentry of Alameda County residents involved in the criminal justice system who may be susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism.

Outcome Indicators

- Glenn Dyer: 36 individuals enrolled; 14 individuals graduated across 3 cohorts who completed the 10-week program involving 20 hours of MBA proprietary curriculum; 10 participants completed 3 hours of one-to-one evidence-based coaching
- Santa Rita Jail: 69 individuals enrolled; 52 graduated across 3 cohorts who completed 10-week program involving 20 hours of MBA proprietary curriculum; 30 participants completed 3 hours of one-to-one evidence-based coaching

Results

No information was provided regarding successful reentry of criminal justice-involved individuals.²

²This was all the information provided on this outcome. See Recommendation 1.

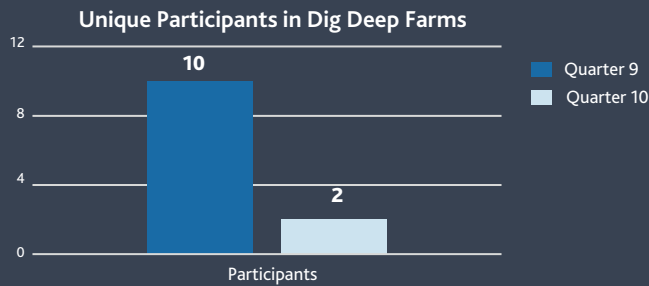
Outcome 1.5: The Deputy Sheriff's Activities League operates the Dig Deep Farms enterprise and is continuing its strategy of providing reentry clients with a 6-week paid internship at the farm.

Outcome indicators

- Across the life of the grant, a total of 12 unique interns completed the program (10 in quarter 9 and 2 in quarter 10).
- Several interns repeated the program to gain additional experience.

Result

Dig Deep Farms was able to continue providing at least 12 reentry clients with 6-week paid internships.



MBA PACT Workshops

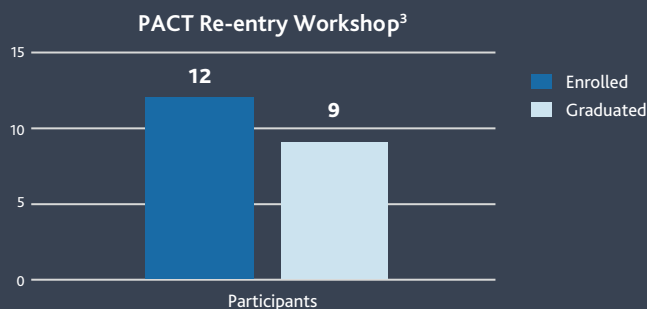
As part of the award project, MBA worked with Operation My Home Town (OMHT) clinical case managers to launch the first post-release cohort of mindfulness classes and individual sessions at the PACT housing complex in Oakland. PACT grew out of the need for parents incarcerated in Santa Rita Jail to develop positive parenting skills both while incarcerated and after being released. PACT is a partnership between the OHA, the ACSO's OMHT reentry initiative, and community-based organizations that work with formerly incarcerated parents living in an OHA complex.

The MBA workshops at PACT began in January 2020 with a 14-person cohort. MBA completed three sessions before in-person sessions were discontinued because of the statewide shelter-in-place order. After some adjustments and planning, MBA and OMHT staff coordinated to plan individual telephone sessions with PACT participants and an MBA facilitator in April 2020.

“We're working to transform jails from a human warehouse to a reentry facility.”

– Capt. Martin Neideffer

MBA PACT Workshop Participants



³ Due to Covid-19, in March 2020, this was pivoted to one-on-one individualized sessions via zoom and phone

MBA training workshops for law enforcement and clinicians

Outcome 2.1 and 2.2: MBA will offer group training on mindfulness and emotional resilience as well as the basics of the CVE curriculum to ACSO sworn staff and civilian clinical staff.

Outcome indicators

- YFSB Behavioral Health Unit:
6 clinicians completed 5-week (10-hour) clinical mindfulness training
- Santa Rita Jail:
12 sworn personnel completed 5-week (10-hour) applied mindfulness training

The limited amount and type of data received makes it difficult to report on the extent to which the ACSO reached its stated goals. ACSO staff and their partners acknowledge the limited quantitative data collected as part of the grant award, which is clearly connected, in part, to the obstacles that were present from the beginning of this grant award. The ACSO's quarterly reports, however, clearly document a wide variety of activities that were undertaken and

completed during the award period, such as the number of programs established, the number of meetings held, and the number of cohorts completed, as described above. The ACSO was unable to provide any follow-up information regarding the inmates who completed the MBA modules, as collecting demographic data on these participants was not an intended goal.

Results from Partner Surveys about the ACSO Project

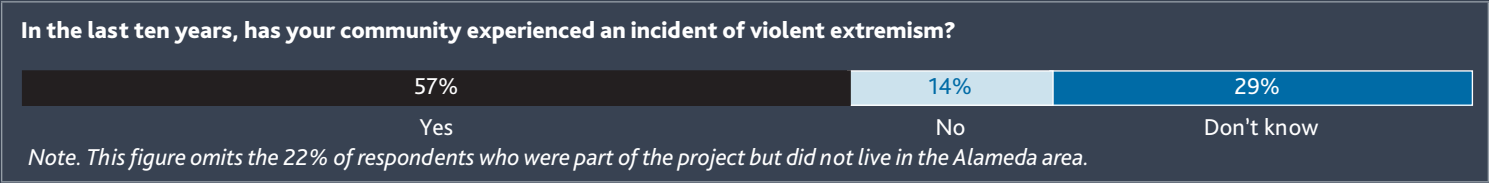
To help supplement the monthly calls and site visits, the evaluation team also conducted a comprehensive survey.³ Partner surveys were sent to contacts identified by the prime grantee. The purpose was to obtain feedback on partner interactions with the prime and each other in regard to the grant. Nine partners completed the survey. Some participants shared that they left a number of responses blank because they were not involved in certain areas of the project. These numbers reflect only those who answered each question.

³ These survey results are a summation of received partner responses; most grantees had a small number of partners. These responses are representative of partner perspectives; they are not intended to be generalized to the broader population.

Perception of Community Experiences with Violent Extremism

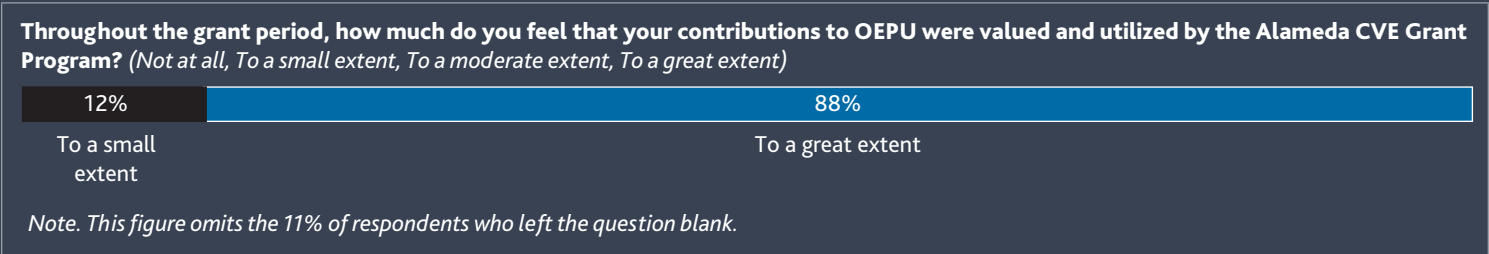
When asked whether the community had experienced a recent incident of violent extremism, responses varied. Two of the “No” responses came from ARI staff who do not live in the Alameda area, so it is unclear whether their responses reflect Alameda County. Three of the four who said “Yes” referenced an incident in May 2020 when a person in a van opened fire at a federal building in Oakland, CA, during a protest, killing one federal officer and wounding another. The shooter was later discovered to be a part of the Boogaloo movement.

“This was a great experience that involved some incredible leaders and smart people working at full capacity.... However, the political climate along with [organizations] that actively created resistance created some real blocks in the delivery of the work.... That said, I feel satisfied with what was accomplished.”
– An OEPU partner



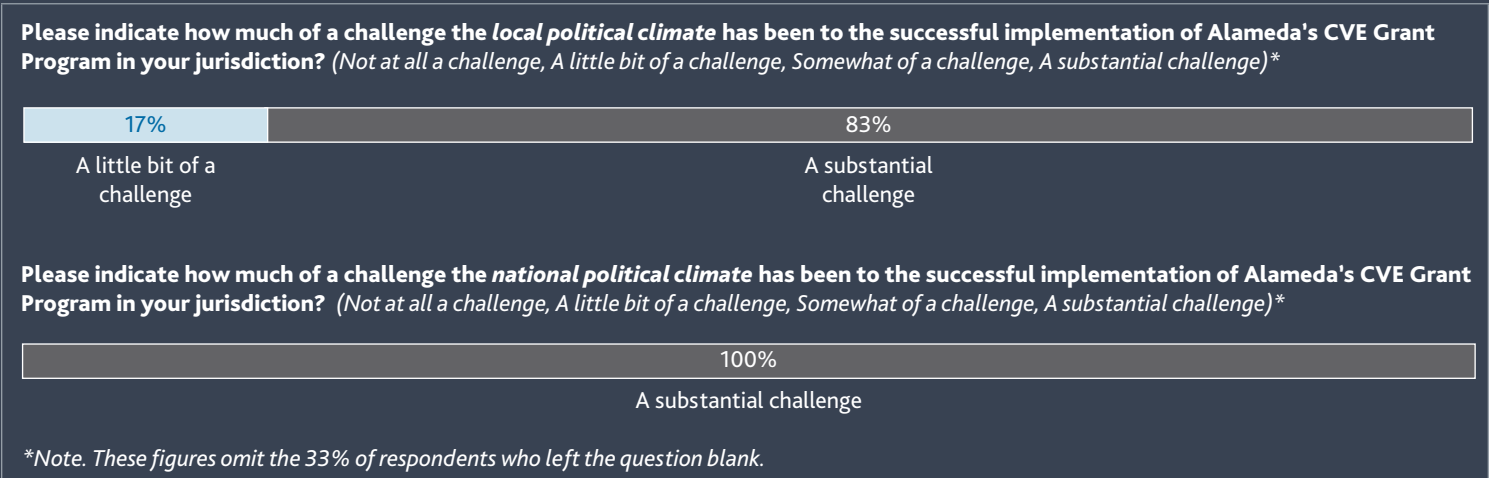
Whether Partners Felt Valued and Utilized

The responses to the survey item about whether partners' contributions were valued and utilized reflected a generally positive level of satisfaction. Within the grant program team, most contributors felt that their contributions were valued and utilized to a great extent.



Local and National Political Climate and How It May Affect Related Work

Two survey items were selected that measured perceived challenges related to local and national political climate. Overall, respondents perceived slightly more political challenges at the national level, but the majority of respondents saw both as a substantial challenge. This is not surprising; as previously mentioned, there were several difficulties navigating the political climate in the beginning of the project. In particular, two respondents specifically mentioned “resistance against anything entitled CVE” as a major barrier to accomplishing project goals.



Recommendations

In this section we rely on information the evaluation team collected during monthly calls, site visits, review of data from the Project Implementation & Evaluation Plan, and the survey results to discuss several recommendations. Each recommendation is followed by a further explanation of why we think these changes would enhance the DHS CVE grant program.

Recommendation 1: Allocate evaluation funds to support involving an evaluation team from the beginning of the grant award to measure program performance.

The current outcome measures are helpful in terms of establishing the frequency of activities but are unsuitable for establishing any type of change in attitude or behavior. Many of Alameda's outcome measures included the number of individuals who completed the CVE curriculum module and training workshops or the number of individuals who completed the Dig Deep Farms internship program. This type of information is important, but earlier involvement of an evaluation team could have helped Alameda develop additional measurable outcomes to gauge changes in the attitudes or behavior of the individual participants. The ARI evaluation is focused on developing a CPM that will be submitted as OEPU's final report to DHS and used to help the OEPU team understand the connections that were developed during this grant project.

Recommendation 2: Rename the CVE grant program in a way that highlights emphasis on building community resilience and harm reduction.

In varying degrees, the use of CVE terminology resulted in political opposition across multiple award sites, including Alameda. Alameda's location in California has been characterized by substantial concerns related to CVE due, in part, to long-standing social movements in the area focused on government overreach and police misconduct. As such, Alameda experienced opposition related to its participation in the DHS grant award program.

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