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PEACE—Proactive Engagement to Achieve Community Empowerment

Grant Number | EMW-2016-CA-00066
Lead agency name | Nashville International Center for Empowerment (NICE)

Location | Nashville, TN

Award period of performance | August 2017 – July 2019



This document focuses on the work of the Nashville International Center for Empowerment (NICE) completed under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grant award for the Proactive Engagement to Achieve Community Empowerment (PEACE) project. To understand the NICE organization and the PEACE 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. 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 support local, state, and nongovernmental entities design and implement prevention and intervention strategies focused on the reduction of domestic violent extremism.

Nashville: A Growing and Diverse City

The city of Nashville has experienced rapid growth with a population that reached 691,243 in 2017. It has become one of the most diverse cities in the country. In fact, Nashville is home to the largest Kurdish immigrant population in the United States, a growing Latinx population, and increasing numbers of immigrants from various African and Middle Eastern countries. The rapid economic and demographic changes offer substantial opportunities for Nashville in terms of cultural enrichment and economic diversification but can also result in divisiveness and social conflict. New immigrants face substantial obstacles in terms of language barriers, complications with legal status, and hostility directed from individuals who perceive them as “outsiders.” In this type of environment, there is a substantial need for both governmental and nongovernmental entities to develop programming that fosters integration and helps develop community resilience.

"New American" is a term used by NICE and other local agencies to describe immigrants who currently live in America but were born in another country.

The Nashville International Center for Empowerment: Strengthening Communities

NICE, which was founded in 2007, works toward building community resilience and integrating New Americans. NICE is a nonprofit organization that focuses on empowering refugees and immigrants and strengthening communities. Programs are organized into six broad areas: Adult Education, Resettlement, Employment, Health, Immigration, and Community Empowerment. The 2-year DHS CVE grant awarded in 2017 funded the development of the Community Empowerment Program. A few of the services provided by NICE are English language learner classes at six different levels, citizenship classes, translation services, and naturalization services.

"Violence ensues from being oppressed and beat down. When you provide [New Americans] resources and treat them like human beings, they feel less oppression."

– A representative from an organization that works with NICE.

The Proactive Engagement to Achieve Community Empowerment Project

The initial DHS CVE grant proposal for the PEACE project was submitted by NICE's Executive Director with the intention of organizing a community lecture series related to violent extremism. As part of the grant proposal, NICE partnered with Peace Ambassadors USA (PA), another Nashville-based nonprofit founded in 2012 as an initiative for Islamic American outreach and to fight bigotry, bias, and racism through education and interfaith dialogue. Shortly after the award start date, on August 28, 2017, Logan Ebel was hired as the Community Empowerment Program Manager to coordinate the DHS grant. As part of Logan's review of the grant proposal, he determined that the focus for the project needed adjustment. Under Logan's direction, NICE changed the scope of the award to a much broader, more interactive set of community-based activities such as summer camps, a youth curriculum, and story exchanges.

PEACE Project Focus Areas

YEA! Curriculum (NICE) – Curriculum previously developed but refined under the PEACE grant to address social and emotional vulnerabilities among New American youth.

Cultural Exchange (Narrative 4) – A method of increasing empathy by sharing stories.

Community Outreach (NICE, Peace Ambassadors) – Addressing needs in the New American community.

They used what they referred to as "leadership dialogues" to assess the needs of New Americans and respond to them accordingly.

With the support of the grant award, NICE and PA led a multifaceted community outreach approach. The PEACE project focused on empowering youth and adults through a range of community engagement activities meant to enhance unity and solidarity. PEACE relied on what they describe as a "relationship rich model" designed to address communities experiencing trauma as well as language and cultural barriers. More specifically, the PEACE project focused on community leadership and dialogue, resource development, and youth engagement.

Resistance to the CVE Grant Award

Like many communities across the United States, segments of Nashville were concerned about receiving a grant award from the DHS as part of the CVE program. The concerns stemmed from the perception that CVE is essentially a Muslim-focused program that involves surveillance and leads to further stigmatization of the Muslim community by branding individuals (youth in particular) as "at risk" for terrorism.

To address some of these concerns, NICE held public and private meetings that provided opportunities for community members to express these concerns and for NICE to emphasize their programmatic focus on building community resilience by addressing various social and

emotional needs among New Americans. Despite their efforts, NICE did encounter groups that would not work with them on this grant for political reasons.

Program Activities Completed During the PEACE Project

To address these issues, the PEACE project initiated collaborative relationships with a variety of local community organizations including the Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) and the Boys & Girls Club. At the core of this effort is a youth-based curriculum developed by NICE, Youth Empowerment to Achieve! (YEA!). The curriculum includes a wide variety of emphases such as healthy lifestyles, communication skills, emotional

maturity, and various other issues. The purpose of this program is to promote English language learning and other academic skills. The program seeks to provide a safe space for immigrant and refugee youth to develop and refine positive and pro-social skills consistent with a range of healthy outcomes. PEACE emphasizes that their approach is not focused on identifying at-risk youth susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism. Instead, the program is meant to be a more general approach to proactively reducing trauma and building resilience among New Americans.

The section below highlights the extensive types of activities the PEACE project initiated as part of their grant award.

Activities Supported by the PEACE Project

More details on these activities can be found in the Performance and Outcome Indicators section.



**Leadership
Dialogues**



**Sewing
Classes**



**Driving
Classes**



Mentoring



**NICE
Camp**



**Peace
Ambassadors
Camp**



**YEA! Curriculum Revision
and Implementation**

Middle School
High School
Boys & Girls Club
Summer Camp

N4

**Narrative 4
Sessions**



**OneVoice
Nashville**



**New American
Resource Guide
Translation**

Key Partners Connecting with the Community

Peace Ambassadors, USA – Community-based Islamic outreach center that provides a variety of family, educational, and other services to help integrate New Americans into the larger society. Peace Ambassadors, USA collaborated with NICE on the original proposal and received 40% of grant funds.

Narrative 4 – An organization that uses story exchanges to increase empathy and improve communities. They were brought into the PEACE project after the grant was awarded and entered into a contract with NICE for their services.

The PEACE project reflected a collaborative effort between NICE and PA, with grant funds relatively evenly allocated between the two organizations (60% NICE/40% PA). In addition, the PEACE project also involved a key partnership with Narrative 4, a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to build empathy, disrupt stereotypes, and reduce various types of sociocultural barriers. PEACE incorporated Narrative 4 by arranging a memorandum of understanding and executing a subcontract that involved Narrative 4's organization of "story exchanges." This is a term Narrative 4 uses to refer to sessions in which groups of individuals learn to listen to another person's life story one on one and then recount their partner's story orally to the larger group.

Other Partners Opening Doors to the YEA! Curriculum

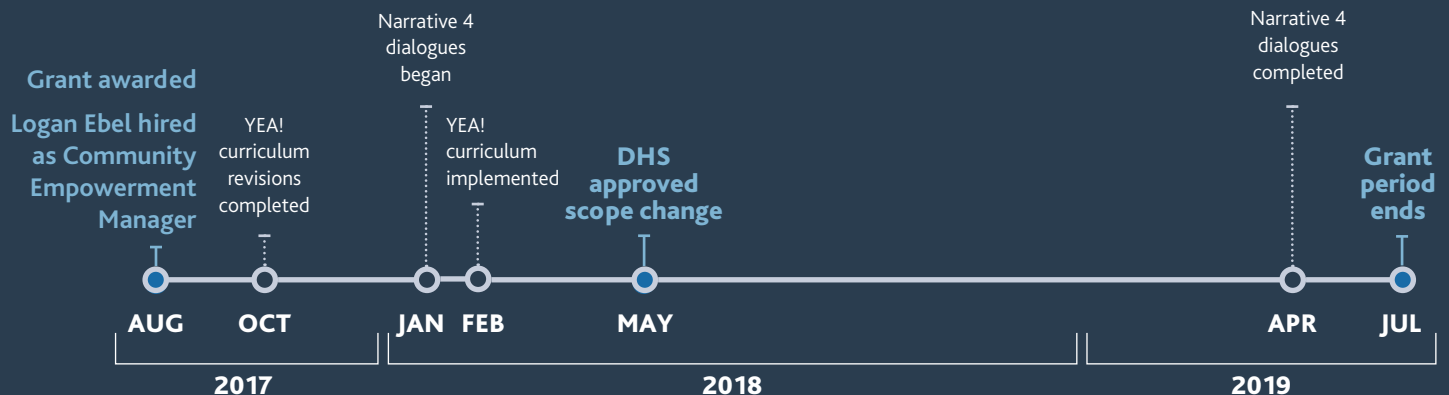
The PEACE project also included partnerships with the Boys & Girls Club and the MNPS. Both of these organizations provided spaces and opportunities for NICE to implement

the YEA! curriculum. The YEA! curriculum was implemented in three different Boys & Girls Clubs located in the Nashville metro area. In terms of public schools, NICE collaborated with two metro schools in Nashville to implement the YEA! curriculum. In the first instance, a local high school used their Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) program to host the NICE intervention. The SIFE program was designed for New American students to help them transition into public education, with an emphasis on overcoming language barriers. This particular high school is considered one of the most diverse schools in Nashville, with 30 different languages spoken among students. The second school involved in the grant program included a middle school where the YEA! curriculum was presented to a broader selection of students as part of an after-school program.

Building Empathy Through Story Exchange

During a site visit, two members of the evaluation team were able to observe and participate in a story exchange. Participants were a fair mix of Americans and New Americans. One of the participants of the group was a survivor of the genocide in Rwanda and shared that experience for the first time. No one had ever asked them their story before. Another participant shared their child's experiences as an immigrant in an American culture with xenophobia. These stories underscored the pain and frustration that result from this type of rejection and hostility. Group participants of all backgrounds responded tearfully to these stories and shared their emotional responses at the end of the session. While it is difficult to assess the short- or long-term effects of this type of intervention, both team members agreed that the experience was "eye-opening" and emotionally "intense."

Timeline



Performance and Outcome Indicators

As part of the evaluation, performance and outcome indicators were reviewed using quarterly Project Implementation & Evaluation Plan (PIEP) data. In their proposal, NICE lays out a plan to use the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Quality Standards to evaluate

their CVE program effects, as well as the Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) to assess the quality of youth programs. Though there were many quantitative outputs surrounding program participation, no DAC or PQA data were available.

Accomplishments Visualized Through PIEP
Output Data

The PEACE project provided expected outcomes in their proposal once the final focus areas were determined. This section lists their outcomes, outcome indicators, and the quantitative outputs provided as measures.

Legend

GOAL

ACTUAL

*Participation number does not represent unique participation

Youth Engagement Activities Outputs

The PEACE project’s goal was to conduct 12 YEA! sessions with 240 participants total over 2 years. They ended up exceeding those goals with 21 total YEA! sessions and 1,084 non-unique participants.

YEA! Sessions



YEA! Participants*



Cultural Exchange

The PEACE project’s goal was to conduct 12 cultural exchange activities with 120 participants total over 2 years. They completed a total of 10 cultural exchange activities with 94 non-unique participants.

Cultural Exchange Sessions



Cultural Exchange Participants*



Leadership Dialogues

As part of the PEACE project, community dialogues were conducted between organizational and community leaders. Their goal was to have 12 leadership dialogues with 90 participants total over 2 years. They completed a total of 31 community dialogues with 529 non-unique participants.

Leadership Dialogues



Leadership Dialogue Participants*



Because of its format for tracking attendance, NICE recognizes it is unable to distinguish unique participants or visits/involvement among participants. An example to help understand these data is that if 20 students are enrolled in a YEA! session that is 6 weeks long and everyone attended every session, that would count as 120 attendees, even though it was the same 20 students attending all 6 weeks of a single program. An asterisk (*) is used to denote these instances when participation numbers do not represent unique participation.

Outcome 1: New American youth feel safe and secure.

Short-term outcomes

Youth Empowered to Achieve (YEA!) – Increased sense of self-worth and empathy

Youth Mentorship¹ – Mentees felt heard by their mentors.

Outcome indicators

75% of mentees will report an increase in self-worth and connectedness with other youth and community members.

Results

Those who responded to surveys showed an increase in self-worth.²

¹Mentoring data and tables will be provided in the final report. NICE is providing corrected Mentoring Program data in Q8, as previously reported data are inaccurate.

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

Outcome 2: New Americans feel an increased sense of belonging and integration in their communities.

Short-term outcomes

Cultural Exchange Activities – Increased respect and understanding for people of different faiths and cultures and religions

Leadership Dialogues – Increased understanding of community needs, organizations, and access to available resources

Outcome indicators

70% of participants will show increased respect for their community.

Results

100% who responded agreed in Q6.³

Leadership Dialogues will create new cultural events, program development, and collaborations.

As a result of dialogues, a new driving school program and an additional swimming program were created.

³This was all the information provided on this outcome indicator. See Recommendation 1.

Accomplishments Visualized Through PIEP Output Data (continued)

Legend

GOAL

ACTUAL

*Participation number does not represent unique participation

Expand Referral Services/Printed Materials and Update New American Resource Guide

During the course of the grant, the New American Resource Guide was completed in English, printed and posted online, and translated into Spanish. Almost 40 flyers were created or translated as a result of the PEACE grant efforts. Translations were made to Spanish, Arabic, and Kurdish. The PEACE project's anticipated quantitative outputs for this goal were 20,000 printed and 5,000 digital touches over the 2-year grant period.

Printed Impacts



Digital Impacts⁶



⁶The PIEP said electronic touches would be counted in Q5, but there was no report of these. We will look again when we receive Q8 data.

Connect Organizations/Community Members for Interpretation Services

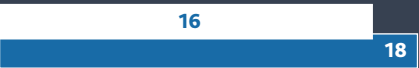
The anticipated outcome was to develop a process for connecting people and organizations with translation services. Though no quantitative goal was established, it appears to have been successful as, over the life of the grant, at least 250 connections were made for translation services.



Community Outreach

In an effort to expand knowledge, programs, and resources, the PEACE project anticipated hosting 16 cultural events during the 2-year grant period. In total, they reported hosting 18 events, including things such as sewing, driving, and yoga classes.

Cultural Events



Outcome 3: Increased awareness of and access to resources and programs offered by organizations and institutions among New American populations.

Short-term outcomes

Expand Referral Services/Printed Materials and Update New American Resource Guide – Network of referral services to include organizations in Middle Tennessee. Increase awareness of and access to service among New Americans.

Connect Organizations/Community Members for Interpretation Services – Increase availability of interpreters to access services.

Community Outreach – Community members will learn new skills that have been identified by community members and leaders. They will also be connected with existing resources from resource expansion.

Outcome indicators

Number of New Americans using local resources and accessing translation services, and number of organizations requesting translation services.

Results

They saw an increase in community groups seeking help with translation services⁴ and identified a new partner who helped host a large cultural fair with 10 organizations and over 450 community members.

⁴This was all the information provided on this outcome indicator. See Recommendation 1.

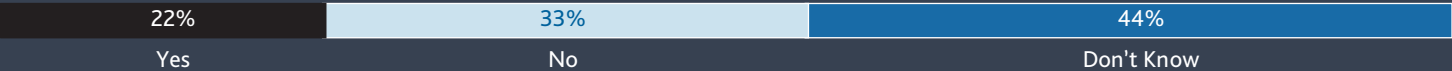
Results from Partner Surveys About the PEACE Project

To help supplement the monthly calls and site visits, the evaluation team also conducted a comprehensive survey. 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 people from Nashville completed the partner survey. For identification purposes, the PEACE project was referred to as the Community Empowerment Program. The tables below highlight selected survey items.

Perception of Community Experiences with Violent Extremism

In terms of history of violent extremism incidents, respondents named the shooting at the Burnette Chapel Church of Christ in Antioch and the Waffle House shooting as examples of violent extremism in Nashville. In the case of the Burnette Chapel Church of Christ shooting, the gunman was reported as having ties to the New Black Panther Party and Nation of Islam and shared an intent to “kill white people.” The Waffle House shooting was perpetrated by someone who allegedly identified as a sovereign citizen and the incident is believed to have occurred as an anti-government protest. Nearly half of respondents responded, “Don’t Know,” likely reflecting the larger confusion about how to define “violent extremism.”

In the last ten years, has your community experienced an incident of violent extremism?

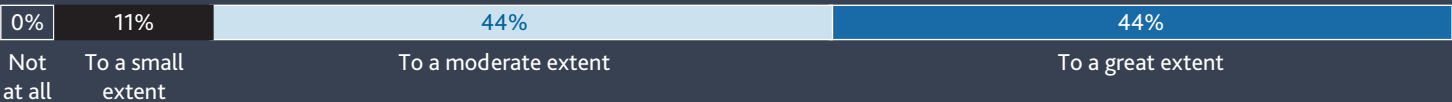


Whether Partners Felt Valued and Utilized by NICE

The responses to the survey item about whether partners' contributions were valued and utilized reflected a generally high level of satisfaction. Within the grant program team, the majority felt their contributions were valued and utilized to either a moderate or great extent. We believe these sentiments reflect the partners' general feelings toward NICE, not specifically to the DHS CVE grant. During site visits, almost all partners expressed positive sentiments about their work with NICE and particularly the Community Empowerment Program, even if they were unaware of the grant.

“NICE is an excellent organization with which to work.”
– A survey respondent

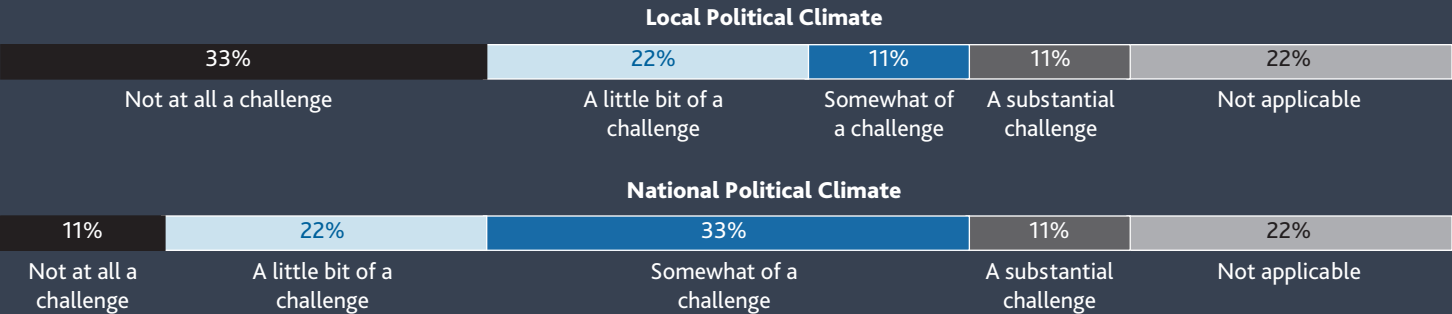
Throughout the grant period, how much do you feel that your contributions to the Community Empowerment program were valued and utilized by NICE?



Local and National Political Climate and How It May Affect CVE-related Work

Last, two survey items were selected that measured perceived challenges related to local and national political climate. The results were mixed for both items, but, overall, respondents perceived more political challenges at the national level than at the local level. This result may reflect growing polarization at the national level. It is notable that one-third of respondents did not see the local political climate as a challenge.

Please indicate how much of a challenge the political climate has been to the successful implementation of the Community Empowerment program in your jurisdiction?



Recommendations

In this section we rely on information the evaluation team collected during monthly calls, site visits, review of PIEP data, 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. Most of NICE's data tracking appears primarily to involve tabulating the number of attendees at events or the number who have completed specific programs (e.g., YEA!).

Several outcome goals involved increasing attitudinal qualities such as "respect." To gauge whether a person's level of respect for something had changed, NICE would need to collect measures of respect at multiple points in time, both preceding the initiation of the program and at the end of the program.

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

The use of CVE terminology resulted in political opposition among both prospective project supporters and the general public. As such, NICE explicitly avoided any reference to "Countering Violent Extremism" for two primary reasons: (1) to overcome concerns in the Nashville community that CVE is really a surveillance program designed to monitor specific individuals and (2) to place greater emphasis on the importance of "early prevention" efforts. The same grant under another name may attract less controversial attention.

Developed for:
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**Homeland
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