Coming Together and Ripple Mapping Effect: Are We Making a Difference?

Mary Emery, University of Nebraska
Grace Langford, Southern Rural Development Center
Anuradha Choudhary, University of Nebraska
Mike Stout, Oklahoma State University
Marcia Ostrom, Washington State University
Eric Walcott, Michigan State University

Introduction
Many institutions of higher education have initiatied efforts to address the need for racial understanding, often with little success. In 2018, the Extension Directors launched a system-wide initiative to address the challenges confronting the Land-Grant University System (LGU) as it struggled with the need for racial understanding both within the Extension System and within the communities Extension serves. Designed as a dialog-to-change process, *Coming Together for Racial Understanding* was designed to make a difference in our systems and our communities. Five years later, using Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) we have evidence that this process can make a difference in building understanding that leads to change in actions, practices, and policies.

Context
In 2016, Extension Directors recognized the need to help communities engage in meaningful conversations around race. The Extension Committee on Operations and Policy (ECOP) identified a small group of Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and non-LGU experts, the Rapid Response Team, to evaluate CES's present capacity to respond to the need for dialog to promote racial understanding and healing. (Welborn, R., 2017). Following the April 2017 report to ECOP, a group of 23 experts both from within and without the LGU system created a training program called *Coming Together for Racial Understanding* to get Extension teams ready to train others in their respective states to facilitate dialogues.

Summary Focus and Findings

Coming Together for Racial Understanding is a dialog-to-change process for communities seeking new pathways for working together across racial/ethnic lines that seeks to foster understanding and build trust to take informed collective action for meaningful change, unlike required DEI training alone which seldom seeks to develop trusting relationships among participants. Using a Ripple Effect Mapping process to inform a follow-up survey, we found evidence that the dialog-to-change process does create positive change in shifting individual mental models informing personal and interpersonal relationships. We also found evidence of emergent changes in institutional practices and culture.

Shortly after, a research work group was convened to help provide formative feedback on how well the training and support for trainers was working and to determine how well the dialogue process had worked in creating change within the LGU systems. To that end, the group developed a survey which was administered in 2019 to the first cohort which helped us learn how people were using the training, what was working for them, and what challenges were impeding their work.

About Coming Together

Coming Together for Racial Understanding (*Coming Together*, for short) was developed using a theory of change derived from the dialog-to-change work at Everyday Democracy. Adapting this theory of change, *Coming Together* seeks to address racial inequities and structural racism, not through mandated training and official policy shifts, but rather by changing individuals' understanding of how race functions in their world. Thus, the goal was to move the LGU system toward a more equitable context for our work capable of dismantling the elements of structural racism that often persist in the institutional or community environment. A foundational assumption underlying this model is that changing mental models will result in changes in everyday practices which will lead to supporting change toward equity and challenging practices that support inequities.

Our Goal

We wanted to know more than just, were people following up to do the work! We wanted to know if the work of the teams was actually making a difference in their institutions. If so, what did that look like? We needed to know how those doing the on-the-ground work might answer these questions before we could add questions about impact to our existing survey. To learn more about whether *Coming Together* was making a difference on the ground in our institutions, we developed a process for implementing Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) (Chazdon, et al 2017). We implemented REM virtually using Google Jamboards, which was a new way of applying the REM practice that normally is conducted face-to-face. Our goal in conducting the mapping sessions focused on better understanding how the work initiated by state team members was impacting attitudes and actions around issues related to race within the LGU Extension System. Did changes in attitudes and actions lead to changes in practice and policy? What possible trajectories for changing our institutions to become more inclusive were emerging?

Our Process

We chose REM for three reasons. First, several members of the team had experience using it as an evaluation technique in other projects. Second, REM is a process that is as useful to participants as it is to evaluators by helping them reflect and learn from their experiences, and third, we thought we could adapt it to a virtual context without losing robustness. We anticipated learning more about how the training led to people thinking

differently about race, and how thinking differently resulted in changes in their actions and attitudes. We wanted to know more about those actions and attitudes and how any changes they made may have led to other changes in programming, their interactions with others, their institutions, and their communities.

To address our evaluation question, what impact or potential impact has *Coming Together* had on participants and on the LGU and individuals who work within those institutions, we wanted to first explore the individual experiences of the training team members as they returned to their states and began the work. To do so, we chose to use the web mapping for impact version of REM (Chazdon, et al 2017). This method seeks to map how the first ripple of individual change leads to wider ripples of changes in interactions and activities and from those ripples to the widest ripple indicating potential for change in policy, structure, and accepted practice. We structured the mapping process using the four levels of oppression: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. This framework allowed us to situate the mapping process in the context of everyday life in the LGUs. We used what we learned from the mapping process to populate a follow-up survey to those who received training in 2018 and 2019.

Rippling in the Virtual World

To adapt REM to a virtual environment, we changed the process from the facilitator doing the mapping to participants brainstorming ideas and adding them to the Google Jamboard for each of the four levels of oppression and the three ripples mapping process. We offered two opportunities for people to participate with six attending the first session and 14 the second for a total 20 REM participants. For the first ripple, we asked participants to first identify things they had done or were doing and thinking about differently regarding personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural change. Using a different color virtual sticky note, participants were then asked to add the second ripple to the Jamboard by identifying changes they saw because of what they were doing and thinking differently (first ripple).

A third color distinguishing the third ripple, explored overarching changes that had occurred because of what was documented in the first two ripples. For each ripple, as the ideas were added, facilitators followed with prompting questions to clarify what was recorded, and then asked for reflection on the Jamboard contents and any additions. Facilitators also provided an opportunity for a short discussion on the Jamboard results.

When the research team convened with the additional facilitators to follow-up on the REM session and identify next steps, we shared a common observation of the process.

The types of things posted on the Jamboard tended to differ for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) participants in contrast with white participants. We thus decided that BIPOC national training team members would lead a follow-up session with BIPOC state team members to capture more learning about how the process was unfolding differently for them and to identify changes we could make to address those differences.

What Did We Learn from this Mapping?

Many of the Jamboard comments were focused on personal and interpersonal change, which reflects the theory of change underlying the dialog-for-change approach. Through dialog in a trusted environment, we anticipated that the insights from the dialog would influence participants' thinking about race and thus lead to changes in behavior. We see evidence of change in behavior in the comments focused on interpersonal interactions as changes in thinking led to changes in actual behaviors and willingness to speak up. We also saw that those changes were impacting both the institutional and cultural spheres where *Coming Together* teams were actively working in their respective states. Through all of this, we found insights on how Coming Together made a difference on:

1. Personal actions and thinking
2. Interpersonal actions and connections
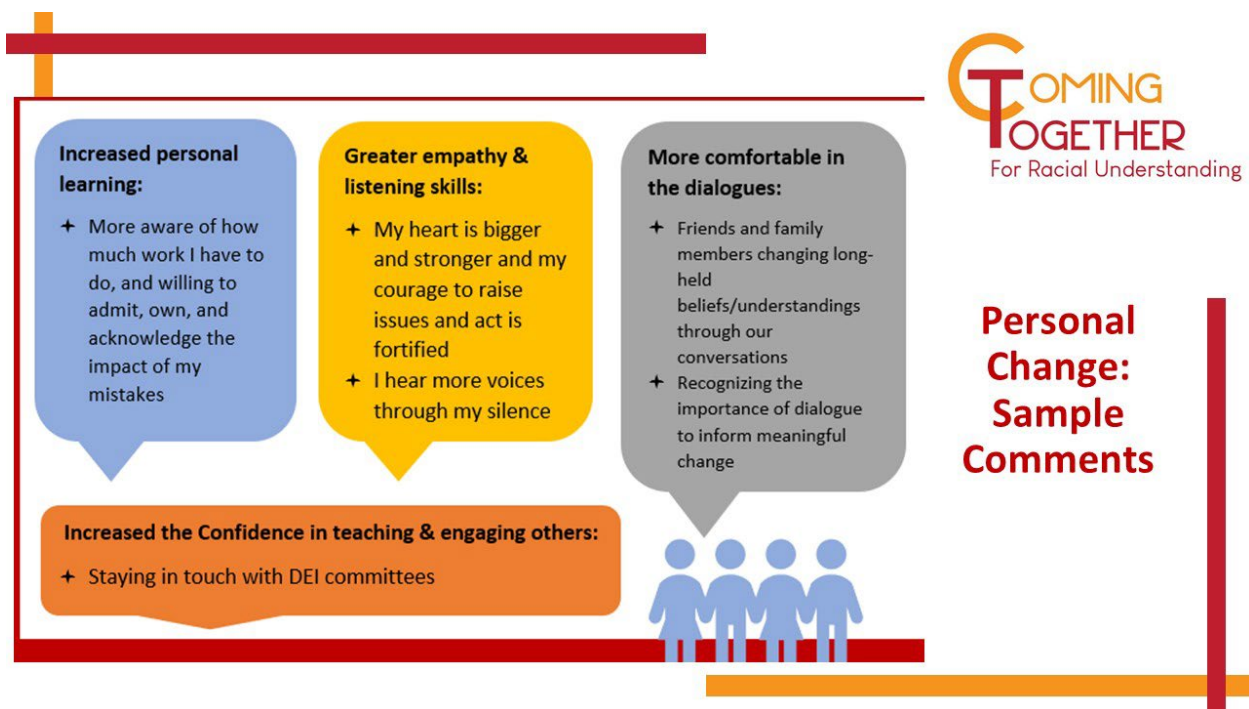3. Emergent institutional and cultural changes

Figure 1 Ripple 2: Personal Change Sample Comments

In Figure 1, we see examples of changes in participant's thinking about race as well as the changes in actions that reflect thinking differently about race.

Figure 2 provides examples of changes in how people were interacting with others.
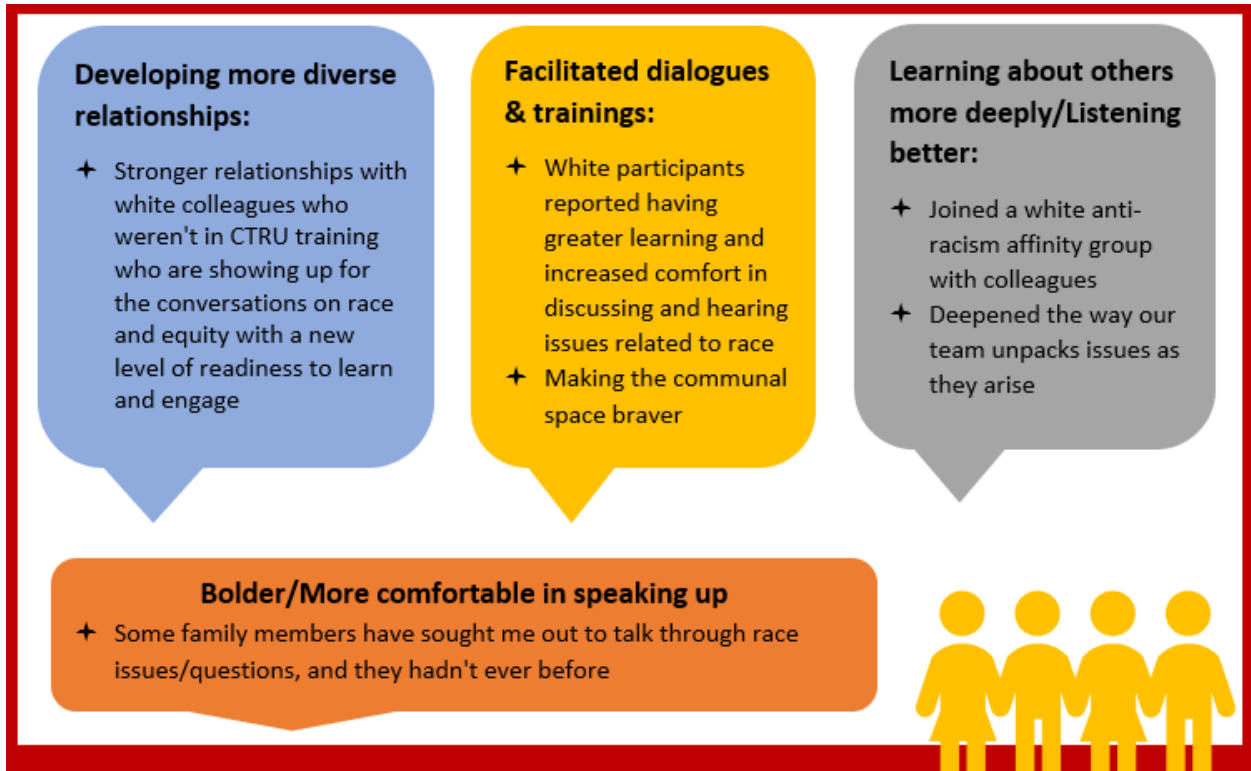
Developing more diverse relationships:
+ Stronger relationships with white colleagues who weren't in CTRU training who are showing up for the conversations on race and equity with a new level of readiness to learn and engage

Facilitated dialogues & trainings:
+ White participants reported having greater learning and increased comfort in discussing and hearing issues related to race
+ Making the communal space braver

Learning about others more deeply/Listening better:
+ Joined a white anti-racism affinity group with colleagues
+ Deepened the way our team unpacks issues as they arise

Bolder/More comfortable in speaking up
+ Some family members have sought me out to talk through race issues/questions, and they hadn't ever before

Figure 2: Ripple 2 Interpersonal Change Sample Comments

Teaching/facilitating dialogues:
+ Growing capacity to talk about race
+ Greater demand for training with more Extension interest
+ Extension leadership is paying attention to CTRU and promised to financially support it

Working in new positions or committees of influence:
+ CTRU made anti-racism more visible in my department and snowballed in various realms (curriculum, hiring, student recruitment, etc.)

Examining policies & practices with my realm of influence:
+ DEI lens applied to Extension awards
+ Changes made to hiring systems (recruitment, training for committees, rethinking requirements)

Including more voices in decision making:
+ Raising attention to policy as we do our own work is leading to changing policy

COMING TOGETHER For Racial Understanding

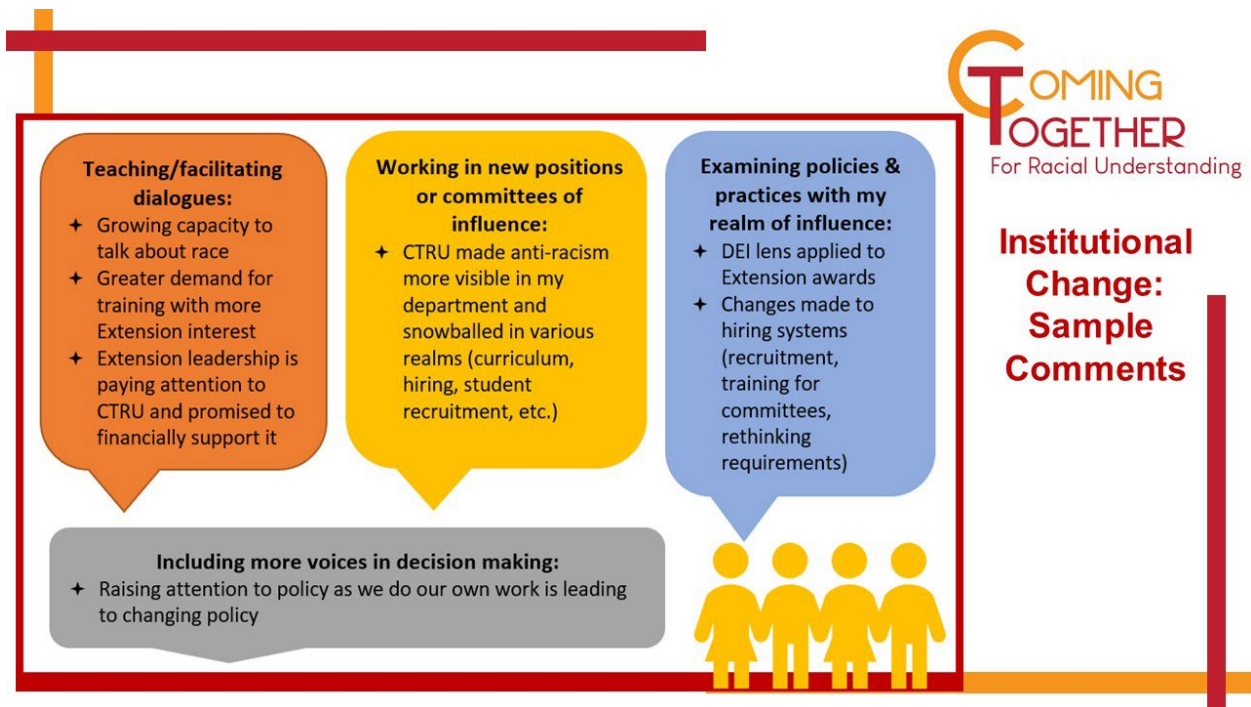**Institutional Change: Sample Comments**

Figure 3: Ripple 3 Institutional Change Sample Comments

In Figure 3, we see evidence of changes in institutional practices. Finally, Figure 4 offers examples how work culture is changing as result of changing participant's different thinking about how race functions at work and in their communities.
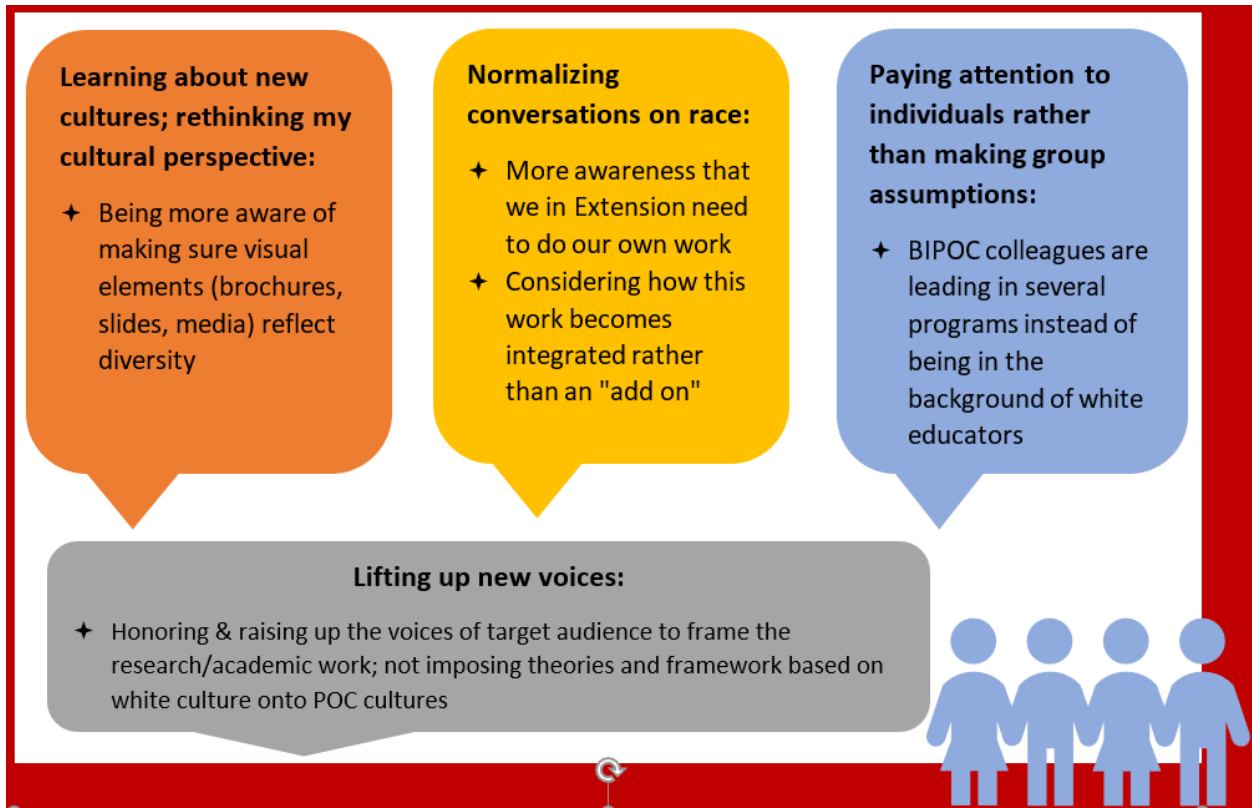

Figure 4: Ripple 4 Cultural Change Sample Comments

As the results indicate, our evidence demonstrates that *Coming Together* has made a difference in the personal and interpersonal lives of those participating, and we can see evidence of emergent institutional change. As shown in Figure 5, the mapping process demonstrates how changes in a person's mental model influences how they think and act, which leads to change within their formal and informal networks which then lead to systems and structural change.
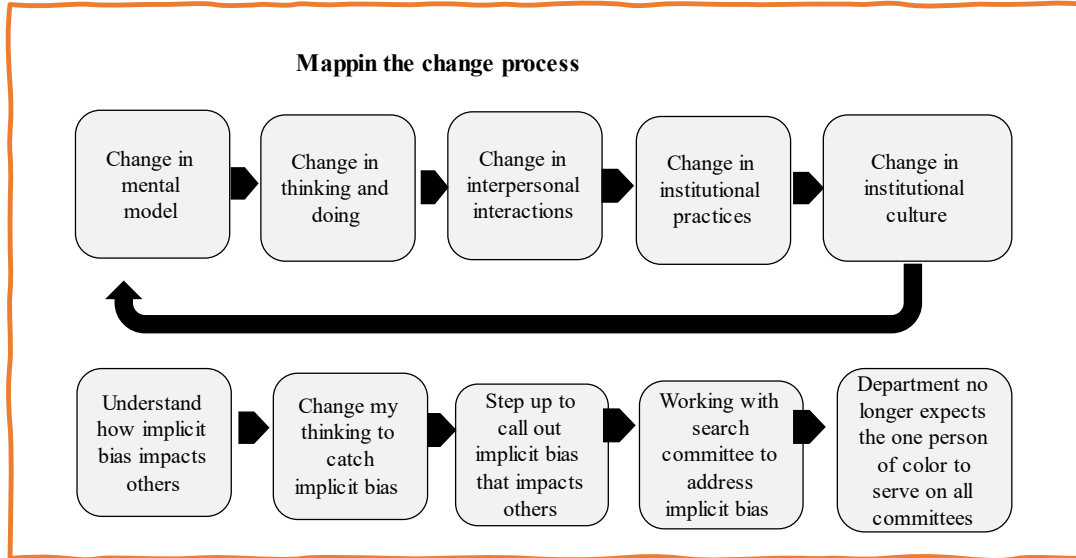
Mappin the change process

Change in mental model	→ Change in thinking and doing	→ Change in interpersonal interactions	→ Change in institutional practices	→ Change in institutional culture

Understand how implicit bias impacts others	→ Change my thinking to catch implicit bias	→ Step up to call out implicit bias that impacts others	→ Working with search committee to address implicit bias	→ Department no longer expects the one person of color to serve on all committees

Figure 5: Mapping the Impact of Mental Model Change

Our theory of change focuses on the importance of changing mental models which calls to mind the iceberg metaphor for system change. Within the field of work focused on equity, inclusivity, diversity, and justice in higher education, we see a need to identify true wins. Often new policies and programs don't actually make a difference in how the institution works on an everyday basis. We see this project as an opportunity to dig below the surface indicators of inequities and lack of inclusion, past the patterns and trends that give rise to those surface indicators, down to the mental models that drive how we understand trends and create or maintain patterns that reinforce or confront and change the patterns that lead to the surface level inequities and injustices. The REM and survey results provide insight into how the training to create opportunities to build trust and engage in dialog with those around us about tough issues can lead to changes in how we understand and deal with these concerns to create new patterns of behavior that address the surface inequities and injustices.
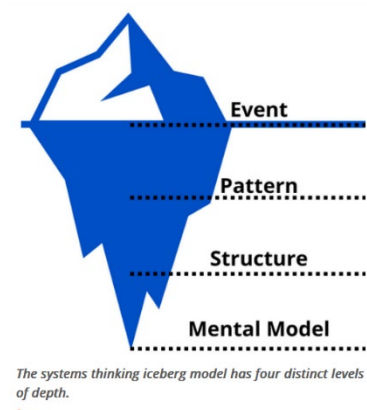
The systems thinking iceberg model has four distinct levels of depth.

Figure 2: Iceberg Model for Systems Thinking Overview Analysis (Study.com undated.)

Did Using REM Make a Difference in How We Understand this Work?

The follow-up survey data helped us identify the extent of the changes identified in the mapping process across our participating states. As mentioned earlier, the analysis led to refinements in the training, adding support activities, providing training for

administrators, and reporting on short and mid-term outcomes and potential impacts as we expanded the initiative. Data from the survey also allowed us to better understand where state team members encountered barriers to change.

Our virtual adaptation of REM lost us some of the advantages of being in real time and mapping together, as the interaction usually involved in the process of mapping together often encourages insights and suggestions that would not show up otherwise. In addition, people could be checking email or talking on the phone rather than being fully engaged, and we could not know that. However, judging from the active efforts of participants (adding notes and comments), it appears this was less of an impact than other less engaging virtual processes might experience. Also, the virtual session did allow us to engage in mapping across geographies and time zones and thus expand participation across institutions and projects, and the comments from people working in one place often provided insights to those in other geographies. The depth and breadth of the data collected was not dissimilar to that collected in real-time environments. The data collected resulted in both summative and formative analyses leading to project improvement as well as to an understanding of outcomes and potential impacts.

What's Next

Going forward, we intend to repeat the survey, so we will be able to compare results across time and determine if and how those small changes are starting to influence institutional policy and practice. We will also engage new cohorts to enable us to see differences as the training teams mature. As with most projects, we have also had some turnover, so we hope the new data will allow us to explore the impact of those changes and to better understand the role of administrative support in leading to positive changes at all four levels of change.

As with all studies, our results are limited by the ever-fluctuating changes in teams, as our turnover rate was also impacted by COVID as well as the small number of respondents limiting the types of analysis we could perform. Finally, because of the timeframe, our data on institutional and cultural change are limited.

Acknowledgements

References

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