



## **VOICE Grant Final Report – June 2021**

For: UC National Center for Free Speech  
and Civic Engagement

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Poverty, Inequality, and Democracy



## 1) Were your project's objectives met?

The main objective of our VOICE grant was to support the expansion of our podcast, *Power to the People*, beyond a few pilot episodes to a complete first series. In so doing, we hoped to create a solid foundation upon which to build future series. Through our podcast, students who work at the Blum Center interview leading thinkers, activists, and organizers about pressing questions shaping the lives of youth today, strategies for mobilizing their engagement, and avenues for democratic action. The podcast aims to create a more informed and engaged campus community by providing accessible, inclusive, and in-depth information on issues of poverty and inequality, as well as highlighting the voices of college students to spotlight their potential to challenge inequality and take action as powerful agents of change.

Thanks to the financial support of this grant, as well as the networks gained through the VOICE cohort, we were able to achieve our main objective. In May we formally launched the podcast, and its 5-episode first series. These episodes focused on the power and potential of this generation of young people, which issues they care about, who they see as effective agents of change, how their defining characteristics compare historically to other generations of youth, as well as the critical ways in which identity shapes youth experiences and activism. The financial support from the VOICE grant was critical in helping us cover the costs of our podcast consultant: who guided us through the development of the first series; helped flesh out our podcast mission, audience, and goals; provided critical feedback on our script writing; and developed a podcast training resource that we can refer to as needed. With this key guidance and feedback in our first series, we now have the tools and skills to develop future podcast series.

## 2) Who attended, listened, participated, etc. and how many?

All five of our Blum Student assistants last year (**Warsan Ali**, **Lizzy Mau**, **Yara Khamis**, **Simone Stewart**, and **Cloe Gentile**) were involved in either research, writing, and/or recording our first podcast series. One of our new students at the Blum Center this year (**Brenna McDuffee**) was also brought into the podcast learning process by playing a critical role in planning and helping moderate our podcast launch session, and liaising with our podcast panelists for the event. I was also assisting throughout the podcast process, e.g. providing feedback on podcast topics, guests, and editing scripts.

Our featured guests also had a critical role in our podcast process. By sharing their insights and expertise, our podcast team was able to examine the key questions framing each episode. Our podcast guests included: **Sarah Jacquette Ray** (Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, Humboldt State University); **Alice O'Connor** (Professor of History, UCSB); **Cassie Barnhardt** (Associate Professor of Education, University of Iowa); **Yulia Gilichinskaya** (a founding organizer of the wildcat strike at UCSC); **Julia Jordan-Zachery** (Chair of the Africana studies Department, UNC-Charlotte); and **Makeen Zachery** (founder of the digital platform, *Blk Girl Culture*).

We also had over 20 participants at our podcast launch, and all our podcast episodes are now posted to [our website](#) for the public to access. We also plan to purchase a subscription to larger streaming sites to host our podcast, e.g. Spotify, Stitcher, etc. to expand our reach and broaden our audience base.



### **3) What demographics did attendees/participants represent (students, staff etc.)?**

We had both UCSB undergraduate and graduate students involved in our podcast, either during the research, interviewing, script writing, recording, and or launch planning process. We also featured an undergraduate student from Barnard College (Makeen Zachery) and a graduate student from UCSC (Yulia Gilichinskaya) as podcast guests. We also had four faculty members from UCSB and three other Universities (e.g. Humboldt State University, University of Iowa, and UNC-Charlotte) as podcast guests. I was also a member of the podcast team, and participated throughout the planning and production process (representing Blum Center staff on this project). Our attendees of the launch event included undergraduate students, community members, and faculty.

### **4) What was challenging about completing your project?**

We had originally planned to launch the first few episodes of the podcast by late Spring/Summer 2020. However, the sudden closure of campus (and the return of most of our Blum Center student team to their homes outside Santa Barbara) in March 2020 made it impossible to access the campus audio recording equipment and space to complete the episodes in the original timeframe. However, over the last year we adapted to our new virtual reality by recording Zoom interviews with our podcast guests, and purchasing equipment to facilitate recording episodes from the students' homes. This additional time also facilitated the expansion of our first series to five episodes, which allowed our team to explore our focal topics related to the power and potential of youth in more detail. While having our student team in a shared recording studio, as opposed to recording via Zoom from their separate homes, would likely have facilitated the flow of the podcast recordings, the students pushed through the process and still created a warm and inclusive conversation in each podcast episode.

### **5) What impact do you think your work had on the campus community?**

The podcast has been an incredibly important professional development opportunity for our student team through which they have gained/strengthened their skills in research, writing, editing, public speaking, and interviewing. It has also been an avenue through which they strengthened their confidence, as they were provided a platform to share their voices as young leaders and activists with important experiences and perspectives to share on issues related to poverty, inequality, social justice, and democracy. As an example, one of the co-hosts (Cloe Gentile) explained that:

*“Being a lead/host on this podcast allowed me to use my voice in a new way. I consider myself to be a singer, teacher, activist, and writer, and I feel the podcast gave me a platform to combine all these facets of myself in one creative outlet. I got to speak to so many amazing scholars and activists, and being on a podcast team exclusively with other women of color was one of the favorite environments I've ever worked in. I think podcasts provide outlets of expression for many people of color, and can be a space for uncensored discussions about the things that we struggle with and enjoy. It is a really important tool in envisioning a multiracial democracy, in my mind.”*

We have profiles describing the experience of each of our student co-hosts during this podcast journey on our website [here](#). Once we are back in-person on campus, we look forward to collaborating with other members of our campus community, e.g. KCSB - the campus radio station and other student-led podcasts (Envirosations), on podcast projects in order to strengthen the ecosystem of platforms centering youth voices on today's key issues. We will also be in touch with local newspapers on and off campus to promote the podcast now that the first series is publicly accessible on our website, and will soon be hosted on mainstream streaming sites.



**6) How might the Center change the process moving forward to further support VOICE Initiative awardees' efforts?**

I have thoroughly enjoyed my experience with the VOICE Initiative, from start to finish. First, the application process was not overly restrictive, cumbersome or time consuming, which made it feasible despite busy schedules. Also, the openness of the applicant pool (allowing students, faculty, and/or staff to submit a proposal) was a welcome change from the majority of grants that require a faculty principal investigator. I very much appreciated the professional development opportunity to submit an application on my own to refine my grant writing and project management skills. One of our student podcast co-hosts, who was sponsored to attend the *Speech Matters* conference in February 2020, greatly appreciated this professional development opportunity to present our podcast to a professional audience and travel outside California. The fact that this program covered her travel/conference costs was another example of how equity and inclusion are factored into this initiative. In addition, the limited restrictions on budget categories permitted the freedom to build out all aspects of this project, e.g. audio engineering, consulting/advising, and marketing costs, in a single grant.

Second, the conference bringing together the VOICE grant recipients and fellows, alongside experts in related fields, was a wonderful networking opportunity to meet colleagues and peers engaged in similar civic initiatives. Notably, one of the featured guests in our third episode, *Cassie Barnhardt*, Associate Professor of Education at the University of Iowa, was a VOICE Fellow we met during the 2020 *Speech Matters* conference, who shared her expertise on campus-based mobilization and how students/universities engage civically. I have also appreciated the VOICE grantee meetings facilitated by Michelle and Brenda, through which we learned about other exciting projects, strengthened networks that were initiated in the February 2020 conference, and also received guidance and mentoring from Michelle and Brenda. My only suggestion (which I think is already underway) would be to pair up former and current VOICE members to have a more direct connection to a specific group/network that could facilitate deepening those connections and sharing best practices. I'm very excited to follow the evolution of the VOICE program as it grows and expands, it is a wonderful initiative!



## Appendix

### A – Snapshot from Podcast Recording Process (pre-pandemic)

One of our Blum student co-hosts, and a key contributor to the podcast, Ms. Warsan Ali.





## B – Snapshots from Podcast Webpage

University of California, Santa Barbara

**BLUM**CENTER  
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Podcasts

... POWER TO THE PEOPLE PODCAST ...



The Blum Center approaches poverty as a problem of democracy.

A key pillar of democracy is voice, and in particular, ensuring all voices are provided a platform to be heard.

On the *Power to the People* podcast, we explore the youth perspective at the forefront of today's conversations about poverty, inequality and democracy. We use this platform to make discussions of poverty and inequality relatable and inclusive to young people, highlighting marginalized perspectives that are often overlooked. As students, we hope this podcast serves as a resource for our peers who are interested in activism and ready to take the next step.

**DWR TO THE PEOPLE  
SERIES 1**

In our first series, we explored the power and potential of this generation of young people — what issues they care about related to poverty and inequality, what drives them to call for change, who they see as effective agents of change, and how their defining characteristics compare historically to other generations of youth years ago. After providing a general portrait of this generation, we examined the critical ways in which identity shapes youth experiences and activism today. Our hosts, all of whom are young women of color, hope to highlight youth change makers at home and abroad and contribute to a more inclusive democratic discourse. *Podcast episodes will be released in May 2021.*

... EPISODE OVERVIEW ...

**DWR TO THE PEOPLE SERIES 1, EPISODE 1  
WHAT MOVES YOUTH TODAY?**

We are witnessing one of the largest and most diverse generations in history come of age. A growing number, like Greta Thunberg, Isra Hirs, and Nadya Okamoto, are already emerging as leaders on the national and global stage. This episode investigates the specific issues young people care about, as well as what changes they think need to be made in society—from our global response to climate change to healthcare being a right everyone deserves. UCSB students tell us what moves them and how they think change is best made. In addition to showcasing

### C – Power to the People Podcast Logo

Please feel free to use this logo to represent the podcast on the VOICE webpage.

