DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION: ADULT INTERVIEWS

2020 Data Use Meeting
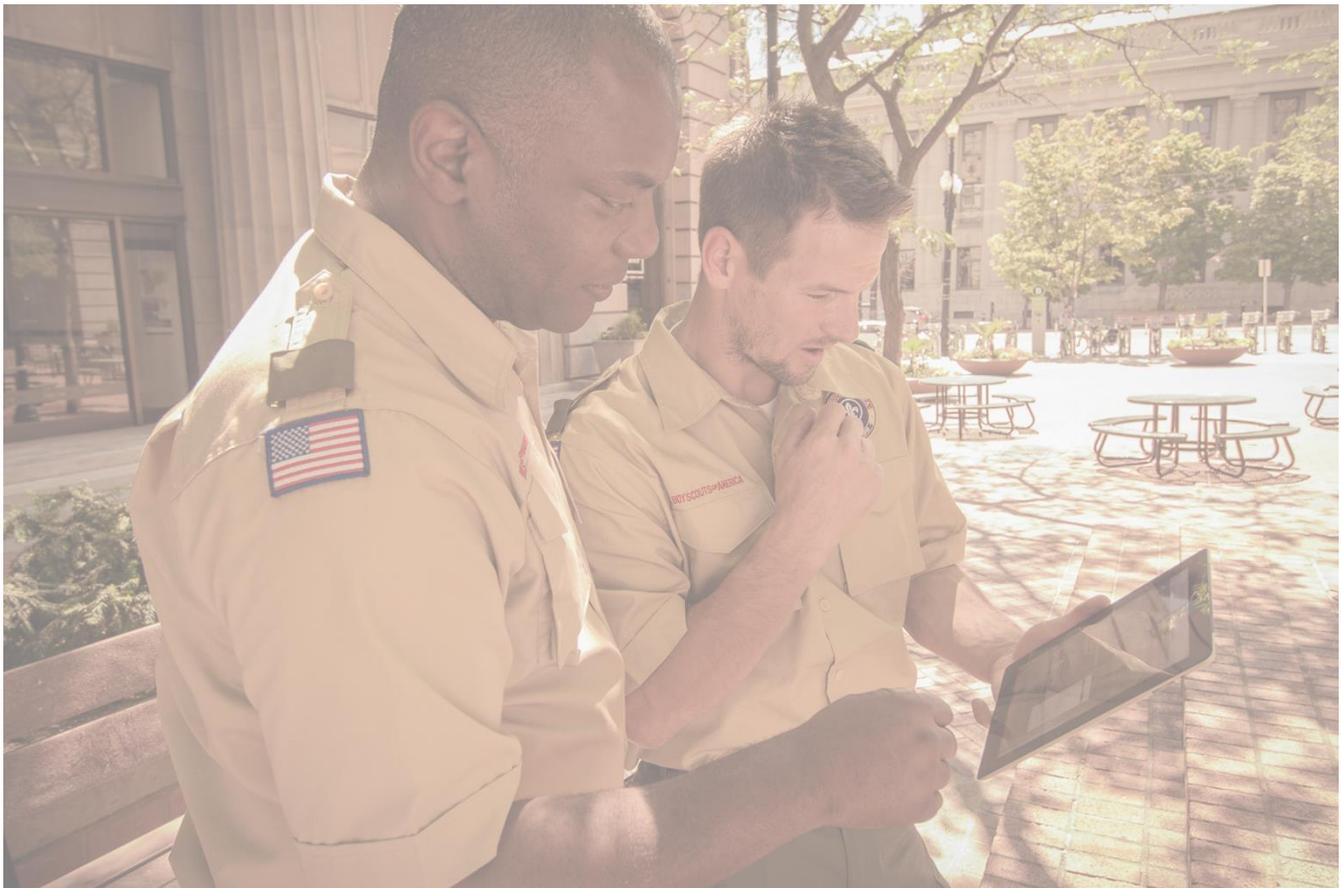
A Collaborative Initiative:

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY
Institute for Research on Youth Thriving and Evaluation

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SAMPLE

Out of the full survey sample, a sub-sample of 110 adult leaders from four regions of the country (Northeast, Central, Southern, and Western) were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews that asked about their experiences in Scouts BSA. Purposive sampling was used to maximize the heterogeneity of this qualitative sample. The sample included both male and female adult leaders, leaders serving both diverse and homogeneous troops, and leaders from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, leaders represented diverse religious and racial backgrounds and reported positive and negative experiences with Scouting. A total of 110 participants completed the Wave 1 interview, and 103 of these adult leaders also completed the Wave 2 interview.

Interviews were conducted by phone by trained interviewers, audio-recorded, and then transcribed. Transcriptions were double-checked for accuracy and corrected accordingly before being coded. Wave 1 interviews took place from March through June 2019, and Wave 2 interviews took place from September to December 2019, providing a follow-up period of about six months between interviews.

METHODS

Both Wave 1 and Wave 2 interviews include questions relating to diversity and inclusion in BSA. These include:

WAVE 1 INTERVIEWS

- ☐ Tell me about a time when an adult made you feel included in BSA.
- ☐ Tell me about a time when an adult made you feel excluded from BSA.
- ☐ How welcoming has your troop been to you?
- ☐ To what extent do you think there is racial and cultural diversity among the Scouts in your troop?
- ☐ How does the diversity in your troop compare to your community?
- ☐ To what extent do you think there is racial and cultural diversity among the adult leaders in your troop?
- ☐ To what extent do you think there is racial and cultural diversity in the BSA organization overall?
- ☐ What impact has racial and cultural diversity (or the lack of racial and cultural diversity) had on your troop?

WAVE 2 INTERVIEWS

- ☐ Since our last interview, have there been any barriers to your involvement in BSA related to race, culture, gender, orientation, or religion?
- ☐ How have you handled these barriers (or this barrier) as a leader?
- ☐ How have these experiences influenced how you work with Scouts in your troop?
- ☐ How do you feel about girls joining Scouts BSA?
- ☐ Why do you feel that way?
- ☐ How, if at all, has your troop changed since girls have been included in Scouts BSA?
- ☐ If you had to summarize the mission of BSA in one sentence, what would it be? How, if at all, does diversity and inclusion fit in with the mission of BSA?
- ☐ How does diversity and inclusion fit in with how you work with your troop?
- ☐ Have you made any changes in your troop related to diversity and inclusion?

To begin analyzing interviews, a team of three researchers read 20 interviews from the larger sample to identify an initial set of themes related to diversity and inclusion; these interviews were chosen because interviewers had previously noted that participants had engaged in some detailed discussion of diversity/inclusion in interviews (whereas other leaders may have chosen to skip or only briefly respond to questions about diversity/inclusion). From this review, a set of initial themes were identified related to the topics of diversity/inclusion. Themes were revised and adjusted through ongoing data analysis. Ultimately, a final set of 12 main themes, altogether containing a further 82 more specific subthemes, were used by the researchers to code text from both Wave 1 and Wave 2 interviews, from a set of 25 adult leaders.

These 25 adult leaders were purposively selected because they represented a range of racial/ethnic and religious groups, and their troops also collectively included Scouts from a range of racial/ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Two female leaders were also included in the sample. (Researchers are continuing to code adult interviews for the remaining adult leaders; the analysis for the full adult interview sample will be made available once the coding is complete.)

25 Adult Leaders Interviewed

6 Adult Leaders Identified as a Religious Minority

~51 Average Age of Adult Leaders

2 Adult Leaders Identified as Female

12 Adult Leaders Identified as Racial/Ethnic Minority[1]

5 Average Years of Adult Leader Experience

The majority of adult leaders identified as **White.**

Category	Count
White	13
Hispanic/LatinX	6
Asian	2
Black	1
Mixed	1
Native American	1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1
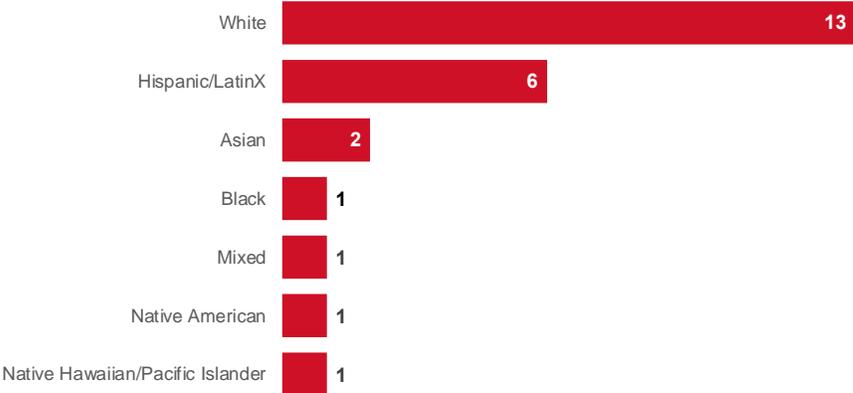
The majority of adult leaders identified as **Christian.**

| Category	Count
Christian	19
Buddhist	2
Atheist	1
Hindu	1
Jewish	1
Druid	1

[1]When referring to racial/ethnic or religious minority groups in this document, we mean that they are a minority in the larger sample of Scouts and Scouters—in the BEST study, the majority of participants are White and Christian.

Troops were predominantly majority White but reflected a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, although they were majority White, most included some Scouts of color as well, and the majority of leaders (68%) described having Scouts in their troops with disabilities.

In addition to reading the interviews and coding participants' statements into themes, researchers also made annotations and wrote memos on the interviews they read, focusing on ideas relating to diversity and inclusion in BSA, and areas of uncertainty in coding. These notes and memos were included in the analysis to identify additional important themes and findings.

The majority of adult leaders indicated working with Troops consisting of **middle social economic status.**[2]

Category	Value
Low SES Backgrounds	2
Middle SES Backgrounds	11
High SES Backgrounds	7
Unknown SES	4
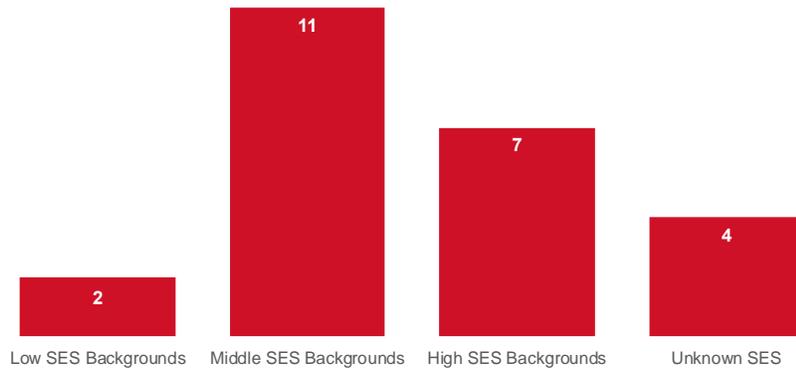
Most adult leaders indicated they lead **majority White/Caucasian Troops.**[3]

Category	Value
White/Caucasian	17
Diverse	6
Majority Black/African American	1
Did Not Specify	1
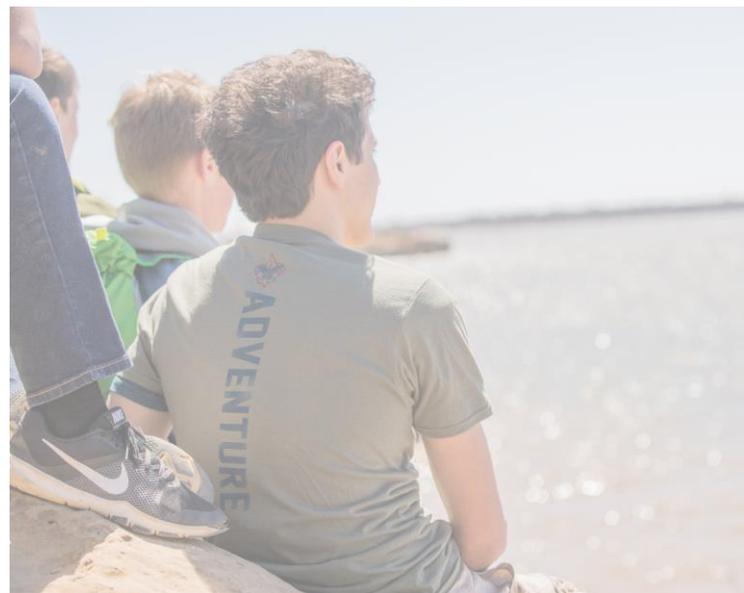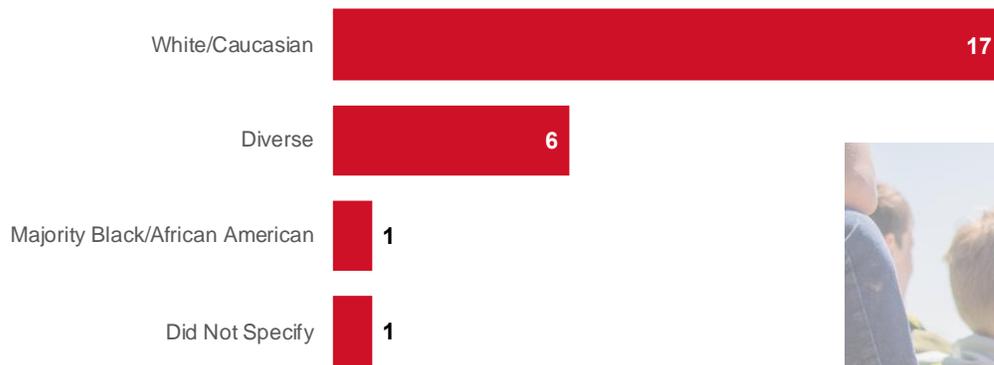
[2]SES was determined by adult leaders' responses to survey questions about household income and their highest level of education.
[3]During the troop registration process, Scoutmasters were asked a survey question about the racial makeup of the Scouts in their troop; response options were: Diverse, Majority Black/African American, Majority Hispanic, Majority White/Caucasian, and Other (please specify)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

A majority of leaders (72%) feel that diversity has a positive impact on troops. 80% of leaders reported that the diversity in their troop reflects the diversity of their community, though this means that homogenous communities typically have homogenous troops. With regard to how leaders approach diversity and inclusion within their troops, 40% of leaders demonstrated an equity approach, acknowledging differences among Scouts and tailoring how they work with them to meet Scouts' needs. This was especially the case for youth with disabilities. 36% of leaders employ a multicultural approach, seeing diversity as a benefit but not necessarily changing their approach to meet differing needs of Scouts. 76% of leaders shared strategies they use to promote inclusion, and 36% provided suggestions on how to promote inclusion; these suggestions and strategies were mainly around working with youth with disabilities and overcoming economic barriers in Scouting. 20% of adult leaders suggested additional training around working with youth with disabilities, and how to do outreach to youth of color and lower socioeconomic status.

A number of adult leaders felt that there was not enough diversity in BSA. Four leaders had experienced discrimination themselves, and six described discrimination against Scouts. Adult leaders were often dissatisfied with the way these incidents were handled by fellow adult leaders and BSA overall.

Three leaders felt that BSA puts too much focus on diversity, indicating that more emphasis should be placed on everyone being a Scout than on individual identities. 36% of leaders demonstrated an equality approach, emphasizing the importance of treating everyone the same, and five leaders demonstrated a colorblind approach. While this overlaps with the equality approach, colorblindness deemphasizes or ignores race and ethnicity as a part of one's identity, which can be problematic as it can diminish or deny experiences of discrimination encountered by members of minority groups.

It seems that some of the leaders who take an equality or colorblind approach may be doing so to prevent Scouts from being mistreated (or feeling excluded or singled out) based on their identities. In other words, they may be assuming that if they, as leaders, ignore differences and treat everyone the same way, then their Scouts will feel equally included and a part of the group despite their differences (e.g., being the only Black Scout in a White troop). However, taking this approach may mean that important differences between Scouts in terms of their past life experiences, identities, and individual needs within the program are likewise being ignored which could have a negative impact on their experience of Scouting (see below).

FINDINGS

The most important themes found in the interviews fall into five overarching categories: leaders' attitudes toward BSA's diversity/inclusion policies (e.g., how diversity fits with mission of BSA, impact of diversity on troops, attitudes about girls joining BSA), leaders' approaches to diversity/inclusion (e.g., equity, equality, multiculturalism, colorblindness), experiences of discrimination in BSA Programs (e.g., Scouts' experiences of discrimination, how discrimination was handled), systemic barriers to promoting diversity/inclusion in BSA (e.g., charter organization limits diversity, economic challenges), and leaders' experiences and ideas regarding how to address barriers to diversity/inclusion (e.g., strategies for addressing barriers, suggestions for trainings to support diversity).

A majority of leaders (72%) feel that diversity has a positive impact on troops. However, a number of leaders felt that there was not enough diversity in BSA, citing barriers that prevent girls, low-SES and sexual minority youth from participating. A couple of leaders equated diversity/inclusion with a lack of exclusionary practices, and three leaders felt that BSA puts too much focus on diversity, indicating that more emphasis should be placed on everyone being a Scout than on individual identities.

"I think it makes us stronger. It helps us gain a better understanding of different ethnicities, cultures, backgrounds. […] Plus, I think that it gives the Scouts the ability to interact with people who are different from them and come away with an understanding that, 'Hey. We're all human beings, that we need to learn to respect each other regardless of that."

Adult leaders employ a range of approaches to diversity and inclusion in their troops; 40% of leaders demonstrated an equity approach, acknowledging differences among Scouts and tailoring how they work with them to meet Scouts' needs. This was especially the case for youth with disabilities. 36% of leaders employ a multicultural approach, seeing diversity as a benefit but not necessarily changing their approach to meet differing needs of Scouts.

"…In our troop, we are pretty diverse from every perspective, I think, from race, religion, economic backgrounds, and so forth. I learned a long time ago, no two people alike, you've got to learn, especially if you're going to lead, you have get to know your people, and learn how to deal with whatever they're coming in with, wherever they're coming from and so forth."

As stated above, 36% of leaders seemed to take more of an equality-based approach, emphasizing the importance of treating everyone the same. Five leaders (20%) demonstrated a colorblind approach; which, while overlapping in some ways with an equality approach, can have the (often unintended) effect of deemphasizing or ignoring the importance of racial or ethnic identity for youth and adults, and likewise, the negative experiences individuals may have related to their social group memberships. One leader's comments indicated, for example, that he did not see a difference between acknowledging different identities that might be important to individual Scouts, and segmenting Scouts into groups.

"There are no colors or no barriers in Scouts. You're a Scout, you're not a Black Scout, you're not an Italian Scout, you're not a Jewish Scout, you're just a Scout. […] I think it's important to understand different cultures and different backgrounds, but I think when you start to label Scouts, I think you go down a very slippery slope."

A number of leaders also shared experiences of discrimination in Scouts BSA. Four leaders had experienced discrimination themselves, and six described discrimination against Scouts. Several leaders recounted instances of racism that they or their Scouts had experienced. Adult leaders were often dissatisfied with the way these incidents were handled by fellow adult leaders and BSA overall.

"[…] another Scout from a different troop, who wasn't even from our council, threatened one of my Scouts with a knife, and he wrote ... He said to the boys, and again, my Scouts are all African-American and Hispanic, he said to my Scouts, "I hope all the Black people leave camp and die." When this was reported, he had ... the camp director had said, "This is a problem, and he'll write an apology, but we're not removing him from camp." It was made very clear that this boy was more important than my Scouts feeling safe. It's unfortunate that there was only so much I could do, because it's at the one camp that we can get scholarships from."

There are several important barriers raised by adult leaders that prevent them (and BSA in general) from promoting diversity and inclusion in Scouts BSA. One of these is the lack of diversity in their local communities; 80% of leaders reported that the diversity in their troop reflects the diversity of their community, and eight of these leaders clarified that their communities are predominantly White, so their troops are as well. The diversity within the charter organization is another factor, and six leaders indicated that the fact that their charter organizations were religious institutions limited the diversity of their troop membership. Over half of the leaders (60%) noted economic barriers that prevent participation from youth of low to middle income backgrounds.

"When Scouting was not only in churches and synagogues, but it was also in fire departments, and police departments, and schools, and different service organizations, we had more diversity."

"At the end of the day, the reality is that my troop is in a poor to middle, not even sometimes, middle class. […] And me, as the financial chair, I know how struggling it was to go after the parent to get the money[…]And because of that again, some parents feel like "Hey, I cannot afford that." The boy will just stay home, and unfortunately, it's also the same area, where people need the most, and the same area where they don't do much with fundraising, unfortunately".

Adult leaders also discussed their experiences and ideas regarding how to address barriers to diversity and inclusion. 76% of leaders shared strategies they use to promote inclusion, and 36% provided suggestions on how to promote inclusion; these suggestions and strategies were mainly around working with youth with disabilities and overcoming economic barriers in Scouting. 20% of leaders also made suggestions about further trainings that would be beneficial to promoting diversity and inclusion; these included trainings on working with youth who have disabilities, and how to conduct outreach for low-income youth and communities of color.

"If you look at areas that have more diversity and have lower socio-economic status, or less of a tradition of Scouting, those numbers change dramatically. And so you have a larger number of kids that really have more of a need for Scouting, and higher chance of dropping out, and I do not think Boy Scouts, or our troop have solved that riddle. So, we have to become more in Hispanic communities, or African American communities. We really are, as a group, still struggling with how to do that."

EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Another aspect of the analysis consisted of reviewing data from each leader individually to identify leaders whose approaches to diversity/inclusion (including strategies they have used to address barriers) could be used as a resource for other leaders (as well as in other levels of BSA) who are interested in enhancing their leadership in this area. Five leaders stood out as exemplary in their approaches to diversity and inclusion.

Two of these exemplary leaders demonstrated an equity approach to diversity in their troops. Joseph[4] is a 46 year-old Person of Color and an immigrant. He has 6 years of leadership experience and served a medium-SES troop with mostly Scouts of Color. Joseph talked about how differences between Scouts and adults are acknowledged, valued, and discussed openly in his troop, rather than ignored. He also described how when conflicts arose related to diversity/inclusion, he addressed them directly. In addition, Joseph provided strong examples of how his work with Scouts and parents reflected his equity approach, and how this approach seemed to also be enhancing and modeling character development.

> *If you are a girl or another one is a boy, yes there is a difference. And it's good to kind of call out that difference that, "Hey, I am a boy, you are a girl." But when it comes to the value, which should bring all together, there should not be any difference at all. Within the troop, we have done a pretty good job making sure that it's part of our culture to think about diversity, and making people feel included. Making people feel part of the large family of [our] troop. And even when I know one day we had an issue and I say, even when somebody takes a decision. Let's say you send, I don't know, you call a boy to be the flag bearer and the next meeting, you call another boy to be the flag bearer. If a parent come out and say, "Why are you always pick the Black boys" or "Why you always pick the White boys?"[…]It's not about I pick a Black boy. No, I pick a boy who happens to be Black. But […]once somebody raises the concern or the question, then you should be more aware of your decision process.[…]Once a parent brought up that concern, you should change that decision process and make sure that before taking any decisions, you kind of step back one second and just ask yourself "How does that decision affect any stakeholder?"*

Michael also demonstrated an equity approach. Michael is a 55 year-old Person of Color and religious minority. He has more than 10 years of leadership experience and serves a high-SES and predominantly White troop. Michael described this approach as influencing all of his interactions with people, in and out of Scouting. He shared that when he interacts with people:

> *"I'm not so much trying to change their mind, but rather I'm trying to challenge my own views […] And sometimes at the end of the discussion, then I feel like, oh well you know what? I see where you're coming from with that."*

As is also clear in the above excerpt, Michael's descriptions of how he engages with people emphasized another important value that often accompanies an equity approach: cultural humility. Cultural humility is about trying to appreciate and learn from other people, cultures, and communities, and being able to acknowledge the limits of one's own knowledge about other people's experiences. In his interview, for example, Michael described the various ways he tries to engage parents of Scouts with disabilities as he tries to work with their Scouts and provide them with the best Scouting program possible, tailored to fit their needs and help them thrive.

Two other leaders spoke very thoughtfully about diversity and inclusion in Scouts BSA. Aaron is a 56 year-old White leader. He has more than 10 years of leadership experience and serves a medium-SES and predominantly White troop. He also worked closely with Scoutreach in the past and seems to have knowledge about the systemic barriers to including youth of color and youth from low-income communities in the program. Aaron said:

> *"The problem is getting these units started in areas that have not had Scouting in the past […] you have an environment that maybe does not have a tradition of Scouting. And so the families themselves don't know really what Scouting offers and why it can be important and useful. The second [factor] is really just resources."*

[4]All names have been changed.

In addition, when describing the benefits of taking his Scouts (who were predominantly affluent and White) to larger BSA events, he acknowledged the ways in which his Scouts benefited from being exposed to Scouts with different assets and strengths than they had, but also described hoping his Scouts had the same positive impact on their peers. He seemed to suggest that the limited breadth of experiences and learning Scouts have when they are only in homogenous troops and contexts can also translate to limited character-building opportunities as well, especially if this barrier is not acknowledged and addressed by leaders.

Similarly, Robert is a 30 year-old White leader who speaks very clearly about the value of having Scouts from diverse racial/ethnic and SES backgrounds in the program. He has 6 years of leadership experience and serves a medium-SES troop with mostly Black Scouts. Robert acknowledged how he did not always have the same life experiences as his Scouts, being a White leader of a mostly Black troop, which he kept in mind as he worked with them. He too evidenced his high level of cultural humility throughout his interview. In addition, he described the powerful and positive impact Scouting has had on his life, and how he keeps this in the forefront of his mind when working with his Scouts, and trying to ensure that "all" youth can have access to the program. Because of his strong commitment to keeping Scouts in the program, he also works hard to bring them to Scouting events, including camporees, even if that means using his own equipment, and the unfortunate reality of having to contribute funds from his own pocket. Finally, Robert talked about experiences of racism his Scouts had at camping events two summers in a row and how he did his best to address these experiences directly, and make sure Scouts who committed the racist acts were held accountable. He spoke about how the organization as a whole needed to do more to confront discrimination, while, likewise, providing more support to bring Scouts from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds into the program, and to retain them once they are in the program.

Chris is a 43 year-old Person of Color. He has 9 years of leadership experience and serves a low-SES and predominantly White troop. Chris had a lot of expertise in working with troops from very economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and talked about how Scouting can be a real refuge for these youth. His troop also had Scouts who experienced homelessness:

> *"We had issues and we've had two separate Scouts now that have been in homeless situations. Where the one was very vocal that they were in a homeless situation and the unit helped them find housing, helped them find employment, helped them get food and what have you."*

Thus, Chris speaks to the life-saving potential of Scouting for some youth, while also acknowledging significant barriers he has faced to bringing youth into the program and supporting them once they are there[5]. Chris, like Robert, also talked about discriminatory experiences Scouts and leaders have had, and how he wished Scouting would take a stronger bottom line toward these experiences.

Nevertheless, he is relentless in his commitment to provide the program to youth who may stand to benefit from it the most. He described regularly speaking with religious leaders and civic leaders from minoritized communities to try and recruit youth from those communities, and as well, the great lengths he has gone to keep youth in the program who have severe psychological and behavioral problems:

> *With both Scouts…we pull them aside and we work with them. The one that comes from the drug abuse, we do a lot of actually sitting down with him because it also happens with school and stuff and we try by different yoga, different things, breathing exercises, mental exercises, anything that we can offer to them that say okay we tried this and you say we tried and it didn't really do anything for you so let's try this, does this do anything for you? And we find things that work. We try to keep on reminding them to try those things that work.*

Thus, Chris exemplifies a leader who both sees the value of diversity/inclusion in Scouting, as well as the potential for Scouting to make a difference in the lives of the youth it serves, including and especially the hardest-to-reach youth in the program.

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[5]Chris described being at multiple events where people display items that promote daughters of the confederacy and how this is a direct barrier to recruiting African American youth and families into the program.

The vast majority of leaders interviewed feel that diversity has a positive impact on troops, and these exemplary leaders demonstrate successful strategies for including Scouts from different racial, ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds. Their cultural humility enables them to learn about the beliefs, values, experiences and needs of people of different backgrounds, allowing them to develop relationships defined by respect and open-mindedness. This then lays the groundwork for an equity approach, ensuring that all of their Scouts have the same access to the opportunities provided by Scouting as they meet each Scout where they are, and help them to overcome barriers—whether those barriers are related to economic difficulties, physical or mental disabilities, or systemic barriers that have historically prevented youth from different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds from participating in Scouting. By recognizing important differences between Scouts in terms of their past life experiences, identities, and individual needs within the program, they are working to ensure the best possible Scouting experience for all of the Scouts in their troops.

3
SUMMARY

Between March 30th and June 30th 2020, we analyzed 49 interviews from 25 additional leaders (across Waves 1 and 2). These 25 leaders were also selected to represent a range of diverse characteristics. Across all leaders, two were racial/ethnic minorities; four were female; six were religious minorities; four served racially and ethnically diverse troops; 17 served troops with Scouts from middle-income backgrounds; and 2 served troops with Scouts from low-income backgrounds. Leaders were 51 years of age on average and ranged from 24-86 years of age.

Some initial findings were that out of these additional interviews, 10 leaders were identified as endorsing an equity approach and/or as demonstrating cultural humility in their work with Scouts. This took the form of approaching general interactions with Scouts from an equity lens, and using specific strategies that reflected cultural humility, such as food preparation for camp-outs that respected dietary restrictions for religious reasons, and making room for diverse perspectives and beliefs at traditional scouting events.

> *"I don't think race or gender or religious beliefs will kill your troop as long as you be loyal and helpful and courteous. We have black youth members in our troop. We have Indian youth members in our troop. We have boys, we have a sister troop full of girls, so I think it's what you project is what you get…We'll cover inclusion and diversity, like even with our religious ceremonies at the troop camp-outs. We let our Indian boys if they're feeling uncomfortable about our services, they'll share a portion of their history or what they do."*

Importantly, although this practice is aimed at being inclusive, it may also put young people on the spot when they do not want to be put on the spot. Nevertheless, this leader is articulating ways in which he and his fellow leaders try to anticipate different needs among their Scouts, and how they try to be responsive to those needs.

In these 49 interviews, another important theme came to the fore that was also present in previous interviews, though not as clearly articulated: **Leaders view skills for working with diverse individuals as essential for being an effective leader.**

More specifically, leaders pointed out that promoting diversity and inclusion in their troops is especially in line with BSA's mission because having a diverse troop, and being able to facilitate meaningful friendships and experiences among Scouts from different backgrounds, helps Scouts become strong leaders. However, the strategies leaders use for doing this, and the opportunities they have for doing this, within their more homogenous troops, was less clear.

> *"We want all youths to be the best possible version of themselves in the future, that it doesn't matter what gender you are, what race you are, what religion you are, we want to give you the tools to be the best possible version of themselves so they can help others or help become the future leaders…Our troops are very diverse because of the area we live and it's great to see even my small girl's troop, it's fantastic to see different ethnic backgrounds, different religions, it's great. Because then they become more understanding of the entire world around them, just having those different experiences. And when we do plan different meals or celebrate, we encourage them to talk about if there's a holiday that their family celebrates, we want to know that so we can help celebrate it with them and learn something new about another culture…we want to understand where all the Scouts are coming from because they all come from different backgrounds. Like I was saying, if there is a holiday that's really important to them, we want to know about it so we can celebrate it with them or understand it, just learn something new. So we encourage that."*