

## Research!America 2024 Summer Micrograntees

With support from the Sloan Foundation, Research!America awarded five civic engagement microgrants to early career scientists this summer. The selection process was competitive with 36 applications received. The winning proposals represented efforts of underrepresented minorities in science to engage with their local communities or were designed to inspire underrepresented minorities to explore science. Awarding summer microgrants was the last component of the multi-part Sloan Foundation grant to Research!America to diversify the early career civic engagement microgrant program and build a pipeline of scientists of color prepared to engage in civic science. (A formal report will be submitted as well.)

Here is what our summer micrograntees accomplished:

### Howard University: “Interfaith Dialogues: Building Science Perspectives”

The Howard University micrograntees organized a forum between researchers from this historically Black university based in Washington, D.C. and two dozen community members from Christian faith-based groups. During the forum, community members shared their hesitancy about participating in research studies (You can listen to their comments [here](#)). They spoke of mistrust and a lack of understanding about the importance of racial and ethnic diversity in research samples but were happy to have the opportunity to speak openly about their concerns. According to exit surveys, the community members said they gained a better understanding of research and would be more likely to participate. The Howard University microgrant group plans to continue to educate and engage members of the local community. In their closing report, one of the microgrant leaders stated “this opportunity has made me more aware of the needs of underrepresented communities that will enable them to participate in scientific research. It has made me even more passionate about getting involved in science policy and civic engagement.” She further stated that “I would like...to have this as an ongoing project. The community often times feels that they are a means to an end with no real opportunities to build strong collaborations with policy makers and/or researchers.”

**Interfaith Science Alliance Group**

**BUILD SCIENCE PERSPECTIVES**

We aim to address disparities in minority representation in scientific research by engaging with faith-based communities. By fostering collaboration and understanding, we seek to enhance minority participation, correct misconceptions, and advocate for equitable policy change, ultimately ensuring diversity in scientific studies and treatment outcomes.

**BRIDGING FAITH AND SCIENCE FOR INCLUSIVE RESEARCH**

**A Faith and Science Collaboration:**

- 70% of individuals in faith-based communities believe that religious beliefs and scientific understanding can coexist. Collaboration enhances mutual understanding and enriches research.

**Mistrust in Healthcare:**

- 42% of African Americans report high levels of mistrust in the healthcare system, posing a barrier to clinical research participation. Addressing this mistrust can increase minority participation.

**Diversity in Clinical Trials:**

- 80% of clinical trial participants are white, which limits research effectiveness. Ensuring minority representation improves treatment generalizability.

**Community Perspectives on Science:**

- Faith-based communities offer valuable cultural and ethical insights often overlooked in research. Incorporating these perspectives fosters culturally sensitive and ethical practices.

**Our Goals:**

- Understand faith-based community perspectives on scientific research and correct misconceptions.
- Collaborate with community members to identify barriers to research recruitment efforts.
- Foster appreciation for science that translates into enthusiasm for participating in research.
- Increase minority representation in scientific research and literature.

Developed for Howard University “Interfaith Dialogues” Microgrant

### University of Maryland Eastern Shore - Groundswell UMES Podcast

The graduate students at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), a historically Black university, used their microgrant to produce and release five podcast episodes focused on the impact of climate change on the African American community of Somerset County, Maryland. An agricultural area with nearly a quarter of its residents living in poverty, Somerset County is experiencing significant economic, environmental, and health consequences related to climate change. The Groundswell UMES podcast was designed to be a resource and platform to educate and coalesce community members about these threats to their quality of life. Hosted by UMES graduate students, the podcast features roundtable discussions with Somerset County community leaders and local government officials, residents, STEM professionals, and members of the academic community. To reach listeners, the micrograntees publicized the podcast through social media channels, such as LinkedIn, X, Instagram, and TikTok. Additionally, the graduate students attended in-person events in Somerset County, like National Night Out, to have conversations with community members about the podcast. In their final report, the UMES group stated that “this microgrant project helped to develop important public engagement and project management skills and to identify viable approaches to bridging stakeholder relationships.” About the Civic Engagement Microgrant program, the grantee commented that they liked “the clear structure and guidelines as well as the backing of Research!America’s reputation in the research advocacy space. The Research!America team were awesome partners and supporters!”



*Photos from “UMES Groundswell Podcast”*

### Drexel University - Biomedical Graduate Students for Diversity: Science is for All!

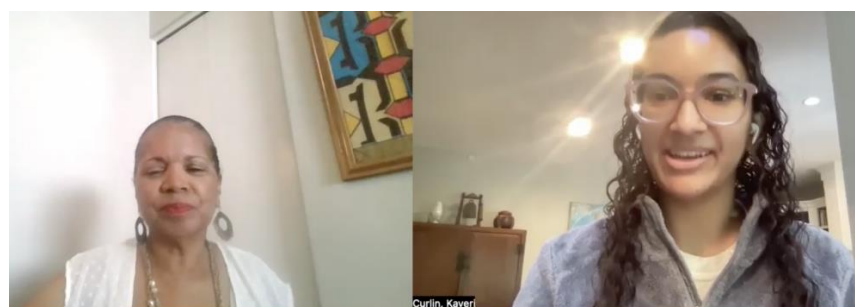
The Biomedical Graduate Students for Diversity at Drexel University held interactive science outreach events during four weekends at the East Falls Farmers’ Market in Philadelphia. The micrograntees worked to foster enthusiasm for science among the public and provide an opportunity for questions about science. Some 200 East Falls community members participated in hands-on activities related to biology, chemistry, immunology, and neuroscience. Graduate students tested and sharpened their communication skills through one-on-one conversations with participants. Following one farmers’ market event, the graduate students held a Science Coffee Hour with 30 community members for more in depth conversation on topics such as addiction, vaccines, and healthy lifestyles. In response to the question in the closing report about what they liked best about the Civic Engagement Microgrant Program, the Drexel group responded with “Everything! This grant enabled us to expand our capabilities. It was also a great opportunity to learn about other outreach efforts and connect with leaders in the field like Fanuel.” (Fanuel Muindi, Research!America’s Senior Fellow for Civic Engagement).

Sample poster and photo from Drexel University "Science is For All!" Microgrant



### UC Irvine - Deeply Rooted Podcast

The UC Irvine's (UCI) Mapping Health Equity Research Group researched the history of health inequities in Orange County and the local health organizations working to improve the lives of its most vulnerable populations. The UCI micrograntees conducted interviews with the leaders of these groups in order to expose UCI medical students to the many challenges faced by the local community and these interviews were part of the incoming medical student orientation in September. Medical students were invited to write reflections on the podcast episodes. The complete first season of episodes will be released in October, and the UCI group will publicize the podcast through social media channels used by UCI medical school and other departments. Reflecting on the experience in the final report, a leader of the UCI microgrant said, "it strengthened my resolve to continue to be involved with public engagement projects throughout my career. The community organizations with whom we partnered were so excited to hear from us and eager to add their voice to this project." She continued, "it's (the microgrant) truly a remarkable program because there isn't as much "red tape" to work on a program that spans across multiple disciplines...I absolutely loved this process and look forward to sharing our work with everyone!"



Interview for UC Irvine Microgrant "Deeply Rooted Podcast"

University of Puerto Rico – Science Inclusive: Bridging Science and Hispanic Communities Through Digital and Social Media

The Asociación de Estudiantes Graduados de Ingeniería Química (AEGIQ) at the University of Puerto Rico utilized their microgrant to leverage the power of social media as a science communication tool. The graduate students created a podcast in Spanish to bridge the gap in scientific knowledge and accessibility to science topics for native Spanish speakers. To date, podcast discussions have centered on understanding viruses and why vaccines are important. Additional podcasts will address cancers relevant to the Puerto Rican Hispanic community. The podcast will be coupled with a new Instagram account, called "[ciencialatinx](#)", which will serve as an additional platform to disseminate scientific information and foster engagement with young Hispanics. (Note this micrograntee sought an extension through October 15 which was granted; more information will be included in our final report.)