

Recovery After Trafficking: Research, Evaluation, and Innovation to Improve Outcomes

A Concept Paper (Revision 1.7)

I. Introduction

The Problem

Human trafficking is an urgent and worsening problem in the United States¹. The federal government spends hundreds of millions of dollars annually on programs to prevent trafficking, protect victims and survivors², prosecute perpetrators, and partner for increased coordination across jurisdictions¹. An important part of the effort to protect people who have been trafficked involves referral to services such as safe places to stay, trauma counselors, or attorneys. Yet despite the important role of services in the fight against human trafficking, we do not understand what happens to survivors over the long term after services have been received because outcomes for survivors are not being evaluated.

A literature review found a wealth of information on service and treatment needs for trafficking survivorsⁱⁱ, but few systematic studies on outcomesⁱⁱⁱ. Of 63 journal articles, reports, and books reviewed, only 4 included quantitative evidence on survivor outcomes. The relative scarcity of reported outcomes is due to several factors including no widely agreed upon outcome measures, resource scarcity in organizations that provide services, disincentives to research on outcomes, and obstacles to connecting with survivors after they depart from services, including early departure with loss of contact^{iv}. Research has shown that as many as 40% of survivors may leave programs before completion^v. We can only know if human trafficking is being combatted effectively if outcomes for survivors are evaluated. Without data on outcomes, it is difficult to assess program effectiveness, identify necessary changes to improve outcomes, and make informed decisions about what programs to fund.

The Program

The Foundation for Women and Children Enslaved in War (WCEW) proposes a program of three interacting components – research, evaluation, and innovation³ -- to strengthen the capacity of service organizations to produce actionable evidence on outcomes, improve service delivery, and qualify for funding. This effort, called the *3 Strong for Survivors Program*⁴, will support organizations in *effectively serving diverse groups* of trafficked people; *incorporating survivors' input* into the evaluation of outcomes; and *discovering, designing, and deploying innovations in practice* that strengthen outcomes evaluation and effectiveness of services.

The focus of the 3 Strong for Survivors Program is survivors of human trafficking who reside in the United States, and the organizations that provide direct services to support them. Survivors include

¹ Between 2015 and 2019, the US National Human Trafficking Hotline reported that the number of individual victims and survivors contacting the hotline increased by 167%, from 1,612 to 4,312 (see Polaris Statistics 2019).

² The terms *victim* and *survivor* may be defined as 1) persons who have suffered injury due to a crime or other incident (victim) and 2) persons who have endured injury and are in the process of recovery (survivor). These situations overlap – a victim may believe s/he is surviving, and a survivor may be revictimized. The term *trafficked person* or *people* refers to those who have experienced trafficking as victims or survivors.

³ We define *innovation* as ideas and applications that are novel and useful within a given context.

⁴ 3 Strong for Survivors means research, evaluation, and innovation to support survivors.

trafficked persons who are immigrants and migrants (both documented and undocumented), refugees, and asylum seekers now living in the US, as well as American citizens and permanent residents, who have experienced forced labor or sex trafficking.

Who We Are

The Foundation for Women and Children Enslaved in War (WCEW) is a 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to support organizations that provide direct services to women and children survivors of human trafficking who have been commercially exploited for sex or labor in a conflict zone and now reside in the US⁵. Support includes providing grants to service organizations and conducting collaborative research on service outcomes for trafficking survivors. We envision a future in which every survivor of human trafficking is supported with the resources she or he needs to make a full recovery.

WCEW believes in the dignity and value of every human life, in the right of all people to live in freedom with justice under the law, and we seek the inclusion of diverse people and perspectives across our organization. Our leadership team includes people with career-long experience in organizational strategy and transformation, grant making and fundraising, policy analysis and innovation, and engagement with community-based organizations in marginalized communities. [See Appendix A for biographies of Board members and principals and Figure 1 for WCEW organizational chart].

II. Background

Human trafficking in the United States, including labor and sex trafficking, is a pressing national problem, with consequences for public health and safety, children's education, local economies, and human rights^{vi}. Domestic minors (US children) represent a significant share of survivors, after being recruited in places that once were considered "safe" (e.g., homes and schools)^{vii}.

Federal human trafficking law was designed to counter trafficking of persons into the US from another country^{viii}. It has been recognized more recently that American citizens and permanent residents represent a large share of persons who are trafficked^{ix}. Many victims of trafficking are school-age children, and recruiters may search for victims on school grounds, in neighborhoods close to schools, and on the internet^x. Other vulnerable groups include persons experiencing homelessness, those involved in foster care, and the developmentally disabled.

The nature of trafficking activity also is changing, with new perpetrators such as US street gangs using sophisticated methods to facilitate crime discreetly and to adapt quickly to efforts made to thwart them.^{xi} Gang members act as pimps who use force, coercion, or false pretenses to draw minor victims into prostitution or forced labor. They cooperate with gangs in other territories to transport underage victims from one state to another^{xii}. These perpetrators are adept at the recapture of victims who have been freed, preventing survivors from sustaining their connections to supportive services^{xiii}.

The prevalence of human trafficking in the US is difficult to measure due to several factors, including: Inconsistencies across Federal, State, and local definitions, laws, and regulations; little or no compilation of national or comprehensive data; and methods that have not compensated for the increasing

⁵ A conflict zone is a geographical area where there is a high level of political and/or crime-related violence. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program requires 25 battle-related deaths for a conflict to be included in their global database on conflicts. There are several cities and other areas in the US where the number of homicides exceeds 1,000 deaths per year.

sophistication of criminals in keeping victims hidden and the re-trafficking of survivors^{xiv}. While the proposed program does not include studies of prevalence, it is important to account for these measurement challenges in the evaluation of outcomes, as discussed below.

The scarcity of focused, quality evaluation hampers programs and policymakers in planning and conducting effective services and advocating for responsiveness and consistency of laws. In the next section, the challenges to evaluation at all levels will be described.

IIA) Challenges in Evaluation of Survivors' Outcomes

This section describes several specific challenges that confront the evaluation of outcomes for trafficking survivors. Empirical evidence on outcomes is difficult to collect and interpret for the following reasons:

- **Outcome Tracking and Metrics.** There are four key challenges related to outcome tracking:
 - Survivors' points of view often are missing from studies pertaining to outcomes, frequently due to difficulty in connecting with survivors over time^{xv}. Understanding what survivors believe are critical outcomes *for them* is central to understanding what works overall.
 - There are no widely agreed-upon outcome metrics for services for trafficked persons. This means victims' and survivors' trajectories toward recovery are not well understood^{xvi}. A lack of agreement on what "success" looks like means that effective interventions may not be recognized^{xvii}.
 - Resource scarcity. Organizations serving trafficked persons need support and resources to develop the tools and the staff resources with which to design and carry out service evaluation. Organizations require special resources to trace survivor outcomes, such as staff with appropriate knowledge and expertise and sufficient financial resources to support an evaluation program. If resources are scarce, organizations may not be able to identify outcomes, especially if survivors have departed prematurely or been revictimized^{xviii}.
 - Multiple disincentives to research on outcomes. Barriers to outcomes research include client confidentiality, difficulty communicating with survivors over time, and risk aversity within organizations (for example, concern about the possibility of adverse consequences).
- **Early Departure from Service Programs.** Survivors who do not complete service programs are of special interest because early departure is associated with revictimization (i.e., a return to forced labor or prostitution)^{xix}. Longer times in service programs are associated with greater economic self-sufficiency for survivors^{xx}. Early departure may include disengagement, lost contact, or running away with intent not to be found. Survivors who have been trafficked by gangs risk threats of violence against themselves and their families while in treatment and may be under pressure to leave; others have continuing bonds with their exploiters (e.g., trauma bond or other links), further increasing the chances for departure^{xxi}. Distrust of service providers, as well as difficulty in locating secure housing or other basic needs also may influence a survivor's decision to depart^{xxii}. If survivors were previously arrested or jailed, having a police record makes it more difficult to find housing and employment, both of which are key elements in survivor recovery^{xxiii}.
- **Heterogeneity Within and Between Groups of Survivors.** Survivors of human trafficking are a highly diverse group. Important differences among survivors may include national origin, ethnicity,

age, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. In addition, a complex array of experiential conditions and risk factors for trafficking at several levels also influence outcomes, including^{xxiv}:

- *Individual level* – History of child abuse or neglect, disruptions in normal physical or mental development, running away or experiencing homelessness, institutional systems involvement (e.g., foster care or jail/prison), substance use, impaired cognitive functioning.
- *Family level* – Family dysfunction, domestic violence, lack of parental supervision, including absence of one or both parents.
- *Community level* – Poverty, deficiency of local community cohesion and support, community norms and expectations (e.g., normalization of prostitution), local gang involvement in sex trafficking.
- *Societal level* – Cultural-level beliefs, norms, and values (e.g., tolerance of violence against women, sexualization of children), armed conflict and violence.

Interventions must be designed to acknowledge and address diversity within and across groups of survivors. A single treatment program for trauma survivors may not be effective; specially designed services may be warranted^{xxv}. Employing non-optimal treatment for certain groups of survivors can lead to high rates of lost contact, premature termination, and revictimization^{xxvi}.

- **Complex State Laws and Regulations.** State and local laws and regulations on human trafficking vary markedly across the U.S., a factor that perpetrators exploit by frequently moving victims across state lines^{xxvii}. One key variant is whether a state prosecutes trafficking victims who are minors for prostitution^{xxviii}. Some states allow such prosecution, while others try to protect minors through Safe Harbor Laws, although local law enforcement agencies retain substantial discretion^{xxix}. Criminalization may lead to arrest, detention, and/or deportation, which in turn can create severe legal and social barriers to recovery and result in a return to being trafficked^{xxx}. State laws also vary in the extent to which schools are involved in the effort to identify, protect, and support survivors^{xxxi}. Schools are important because they are one of the few institutions that are both origins for trafficking and places where victims may be served (although often they are not).

III. Proposed Program of Research, Evaluation, and Innovation

The 3 Strong for Survivors Program of research, evaluation, and innovation proposed by WCEW will design, fund, and collaborate on the conduct of *projects* with the *participation of project partners*, including research and evaluation collaborators, expert advisers, service organization partners, project sponsors, and people who have experienced human trafficking [see Figure 2]. Projects will be led by *multi-disciplinary leadership teams* representing participating organizations and individuals, including the following:

- *Project collaborators* – Universities and colleges, non-profit research and evaluation organizations, and other entities will participate in the design, development, and implementation of specific projects
- *Expert advisers* – A network of individuals with expertise in the field of human trafficking and related areas will provide guidance at the project level and on key questions
- *Organizational partners* – Agencies providing direct services to trafficking survivors, and committed to evidence-informed functional evaluation of outcomes, will be invited to partner in

projects bringing benefits, including improved services for clients, strengthened cases for funding and potentially an expanded set of donors, opportunities to interact and collaborate with peers and other organizations, and access to new technical resources

- *Persons who have experienced trafficking* – Survivors and others who have experienced trafficking will be invited to participate in projects at all levels
- *Project sponsors* – Public and private institutions supporting research, evaluation, and innovation in the field of human trafficking will be identified and engaged as prospective funding partners and sponsors.

WCEW also will directly organize, lead, and fund initiatives related to research and evaluation, and will engage in convening and collaborating with partners, policy advocacy in the field of human trafficking, grant-making, and fund development.

The purposes of projects WCEW and its partners will undertake as part of this effort are to:

- Strengthen services through capacity development and improved effectiveness information
- Produce actionable evidence of service effectiveness
- Enhance sustainable services collaboration
- Support strengthened prevention and mediation services advocacy.

The methods WCEW and its partners will use to achieve these purposes will include: Community-based participatory research (CBPR); developmental evaluation; evidence-informed and/or evidence-based approaches; capacity-building; training and technical assistance; coaching and consultation, and communications development and dissemination.

Opportunities for projects to engage with the 3 Strong for Survivors Program will be identified through discussions with collaborators, advisors, partners, and prospective sponsors. Projects may focus on geographic areas or regions where human trafficking has been identified as a key issue and/or where specialized resources for projects are located. Projects may be structured in phases emphasizing research, evaluation, or innovation, with a demonstration or pilot project as the lead effort. A pilot project could be conducted in one or more key States that are focusing on anti-trafficking efforts. Action plans for projects will be developed in cooperation with leadership teams identified for a particular project and other institutions with a focus on human trafficking such as law enforcement. Action plans are expected to include:

- Values-based visioning and goal setting
- Team building activities to focus on how teams will work together
- Project-based research to understand the current state and need for change
- Development of strategies and practices to identify gaps and how they can be addressed
- Implementation and management of changes to achieve desired results

In the following sections we provide details on the design, conduct, and anticipated outcomes of potential research, evaluation, and innovation projects.

IV. Prospective Project Descriptions

- ❖ **Collaborative Research** – WCEW and the 3 Strong for Survivors Program (hereafter the Project Team) will work on the design and conduct of collaborative research projects aimed at bringing key

partners into collaboration, and particularly to gain survivors' input on outcomes and services, understanding survivor diversity, and identifying promising practices to support survivor recovery.

- ***Collaborative Research with Survivors and their Networks***

Service programs often are created without survivor input. To gain survivors' points of view on recovery and services, the Project Team will conduct community-based participatory research (CBPR) in collaboration with partner organizations. CBPR will include qualitative interviews with a sample of survivors served, applying a trauma-informed protocol.

1. Research questions will include survivors' definitions of recovery; what kinds of support they believe is needed to enable recovery; whether services they have received provide such support; services they have experienced that were important for them; and why and when some survivors leave programs early and what can be done about it.
2. To gain further insights into these questions, we also will include interviews with people in survivors' networks, such as family members, school and law enforcement personnel, other service providers (US-based and in border countries such as Mexico), and persons previously affiliated with exploiters (e.g., former gang members), giving due consideration to security.
3. School personnel will be interviewed to identify key elements of school-based programs to counter trafficking, involvement of schools in state or county-level anti-trafficking efforts, and how these programs connect with survivors and other service providers in the study.
4. In certain projects where a large sample of information is required for a particular research question and this information is not available in organizational records, then survey research may be conducted to reach larger groups of respondents.
5. Interview and survey data on survivor outcomes and related factors will be quantified and incorporated into a database, enabling statistical analysis.
6. To protect respondent confidentiality, narratives from different programs will be used to highlight findings from a given location, while still maintaining the impact of the story. Survivor stories of success in their terms will be gathered.
7. For each partner organization, a report on data and analysis from the qualitative interviews and surveys will be prepared and presented to the partner.

- ***Understanding Survivor Diversity for Effective Services***

The Project Team will gather and analyze background information to describe survivor diversity, and to understand what characteristics survivors share, for a particular organization or several organizations so that services may be tailored accordingly. The project described here will rely upon information contained in an organization's existing records, with the project providing funding and technical assistance to describe and analyze these data. The data will be anonymized so that the confidentiality of an individual's information may be maintained.

1. WCEW and its project partners will review and record in a database existing background information drawn from an organization's records on trafficking survivors who have been served

by a given partner organization, maintaining privacy and confidentiality, with protocols reviewed by an IRB.

2. Reviews will include demographic characteristics and recovery outcomes for individual survivors that are contained in an organization's records (as these terms are defined by the organization), together with any existing information on historical experiences and risk factors. WCEW and its project partners also will record information on services received by survivors, including service components, delivery models, and whether/how service quality is assessed.
3. Toward the goal of placing each partner organization's data in a broader context and understanding factors that influence outcomes, we will aggregate anonymized background information across partner organizations (with permission of the organizations) and statistical analysis will be performed to show relationships among variables described above and survivor outcomes.
4. Geocoding of publicly available data will allow us to trace the geographical locations of trafficking venues to gain a better understanding of the need for cooperation in services within and across states.

- ***Literature Reviews to Identify Effective or Promising Practices***

Diversity within and between groups of survivors means that services must acknowledge distinctive demographic, experiential, and risk factor characteristics. This research project directed by WCEW will examine how these factors relate to outcomes, and how programs may be tailored to address diversity. Toward this goal, WCEW will conduct reviews of the scientific literature to improve understanding of outcomes for diverse groups of survivors and the services that support them.

State policies affect outcomes for survivors. A review of data repositories and uniform models⁶ of state laws on human trafficking will be conducted to further identify promising practices and to recommend model laws that create an environment for success.

❖ **Planning and Implementing Enhancements in Evaluation⁷ and Services** -- In specific projects, the Project Team will work with partner organizations and survivors to identify gaps in existing practices and opportunities for improvement in evaluation or services.

- We will identify immediate improvements in evaluation and services that can be made using existing resources and develop action plans to implement changes. For example, evaluation outcome goals and measures could be modified to better include survivors' input; or intake assessments could be modified to capture more elements of heterogeneity and improve case management practices or make other enhancements for outreach to people of interest. Action plans for these efforts will include what will be done, who is responsible, what are the measures of success, and what is the expected time to completion.

⁶ Uniform laws are carefully drafted models for potential enactment by state legislatures. See Uniform Laws and Model Acts. D. Barmakian. Harvard Law School Library. library.harvard.edu -- accessed March 12, 2021.

⁷ The project will conduct evidence-based assessments of existing evaluation practices in collaboration with partner organizations. These assessments will be *developmental evaluations*, meaning that they are designed to support innovation within complex organizations. Since processes are not prescribed in advance, the process is flexible and emerges from interactions among organizational partners, and their encounters with new evidence and applications of ideas.

- We will identify enhancements that require more time to implement (e.g., adjustments in resources, programming, or partners). For longer-term modifications, we will provide any requested technical assistance and/or leadership coaching for partner organizations in developing proposals to present to sponsors.

❖ **Shared Learning and Innovation.** The Project Team will organize sponsored workshops and conferences to encourage learning across organizations and individuals, increase community awareness and understanding of relevant developments in the field, and support the visioning of innovations in evaluation and services practice.

- ***Workshop on Outcomes Measurement***

The Project Team will organize a workshop to address challenges of outcome measurement. The goal will be to facilitate development and/or adoption of outcome measures that are accepted as valid and feasible across organizations. Partner organizations, survivors and people in their networks, and subject matter experts will be invited to participate in an agenda that includes:

- A review of new, emerging, and effective approaches to outcomes evaluation and measures
- Findings from projects that contribute to our understanding of outcomes and their evaluation from survivors' points of view;
- Proposals for outcome measures and evaluation frameworks that could be adopted across organizations; and
- Action plans for moving projects forward.

- ***Workshop on Technological Support for Sustaining Survivor Connections with Services***

The Project Team will hold a workshop to focus on the role of technology in sustaining connections between service organizations and survivors over time. The goals of this workshop will be to understand the ways survivors currently connect with service organizations, to consider ways in which technology can support such connections for improvements in services and outcomes, and to generate proposals for technological innovation that can enhance survivors' connections. Partner organizations, survivors and people in their networks, law enforcement organizations, subject matter experts, and technology developers will be invited to participate in an agenda that includes:

- Update on the role of technology in supporting services for trafficking survivors
- Findings from projects relevant to survivor connections with service organizations and implications for outcomes;
- Proposals for technological innovations and the identification of sponsors for future projects. Security and secure systems will be an important element of system development; and
- Action plans for moving projects forward.

- ***Workshops and Conference on Schools and Human Trafficking***

The Project Team will organize workshops and conferences for organizational partners, school personnel, and other stakeholders to consider the role of schools in enhancing outcomes for trafficked persons. The goals of the conference will be to develop a broader understanding of schools as contributors to services for trafficking victims and survivors and as collaborators with other institutions in counter-trafficking efforts. Public awareness of trafficking for people in schools also will be a focus. Strong relations between schools and support organizations will be encouraged so that schools can be critical and sensitive links for survivors or potentially trafficked persons to service organizations that have direct experience in support and safety within the context of trafficking. We will invite organizational partners, school and law enforcement personnel, students, subject matter experts, and stakeholders such as State and national policy makers to engage in an agenda that includes:

- An overview of scientific and policy evidence regarding the role of schools in the fight against human trafficking
- Findings from projects related to the impact of schools on survivor outcomes; and
- State-level models for engagement of schools in counter-trafficking efforts and recommendations for enhancement of these models.

Other topics for workshops and conferences may be recommended by collaborators, advisors, partners, survivors, and sponsors.

❖ **Project Deliverables**

Projects are expected to produce the following types of deliverables:

- Reports and presentations for participants and sponsors
- Conference papers and publications
- Evaluation tools, templates and frameworks, and success measures for organizations and associations
- Content for websites, blogs, and other publicly accessible information
- Policy and advocacy recommendations to strengthen outcomes for trafficking survivors
- Progress reports to update partners on key developments, including project evaluation.

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*Appendix A***WCEW Board Members and Principals**

Marietta Baba, Executive Director and President, is a leader and scholar who has transformed large organizations, founded new research and professional organizations at the national level, led fundraising campaigns, and consulted to a wide range of public and private sector agencies and corporations. She was Dean of the College of Social Science at Michigan State University for 14 years (2001-2015) where she led a large and diverse college of 12 disciplinary departments and professional schools, and over 330 tenure stream faculty members, with a focus on data-driven improvements in research, teaching, and the service/outreach missions. As Dean, she exceeded the goals of a major capital campaign for her college. Previously, Baba was Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan (1996-2001) where she founded the first business anthropology education program. At the National Science Foundation (1994-96) she co-led NSF's first industry-funded grant program -- Transformations to Quality Organizations (now called Science of Organizations). Baba also was a co-founder of the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association. She is the author or co-author of about 100 scholarly and technical publications. Baba holds an MBA from the Advanced Management Program, Eli Broad Graduate School of Management, Michigan State University, and a PhD in Anthropology from Wayne State University. The mission of WCEW is inspired by her family's history as Christian cultural minorities and war refugees from Persia (now Iran) during World War I.

Sylvia Edgerton, Grant Committee Principal, has shown an ability to build, lead, and manage scientific research programs that advance the state of knowledge, enhance scientific awareness, promote collaboration, and build consensus between government, academia, private enterprise, and local communities to apply scientific knowledge to societal issues. She currently works at the National Science Foundation where she develops and manages a diverse portfolio of cutting-edge research projects in atmospheric science. She also has worked as a Senior Scientist for the U.S. Department of Energy laboratories, both Argonne National Laboratory and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, on issues related to atmospheric chemistry and climate change. Early in her career, she served as a Research Fellow at the East West Center where she participated in energy, air pollution, and development programs for Asia.

Charlie Lehman, Vice President for Communications, has experience in journalism, public relations and communications, Charlie Lehman co-founded and managed a marketing communications agency that served organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors for more than 20 years. He has worked closely with nonprofit organizations, providing pro bono services and volunteer time. Over the course of his career, he has served as board member and chairman for Habitat for Humanity, president of Rotary Club, chair of the marketing committee for an arts council, PTA president, and board member for Boys and Girls Clubs, Piedmont Environmental Center, Kids Korp USA, Communities in Schools, and Center for Independent Living. A member of these boards, Charlie inspired others to re-imagine fundraising activities and events and cultivate and engage existing and new donors to grow support for the mission of these organizations. He has worked with several executive directors to create and execute comprehensive marketing and business plans and has counseled nonprofit boards and senior management on effective communications strategies. Charlie earned a B.A. in English and History and attended graduate school at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

Dawn Lehman, Vice President and Secretary, combines corporate communications, research, and evaluation experience to help organizations in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors identify and address workplace issues associated with employee development; cross-cultural communications; generational differences; caregiver support; diversity and inclusion; and most recently, organizational changes related to COVID-19. As Associate Director of Institutional Advancement at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Dr. Lehman focused on increasing public awareness of the school's mission. She currently works with leadership to develop resources for companies seeking ways to effectively support their workforce while navigating change. Throughout her career, Lehman has worked with diverse populations, including youth with disabilities, older adults in senior living communities, and Boys & Girls Club members. With foundation funding, she developed Chicago's first intergenerational, inclusive volunteer program that provided opportunities for young adults with disabilities and older adults to volunteer together in three Illinois counties. Dawn is the co-founder of Kids Korps USA (www.kidskorps.org), an award-winning 501 (c)3 youth volunteer organization that has engaged 100,000+ young people in service to more than 350 community organizations in California, North Carolina, and Illinois. She has received awards from the Michigan House of Representatives, the Governor's Office of the State of California, the Washington Association for the Practice of Anthropology, and the news media for her service work. Lehman holds a B.A. degree in communications from St. Mary's College and an M.A. in organizational anthropology and Ph.D. in medical anthropology from Wayne State University.

Alexia Smokler, Vice President for Policy Research, is a public policy professional and licensed attorney with over a decade of experience in policy research, analysis, communications, and project leadership. She is currently Senior Policy Representative for Fair Housing at the National Association of REALTORS®, where she represents America's largest trade association on civil rights-related federal regulatory and legislative matters and provides subject-matter expertise to training, research, and publications. Smokler previously served as Presidential Management Fellow and Program Analyst at the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (HUD), where she supported career executives and political appointees with policy analysis, speechwriting, and strategic communications, and led high-level projects. Before serving at HUD, Smokler was a Legislative Assistant to Congressman John Conyers, Jr. Smokler holds a law degree from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, a Master's in Public Affairs from Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs, and a bachelor's degree in government from Smith College.

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