

Program: AMERICORPS

Population Served:

Size: Over 20,000 members (participants) in first 2 years for 110 grantee organizations in more than 300 AmeriCorps programs nationwide

Age: 17 and older

Other Characteristics: Out-of-school

Studies: 1 quasi-experimental

Program Components:

<u>Component</u>	<u>Provided by</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Description</u>
Education voucher	AmeriCorps	One time	After 1 year of full-time service, members receive voucher (\$4,725) to be used for future college or vocational education or for college loans.
Full- or part-time work in community service	Community organization sponsored by AmeriCorps	1 year	Examples of work done by members: ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tutor teens and teach elementary school students • assist crime victims or start neighborhood crime watches • turn vacant lots into neighborhood parks • provide assistance and companionship to homebound elderly or individuals with disabilities • lead community health awareness campaigns • restore coastlines • respond to natural disasters with emergency relief for victims
Health insurance, student loan deferment	AmeriCorps	While in program	

Program Objectives/Goals:

Members:

To expand educational opportunities and attainment, increase members' ability to engage in civic affairs, foster an increased commitment to community service, and broaden and strengthen life skills.

Overall:

To strengthen America's communities through community service. The program supports locally originated programs that meet four standards:

1. "Getting things done" to help communities meet their educational, public safety, human, and environmental needs

¹ Examples taken from website <http://www.americorps.org/joining/direct/index.html>

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2. "Strengthening communities" by bringing people together from all backgrounds to solve problems at the local level
3. "Encouraging responsibility" through service and civic education
4. "Expanding opportunity" by making post-secondary education more affordable to AmeriCorps members

Costs:

- The average cost of an AmeriCorps member in the programs studied was \$27,486.
- The minimum AmeriCorp stipend is \$7,500.

Study:

Aguirre International. (n.d.). *Making a difference: Impact of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct on members and communities 1994-95 and 1995-96.* San Mateo, CA: Author.

Study Objectives and Measurements:

Objective:

Member impact study:

Measure the extent to which the projects improve the personal qualities and competencies that members need to succeed in the workplace, community, and home. Four questions were answered:

1. Does participation in service programs increase civic responsibility?
2. Does participation increase educational attainment?
3. Does participation in AmeriCorps expand educational opportunities?
4. Does participation in service programs enhance life skills? (quasi-experimental)

Measurement instrument:

Life Skills Inventory (LSI) measuring five indicators: communication, interpersonal, analytical problem solving, understanding organizational systems, and technology. LSI is a self-assessment of skills.

Evaluation:

Type: Quasi-experimental; comparison group; random selection of operating sites; some qualitative data

Statistical techniques: Pre- and post-program tests. Paired sample T-tests.

Significance level: $p \leq .10$

Population evaluated: Experimental group: 42 programs with 382 members completing the LSI; 70 percent were 17-25 years old, 30 percent were 26 and older. Comparison group: 732 individuals completing the LSI at the end of the second phase; 63 percent were 17-25 years old, 37 percent were 26 and older. Individuals in the older comparison group were selected randomly from a mailing list of community members. For the younger comparison group, community members who were affiliated with traditional institutions, such as GED programs, adult schools, or youth programs, were selected.

Key Findings:

Quasi-experimental analysis:

Life Skills:

Participation had a substantial positive impact on development of life skills; AmeriCorps members reported gains in all areas of life skills. Comparison group had a higher baseline life skills measure but showed no statistically significant change in life skills at the end of the program.

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- About 70 percent of members reported significant gains, evenly distributed between those with modest gains and those with dramatic gains.
- 76 percent of members reported a lot or a little gain overall, compared with 27 percent of comparison group. Members reported greater gains in all five functional life skills areas—communication, interpersonal, analytical problem solving, understanding organizations, and using information technology. The magnitude of the gain for each skill area is in the complete report.
- Information technology was the skill area most likely to stay the same over the study period.
- Members who made the greatest gains in skills were likely to have been self-directed and well-prepared to engage in experiential learning.
- Gains were most dramatic for members who entered with the least developed skills but were not limited to this group.
- Gains in skills were slightly greater in functional areas where life experience provides a foundation (such as communication and interpersonal skills).

Skills gains in relation to member characteristics:

- Low-skilled members with previous employment experience benefited more than those with no prior employment experience
- Low-skilled members who had dropped out of high school benefited more than those who had completed high school.
- All ethnic groups experienced substantial gains in skills, although Hispanic/Latino members who entered with low skills reported the greatest gains, followed by Asian Americans, African Americans, and Caucasians. The relationship was much less pronounced for those who entered with mid-level or average skills.
- Human services programs and strong program designs were associated with greater increases in skills.

Analysis at follow-up (no comparison group):

Almost all of the members surveyed were strongly committed to the ethic of service. Personal development or self-discovery emerged as an important theme. The experience of diversity was an important and positive experience.

Civic involvement:

- 99 percent of members planned to continue providing community service.
- Members were motivated to choose public service and community-oriented careers.
- Leadership skills were enhanced.
- Projects with clearly visible impacts reinforced members' sense of civic responsibility.

Educational attainment and opportunities:

- 85 percent of members plan to use their educational awards.
- 5 out of 6 members who plan to further their education stated that the educational award was necessary to attain their goals.
- 40 percent of members were enrolled in an educational program while completing their service.
- All members benefited from the educational opportunities offered by AmeriCorps.
- Academically disadvantaged members met with limited success earning high school diplomas or passing the GED exam.

Other Information:

This evaluation also included chapters on community impact and a cost-benefit analysis. A subsequent 5-year report did not include an evaluation of member outcomes but focused on institutional and community outcomes.
