AMERICORPS*STATE/NATIONAL DIRECT FIVE YEAR EVALUATION REPORT

T his report presents the results of Aguirre International's follow up study of the institutional development and community strengthening impacts of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct Programs[1]. The current study, conducted three program years after our original 1994-1995 impact evaluation of the first two years of AmeriCorps, focused specifically on institutional development and community impact. We replicated the methodology used in the original study where relevant and used a wealth of field data to determine the evaluation findings for AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs.

The evaluation's findings are presented in the following four sections of this report. Section I presents a brief discussion of the organization of the AmeriCorps program and its mission. It also includes a description of the evaluation and a succinct overview of the complex methodology employed by the study. Sections II and III report on the field data to answer the broad questions addressed by the study:
(1)   What were the institutional impacts on sponsors, partners, or involved institutions?
(2)   Did the programs build stronger communities?
Section IV presents a complete summary of the findings of the follow-up evaluation of AmeriCorps' community and institutional impacts.

DESCRIPTION OF AMERICORPS[2].

The National and Community Service Trust Act, signed into law by President Clinton on September 21, 1993, created the Corporation for National and Community Service. Now called the Corporation for National Service (the Corporation), this organization is responsible for the administration of three service learning programs also created in 1993: Learn and Serve America K-12 (for school age youth), Learn and Serve America Higher Education Grants (for college students), and the AmeriCorps State and National Direct. The Corporation is also responsible for previously existing service learning programs including Promise Fellows and Education Award.

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[1] Please refer to the original report of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct impact entitled, Making a Difference: Impact of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct on Members and Communities 1994-95 and 1995-96.
[2] Details on AmeriCorps funding structure and priorities are found in the original report of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct impact.

The AmeriCorps*State/National Direct grants program offers opportunities for service to Americans who are over the age of seventeen. Through the AmeriCorps program, adults of different ages and backgrounds are involved in strengthening America's communities through service. AmeriCorps participants, known as "members," who make a substantial commitment to service can receive an educational award for college or vocational training, and in some cases, a living allowance. Over 100,000 AmeriCorps members were enrolled during the first five years.

Mission of AmeriCorps

In building the national service system, the Corporation sought to support locally originated programs that meet four rigorous national standards:

1. "Getting Things Done" to help communities meet their educational, public safety, human and environmental needs.
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 helping to make post-secondary education more affordable to AmeriCorps members.

National service programs selected for funding had to meet educational, public safety, human, and environmental needs in the target community and provide a direct and demonstrable benefit that was valued by the community. Eligible activities also included supervising participants or volunteers whose service provided a direct benefit to the community. It was important that AmeriCorps programs undertake service that would not otherwise be provided and that would have maximum impact on the nation's communities. Many of the services were targeted to areas of high need. These included communities adversely affected by high rates of crime or closures of military bases. In all cases, service activities had to result in a specific service or improvement that otherwise would not have been provided with existing funds or volunteers and that did not duplicate the routine functions of workers or displace paid employees. Despite the diversity of AmeriCorps programs with respect to type, size, and participant profiles, they shared common elements that formed a network of national service.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATION

In designing and conducting the follow-up evaluation of AmeriCorps, the Aguirre International research team had the advantage of its previous experience conducting the 1994-1995 AmeriCorps evaluation study as well as an intimate familiarity with the original study's findings. With this experience and knowledge, Aguirre International fine-tuned its research strategy, largely adhering to the same methodology used in the original study, with some alterations. The design of the

original evaluation relied on two parallel components: the Community Impact Study and the Member Impact Study. The follow-up evaluation, on the other hand, focused specifically on community impact.

In addition to the experience of the research team, the study design leveraged the investments made by programs in internal monitoring and evaluation. The Corporation required all AmeriCorps grantees and subgrantees to perform internal evaluations in an ongoing effort to assess performance and improve quality. Programs were asked to continually assess management effectiveness, the quality of services provided, and the satisfaction of both participants and recipients of services. Programs also tracked progress towards their annual objectives, as approved by the Corporation, and reported on them at least three times per year. Finally, programs were asked to complete an annual accomplishment survey. This internal evaluation data provided substantial input to the findings of this study.

The original study evaluated the impact of programs on the communities they served. Five broad questions determined by the Corporation were addressed:

1. What work did the programs perform?
2. What was the impact of the work on direct beneficiaries?
3. What were the institutional impacts on sponsors, partners, or involved institutions?
4. Did the programs build stronger communities?
5. What is the return on the national service investment?

In the follow-up evaluation, only two of the original questions, those encompassing institutional and community impacts, were addressed:

1. What were the institutional impacts on sponsors, partners, or involved institutions?
2. Did the programs build stronger communities?

Three Tiers of the Evaluation

The research approach in both the original and the follow-up AmeriCorps evaluation studies utilized three tiers. Each tier used different sampling strategies and sets of evaluative activities. For tier one, which includes all AmeriCorps programs, activities were scheduled to provide comparable data on all programs sponsored by AmeriCorps. Tier two, a large sample of programs, was designed to provide a closer look at how programs work and a fuller picture of their services to communities and, in the case of the first study, also the benefits for members. Tier three, a smaller sample, provided a context for studies that examined cause and effect relationships in depth for a select group of programs. Data from tier three studies helped validate the statistical findings from tier one and tier two.

The goal of the follow-up study was to update key findings, primarily on institutional development and community strengthening impacts. Hence, to maintain a sound

sampling strategy and consistent research methodology, the programs identified for tiers two and three in the original study were the same ones examined in the follow-up evaluation. Drawing on the original sampling design preserved the power of the results since they derived from random samples. At the same time, this approach maximized the comparability of the information between the two studies.

Tier one data was collected from project grant applications, reports to the Corporation, evaluation plans and instruments, program objectives, and the Annual Accomplishment Review. These data enabled us to verify findings about the growth in institutional capacity, and in the areas of accountability, monitoring and evaluation. Tier two and tier three data were collected through telephone interviews and site visits. These data allowed an in-depth view of how individual programs functioned, how programs were perceived in their communities and the impacts of AmeriCorps service on those communities.

Tier One

This tier included all AmeriCorps programs and all AmeriCorps members. The research team conducted an extensive examination and analysis of the Annual Accomplishment Reviews conducted by programs and the Corporation's administrative databases. Tier one activities for the follow-up study focused on community impact.

Tier Two

For the follow up study, Aguirre International identified 34 of the 60 sites from the original study (57 percent) that are still active[3]. Since the original 60 programs constituted a random sample, the 34 remaining programs also form a random sample. Researchers conducted telephone interviews with administrators and community representatives for each of the surviving programs from the original study. These interviews focused both on community impact and institutional impact.

Tier Three

The tier three sample consists of the six original tier three sites (75 percent) that are still in existence. Five of these sites participated in site visits conducted by researchers. Each site visit included an extensive interview with the program administrator, a meeting with the program's evaluation coordinator, a meeting with service recipients, informal discussions with members, and, where possible, the observation of actual service. In addition, interviews were also conducted with community stakeholders familiar with the program. These site visits augmented the rich body of data already collected on each site, enabling comparison with 1994-95 site visit data and detailed analysis.

In addition to the three tiers described above, content analysis was conducted on program objectives both from 1995-96 and 1998-99, as well as on progress reports

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[3] Thirty-one of the thirty-four sites completed all the evaluation activities. We were not able to interview three sites (including one Tier 3 site). However, they are included in Aguirre's analysis of Corporation data sources.

and evaluation documents from the same time period. This enabled us to identify the current community strengthening objectives, activities, and accomplishments of each of the programs and compare it with the data from the original evaluation.

The methodology employed in the follow-up study enabled Aguirre International to carry out an evaluation that yielded rich results regarding the institutional development and community strengthening impacts of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct Programs. It also provided us with the data necessary to identify differences and note changes that have occurred since the 1994-1995 impact study. Our three tiered approach, consistent with the approach taken for the 1994-1995 study, yielded diverse findings. Taken together, they provide a good picture of AmeriCorps' five-year impact on the nation's communities.

SECTION II.
AMERICORPS PROGRAMS AT FIVE YEARS

KEY FINDINGS

- 57 percent of AmeriCorps programs were still in existence five years later.
- Programs have adapted to changing circumstances and community needs by altering their service areas and models.
- Surviving programs provided more member supervision and training and had better communication with partner and host agencies.
- By the fifth year, programs were more focused and their previous years efforts laid the groundwork for more concerted and successful service delivery.
- Most surviving programs have matured by building on their strengths and coming in to their own.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the changing impacts of AmeriCorps participation on sponsoring organizations and the programs they developed over a five program year period. The chapter will discuss how the AmeriCorps funding, and its concomitant requirements, affected program services, organizational structure, management, internal procedures, and external relationships of involved institutions.

SAMPLED PROGRAMS AT FIVE YEARS

After five years, 34 of the original 60 programs (57 percent) were still receiving Corporation funding. National direct programs appeared to have had higher survival rates. About two-thirds of the programs sponsored by federal agencies and national non-profits were still in existence while only half the programs funded through state commissions still received Corporation funding. Five of the 26 no-longer-funded programs dropped out by the end of the first year of the study. The remaining 21 programs continued to the second year but dropped out in succeeding years.

Among the remaining programs, one in five had reorganized their funding relationship to the Corporation. The most dramatic reorganization occurred when congress ordered that federal agencies cease sponsoring AmeriCorps programs, forcing these programs to find new sponsors. Of the six federal programs sampled, four become state programs and two ceased to exist. Another type of reorganization occurred when a few national direct programs in our sample also became state programs. Among sampled programs, this occurred in two ways. One sponsor stopped operating as a national direct and its sites became state programs while

another continued to operate nationally but some of its sites became state programs. Both of the demonstration programs were still in existence and had reorganized; one became a Learn and Serve higher education program and the other a national direct program.[4]

Table 2.2. Five Year Survivability of AmeriCorps Programs

Original type of program	Number of programs		
	1994-95	1998-99	% Remaining
Federal programs	6	4	67%
National Direct programs	8	5	63%
Demonstration programs	2	2	100%
State programs	44	23	52%
Total	60	34	57%

Source: Corporation Grants Database 1994-95, 1998-99

PROGRAM DOCUMENTATION ANALYSIS

Program objectives and reports were reviewed for quality and completeness by evaluators experienced in working with AmeriCorps programs. All 34 programs had at least some data available for this review, however the number of pre and post sets of reports and objectives were slightly lower. For each report or set of objectives evaluators completed a yes-no checklist of items. (See Appendix G for instruments) Data were entered into an Access database and analyzed using paired sample t-tests.

Objectives

Pre (1995-1996) and post (1998-2000) objectives for 27 programs were scored. Each objective statement could earn up to 16 points, and scores within each category (Getting Things Done, Community Strengthening, Member Development) were averaged to arrive at one score for the category. Programs showed a statistically significant improvement ($p < .05$) in the quality and measurability of objectives in all three categories. The average objectives scores improved by one point or more in all categories. Programs are still in the process of learning to write high quality, measurable outcome objectives. The average Getting Things Done objective scored 4.3 out of 16 points at post test. However, programs are making meaningful progress in this area.

Reports

Pre (1994-1996) and post (1998-1999) reports for 29 programs were scored. There

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[4] The Learn and Serve program is counted here because it is still receiving Corporation funding. However, it is not included in subsequent analysis that pertains to AmeriCorps*State/National Direct.

was a significant (p<.05) improvement in the type and quantity of information included in progress reports. Programs scored an average of 13 out of 21 possible points on 1994-1996 reports and an average of 17 on their 1998-1999 reports. Areas scored included the completion of report sections, inclusion of progress data (e.g. type and number of beneficiaries served), description of outcome evaluation procedures and results, and descriptions of plans for modifying and improving outcomes on objectives.

Overall, the largest advances in reporting were seen in program's abilities to describe the desired result of the program and evaluation activities in which they engaged. Smaller gains were also seen in programs abilities to compare their evaluation results to their standard of success and to state ideas for next steps and improvements.

INCREASING MASTERY OF PROGRAM STRUCTURE

In order to field an effective program, agencies had to successfully master several aspects of program development. Initially, few programs were able to be effective in all areas of program development. However, by the end of five years, programs had made great gains in all of these areas.

Organizing Members to Provide National Service

The structure of AmeriCorps services varied greatly from program to program depending on the type of service being provided, as well as according to the needs and resources of the communities in which members served. Similarly to previous service years, existing programs primarily deployed members in one of three ways: crew or team approach, individual approach, and modified individual placement approach.

Approximately 50 percent of the surviving programs had some sort of team-based service.[5] Members who served in crews generally performed a series of short-term service projects responsive to community needs. Administrators' experiences have proven that the types of activities most successful in this approach were quantity-focused or physical. Consequently, this was a major method of organization for environmental service and other services that required well-organized teams to be effective.

These AmeriCorps programs required substantial planning to keep teams of members completing direct service on a daily basis. With experience, programs have developed more effective team assignments. According to AmeriCorps administrators, host sites now actively participate in implementing the team approach. Many agencies are now acquainted with the AmeriCorps structure and are aware of

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[5] Many programs used more than one placement type.

the degree of supervisory responsibilities needed to effectively manage services and members. Developing strong collaborations and communication channels with AmeriCorps have allowed them to overcome most of the difficulties in managing the logistics of the operation.

AmeriCorps programs have learned from preceding years that team dynamics and interpersonal interactions can threaten the viability of some team activities. This understanding has changed the type of diversity training provided to members. To this end, the evaluated programs' provided substantial and comprehensive on-going diversity and service-specific training. Numerous administrators reported that having more structured training, as opposed to informal "training" sessions, followed by member feedback, proved successful.

Another common method of deploying members was to place one member to serve with each service partner, often under the primary supervision of the service partner personnel. Generally, programs that focused on the education and human needs service areas were most likely to use the individual placement model.

Members individually placed, usually at community agencies or schools, provided sustained direct service to their host's service recipients. In 1998-99 only 41% of AmeriCorps programs made individual placements at host sites. Administrators recognized that in order for this model to be effective, members needed to be thoroughly trained, supported, and supervised for the duration of the project. When well implemented, members in individual placements became the critical link between AmeriCorps programs, host service partners, and the communities.

The third type of placement was a hybrid of the other two models known as the modified individual placement. This service model assigns more than one individual to long-term placements at schools and community organizations. Over the years, there has been a great increase in the number of programs offering these types of placements. Virtually unknown in the first year, modified individual placements are now offered by 60 percent of programs.

The modified placement model involved establishing pairs or small groups of members in a host location, such as a community organization, a park, or a school, to pursue specific responsibilities for the duration of their participation in AmeriCorps. As with the other models, good supervision that was frequent and support of member teams were essential to success. Because a unified AmeriCorps team remained an important component of member development, weekly team meetings and regular training sessions were also crucial to success. Forty-five percent of the administrators at the existing programs noted members and supervisors are in immediate contact with one another; and another thirty-three percent of supervisors had daily contact with members. This strategy has proven to work well because pairing members at sites formed a small-scale team-like atmosphere and support system while simultaneously permitting members to focus on their core activities.

Independent of the type of member placement model used, the combination of effective training, good on-site supervision, and thoughtful matching of member skills and service sites enhanced both AmeriCorps members and host agencies' experiences. AmeriCorps personnel confirmed that the higher rates in member retention, improved services to beneficiaries and increased partner collaboration indicates that AmeriCorps is successfully addressing the challenges that plagued them in the preceding years.

Recruitment and selection of members

In its first five years, AmeriCorps programs fielded over 100,000 members. Developing, planning and implementing strategies for a vast cadre of members and services was and continues to be a daunting feat. Nevertheless, these AmeriCorps programs confirmed that the member recruitment and supervision processes are more transparent and streamlined. The selection, training, and supervision of these members had a fundamental influence on the quality and impact of the services provided by individual AmeriCorps programs.

As programs have matured their member selection processes have become more sophisticated and structured. The five years of service have guided programs to set more specific and appropriate criteria, and develop more structured review processes of member selection. As a result, while member turnover was significant in the first years, member retention did not seem to be a challenge for the programs in this follow up evaluation.

The 1998-99 programs addressed three main issues associated with member selection that caused challenges in the previous years. Where many programs had naively thought that AmeriCorps was primarily a member development program and that they could take anyone willing to serve and turn them into an effective service provider, the focus now is to recruit members with some level of experience and relevant skills. Over seventy percent of the programs recruited qualified members from the local communities, but when the selection of qualified applicants was slim, they resorted to national recruitees. Programs are more knowledgeable of the types of skills required to perform service tasks and match those with the members' skills.

Furthermore, many of the AmeriCorps programs opted to include potential partnering organizations and host sites to help select from the pool of AmeriCorps applicants. Some AmeriCorps programs used these community organizations as networks to recruit members and clients. For instance, one adult education program that provided GED and ESL training was forced to change its recruitment style in response to its' state's reply to welfare reform. The social service agencies in answer to the state's "Work first" approach now attempted to place clients directly in jobs and only rarely referred them to skills training (including GED). The AmeriCorps program experienced a corresponding decline in students. In response, the program expended more efforts to develop relations with new community organizations focusing on strengthening referrals and student recruitment. This program is now working on a

new referral system with job service/welfare to which nine organizations (work force services agencies, county libraries, and non-profit organizations) contribute. The GED on TV program has begun referring students.

Second, programs strove for a better match between AmeriCorps member's backgrounds and the supervision and deployment models they would encounter during their service tenure. Programs that required individual placements or programs with geographically diverse sites realized during the start up years that they needed to recruit members with higher levels of maturity and experience. Consequently, in the fifth year, these programs are recruiting members who have higher levels of initiative and self-discipline in order to organize and carry out projects with minimal oversight.

Third, programs continued to select members that best reflected the activities and communities with whom they were interacting. In this study, fifty-six percent of the programs reported that they felt that the demographics of the members selected and recruited mirrored those of their client population. Programs jointly selected and recruited members with host sites to ensure there was a suitable fit between members and local needs.

Additionally, on average, AmeriCorps programs recruited 72% of their members from the local community. From that pool, an average of 40% of the programs mentioned that those members were considered "at-risk". That is to say that many of these members had not obtained their high school diploma or were enrolled in GED programs. For those that did further their education beyond high school, they were more than likely the first generation in their family to be college bound.

This collaborative practice not only solidified AmeriCorps and host agency relationships, but yielded more direct services as
- communities responded positively when they saw local members, more specifically at-risk members, serving in their communities; and
- in several situations it became apparent that locally recruited members had a much better understanding of the community and how service beneficiaries should be approached.

MEMBER TRAINING

Members received a variety of initial and ongoing training; however, follow up programs commented that training became more service-specific and more thorough over the years. Program training still consisted of a cursory session on performing direct service along with some training urged by the Corporation in diversity, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), and conflict resolution. Programs also gave greater weight to training focusing on member development, where members received extensive initial and ongoing training in academic, interpersonal, and life skills. At one program, member training helps the members turn their lives around. As a result, both the members and the community recognize the contribution of the

program's members, many of whom had been community liabilities before their service year.

One notable difference from the previous years is that partnering organizations with AmeriCorps were also jointly developing training programs and materials that will best serve the communities and members.

During the course of the first year, administrators and supervisors became more aware of the types of skills needed by members. In the intervening years, administrators and host agencies have gradually realized the value of focused training and approach it as a practical function, rather than a grab bag of miscellaneous training classes.

Supervision and Coordination of Members and Activities

The quality of member supervision emerged as an essential issue in program effectiveness. It was also one of the greatest challenges that programs faced. There were many models of supervision among AmeriCorps programs, each with its strengths and weaknesses. To address these challenges, programs generally increased or stressed host supervision training and placed more supervisory responsibilities on the host sites.

An overwhelming majority of the 1998-1999 AmeriCorps programs (75%) annually provided training and materials to new and ongoing partners. Training support to host agencies and an increase in communication with partnering or host organizations has tremendously effected the quality of supervision being provided at the sites. Eighteen of the thirty-one administrators noted that this was possible because they regularly talked or met with each of their partners or met with each partner on an as - needed basis. Two of three administrators also had regular meetings with groups of partners.

Team-based programs generally assigned a supervisor to each team who was most often based at the job site. In some cases, this crew supervisor was a full-time paid member of the program staff. In other cases, a member was assigned to act as a team leader under the direction of a staff supervisor who also supervised other teams, sometimes at several different service sites. The team supervisor faced three main tasks:
- making sure each team member performed a fair share of service,
- maintaining team morale, and
- mediating interpersonal conflicts among team members.

Programs in this study continued to employ second-year members to supervise first-year members. This strategy works because second-year members with previous AmeriCorps experience could relate to the challenges that new members were experiencing, such as, adjusting to standards, learning the procedures of an office, or

dealing with disciplinary actions or regulations. In addition, returning members were more familiar and adaptable in dealing with the bureaucracies at the different organizations, as well as knowing the characteristics of the communities.

While second-year members brought a unique perspective to member supervision, programs provided support with closer supervision. These changes were seen in this study. Programs had a structure where team leaders, who were second-year members, oversaw service projects, but staff supervisors dealt with team conflicts and discipline. This was probably the most successful model for incorporating members into supervisory roles.

Different supervision structures had to be adopted when members were geographically dispersed at a variety of community locations, typically at programs using individual placements or modified individual placements. In these situations, supervisors could be staff members at either the sponsoring agency or the host agency.

Sponsoring agencies actively provided member supervision, each supervisor would be in charge of several AmeriCorps members placed at different host sites or locations. Members and supervisors often met on a weekly schedule and most supervisors tried to be available by telephone or in person when challenges arose. The prevalence of electronic mail and other technology driven communication channels has also provided for Members at different sites that share a common supervisor and guidelines, although they do not have daily, immediate supervision. Supervisors often tried to form links among members at various sites through program-wide projects and training sessions.

Another option was to have the host agency provide supervision. This strategy has become more predominant over the last years. As programs have developed better communication and working relationships with their host sites they have naturally evolved to this approach. This configuration provided the AmeriCorps member with local supervision and immediate feedback. The site supervisor was more knowledgeable of the specifics of the placement and could give better guidance and support. Moreover, AmeriCorps administrators provided joint training to both host and staff supervisors. Through the years, host agencies have become more knowledgeable of the AmeriCorps requirements; thus, they have become consistent in adhering to them.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

By now it should be clear that AmeriCorps*State and National programs are diverse in program structure, organization, and services performed. There is no one "model" program. However, several factors that characterize successful programs have emerged:

- Choose an appropriate member deployment strategy.
- Provide appropriate and frequent member supervision.
- Match member skills to service projects.
- Provide appropriate and adequate member training.
- Educate host agencies about the AmeriCorps goals and their roles with members.
- Maintain good communication with partner agencies.
- Plan for and directly address diversity issues among members.

AmeriCorps programs have now become extremely successful in obtaining partners and developing liaisons with a wide-range of community organizations. This stands in stark contrast to the first years when partner problems were more prevalent. This change is partly due to the success of these programs, thus making potential partners realize that they would be advantageously served if in partnership with AmeriCorps. Furthermore, programs' experience over the last years within their communities has made them more expert at forming coalitions and engaging community, and sometimes region-wide, collaborations.

SECTION III - CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY IMPACT

Assessment on the impact of AmeriCorps on these communities involves looking at several types of program activities and their effects. For this study Aguirre International examined the extent to which AmeriCorps programs:

1. improved the lives of service beneficiaries,
2. strengthened partners and involved institutions,
3. improved linkages between community organizations,
4. improved community infrastructure and increased community resources,
5. increased the skills and capabilities of AmeriCorps members,
6. involved community members and organizations in service,
7. mobilized community members and improve community morale, and
8. increased understanding of diversity.

SECTION III - CHAPTER 2: INVOLVING OTHER INSTITUTIONS WITH AMERICORPS

KEY FINDINGS

- AmeriCorps expanded the number and type of institutions involved in direct community service.
- AmeriCorps caused new community institutions and partnerships to develop.
- Partnerships and consortia of community organizations created by AmeriCorps streamlined the delivery of community services.
- AmeriCorps members frequently provided partners critical resources that enabled partner organizations to sustain or expand existing services.

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning, AmeriCorps programs provided benefits to far more entities than just the sponsoring agencies. Many other community institutions involved in the AmeriCorps effort also benefited from their association with AmeriCorps. Collaborating institutions included partners and any organization that participated in the program, or provided technical assistance or resources other than money. Examples of these institutions included schools, homeless shelters, and mental health agencies. For the purposes of this study, Aguirre International has categorized participating institutions as follows:

- *Partners*, were community organizations that were directly involved in the AmeriCorps program. They did not directly receive AmeriCorps grants or administer the funds, but did formally participate, along with a sponsor in the development and implementation of the AmeriCorps services. Partnering organizations differed greatly in the ways and degree to which they were involved with AmeriCorps. Many partners had AmeriCorps members working on their premises.

- In addition to partners, there were *other involved institutions* that provided assistance or resources, but did not have formalized relationships with the AmeriCorps programs. This might include a church that donated space to a program, a community agency that helped recruit clients to a new AmeriCorps service, or a group of community leaders who helped plan feasible service projects.

This chapter will examine the impact the new AmeriCorps program on the institutions most committed to AmeriCorps, namely, partners and other involved organizations. It will discuss how the AmeriCorps funding, with its concomitant requirements, affected involved institutions' and partners' program services, organizational structure, management, internal procedures, and external relationships.

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATED IN AMERICORPS

Institutions were involved with AmeriCorps sponsors in a variety of ways. Aguirre International undertook a review of all institutions providing resources or assistance to the sampled AmeriCorps programs. In 1998-99, the 30 responding sponsoring organizations identified 679 collaborating community organizations that were involved during the 1997-1998 program year. The number of organizations involved with the average AmeriCorps program increased from ten involved organizations in 1994-95 to 23 per sponsoring institution in 1998-1999. These institutions included:

- 57 for-profit organizations (8 percent),
- 116 governmental institutions (17percent) including 23 Federal agencies (4 percent) and 93 state and local agencies (14 percent), and
- 361 non-profit organizations (53 percent) including 194 community organizations (29 percent), 130 educational institutions (19 percent), 17 foundations (3 percent), and 20 organizations (3 percent).

AmeriCorps Involvement with Community Institutions

In order to determine how involved institutions were affected by their participation in AmeriCorps, Aguirre International surveyed stakeholders from an average of two involved institutions at each sampled AmeriCorps program. (73 involved community institutions.)[6] To be involved, an organization had to do more than just provide resources, it had to take an active role in the program by participating in a core program activity. Table 3.3 summarizes the extensive collaboration between sponsors and involved institutions in the measured core program activities. More than half of the institutions were involved in conceptualizing project activities, implementing the project and/or evaluating it. Sponsors often involved partners in key aspects of defining, carrying out and modifying their AmeriCorps programs. Involved institutions also worked closely in training members and recruiting service beneficiaries. To a lesser extent, involved institutions assisted with recruiting members and proposal writing.

Table 3.1 How Involved Institutions Participated in AmeriCorps

Activity	Year 5
Recruiting of Clients	80%
Soliciting Community Support	82%
Members Training	73%
Conceptualizing Project	68%
Evaluation of Project Work	70%
Projects Implementation	82%
Member Recruitment	52%
Proposal Writing	35%

Source: Community Representative Interviews

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[6] The sample of representatives of involved institutions was a sub sample of the community representative survey. Those interviews from the community representative sample that were from individuals whose institutions were not involved with the corresponding sampled AmeriCorps program were not included in this analysis.

PARTNERS AND INVOLVED INSTITUTIONS

Active collaboration with involved institutions was critical to the successful and smooth functioning of programs given their depth of involvement. Initially, the AmeriCorps programs had some difficulties incorporating other community organizations into their service programs. Issues related to coordination, member supervision, communication and commitment had to be addressed. After five years, Aguirre evaluators found that programs had made great strides in their relations with partners and other involved institutions.

As programs matured, they became better known in their communities. More agencies saw the value of allying themselves with AmeriCorps. Several programs remarked that while they once had difficulty finding partners, they now had waiting lists of organizations wanting to participate. Consequently, they could be more selective in choosing their partnerships.

In addition, programs became more sophisticated in their relations with their partners. They instituted trainings for partners, developed partner councils with regularly held meetings, and better supervised and evaluated partners contributions.

The best cases of collaboration between sponsors and involved institutions resulted in new ways to centralize costly operations while decentralizing program design and implementation. The partnerships and consortia arising out of AmeriCorps collaborations also created new models for organizational structure and practice that marshaled scarce community resources more effectively.

One illustrative example consists of a homeless coalition that formed forty-one collaborative partnerships. These new collaborative partnerships heightened the awareness of homeless issues among other service area providers; they also challenged these providers to evaluate their existing program management systems by reconsidering their intake processes, assessment procedures, and eligibility requirements. Each new collaborative partnership provided additional connections to social service or community-wide agencies, thereby combining resources to help homeless people in more effective ways. An additional benefit was that the sponsoring organization necessitated the development of networking and collaborative skills among AmeriCorps members. Members learned a great deal about how to collaborate effectively and the ingredients necessary for motivating organizations to work together.

Closely involved institutions derived many of the same benefits that partners did. These benefits included increased community legitimacy, expanded community involvement, greater community awareness, and greater collaboration with other community-based organizations. In addition, these organizations often underwent similar transformations as sponsors as they became involved with new service populations or added direct service to their organizations for the first time. For

example, one Lion's club, that had predominantly been involved in providing vision services to children, expanded their services to include the homeless.

The examples listed below further illustrate the positive transformations resulting from collaborative partnerships. As stated by some community representatives,

> *"AmeriCorps' participation has let us expand our services, loser student/client rations, and provide mentoring to clients. Our focus is building developmental assets in clients and AmeriCorps members help us to do to this. They add strength to our program."*

> *"AmeriCorps members can work more flexible hours and are more committed than volunteers."*

> *"The [AmeriCorps members] have done work we wouldn't have been able to do otherwise."*

> *"AmeriCorps has helped us open relationships with other organizations and build new collaboration with migrant health and education."*

- AmeriCorps members helped a community partner survey the needs of youth in its community. AmeriCorps members continue to help a partner tabulate the results of the survey. The partner's director has said, "I've been delighted with the work done by AmeriCorps members. We would not have reached our goal of 250 surveys without them, and they brought an energy and enthusiasm that made this project easy and a pleasure."

- Members provided truancy support to a high school resulting in double-digit gains in attendance, yielding more funding for the school.

- In one state, AmeriCorps members collaborated with a partner by running a three-day per week summer program for children. This agency had never implemented a program for children, as they had worked primarily with parents and the elderly. This new program, run by AmeriCorps members, had a major effect on the agency. They began to get more parents involved in the program as a result.

Overall, involved institutions gave sponsors high marks for community collaborations. Ninety percent said that their collaboration with the sponsoring organization seldom fell short of what was needed, while 90 percent said that it always met or exceeded what was needed to accomplish goals.

LINKAGES BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to strengthening communities by providing new institutional architecture in terms of sponsors and consortia, AmeriCorps developed institutional infrastructure among sponsors and involved institutions, including non-partnering organizations. Creating links and relationships between community organizations was an important contribution of AmeriCorps programs.

AmeriCorps contributed the following institutional changes:

- strengthened links between schools, community organizations, and businesses,
- organized referral networks,
- brought together organizations that do not usually work together, and
- improved services by eliminating inter-agency bottlenecks.

The new linkages established between AmeriCorps and other institutions in the community actually strengthened both the actual partnering organizations and the communities in which they worked. In becoming more aware of other community organizations and their service missions, community organizations can better support one another in providing comprehensive services. In many cases, these links and changes will endure. The following examples illustrate how AmeriCorps strengthened institutional infrastructure of communities.

- In some communities, AmeriCorps programs developed institutional links with local businesses such as banks, real estate agents and landlords. These business networks made businesses more aware of the opportunities to serve low-income community residents, while making services more easily available to residents. Other programs linked together complimentary services, such as job training and childcare.

- In another case, a city's planning department worked with AmeriCorps to secure more lots to build on and in the evaluation of energy and resource efficiency of the homes members build.

- Active collaboration between the community and one university led to the creation of a service-learning center. Classes were created to provide colleagues from different disciplines the opportunity to work together on local service projects, which not only benefits their students, but also the inner-city communities. The development and strengthening of these collaborations will inevitably have long-term impacts on making the communities stronger and more cohesive.

In many cases, the AmeriCorps members themselves served as a link between agencies. At one program, AmeriCorps members who were placed at various community agencies developed a neighborhood improvement. They linked beneficiaries of one agency with supplies and tools at another agency to develop a clean-up and fence-building project that improved the appearance of the neighborhood and reduced loitering.

AmeriCorps Strengthens Links Between Involved Institutions

Overall, 66 percent of involved institutions felt that the AmeriCorps program fostered at least a moderate amount of active community collaboration between their institution and community organizations other than the sponsor. In addition, 74 percent of the involved institutions thought that AmeriCorps was doing a good job helping community organizations work together. Another 22 percent felt that AmeriCorps had made satisfactory progress in this area. Only 4 percent felt that AmeriCorps programs were needed development in helping organizations work together.

When specifically discussing how community service organizations worked together, 69 percent of the involved institutions felt that the AmeriCorps program was doing a very good job changing the ways in which organizations worked together to provide direct services. An additional 26 percent felt that AmeriCorps had made satisfactory progress. Only 5 percent felt that AmeriCorps programs needed development in this respect.

In almost all cases (94 percent), involved institutions felt that AmeriCorps had a positive impact on their organizations. Only 11 percent said that they did not expect to continue their AmeriCorps collaborations. Involved institution representatives stated that AmeriCorps had infused their organizations with new resources, helped them achieve their goals, made their jobs easier, and helped their clients. Schools that were host sites to members were particularly grateful to AmeriCorps programs for easing teachers' burdens, expanding the quality of education, and increasing contacts between students and adults. Businesses that began by providing resources often became more involved in direct service over time.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Involved institutions made substantial contributions to the AmeriCorps program, as many were deeply involved with sponsors' core activities. Over time, more community organizations became involved with AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps forged new relationships and networks among involved institutions. These new networks continue to streamline community services and to provide a more cohesive web of services for community beneficiaries. Involved institutions experienced many of the same benefits as sponsors did from AmeriCorps participation. These benefits included increased community legitimacy, expanded community involvement, greater community awareness, and greater collaboration with other community-based organizations.

Since 1994-1995, AmeriCorps programs have become more sophisticated in their relations with their partners and collaboration between sponsors and involved institutions resulted in new ways to centralize costly operations while decentralizing

program implementation. New and more effective models for organizational structure and practice that marshaled scarce resources were also created.

The effects of AmeriCorps on America's community institutions are profound. AmeriCorps has served as a catalyst for change in how community organizations operate and deliver services. AmeriCorps has made great progress in meeting the challenge of helping community organizations provide targeted services in an efficient and accountable manner.

SECTION III - CHAPTER 3: IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

KEY FINDINGS

- AmeriCorps strengthened the physical infrastructure of needy communities benefiting 7.5 million people.
- AmeriCorps brought new financial resources into communities, above and beyond the AmeriCorps grants.
- AmeriCorps programs leveraged new community volunteers
- AmeriCorps programs incorporated more businesses into their programs in a variety of ways that drew on the strengths and interests of local merchants and multinational companies.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

AmeriCorps serves many low-income communities that lack resources and infrastructure. As part of setting up and carrying out their community service and community strengthening objectives, AmeriCorps programs strengthened communities by developing new physical and informational infrastructure.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

AmeriCorps strengthened America's communities by building and upgrading the physical infrastructure of communities. Members built or renovated community centers, park buildings and structures, playgrounds, low-income housing stock, roads, trails, and community gardens. AmeriCorps programs also protected communities from disasters and emergencies and helped repair damage to community infrastructure in both rural and urban areas. In some cases, AmeriCorps members improved the physical infrastructure of communities by removing nuisances that prevented community members from enjoying public spaces. These efforts included

organizing community cleanups, removing and replacing graffiti with community artwork such as murals, destroying condemned and dangerous structures, and closing down drug houses. As part of their direct service, members also made existing infrastructure more usable by improving community safety.

The range and magnitude of the developments in physical infrastructure accomplished by AmeriCorps members can be appreciated in the aggregate Annual Accomplishment Reviews. In 1997-1998, 7.5 million community members benefited from improvements to their neighborhoods. AmeriCorps programs built over 230 shelters, weatherized or winterized 1,067 homes and apartments and 36 community buildings, planted parklands with 1,320,640 trees, repaired 8,194 dams, established 981 neighborhood gardens, and built 1,096 units of housing. These and other projects positively effected whole communities.

Other examples also show how physical infrastructure was developed or maintained, but reflect the collaborative nature of these endeavors that involved various organizations and community participants. In addition, they show how addressing one problem often leads to the solution of another. A garden is planted and community members begin to beautify other parts of their community; a trash collection activity paves the way for a community-wide recycling effort; the effort to teach one parenting class leads to an on-going and productive association between community outreach programs and the community's schools.

- Several AmeriCorps programs have successfully removed crack houses, abandoned cars and other blights from drug and crime infested neighborhoods. Members at one AmeriCorps program persistently called the police and city until finally succeeded in getting the blights removed. In one town, AmeriCorps members worked with the community to rehabilitate a dilapidated home that then provided a safe, affordable homeownership opportunity for a low-income family.

- In one conservation corps project, members helped clean and restore facilities at a major waterway, making streams and state forests more accessible to visitors. These restoration and cleanup activities enabled thousands of residents to use areas and they can now enjoy the beauty of their community and feel a sense of pride and ownership.

- A local elementary school joined AmeriCorps in refurbishing a community resource center that will provide residents with classes in parenting, health, and literacy.

- A single AmeriCorps program can have a substantial impact on the neighborhood it serves. One building rehabilitation program in a low-income neighborhood has been successful, not only in improving the building stock of the neighborhood, but also in improving neighborhood morale. In 1998, this project assisted local families by constructing eleven energy efficient homes and rehabilitating five more. They weatherized an additional 27 homes and provided emergency air conditioning to needy residents during an extended heat wave. At the community level, this same program cleaned up and replanted nine parks, repaired park facilities, and maintained trails in twelve parks during the same year.

- In one neighborhood the local AmeriCorps program has become a national showcase for how good community policing can work by building community policing and block organizations. The Aguirre evaluator who visited this program described her entrance to the community this way.

  > *"I drove through a series of depressed neighborhoods and then there was a shift away from abandoned lots and unkempt houses to a beautiful park and a vital looking block with a beautifully painted senior center and child care facility."*

Prior to AmeriCorps the beautiful park was called "needle park" and this neighborhood, like those currently surrounding it, was littered with abandoned cars and abandoned properties.

INFORMATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

AmeriCorps members also developed communities' informational infrastructure as part of their community strengthening objectives. AmeriCorps programs gathered, updated and compiled information and put it in databases, newsletters, Internet postings, and other formats made available to the community. Improvements to informational infrastructure included writing procedural manuals, compiling and distributing lists of community resources, setting up referral services, and developing on-line databases for service providers or community members. Other sites increased the databases of service organizations by door-to-door canvassing, environmental assessments, and community surveys. In addition, AmeriCorps members developed workshops, made presentations, passed out fliers and held informational events to better distribute information within communities.

Informational infrastructure is not systematically tracked as such in the AmeriCorps accomplishment surveys, so no overall level of effort or impact can be determined. However, some program examples illustrate the types and efforts undertaken

- A member collaborated with local agencies to plan and facilitate six parent education workshops on the following topics: "Stages and Ages," "Your Child's Nutrition," "Ensuring Your Child's Health and Safety," "Preparing Yourself (and your Child) for Kindergarten," "Television and Kids," and "Why Do My Children Act This Way?"

- Members held meetings community *fiestas*, workshops and gatherings to distribute information on diabetes awareness, HIV/AIDS training, personal health, immunization, household safety, and solid waste management to members Native American groups.

- An AmeriCorps member created an emergency family services website, including a job posting bulletin board. A non-profit internet service helped the member put the information and bulletin on line.

- A second year AmeriCorps Member who provides peer counseling and resource development/procurement at one program, created a system for tracing over 200 veterans' aftercare programs. Previously, the tracking system was old and outdated. The Member devised forms, electronic tracking systems, and follow up procedures that allow former clients to be successfully tracked 85 percent of the time, as opposed to 35 percent before. The agency will use this model as their tracking system when undertaking new projects in this area. As a result of her efforts, clients are able to receive much better follow up care. The agency can continue to play an important supporting role, as well as monitor progress on an ongoing basis as clients continue to receive services even after they move on. This has made a significant impact in helping clients avoid relapse of harmful behaviors. In addition, the member recruited 16 executive directors of local social service agencies to attend a meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission and to agree to track the number of veterans their agencies were serving.

- A first year AmeriCorps Member formed a collective with six middle school students and six high school students. The group did extensive surveys on the problem of sexual harassment in the schools. Using the findings, they developed a booklet called "Sexual Harassment Hurts Everyone." The booklet explains in detail what sexual harassment is, has personal stories from students, contains some cartoons which illustrate sexual harassment, and has some resources for student if they experience sexual harassment. When they had completed the booklet after five and one-half months of work, the Member and her students set up a booklet release celebration and invited teachers, students, principals, parents, and the City's Board of Supervisors to review the booklet. The celebration was a great success and attendance was excellent. The students will use the booklet in their presentations to the city's Youth Commission and board of supervisors. Their goal is that every student at the middle school get a booklet upon request. The student group hopes that the sexual harassment booklet will become part of school policy and that every elementary, middle school, and high school student will have one. The impact is that the whole school district will have a new sexual harassment policy, put together by students for students, as well as a booklet to use as reference.

BRINGING RESOURCES TO COMMUNITIES

In addition to improving community infrastructure, AmeriCorps programs brought new resources to communities by raising funds above and beyond the AmeriCorps grants and recruiting volunteers, many from outside the community.

Volunteer resources

In addition to improving community infrastructure, AmeriCorps programs brought new resources to communities by raising funds above and beyond the AmeriCorps grants and recruiting volunteers, many from outside the community. According to the Annual Accomplishment Survey, 522 AmeriCorps programs recruited, placed, supervised and/or trained 433,623 community volunteers. These volunteers greatly expanded the work that the 13,297 AmeriCorps members who recruited them could accomplish in their communities. Volunteers helped staff community events, participated in community cleanups, worked in schools, helped the elderly, taught

adults to read, and provided other needed community services.

While many of these volunteers were drawn from the surrounding community, programs did not just displace other community volunteers. Many AmeriCorps programs leveraged new volunteers—they were able to recruit individuals without a tradition of community volunteering to participate. While some programs involved parents, youth, the elderly and other community members as ongoing volunteers, other programs created volunteer opportunities and recruited volunteers for one-time events. A typical program in this category organized service projects and recruited volunteers for opening day, signature service days, an annual serve-a-thon, and Martin Luther King Day. The program managed to get three local banks involved in the events and the state attorney general was the guest speaker for their Martin Luther King Day event.

Some AmeriCorps program sought out new sources of volunteers, both on a one-time and continuing basis.

- One AmeriCorps program partnered with a local university to develop the "Learning from the Community" symposium. The event included workshops designed to prepare university students, faculty and staff, and community service providers for work in the community.

- An enterprising program enlisted members of a national service fraternity while they attended a regional conference, for an environmental service day. Conference participants volunteered at five sites. They (1) maintained trails and replaced a bridge washed out by flooding at a local nature center; (2) mulched a nature trail, planted native plants, and installed a temporary fence along a recreational area AmeriCorps members had created at an apartment complex for the working poor; (3) cleaned out a garden and built an outdoor classroom at an elementary school; (4) cleaned up a creek at a site notorious for illegal dumping; and, (5) cleaned up a creek in a community park.

Financial resources

Along with increasing human resources, AmeriCorps programs brought financial resources to America's communities in many ways. First, federal dollars made up a maximum of 85 percent of AmeriCorps program funding. This funding provided a small but vital infusion to America's neediest communities. Second, every AmeriCorps program was required to find matching funds. While some of these matching funds were already in communities, those providing the additional funds apparently saw greater value in the AmeriCorps programs than in other alternative uses.[7] AmeriCorps programs also succeeded in bringing new foundation and corporate resources to their communities. In their first years, some programs were

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[7] According to economic theory, however, providers of matching funding are rational agents who look for the best return on their contributions. Dollars diverted to AmeriCorps programs might represent the greater value donors saw in AmeriCorps programs as opposed to other uses.

struggling to make their match. However, in 1994-95, the sampled AmeriCorps programs averaged at least one foundation or business among their partners. By 1998-99 programs averaged two to three foundations or businesses and in addition, programs had become more sophisticated about incorporating foundations and businesses into their programs, and, like other community institutions, more businesses had come to see the value of AmeriCorps programs.

Businesses worked with AmeriCorps in a variety of ways.

- In one town, the AmeriCorps program persuaded a church and a bank cooperative to donate minimum deposits and set up checking accounts for homeless individuals. This effort was also coordinated with a new partner, a consumer credit counseling program that assists individuals with money management skills.

- An alumnus of an AmeriCorps after-school program who now runs his own computer company, upgraded two older computers and loaded them with software so children at the school could use them to learn math, reading, and language skills.

- One member got local businesses to contribute prizes for a "Parent/Caregiver of the Month" award, including a television station that donated broadcast time to announce the award.

- One program involved local community leaders with the schools for a week. Participants included company executives, an anchorperson and reporter for a local television station. The participants gained understanding of and support for local schools. In addition, the partnerships have provided students with positive role models and opportunities to visit local businesses in the community.
- At a home building program, the local utility company provides in-kind donations of natural gas connections from mains to individual homes. A bank provides interim construction financing and home buyer mortgages.

- An education program linked each school with a community partner, either a local church or business. Children in these schools receive additional resources for the classroom or their families. Volunteer mentors from the organizations visit children providing one-on-one support and encouragement.

AmeriCorps members generating community resources

AmeriCorps members gave to the communities they served in ways outside their service requirements. They brought financial resources to communities when they helped write proposals for community groups, helped organize staff, or participated in community fundraisers, such as walk-a-thons and charity events such as holiday baskets for the needy. AmeriCorps members also spent their weekends and free time volunteering with other organizations in the communities they served. AmeriCorps members often did such service on their own time, in addition to their AmeriCorps service commitments.

In addition to the financial resources, many AmeriCorps members brought needed skills to the communities.   While some AmeriCorps members were young and unskilled, about one third of AmeriCorps members were comprised of individuals over thirty years old. Some AmeriCorps members were college graduates and a few were graduates of professional schools. These members brought their skills in nursing, architecture and other professions. For example, a member who was an architect helped draft plans for a low-income housing construction; a law student set up a teen court program.

SUMMARY

AmeriCorps programs made substantive contributions to the development and sustenance of communities' physical and informational infrastructure. In addition, they brought new resources to communities by raising funds (above and beyond the AmeriCorps grants), recruiting new volunteers, and incorporating foundations and businesses into their programs. Many program members brought needed skills to their communities and served in ways outside their service requirements by doing such things as helping to write proposals and organize community fundraisers.

Many of these contributions can be measured and quantified—the number of trees planted, the number of volunteers recruited, the number dollars obtained. However, our findings also show that hand-in-hand with these efforts there are other less tangible, though by no means less meaningful, results. Communities are invigorated in numerous ways with the advent and completion of even a most modest project. As the examples above so clearly demonstrate, the actions taken by AmeriCorps members to creatively solve one community problem, frequently leads to the positive reinforcement of community mechanisms—such as collaboration, activism, and education-- that then form the basis for action and problem solving on a wide range of fronts.

SECTION III - CHAPTER 4: IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY MEMBERS

KEY FINDINGS

- AmeriCorps programs provided a wide-range of services to more than 10 million individuals and families that often translated into far-reaching and positive impacts for entire communities.

- Programs that recruit and invest in local members experience increased community support and participation overall.
- AmeriCorps programs mobilized neighborhoods and communities to address critical issues within their communities.
- AmeriCorps programs achieve diversity with regard to race, culture and generation; in fact, partnerships and community mobilization projects further bring together diverse people and organizations for work on collaborative enterprises.

INTRODUCTION

AmeriCorps was created to strengthen America's communities by providing direct service in distressed communities—communities of scarce resources and low-income residents. The sponsoring organizations of the AmeriCorps sites took this challenge seriously. The findings from this study are clear in demonstrating the positive impact of AmeriCorps on these communities—not only in terms of strengthening those communities through service addressing specific social and economic needs, but in creating opportunities and providing avenues for the development of the community members themselves.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH SERVICE

Overall, AmeriCorps service resulted in strengthened communities by helping those in crisis, providing better education for children, helping workers improve educational skills and living conditions, making families healthier, and providing communities that were safer physically and environmentally. Almost all of the community representatives (93 percent) concurred that the AmeriCorps members were making a difference in the day-to-day lives of community members. Many of these differences, in turn, positively affected others as indirect beneficiaries. Seven out of ten felt that the AmeriCorps members made a lot of difference in the daily life of the community.

In designing and implementing their service programs, over half the programs had conducted needs assessments and 93 percent had some system of collecting community input. In addition, two-thirds of programs had formalized their methods for collecting community input.

In many cases, helping individual community members also improved life for their families, friends, and neighbors. A survey of 522 AmeriCorps*State/National programs showed that during the 1997-98 program year, more than 17.6 million people benefited from AmeriCorps service. Residents benefiting from AmeriCorps encompassed a wide spectrum of Americans including low-income adults, the elderly, the homeless, pregnant women, new mothers, farmers, victims of violence, and many others. AmeriCorps members personally provided services to 10.1 million individuals. This included 2 million students that received educational services such as tutoring, mentoring, after-school programs, or received other services. In addition, nearly 250,000 young

children received care, instruction, or immunization while 54,000 parents were trained in parenting skills. The remaining 7.8 million individuals that personally received services benefited received a variety of education, other human needs, public safety, or benefited from disaster relief activities. The following examples reflect the range of services provided to individuals and families, results that often translated into far-reaching and positive impacts for entire communities.

Human Needs

Services provided by programs that focused on human needs encompassed broad types of activities, from facilitating independent living for low-income families, elderly, and the disabled, to assisting individuals and families as case managers in areas related to housing.

- One program assisted 582 homeless families and 635 homeless individuals into permanent housing in 1998. Another AmeriCorps program provided on-site mentoring to prospective homeowners during home construction, helping families to complete their requisite sweat equity hours.

- An AmeriCorps team used information obtained from a community survey to plan a major repair effort of dilapidated homes with a wide range of local organizations. In another program, AmeriCorps assisted 198 individuals with HIV/AIDS to secure housing.

Health care and health education form another major service area of AmeriCorps programs. In many of these, it is not only direct beneficiaries who reap positive benefits. Their families and communities are also recipients, though indirectly. The examples below illustrate the ripple effect of these service areas:

- In one service year, a program immunized and provided "First Steps" screenings to 191 newborns resulting to healthier babies and a new Healthy Families program sponsored by the Child Protection Service.

- AmeriCorps members organized parenting and nutrition classes for parents of young children. These courses provided parents with basic child development information needed in the low-income community. Additionally, all of the participating families immunized their young children.

Public Safety

In the area of public safety some AmeriCorps program's members helped a community victims' service provide victims and their families with counseling or support. As part of these services, AmeriCorps members arranged medical and counseling referrals for the crime victims. This example illustrates how AmeriCorps service bolsters existing community organizations, often expanding and making more efficient the means by which these pre-existing organizations deliver services.

- A first year AmeriCorps member and a senior peer health educator with a local youth program tells the following story. "While working at a street clinic, I have come across an array of youth, from street kids to rich kids, straight kids to gay kids, but one kid sticks out in my mind. His name is 'Jeremy', a 14 year old gay teen who was kicked out of his home in the Midwest. He was given a ticket and $500 on the condition of never coming back home. We talked a lot about our lives, and he revealed to me that he was homeless for a time and doing whatever he could to get on his feet. I gave him some advice on different shelters and agencies that could help him. The boy ended up at a run away shelter. This was a huge step for him. On our last meeting he told me that he had spoken with his mother and was making some progress. I was glad to see that I had an impact on someone's life."

- AmeriCorps members helped a community victims' service provide victims and/or their families with counseling or support and helped them file crime victim's compensation claims. They also provided individuals with help in dealing with intimidation and harassment problems, including providing escorts to special court hearings. Victims also received medical and counseling referrals

Education

Education continues to be one of the most popular service areas. AmeriCorps programs assist in schools by tutoring students, mentoring students, organizing after-school and vacation activities, running after-school programs, and developing tutoring programs. In addition, Adult Education programs in areas such as English as a Second Language and GED preparation are also numerous. Many of these programs, because of their collaborative nature among various community organizations, enabled clearer identification of educational issues and secured more resources to address them. . "Because of our small staff, this after school program would not have happened without the in presence of the AmeriCorps service members. The incredible benefits the service members brought to our center include their enthusiasm, creativity, willingness to help with projects above and beyond their contract and desire to provide an invaluable service to an audience we would not have been able to reach without their help." In other cases, educational benefits to community members were coincidental to other aspects of AmeriCorps programs.

- AmeriCorps programs provided Adult Education programs that resulted in at-risk participants receiving their GED or High School diplomas. This in turn provided participants the opportunity to pursue a college education.

- Members coordinated projects in partnership with local schools designed to provide children with a hands-on learning experience while performing environmental service work. One local middle school sits on more than 20 acres of wooded wetlands and forest. A group of sixth graders is helping AmeriCorps and their teachers decide where to place a planned trail and boardwalk system. They are also assessing plant life on their school grounds. An eighth grade class is planning to install water quality monitoring equipment. Students will also construct the trail system with the help of corps members.

- In one AmeriCorps program, 70 percent of the participating families obtained library cards and are using libraries to improve their literacy skills.

Environment

Programs involved in urban and rural environment activities were numerous. These programs conducted needs assessment, planned, monitored and provided public education around environmental topics, and made general improvements in both neighborhoods and at the community level.

Some activities were large scale—involving massive cleanup efforts or maintenance projects. Others were smaller—such as presenting a seminar on environmental hazards.

- To educate the public about reducing and reusing waste and recycling products, AmeriCorps members organized a variety of activities around these themes. These included a rural painting project, a papermaking station, a hat-making station using paper bags, a booth educating the public about population problems, and a puppet show. Members also participated in a local adopt-a-block clean up event.

- "It all started as an idea to try to enhance the quality of habitat and salmon run . . . in the Skokomish watershed. Members had to learn to identify different types of salmon . . . and determine the sex of the fish and how to milk the eggs or sperm. In addition to working with the hatchery staff, our members helped plan the entire strategy for the project. … The project has become a national and international model for artificially (using natural materials) fertilizing stream systems."

LOCALLY RECRUITED MEMBERS

The success of AmeriCorps programs in many communities can be accounted for by communities' acceptance of these needed services. One essential factor in encouraging community support of AmeriCorps programs is AmeriCorps' proactive measures to recruit and invest in the troubled youth in these very same communities. On average, programs reported that half of their members were at risk individuals.
Recruiting members from the local community results in the program being more readily accepted by the community at large. On average, programs recruit 70 percent of members locally. Consequently, AmeriCorps programs that recruit their members locally experienced an increase in community participation as measured by member enrollment forms.

Furthermore, using local resources and community members in community service has helped to bridge gaps between different population segments and has undermined negative stereotyping among diverse groups within the same community. At one program, several older community residents remarked on their improved view of the youth of the neighborhood when they saw kids who used to hang out on street corners fixing up the neighborhood and helping residents. They also remarked on how

AmeriCorps was providing skills and experience that could lead to a better future for these locally recruited members.

In addition, local recruits served as role models for other community members. This, while not only bolstering the self-esteem of the participating members, also showed members' peers how alternative life choices can be made.

As one member put it:

> *"Before I started with AmeriCorps, I was so quiet. I didn't like to talk or be involved in community events. I wouldn't even attend parent trainings. Now I can't quit talking, you can't shut me up! I've learned so much about children and other agencies. Now I'm the one leading parent trainings. I've also gained many new friends and learned how to really 'listen,' knowing when not to speak out right away. Our community is really starting to work together."*

While not asked directly, several community representatives mentioned that AmeriCorps programs were positively affecting their communities by developing AmeriCorps members who were from the community. In general, at least eight out of ten community representatives felt that the AmeriCorps program had enhanced members' community responsibility (86 percent), provided them with new skills (89 percent) and given them greater provided career awareness (86 percent).

Communities are strengthened when individuals in those communities improve their own skills and opportunities. Members were able to do by using the educational stipend to increase their knowledge and skills and taking advantage of professional development opportunities that are offered by the programs themselves—whether getting a resume together, gaining valuable work experience, or learning how to engage in community service. Many have gone on to school, something that they felt was not a viable option prior to their participation in AmeriCorps. In addition, local members at various programs have gone on to gain employment at jobs in the partnering organizations with which they had become familiar because of their AmeriCorps service.

Members shared the following experiences with evaluators.

> *"AmeriCorps has helped bring people in our community together to share ideas, knowledge and resources, and to bring these directly back to the community. It is inspiring others to care and try to make a difference themselves."*

> *"Being in AmeriCorps has helped me study for and obtain my Child Development credentials so I can stay connected to the early childhood field. I've also been getting some experiences in social services. I'm doing a secondary project with the local council social service worker and will be taking coursework in Human Services."*

> *"Being an AmeriCorps member has given me more confidence and more skills like time management, communication, team building, learning more about substance abuse, stress management, and first aid and CPR. I still want to become an Emergency Medical Technician, but I want to stay at home and continue helping my community."*

- Corps members have attended career development workshops. Members in another community are taking advantage of computer training being offered in their school building.

AmeriCorps returned high-risk members to their communities with more skills and preparation to look for jobs. Many members got training in basic job search skills and career development workshops that would allow them to explore career options and better prepare them for their professional endeavors after AmeriCorps. Many members, by means of their service, gained invaluable work experience that they could later leverage to attain employment. Members discovered and strengthen their organizational and communications skills—skills, that while necessary for the successful implementation of AmeriCorps projects, are also fundamental to most employment settings.

Ultimately, informed community members will be more likely to take action to keep communities safe and wholesome. This will save on many community resources. It currently costs over $30,000 to keep a person in prison but only $15,000 to keep a person in school. AmeriCorps clearly prevents some members from going to prison by keeping them out of trouble in the first place. As one member told our evaluator, serving in AmeriCorps, "is something legal for me to do." In addition, it encourages them to further their education through use of the education stipend and promotes the attainment of job and other life skills. The community benefits when individual members engage in productive and positive pursuits, but is drained when they engage in disruptive, negative activities.

EMPOWERING AND MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES

Many residents in the areas served by AmeriCorps feel overwhelmed by their community's problems as well as their family's struggle for survival. The impact of AmeriCorps members' enthusiasm and hope on the distressed communities in which they work was profound. When AmeriCorps programs went further and involved local residents in improving their own neighborhoods and towns, the results galvanized whole communities.

Several community representatives remarked that it was important for people to see AmeriCorps members working to improve their communities. Community residents told Aguirre International researchers that it made them feel that their community mattered and gave them pride to see these dedicated, often young, people trying to clean up, fix up or improve the community and help its residents.

Many AmeriCorps programs emphasized the importance of enabling communities to address their own problems—in other words, to learn how to help themselves. To that end, AmeriCorps programs organized community projects and recruited and motivated community members to participate in improving their own communities. AmeriCorps provided the spark—showing community members that someone cared, that something could be done, and that community members could make things happen in their own neighborhoods. A member spoke about how awareness of community issues through AmeriCorps led to community action, "Awareness is increasing in the community; community problems have to be taken on by the community... Through AmeriCorps they [the community members] see some ways of taking action."

AmeriCorps undertook two types of community mobilization efforts. The first type was the single event project organized by AmeriCorps members to address critical neighborhood problems; often this involved eliminating environmental or public safety hazards. Examples of such efforts include tearing down crack houses, community cleanups, and a "Take Back the Neighborhood" march. One program recruited parents to serve food on Thanksgiving Day to the homeless at a local temple. They also organized a clothes and food drive for those with less means in a month-long drive called "Care to Share." Another project, comprised of number of women volunteers and one AmeriCorps member, in response to a regional need for suicide prevention training, held a conference attended by 80 people on the topic.

The second type of community mobilization effort was the sustained ongoing neighborhood project. In one case, an AmeriCorps program trained families in neighborhood revitalization techniques. Sustained mobilization efforts often involved setting up institutional means for the community to continue to work together. In the area of public safety, AmeriCorps programs established ongoing neighborhood watches and safety patrols, involved residents in community policing, and recruited volunteers to staff a police mobile station.

In many other instances, AmeriCorps members have succeeded in recruiting parents to participate in activities and volunteer in programs (e.g., serving as classroom aids, providing one-on-one tutoring to children with special needs, assisting with meal services, reading books, serving on selection committees for new staff, and preparing community events such as parent training.) Not only do the parents provide valuable volunteer time, but their engagement with schools, Head Start programs, and child development and health centers has spurred their commitment to these institutions in their community. At the same time, the family, as a unit of social engagement and change, is

given viability and strengthened. In short, by AmeriCorps programs have provided the forum for intergenerational and cross-cultural collaboration.

- AmeriCorps members participated in various advisory councils that gave them useful contacts with homebuilders, park managers, and neighborhood activists. These included monthly meetings of various neighborhood associations.

- At an inner-city charter school, members held parent conferences and monthly workshops on issues related to child, preteen, and teen development. They encouraged all parents to be active participants in all stages of their children's academic and social development. They have also conducted a lot of conflict resolution for both students and parents. In another program, families and students were encouraged by members to set educational goals and devise a process for achieving these goals.

- An AmeriCorps Member serving at a community housing partnership implemented and organized the first-ever life skills series at one site. The Member procured professional consultants and staff from other agencies to donate their time (in kind) and provide residents with training in areas such as food preparation, health care (as a profession), how to secure and maintain low income housing; how to become self sufficient, and other areas that have significantly improved the residents' lives. As a result, of these skill classes, residents have been able to move into their own housing; ten have entered training classes to become health care professionals; and fifteen residents who have never had bank accounts have opened them. It is clear that the Member's innovative new programs have had a definite positive impact.

- One AmeriCorps program organized 25 residents and businesses to assist the police in a radio patrol for the community, as well as recruiting 20 residents and businesses to assist in painting over graffiti.

- To build communities, one program engaged volunteers in community service projects, trained young people to provide peer tutoring, peer mentoring, and/or peer health education, recruited, trained and supported adult volunteers to serve as mentors for young people, and provided individual and group health education outreach, resulting in increased involvement in building communities through volunteer service.

- AmeriCorps members have been instrumental in recruiting and utilizing parents and other volunteers to enhance Head Start, Early Head Start, and Child Development Center programs. Parents and community members have served as classroom aides, provided one-on-one attention to children with special needs, assisted with meal service, read books and stories to children, served on screening and selection committees for new staff members, and helped out with community events such as parent training, potluck dinners, and special holiday events.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH DIVERSITY

Given the changing demographics of our society, understanding and managing diversity will be necessary for communities to remain viable and strong. AmeriCorps programs aimed for and achieved diversity. Consequently, they have learned to weather racial, cultural, and generational tensions. Those that were successful strengthened communities by increasing the numbers of community members that now have experience at making diversity work. There were many success stories of AmeriCorps program staff and members who achieved greater understandings of others. The following examples illustrate the variety of understandings achieved by those involved with AmeriCorps.

- After a training session on diversity, an African American member stated, "Before taking this workshop, I couldn't really relate to Spanish American people. I guess I couldn't really understand them. Now, I realize that we are not much different from each other. We fear the same thing and we want more or less the same things. It also helped me to start caring for them as well."

- Using local members who had previously been viewed as unproductive or undesirable by other members of the community has also helped to both bridge generations and undermined the credibility of stereotypes. Youth, often seen as a scourge or threat by the elderly in many communities, are now viewed as contributors to the common good. As one member put it:

  "I think I'm starting to build the "bridge" between our elders and the young. I still have some building on the frame, but believe me, I will do it. I really want to see it happen. I want my community to become one."

- One member in a southern state shared that his first year was terribly hard because of class differences. Although he was middle class, he was working in a lower-income environment with members mostly drawn from that community. At the end of the first year he considered quitting AmeriCorps, however he decided to stay with the program. At the end of his second year, he shared that he had learned so much about tolerance, class, and cultural differences, he felt it was the best and most valuable experience he could have had.

In addition to using member recruitment and service delivery models as opportunities to raise awareness, one program used a fund-raising event to galvanize the business and civic community.

- The AmeriCorps program invited guests from the civic and business communities. The guests were randomly assigned to one of three socio-economic levels: elite, middle class, and poor. Elite guests, representing 15 percent of the world's population, were seated on the cafeteria stage, dined on a five-course meal on fine china, and were served by tuxedoed waiters while listening to a harpist from the local symphony. Middle class guests, representing 40 percent of the world's population, sat at tables on the cafeteria floor and were served a simple meal of spaghetti and bread on paper plates. The poor guests, representing 55 percent of the world's population, were seated on the floor and served a meal consisting of a small scoop of rice, a hunk of bread, and a cup of water. Guests from any given organization found themselves split up among the dining groups. To reinforce the lessons of disparity, some guests were obliged to move from one "class" to another, simulating the effects of changes in personal circumstance in the real world. Guests reported they found the banquet a very effective way of bringing home the lessons of nutritional disparity and the

reality of hunger in America. The event was covered widely in the local press, and response from the community was overwhelming. Participating agencies received a heavy volume of calls from people wanting to volunteer or to make donations.

Making the community strong by helping its members bridge race, class, culture, and age differences was clearly a positive impact for many because of their AmeriCorps experiences.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

AmeriCorps programs were most often guided by community input in formulating their service programs and, therefore, were more responsive to community needs and in developing appropriate service models and service delivery systems. In many instances, however, the reverse was also true: AmeriCorps programs raised community awareness of the social or economic problems faced locally and helped community members to address these needs.

The communities in which AmeriCorps serves are faced with numerous problems that interfere with community strengthening; illiteracy, racism, drugs, homelessness, pollution, gangs, violence, and apathy are just a few. As a result, community strengthening is a slow process.

However, AmeriCorps programs were also instrumental in linking diverse community organizations in efforts to form more comprehensive and efficient service delivery networks that helped millions of people. These cross-institutional collaborations also had a galvanizing effect on community members— heightening awareness of community problems that needed to be targeted and addressed, and enlisting community participation to solve those problems. AmeriCorps mobilized whole communities through service projects and many community members became involved in improving their own communities on an on-going basis.
Community residents were empowered as locally recruited members served as role models and increased their own skills through service.

SECTION III - CHAPTER 5: RATING AMERICORPS USING COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING INDICATORS

KEY FINDINGS

- 82 percent of community representatives rated programs "outstanding" "excellent" or "very good" in strengthening communities.

- 96 percent of community representatives rated programs as having an "outstanding" "excellent" or "very good" impact on their communities.

RATING AMERICORPS USING COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING INDICATORS

In this section, community representatives were asked to rate the community strengthening ability of AmeriCorps programs. Of the community members surveyed sixty percent said that their organization had been involved with AmeriCorps for at least three years. Most (59 percent) rated themselves very familiar with the AmeriCorps program in question. And the majority (76 percent) felt they played an active role working with the AmeriCorps program.

Overall, community representatives gave programs high ratings on the various components of community strengthening. Eighty-two percent of community representatives felt that programs did a very good, excellent, or outstanding job of strengthening communities. In general they felt that two in five programs did an outstanding job of working in the community, three in five programs did an excellent or very good job, and fewer than one in five programs did a satisfactory or less job of working in the community. At least three in five of the community representatives thought that the programs had done a very good, excellent, or outstanding job at some of the more difficult community strengthening tasks. Table 4.1 lists the precise percentages of community representatives who felt programs rated between unsatisfactory to outstanding in various indicators of community strengthening.

Table 3.3 Community Representative Ratings of AmeriCorps' Community Strengthening Indicators

Measure	Outstanding	Excellent / Very Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory /Development Needed
Overall project impact	31%	65%	2%	2%
Impact on the community	27%	67%	5%	0%
Strengthen communities	18%	64%	13%	5%
Overall project quality	37%	56%	3%	4%
Provide support to the community	32%	61%	2%	4%
Working with other groups/agencies	19%	73%	7%	1%
Understanding clients	22%	71%	7%	0%

Understanding community politics	15%	58%	19%	8%
Community mobilization	12%	65%	22%	7%
Reach goals/objectives	33%	66%	2%	0%
Make communities more aware of issues	9%	55%	26%	9%
Help organizations work better w/each other	13%	61%	22%	4%
Provide sense of community leadership	14%	67%	14%	5%
Change ways CBOs work together	13%	56%	26%	5%
Encourage civic responsibility among groups	22%	63%	10%	5%

(a)   Scale: Outstanding; Excellent; Very Good; Satisfactory; Unsatisfactory or Development Needed
Source: Community representative interviews.

SECTION IV.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This study examines five-year outcomes and impacts of the Corporation for National Service's AmeriCorps*State and AmeriCorps*National Direct programs in the areas of institutional development and community strengthening.   Institutional development included impacts on program sponsors as well as partnering and other involved institutions. Community strengthening included impacts on community resources, community infrastructure and community members.

The Process of AmeriCorps

In general, the study focused on measuring impacts and did not focus on the processes programs used to achieve these outcomes. The processes of program organization, implementation, and administration were mainly noted when they affected outcomes and impacts. Nevertheless, a few words on the processes of AmeriCorps are necessary to set the stage for this evaluation.

The AmeriCorps programs underwent various stages of implementation and, more importantly, adaptation over the course of their first five years. In the first year, programs faced the challenge of implementing a new federal program. While some programs, particularly those that had been demonstration programs, were up and running quickly, others found themselves bogged down with issues of hiring staff, fielding service initiatives, and recruiting and supervising members.

In spite of these challenges, programs persevered. When evaluators visited programs during their fifth month of service, all of the programs we studied had fielded service programs with measurable outcomes. AmeriCorps' ethic of "Getting Things Done" served it well as programs were admonished not to get overwhelmed with start up issues but to focus on providing service. Consequently, programs accomplished more than they might have otherwise.

By the second year, program leaders had made changes to improve the quality of service offered, provide the necessary support to members, and strengthen their organizational structures and processes to expedite quality service. As programs gained experience, they were able to define their service objectives with more precision and fine-tune their activities to reflect the needs of their service communities better. Thus, despite early setbacks, these nascent programs were able to demonstrate significant service accomplishments and quickly adapt their organizations to meet needs and problems as they arose. Therefore, member retention increased while services to beneficiaries improved. Likewise, stresses related to inter-organizational cooperation decreased.

While programs did accomplish a lot, during their first two years, programs could have accomplished more had they had fewer organizational challenges. However, it is difficult to judge what that level of outcome and impact might have been.

By the fifth year, programs had matured considerably. Overall, they had strengthened supervision, expanded and improved services, instituted more selective recruitment standards, and increased and enhanced their relations with other community organizations. Programs now found themselves sought after by community organizations as partners whereas in the initial year, programs had had to go asking.

Impact on Sponsors and Other Involved Institutions

The institutional impacts of AmeriCorps were far stronger than expected. AmeriCorps did a good job of bringing together community organizations and helping them organize service delivery. To its credit, AmeriCorps took risks on small grass roots organizations that had never previously received federal funding. These programs were often innovative and used their knowledge of the community to effectively address overlooked needs. In addition, the emphasis on professional standards, particularly accountability, led to institutional strengthening.

The principles of high quality service that are fundamental to AmeriCorps obliged many service providers to change how they viewed their programs, provided services, and structured their administrative functions. Sponsors made changes in program design or implementation to meet AmeriCorps requirements. Writing clear objectives helped programs deliver more focused services with a higher chance of being able to measure the effects of the service. Sponsors learned to change their measures of service from

inputs such as numbers of volunteers or of hours of service provided, to outputs, such as the numbers of children immunized. Formulating better objectives helped sponsoring organizations deliver services that are more effective and increased their ability to measure the effects of their services.

AmeriCorps funds allowed programs and their service partners to expand, improve, restore, or add new service. Because of collaboration with AmeriCorps, many institutions were able to streamline their service delivery within communities. New relationships between agencies were made. These collaborations often resulted in the formation of a network of community organizations that, having become aware of one another, could pool resources, share organizational insight, and provide communities with more cohesive and comprehensive services. In some instances, AmeriCorps was a catalyst for change—enabling sponsors to expand and improve their existing organization. AmeriCorps funds also assisted new organizations to begin providing valuable community services.

The institution building that resulted from organizations' involvement in AmeriCorps has had a profound and potentially long-term impact on America's communities. Sponsoring organizations developed new community consortia and deepened links with other community organizations as they created new solutions to community problems.

AmeriCorps bolstered existing community organizations by enabling them to develop and upgrade their services. AmeriCorps also strengthened non-partnering organizations by creating new links between a whole range of private, public, and community organizations.

Impact on Community Resources and Infrastructure

Those AmeriCorps programs found in America's neediest communities helped develop and/or strengthen the actual infrastructure of those communities—whether physical, or informational. AmeriCorps programs actually built or renovated community buildings and public areas, such as parks or gardens. Concerning informational infrastructure, AmeriCorps programs gathered, updated, and compiled information that was then transmitted into a myriad of formats and made available to the communities.

At least 7.5 million individuals benefited when the physical infrastructure of their neighborhoods and communities were improved in some way. For example, they felt safer because a crack house was torn down and replaced with a new family home or their families could enjoy a new park, playground, or community garden.

In addition, there was infrastructural development for which the number of beneficiaries could not be determined. This included the many environment restoration efforts undertaken including planting more than 1 million trees, improving nearly 400,000 acres or miles of park lands and wild lands and repairing 8,000 dams.

AmeriCorps' presence enabled many communities to both share and expand on resources. AmeriCorps brought new resources into communities by raising funds and recruiting volunteers. Nearly 105,000 community members were recruited as volunteers for tutoring or other educational purposes.

Programs also involved businesses in their organizations in ever more sophisticated ways. On average programs involved 2-3 businesses in their program. These involvements continue to grow and become more sophisticated providing support to the program and unique opportunities for community involvement to businesses both within and from outside the communities served.

Impact on Community Members

AmeriCorps contribution to America's neediest communities resulted in community strengthening. This is not to say that a relatively small fledgling federal program solved intractable social problems. However, there were measurable improvements to communities in terms of improved services and infrastructure.

AmeriCorps programs performed substantial amounts of direct service in all issue areas-- education, other human needs, environment, and public safety -- that substantially benefited members of American communities. A survey of 522 AmeriCorps*State/National programs showed that during the 1997-98 program year, more than 17.6 million people benefited from AmeriCorps service.

AmeriCorps members personally provided services to 10.1 million individuals. This included 2 million students that received educational services such as tutoring, mentoring, after-school programs, or received other services. In addition, nearly 250,000 young children received care, instruction, or immunization while 54,000 parents were trained in parenting skills. The remaining 7.8 million individuals that personally received services benefited received a variety of education, other human needs, public safety, or benefited from disaster relief activities.

The impact of AmeriCorps in terms of mobilizing communities and infusing hope into depressed communities cannot be understated. Member enthusiasm galvanized communities worn down by their own problems. Members recruited locally became aware of the problems in their own community and the need for action, while developing skills that would enable them to move forward. AmeriCorps organization of community projects sparked community interest and participation.

HOW THE COMMUNITIES RATE AMERICORPS' IMPACTS

Communities responded favorably to AmeriCorps. The majority of community representatives gave AmeriCorps programs high ratings. This was partly a result of service programs conducting needs assessment and collecting community input. There

was little overlap or conflict (14 percent) between AmeriCorps service activities and the work carried out by other community organizations.

Overall Assessment

In examining the impacts of the sampled AmeriCorps programs, as a whole, there were substantial achievements in all eight study areas reviewed. At the individual program level, it was too much to ask most new programs to make substantial contributions in so many different areas. Some outstanding programs achieved impacts in all eight study areas reviewed. However, these programs were the exceptions. Some programs by design focused more on certain types of impacts. Approximately one-fourth of programs stated a focus on member impacts. These programs often had less impressive service impacts. The remaining programs said their focus was service impacts. Similarly, these programs tended to have less impressive member impacts. One or two ineffective programs had few impacts in any area.

Altogether, the efforts of these sampled programs are representative of the impacts of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct. Overall, programs met the goal of achieving impacts in these eight study areas. While the level of impacts might have been higher without the inevitable start up issues, nevertheless, there were measurable and in most cases substantial impacts in each of the eight study areas.

Impacts were strongest in the area of service-related impacts. These included the community outcomes and impacts -- providing needed service that had impacts on beneficiaries, institutions, and the community. There were also substantial and measurable impacts in the areas of member impacts that were a direct outcome of performing service. These areas included life skills gains and developing an ethic of service in those who had not been previously involved in service.