Making a Difference:
Impact of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct on Members and Communities 1994-95 and 1995-96

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The AmeriCorps*State/National Direct impact evaluation evaluated the outcomes and impacts of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs in eight study areas designated by the Corporation for National Service. Of these, four were areas of community impact: level of service provided, beneficiary impacts, institutional impacts, and community strengthening. In addition, there were four areas of member impacts: life skills, civic responsibility, educational attainment, and educational opportunity.

AmeriCorps programs provide a wide range of community service activities through multiple sponsoring organizations. This two-year study included various layers and components aimed at providing an understanding of the overall field. The study was conducted to evaluate the first two years of participating program involvement with AmeriCorps and thus is limited in scope. Findings on members and community benefits, however, should be understood to have longer-term impacts. As fledgling programs develop, future benefits provided by these programs should be more substantial.

Aguirre International's evaluation employed a variety of methods and approaches to gather and assess information about AmeriCorps programs. The evaluation methodology combined quantitative and qualitative data to describe the way AmeriCorps programs looked and the services they provided. The overall evaluation consisted of three components:

Information surveyed from all programs. The primary focus of this component was a survey of program accomplishments. This consisted of a broad-based assessment focusing on "what got done." The intent was to obtain information from the entire universe of AmeriCorps members. In addition, the study used data from member surveys administered by the Corporation at member entry and exit.

Information collected from a random sample of sixty sites. At these sites, evaluators conducted interviews and Life Skills Inventories (LSI) of participating members using a multi-tiered approach. This involved regular site visits and interviews with staff and members. Members reported on their skills in five areas before beginning service and, then, after the completion of service. A control group of demographically similar non-members was also surveyed. The comparison between the member group and a control group greatly enriched the results of this study. This tier of the study was scientifically valid, allowing us to make generalizable statements about AmeriCorps.

Case studies for eight sites. A variety of intensive qualitative and quantitative research was done on eight sites focusing on specific information about what worked, what did not work, and why. It also examined ways in which AmeriCorps programs collaborated with others in this commitment. The case studies were designed to add depth and insights to surveys and interviews, and provide lessons learned. They drew information on the impact of AmeriCorps, documented outcome results regarding communities and service beneficiaries, and provided evidence and indicators needed to assess overall impact. The eight case study sites were selected at random from the sample of sixty sites.

The field researchers used by Aguirre International were all experienced evaluators with diverse backgrounds and a range of expertise in the areas of environmental studies, social science, language, literacy, organizational structures, and operations. Some evaluators had direct experience working in and with community-based organizations, and therefore clearly understood the challenges organizations and individuals face in designing and implementing programs. This report summarizes benefits of the AmeriCorps programs that we found during the evaluation.

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 two 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. Programs suffered from trying do to too much in a mistaken idea that providing services in more areas would increase their chances of selection by AmeriCorps. Services were often too diffuse and programs found themselves stretched thin.

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.

About 8 percent of the programs in our sample did not continue into the second year of the AmeriCorps program. For the most part, the Corporation weeded out these

weak programs. One or two programs found AmeriCorps overwhelming or not meeting their goals and opted not to continue.

By the second year, program leaders had made changes to improve the quality of service offered, provide the necessary support to its 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 adapted 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.

Furthermore, while programs did accomplish a lot, 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. This evaluation measured the programs against their actual accomplishments and the resulting impacts.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

What Work Did the Programs Perform?

AmeriCorps programs performed substantial amounts of direct service in all issue areas: education, other human needs, environment, and public safety. A survey of 310 AmeriCorps*State/National programs showed that during the 1995-96 program year, more than 9 million people benefited from AmeriCorps service.

AmeriCorps members personally provided services to 5.5 million individuals. This included 1.9 million students that received educational services such as tutoring, mentoring, after-school programs, or received other services. In addition, 75,000 young children received care, instruction, or immunization while 25,000 parents were trained in parenting skills. The remaining 3.3 million individuals that personally received services benefited received a variety of education, other human needs, public safety, or benefited from disaster relief activities.

An additional 3.7 million individuals benefited when 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.

Furthermore, there was service for which the number of beneficiaries could not be determined. This included the many environment restoration efforts undertook including improving planting more than 80,000 acres or miles of trees, improving

more than 90,000 acres of park lands and wild lands and repairing 266 agricultural dams.

What Was the Impact of the Work on Direct Beneficiaries?

A variety of methods was used to rate the impact of AmeriCorps services on beneficiaries at our case study sites. The beneficiaries involved gave AmeriCorps services high customer satisfaction ratings. Beneficiaries were pleased and felt that they had benefited from the service. In terms of more objective impact measures, the results showed that seven of the eight programs had measurable beneficiary impacts and of these, three programs had substantial beneficiary impacts. The remaining program had little measurable beneficiary impact.

While there were measurable beneficiary impacts, program ability to achieve and measure impacts could have been greater. Overall, programs had difficulty documenting and measuring their accomplishments and impacts. The results were that whatever achievements they could report tended to be understatements of actual achievement.

In addition, some programs had a good grasp of community needs but were not necessarily able to select a service intervention that would effectively address that need. While many programs were providing effective services, others were providing services that had little hope of achieving the impacts they desired. For the most part, programs had few resources for obtaining guidance as to which interventions were and were not effective. By trial and error, some programs revised their services to be more effective.

What Were the Institutional Impacts on Sponsors, Partners, or 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.

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.

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.

Did the Programs Build Stronger Communities?

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.

Those AmeriCorps programs found in America's neediest communities helped develop and/or strengthen the actual infrastructure of those communities—whether physical, informational, or institutional. 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. 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.

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 (8 percent) between AmeriCorps service activities and the work carried out by other community organizations.

As stated previously, AmeriCorps' presence enabled many communities to both share and expand on resources. AmeriCorps brought new resources into communities by raising funds and recruiting volunteers. AmeriCorps member skills also proved to be a valuable addition to community enterprises.

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.

MEMBER IMPACTS

Does Participation in Service Programs Enhance Life Skills?

AmeriCorps members were asked to assess their life skills in five functional areas: communication skills, interpersonal skills, analytical problem-solving, understanding organizational systems, and information technology. According to many experts, these are the skills our society needs to compete in a global economy and to overcome the social, economic, and environmental problems we face across the country. The skills are not specific to any given curriculum but are linked to the framework outlined by the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Necessary Skills (SCANS).

Participation in AmeriCorps resulted in substantial gains in life skills for over three-quarters of the members. Even those members who reported their life skills had not improved overall were able to identify gains in at least one area of skill development or to cite a specific vocational skill that they had acquired.

AmeriCorps members had higher skill gains than the control group participants. As part of the study, a randomly selected control group of individuals with characteristics similar to AmeriCorps members evaluated their life skills at the beginning and end of the one-year study. Members showed gains in life skills that were significantly greater than those of the control group participants.

AmeriCorps members' gains in life skills were broad-based. Members reported statistically significant gains in all areas of life skills, indicating that the AmeriCorps service learning experience provides a balanced, across-the-board opportunity for gaining and sharpening skills.

Benefits occurred for all AmeriCorps members, including those with the least developed skills upon program entry. Almost all (about 90 percent) of the members who considered their initial skills to be deficient achieved substantial or dramatic gains in every area except for the use of information technology.

Members who achieved the greatest gains were those oriented towards self-directed learning and relatively well prepared to engage in experiential learning. One-fifth of the members entered AmeriCorps with a high level of overall skill and remained that way. Nevertheless, the average member's prior work experience was often in jobs requiring less teamwork than the collaborative environment of their service

experience. This teamwork experience is likely to contribute greatly to their developing more agility and flexibility in the "high performance" workplace of the 21st century.

All ethnic groups share in the reported gains in skill. Hispanic/Latino members who entered with low skills reported the greatest gains in skill, followed by Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Caucasians. More generally, participation in AmeriCorps appears to have provided minority AmeriCorps members with extraordinary opportunities to develop new skills and to enhance existing skills, particularly to those who have had limited employment experience and, in many cases, less than satisfactory school experience. All groups gained skills in serving with diverse customers and co-workers.

AmeriCorps seemed best suited to providing opportunities for concerned and motivated individuals who have had some work experience in a structured setting fulfilling specific responsibilities. However, the AmeriCorps experience seemed to work well even for individuals who have not previously succeeded in a formal educational setting. For these individuals, AmeriCorps' service-learning experience provided a jump-start for career mobility and an alternative pathway for fulfilling their personal goals and realizing their full potential. Success in AmeriCorps can renew aspirations, self-confidence, and optimism. One member referred to "the fact that now I know how I can best use my talents. I've found my niche."

Does Participation in Service Programs Increase Civic Responsibility?

Civic responsibility is the hallmark of AmeriCorps and forms the backbone of the service that members perform. As stressed in AmeriCorps programs, civic responsibility includes becoming aware of local, state, and national issues; becoming involved in community issues; and collaborating to mitigate community problems and address community needs. It also includes a desire to continue community service beyond their AmeriCorps experience.

Members' interest in performing community service increased during their AmeriCorps service. At the end of their terms, nearly all (99 percent) of AmeriCorps members reported plans to continue some form of community service in the future, even though only 56 percent of them reported involvement prior to serving. It is not clear to what extent AmeriCorps caused this high level of interest or simply encouraged an existing (if not previously expressed) interest. What is clear, however, is that the AmeriCorps experience reinforced members' interest in community service.

AmeriCorps service motivated many members to choose public service and community-oriented careers. Interest in community service careers was high among members. In fact, members were more likely to say they would be involved with community service agencies in a career rather than volunteer capacity. In addition, AmeriCorps service increased members' awareness of civic affairs. Both supervisors and members reported an increase in an awareness of community issues, often a precursor to a sustained commitment to community service.

Members of different educational backgrounds differed in their perspectives on community service. At the end of their service year, less educated members were more likely to have applied for positions in community service agencies. However, they were more tentative in terms of committing themselves to future volunteer or community service activities. Before their service, less educated members tended to have less experience with community service. Unlike their more educated colleagues, they often cited the stipend, vocational training, and educational opportunities as primary reasons for joining AmeriCorps.

The AmeriCorps stipend was a key to enabling low-income members to perform community service. Members drawn from low-income families needed the stipend to be able to perform community service. Many members were energized by this experience and began to see themselves as contributors to their communities.

Does Participation in AmeriCorps Increase Educational Attainment and Expand Educational Opportunities?

One of the goals of AmeriCorps is to help members increase their educational attainment and/or enhance their educational opportunities. AmeriCorps offered various educational opportunities for members through training and learning opportunities related to service, professional and career development, and providing an educational award to be used by each member to further his or her education or to pay back student loans.

AmeriCorps increased both educational opportunity and attainment for the majority of its members. Four out of ten members were enrolled in educational programs while completing their AmeriCorps service. In addition, many members received certificates in newly mastered skills such as carpentry or child development. Members with lower initial academic skills showed some gains but they were lower than their more educated counterparts.

Members' needs differed significantly for different subgroups. Those who entered AmeriCorps with a solid foundation in education looked for opportunities to increase their life skills and acquire specific service related skills. Members who were academically under prepared needed to improve their basic skills and gain diplomas or GEDs while they did their service. This group also needed help in overcoming the multiple barriers that typically prevent at-risk-youth and adults from making the transition to higher education.

Many members received certificates from AmeriCorps for newly mastered skills and some completed their GED. However, others in this group had difficulty overcoming the barriers that had prevented them from previous academic success. Members who received certificates felt proud of their accomplishments and felt the certification would be useful.

AmeriCorps was less successful in helping members who needed to complete their GED (14 percent) and those who needed help to their transition into a college-level program. It appears members with educational levels of high school or below were, at least in part, overwhelmed by the exigencies of their own lives and roles. These members needed more direct and continuos support and guidance.

The educational award increases educational opportunities for members. The majority of members (85 percent) had concrete plans to use the award. Five out of six members who planned to further their education said the educational award was necessary to attain their goals. This is a very positive result from AmeriCorps service.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Aguirre International assessed the AmeriCorps programs not only in terms of their member and community impacts but also in terms of their cost efficacy. While AmeriCorps achieved substantial impacts in a variety of areas, the question remained whether the benefits represented a reasonable return on the federal and local funds invested. The results of the benefit-cost analysis showed that AmeriCorps, even during its fledgling years achieved a positive return on the national investment. AmeriCorps direct service and member benefits returned $1.66 for every dollar spent. Direct service benefits alone outweighed costs. As a result of the conservative assumptions used in valuing benefits and the omission of several hard-to-value benefits, the ratio reported here may be considered a lower bound.

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.

In contrast, programs were less effective in providing non-service related development for members. This particularly affected members who entered AmeriCorps with low education levels. While most programs attempted, members got very little effective support and monitoring in the area of completing a high school degree. Programs most often offered too little and/or failed to understand the level of effort needed to achieve success in this area. The exception to this was a few AmeriCorps programs with a primary focus of providing opportunities for at-risk youth.

In conclusion, the AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs provided needed services that had positive impacts on America's communities. AmeriCorps members gained valuable skills and opportunities through serving in AmeriCorps. In weighing these outcomes and impacts against the cost of the program, AmeriCorps*State/National Direct provided a substantial positive return on the federal and local funds invested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, Aguirre International makes the following recommendations:

Implement Program Funding and Planning Strategies

The results of this study indicate that the Corporation for National Service can more effectively support AmeriCorps grantees in implementing programs that have impact on members, service recipients, and communities by incorporating the following funding and program planning strategies:

1. Assist programs in selecting service interventions that are of long-term benefit and capable of achieving short-term impacts within the one-year AmeriCorps framework.
2. Continue to take risks on small grassroots organizations and foster creative institutional arrangements. At the same time, provide guidance to these small

institutions to move them towards sustainability.

3. Maintain a high community profile through visible service projects – even if they are only special one-day events. In addition, create a high visibility for AmeriCorps logos, t-shirts, etc.
4. Increase or maintain focus on strengthening community infrastructure.
5. Retain the educational award and encourage programs to create a culture where education is valued and academic pursuits, service, and future career choices are intentionally linked.
6. Discourage education programs that consist of outsourcing GED preparation and asking members to attend on their own time. Members' time spent in these programs should be part of their AmeriCorps hours. Programs that do outsource GED preparation need to use program resources for monitoring and support.
7. Encourage programs to integrate information technology into their service delivery strategies and provide AmeriCorps members with opportunities to use these technologies in the course of their service experience.

Upgrade Member Selection and Support

In addition to providing guidance that will encourage more effective program planning, the Corporation can also increase impacts on members and communities by designing funding and policy practices that support economically and educationally disadvantaged members. Aguirre International recommends that the Corporation:

1. Continue funding programs in low-income neighborhoods that attract and train members who have few opportunities. Special attention should be paid to help these members develop the knowledge, skills, and strategies that make them employable, particularly in the communities from which they come.
2. Require programs to train supervisors in encouraging participation in GED preparation programs and providing support to members participating in said programs.
3. For members with low education levels, consider transitions that link academic work with service; take advantage of peer support; and provide a bridge to higher education through guidance, support, and successful academic experiences.
4. Encourage programs to hire former members for paid positions.
5. Require programs to help members (for those who need it) gain access to higher education.

Improve Member Training and Service Experience

Beyond supporting disadvantaged members, the Corporation can improve impacts for members by encouraging programs to include the following elements into their member training and experience:

1. Support member training that links vocational/technical skills with service. Offer certificates where appropriate and provide access to such training for members whose skill gaps inhibit access to other kinds of educational opportunities.

2. Encourage programs to design projects that maximize life skills by providing members diverse opportunities to develop the skills in teamwork, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills, technology use, and problem solving.
3. Require program designs to include formal member reflection times, which members are encouraged to reflect on the skill they bring to their service, resources for enhancing these skills, and progress made. Train supervisors to foster development of life skills and service experience reflection in members.
4. Encourage programs to foster members in a broad definition of civic involvement. This definition should include continued commitment to address community needs in various forms (e.g., through volunteerism, on-going formal and informal civic involvement, social service or environmental career choices, and development of personal, life, and technical skills that benefit communities in need).

Provide Technical Support to Programs

Finally, the Corporation can ensure that programs have the technical support they need. Results from Aguirre International's study of programs during the 1994-95 and 1995-96 program year indicate that, in order to maximize documentable program outputs, outcomes, and impacts on beneficiaries, members, and communities the Corporation should:

1. Upgrade program members' skills in the area of monitoring service outputs and impacts.
2. Provide program development in the areas of assignment structure, supervision practices, and project communication.
3. Provide programs with models and guidance in developing education programs for members, particularly those who have not completed high school or obtained their GEDs. Program efforts should include sustained support and guidance, along with help in reducing significant barriers to academic success.

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

AMERICORPS*STATE/NATIONAL DIRECT EVALUATION REPORT

This report evaluates the impact on members and communities of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct during its first two years. It draws on a wealth of field data and summarizes the evaluation's findings for AmeriCorps*State/National Direct's first and second program years. It begins with a brief discussion of the organization of the AmeriCorps program and of its mission, funding mechanisms, and priorities. A brief description of the evaluation and a succinct overview of the complex methodology employed by the evaluation is also provided. Sections II and III draw on the field data to discuss at length answers to the broad questions that provide the structure for the two chief components of the evaluation, the Community Impact Study and the Member Impact Study. Section IV provides an assessment of the measure of return on investment —the comparison of benefits to costs. In the conclusion, Section V, a summary of the findings is presented, along with recommendations. Section VI, the Appendices, provides the actual instruments used in the evaluation for all stages of this study.

DESCRIPTION OF AMERICORPS

The National and Community Service Trust Act, signed into law by President Clinton on September 21, 1993, brought into being the Corporation for National and Community Service. Now called the Corporation for National Service (CNS), this entity is responsible for the administration of three new service/learning programs: 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[1,] as well as for previously existing programs.

The AmeriCorps grants program offers opportunities for service to Americans who are out-of-school. Through the AmeriCorps program, people of different ages and backgrounds are involved in strengthening America's communities through service. AmeriCorps volunteers, known as "members," who make a substantial commitment to service can receive an educational award for college or vocational training. During the first two program years, a total of 20,000 AmeriCorps members served for approximately 110 grantee organizations and served in full or part-time capacities in more than 300 AmeriCorps programs nationwide.

[1] For ease of exposition, AmeriCorps State/National Direct will be referred to as the AmeriCorps grants program or AmeriCorps throughout. Although VISTA is formally an AmeriCorps program, it was not a subject of this study.

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 community served 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.

Common Elements of AmeriCorps Programs

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. Generally speaking, each program had a minimum of twenty AmeriCorps members who were at least seventeen years of age. Programs recruited classes of members who began service at one of the three designated start- times: September, January, or June. (This was to help create a national identity and to facilitate recruitment in concert with the academic year). All programs focused on meeting either the educational, public safety, human, or environmental needs of their communities.

Distribution of AmeriCorps Funds

Eligible recipients included non-profit organizations, Federal, state and local government agencies, institutions of higher education, and Indian tribes. Two-thirds of AmeriCorps

funds went directly to State Commissions on National Service, which selected local programs for funding. The Corporation distributed the remainder of AmeriCorps funds to national programs and special initiatives through a competitive grants process. AmeriCorps programs were required to demonstrate local support by raising matching funds from businesses and other local sources.

AmeriCorps Funding Vehicles

The Corporation selected the initial AmeriCorps grantees using a grant application process. Although grants could last up to three years, they were subject to review to determine renewal or termination at the end of each program year. According to statute, one-third of the AmeriCorps funds were earmarked for AmeriCorps*National Direct. These programs were comprised of non-profits operating multi-state programs, tribes and territorial programs. All these were funded and administered directly by the Corporation for National Service. During the 1994-95 and 1995-96 program years, federal agencies were eligible to receive AmeriCorps grants. This policy changed in 1996-97 when federal agencies were declared ineligible to receive AmeriCorps grants. Many programs formally sponsored by federal agencies found new sponsors and were thus able to continue their AmeriCorps services.

The remaining two-thirds of the AmeriCorps program funds were allocated to programs administered by the State Commissions. Each participating state has a commission of twenty-five individuals appointed by the governor to represent various stakeholder groups. These commissions have an office, an Executive Director, and often a staff to oversee the AmeriCorps*State programs. They were responsible for performing outreach to potential applicants in their states, administering the competition for grants, pre-selection of AmeriCorps programs, and submission of a package of proposals to the Corporation for review. Each State Commission's package was submitted to peer and staff review before awards were finalized.

Program priorities and funding criteria used to select programs varied tremendously by state. State programs, whether competitively or formula funded, were grantees of the State Commissions and thus, sub-grantees of the Corporation. Typically, the following types of organizations received state funding: local community groups, colleges and universities, statewide organizations, and local chapters of national non-profit organizations. Occasionally, local government agencies or school systems received state grants.

There was also a National Direct stream of funding that accounted for one-third of total AmeriCorps funding (approximately $50 million). The Corporation made direct grants to federal agencies and national non-profit organizations served as sub-grantmaking

umbrella organizations analogous to the State Commissions for funding awarded to local non-profit organizations or state and local government agencies.

There was a 1 percent set aside for competitive awards to Indian tribes and an additional 1 percent set aside for distribution to U.S. territories on a population-based allocation formula. Each set aside was funded at approximately $1.5 million.

In 1994-95 the Corporation funded 310 programs, of which 208 were AmeriCorps*State programs and 102 were AmeriCorps*National Direct. A small proportion of programs were terminated at the end of the first program year. Most programs in 1995-96 continued activities from year one, but a few new programs were added in the second year. At the end of 1995-96, the combined total of programs funded through AmeriCorps*State/National Direct was 448: 342 AmeriCorps*State programs and 106 AmeriCorps*National Direct programs.[2]

AmeriCorps' National Priorities

In 1994, the Corporation identified priorities for specific service areas for each of the four "Issue Areas" established by law: for Education, school readiness and school success; for Public Safety, crime control and crime prevention; for Human Needs, health care and housing; and for Environment, community hazards and natural habitats.

In 1995, the Corporation produced further refinements of priorities to assure the maximum impact of its programs and to make sure that certain critical community needs were being addressed. The 1995 priorities are as follows: for Education, school success; for Public Safety, community policing and victim assistance; for Human Needs, early childhood development; and for Environment, neighborhood/community environment.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATION

The AmeriCorps program has both internal and external evaluation components. This section discusses how Aguirre International built its external evaluation on work already accomplished by AmeriCorps grantees and subgrantees in meeting their own internal monitoring and evaluation obligations to the Corporation. The research design of Aguirre International's evaluation was based on two parallel components: the Community Impact Study and the Member Impact Study. It was structured around three tiers, as discussed below. Aguirre International's methodology is described in detail below to provide the necessary background to the findings and outcomes discussed in subsequent Sections.

[2] Source: trust data from the Corporation for National Service.

Internal Monitoring and Evaluation

The Corporation has prudently laid the essential groundwork for the external evaluation of the AmeriCorps program. Applicants for funding had to prepare a mission statement for their proposed projects and set three primary objectives in each of the following areas: Community Service, Participant Development, and Community Building. These areas corresponded to the Corporation's national goals.

All grantees and subgrantees had to perform internal evaluations in an ongoing effort to assess performance and improve quality. Programs were 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.

Programs cooperated with the Corporation and its evaluators in all Corporation monitoring and evaluation efforts, including in-depth studies of selected programs. Programs collected and submitted to the Corporation information on participants (including the total number in the program and the number classified by race, ethnicity, gender, age, economic background, education level, disability, geographic region, and marital status). They also collected information on services conducted in special areas (empowerment zones or redevelopment areas, environmentally distressed areas, areas adversely affected by actions related to the management of Federal lands, areas adversely affected by reductions in defense spending, and areas with a greater unemployment rate than the national average).

The Aguirre International Evaluation

Aguirre International sees the evaluation process not as an end in itself but as part of the process of AmeriCorps' continuous improvement. Recognizing that the Corporation, its grantees and subgrantees already have built-in monitoring processes to help them make continuous improvements in programs and service learning, Aguirre International developed a research design for the evaluation that leveraged the investments already being made in internal monitoring and evaluation.

The research design has two parallel components: the Community Impact Study and the Member Impact Study. Although these studies overlap for the sake of efficiency in data collection activities, each was given its own theoretical base and objectives. In some instances, data collected had a bearing on both community and member impacts and is shared between the two studies.

Community Impact Study

This 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?

Overall, the Corporation's objective of managing a major national initiative in community service required careful attention to both the direct and the indirect benefits of this service. The indirect and difficult-to-measure outcomes represented the most long-lasting and fundamental changes in community dynamics.

Member Impact Study

This study examined the impact of participation in AmeriCorps projects on members, measuring the extent to which AmeriCorps' service-learning projects improved the personal qualities and competencies that members need to succeed in the workplace, community, and home. Five broad questions were addressed in this study:

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

Return on Investment

In addition, this study reviewed the return to communities and member of the national service investment. This involved careful attention to identifying and valuing all the costs and benefits of AmeriCorps.

Three Tiers of the Evaluation

The research design of the Aguirre International AmeriCorps evaluation includes three tiers, each with a different sampling strategy and set of evaluative activities. For Tier One, which includes all programs, activities were scheduled to provide a wealth of 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 benefits for members. Tier Three, a smaller sample, provided a context for studies that will examine 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 data.

Tier One

This tier covers all 310 AmeriCorps programs and all AmeriCorps members. Data were collected from project grant applications, reports to the Corporation, and member enrollment and exit forms. Aguirre International also administered an Annual Accomplishment Review.

The Community Impact Study drew on grant applications, reports to the Corporation, and the Annual Accomplishment Survey for its data sources on Tier One programs. The Member Impact Study relied on enrollment and exit forms submitted by programs to the Corporation for its data sources on Tier One programs.

Tier Two

This tier was based on a random sample of sixty programs, approximately 1,800 members, and 750 non-member controls. Data were collected from annual interviews with project staff and community members, questionnaires completed by members, and data supplied by the Corporation.

The project sample size constitutes 20 percent of the 310 AmeriCorps programs in operation. The relatively large sample of sites was selected to assure broad geographic coverage and adequate representation of all of the Corporation's "issue areas." Since there are approximately 1,000 sites where AmeriCorps activities are taking place throughout the 300 operating programs, each program had, on average, approximately three sites. For programs with only one site, there was no issue of site selection, but for those with many sites, a sample was selected using probabilities proportional to size. The sites where AmeriCorps members and beneficiaries were interviewed were always the same.

The Community Impact Study sampled sixty projects, and drew on the results from annual interviews with each project's Program Administrator, Site Supervisor, community residents, local officials, and representatives of local organizations, as well as an investment returns analysis for its data from Tier Two programs.

The Member Impact Study sampled 1,800 AmeriCorps members from the same sixty programs as well as 750 non-member controls. The data sources for Tier Two projects included Entry, Exit, and Follow-Up Questionnaires and the Skills Inventory.

Tier Three

This tier was a random sample of eight projects, 500 members, and 500 non-member controls, drawn from the Tier Two sample. Data were collected by (1) observing projects four times a year, (2) interviewing groups of community members served,

groups of members, and control groups of non-members, (3) conducting Life Skills Assessments of members and non-member controls, and, (4) reading, coding and analyzing members' journals.

The Community Impact Study sampled eight of the sixty Tier Two programs. Data sources for Tier Three projects included the Quarterly Ethnographic Observation and various Beneficiary Panel Studies, including Entry, Exit, and Follow-Up interviews and focus groups. The Member Impact Study sampled the same eight programs as the Community Impact Study. Data sources for Tier Three projects include: (1) Life Skills Assessments of AmeriCorps members and non-member controls; (2) separate quarterly focus groups of eight AmeriCorps member participants and eight controls at each program; and, (3) the results of the Journal Project (a quarterly review of the journals of eight participants from each program).

Return on Investment Analysis

The primary vehicle for assessing investment returns was the Tier Two site, both the Community Impact Study and the Member Impact Study. Four techniques were employed to make the calculations for this part of the study. These include: (1) recording dollar values when these are known; (2) obtaining professional estimates of value (or savings) in cases where these can be estimated; (3) calculating dollar benefits from leveraging; and, (4) using contingent valuation in those cases in which benefits are hard to measure, such as the value of a new park or the impact of environmental improvement.

There are also a variety of ways of measuring the return on investment in AmeriCorps members for the Member Information Study. Information from Entry, Exit and Follow-Up Questionnaires were employed to compare groups of AmeriCorps members and controls according to such traditional measures as: (1) post-program employment and earnings; (2) negative outcomes prevented; (3) government benefits not needed; and, (4) additional lifetime earnings from educational benefits earned. Where observed, non-monetary returns on investment were also noted.

The following sections set forth the findings for all three major areas addressed by this evaluation: community impact, member impact, and cost benefit. Section V, the conclusion, summarizes the main findings of the data analyses.

SECTION II. COMMUNITY IMPACT

CHAPTER 1: WHAT WORK WAS PERFORMED BY THE PROGRAMS? - IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE INITIATIVE

KEY FINDINGS

- AmeriCorps*State/National Direct quickly launched viable programs in 1994-95
- Programs suffered from some start up challenges; however, both programs and the Corporation quickly moved to make program improvements.
- Three factors emerged as keys to program success: good service models, effective supervision, and solid management.
- Programs followed the directive of "Getting Things Done" and demonstrated service accomplishments as early as five months after program launch.
- Members accomplished a substantial amount of service in each of the four service areas – education, human needs, environment, and public safety – in both 1994-95 and 1995-96.

INTRODUCTION

Getting Things Done This straightforward and simple AmeriCorps motto illustrates AmeriCorps*State/National Direct's emphasis on accomplishing tasks through direct service. Unlike AmeriCorps*Vista, whose members provide such indirect services as fundraising support and capacity development, the mission of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct members is to provide needed community services directly to program beneficiaries. During the hectic first two years of AmeriCorps funding, programs were constantly reminded of the importance of concrete results, particularly when faced with competing exigencies.

The 1994-95 AmeriCorps grantees and sub-grantees faced the complex and daunting task of launching a new national service program. While familiar with community service, most grantees had not previously participated in a nationally funded service initiative. The challenges of implementing a completely new national service program were significant and should not be underestimated.

How successfully a program provided services was a direct result of its ability to mobilize its following core parts:

- members (AmeriCorps national service participants),
- volunteers (community members recruited to assist members in local activities),
- supervisors (staff assigned to supervise members and volunteers),

- sponsoring agencies (organizations that received AmeriCorps grants), and
- host agencies (organizations where members were based to perform service).

These different participants carried out the functions that comprised the service programs. In order to deliver an effective service program, a sponsoring agency had to coordinate these participants and address several tasks. These pivotal tasks included:

- developing a service model to meet community needs,
- recruiting, training, and supervising AmeriCorps members,
- engaging community partners and community member volunteers, and
- providing management for a new national service project.

AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs provided direct services in four issue areas: education, environment, public safety, and other human needs. Education programs provided a variety of in-school and after-school services to children and adults, including teaching, tutoring, and curriculum development. Environmental programs restored wild lands, abated hazards, and assisted in disaster prevention. Members also assisted in emergencies such as floods, fires, and other unanticipated natural disasters. Public safety programs performed a variety of activities aimed at reducing crime and improving community life. In these programs members mediated conflicts to reduce violence, served as escorts, and provided safety patrols. Other human needs programs focused on public health and services to targeted individuals and communities. These programs provided immunizations and pre-natal services. In addition, these programs provided assistance in accessing social services and in finding shelter, food, and clothing to people who need extra support.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how the AmeriCorps program works and to illustrate what service AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs actually performed in the first two years of operation. Part I describes the structure and organization of AmeriCorps and the issues involved in implementing a new service initiative. Part II focuses on the accomplishments of the first two years of AmeriCorps service. Overall, the chapter will address the following questions:

1. How were services organized and accomplished?
2. How did programs recruit, select, and train members to perform community service?
3. How were community partners and volunteers utilized by programs?
4. What were the related issues and challenges faced by programs in their initial years of operation?
5. What services did members perform?

PART I. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF AMERICORPS PROGRAMS

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. Service programs usually deployed members in one of three ways: crew or team approach, individual approach, and modified individual placement approach. Members who served in crews generally performed a series of short-term service projects responsive to community needs. This was a major method of organization for environmental service and other services that required well-organized teams to be effective. Members individually placed, usually at community agencies or schools, provided sustained direct service to their host's service recipients. Many education and other human needs programs were organized in this fashion. In response to some of the shortcomings of the individual placement model, AmeriCorps programs began to assign more than one individual to placements at schools and community organizations. This service model could be called modified individual placement. The appropriateness of each model for a particular situation depended on the people, the objectives, and the community context. These are described below with the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Crew or Team Approach

In this model, members were grouped together to perform short or long-term activities at designated sites. Programs assigned various members to multiple groups, placed them at different sites, or gathered all the members to focus on one single project. These AmeriCorps programs required substantial planning to keep teams of members completing direct service on a daily basis. One strategy for handling the substantial organizational demands posed by this model was to collaborate closely with a variety of community organizations in determining the work to be accomplished, the sites to focus on, and the duration of the projects.

Deploying members in teams enabled program to complete simple short-term, but very labor-intensive tasks. Called "SWAT tactics" by one evaluator, these team efforts were ideal for one-day service activities, such as health information fairs, immunization drives, or easy community or environmental clean-up projects. Evaluators observed that the types of activities most successful in this approach were quantity-focused or physical. In addition, AmeriCorps administrators and supervisors viewed team activities as helpful in building a sense of identity as AmeriCorps members among the team.

The team or crew model produced challenges in some circumstances. Since most team activities were conducted through or with a host agency or other organizational partner, organizational collaboration was essential. Implementing the team approach at some sites proved to be a very tedious and sometimes labor intensive process, both for host sites and AmeriCorps. While many agencies were eager to develop collaborations with AmeriCorps, some had difficulty managing the logistics of the

operation. Housing large groups of members proved difficult. Limited space at some host sites restricted the number of members they could accommodate and thus limited the output of labor-intensive activities. In addition, there were AmeriCorps supervisors and host sites who had difficulty keeping a large group of members busy at all times, particularly when resources were scarce. Some host agencies commented that AmeriCorps staff did not provide enough supervision for members. In other cases, the ratio of members per supervisor was too high; thus, supervisors had difficulty keeping all team members occupied.

Feedback from host agencies indicated that the team approach was not well suited for most human needs services. In order for members in human needs projects to have a positive impact on their beneficiaries, they needed to create a sense of trust with beneficiaries. Host agency staff felt that the use of the team service model, especially in short-term assignments, was not conducive to cultivating the appropriate type of relationship with communities who have historically been skeptical of strangers' charitable efforts.

Team dynamics and interpersonal interactions among team members threatened some team activities. Supervisors observed variation in work ethic among members. Some members expressed the feeling of doing the bulk of the work while others did little work, yet received credit for the activities performed. Subsequently, this perception, whether correct or not, led to conflict between team members. In addition, personality conflicts among team members also created inter-team stress. Some members who were more vociferous about their feelings toward others or the service strained the relationships and morale between members.

Residential Crew-Based Programs

Some crew-based programs adopted a model in which members, for the duration of their service, lived on the premises of the program or near the location of the service activities. Programs engaging in very physical or labor intensive activities favored residential crews. Programs performing environmental services were the most likely to use the residential model. From time to time, administrators and supervisors referred to these programs as "boot camps," likening them to military training where intensive and demanding physical training and discipline are practiced.

On the positive side, administrators of residential programs believed that they created a strong sense of camaraderie due to the length of time members and staff spent together. Once members were comfortable with each other, developing a sense of trust and common goals, they were more apt to work together in resolving their differences than crews in non-residential programs, particularly when performing grueling services in volatile conditions. The day-to-day interaction between staff and members permitted program administrators to refine standards and regulations to correspond to members' skills and planned activities for member training.

Conversely, friction between members and administrative staff gradually increased. The lack of privacy, closeness, duration of the activities, and the large number of

people participating in the residential programs contributed to discord among all the participants. To quote one program administrator:

> *Working and living with about sixty people, along with the feeling of being observed almost constantly by the team members and other staff, eventually tested their (members') temperament(s).*

Individual Placements

The second most 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. Programs focusing on the education and human needs service areas were most likely to use the individual placement model. For example, in several education programs individual members were placed in schools to tutor elementary students and a human needs program assigned a member to attend to a physically challenged person by periodically checking to make sure he was following his treatment.

Overall, host service partners believed that the one-on-one placement enabled members to provide specialized attention to beneficiaries with whom other service models would not work. Many of the target beneficiaries of education and human needs services had had previous negative experiences with well-meaning, but poorly designed assistance efforts. In addition, many beneficiaries are extremely distrustful of government or other assistance agencies. Thus, the close relationship and trust that can be established in a well-conducted one-on-one interaction can be integral to providing useful services. Nevertheless, host agency staff stressed that in order for this to work, 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 individual placement model also provided professional development opportunities for members. Because members were apt to feel personally accountable for their activities and how they provided services, they learned to interact with all layers in their host organization and with participants in the community. These interactions allowed members to develop their knowledge further regarding serving in an organization, self-confidence, future contacts, and relationships with those in the community.

The host service partners most successful with individual placed members were those that had a clear focus of their objectives and provided overall support. Some host agencies did not find the individual placement model practical or successful. Individual placements were less effective in cases where members lacked:

- experience in organizing and implementing projects on their own,
- experience defining goals and setting job parameters themselves, and
- appropriate supervision and support from AmeriCorps project personnel.

Most members were not professionally trained teachers or social workers and often had fledging job skills. The lack of qualified and stable – not necessarily constant – supervision caused some members to lose focus of project goals and to lose the incentive to reach their goals. Another factor that hindered the success of some individual placements was the strong agendas of site personnel that were not compatible or complementary to the AmeriCorps service goals. In some cases, organizations treated members as "extra staff" rather than realizing that AmeriCorps had specific goals for members to meet. Individually placed members who were not closely supervised sometimes lost focus on their own projects and were drawn into surrounding staff activities.

Modified Placement Approach

Modified placements were created to address those challenges that programs had with both the team placement and the individual placement models. In year one, evaluators found that the large groups used in the team approach tended to overwhelm service partners. In addition, administrators had difficulty soliciting adequate projects for the large groups. At the same time, many members placed individually at host sites lacked support and felt detached from the AmeriCorps team.

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. This strategy worked 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, evaluators felt that a 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 and evaluators alike agreed that by the end of the second year, the success rate in member retention and improved services to beneficiaries indicated that the experienced AmeriCorps personnel were working hard to address the challenges encountered in year one. Evaluators also noticed an easing of tension between AmeriCorps program staff and host site administrators as challenges from year one were addressed satisfactorily in year two.

RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, TRAINING AND SUPERVISION OF AMERICORPS MEMBERS

AmeriCorps programs fielded 17,341 members in 1994-95. This number rose slightly to 18,696 in 1995-96.[3] The selection, training, and supervision of these

[3] Source: Corporation for National Service trust data

members had a fundamental influence on the quality and impact of the services provided by individual AmeriCorps programs.

Selection Process

In general, the AmeriCorps members recruited for the first two program years of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct were optimistic, willing to serve and inspired to make a difference in America's communities. Evaluators at every program and the vast majority of the community representatives interviewed remarked on the energy, enthusiasm, and hard work of the first two groups of AmeriCorps members.

The quality of member selection processes varied tremendously in the first year. While some programs had specific and appropriate criteria, elaborate member application and review processes, and waiting lists, other programs were scrambling to fill slots well after their program launch date. In the first program year, almost all programs experienced significant member turnover or worked hard to incorporate "problem" members into their programs. Therefore, many programs made changes in their second-year recruitment programs to correct challenges experienced during the first year. Administrators and supervisors reported that member turnover substantially declined in year two because of a more fastidious approach to member selection.

Programs addressed three main issues associated with member selection that caused challenges in year one. First, programs realized that, in many cases, there had to be a closer match between the services of the program and members' skills. Some programs complained that the skills of first-year members were too low to complete certain tasks effectively. 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. In general, the focus on performing service meant that inexperienced and unskilled members could only effectively serve in programs where service projects required low skill sets or where service-related skills could be easily acquired. Other programs had over estimated what training could do and realized that they needed to select AmeriCorps members with higher skill levels. Programs that perform technical skills, particularly individual placement programs, often require specific backgrounds or levels of education in order to perform effectively certain types of services. For example, members must be proficient in the academic subject in which the program provides tutoring.

Second, during year two, programs tried to get a better match between AmeriCorps member's backgrounds and the supervision and deployment models they would encounter during their service tenure. In many individual placements, members served by themselves or with only a few other AmeriCorps members. These programs and programs with geographically diverse sites offered minimal supervision for members; thus, they relied on AmeriCorps members to have high levels of initiative and self-discipline. Many of these programs realized during the first year that they needed to recruit members with higher levels of maturity and experience in

organizing and carrying out projects with minimal oversight. Crew-based programs with higher member to supervisor ratios were more successful at using inexperienced and less mature members.

Third, within the guidelines of the two constraints described above, programs continued to select members that best reflected the activities and communities with whom they were interacting. Programs continued the practice of hiring members locally to ensure the fit between members and local needs. In this respect, programs responded to two sorts of input:

- communities responded very positively when they saw local 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.

Training Members

Members received a variety of initial and ongoing training. In some programs, this training 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. In other programs where member development was the focus, members received extensive initial and ongoing training in academic, interpersonal, and life skills. Some programs had established training for service interns or volunteers that they adapted for AmeriCorps. Other agencies had never participated in direct service projects and had to develop training programs from scratch. Training and skills acquisition by AmeriCorps members is covered in detail in the member impact chapters. Training is discussed briefly in this chapter in the context of its importance for effectively carrying out the service activities of the program.

During the course of the first year, administrators and supervisors became more aware of the types of skills needed by members. In year two, programs designed training to overcome member skill deficiencies and to improve service; therefore, member development and skills significantly improved through course of the service year. By the end of the second year, specific training needs for particular activities were given and host agencies were more involved in sharing this responsibility. Training became more of 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. As noted earlier, there was a loose mapping of these supervision configurations to the member deployment strategies.

Crew-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.

Without close supervision, it was hard to identify who among the crew might be shirking service; particularly since the whole team got credit for service accomplished. Strong team morale was correlated to team productivity. Interpersonal conflicts among AmeriCorps members had a higher impact on service performed in team-based programs because of the importance of working together to accomplish tasks. To address the inter-personal relations issue, team programs tended to emphasize conflict resolution in their training classes. This gave supervisors a common language and framework to use in addressing these issues and made members aware of what would be expected.

In general, having first-year members as supervisors did not work well. Members chafed at accepting direction from peers who, in many cases, had no greater skills or background experience than they did. Some members cited the stress caused by peer-as-supervisor situations as reasons for leaving AmeriCorps service. In general, members were more accepting of taking direction from other members in the role of team leader rather than supervisor. Conflicts arose, however, even when team leaders tried to discipline members.

In the second year, some programs had second-year members supervise first-year members. This worked somewhat better for some programs. In some cases, second-year members with previous AmeriCorps experience were exceptional supervisors because they 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, it was still critical for programs to back up these fledgling supervisors and team leaders with strong supervision. A second-year AmeriCorps member at one program was asked to function as a site supervisor. The strain of straddling both member and supervisor positions simultaneously led her to leave the program. Some programs had a structure where team leaders, who were first- or 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.

When a sponsoring agency 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. Members at different sites shared a common supervisor and guidelines, although they did not have daily, immediate supervision. Supervisors often tried to form links among members at various sites through program-wide projects and training sessions. However, since supervisors were generally off-site, members sometimes felt that the supervisor was out of touch with the member's service or that control and discipline were imposed arbitrarily.

Another option was to have the host agency provide supervision. This configuration provided the AmeriCorps member with local supervision and immediate feedback. The supervisor was more knowledgeable of the specifics of the placement and could give better guidance and support. This structure also had several weaknesses. Host agencies were often not totally knowledgeable of the AmeriCorps requirements; thus, they were inconsistent in adhering to them. Host agency supervision meant that members did not have a unified relationship to the AmeriCorps program and its standardized guidance. Therefore, while members often forged strong bonds with their host agency, this was at the expense of a national service or AmeriCorps program identity. This varied to the extent that some AmeriCorps Programs worked more closely than others did with host agencies to train their staff in AmeriCorps rules and regulations and to identify and enforce common conduct guidelines.

Diversity and Supervision

As part of its historic mission, AmeriCorps emphasized mixing individuals of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds as one of the positive aspects of community service. Conflict among members who were culturally or socially insensitive of others sporadically strained interrelations between members. For this reason, AmeriCorps supervisors often had to provide guidance to individual members in how to get along with those of different backgrounds. They also mediated conflicts based on cultural, class, and ethnic misunderstanding.

Team-based programs experienced more challenges related to member diversity than programs using individual or modified placements. This was because as a team, members had to serve closely together for the duration of the project in order to achieve their service goals. In general, team-based programs that focused on member

development recognized the importance of dealing with diversity-based conflicts and, thus, emphasized training about diversity and conflict mediation. Effective programs addressed diversity issues directly and members tried to identify ways of working successfully with each other. As one partner indicated, the observable results of better integration of member development goals and project objectives were that projects "became more fluid and dynamic within the framework of the structure of operations". More than one active partner referred to the success in this transformation of services. They felt that if programs had not perceived and addressed the diversity issue, the project's efficacy and community connection would have substantially weakened.

In a few team-based programs where the emphasis was on service at the expense of member development, supervisors either ignored diversity challenges or used a rule-based system for defusing conflicts. For example, one program forbade members from talking about the O.J. Simpson trial in an effort to avoid conflict. These kinds of strategies were not successful and resulted in lowered productivity.

The most intensive interpersonal interactions among members were found in residential programs. These members not only had to get along with each other while serving on projects, they had to continue to get along in their personal lives. For example, members had to confront individual differences in food, music, and communication styles as they lived together. As with other team-based programs, most residential programs anticipated that member diversity would be an issue and provided supervisors with diversity and conflict resolution training.

Members in individual placements served less closely with each other. Individual placements often divided service and placement along beneficiaries' ethnic lines. If the program tutored children, Latino members tutored Latino students, and Asian members tutored Asian students, etc. In this structure, it was easier for everyone to appreciate each other's service within his or her own groups. This does not mean these programs were free of conflict, rather they tended to have less intense interactions than crew-based programs.

In general, AmeriCorps programs made a good faith effort to address diversity issues and to supervise in such a way that members grew in their understandings of others. Many AmeriCorps members remarked on the gains in understanding of others' perspectives that they acquired. To the extent that programs managed diversity well, they improved the effectiveness of their programs.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management were key to fielding a successful program. Evaluators consistently noted that organizations with strong leaders who held a clear vision of the function of AmeriCorps members were far more successful than those organizations where staff had nebulous ideas about the use and function of the members. Programs with strong management were more able to respond effectively

to the inevitable setbacks and challenges of starting up new services.

The range of management capability at AmeriCorps programs varied tremendously. Some programs were nationally known prior to AmeriCorps for having strong leadership and specific goals, and were able to get members right to work. Poor management plagued other programs. One program in the study sample closed down at the end of year two due to poor management. Another program had great difficulty when the staff and the charismatic administrator who built the agency had major disagreements about the direction of their AmeriCorps program.

The Corporation imposed a cap of 5 percent of each grant for administrative costs. This limit led to program designs with slim administration and meant that some programs could not afford to fund their AmeriCorps administration costs adequately. In some cases, institutions subsidized their AmeriCorps grant administrative costs from other sources and many administrators worked considerable amounts of extra, uncompensated time to make up the short-fall. While in all cases (96 percent) the administrators of AmeriCorps programs were full-time staff of the sponsoring agencies, only 55 percent of the administrators interviewed worked full-time as managers of the AmeriCorps programs. This figure rose to 61 percent by the end of year two. In agencies with other ongoing projects, it was common for AmeriCorps administration to take up only part of a staff member's time.

High staff turnover was as endemic to AmeriCorps programs as it is to the community service sector in general. The staff jobs in such agencies are often low paying with long hours. Higher-paying positions often recruit staff from these jobs. Program administrators' ability to reduce staff turnover and manage inevitable turnover were essential to sustained service delivery. Programs that could not reduce staff turnover suffered when they had to spend valuable time and energy on staff recruitment and training rather than on the AmeriCorps mission.

Over the course of the two years studied, most program managers responded to the challenges and crises of initiating a new program. As a group, they responded by making their goals and objectives more clear and developing more precise and targeted recruitment strategies. Training and supervision were also scrutinized and adapted based on the first year experience by many sites. They also responded by screening of partners and placement sites more carefully. These were common institutional changes initiated by program administrators from year one to years two and three of the program.

OTHER PLAYERS: PARTNERS, HOST AGENCIES, COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

Involving Community Partners

In developing their programs, many sponsoring agencies reached out to include other community agencies and community volunteers. Each of these participants enriched

AmeriCorps programs and provided challenges. While some AmeriCorps programs involved only the sponsoring community agencies, most programs involved several community partners. These partners were other community-based organizations such as schools and local service agencies that participated in the AmeriCorps program.

There were three models of how community organizations participated in AmeriCorps: full partners, a consortium, and informal involvement. In the first model, community agencies functioned as full partners, which provided a coherent service model to organize and deliver services. In many of these cases, agencies that worked in similar service areas collaborated. A second model was a consortium in which a group of agencies banded together to provide the critical mass needed for an AmeriCorps project and one agency took the lead as the sponsor. In general, these agencies had little prior relationship and were mostly interested in acquiring AmeriCorps members for their respective agencies. In a third model, the community agency was not formally part of the AmeriCorps program structure but worked with the AmeriCorps program in some capacity. Some agencies donated space or other resources to the AmeriCorps program, for example, many AmeriCorps programs provided after-school and tutoring programs on school grounds. Oftentimes the schools, though important stakeholders, were not formally part of the AmeriCorps program structure.

The involvement of community organizations with AmeriCorps programs had many benefits. It brought a variety of community resources together, joined skills and expertise, and fostered collaboration and communication among community agencies. For example, one school-based program in which members provided after-school activities had trouble providing kids with their desired activity, basketball, due to a lack of resources, materials, and equipment. Members and the host school solicited resources from local organizations. After widely advertising and holding a bake sale involving the parents, members planned and conducted a fundraising campaign with local businesses and organizations. While most of these organizations were also economically strapped, some donated money, another provided the children with basketball uniforms, and other staff from various organizations volunteered their time to be referees or assist in training of the newly formed basketball team. By pooling different community resources for the basketball cause, not only did the school develop an official and competitive basketball team and give the kids a healthy and safe activity to pursue, but planted the seed that would develop better community relations and networks with local organizations for the future.

In some cases, the relationships between sponsors and host agencies suffered from tensions stemming from perceived political or territorial conflicts. According to several administrators, the lack of communication and misunderstanding between AmeriCorps programs and host agencies regarding members' roles put members in difficult situations. In addition, some host agency employees were condescending towards AmeriCorps members because they perceived members to be "cheap" staff, essentially an inexpensive way to fill staff positions. Finally, AmeriCorps

administrators claimed that host agencies that had applied for but not received AmeriCorps funding resented the AmeriCorps members serving at their sites.

A lack of planning, organization, supervision, and support from host sites periodically interfered with AmeriCorps members' ability to deliver services. As previously mentioned, sometimes supervisory responsibilities of members were not clear between host agency and sponsoring program and some members remained virtually unsupervised. Evaluators found that the lack of organization and supervision by host supervisors hindered the collection and reporting of valuable program information. In other cases, neither host supervisors nor members were clear on what members should actually have been doing. Even more surprising were some supervisors who were not aware of the AmeriCorps program objectives and had no operational plans to carry out activities or provide direct services. Therefore, some sites had members perform indirect services to help host staff in violation of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct goals. Members in these situations expressed frustration with their assignments.

Where teams were placed at host sites, members felt that their efforts as AmeriCorps members were not highly profiled if they served under the host program umbrella or were competing with the activities sponsored by host organizations. In other words, members worried that the host organizations would take credit for the AmeriCorps members' accomplishments.

AmeriCorps incorporated an extensive network of community organizations into its national service programs. Overall, the collaboration among the various community-based organizations has helped leverage their resources and capabilities in the community. While there was some tension, good programs took advantage of an opportunity to improve community-agency relations. Programs that wanted effective relationships with their partners tended to spend considerable effort ensuring good communication with partners, educating partners about the requirements of the AmeriCorps program, and developing formal structures for ongoing communications such as one-on-one or program-wide host agency meetings.

Volunteers

The final participant in the AmeriCorps program is the non-member, un-stipended community volunteer. AmeriCorps programs involved 329,987 volunteers in 1995-96[4]. Across programs the pool of volunteers greatly varied in education, age, demographics, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Unlike some members, volunteers were comprised of local community members and parents whose children were beneficiaries of AmeriCorps service. Typically, volunteers were recruited to assist members in activities such as holding one-day events (e.g., health fairs), tutoring students, constructing houses, and cleaning-up trash or other labor-intensive environmental projects.

[4] Source: 1995-96 Annual Accomplishment Review

While both AmeriCorps members and community volunteers were part of service provision, the tasks they did were for the most part quite different. AmeriCorps provided members the opportunity of full-time or extensive part-time service. This allowed AmeriCorps members to provide on-going intensive service that most community members could not. Most community volunteers can offer only a few hours of service and even regular service involves only a few hours per week. AmeriCorps program administrators felt that the use of community volunteers helped their overall community outreach. As members of the target communities, non-member volunteers had a lot of interest in what the programs had to offer, and benefited from the resulting community impacts. This, in turn, has assisted programs to develop programs tailored to community needs quickly. Programs that used volunteers received more participation from those who actually benefited from these services, less resistance from the community, and more interest from members to develop their own skills. Members involved with volunteers saw that they were furnishing valuable services to the community.

Issues Confronted by Volunteers

Like the AmeriCorps members, the non-member volunteers were not spared from the tribulations encountered by the fledgling programs. The obstacle for volunteers in some neighborhoods was fear for their own personal safety or fear of antagonism from their own community members. Second, evaluators mentioned that while community members believed that volunteering was an important part of the community service effort, people generally volunteered only when requested or actively recruited. As one AmeriCorps Administrator explained, "It's less frequently that volunteer services are offered up independently." Third, community volunteering is based on economic realities. The depressed socioeconomic states of many communities prevented volunteerism from becoming a priority in people's lives. Many simply did not have much time between work and family responsibilities. Fourth, as stated by an administrator,

> *…efficiency of volunteering depends on effective management, and the lack of good volunteer management is one of the consistent topics of self-criticism in the nonprofit world. This neglect often limits the contributions of volunteers and the quality of their experiences.*

Last, the attitude "if it's free it's not valuable" permeated some staff members' perceptions of community volunteers.

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

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. Several factors, however, have emerged that tend to produce successful AmeriCorps programs.

- 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.
- Plan the use of volunteers and respect their role in service provision.

PART II. WHAT SERVICE WORK DID AMERICORPS MEMBERS PERFORM?

The purpose of Part I of this chapter was to give the reader a snapshot of the various forms AmeriCorps programs and services actually take. The next section will focus on the service work accomplished in the first two years of AmeriCorps funding. First, the next section details the type of work found in each service area and presents a summary of an actual program operating in that area. Second, the report provides a description of how evaluators collected data on actual program accomplishments. Finally, several charts present the prodigious amount of direct service completed by members in the first two years of AmeriCorps program operation.

Types of Service Provided by AmeriCorps

Programs engaged in a variety of services within the four issue areas. These services are discussed below with an example of an actual program in each issue area presented.

Education

Education was perhaps the most popular service area. AmeriCorps programs assisted in schools by tutoring students, mentoring students, and organizing after-school and vacation activities for youth. Education projects commonly assigned members individually or in modified crews comprised of fewer than five members. Host organizations (e.g., a particular school) assigned members in both urban and rural environments. The number of members at each site depended on the type of activity and the skill level of the member. In collaboration with host sites, AmeriCorps supervisors planned and coordinated the types and structure of the activities. Because members were dispersed at multiple sites, host sites generally managed members' daily activities. AmeriCorps supervisors would then maintain daily or weekly contact with members.

One national program placed members individually at urban and rural elementary and high schools. The members provided support to teachers in classroom instruction, tutored students during school hours, and mentored or counseled students concerning their progress. Host agencies and the AmeriCorps program shared in the planning,

management, and support of members in their activities. The tremendous support and collaborative efforts from both host agencies and the program provided effective services to the many children, students and parents involved in the program.

Other Human Needs

Services provided by programs with an other human needs objective encompassed broad types of activities, such as:

- facilitating independent living for low-income families, elderly, and the disabled,
- providing preventive health services and distribution of related materials to low-income families, and
- assisting as case managers for low-income and elderly in housing issues.

Because much of the work done required one-on-one interaction with the beneficiaries, members in these activities often worked independently. Occasionally, programs used teams of members when projects planned sizable one-time events, such as health fairs or pamphlet distributions. Moreover, host agencies participated in the planning and coordination of activities, but AmeriCorps programs guided these projects.

One urban-based program illustrates the aim of the other human need programs. Members worked personally with beneficiaries and performed the following services:

- counseled individuals on job development and job placement,
- assisted pregnant women to obtain prenatal care and other services,
- served as advocates for various disadvantaged people (e.g., low-income families and the elderly) to obtain access to health care services,
- assisted counselors with clients needing physical or mental assistance, and
- distributed clothes and food to low-income families and homeless people.

Other activities called for a group effort from members, such as mass distribution of informational materials related to drug, pregnancy, and violence, and coordinating community events related to health or other human needs issues. While most other human needs programs deployed members individually, they differed from the education programs in that AmeriCorps supervisors maintained close daily interaction with members, either via telephone or in person.

Although placement of members was similar to that found in education programs - individual placements - unlike education programs, AmeriCorps supervisors in other human needs-focused programs usually were supervised by host agency staff who had daily interaction, via telephone or personal contact, with the members.

Environment

Neighborhood environment was another popular service area. Programs involved in

urban and rural neighborhood environment activities conducted needs assessment, planned, monitored, provided public education, and made general improvements of neighborhood communities. These activities included large-scale clean up or maintenance projects, safety and health seminars about environmental hazards, and the distribution of materials or resources to decrease homeowners' utility expenses. Programs typically deployed members in teams or crews with direct supervision from AmeriCorps supervisors. The nature and size of the activities performed in the environment service area benefited from medium to large groups of members.

One Native-American program focused on building community gardens and restoring the use of traditional agricultural practices. Before starting on the gardens, members conducted research among the elders in the communities in order to learn what the traditional agriculture practices and techniques were. They incorporated their findings in manual containing environmental and garden curriculum materials to be used by the members in teaching these techniques to the local schoolchildren. Teachers commented that students improved their awareness of their cultural heritage.

The gardens were very successful. They displayed the application of good techniques such as the biological control of pests. Much of the produce was donated to those in need and people in the community started to rely on the garden. In one village, residents were able to harvest its traditional corn for their dances for the first time in over forty years, bringing back an important tradition that was almost lost.

Programs focusing on the other component of the environment service area - natural environment – performed extensive environmental enhancement activities involving conservation, habitat restoration, or parkland improvement. These projects were often complex and physically demanding, in which teams needed to possess versatility in resources and management. Typically, AmeriCorps supervisors closely supervised large groups of members performing these challenging missions. Many partner organizations provided resources and materials to the AmeriCorps programs.

One well-organized conservation corps targeted several important aspects in environmental protection. Members worked on projects such as wetland reclamation, trash clean up with other environmental programs, the restoration and building of new facilities in state forests, and conducted baseline data collection and documentation of stream conditions. Supporting services included giving demonstrations at schools to teach school children the effect that humans have on their environment. The high visibility and accomplishments of the AmeriCorps members influenced community members to participate in environmental projects that affected them. Crews of members carried out most of these activities in different sites across the state. Each site had AmeriCorps supervisors responsible for its own activities.

Public Safety

Programs dedicated to public safety rendered assistance in the following topics and

activities:

- improvement of community-police relations,
- prevention of drug abuse and raising awareness of those at risk for abuse, and
- provision of assistance to victims of violence and abuse, as well as dispensing information about risks, safety measures, and avoiding victimization.

AmeriCorps public safety programs frequently assigned a member or a small group of members to various host organizations. Partner agencies assisted in the development of activities and the administration of members.

The major objective of a program that worked with victims of domestic abuse was to provide direct client services and community education. The main beneficiaries of this program consisted of victims and children of victims involved in domestic violence. The direct services were split into three areas: crisis centers, prosecutor's offices, and civil courts. First, members at the crisis centers provided victims and their children vital information of services available, as well as the steps needed for self-protection. In addition, members provided counseling and referral. Secondly, those members serving at the prosecutor's offices acted as advocates for victims going through the court process against their abuser. Lastly, in civil courts, members provided guidance through the legal maze and information to aid the victim in making decisions regarding their situation. Members worked closely with their host agencies but the physical distance between the host agencies and the AmeriCorps program office separated them from their AmeriCorps supervisors. Thus, the host agencies provided most of the daily supervision of members.

While AmeriCorps programs were widely diverse in structure and the services they provided, the above descriptions give a view of typical services and service structures. As previously mentioned, the programs attempting to meet the goals of a new service initiative inevitably had some start-up challenges. In the first year, programs tended to have over-ambitious service models. The overwhelming majority of programs tried to provide service in multiple issue areas. Partly this was due to an erroneous perception that, despite Corporation indicators to the contrary, programs believed they had a better chance of being funded if they provided services in multiple issue areas.

During the first program year, programs discovered how difficult it was to field several different services. At the same time, Corporation and state commission staff worked with programs to get them to focus their objectives and narrow their program emphasis to at most a few essential related services. Consequently, in the second year programs had fewer cross-service programs.

GETTING THINGS DONE

Despite the many challenges that programs faced in starting up new AmeriCorps

programs, they managed to stay focused on "getting things done." Accordingly, AmeriCorps*State/National Direct had substantial service accomplishments during its first two years.

Data Collection

Early in the process, the Corporation began an intensive campaign to measure the direct service outputs of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs. Five months into the program launch, the Corporation was faced with a request from the United States Congress to show demonstrable results. In response, Aguirre International conducted an accomplishment audit of a sample of sixty randomly selected AmeriCorps programs.[5] An evaluator visited each program and conducted an accomplishment review. The results of this undertaking showed that all sixty programs had service sites that were up and running with substantial, measurable accomplishments. This was especially impressive given the previously discussed difficulties inherent in launching a new national community service program.

Subsequently, a census of program accomplishments was undertaken at the end of the first program year and at the end of each subsequent year, using the five-month accomplishment survey as a guideline. To conduct the review, Aguirre International developed a set of seventy aggregate service categories, including more than a dozen activities in each of the four priority areas. This review collected information on the amount of service accomplished the number of members performing service, the characteristics of service recipients, and any observed results. Both the 1994-95 and 1995-96 accomplishment reviews show substantial service accomplishments in the areas of education, other human needs, environment, and public safety. Table 1.1 provides the details.

Impressive as these accomplishment review results are, they should be considered an undercount of the accomplishments of AmeriCorps for the following three reasons. First, during the first few years, the ability of AmeriCorps programs to generate accomplishments outpaced their ability to report accomplishments. Second, the process of collecting accomplishment information was undergoing substantial changes and improvements, which resulted in the capture of accomplishments that had previously been missed. Third, the focus on direct service caused an undercount of the substantial services that programs provide in the area of community and institution building.

During the accomplishment audit, evaluators consistently remarked that fledgling AmeriCorps programs had not yet established adequate accomplishment tracking systems. It might be assumed that without specific tracking criteria a program would be tempted to overstate its accomplishments, but the opposite proved to be the case. Programs tended to have such rudimentary tracking systems that they missed all sorts of relevant accomplishment data. At best, during the first year, they were tracking

[5] This audit took place at the forty-seven Tier II programs that started in September 1994 as well as thirteen additional randomly selected programs that also started in September 1994. These stood in for the thirteen Tier II sites that started in January 1995.

both main service activities and their outputs. Programs did not track ancillary services, such as one-time service activities organized for special events. For example, an education program might not track as accomplishments a crack house clean-up or participation in a one-time community information fair. Also, there was some confusion as to what types of service counted as direct service. Initially programs tended not to report items that they considered indirect service, like building up a volunteer corps, even when the items appeared on the accomplishment review.

Another problem was a low response rate for the first accomplishment reviews. Programs overwhelmed with launching new activities, ending a service year and starting a new one often saw the accomplishment review as optional paperwork. Programs with previous experience receiving federal funds were more used to complying with data requests and tended to complete the reviews at a higher rate than new programs.

In the second and third years, responses improved dramatically. Starting in the second year, the locus of accomplishment survey administration was changed from operating sites to programs and the grantee hierarchy was used to collect the data. In addition, programs were more used to the process of reporting accomplishment data. The Corporation's launch of an evaluation technical assistance program, Project STAR, also facilitated this change. As one of its services, Project STAR provided programs with assistance in identifying and monitoring accomplishments. For the third accomplishment review, 78 percent of programs reported their accomplishments. Eighty-two of AmeriCorps*State programs participated, as did 57 percent of AmeriCorps*National Direct programs.

The emphasis on direct service and getting things done led the Corporation and their programs to focus first on measuring direct service. While this focus has served the Corporation well in providing direct service, it has also meant that accomplishments in the areas of member development, community building, and institutional development are not as well documented. This has contributed to a substantial undercounting of AmeriCorps outputs. While this evaluation chronicled some of those impacts, there is no ongoing effort to collect this information systematically.

SUMMARY

The focus on "Getting Things Done' served AmeriCorps well. Despite inevitable start up challenges, these fledgling programs managed to demonstrate significant service accomplishments from the beginning. Over the course of the two years, the programs made many changes as they learned and grew from their first year experiences. Programs tightened service objectives, implemented better monitoring systems, made changes to placement and supervision structures, dropped and added partners, and improved management structures to make their programs more effective. Therefore, service delivery improved and the amount of accomplishments reported increased.

Table 1.1 AmeriCorps*State/National Direct Accomplishment Summary

A Summary of 1995-96 Accomplishments from 381 programs representing the service of 11,099 members

Education

The AmeriCorps members assisted children and youth in impoverished urban and rural communities to succeed in school. They taught in classrooms, established new learning programs in and out of school, and prepared preschoolers for the demands of school. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Taught **14,761** students in Head Start or kindergarten.
- Taught **366,831** students in grades 1-12.
- Tutored **118,664** students in grades 1-12.
- Mentored or counseled **93,575** students concerning school success or achievement.
- Provided in-class enrichment (such as speakers, presentations) to **209,859** students.
- Provided out-of-class enrichment (such as field trips) to **219,020** students.
- Organized or conducted service learning and community education activities for **244,102** students.
- Developed curricula or curriculum materials for **480,372** students.
- Assembled book collections, maintained libraries for **113,395** students
- Recruited **11,834** peer (student) tutors.
- Trained **13,446** peer (student) tutors.
- Recruited **58,197** volunteers for tutoring or other educational purposes.
- Trained, placed, and/or followed-up with **61,691** volunteers who were providing services.
- Provided other student or instructional support to **123,873** students.

The AmeriCorps members helped at-risk children succeed in school by assisting them and their families to develop their sense of civic and community responsibility and to become more stable, more self-sufficient, and more involved in the community. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Worked with **28,227** parents or families on parenting skills development.
- Taught **17,468** adults GED or basic skills development.
- Counseled **12,668** people concerning job development or placement.
- Performed case management (e.g., followed up student performance in different classes; worked with students' teachers to integrate instruction) for **108,879** students.
- Conducted home visits for instruction or follow-up of educational activities to **29,272** students.
- Provided childcare to **30,421** children.

Health and Human Needs

The AmeriCorps members made independent living easier for disabled, elderly, or hospitalized individuals by providing direct support. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Provided independent living assistance to **15,011** people.
- Completed **226** low-income or other housing and began construction on **336** additional units for this group, altogether benefiting **2,070** disabled or elderly individuals.

The AmeriCorps members helped meet the basic needs of low-income and homeless people for food and shelter. They improved low-income housing, fed the hungry, and improved the methods of service referral and delivery. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Placed **18,687** homeless people in housing (permanent or transitional to permanent).
- Gave **56,730** homeless people goods to help them, such as distributed clothes and food (shelter support).
- Organized or packed **3,302,961** pounds of food or clothing for a food bank or clothing distribution center, or provided furniture or other goods to **591,769** recently homeless people.
- Gave homeless shelter or vouchers for shelter to **28,443** people.
- Provided housing services and loan development to **7,832** new homeowners or potential homeowners.
- Completed **60** new homeless shelters or made old shelters habitable for **1,422** individuals and began work on **56** additional shelters.
- Completed **1,259** rehabilitation/renovation of low-income or other housing and began **1,419** additional rehabilitation, benefiting **7,200** disabled or elderly people.

The AmeriCorps members provided emergency medical services, as well as health training and education. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Provided access to health care, diagnosis, and/or follow-up to **57,893** individuals and/or screened for needed care.
- Provided access to prenatal care, screening or actual health services, and/or taught about children's health or development, and/or provided health care or screening to **21,376** pregnant women or families with young children.
- Immunized **4,833** adults and **30,724** children.
- Provided case management such as health appointments or follow up scheduling to **68,074** people.

- Assessed or identified **163,414** people's specific support needs.
- Distributed health related informational materials to **973,035** people.
- Organized or staffed a community event, fair, or benefit related to health or other human needs at which **1,505,773** people attended.
- Counseled **74,133** people related to health and family matters (mental or physical health, or other matters).
- Recruited and coordinated **64,881** volunteers for assistance in addressing human needs issues.
- Provided childcare in support of other human service activities to **12,505** families.
- Provided transportation in support of other human service activities to **26,687** adults or children.

Environmental and Neighborhood Restoration

The AmeriCorps members improved neighborhoods, parks, and recreation facilities by converting vacant lots, renovating buildings, repairing public facilities, and conducting recycling and conservation programs, resulting in a heightened sense of community ownership. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Made **1,357** assessments of the need for public or community building repair needs (e.g., for public facilities or lead abatement) for **163,623** people.
- Assessed **10,020** housing or building repair needs (e.g., for housing, pollution prevention or containment, or risk management).
- Designed or drew up **892** plans for picnic areas, community buildings, housing or shelters.
- Completed **315** rehabilitation, renovation or repairs on other community buildings and started **1,897** examples of such work for **374,689** individuals.
- Weatherized or winterized homes and/or other buildings, benefiting **10,767** individuals.
- Worked on business development activities or helped prepare redevelopment or business development events; **1,590** businesses attended from **71** communities and **57,951** individuals benefited directly.
- Assessed maintenance needs of **234** miles/acres of park trail or wild land area (e.g., need for repair of trail erosion, safety enhancement).
- Helped **7,091** clients identify requirements to meet health or pollution standards (e.g., water quality or air quality guidelines).
- Planted **22,455** trees in urban areas or rural towns (not wild lands).
- Recycled **629,335** consumables or improved energy efficiency in neighborhoods for **163,655** individuals.
- Distributed **211,590** pamphlets/flyers/brochures of information about risks or prevention to the public, directly affecting **458,183** people.

Service to the Community as a Whole

- **442,664** residents who lived in areas where **1,824** neighborhood gardens were established.
- **311,112** residents who lived in urban or rural neighborhoods were affected by the elimination or abatement of environmental risks in **10,377** buildings, bases, parks or other areas.
- **2,927,297** individuals benefited from **3,544** neighborhood clean-up activities.

The AmeriCorps members responded to emergencies, including post-disaster environmental restorations, and worked to improve emergency response capacity in parks and public lands. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Provided emergency assistance to **8,309** individuals in need.
- Performed **494** emergency responses (e.g., fought fires and performed search and rescue).
- Repaired **266** dams or other flood control activities.

The AmeriCorps members restored and stabilized the natural environment and wildlife habitats. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Planted **80,727** acres or miles of trees in wild or park lands.
- Eliminated environmental risks in **50,340** acres or miles of wild or park lands.
- Restored or conserved **3,061** miles of rivers, river banks, beaches, and fish habitat.
- Restored or conserved **40**,**389** acres of public lands and fowl or fauna habitat.
- Maintained or cleaned up **1,604** miles of trails and other public park areas or roads.

Public Safety

The AmeriCorps members started neighborhood safety programs, mobilized neighbors, and improved community/police relations, resulting in safer communities. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Established better working relationships and improved communication between diverse groups (e.g., between members of different gangs, or between tribal groups, through **851** community groups), benefiting **54,027** people.
- Conducted **887** neighborhood watches or violence prevention patrols, and utilized **9,511** child or senior escorts to escort **21,002** individuals.

The AmeriCorps members worked to prevent violence and drug abuse in families and communities and provided direct assistance to victims of crime as well as referring them to needed services. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Started or continued **282** community policing or police relations programs, directly affecting **81,955** individuals.

- Counseled **29,352** individuals about substance abuse prevention or related issues.
- Counseled **79,421** individuals regarding victim rights, child abuse prevention awareness, violence prevention, and provided help and support in negotiating the justice system.
- Worked with **5,346** adjudicated youth and **906** adults on probation (e.g., through career development, community service).
- Provided information about risks, safety measures, or victimization prevention to the public, or answered hotline calls to **136,730** individuals.

The AmeriCorps members worked to prevent violence in school by teaching mediation techniques, resulting in decreased incidents of violence and negative behavior. Specific accomplishments include the following:

- Conducted or trained students in **2,226** conflict mediation/ resolution programs in schools.
- Conducted or trained **22,087** students, adults, or families in **1,145** conflict mediation/resolution out-of-school programs.
- Organized and/or conducted after school sports and violence avoidance activities for **93,169** students.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE WORK ON DIRECT BENEFICIARIES?

KEY FINDINGS

- AmeriCorps provided identifiable benefits to over 9 million individuals across the nation.
- All eight of the randomly selected programs were well received by service beneficiaries and seven or eight had moderate or substantial impacts on direct beneficiaries.
- Strong management, well-defined service models, and strong program focus were the most important factors in achieving substantial impacts.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one depicted the prodigious amount of service completed by AmeriCorps programs and members. This chapter examines the impact of those activities on service beneficiaries; the many individuals affected by AmeriCorps services. In 1995-96, AmeriCorps provided services to over nine million identifiable individuals. The total number of individuals benefiting from AmeriCorps can only be estimated. The beneficiary count would include not only the nine million identifiable service recipients, but also countless individuals who benefited from AmeriCorps projects that reduced environmental hazards, and improved the nations wild lands and recreational facilities.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the impact of AmeriCorps services on their direct beneficiaries. For the purpose of this chapter, direct beneficiaries of services are defined as those individuals who received services personally from AmeriCorps members or who were tangibly affected by service to their neighborhoods and communities. This definition focuses on beneficiaries who can be easily identified and counted and for whom the benefits of service are measurable. Assessing services whose benefits were to larger groups was beyond the scope of this study. However, it should be stated that AmeriCorps projects provided substantial services for which beneficiary numbers were not estimated, nor were their impacts investigated.

This chapter presents beneficiary data from two main sources: the 1995-96 Accomplishment Review and eight case studies. The 1995-96 Accomplishment Review data details how many beneficiaries received what type of services. This information is presented in detail in Table 2-1. However, the bulk of the data on beneficiary impacts was derived from eight in-depth case studies of randomly selected programs. The case studies are summarized and the analysis of beneficiary impacts is discussed at length.

WHO BENEFITED FROM AMERICORPS SERVICES?

According to the 1995-96 Annual Accomplishment Review, the aggregate of people benefiting from all services rendered in 1995-96 was well over 9 million. The most immediately affected beneficiaries of AmeriCorps services were the individuals who personally received services from AmeriCorps members. In 1995-96, AmeriCorps programs personally provided services to 5.5 million individuals. This included 1.9 million students, who were tutored, mentored, enrolled in after-school programs or received other services as well as 75,000 young children who received care, instruction, or immunization. In addition, 70,000 families were helped and 25,000 parents trained in parenting skills. The remaining 3.3 millions individuals received a variety of education, other human needs, public safety, or environmental services. Moreover, 3.7 million individuals benefited as members of neighborhoods and communities that were improved. Individuals included in this category had to be members of an identifiable group (e.g. residents of a specific neighborhood, frequent users of a park that was served). Furthermore, these individuals were not only aware of the service provided, they could identify whether or not they benefited from that service. They said they felt safer because a crack house was torn down and replaced with a new family home. Their families enjoyed a new park, playground, or community garden. While this group has a less direct relationship to the AmeriCorps service, they are still tangibly affected by the service.

In addition to the over 9 million service beneficiaries, countless other individuals benefited as members of larger less cohesive groups. The problem of quantifying and assessing beneficiaries is particularly difficult for environmental programs. These programs often provide services in rural areas that have diffuse, but real benefits. For example, trail improvement projects benefited all hikers who used the trails. While these individuals certainly enjoyed the improved parks and trails, they probably were not aware that AmeriCorps was responsible for these benefits. Similarly, a flood abatement project benefited all members of a watershed. While all the residents of the watershed were safer, they may not have even been aware that they were safer nor have known that AmeriCorps had made them safer. While this group received benefits, both the degree of benefit and the exact number of people benefiting are difficult to estimate.

Table 2.1 lists the services provided by AmeriCorps programs and the number of beneficiaries of those services. It also lists some of the many large-scale projects whose beneficiaries are inestimable.

Table 2.1: 9 Million Direct Beneficiaries of AmeriCorps Service

Individuals Directly Helped by AmeriCorps Members		**5,523,197**
Students: 1,963,743	480,372	instructed with developed curriculum materials.
	108,879	followed through case management.
	366,831	taught, grades 1-12.
	118,664	tutored, grades 1-12.
	93,575	mentored or counseled on school success/achievement.
	209,859	provided in-class enrichment.
	219,020	provided out-of-class enrichment.
	29,272	received home visits for instruction/follow-up.
	244,102	received service learning and community education activities.
	93,169	participated in after school sports and violence avoidance activities.
Young Children: 75,096	30,421	provided child care.
	14,761	taught, Head Start or kindergarten.
	30,724	immunized children.
Parents: 28,227	28,227	received parenting skills development.
Adults/Children: 32,033	26,687	provided transportation.
	5,346	provided activities to juvenile offenders or ex-offenders.
Families: 70,398	12,505	received childcare.
	57,893	received health care or screening.
Adults/People/ Individuals: 3,352,890	17,468	received GED/basic skills development.
	68,074	received case management.
	163,414	identified specific support needs.
	1,505,773	attended community event, fair, or benefit related to health.
	15,011	received independent living assistance.
	12,668	counseled on job development or placement.
	74,133	counseled related to health and family matters.
	28,443	given shelter or vouchers for shelter.
	56,730	given clothes and food.
	7,832	provided housing services and loan development to new homeowners.
	57,893	received access to health care.
	21,376	pregnant women received prenatal care, or taught about children's health.
	4,833	immunized.
	54,027	taught to reduce community tensions from 851 local groups.
	1,422	placed in reconstructed or rehabilitated sixty shelters.
	2,070	elderly/disabled placed in 226 housing units constructed.
	7,200	renovated/rehabilitated 1,259 housing for low-income families/disabled/elderly.
	10,767	weatherized/winterized homes.
	81,955	assisted by 282 community policing programs.
	29,352	counseled about substance abuse prevention.
	136,730	provided information about risks, safety measures or victim prevention.
	79,421	counseled/trained in victimization/child abuse/violence prevention.
	906	provided activities for adult offenders or ex-offenders.
	60,433	received conflict mediation as part of 2,226 programs.
	22,087	participated in training programs for conflict mediation/resolution.

	458,183	received informational materials.
	374,689	restored, repaired, or renovated buildings.

Those Benefiting as Members of Communities That Were Improved		
Community Member Beneficiaries		3,681,073
	2,927,297	residents could benefit from 3,544 neighborhoods that were cleaned up.
	442,664	residents could benefit from 1,824 neighborhood gardens established.
	311,112	residents could benefit from decrease in environmental risks in urban or rural neighborhoods.

Benefits for Which Accurate Beneficiary Estimates Could Not Be Made		
		213,017
Materials: 211,590	211,590	informational materials were distributed.
Programs: 1,427	1,145	programs trained students or adults in conflict mediation/resolution.
	282	community policing programs were initiated, expanded, maintained.
Community Units: 315	315	community buildings restored, repaired, or renovated.
Environmental Activities by Units: 266	266	dams repaired.
Activities By Land Coverage	3,061	miles of riverbank restored, cleaned up, or enhanced.
	80,727	acres or miles of trees planted in parks and public lands.
	40,389	acres of public/park lands enhanced (picnic tables, fence lines, bird houses, boxes).
	1,604	miles of park trails or roads maintained, repaired, or cleaned up.
	50,340	acres of environmental risks in wild or park lands were eliminated.

** Data are based on 1995 - 1996 Annual Accomplishment Reviews from 381 AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs.*

MEASURING THE DEGREE OF IMPACTS OF AMERICORPS SERVICES

During 1995-96 program year, Aguirre International undertook an in-depth look at beneficiary impacts. Evaluating beneficiary impacts is time consuming and expensive for most social programs, which is particularly true for AmeriCorps with the variety of services provided and the uniqueness of each program design. Because one standard methodology could not be administered at each site and yield useful data, Aguirre International evaluators developed a unique methodology for each site measured.

This phase of the evaluation was carried out at the eight Tier III sites. The eight sites, representing a cross-section of AmeriCorps, were randomly drawn from the sixty programs participating in the site visit evaluations. The sample included four national direct programs and four state programs. The programs were geographically diverse and ranged in size from ten to seventy members. Together they represented service in all four priority areas and provided service to most of the core beneficiary populations served by AmeriCorps. See Tables 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 for a breakdown of the characteristics of each program.

The evaluation draws on a variety of methods used at each site. Beneficiary information was obtained from all of the data collection efforts carried out at each site. This included Tier I accomplishments reporting and Tier II annual site visits, interviews, and observations of service. In addition, an individual research plan was developed for each site to study beneficiary impacts in detail. These plans included quarterly site visits, interviews, and focus groups with beneficiaries and members. These plans provided a much greater degree of interaction with the program and its community than sites not included in Tier III. Furthermore, wherever possible the evaluator instituted a quantitative assessment of beneficiary impacts. These assessments included baseline measurement and/or a control group.

At each Tier III site, the beneficiary impact study was the responsibility of that site's Tier III evaluator. The Tier III evaluators were senior evaluators who possessed both significant evaluation skills and expertise in the type of service being delivered at the site. To answer the research question, "What is the direct impact of the work performed on direct beneficiaries of service?" the evaluator devised and carried out a variety of methods. The methods selected depended upon the nature of the service and whether the program already was carrying out any beneficiary impact evaluations. At each site, the senior evaluator carried out a mix of ethnographic observation and carefully designed interactions with beneficiaries, members, and community members. Because of their frequent visits and intensive interactions with the programs, the evaluators were able to respond in both design and implementation to real-world considerations such as a program's geography, its relationships with partner organizations, its staff and members skills and experience of, and its social and political environment. The in-depth case studies allowed them to understand not only *what* were the programs' impacts, but *why* these impacts occurred.

Beneficiary impacts were analyzed in terms of both perceived benefits (customer satisfaction), as well as observed changes in the condition of beneficiaries. Evidence of impact was obtained from multiple sources, including:

- **direct reports** obtained through interviews, surveys, and focus groups from beneficiaries (or their parents, in the case of young schoolchildren), program staff, members, and staff of partner organizations,
- **records** of performance (e.g., school grades, standardized test scores, school attendance, immunization rates, crime rates),
- **special measures** of performance that were part of the evaluation (e.g., reading test), and
- **evaluator observations** from reports made of each site visit**.**

RATING PROGRAM IMPACTS

Based on all the available information, evaluators rated each of the programs as having substantial, moderate, or little/no beneficiary impacts. The rating of a program was based on the extent to which its service activities had positive impacts on beneficiaries and on the strength of evidence of that impact. For example, if five children received tutoring in reading and no measure demonstrated an improvement in their reading skills, then no positive impact would be ascribed to the program, albeit they did in fact, provide the tutoring.

Some impacts and evidence weighed more than other evidence in judging whether service activities had greater or lesser impact (starting from a null hypothesis of no impact). Objective and quantitative data had more weight than evidence that could not be objectively verified. For example, for programs providing prenatal instruction, increased use of health services weighed more than mothers' self-reports of liking the service or feeling that the service helped them.

When the evidence was subjective (e.g., anecdotal evidence from program staff), it was given greater weight if there was concurrence from several observers, such as program staff *and* site supervisor *and* student parents. Along these lines, when the impact measure was "greater parental involvement with the schoolwork of elementary students," the impact was rated higher if parents, students, *and* teachers reported increased involvement, rather than a report only from an AmeriCorps member.

Evaluators also rated service impacts higher when they had more than one concurring impact measure. In a public safety program, a combination of the following measures would be weighted more than one alone: decreased crime from police records, reports of improved sense of safety from community members, and reports of lower crime involvement from both youth and police.

Evidence of outcomes was weighted more than evidence of process. Thus, an increase in the number of adults tutored completing their GED's was given more

weight than a simple increase in the number of adults tutored. Evidence of knowledge gained by beneficiaries was given more weight than evidence of an "enriched" curriculum.

Ideally, evaluators would have been able to look at both a service's measurable impact per beneficiary and at the number of beneficiaries receiving the service. In a number of cases, this was not possible. Evaluators and programs had challenges counting beneficiaries or identifying the portion of the beneficiaries and their outcome that was specific to AmeriCorps. In all cases, programs had services where beneficiaries could be identified and where evaluators could design impact evaluations. These services generally comprised the bulk of the services done by the programs. However, even programs that mainly provided services to specific individuals occasionally did projects that provided very visible benefits to not-so-visible beneficiaries (e.g., environmental programs). Additionally, there were some instances in which events intervened and evaluators were unable to carry out the planned evaluations. These limitations are noted where applicable in the descriptions below.

HOW THE PROGRAMS RATED

Each of the programs examined in Tier III of the study was rated for beneficiary impact based on the evidence collected and the strength of the evidence. In order to protect program privacy, a letter of the alphabet is used to identify each program rather than the name or other identifying information.

Programs were given one of the three ratings: substantial beneficiary impacts, moderate beneficiary impacts, and low beneficiary impacts. A program was given an overall rating of "substantial beneficiary impacts" when most of its major service activities showed substantial measurable beneficiary impacts. Programs were rated as having "moderate beneficiary impacts" when their major service activities and most of their individual placements were rated as moderate. Programs were rated as having "low beneficiary impacts" when the majority of their service activities had little measurable beneficiary impact beyond customer satisfaction.

The ratings of the beneficiary impacts of the eight programs are presented below:

- Substantial beneficiary impacts — 3 — [Programs A,B,C]
- Moderate beneficiary impacts — 4 — [Programs D,E,F,G]
- Little impact measured — 1 — [Program H]

The three programs with substantial beneficiary impact shared several traits. First, these programs had relatively focused service models. One of the three deliberately pared down its range of service activities after the first year in order to increase its beneficiary impacts. Secondly, these programs gave beneficiary impacts a higher priority in relation to member impacts than other programs. This meant devoting a

major portion of their resources to training members and working collaboratively with service sites. Finally, they put more effort into evaluation by developing measures, identifying sources of information, collecting data, and organizing surveys and focus groups. Thus, in addition to producing more substantial beneficiary impacts, their impacts were more readily measured than those of other programs were.

The three programs that had moderate but not substantial beneficiary impacts were marked by less focused service models and other issues. Two of the programs had difficulty managing individual placements and two of the programs had issues with host agency relations, members' lack of appropriate skills, and weak service interventions. In spite of these difficulties, these programs did show moderate impact on beneficiaries.

The program that had little impact was experiencing considerable turmoil. This program was dramatically changing its service model while experiencing staff dissension, and staff and member attrition. It was also experiencing major organizational changes. Not only was it hard for members to provide ongoing service, it was very difficult to measure service impacts. On the positive side, the newly implemented services received very positive beneficiary and community reports; however, they were not fully implemented in time to measure their impact.

CASE STUDY SUMMARIES

Program Characteristics

The following tables summarize the characteristics of the eight programs selected for study in Tier III. Like most AmeriCorps programs, the sample of eight programs had a heavy concentration in education. The beneficiaries were a diverse group dominated by low-income schoolchildren.

Table 2.2: Characteristics of Tier III Programs

Program Characteristics	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Program size (number of members)	35	16	10	50	36	29	50	70
Priority Area								
Education		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Human Needs	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Public Safety					✓	✓		✓
Environment	✓			✓	✓			✓
Region								
Northeast						✓		✓
Southeast		✓					✓	
Midwest				✓				
Southwest			✓					
West	✓							

Table 2.3: Main Service Activities of Tier III Program

Program Designation **Program Service Activities**	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Teaching and tutoring preschool children							✓	
Education support in classrooms, lunchroom, recess		✓		✓	✓		✓	
After-school tutoring and recreation		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Education support during spring and summer breaks				✓		✓		✓
Escorting children to and from school						✓		
Teaching English as a second language		✓	✓					
Tutoring adults, teenagers, inmates – GED							✓	
Rehabilitating houses and other buildings				✓			✓	✓
Distributing water conserving devices	✓							
Disseminating information on water conservation	✓							
Inspecting public water distribution systems for leaks	✓							
Disseminating public health information					✓			
Providing child care			✓					
Teaching parenting skills			✓					
Teaching life skills, job search techniques							✓	
Teaching first aid							✓	
Maintaining and improving parks and recreational facilities					✓			
Distributing food and clothing	✓						✓	
Counseling youthful dropouts/those at risk for dropping out			✓					
Conducting training in conflict resolution					✓	✓		
Assisting police in crime prevention						✓		

Table 2.4: Direct Beneficiaries of Main Service Activities, Tier III Programs

Beneficiary Populations	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Preschool children					✓		✓	
Low-income schoolchildren		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
At-risk youth					✓	✓		
Low-income households	✓							✓
Low-income mothers and children							✓	
Teenage parents			✓				✓	
Children of teenage parents			✓					
Spanish-speaking immigrants		✓						
Adults with low educational attainment			✓				✓	
Adult community college students			✓					
Elderly living at home or in public housing				✓			✓	
Homeless; residents of shelters	✓							
Prison inmates			✓					
People with mental illness or mental retardation							✓	

The following section presents case summaries of each of the eight selected sites. Each program summary discusses the services were provided, the beneficiaries, the assessment of these interventions, and the impact of each service on its direct beneficiaries. Programs are presented in order of rating; those receiving a rating of "high beneficiary impacts" (Programs A-C) are presented first, those rated "moderate beneficiary impacts" (Programs D-G) next, and the program rated "low beneficiary impacts" (Program H) is presented last. A complete listing of the services evaluated, the methods used, and the results are listed in Appendix I.

Programs Showing Substantial Beneficiary Impacts

Program A

Program A was an innovative new program developed specifically for AmeriCorps. The program brought together players in a water delivery bureaucracy in a novel way. Its objectives were to promote water conservation, to improve the urban environment, to provide humanitarian services to area residents in need, and to provide training and employment opportunities for at-risk youth. Its members were mostly Hispanic and African American, drawn from the low-income urban community where the program was located. The core services of this program were:

- distributing water-saving toilets and shower heads to area residents,
- canvassing the area, performing water audits, and educating area residents about water conservation, and
- inspecting water distribution pipes for leaks.

This program had a mix of direct and community beneficiaries. The 40,000 direct beneficiaries were the members of the households that received the water conserving devices. In site visit interviews, beneficiaries reported that they were experiencing

lowered electric bills. Focus groups with beneficiaries showed that the beneficiaries were pleased with their new toilets. A few grumbled that the installation costs were higher than they had been led to expect. Overall, beneficiaries experienced reductions in water charges for specific uses (per flush, per shower). These resulted in either an immediate payoff or a payoff over time depending on how long the installation costs had to be amortized.

In addition to the benefits that accrued to the direct beneficiaries, benefits were accrued to the community. The water district that participated in this AmeriCorps program estimated savings to be 165 million gallons. Furthermore, the water district benefited from the leak identification program, the water audits, and conservation education. Since this community is located in an area that is a natural desert, water conservation is vital to the region's economy and welfare. In a sense, all water district customers, and thus all members of the community, benefitted from water conservation. This was a very real, if diffuse, benefit for several million people.

In conjunction with the water conservation effort, members were taught about the water industry and related issues: water rights, water distribution technology (including irrigation), industry structure, and service opportunities. They learned to locate pipes, detect leaks, read meters, perform water audits, and use tools and safety gear. Since this aspect of the program was only fully implemented in the second year, impact data are not available on whether members found jobs in the water industry. This constituted an innovative job-training program designed to provide opportunities for AmeriCorps members from a low-income community.

AmeriCorps members in this program also assisted with the recycling of the old toilets exchanged for water-saving versions. Almost 15,000 toilets were crushed to be incorporated into paving material and thus, kept out of city landfills. Members also painted "No Dumping" on 200 storm drains as part of an effort to reduce toxic water runoff. Again, these environmental services benefited the entire community rather than individual beneficiaries. Presumably, the municipality would have had to pay to haul away the toilets.

In addition to their core service areas, this program participated in several ancillary, but useful service projects that benefited the community as a whole. Members carried out short-term projects, such as cleaning beaches and streambeds.

This program also performed service activities in the area of other human needs. Members conducted food and clothing drives, as well as helped with maintenance at shelters for the homeless and battered women. In addition, they helped distribute donated computers to area schools and collected toys for distribution to homeless children. While individuals may have directly benefited from these services, the impact of these ancillary service projects was not measured.

Much of the success of this program was due to its well-defined and focused service methodology. While there was ancillary service, all of the core services were

complementary and even the member development goals were directly relevant to the service activity.
As with many environmental programs, much of the impact of Program A is at the community level and in this case at the regional level. However, this program had a substantial number of direct beneficiaries and its major service (distributing conservation devices) had a measurable and substantial impact. Two of its other services had moderate impacts, the community canvassing and water audits. These might have had more of an impact than was measured, but no confirming data were available.

Program B

Program B provided literacy and English as a second language (ESL) services from a university-based setting. The sixteen part-time members were full-time university students who performed their service in two low-income communities; each associated with a different university.

This program provided three service activities, all in the education priority area:

1. in-school support during the year complemented by a summer drop-in center,
2. after-school services, and
3. ESL services.

Beneficiaries of the school-based services were low-income students in elementary and middle schools near each university. The beneficiaries of ESL services were adults who recently had immigrated from Mexico and Central America.

Due to the extent of services provided and the multi-site nature of the program, the evaluation focused on the after-school and ESL services. The in-school services were not evaluated because, although teachers felt that the service was beneficial, teachers had difficulty identifying the amount type of intervention specific students received. Similarly, while staff indicated a general feeling that the summer programs benefited participants, the evaluator did not conduct a formal evaluation because of the short-term nature of the intervention, the difficulty in tracking drop-in beneficiaries, and the exact services rendered.

In-school support

At each site, members served in school classrooms under the close supervision and direction of their teachers. In the classroom, members helped students with their reading skills and other assignments, using existing materials and curricula. They also helped with class field trips. Most of the service beneficiaries were African American.

After-school services

Members at both sites also served students after school. Here they bore most of the responsibility for structuring activities and developing materials. They also served

more directly with students. At both sites, members provided tutoring, homework assistance, games/activities, and field trips.

Adult ESL program

One site developed an ESL program for recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America. The program began with a single member who tutored some men at a homeless shelter and evolved into regularly scheduled classes held at a church four nights a week. The curriculum evolved as well. Moving away from their early emphasis on English grammar and sentence construction, members developed a set of dialogues, simulations, role-plays, and skits meant to give these adults practical skills. This curriculum focused on topics such as:

- how to access health services,
- how to get information from a newspaper,
- how to talk to the police,
- how to find a job, and
- how to talk to people at work and to make small talk in social settings.

Not only were these "coping" skills more useful to beneficiaries, but the teaching methods were more suitable than the original curriculum for clients who had different abilities and who did not regularly attend class.

Based upon the responses of members, program coordinators, and parents of the beneficiary schoolchildren, the after-school program produced a great deal of change in several measures:

- homework completion,
- parent involvement,
- reading behaviors,
- reading comprehension,
- academic behavior, and
- aspirations.

Respondents cited examples, such as more assignments completed by the students, parents' greater awareness of assignments, and students' increased interest in the stories they read. Students also were reported to be quieter and more open to ideas. Parents reported that the youth were excited about being with college students who were closer to their own age than teachers. In addition, the youth asked members questions about college.

In a focus group, ESL beneficiaries reported improved English fluency, confidence, and life skills. They could communicate better and were less isolated. They saw payoffs in the workplace, as illustrated in the following quotes:

- *"Classes like this make it easier to find jobs and show what we can do; we can move from working with our hands to working with machines."*
- *"We learn to talk to our boss and understand the work better."*

Overall, this program was rated as having a substantial impact on its beneficiaries. Of its three core services, the two that were evaluated—after-school programs and ESL instruction—were found to have substantial impacts. These impacts were confirmed by a concurrence of multiple measures from several sources.

Program C

This program was based in a rural area of widely scattered, small communities in the Western United States. Its ten full-time members provided education services at its college base and in some of the outlying communities. They tutored adults and high school students to increase the educational attainment and self-sufficiency of residents of this economically depressed area. The program evaluation covered its five principal service activities; several minor activities were not evaluated because they received relatively minor emphasis, used few resources, or were not in operation long enough to evaluate.

Tutoring Adults

The largest program component, involving nine of the ten members, was tutoring adults in literacy and basic skills to help them obtain their high school diploma or GED. Members served under the auspices of a college Continuing Education Division. Most of the beneficiaries were adults of the mainstream community who were tutored on campus. However, the AmeriCorps members also took the program on the road, tutoring adults who were receiving Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) at the social services agency and adult inmates at the prison. According to host agency records, out of 1,147 beneficiaries, 420 completed their diploma or GED. Another 650 completed parts of their diploma/GED. There was very little beneficiary attrition; most of those who did not complete their certification persisted in working toward their diploma/GED. The efforts of this program greatly improved access to GED instruction by welfare recipients. Of beneficiaries responding to a survey, 78 percent said they would not have completed the program without the contributions of AmeriCorps members. Beneficiaries reported reduced dependence on public assistance and better success in obtaining employment. Staff at Human Services and at the prison rated the program very effective.

ESL Instruction

One member taught English as a second language to 84 community adults who would not otherwise have access to ESL instruction. In a focus group of beneficiaries, one reported that his improved English had helped him get a job; another beneficiary got a raise. Member activity logs reported that these beneficiaries were better able to communicate in oral English; they also improved their vocabularies and reading skills.

Tutoring for College Students

Members provided an academic tutorial for 144 adult college students who had difficulty with their studies. Of these, 140 reported in their logs that they were helped to stay in school. Half moved from inconsistent to consistent performance in reading, communication, or math. In a survey, 75 percent indicated that they were better able to solve problems and make their way through the education system.

Tutoring for At-risk High School Students

One member provided an academic tutorial to 84 continuation school students (former high school dropouts). Among these at-risk beneficiaries, 50 percent completed their GED or diploma, and another 45 percent were making good progress toward completion. According to school records, the average grade point average (GPA) among beneficiaries rose from 1.6 to 3.3. This success rate was unprecedented and was attributed to the AmeriCorps member improving the curriculum by, for example, arranging for outside speakers who gave beneficiaries a broader sense of opportunities and strategies.

Child Care and Child Care Instruction

One member served with a high school program for teenage mothers. Services included care for their children at the child development center across the street from the high school. Mothers also were provided child development instruction. The presence of an AmeriCorps member increased the capacity of this program, improved the welfare of the children, and helped mothers finish school. A beneficiary survey indicated that more children were up-to-date with their immunizations. Direct observation, as well as reports by the staff of the child development center, showed that the children's cleanliness and nutritional status improved. Mothers' behavior with their children when they came to feed and play with them was better and their attitude toward their children improved. The high school counselor reported that the mothers' attendance rate maintained at 85 percent during the sampled semester, and that all fourteen of them graduated from high school.

This program received an overall rating of substantial beneficiary impact. Of the 1,147 beneficiaries of its main service activity, 1,070 made measurable progress towards achieving their GED. The programs three other service activities were rated either substantial (one activity) or moderate (two activities).

Programs Producing Moderate Beneficiary Impacts

Program D

This program was a site of a national direct program whose service model involved crew-based service teams of individuals with diverse backgrounds. The members of Program D provided a variety of educational services primarily to inner-city schoolchildren, most of who were either African American or Hispanic. This site differed from its parent agency's model in several ways. First, it had a high proportion of locally recruited inner-city youth. In addition, it had a more focused service model that involved ongoing direct service to individual beneficiaries in only one issue area. The program had five core service activities:

1. teacher assistance in class (one member per class),
2. in-class service with one to four students,
3. after-school tutoring twice a week,
4. after-school homework assistance and enrichment at a community center, and
5. spring vacation camps.

Each of these services was evaluated individually using a variety of measures. The results of this evaluation are presented below.

1. Placing individual members in an elementary school classroom to provide general assistance to the teacher had negligible impact on student performance as measured by class grades, although it received high marks for customer satisfaction; the students liked having the member in the class.
2. On the other hand, teachers reported that members' in-class service with a single student or a small group of students somewhat improved the students' preparation, concentration, and focus (although this impact did not translate into better grades compared to the students' own baseline).
3. After-school tutoring with small groups of students had a moderate impact on the students' concentration and homework completion. Again, there was not a demonstrated impact on grades, but teachers reported student improvement in specific skills.
4. The after-school program at a community center had a moderate impact on students' behavior and a substantial impact on their self-esteem. This service involved both homework assistance and enrichment activities.
5. Members developed and implemented two spring vacation camps serving the same beneficiaries. They planned activities, recruited volunteer assistance, and supervised the students from the hours of 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. every weekday during spring break. They led the children in sports, games, arts and crafts, and field trips. Both camps had a substantial impact on students' spring break activities. The students themselves reported that they had fun and learned things instead of being bored. The camps also contributed to students' safety and security, since they lived in a dangerous area where it was easy to get into trouble when they were out of school. Students demonstrated that they had increased their general knowledge substantially in one of the camps; this was not the case in the other.

In addition to its core service activities, this program also had its members improving the neighborhood environment, such as building a playground at one of the after-school centers. The new playground had a substantial impact by giving children an alternative to an old playground that exposed them to danger. Members also cleaned buildings for use by senior citizens, people with AIDS, and people recovering from substance abuse and prepared garden sites for use by senior gardeners. Some of these environmental services had substantial, positive beneficiary impacts as established through evaluator observation and interviews with beneficiaries. Others had a high

potential, but were at too early a stage to assess when this evaluation was conducted.

Although Program D did accomplish a lot, unfortunately one of the main activities of the program had low effectiveness. Placing AmeriCorps members in the classroom was much less effective for individual student beneficiaries than the one-on-one tutoring activities. Students in the AmeriCorps enhanced classrooms did no better than control classrooms without AmeriCorps members. In spite of these challenges, most of the program's other service activities were found to have a moderate or substantial impact on beneficiaries. Its housing renovation services and other building projects were rated as having substantial impact. Its after school and spring vacation activities for children were rated as having moderate impacts on student behavior. Overall, this program got a rating of moderate impact on its beneficiaries.

Program E

Program E was a university-based state program. With roughly equal numbers of part-time and full-time members drawn from the student community, this program provided a very wide array of services. Its principal beneficiaries were located in a rural area characterized by poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, violence, and juvenile crime. Members were placed individually and in small groups in agencies throughout this eight-county area. Over the two-year period of evaluation, they performed services at 22 sites in all four priority areas.

Education

- in-class tutoring and teacher assistance
- after-school tutoring and recreation

Environment

- community recycling program
- environmental awareness, highway cleanup, tree planting
- flood cleanup; disaster relief

Other Human Needs

- public health outreach
- prenatal instruction
- health screening

Public Safety

- conflict resolution
- mentoring youthful offenders

In a program as diffuse as this, it was not possible to measure the impact of all the core services. Instead, the evaluators chose to focus their quantitative measurement on the main educational service and conduct qualitative assessments of as many of the other activities as possible.

With the objective of improving school success, members were placed in elementary schools where they helped in the classroom, supervised students at recess and in the lunchroom, and assisted with after-school activities. As reported by school representatives, the members increased in-class support, giving the teacher more time for individual interactions with students. They also increased the staff to student ratios in after-school activities. In two schools, new scouting programs were established and appeared to be successful and growing. Student beneficiaries in focus groups reported that they liked having members around.

In the environmental area, members served with juvenile offenders who were residents of a youth services group home to improve the environment and increase environmental awareness. They established a recycling program, did roadside cleanup, and planted trees. They also made presentations to educate the public about environmental issues. In focus groups, beneficiaries reported that they had become interested in, and better informed about, environmental issues.
This service area had crime control as a secondary objective; however, no crime impacts were available to be included in the study.

In the area of other human needs, members were placed in six local health departments where they assisted with the dissemination of public health information. They served in immunization and health screening programs, sending reminders to families with children, and conducting telephone follow-up. They also helped the health department staff expand their health presentations to the public. One member, who was a registered nurse, made public health outreach visits to rural homes whose residents generally avoid all contacts with government. She was extremely successful at gaining the confidence of these very low-income beneficiaries, providing some services in the home, and persuading them to come to public health clinics.

Moreover, in the public health community members served with staff providing prenatal instruction to pregnant teenagers. Site supervisors reported an increased interest in and use of prenatal and infant care services by this target group.

In the public safety area, members provided instruction in conflict resolution to students in grades four through seven. A student focus group reported that they had learned to respect others and had greater confidence in interacting with other students. They said there were fewer fights at school, and that they use their new communication skills and manners at home.

Members served as mentors with juvenile offenders through the Department of Youth Services. They helped these troubled youth improve their study skills and gave them positive role models. The DYS beneficiary focus group reported that they had been helped and that they looked to AmeriCorps members for advice and example.

The geographic area in which Program E is located suffered severe flooding during the evaluation period; members recruited other volunteers and served in the cleanup

effort. Although their efforts were greatly appreciated by beneficiaries in the affected communities, no impacts were measured.

This program was an individual placement program. Several of its members were placed in classrooms to provide assistance. While this service had high beneficiary satisfaction, it had little impact on the students' academic performance. Other placement's that were evaluated did have moderate or substantial impacts on their beneficiaries. Overall, this program was rated has having a moderate beneficiary impact.

Program F

Program F was located in an area of a large city where poverty rates ranged from 40 to 60 percent. Industry had abandoned the area, which was characterized by crime, violence, unemployment, and abandoned buildings, many of them gutted by arson. Its mostly minority residents experienced high birth rates, high numbers of low birth weight babies, and a large percentage of households headed by single women. Nearly half the community received some kind of public assistance; over two-thirds of residents lacked a high school diploma. The majority of residents were Hispanic, mostly of Puerto Rican origin.

The primary service activities in this program were in the priority areas of education and public safety. Members also undertook one-day environmental projects to clean up the neighborhood.

We had difficulty obtaining certain types of measures of impact from this site. Local police involved with the program warned the evaluator not to pursue in-depth interviews in the neighborhood out of concern for her personal safety. The evaluator then had to rely on opportunistic interviewing of beneficiaries, as well as staff and teacher reports and direct observation for her assessments.

Education

Members performed two education services:

1. Providing after-school activities and summer day camps for elementary and middle school students, and
2. Teaching conflict resolution classes.

Every day for two hours after school, members directed students in homework (for about an hour), followed by recreational activities ending in a snack. They also took the students on trips to art museums, the zoo, and special events. Members developed and directed activities for six-week summer day camps serving the same student population. The summer program included learning, recreation, and service activities. The beneficiaries of these services were approximately 200 students who participated voluntarily.

Members also taught conflict resolution in the classroom to about 1,300 fifth and

sixth grade students in seven area schools. The course emphasized specific skills for problem solving and avoiding violence, building upon members' own training in conflict resolution, and mediation training. Pairs of members came to each participating class once a week for four weeks to introduce concepts of non-violent conflict resolution, suggest alternative problem solving-modes, and teach the vocabulary and skills to deal with challenges without using violence.

The after-school and summer day camp programs were evaluated by direct observation, interviews with program staff, and surveys of parents. These respondents noted the following traits among the students:

- increased individual attention,
- more and richer program activities,
- more children participated in the program,
- children liked the program and attended regularly,
- children were safer because of their program participation (e.g., not out in the neighborhood unsupervised), and
- the program helped children get their homework done.

While they viewed the program favorably, they pointed to improvements in process rather than outcomes. The program staff believed it was a good thing, and thus more of it (more activities, more participants) was by definition a positive impact. Staff and parents believed the participating students were safer than non-participating students. As a further complication, the self-selection of participants made it difficult to compare them to non-participants; participants already had made choices about how they would spend their time (in learning and supervised recreation rather than in crime, violence, or drugs).

Because AmeriCorps members served next to program staff and other volunteers, it was difficult to detect independent impacts of their service. One exception was a program innovation that was directly credited to AmeriCorps members. They developed a "dance team" activity that attracted teenage girls to the program. This was a group that had not previously participated in the program and that especially lacked things to do as alternatives to getting into trouble. The activity was safe, fun, and program staff believed that it increased their self-esteem. The team performed at community events such as sports games.

The impact of conflict resolution classes was assessed from interviews of school principals and counselors and a survey of participating teachers. A large majority of teachers believed the program had a positive impact and students found it valuable. One third of the teachers felt the program had positive behavioral impacts on violence at school.

Public Safety

Members performed three service activities in the public service area.

1. They served with parents, schools, and parent-teacher associations to ensure safety for students traveling to and from school. Their service included both organizing the effort and escorting children twice a day.
2. They assisted crime victims in negotiating the justice system.
3. They assisted with community policing, serving with a mobile police unit and increasing the police "presence" through activities such as canvassing nearby residents on crime activities and cleaning up vacant lots.

These service activities were evaluated based on interviews with program staff, police, and community representatives. The staff praised the student escort activity generally.

There were no direct indicators of benefits or successes because of crime victim assistance. The two members involved left the program early in Year 1 and the program was not continued into Year 2. It was to have begun again in Year 3, but this was too late for evaluation.

Police had no concrete measures of any impact on crime from AmeriCorps support of the work of mobile units. They did note how helpful it was that members took over much of the paperwork and the task of contacting neighbors when police cleared the area of over 300 abandoned cars. They believed that members helped improve community relations by their presence, although they offered no specific examples. The presence of police vans appeared to increase the frequencies of "tip sheets" from area residents on violence, drugs, abandoned buildings, and suspicious activities, but respondents could not attribute this to any contribution of members. Even without good evidence of impact, the service had high customer satisfaction. The police liked the program and intended to continue the partnership with AmeriCorps.

Environment

Members participated in community service days and events, most of which had an environmental focus, such as park and vacant lot, and graffiti clean up. They also constructed a play area in a park and then patrolled the park all summer, increasing the use of the park by children in the community. This activity produced the most tangible impact of this program.

In general, the services of this program were well received by its beneficiaries. However, while, customer satisfaction was high, impacts on its intended beneficiaries were almost uniformly rated as moderate. The evaluator felt that several of the activities had additional impacts that were hard to measure but were still in the moderate range.

Program G

This program was an independent placement program that provided services over a wide geographic area. In the first year, its 80 members were placed in 60 service

sites; in the second year, 50 members were placed in 35 sites. Although most members were placed alone, some members were placed with another member. In the first year, service activities were in all four priority areas. In the second program year, they were reduced to education and other human needs services. The scattershot nature of this program meant that very few of its services could be evaluated in any depth.

In the other seven evaluations, the evaluator focused on the activities that accounted for the largest amount of service; however, this was not possible in this case. Instead, the evaluator relied on a broad-brush approach for a small random sample of placements. By focusing on placements instead of activities, the evaluator was able to get a representative look at the services of this program.

In addition to the program quarterly reports and the Tier II instruments, the sample of nine placements received a variety of methods for assessment. These included member journals (five members submitted journals); one member focus group (six members attended), and 11 member interviews; a telephone survey of site supervisors; member exit forms; and two member surveys. Other information on beneficiary impacts was obtained from two panel focus groups that tracked beneficiaries over time. These included a group of pre and post focus groups with six beneficiaries representing three service activities in one area; a post service focus groups with parents whose children were beneficiaries in elementary school programs; and one focus group of middle school student beneficiaries.

Overall site supervisors felt that most of the services provided by AmeriCorps members were necessary and provided benefits to their direct beneficiaries. Site supervisors were less helpful in providing records of actual improvements. Post service interviews/focus groups with beneficiaries showed that satisfaction with services was high and most beneficiaries could point to concrete improvements resulting from service.

Education Services

Four service activities were evaluated in the education area:

1. Adult literacy and basic education tutoring,
2. Tutoring and in-class support for students grades k-12,
3. After-school mentoring, and
4. Healthcare in middle schools.

At one placement, a member provided adult literacy and basic education services to sixty-nine literacy and fifty-nine GED adults. This had a moderate impact on the skill development. One of the four beneficiaries interviewed and tracked had completed the GED; however, the other three remained in the program and were making progress. Both interviews and observations showed skills improvements of literacy students. All beneficiaries had high marks for the AmeriCorps members as role models and felt that they were having a positive impact on their aspirations and

program involvement.

Over 1000 students in grades K-12 were provided tutoring and in-class support at a school hosting AmeriCorps members. In fact, nine out of ten parents who participated in a focus group lauded these services as outstanding, stating that they had experienced substantial difference in students' attitude towards the service done in class, as well as behavioral changes. Moreover, the parent focus group also broached that the tutoring and in-class activities provided the children with more attention than in a regular classroom setting. Again, this was evident in the children's behavior and approach towards their schoolwork.

Another activity inclusive in the education scope is the mentoring children, whether it is in after school activities or an AmeriCorps member mediating in conflict resolution. In these activities, 2,500 school children were provided such services. In fact, school records for six of a sample of ten elementary students showed improvements their grades. While there is no consistent records of these impacts, staff and members that were involved with kids in the after school activities believe that there has been moderate impact on these children. School records also indicated that school attendance had improved for a number of students. The impact on these students was visible in a focus group of students who mentioned that some took school more seriously and asked members for help when needed.

Other formidable tasks taken upon members were in-class teaching in alternate classroom setting to sixty-five "problem" students who had been expelled from school. Their involvement with these students resulted in improvement of their school behavior. Documentation on the improvement of some of the students' behavior was provided to the evaluator. More conclusive were the interviews with the administrator and with the member relaying the moderate influence that the change in teaching method and setting has had on this particular group of students.

In addition, members conducted parenting workshops for 346 parents. These activities displayed average impacts on the parents. Head-Start parents were given information that they took home to help their children.

Other Human Needs

Six service activities in the human needs area were evaluated:

1. Outreach to the elderly (e.g., assistance with Medicaid, FEMA, transportation, food),
2. Life skills training to people with mental retardation,
3. Rehabilitate and construct housing, conduct seminar for new homebuyers,
4. Distribute food and clothing,
5. Prenatal care and teach child development, and
6. Provide living assistance to persons with HIV/AIDS.

Two of the six services had impact measures.

Other human needs assistance performed by members was delivered to clients in various demographic groups. One such client group included outreach to elderly in the form of assistance with Medicaid, FEMA, providing transportation, and food to 230 seniors. Results from beneficiary focus group responses, member interview, and evaluator's observation concluded that considerable impacts were being made in the clients' lives. From observing the member at the senior center, the evaluator noted that the member was vital to the function of program.

A member at a separate operating site provided life skills training to ninety-three people with mental retardation.

Members involved in low-incoming housing projects were able to build twelve new homes and rehabilitate five homes for their clients. Their services expanded in presenting homebuyers seminars in which 255 people attended. Program records and focus groups showed the strong effect members' works have had on their clients. Focus group members were very pleased and felt this service was life altering.

In a different placement, members' activities were involved in the distribution of food and clothing. Their collaboration with other community-based organizations enabled them to expand their capacity and thus, allowing them to serve 1,137 households. At the time of this evaluation, members felt they were being helpful to communities served and that they had some moderate impact on those people with whom they met.

The other human needs priority area encompasses many activities, but at one site the focus was on providing information on prenatal care, teaching about child development, and disseminating health information through a health fair. These activities involved 900 women and 300 children. Records of shots validated that 300 infants were immunized and that mothers were more proactive in acquiring health services for themselves and their children. More importantly, the records show that because of such educational activities, substantial impacts were made in the communities that traditionally are not served.

Another placement rendered 230 HIV/AIDS clients with living assistance services. Members provided outings, food, and company to ill persons. The service done with these clients gave members tremendous satisfaction and much positive feedback was given by partnering organizations. Not only did such humane deeds have substantial impact on those who were provided these services, but also on members involved in these activities.

Other members tutored and mentored middle school students. Activities with students included an emphasis on discussing health issues such as drugs and HIV. Both parents and members noted that students were more outgoing and better disciplined because of the AmeriCorps members' activities. Students' grades improved as well.

The scattered service of the program was hard to evaluate. Several of its placements were successful and had a substantial rating, while other placements received a modest rating, and a few had negligible impacts. Overall, considering the program received a moderate rating for the preponderance of moderate and substantial impacts.

Program Producing Little Measurable Beneficiary Impact

Program H

Located in a distressed and dangerous inner-city area, this program drew its members from the area. They were predominantly male, age 18-24 years, and at-risk due to family problems, previous drug abuse, or dropping out of school. The initial focus of the program was on improving the neighborhood environment through building renovation and construction, while increasing the educational attainment and job skills of its members. Preparing members for work by helping them obtain a GED, teaching them workplace skills and behaviors, and giving them work experience was a major program objective. The objective of improving educational attainment and school performance of elementary school students was added subsequently.

During its second year in the AmeriCorps program, this program underwent an extensive upheaval that included dissension and turnover among management and substantial attrition among members. These factors made achieving and measuring impacts extremely difficult. For example, because one of the objectives of the program stated that the members themselves were primary beneficiaries, a component of the evaluation involved shadowing members. This study element was rendered almost useless by the extremely high member turnover. On other occasions, because of the internal turmoil, the evaluator had difficulty gaining access to the program to conduct evaluation activities. Much of the impact the program may or may not have achieved has had to be inferred from what it accomplished.

Despite its problems, the program did carry out several service projects. The members rehabilitated a duplex and made structural improvements to two private schools in the area. They also rehabilitated a building that subsequently housed some of the members. Progress on a fifth building was hampered by dissension among the staff and misunderstanding of the requirements of the organization providing funding for the renovation. Direct beneficiaries of the improved buildings were the residents of the duplex and the students and staff of the two schools. Members themselves were the beneficiaries of improvements in the building where they lived. The fifth building was to have housed the program itself when it was complete. Besides helping direct beneficiaries, a primary objective in these renovations was to improve the community as a whole.

As to the education component of the program, members who had completed their GED implemented an after-school tutoring program that helped elementary school students with their homework for two hours a day. Members made home visits as follow-up to these education activities, and served with parents to make them aware

of the students' assignments and school progress. The program was popular and maintained a long waiting list.

Members also served in an extracurricular sports program. Along with parent volunteers who served as coaches, they helped over 300 schoolchildren play football, basketball, and baseball during the school year. This program component was a source of community pride, as the teams had winning records competing against rivals from other parts of the city.

In the summer, members served in an eight-week program that provided reading, sports, and field trips for forty boys and girls ages 7 through 13. This program, too, was popular; however, Aguirre International was unable to measure its impacts.

We were able to observe that the program was in the midst of changing its service orientation. It had completed several service projects in the area of improving community building. It was also establishing new services for school-age children. Overall, program H received a rating of low beneficiary impacts. The building objective that was the initial focus of the program had accomplished only a few goals. These projects may have beneficiary impacts in the future but did not have many during this study. More would have been accomplished had the program not had staff problems and high member turnover. The new services showed promise, but were too new to be evaluated except in terms of their high customer satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The Tier III AmeriCorps programs had developed innovative services to tackle difficult social problems, mainly in low-income, often distressed areas. Almost all of the services had high customer satisfaction. Beneficiaries felt that they were receiving useful and helpful services. In seven of eight programs studied, the services that made up the bulk of the program's accomplishments were analyzed and rated as having moderate or substantial impact on beneficiaries.

The three programs that were rated as having substantial impact all were well managed, performed significant, measurable service, and had substantial impacts on beneficiaries. In addition, these programs were focused on beneficiary impacts, as evidenced by their interest in conducting beneficiary impact evaluations.

Of those programs that had less than substantial impact, there were several similarities. Three of the five programs had poor management. One program was restructuring and reorganizing during the study. Two were individual placement programs that had poor sponsor-host agency relations. Several lacked focus in their activities, offering many unrelated services.

It is notable that three of the four programs that had moderate impacts were individual placement programs. While individual placement programs can work well and at least one of the programs with substantial impact was an individual placement

program, they have some inherent problems. As mentioned in Chapter one, these programs are more diffuse with a variety of services spread over several agencies. This requires more management per service and good sponsor-host relations. This form of organization involves identifying and monitoring multiple- service models. Early in the first year, the Corporation recognized these problems and encouraged individual placement programs to narrow their focus, concentrate their placements by placing more members at fewer agencies. At least two of the three programs studied in Tier III were reorganizing along these lines in year two.

AmeriCorps services improved over time as programs gained experience. In particular, end of year two evaluations indicated that programs fine-tuned their activities to reflect the needs of their service communities better. This improved focus meant beneficiaries received better services, and these improved services often had a greater impact on service beneficiaries than initial services offered by programs. Programs learned from their own mistakes and experience and generally improved over time.

The other major factor in the level of impact was the effectiveness of the service provided by AmeriCorps members. Even if a program is well organized and members serve hard, some services are not ever likely to produce substantial individual beneficiary impacts. The examination of these eight programs confirmed the findings from the sixty site visits. In each priority area, some service activities consistently showed positive beneficiary impacts, while others did not. For example, members providing classroom assistance produced little impact on students. While this sample is too small to indict particular services definitively, it does show potential trends that might warrant further review.

Education

Like most AmeriCorps programs, the sample of eight programs had a heavy concentration in education. In schools, AmeriCorps members had more consistently positive impacts when they were doing one of these service activities:

- Serving one-on-one or with small groups of students in the school classroom
- Leading or assisting with after-school tutoring and recreation
- Leading or assisting with day camps during spring and summer school breaks.

Little or no impact was observed when members were assigned to help in the classroom generally, but assisting individuals and small groups of students produced measurable improvements in school performance for those students.

Members were effective in less structured after-school and vacation programs. They brought energy and new ideas to these activities, the youth in the programs liked them, and there were measurable positive impacts on youth behavior and school performance. The best of these also resulted in greater involvement by parents in their children's schoolwork. In dangerous neighborhoods, these activities not only

helped youth learn and have fun, but also gave them a safe place to spend time.

Members also were effective in providing education services to adults. Both tutoring to help adults improve their educational attainment (diploma, GED, college degree) and teaching English as a second language were service activities that showed measurable impacts. Again, members were flexible and innovative in developing curricula to best assist beneficiaries.

Some teachers, principals, and counselors spoke well of the in-school conflict resolution classes that one of these eight programs provided, but their comments related more to process than to outcome and there was no measurable benefit to beneficiaries.

Environment

Often environmental service is not focused on direct beneficiaries but rather the community at large. However, when programs are designed carefully, environmental programs can achieve substantial impacts on direct beneficiaries. Of the eight programs, only one was a primarily environmental program. Many AmeriCorps programs did some environmental service, generally as an ancillary service such as a special neighborhood clean up project.

In environmental programs, beneficiary impacts were far less clear in these ancillary activities such as graffiti clean up, cleaning up roadsides, stream banks and beaches, parks, and vacant lots, and recycling. These activities have diffuse benefits, many people may benefit, but individual benefit or perception of benefit is small. These services rarely can have substantial impacts on direct beneficiaries.

In general, environmental activities focused on neighborhood improvement had a small area with definable beneficiaries. These activities showed the greatest impact on direct beneficiaries; however, much of this was ancillary service and therefore its outcomes were not tracked or measured. Program G constructed twelve new homes. Another program cleaned up and painted a public housing facility for senior citizens. These activities provided impacts that could be measured from beneficiaries' reported improvement in their quality of life. Facility managers also offered a source of information on impacts. Members in two programs constructed play equipment on existing playgrounds. This activity offered the possibility of measuring beneficiary impacts from observations of playground utilization, reports from playground users and their parents, and interviews with community representatives such as police. Program H rehabilitated and landscaped a number of privately owned properties. These services presumably benefited the property owners and users, who might have reported on enhanced property values, new property uses, or other direct impacts.

The one program whose focus was environmental service was in the area of neighborhood environment. They had a good service model focused on specific beneficiaries that at the same time benefited the wider community. Consequently, they were able to have substantial beneficiary impacts.

Other Human Needs

While several of the eight programs provided human needs services, in none of these programs was the provision of services in the human needs area a high priority. It was either ancillary service (e.g., food drives or one-time events) or the result of a single individual placement. Therefore, there was little formal evaluation of these services and thus, minimal observations on the extent of how these services impacted direct beneficiaries or the communities. Much of this individual placement service was in the area of public health with some minimal service performed in neighborhood maintenance. In general, well-designed service models with consistent communication channels and supervisory support did result in effective placements.

Public Safety

Two of the eight programs provided public safety services. One conflict resolution curriculum for middle school students was reported by the student beneficiaries to have reduced fighting among students. They said that interracial interactions had improved. Moreover, the agency hosting this particular AmeriCorps program created a mandatory mentoring program for youth offenders. The second program that rendered services in public safety also provided very similar activities. Their activities mainly involved overseeing the safety of elementary-age children as they travel to and from school and improving community relations with the local law enforcement agency. Overall, these two specific programs were established in depressed communities where there was a need for better police-community relations or public awareness and prevention of youth violence.

In some instances, many education services also had a public safety slant. Those that did incorporate public safety in their services mostly provided extracurricular activities that kept kids off the streets. Other programs taught conflict resolution as part of their weekly curriculum.

While many of the beneficiaries and community members commended these services, evaluators observed minimal to moderate impacts.

In summary, while the eight programs varied tremendously, several aspects were consistently associated with success in achieving beneficiary impacts. First, programs made an impact to the degree that they had a well-defined service objective focused on a needed service. Weak or unfocused service models yielded lower impacts. Second, successful programs had well-organized services. When carried out properly, strong objectives then could be effective in changing beneficiaries' outcomes. Programs with effective recruitment, training, supervision, and partner coordination fared better than those that did not. Finally, programs that had solid management that could respond to challenges, solve problems effectively, incorporate feedback in a way that improved service and member morale and were able to better achieve their direct service objectives.

CHAPTER 3: INSTITUTIONAL IMPACTS ON SPONSORS, PARTNERS OR INVOLVED INSTITUTIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- AmeriCorps expanded the number and type of institutions involved in direct community service.
- AmeriCorps increased the service capacity at existing institutions.
- AmeriCorps caused new community institutions and partnerships to develop.
- Participation in AmeriCorps helped most programs raise their professional operating standards.
- Partnerships and consortia of community organizations created by AmeriCorps streamlined the delivery of community services.

INTRODUCTION

The AmeriCorps program provided benefits for more than just the service beneficiaries discussed in Chapter Two. The many institutions involved in the AmeriCorps effort also benefited from the funds and guidance provided by the Corporation as part of the AmeriCorps effort. The opportunity created by new funds allowed programs to create new service projects or expand and improve existing ones. Many programs, however, found the challenge of incorporating the Corporation's model of an ideal service organization into new or existing service models quite daunting. The challenges and opportunities created by AmeriCorps resulted in significant institutional changes for both program sponsors and the other institutions involved in AmeriCorps. These changes were documented in both program services and the structure and operation of the sponsors and involved institutions.

Perhaps the biggest change for many organizations was the Corporation's focus on accountability – the ability to track accomplishments and account for resources used in the provision of community services. The Corporation's direct service model required AmeriCorps programs to do several things: raise matching funds; create measurable objectives regarding direct service, build community, and develop members; and to conduct regular self-examinations as part of a process of continuous improvement. The challenge of meeting the AmeriCorps service goals resulted in institutional change even in well-established institutions primarily using AmeriCorps funds to expand existing services.

As noted in Chapter One, a variety of types of institutions became involved in the AmeriCorps initiative. For this study, Aguirre International has categorized participating institutions as follows:

- *Sponsoring organizations* received and administered the AmeriCorps grants. Examples of sponsors include the United Way, Habitat for Humanity, state conservation corps, universities, and many smaller, local non-profit organizations.

- *Involved institutions* include partners and any organization that participated in the program, or provided resources or technical assistance other than money. Examples of involved institutions included the following organizations: schools, homeless shelters, and mental health agencies. There were two types of involved organizations
- *Partners*, a subset of involved institutions, 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 provision of 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, such as a church that only 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 involved in AmeriCorps: the sponsors, partners, and other involved organizations. It will discuss how the AmeriCorps funding, and its concomitant requirements, affected program services, organizational structure, management, internal procedures, and external relationships of involved institutions.

THE EFFECTS OF AMERICORPS PARTICIPATION ON SPONSORS' SERVICES

The sixty sponsoring agencies in the site visit sample represented the broad diversity of institutions that received AmeriCorps' grants. About one-fourth were national non-profits and federal departments; the remaining three-fourths were state-funded programs. State programs consisted of a mix of local and state government agencies; colleges and universities; and new and existing community-based service organizations. In terms of their service models, the sampled sponsoring institutions represented programs that spanned all four service areas: education, other human needs, environment, and public safety. Within these four basic areas the types of services varied immensely. While a few of the programs had participated in Corporation funded or commission funded programs (e.g., Subtitle D or Summer of Safety), over 90 percent of the programs were new recipients of Corporation funding.

Sponsoring institutions responded to the opportunity posed by AmeriCorps in several ways. In 83 percent of the sampled programs, AmeriCorps brought increased service capacity to an existing community service organizations. The remaining 17 percent of programs were new community-based organizations or new consortia of service organizations that had not previously provided the direct services for which they received AmeriCorps funds. Existing institutions responded to the creation of AmeriCorps in one of three ways: (1) as an opportunity to expand or improve their

services, (2) as an occasion to add a new service project to complement an existing service project or (3) as a way to incorporate direct service into a previously non-service oriented organization. None of the cases examined demonstrated AmeriCorps funding as merely a replacement to an institution's existing funding. The following chart illustrates how agencies used AmeriCorps funds.

Table 3.1: Institutional Changes Resulting from Participation in AmeriCorps

New organizations provide brand new services	17 %
Existing organizations expand/improve services	43 %
Existing organizations add new services	40 %

Source: Administrator Interviews

The Role of AmeriCorps in Creating New Institutions

The response to the opportunities created by the AmeriCorps initiative was most dramatic in the new institutions created specifically for AmeriCorps. Both the national directs and the state commission-funded programs showed great creativity in their responses to the AmeriCorps initiative. In general, two types of institutions were created in response to the AmeriCorps effort: (1) new stand-alone institutions created to meet the AmeriCorps goals and receive AmeriCorps funds, and (2) newly constituted consortia or alliances of existing organizations.

Many of the new organizations were formed from collaborations of existing agencies or were started with assistance from enduring community institutions. For example, an unusual alliance of three different water authorities – local, state, and federal – was formed to perform environmental services. All three entities had existed before AmeriCorps, but the alliance and the resulting institution and services they provided, were new. In another case, a new national direct organization provided services through individual placements in three states. In each state, the coalition had an office that individually placed members in numerous local communities, many of them rural.

In a final example, one new program forged links between five Indian tribes with a history of animosity toward each other to work on improving a common ecosystem.

Among state commission-funded programs, one common type of new institution was a coalition of community organizations joined together to create an AmeriCorps program. This type of coalition functioned to bring AmeriCorps to an area in need of community service where each agency was too small by itself to sponsor the suggested minimum number of AmeriCorps members. Institutions in the new coalition each agreed to sponsor an AmeriCorps member, resulting in an individual placement model program. Often these coalitions had little in common other than geography and thus, were not able to field strong service models. In other cases, however, strong consortia developed and the individually placed AmeriCorps members focused on an overall service goal. For example, a coalition of schools and local non-profits provided an enrichment program to the children at participating schools. In another case, AmeriCorps members in different social service agencies

coordinated the services of their sponsor and its partner organizations to improve neighborhood services to community residents.

Existing Sponsors Used AmeriCorps to Expand and Improve Service Programs

Table 3.2: How Existing Institutions Incorporated AmeriCorps Funds

Modify Current Services
Expand Services
Improve Quality of Services

Restore Previously Cut Services

Add New Services
- Add New Services to Complement Existing Services
- Begin Providing Direct Service for the First Time

A variety of models emerged among the 83 percent of programs where an existing institution developed an AmeriCorps program. For about half of these programs, the addition of AmeriCorps funding resulted in changes to an existing direct service program. These programs used AmeriCorps funds to expand the number of service recipients, to improve the quality of these services, and/or to restore previously cut services. The other half of existing institutions used AmeriCorps funds to create new services. In a few cases, these new services were complementary to an existing direct service program. Usually, existing institutions that had not previously provided direct services began to do so.

Expansion of Services

Among existing institutions, the most common way of incorporating AmeriCorps into the sponsoring institution was to use AmeriCorps resources for expansion of existing services. Sponsoring institutions already provided communities with a wide array of services. Many were quite efficient in service delivery and used the new resources afforded them with AmeriCorps to expand the same services.

National direct institutions, by their nature, differed from state-funded institutions in how they were able to use AmeriCorps funds for expansion. Several national directs expanded geographically by initiating copies of successful programs in new locations across the United States. For example, one youth corps expanded its program to several new cities throughout the country. This expansion gave more young people the opportunity to participate in a successful service program that brings youth of different backgrounds together to learn teamwork and self-improvement, while improving cities through community service projects. Other national directs expanded by increasing their capacity to serve more beneficiaries at existing sites. For example, an organization that builds housing for the homeless located its AmeriCorps members at previously existing sites in order to increase the output at

those sites.

Among state commission-funded programs, most program expansions focused on increasing the numbers of direct beneficiaries at existing service locales rather than expanding service programs to new geographic locations. State-funded programs were generally smaller and had less overall funding than national directs. Thus, they needed a funding boost to existing services and did not typically have the resources to launch services in a new location. This expansion of services allowed more students, families, and other adults to receive needed services from community agencies with proven records of accomplishment. For example, the number of children being tutored or able to participate in after-school programs expanded as several sponsors used AmeriCorps resources to open additional centers in new neighborhoods or to accommodate more children at existing centers. Similarly, a preschool instruction program opened more centers. One hospital expanded its tuberculosis testing services. In another case, the placement of an AmeriCorps member at a homeless referral center dramatically increased the number of homeless individuals and families helped.

Improve Quality of Service

One of the opportunities AmeriCorps provided for existing organizations was the ability to improve the quality of their existing services. Many direct service organizations are small, under-staffed, and under-funded institutions that attempt to address overwhelming needs. AmeriCorps allowed these programs to blossom by providing additional resources that improved the quality of the organization and its services. Many organizations have responsibility for providing services to large numbers of clients. Often they receive funding based on numbers of clients served, giving some organizations an incentive to provide less service to more people. Some communities' needs are so great that organizations can only provide rudimentary services to the large number of clients who seek their help. AmeriCorps resources have been used to improve and deepen the array of services provided to service recipients so those clients receive more comprehensive services.

At one continuing education center, the quality of the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) instruction improved dramatically. Before AmeriCorps, clients were paid to go to various community programs offering GED classes but usually dropped out, in part because the agencies had no funds to follow up their attendance problems. As a result of AmeriCorps, classes were held on-site at the center, and client attendance greatly improved, as well as the quality of their work. For the first time, clients completed their GEDs. Case workers felt that having the AmeriCorps GED preparation program on-site enabled the agency to fulfill the state mandate to provide Aid for Families with Dependant Children (AFDC) recipients access to High School degrees for the first time.

In other small service organizations, the addition of AmeriCorps members allowed the organization to expand services and better use existing staff. In many individual placement situations AmeriCorps members were able to perform screening tasks,

preliminary interviews, case management or other tasks which gave the staff members more time to tackle more complicated tasks. Members provided the services of the agency and at the same time, eased the burdens on staff. This resulted in improving the host agency's ability to deliver better quality services.

Replace Previously Cut Services

AmeriCorps funds have enabled agencies to reinstate important services that had been dropped due to budgetary constraints. In several environmental programs, AmeriCorps members took on long-delayed tasks in wild land areas. These tasks included improving trails and cleaning up and restoring recreational facilities. One program improved facilities at a waterside recreational area making the park more accessible to visitors. In an individual placement program, members restored a variety of services including after-school and vacation childcare services, while another program reinstated a crisis hotline. In one inspiring example, a member who was a registered nurse re-opened a community's crisis nursery that had been dropped due to lack of funds. Infants were brought to the nursery when parents were arrested, hospitalized, or held for observation. The crisis nursery cared for the children and examined them for injury or illness.

Sponsors Used Funds to Develop New Services at Existing Organizations

Adding New Services

Other service agencies began working with new service populations or trying completely new types of services. One agency that had primarily worked with parents and the elderly added a three day-a-week summer program for children (kindergarten through eighth grade). Consequently, more parents have gotten involved in the agency's work. Another agency that provided job training and support services to farmworkers began providing pesticide safety training in Spanish. The agency was already familiar to many farmworkers and forged new alliances with farm employers who were relieved to be able to direct workers to safety classes in their native language. Another program director said AmeriCorps was the first time "young people" (members) had been involved with the agency. While the inclusion of members into this agency was initially difficult, ultimately their involvement led to new services at schools and preschools.

Incorporate Direct Service in Non-direct Service Organization

A few sponsors had never previously provided direct community services. Some of these organizations did indirect service, such as fundraising, and some were not considered service institutions at all, such as colleges and universities. The United Way, for example, is a charity that raises funds and then distributes them to direct service agencies. Prior to AmeriCorps, the United Way did not provide direct services. In response to the AmeriCorps initiative local United Way offices served as the sponsoring institutions in several states. In other cases, local colleges and universities became involved in AmeriCorps. Professionals schools (e.g., business, education) or continuing education programs served as sponsors. For example, a graduate education program allowed students to participate as AmeriCorps members,

giving them service work related to their studies (i.e., tutoring). In a third model, a few community agencies that had not provided direct services began a youth corps. AmeriCorps literally transformed these institutions and at the same time expanded the number and kind of institutions involved in direct service.

How Did the Changes Differ Among Sponsoring Organizations?

While AmeriCorps affected service provision at all sponsors, one out of previously existing institutions reported that participation in AmeriCorps did not significantly change their sponsoring organizations. National directs and state programs differed significantly in their responses to this question. One in three existing national direct programs reported no change as a result of AmeriCorps, but only one in ten state commission-funded programs reported the same. Among many national directs, AmeriCorps was only a small part of a large existing institutions with a long history of providing community service, particularly when AmeriCorps resources were used to expand existing services. In addition, national directs were more familiar with the professional standards required by the Corporation. State commission-funded programs, on the other hand, tended to be smaller than national directs, so AmeriCorps funding provided a larger proportion of their operating expenses and had a bigger overall impact on their organizations. Furthermore, before AmeriCorps, many state programs had been managed somewhat informally with less emphasis on maintaining high professional standards. Many state commission-funded programs therefore had to change their operations significantly to meet the requirements imposed by the Corporation.

Among the three out of four administrators who reported that AmeriCorps *had* caused their institutions to change, the most common changes noted were strengthening the organization and increasing collaboration with other organizations. 40 percent of institutions that reported changes cited organizational strengthening as a direct result of AmeriCorps participation. Organizational strengthening by AmeriCorps took the following forms: increased resources and capacity, improved efficiency, and improved organizational components, such as training, evaluation, or management. The second most common response by administrators was that AmeriCorps had caused the organization to increase its collaborations with the community, often by developing relationships with other community organizations. Programs that gave this response frequently reported forming alliances with other community-based organizations. Other organizations mentioned that the service requirements of AmeriCorps had changed the institution's focus, improving either its services to the community or to members.

Local Community Perception of AmeriCorps Sponsors

AmeriCorps also had an impact on how local communities perceived organizations. Two-thirds of the sponsors reported that their community’s perceptions of their institution had changed as a result of AmeriCorps. Thirty percent of these programs said that community members now had a more positive view of their institutions. Another 20 percent reported higher visibility in the community. Fifteen percent of

programs reported that AmeriCorps increased community awareness of their programs. Another 10 percent felt that AmeriCorps increased the legitimacy of their organization as viewed by other community institutions. They found their organizations taken more seriously by potential funding sources, local officials, and other organizations. For example, one AmeriCorps program reported that after becoming involved with AmeriCorps, its administrator was requested to sit on citywide commissions.

Among the one-third of programs that reported little impact on how the community viewed their institution, most were well established and already known and respected by community members. One sponsoring institution claimed that other community agencies expressed jealousy of its participation in AmeriCorps, but this appeared to be an isolated case.

Facing the AmeriCorps Challenge – Raising Professional Standards

In many ways, the Corporation's challenge to programs to meet higher quality standards may have the most long-lasting impact of any of the Corporation's goals, although it has been the most difficult for programs to implement successfully. The Corporation has effectively tried to incorporate private sector principals of ensuring effectiveness into the non-profit service sector and raise professional standards.

In 1994, the Corporation published a booklet entitled the "Principles of High Quality Service" to give programs guidance in improving their operations. While a few institutions were already familiar with these principles, for many institutions these were new concepts. Incorporation of these principles required service providers to change how they viewed their programs, provided services, and structured their administrative functions. To assist programs in implementing these principles, the Corporation provided training, feedback, and technical assistance. Programs' implementation of the principles of high quality service depended on the following factors: program structure and funding (i.e., whether it was a national direct or state program), type of members recruited, and the prior experience of the institution in matters of evaluation and accountability.

Overall programs scrambled to launch service initiatives in 1994-95. Programs started up quickly and had little to time to implement the substantial changes required by the Corporation. Eighty-eight percent of administrators stated that AmeriCorps had caused their institution to make changes between the 1993-94 program year and the 1994-95 program year. Only 12 percent of programs were able to incorporate AmeriCorps into their programs without making major institutional changes. These were mainly programs that had service projects with similar goals to AmeriCorps or programs that had fielded demonstration projects in 1993-1994.

During the 1994-1995 program year, institutions tried a variety of models of AmeriCorps service programs. Over the course of the year, both programs and the Corporation learned what was successful and what was not successful. The applications filed for grant renewal changes at the end of 1994-1995 clearly showed

that programs were making significant program changes for year two. Sponsors initiated most of the program changes, but the Corporation's grant administration staff urged others. Consequently, 68 percent of AmeriCorps programs made changes in program design or implementation in the second year. At the beginning of the 1995-1996 program year 62 percent of program administrators thought the running of the program had greatly improved since the previous year. Thirty-six percent reported moderate improvement and only 1 percent each thought their program was functioning the same or worse than in year one. At the end of year two, the process of refining program models continued as 59 percent of administrators reported they were making further changes to their programs for year three.

As programs grew stronger and administrators saw concrete results from their efforts, more administrators came to believe in the effectiveness of the AmeriCorps model. The percent of administrators believing that their AmeriCorps efforts would yield a long-term impact changed significantly, rising[6] from 75 percent at the baseline visit to 89 percent at the end of year one. It was up to 100 percent at the end of year two.

Meeting Accountability Requirements

The climate of American public spending has shifted from propelling large sums of taxpayer money toward social problems to attempting to target money to the most productive endeavors. In order to do this, national service programs must show what works and clearly relate costs to benefits. In this spirit, the Corporation was concerned that programs were able to reasonably account for the taxpayer money spent on AmeriCorps and show results for the resources used. The Corporation required sponsoring institutions to measure their programs' progress in meeting their objectives. To show they were doing this, programs were required to do the following: formulate measurable objectives, submit quarterly progress reports, conduct an annual accomplishment review, and develop and implement an evaluation plan.

Formulating Program Objectives

"Getting Things Done" was a simple slogan that belied the radical change it brought to community service institutions. Adhering to the slogan meant that programs had to define what it its direct services would accomplish in the form of measurable objectives. The Corporation required that a well written objective provide information on the activity the program would carry out (e.g., ten AmeriCorps members will tutor 200 first through third grade students in reading, one half hour per week throughout the program year). The Corporation required that a well written objective state the desired result of the activity (e.g., increased reading skills), how the accomplishment of this desired result would be measured (e.g., the District Standard test of student reading skills), and what outcome standard was set for program success (e.g., 80 percent of the students will improve their reading scores by one grade level). The objective would thus read: "Ten AmeriCorps members will tutor 200 first through third grade students in reading, one half hour per week

[6] $P<0.01$.

throughout the program year. Youth will demonstrate increased reading skills on the District Standard test with 80 percent of the students tutored improving their reading scores by one grade level."

Even during the application process, the Corporation emphasized that grant applicants should list objectives that would serve as the basis for progress measurement. For many programs, the formulation of objectives, particularly for evaluation purposes, was a major change from past operating procedures. Despite the confusion over defining objectives, all of the programs visited by evaluators at four to five months from the program launch had measurable accomplishments. Programs apparently found it easier to develop service initiatives focused on service outputs than to identify how to measure outputs and relate them to quantifiable impacts.

Many sponsors were used to defining their programs in terms of service inputs or resources such as members, hours, or contributions, rather than outputs such as the number of items that were created with those inputs. For example, before AmeriCorps, a typical program might have focused on having staff spend a certain number of hours working in immunization community health clinics or recruiting volunteers for the clinics. In order to generate AmeriCorps objectives, programs had to shift from thinking in terms of "hours of service" or "number of volunteers recruited" to focusing on the number of 'children whose immunizations are up to date" or 'healthy weight babies' that resulted from the efforts of staff, members and clinic volunteers. It may have sounded good to state "ten members spent 100 hours assisting medical personnel in providing prenatal care and child immunizations," yet this statement could not show whether there was any benefit to the efforts.

Learning to formulate better objectives helped programs deliver more focused services with a higher chance of being able to measure the effects of the service. A program with good objectives thus could find out what wasn't working and make appropriate changes in order to increase service effectiveness. One example of a program with clear service objectives was an environmental program that focused on improving a riverine ecosystem. The narrow focus of this program enabled the program to accomplish its mission successfully and to focus on improving service and bettering its members' experience rather than spending time and energy redesigning it's own focus and goal.

While a few programs previously had some sort of objectives, many had not ever attempted to state their plans as objectives. Many sponsors, even those that had been providing community service for several years, initially found the process of developing objectives painful. During the baseline visits, Aguirre International found programs still struggling to understand what the difference was between input, output, and impact. Some programs, however, found that defining objectives provided a positive opportunity for reflection and planning. One program that had been offering service for many years reported that the exercise of defining objectives had given them a new and better understanding of their organization's service and helped them to sharpen its focus.

Programs that expanded previously developed service models found it easier to formulate measurable objectives. New institutions and those adding new services had the most difficulty formulating measurable objectives, sometimes resulting in unrealistic objectives. For example, one new project planned for members to provide direct services to mental health clients on waiting lists for state assistance. Although members were college students, many of the clients' problems were too diverse and complicated for members to handle given their limited training and skills. In addition, the full-time college student members could not always be available when the clients needed their help. To address the problems, program administrators changed their service objectives. The next year, members worked in mental health clinics under the supervision of professional social workers.

Other first-year programs had broad but shallow service initiatives resulting in unfocused service models. Many programs attempted to provide services in all four of the Corporation's issue areas, in part due to a mistaken perception that the Corporation would give funding preference to programs that responded to all four issue areas. Program administrators quickly learned that managing service in so many different areas was infeasible. During the first year, one program placed members at a variety of community organizations in all four of the priority areas. After realizing it could not effectively provide services in all four areas, the program focused its commitments on education and public safety in the schools. The program kept its alliances with the schools and dropped most of its other community placements. The Corporation launched a campaign to inform programs that renewal applications from narrowly focused programs in a single service area would be well received.

Documenting Accomplishments

The Corporation required programs to measure and report progress towards those objectives. While some programs were already familiar with this process, to many programs this was a new step. State-funded local institutions tended to have the least experience and the most difficulty meeting these requirements. Many of these programs were receiving federal funds for the first time.

The process of clarifying objectives, documenting service work, and reporting progress evolved over time for most of the programs. In the first year, programs had difficulty handling data, particularly during the assessment of five-month and first-year accomplishments. This difficulty resulted in the previously described undercount of program accomplishments in year one. The second year accomplishment reporting process proceeded more smoothly as programs learned how to document their accomplishments, formulate clearer objectives, and focus service models.

Progress Reporting

AmeriCorps*National Direct programs had the least problems complying with required periodic progress reports. Many of these large non-profits were familiar

with federal grant requirements and had their own systems for complying in letter or spirit with these requirements. In some cases, however, national direct central offices turned in required grant reports with little consultation from sites. In the first year, many national direct sites complained that they had never seen copies of their objectives until evaluators brought copies to the first site visit. Thus, while the national directs complied with the progress report requirement, some sites may not have benefited from their efforts.

In the first year administrators complained about having to fill out accountability-related paperwork. Many programs were used to private funding sources with few reporting requirements. By the end of the second year, AmeriCorps*State programs were more capable of meeting their accountability requirements. Many administrators came to a grudging acknowledgement that in receiving federal money they had a responsibility to account for its use. On the other hand, a few program administrators cited dislike of the required reporting as a reason for not continuing with AmeriCorps.

Conducting Program Evaluation

Before AmeriCorps, few of the institutions studied regularly monitored and tracked their significant achievements in a way that adequately demonstrated the short-term impact of their services or laid a basis for considering long-term impact. The sponsoring institutions involved in AmeriCorps*State/National Direct reflect the reality of most community-based and service organizations: they lack the necessary resources to meet the huge needs they face. Like other non-profit organizations, AmeriCorps' sponsoring institutions tended to emphasize achievement of immediate service goals over organizational self-assessment. In addition, institution leaders often said they did not possess the skill, infrastructure, and resources to undertake effective monitoring and evaluation. With tight budgets, programs rarely give the measurement of outcomes and impacts adequate attention.

Though all programs said they intended to have some evaluation, few programs had effective evaluations in place at the time of the five-month visit. Nineteen percent of administrators were not able to list any evaluation plans during the initial visit. Some of these administrators thought that program evaluation was something best done at the end of the program year. In general, many programs were waiting for external direction regarding how to conduct an evaluation. Another 10 percent discussed program performance in terms of member performance.

At five months, a little over half of the programs could describe evaluation activities that included assessing changes to beneficiaries because of service. Fourteen percent of programs had hired an outside evaluator to review the performance of their program. Another 4 percent had undefined evaluation intentions. Fully one-third (34 percent) of programs could describe an evaluation plan that they intended to carry out, but most just repeated plans that had been written into their proposals. On-site evaluators saw little evidence that programs were implementing these plans. Administrators clearly knew that evaluation was important, but were not necessarily able to carry through on their commitment.

During year one, the Corporation's Office of Evaluation offered workshops and written documents on evaluation and reporting requirements. By the end of year one, it was clear that programs needed more help. At the beginning of the second year, the Office of Evaluation funded Project Support and Training for Assessing Results Project (Project STAR), a technical assistance program that provided a variety of types of evaluation technical assistance. Project STAR began offering technical assistance in early 1996. Most of the programs using technical assistance during the 1995-1996 program sought assistance to refine objectives and develop evaluation plans for the 1996-1997 program year.

By the end of 1995-96 year, three out of five programs (61 percent) had requested evaluation technical assistance. One-half (49 percent) had requested a site visit to develop an evaluation plan and one-fourth (25) percent had requested that Project STAR review their objectives. Project STAR had developed data collection instruments for about one-fifth (22 percent) of the programs.

By the end of the second year, AmeriCorps programs expressed a greater desire to meet the Corporation accountability and evaluation standards. The number of program administrators reporting that they did not have any evaluation activities dropped by half to 10 percent. At the same time, the number of discussions of evaluation that focused on project management increased from 20 percent to 36 percent. The percentage of programs reporting other types of evaluation activities was similar to what was reported at the first visit. It should be noted that while much of the discussion of evaluation plans was hypothetical at the first site visit, by the end of year two, the reports were indicative of actual program activity. In addition, site visit evaluators noted that organizations had incorporated evaluation into staff training. Several sites had developed forms for documentation.

As a group, sponsoring institutions improved their ability to evaluate their programs, their ability to collect data on accomplishments and impacts, and their use of evaluation data to make program decisions. This represented a major institutional change that was the direct result of AmeriCorps participation.

Assessing Community Needs

In addition to other goals, the Corporation wanted to foster collaboration between AmeriCorps sponsors and those in the community with an interest in the results of AmeriCorps service. These community stakeholders include a broad group from individual community members to community organizations, schools, and even local businesses. Many programs that had previously focused mainly on community members as their core constituency found themselves for the first time working with coalitions of community organizations. Other institutions that had not offered direct services before AmeriCorps were familiar with community-agency relations but new to dealing with individual community members.

Community collaboration baseline levels of a program are evident from their initial

planning documents. Just over half the sponsoring institutions (54 percent) reported that they based the design of their program on the results of a community needs assessment. In order to generate this statistic, the term "needs assessment" was defined broadly as any program participating in a wide range of activities if their intent was to identify community needs. Initially, agencies rarely conducted formal needs assessments or used needs assessments compiled by other community agencies. Often a program's idea of assessing community needs meant having a formal or informal discussion with board members or advisory council members. Albeit, agencies that did make attempts to conduct needs assessment, however inadequate, should be separated from those programs that did not.

One common explanation prevailed among the 46 percent of programs that did not conduct community needs assessments. These program administrators claimed to be in touch with community needs due to their personal or agency's long experience in serving the target beneficiaries. In fact, people who had spent a long time providing services in a particular community often did have an accurate sense of community needs and priorities. However, the exercise of conducting a formal needs assessment necessitates an awareness of data and opinions from a variety of sources that can sometimes highlight emerging needs or urgent needs of those who are not part of the core constituency of an organization. In a few AmeriCorps programs, a better understanding of the community might have led to the provision of different services.

By the first evaluation visit, the proportion of programs claiming to have some method of obtaining community input into their program had increased to 93 percent. When questioned further, 30 percent of programs reported their methods for obtaining community feedback continued to be ad hoc or informal. Sixty-three percent of programs, or almost two out of three, had some formalized method of obtaining stakeholder feedback about their services. Thirty-three percent of programs obtained feedback from a local advisory committee or a board of directors. Twenty-one percent held meetings of stakeholders - parents, community members or other involved groups. It should be noted that of this group, 16 percent used community meetings exclusively and 5 percent of the programs had input from both community meetings and a community board or council of some sort. The remaining 14 percent of programs used surveys or formal evaluations as their primary method of obtaining stakeholder feedback.

Overall, administrators felt that their efforts at soliciting input and communicating with stakeholders paid off. By the end of year two, 75 percent of administrators believed they had a great deal of active community collaboration with their agency. As a result, administrators felt that community acceptance of their programs increased. Seventy-five percent of administrators felt they had a great deal of community acceptance at the beginning of AmeriCorps. By the end of year two, 87 percent of administrators felt that way. Similarly, the percentage of administrators reporting that that the community had a great deal of understanding of the objectives of their program increased from 35 percent to 49 percent.

Many administrators found the process of community involvement and collaboration more difficult than they initially thought. The percentage of administrators ranking their organization as outstanding or excellent at communication with other organizations dropped from 60 percent at the outset to 46 percent at the ends of year one and year two. The percent ranking themselves as only satisfactory increased from 6 percent to 18 percent and 16 percent respectively. The percentage ranking understanding of community politics as outstanding dropped from 25 percent to 2 percent.

Despite the difficulties, as a result of their involvement in AmeriCorps, programs became more responsive to their communities. Methods of soliciting community input became more formalized. Program administrators adjusted their visions of community needs to the actualities of their community's conditions as reported by their stakeholders. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of administrators said that community input had led to changes in program plans for year three.

THE IMPACT OF AMERICORPS ON INVOLVED INSTITUTIONS

As a group, the sponsoring institutions sustained significant change because of their AmeriCorps involvement. To a varying degree, the many institutions involved with the sponsoring agencies also experienced change. In many cases, partnerships between sponsors and involved institutions emerged to streamline service delivery within communities. Many of the closely involved institutions derived some of the same benefits as sponsors from AmeriCorps. Involved institutions became more aware of each other and increased their own collaborations in delivering services.

The Role of Other Institutions in AmeriCorps

Institutions were involved with AmeriCorps sponsors in a variety of ways. At the five month site visit, Aguirre International undertook a review of all institutions providing resources or assistance to the AmeriCorps programs. The sixty sampled sponsoring organizations identified 589 collaborating community organizations that were involved at the beginning of the 1994-1995 program year. This was an average of ten involved organizations per sponsoring institution. These institutions included:

- Forty-six for-profit organizations (8 percent),
- 224 governmental institutions (39 percent) including twenty-six Federal agencies (5 percent) and 198 state and local agencies (34 percent), and
- 303 non-profit organizations (53 percent) including 160 community organizations (27 percent), eighty-one educational institutions (14 percent), forty foundations (7 percent), and twenty-two religious organizations (4 percent).

In terms of their involvement with AmeriCorps, the closest involvement came from the one-third of institutions that provided a service site for one or more AmeriCorps members, often supervising the member and structuring the service activities. Other collaborating institutions often assisted programs by loaning staff members (8 percent), loaning volunteers (5 percent), providing training (27 percent), providing

administrative support (13 percent), or participating on boards (8 percent). Community institutions also provided resources for AmeriCorps programs; 28 percent of the listed agencies provided direct cash contributions and 57 percent provided in-kind contributions. In-kind contributions included space (38 percent), materials (18 percent) or other contributions (21 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 (119 involved community institutions.)[7] For the purposes of this portion of the study, an involved institution was considered a subset of the collaborating institutions mentioned above. 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 3.3 How Involved Institutions Participated in AmeriCorps

Activity	*Year 2*
Recruiting of Clients	62%
Soliciting Community Support	61%
Members Training	60%
Conceptualizing Project	59%
Evaluation of Project Work	55%
Projects Implementation	52%
Member Recruitment	31%
Proposal Writing	28%

Source: Community Representative Interviews

Many institutions were involved with AmeriCorps in more than one way. Of those involved institutions interviewed at the end of the 1995-1996 program year, 61 percent of agencies were involved in three or more ways, 29 percent in two or three ways, and only 10 percent of the organizations were involved with programs in only one way.

Active collaboration with involved institutions was critical to the smooth functioning of programs given the depth of involvement of these institutions. Involved

[7] 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.

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 63 percent said that it always met or exceeded what was needed to accomplish goals.

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 marshal scarce community resources more effectively.

Members Link Sponsors and Involved Institutions Together

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.

In another example, a victim assistance program provided AmeriCorps members with training so they could counsel victims of domestic violence and help them negotiate the legal system. The AmeriCorps program linked the sponsor, the prosecutor's office, the police, and the courts into a more effective process for dealing with domestic abuse. Each of these agencies remarked on the improvements to the system made by the AmeriCorps members. The prosecutors depended on the members to help prepare witnesses for court. The judges benefited from better court documentation, better case presentation, and victim-witnesses who showed up for proceedings prepared to able to participate in a helpful manner. Consequently, the work of the AmeriCorps members allows for better quality work by the prosecutors and the judges as well as better outcomes for the victims.

AmeriCorps Strengthens Links Between Involved Institutions

In addition to forging new relationships between sponsoring agencies and involved institutions, AmeriCorps also fostered new links among involved institutions themselves. These collaborations have strengthened the institutions and the communities they serve. Institution representatives have become more aware of other community organizations and their service missions. With this knowledge, community organizations can better support one another in providing comprehensive services. Overall, 57 percent of involved institutions felt that the AmeriCorps program fostered a great deal active community collaboration between their institution and community organizations other than the sponsor. In addition, 59 percent of the involved institutions thought that AmeriCorps was doing a good job helping community organizations work together. Another 32 percent felt that AmeriCorps had made satisfactory progress in this area. Only 8 percent felt that AmeriCorps programs were less than satisfactory in helping organizations work

together.

When specifically discussing how community service organizations worked together, 63 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 25 percent felt that AmeriCorps had made satisfactory progress. Only 13 percent felt that AmeriCorps programs were less than satisfactory in this respect.

Involved Institutions Derive Similar Benefits from AmeriCorps as Sponsors

Closely involved institutions derived many of the same benefits noted by sponsoring organizations. 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 to serve the homeless.

In almost all cases (95 percent), involved institutions felt that AmeriCorps had a positive impact on their organizations. Only 2 percent said that they did not want 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

AmeriCorps funds allowed sponsors to expand, improve, restore, and add new service projects to their existing organizations. Funds also allowed new organizations to begin providing valuable community services. The institution building that resulted from organizations' involvement in AmeriCorps had the most 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. Greater communication with stakeholders brought the AmeriCorps programs in closer collaboration with their communities, better targeting their services to actual needs, and improving the perceived value of the services provided. The most intense institutional change occurred among small grassroots organizations as they attempted to incorporate the principles of high quality service into their organizations. These organizations had little experience providing funding sources with quick, tangible service results. While programs experienced difficulty and frustration with the

process of change, many of them achieved greater program accountability and increased their professional standards.

Involved institutions made huge contributions to the AmeriCorps program, as many were deeply involved with sponsors' core activities. Over time, more community organizations became involved with AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps not only strengthened sponsoring institutions, but also 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.

Conjointly, 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.

CHAPTER 4: DO PROGRAMS BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES?

KEY FINDINGS

- 68 percent of community representatives rated programs "outstanding" or "very good" in strengthening communities.
- 82 percent of community representatives rated programs as having an "outstanding" or "very good" impact on their communities.
- Providing services to individuals resulted in benefits to whole communities.
- AmeriCorps strengthened the physical, informational and institutional infrastructure of needy communities.
- AmeriCorps brought new financial resources into communities, above and beyond the AmeriCorps grants.

INTRODUCTION

AmeriCorps' programs are found in some of America's neediest communities. Not only are the residents predominantly low-income, but the communities themselves often lack resources and infrastructure. The question of whether AmeriCorps programs strengthened America's needy communities is the most holistic evaluation question posed by this study. To answer this requires examining the totality of AmeriCorps' impacts. Each of the individual impacts examined in previous chapters has the potential to result in stronger communities. In addition, AmeriCorps programs affect communities in ways not previously discussed. For this study Aguirre International considered communities to be stronger when AmeriCorps programs:

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

This chapter will examine the extent to which AmeriCorps achieved the eight indicators of community strengthening listed above. It will discuss the following topics:

- AmeriCorps ratings on community strengthening indicators,
- reasons why helping individuals through AmeriCorps service strengthened communities,
- ways the community infrastructure was enhanced,
- additional resources AmeriCorps brought to communities,
- ways AmeriCorps empowered local community residents, and
- ways communities, AmeriCorps staff, and members dealt with diversity.

RATING AMERICORPS USING COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING INDICATORS

Overall, community representatives gave programs high ratings on the various components of community strengthening. Sixty-eight percent of community representatives felt that programs did a very good, excellent, or outstanding job of strengthening communities. In general they felt that one in five programs did an outstanding job of working in the community, three in five programs did an excellent or very good job, and only 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 4.1 Community Representative Ratings of AmeriCorps' Community Strengthening Indicators

Measure	Outstanding	Excellent / Very Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory /Development Needed
Overall project impact	14%	69%	13%	3%
Impact on the community	11%	71%	17%	2%
Strengthen communities	12%	56%	25%	7%
Overall project quality	20%	65%	11%	4%
Provide support to the community	20%	63%	14%	3%
Working with other groups/agencies	23%	63%	18%	4%
Understanding clients	29%	61%	15%	1%
Understanding community politics	10%	53%	21%	16%
Community mobilization	15%	45%	28%	12%
Reach goals/objectives	24%	59%	15%	2%
Make communities more aware of issues	8%	46%	27%	2%
Help organizations work better w/each other	4%	53%	36%	8%
Provide sense of community leadership	15%	47%	25%	13%
Change ways CBOs work together	10%	54%	32%	5%
Encourage civic responsibility among groups	12%	57%	24%	6%

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

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH SERVICE

Responding to Community Needs

AmeriCorps was created to strengthen America's communities by providing direct service in distressed communities. The sponsoring organizations of the AmeriCorps sites took this challenge seriously. 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.

Did the AmeriCorps programs respond to their communities' needs? When reviewing service provided by the programs, very few community representatives (8 percent) noted any conflict or overlap between AmeriCorps and the work of other community organizations. Additionally, most community representatives (86 percent) said that AmeriCorps was different from other community programs because of the full-time commitment of members, extensive member training, the flexibility of the programs, community focus, and long-term commitment to fixing community problems.Even those 14 percent who thought AmeriCorps was similar to other community programs felt AmeriCorps was still a valuable addition to the community.

By the end of the second year, 82 percent of the community representatives rated the AmeriCorps sites as very sensitive (44 percent) or extremely sensitive (38 percent) to community needs.They rated the AmeriCorps programs as obtaining a great deal of community acceptance (70 percent) and collaboration (56 percent). Understanding of AmeriCorps by community members was more difficult to achieve but by the end of the second year, 83 percent said that communities had a moderate or better understanding of the program. The community representatives confirmed evaluators' observations that the work performed by AmeriCorps programs was making a positive contribution to America's communities. Approximately half of the community representatives (52 percent) rated AmeriCorps' impact on the community as excellent or outstanding. Another third (31 percent) said the impact was very good. All of the community representatives felt that the work of their local AmeriCorps site was useful with more than half (56 percent) rating the programs' work as extremely useful to the community.

Helping Individuals Also Helps Families and Other Community Members

In many cases, helping individual community members also improved life for their families, friends, and neighbors. The 381 programs reporting annual accomplishment data for their first year identified more than 5.5 million community residents who received direct and personal service from AmeriCorps programs. 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. The following examples show how services to individuals positively affected entire families and others in the community.

- At one program, AmeriCorps members trained parents of young children to effectively tutor and teach their own children. Consequently, parents saw their

children entering school happily and, more importantly, parents felt competent working with their children, teachers, and schools. They gained confidence in the educational process and felt involved in the school and in the community.

- One program director noted that many members were noticeably improving their ability to manage their own lives and family relationships. In part, the education stipend was an incentive for many members and enabled them to return to school to further their formal education.
- One Native American tribe used an AmeriCorps grant to fund assisted-living services for the elderly. The members were tribal youth who helped elders with tasks requiring physical strength such as cutting firewood, moving, and serving meals. The program strengthened the tribal community by reinforcing the cultural norms of youth helping elders, aiding the elders, and providing jobs for reservation youth on a reservation with a 60 percent youth unemployment rate.
- As in the previous example, AmeriCorps service strengthened intergenerational links within communities, bringing youth in touch with seniors and children. Members of one program supervised grade-school students in the creation of a community garden located at a residential home for elderly women. Students interacted with the residents by sharing and discussing how to use the garden products and flowers. Another program trained AmeriCorps members to recruit and supervise middle school students to visit elderly residents of nursing programs. The structure of the visits brought the two age groups together for sharing and learning, as well as improving the spirits of the infirm elderly.
- AmeriCorps members improved the health of families by helping to provide pre-natal care and infant immunizations. They also screened community members for contagious diseases such as tuberculosis.
- Another 2.8 million community members benefited from improvements to their neighborhoods made by AmeriCorps programs in the form of community gardens, cleanups, removal of environmental hazards and pollutants, and other environmental improvements. These projects positively affected whole communities.

Overall, AmeriCorps service resulted in strengthened communities by helping those in crisis, providing better education for children, helping workers improve job search and educational skills, making families healthier, and providing communities that were safer physically and environmentally. Almost all of the community representatives (97 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.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Many of the communities where AmeriCorps operates lack resources and infrastructure. As part of setting up and carrying out their service initiatives, AmeriCorps programs strengthened communities by developing new infrastructure.

Three types of infrastructure were strengthened: physical infrastructure, informational infrastructure, and institutional 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.

- One building rehabilitation program in a tough inner-city neighborhood has been successful not only in improving the building stock of the neighborhood, but also the morale.
- Several AmeriCorps programs have successfully removed crack houses from drug infested neighborhoods. Members at one AmeriCorps program persistently called the police and city until finally succeeded in getting a crack house demolished that was located on the same block as an elementary school. A community garden was developed in its place. Another program reported that the drug dealers have moved away from their offices and rehabilitation activities.
- When neighborhood residents feel they live in a "nice" community, they tend to take better care of it and consequently the community as a whole is strengthened and improved. The residents on the rehabilitated streets became more vigilant about picking up trash and not allowing others to litter. One elderly neighbor who had her house for sale decided to remain in the community when she saw AmeriCorps members rehabilitate homes in the area and clean up the neighborhood.
- Many of the conservation projects of AmeriCorps also improved the physical infrastructure of the communities served. Many trails, parks, and streams were cleaned up for community use.
- In one conservation corps project, members helped clean up and restore facilities at a major waterway, leaving streams and state forests more accessible to visitors. These restoration and cleanup activities enabled thousands of residents the use of areas where they can enjoy the beauty of their community and feel a sense of pride and ownership.
- One program staff member stated that because of the environmental cleanup and anti-pollution activities, the community has become more beautiful and children have learned about and are participating in recycling and gardening projects.

Informational Infrastructure

AmeriCorps members also developed communities' informational infrastructure. As part of setting up and carrying out their service initiatives, many AmeriCorps programs gathered, updated and compiled information and put it in databases, newsletters, Internet postings, or other formats that made information available to the community. Improvements to informational infrastructure included writing procedural manuals, compiling and distributing lists of community resources, 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.

Institutional and Organizational Infrastructure

The institutional strengthening of sponsor and partner organizations discussed in the previous section was an essential part of developing institutional infrastructure. AmeriCorps provided an opportunity for community organizations to develop new needed service programs for their communities and upgraded the service standards of many existing service organizations. Not only did programs improve in fiscal accountability, but they also became more accountable to their communities. AmeriCorps sponsors were encouraged to strengthen their relationships with other community organizations, to collect, and use community feedback. Most importantly, AmeriCorps sponsors were encouraged to define their goals in terms of the impact on the community and its members.

In addition to strengthening communities by providing new institutional architecture in terms of sponsors and consortia, AmeriCorps developed institutional infrastructure among non-partnering organizations. Creating links and relationships between community organizations is 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.

In many cases, these links and changes will endure. The following examples illustrate how AmeriCorps strengthened institutional infrastructure of communities.

- One program placed members in many agencies that were unaware of the existence of other service agencies. When members from different placement sites met together, they shared information about their agencies. In some cases, they even coordinated activities between agencies that allowed for expansion and services that are more effective.
- Members in another program linked adjudicated youth to various community centers and resources. They also linked these youth with positive community efforts, such as trail maintenance, park cleanup, and other special programs. This

allowed different agencies and city departments to see adjudicated youth contributing to the community rather then in stereotypical negative ways.

- A member of one program became a liaison between area colleges and her program. She negotiated two scholarships for members at a local school and planned to arrange similar scholarships from other adult education institutions.
- Another program reported that AmeriCorps served as the liaison for many different agencies. A staff member shared, "I was able to link my parish church's Christmas clothing collection drive with the distribution drives at two churches on [a particular location]."
- Members of an education program helped link parents to the community through regularly scheduled parent meetings with topics such as the need for child immunizations and AIDS awareness.
- In some communities, AmeriCorps programs developed institutional links with local businesses such as banks and real estate agents. 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 complimentary services such as job training and childcare services together.
- The AmeriCorps project in one city was reported to have had a very positive effect on the community college and other partners. Through AmeriCorps, the college now undertakes tasks to create an academic community from kindergarten to junior college. As one staff member puts it, " 'The Badge of AmeriCorps' has helped them draw together different groups that were working in schools on different issues."
- An environmental program so impressed the engineers from a Fortune 100 company began volunteering their time to help with stream cleanup activities. The regional power authority was impressed and contributed to the program by delivering surplus materials, such as office equipment. The effectiveness of the program sparked the involvement of other community groups and businesses.
- In one state, AmeriCorps members collaborated with a partner by running a three-day a week summer program for children. This agency had never implemented a program for children as they had predominately worked with parents and the elderly. This new program, which was run by members, had a major effect on the agency. They began to get more parents involved as a result. At this same site, the state's attorney general learned of the work conducted by members and signed a partnership for a community-policing program.
- 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 to work together, which not only benefits their students, but the inner-city communities. The development and strengthening of these collaborations will inevitably have long-term impacts on making the communities served stronger and more cohesive.

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. According to the Annual Accomplishment Survey, 381 AmeriCorps programs recruited, placed, supervised and/or training 329,987 community volunteers. These volunteers greatly expanded the work that the 11,099 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.

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.[8] AmeriCorps programs also succeeded in bringing new foundation and corporate resources to their communities. The 60 sampled AmeriCorps programs averaged at least one foundation or business among their partners.

In addition to receiving grants, AmeriCorps programs brought financial resources to communities in other ways. AmeriCorps members helped write proposals for community groups, helped organize staff, and participated in community fundraisers, such as walk-a-thons and charity events such as holiday baskets for the needy. 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, a solid third of AmeriCorps members was 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.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

Many residents in the areas served by AmeriCorps feel overwhelmed by their community's problems as well as their own 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

[8] 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.

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.

- One community representative related the case of an alley that had become an eyesore and health hazard. Residents had gradually given up on cleaning up the increasing amounts of garbage that were dumped in the alley. After AmeriCorps members organized a cleanup of the alley, the residents were impressed with the AmeriCorps members' concern over their problem, became more hopeful about their community and resumed alley maintenance.

Locally Recruited Members

Communities reacted strongly and positively when AmeriCorps programs recruited and helped the unskilled or troubled youth of their own communities. These local recruits served as role models for other community members. 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.

While all of the programs developed by sponsoring agencies had a service orientation, programs differed in whether their focus was on community impacts or member impacts. When describing their programs, about three-fourths (77 percent) of program administrators saw their primary purpose as providing service to their communities through their impact on service beneficiaries. At the same time these programs often recruited from the community and provided training and services to these community members. For the remaining one-fourth of the programs, their primary focus was recruiting at-risk corps members and changing their lives through training and services. Overall, more than one-third of program administrators made recruiting local members a priority.

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 nine out of ten community representatives felt that the AmeriCorps program had enhanced members' community awareness (95 percent), provided them with new skills (98 percent) and given them greater provided career awareness (93 percent).

Communities are strengthened when individuals improve their own skills and opportunities.

Members improved themselves by using the educational stipend to increase their knowledge and skills, learning how to engage in community service, improving their self-esteem by having rewarding experiences, and seeing themselves as role models for children. Members shared the following experiences with evaluators.

> *"I'm a role model for the kids even though I don't have a teacher's certificate. I'm learning a lot from them; telling them to 'go home, do your homework,' and I never did that before; now I do that and I never thought I could have an impact on another person, but now I see that I can."*
>
> *"I learned the various ways there are in helping people. You have people from all walks of life helping each other [in AmeriCorps]. People helping really make a difference in this world."*
>
> *"One of the things that makes me feel good is some of the women that I talk to on the phone call me in desperation; shots being fired in the hallway or she can't unlock the door to let her kids go down to the corner and back. One mother unfortunately has seen, I can't tell you how many, small children shot to death in her area.... I have difficulty being patient with getting them through the program because I see what they are dealing with and I want to get them in [a house] as quickly as possible...the job I have is pivotal..."*
>
> *"I used to be a 'couch potato' watching soap operas and eating until I became an AmeriCorps member. (This member became a star member, providing workshops, mediation and other skills to her Family Center.)"*
>
> *"This program really gave me hope in my future for my son, and I really hope AmeriCorps can help me find a career so my son and I can make it on our own."*

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, such as what to wear to interviews. An AmeriCorps program staff member shared her observations, *"women know they should wear a dress but don't understand the subtleties of what to wear...that the dress shouldn't be tight-fitting and they should wear hose. The men don't realize that they need dress pants for interviews."*

- AmeriCorps gave members a chance to exercise initiative improving themselves and their communities. When they became aware of the needs for service for African American girls in their neighborhood two members did not let lack of resources stand in their way. They took the initiative to start several after-school programs in front of their own houses and in the yards of neighbors. The neighbors felt pride in the members' work and encouraged children to participate.

- One program drew staff and volunteers from its own high-unemployment community and provided them with a structured service experience that included preparation for employment -- daily accountability, dress codes, starting and stopping times, and lessons regarding communication with supervisors and clients.
- Some members left their immediate communities for the first time. For example, some members in an urban project reported that they had never traveled prior to going to AmeriCorps events and working on service projects in other states. This type of exposure created a larger vision for members and raised their aspirations.
- One AmeriCorps member who worked with farmworkers said that the program had exposed her to conditions she did not know existed in the United States. She felt that this new understanding made it difficult for her to relate to her friends who worked in restaurants or malls. Although she confessed her friends made more money, she now doubts she could ever do a job again without asking herself "What good does this do anybody?"

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. 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.

Mobilizing Community Members

Many AmeriCorps programs emphasized enabling communities to address their own problems. To that end, AmeriCorps programs organized community projects and recruited and motivated community members to participate in improving their own communities. AmeriCorps provided a spark to show 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 that 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. 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. To promote involvement in improving children's lives, AmeriCorps programs coordinated regular monthly parent meeting to train parents to tutor their children. The program recruited and scheduled volunteer parents, grandparents, and community members to read to and with students; and involved parents in community networking classes and self-help groups. These types of activities teach community residents that they can be part of the process of restoring their communities. Community representatives agreed that AmeriCorps engaged in important work that galvanized the community.

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."
- At another program staff reported that community members could see young people helping the community rather than joining gangs and using drugs and that this built bridges among the different age groups in the community. "…we've crossed the bridge of fear between the young people and the old people. People see young people working, helping to remove blight... [This is] giving people hope about young people."
- 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.

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

Overall, AmeriCorps achieved many of the indicators of community strengthening. It is too soon to know whether these will have sustained impacts, but many of the changes such as infrastructure building and institutional strengthening hold great promise. AmeriCorps responded to community needs in most cases by providing needed services guided by community input. Organizations linked together to form more comprehensive and efficient service delivery networks that helped millions of people. The benefits that accrued to one individual often trickled down to other family and community members AmeriCorps programs developed physical, institutional and informational infrastructure and brought new resources to needy communities, improving the lives of local citizens. Community residents were empowered as locally recruited members served as role models and increased their own skills through service. AmeriCorps mobilized whole communities through service projects and many community volunteers got involved in improving their own communities. Finally, communities received the benefit of members' experience with diversity.

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. One community representative described the effect of some of the work of members, "It's a small effect. It's not like the city is going to feel the impact. 477 Franklin was a drug house. Rehabbing it improved (only) **that** section of Franklin Street." However, it is these small victories that, as they accrue, help restore a community's faith in its ability to change. AmeriCorps programs have taken a tremendous step in reaching out in communities and grappling with these problems. In some cases, they have been successful in getting the members, beneficiaries and organizations that make up the community to create novel solutions and take an aggressive stance against the negativity with which weak communities contend.

In some cases, the AmeriCorps programs have succumbed to these very problems which plague America's communities. Overall, however, these programs have been instrumental in taking the beginning steps needed to revitalize the nation's communities. As one evaluator observed, "The community spirit which has resulted from this [AmeriCorps] program cannot be captured in the instruments or words. Everyone spoke of it. It makes the member feel better about his/her community. It was present in the faces of the elderly who received a friendly hello or wave; I felt it when the members delivered meals to the elderly who were all alone." Feelings such as these cannot always be measured or articulated but are present in AmeriCorps programs across the nation. AmeriCorps programs have definitely strengthened the communities they serve.

SECTION III. MEMBER IMPACT

CHAPTER 5: WHAT IMPACT DID AMERICORPS SERVICE HAVE ON MEMBERS' LIFE SKILLS?

KEY FINDINGS

- Participation in AmeriCorps resulted in substantial gains in life skills for more than three-quarters of AmeriCorps members.
- Most AmeriCorps members who initially considered their life skills to be deficient achieved substantial or dramatic gains in every area except use of information technology.
- A comparison group of demographically similar adults who did not participate in AmeriCorps did not make significant gains in life skills over the study period.
- Benefits occur for all AmeriCorps members, especially those with the least developed skills upon program entry.
- All ethnic groups share in the reported gain in skills.
- Participation in a program operating in Human Services and strong program designs are associated with higher-than-average gains.

INTRODUCTION

As specified in the National and Community Service Trust Act, AmeriCorps is expected to have an impact on members in several areas: by expanding educational opportunities and attainment, increasing members' ability to engage in civic affairs, fostering an increased commitment to community service, and broadening and strengthening life skills. Life skills are the general skills which enable a person to make effective use of their school, life, family, employment, and service experience in the pursuit of careers, working with others in community or work activities, overcoming personal challenges and participating in society as informed citizens. AmeriCorps members who acquire these skills are more likely to be successful in managing change in their personal and family lives, to adapt to challenges in the workplace, and to be disposed to work collaboratively with others in their communities. This chapter focuses on the impacts of AmeriCorps participation on members' life skills.

This discussion is limited to examining members' growth in terms of life skills developed over the course of their AmeriCorps experience. There remain important questions regarding the way in which the national service experience may have shaped members' aspirations, personal goals, short- term labor market participation, and future career trajectories. However, these issues are beyond the scope of the current report.

In order to provide the reader a solid basis for interpreting the findings from this analysis, the chapter is structured as follows:

- Overview of the life skills framework,
- Summary of methodology used to determine life skills changes,
- Characteristics of study participants, both AmeriCorps members and comparison group,
- Life skills performance levels of members and comparison group at beginning of study,
- Life skills performance levels of members and comparison group at the end of study,
- Estimates of change in life skills over the program participation period,
- Patterns of skills development, and
- Factors which are associated with the extent of change in skills.

Detailed information on the methodology used for the study, sample weighting, and scale construction can be found in Appendix A.

WHAT ARE LIFE SKILLS?

Life skills are the competencies needed to effectively function in a modern workplace and social environment, which is increasingly complex and demanding. Life skills do not rest on any specific body of knowledge, but on what may be called information-handling competencies. Life skills are built on a foundation of basic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, and oral communication), thinking skills (the ability to learn, to reason, to think creatively, to make decisions, and to solve problems), and personal qualities (individual responsibility, self-esteem and self-management, sociability, and integrity).[9]

Life skills are the competencies needed to effectively engage in lifelong learning as well as deploy new knowledge and specific technical skills in confronting the complex problems which arise in the "real" world (as distinct from the sheltered environment of the high school or college classroom).[10] These competencies, while most commonly analyzed in the context of workplace know-how, actually serve as the basis for functioning effectively in all domains of social life: in the high-performance workplace, in confronting the complex interactions of civic life in America's communities, and in managing one's own family and personal life.

[9] The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, **Learning a Living: A Blueprint for High Performance – A SCANS Report for America 2000**, U.S. Department of Labor, 1992.

[10] Robert M. Smith and Associates (Eds.), **Learning to Learn Across the Life Span**, Jossey-Bass Higher Education Series, San Francisco, 1990.

Life skills can be distinguished from educational competencies in that they represent a general set of skills rather than an institutionally defined set of skills required for technical or professional certification in a particular field. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) identifies five broad domains of skills functioning. The first of these areas relates to using resources effectively—the ability to allocate time, money, materials, and staff. The second relates to interpersonal skills--teamwork, mentoring/teaching others, customer service, negotiating, and working well with persons from diverse cultural backgrounds. The third relates to acquiring, evaluating, organizing, interpreting, using, and disseminating information. The fourth area consists of understanding "systems" including social, organizational, and technological systems (using proactive efforts to design or improve systems). The fifth consists of using technology effectively.

Five Domains of Skills Functioning (SCANS Framework)

1. Effective Use of Resources
2. Interpersonal Skills
3. Use and Dissemination of Information
4. Understanding Systems
5. Technology Use

METHODOLOGY

In order to elicit information on the change in members' life skills, Aguirre International developed the Life Skills Inventory (LSI), a survey instrument which was administered to members at randomly selected operating sites as well as to a comparison group of demographically similar non-members. A follow-up survey was administered to both groups one year after initial administration. The LSI was based substantially on current research on life skills and closely followed the framework set out by The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) in *Learning a Living: A Blueprint for High Performance – A SCANS Report for America 2000*[11].

Table 5.1 identifies the specific variables of the LSI used in constructing measures of competencies in each of the life skills' areas analyzed. This adaptation of the SCANS analytic framework was used to explore members' perceptions regarding the skills they gained in the course of their AmeriCorps experience. As in the SCANS matrix, each LSI competency area in the survey instrument consisted of several sub-domains. It should be noted that in this framework, as in life, the dimensions overlap

[11] The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, **Learning a Living: A Blueprint for High Performance – A SCANS Report for America 2000**, U.S. Department of Labor, 1992.

somewhat. One cannot have good interpersonal skills without good communication skills; and one cannot understand systems well without having some interpersonal skills, etc.

Table 5.1: Indicators of AmeriCorps members' Life Skills

Area	S-1 Use the scale above to rate your ability to do each of the following:
Communication	Listen and respond to other people's suggestions or concerns
	Talk with people to get the information you need
	Express your ideas feelings, and insights
	Work closely with people different from you
Interpersonal	Stop or decrease conflicts between people
	Lead a team by taking charge, explaining and motivating co-workers
	Negotiate, compromise, and get alone with co-workers, supervisors
	Learn new ways of thinking or acting from other people
	Change your plans or ways of doing things to adapt
	Stay calm when problems come up
	Get along well with the customers your organization serves
Analytical Problem Solving	Summarize complicated ideas, ways to solve problems or decisions
	Solve unexpected problems or find new better ways to do things
	Plan for the future
	Weigh different concerns and possibilities before making a decision
	Know how to gather and analyze information from different sources
Understand Organizational Systems	Work within the rules of a new organization or team
	Get the information you need from manuals or handbooks
	Work within an organizational budget and meet deadlines
	Manage your time when you're under pressure
	Know how to get ahead in a career or change careers
	Deal with uncomfortable or difficult working conditions
Technology	Use practical math skills such as graphs, tables or estimating costs
	Use computers to get or analyze information

As one can see in Table 5.1, five scales were constructed to measure members' life skills. Aguirre International's construction of these scales essentially represents a set of hypotheses about the kinds of transferable skills that might be developed in the AmeriCorps environment. Along with the exploration of changes in skills identified within this analytic framework, the AmeriCorps Member Survey elicited information about specific skills that members had developed, their perception of their AmeriCorps experience, information about their previous work, school, and service experience, and their future plans.

Seventy percent of the selected AmeriCorps programs participated in the survey (42 out of 60) with 382 members completing the LSI[12]. One thousand four hundred and forty-seven individuals (1,447) from the comparison group participated in the first phase of the survey and 732 completed the second phase. The comparison group was carefully selected to be as similar as possible in all respects to the AmeriCorps members, with the obvious exception that they could not be members themselves. AmeriCorps members as a group are composed of individuals from varied social, education, economic backgrounds, ages, and geographical locations within America.

[12] See Appendix A for more detailed information about the response rate.

Aguirre International staff expected that each of these socio-demographic factors might impact both skill levels upon program entry and the rate at which individual's life skills change, thus, in order to offer a fair test of changes in life skills, it was important that the control group be similarly diverse. To meet this challenge, Aguirre International designed a procedure that selected constituents randomly and maximized the ability to get access, to both young and older adults. This was done through two strategies. The first strategy aimed at community members who would be comparable with AmeriCorps members who were twenty-five to seventy-five years old. Members in this group were randomly selected from a mailing list. The second strategy aimed at recruiting community members who were likely to be affiliated with traditional institutions, such as GED programs, adult schools, or youth programs, who would be comparable to AmeriCorps members who were seventeen to twenty-five years old.[13]

The primary focus of the data analysis was to determine if members made significant gains in their individual life skills. In addition, the analysis sought to determine the likelihood that positive changes in members' life skills experienced over the course of a year were significantly different from the change experienced by similar, randomly selected individuals not engaged in AmeriCorps service. In other words, to make sure that any gains in life skills were not simply the result of one year of normal life experience but rather, the result of participation in AmeriCorps. Finally, analyses determined if certain subgroups experience particular types of changes in life skills distinct from other member subgroups.

Third Party Ratings and Background Data

People often rate their skills higher or lower than their objective performance would indicate they should. Sometimes this is because individuals do not have performance benchmarks or are not sufficiently informed about the nature of the skills that are under discussion, while at other times it is because they are trying to please the surveyor. Sometimes their self-assessment reflects the degree of self-confidence they have, based on their education or previous job experience. Alternatively, their responses may reflect their judgement regarding their ability to learn quickly.

The study directly addressed the issue of self-report validity in two ways: first by using an independent instrument (designated as the Life Skills Assessment or LSA) to rate actual performance for a sub-set of members who assessed their own skills through the LSI. Second, researchers built into the LSI instrument a variety of indicators associated with effective performance, including information on job, wage level, responsibility level, age, and ethnicity.[14] Certain patterns were found in how respondents rated themselves:

1. members who were younger rated themselves lower overall,

[13] More detailed information on the selection of the control group is contained in Appendix A

[14] This effort is explored extensively in the report *AmeriCorps Impact on Life Skills*, Corporation for National Service, 1998

2. members with less education rated themselves lower overall, and
3. members with little previous work experience rated themselves lower overall.

These findings support what independent researchers' have found—that individuals with higher skills tend to be older, have better schooling, have had more work experience, and the work experience they have had has entailed higher levels of responsibility. This is consistent with the backgrounds of members' who rated their own skills relatively higher than others. The analysis of the LSA data confirmed that the LSI discriminates appropriately among different initial levels of generic problem-solving and organizational awareness and that changes in self-assessed skills are likely to reflect actual growth in skill levels. While performance in dealing with challenging situations will vary from context to context and, indeed, from day to day, the LSI provides a reasonable "inventory" of members' life skills. Put another way, the LSI rating based on respondent self- benefits provides the same kind of imperfect but reasonable assessment that might be made by other observers of an individual's performance such as, prospective employers, supervisors, co-workers, and community collaborators.

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Member and Comparison Group Respondents

Information was returned for 382 members regarding their AmeriCorps participation in 1995-1996. The comparison group had 1,447 individuals respond. Characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Demographic Characteristics of Comparison and Member Groups

Characteristics	Percent of Control[§]	Percent of Members[§§]
Age--P-1. What year were you born?		
17-21	40%	29%
22-25	30%	34%
26 and Older	30%	37%
School Level Completed		
No High School Diploma/GED	6%	9%
High School Diploma/GED	25%	24%
Courses Beyond High School	34%	34%
2 year College Certificate	8%	2%
4 year College Diploma	25%	28%
Graduate School Work or Degree	7%	2%
Gender--P-4. What sex are you? [§§§]		
Female	62%	70%
Male	38%	30%
Ethnicity--P-12. What is your ethnic origin?		
African American, not Hispanic	24%	25%
Hispanic-Latino	12%	13%
White, not Hispanic	55%	47%
Other	9%	15%
Income--P-10. How much did you earn the year before this survey?		
$ 1,000 - $ 4,999	—	61%
$ 5,000 - $ 19,999		36%
$20,000 or More		4%
Employment status--W-1. if you worked prior to completing this survey[§§§]		
Not Employed	18%	11%
Employed	82%	89%
Disability—P-5 Do you have a disability that affects the kind or amount of work you do?		
No	92%	95%
Yes	8%	5%

Notes:

[§]*The control data are not weighted. Data are reported on the 700 respondents who reported both pre and post year life skills data. Minus sign indicates similarities or differences were not computed because one third of comparison group missing.*

[§§]*The member data are weighted. Weights bring the total respondents to 363 members*

[§§§]*Comparison and member groups are statistically dissimilar*

As shown in Table 5.2, in the year before AmeriCorps participation, members were most likely to be female, twenty-one to twenty-five years old, some work experience, but earning a wage at or below the poverty level, slightly less than one-third have graduated from college.

Individuals in the comparison group were most likely to be female, in the twenty-two to twenty-five year old age range, with some work experience, and some college, (although 25 percent either had only a high school diploma or had no high school diploma). A majority of those who responded said they were Caucasian, although 45 percent reported they were African-American, Hispanic, Asian, or some other ethnicity. A third of the comparison group constituents did not answer the question about their personal income, thus it is difficult to compare how they relate in income.

The AmeriCorps member survey respondents were quite young. For 11 percent, their involvement in AmeriCorps was their first "job." Another 21 percent, who previously had been employed had only held part-time jobs. The overwhelming majority (86 percent) earned less than $10,000 in the year before joining AmeriCorps. Looking at the specific occupations the survey respondents had worked as well as their educational experience, it becomes clear that this is a semi-skilled population. About 5 percent of the survey respondents reported they had disabilities, a lower proportion of disability than that found in the general population.

As a group, these AmeriCorps members had some work experience, but were at the beginning of the period in which they will make their peak contributions in workplace, marketplace, and social contexts. The comparison group was similar in age and schooling, although more of the comparison group had work experience before joining AmeriCorps.

Initial Life Skills Assessment by Entering AmeriCorps Members and Comparison Group

AmeriCorps members assessed their life skills at the point that they joined an AmeriCorps program as being adequate, but in a range in which they considered it worthwhile to seek improvement. These ratings reflect a summary assessment of their experience in responding to the demands they had faced so far, coupled with assessment feedback they may have received in a range of formal and informal contexts. The majority of survey respondents report their overall life skills to be "OK" or "Very Good" (i.e., three to four on a five point scale).

The constituents of the comparison group assessed their life skills in the fall of 1995, when they agreed to participate in the survey. This rating served as a baseline measure for the analysis of change in life skills over the course of a period similar to AmeriCorps members' one-year enrollment. Compared to the members, the comparison group rated themselves higher in all components of the scale. The comparison group tended to rate themselves as "Very Good," although they could still improve. The members, on the other hand, were more modest (or less self-confident), and as frequently rated themselves "OK" as they did "Very Good."

Table 5.3 compares the overall baseline skill assessment of the comparison group with what members said upon entering AmeriCorps. All skill areas have been combined here to show an overall baseline. The comparison group was statistically significantly higher than the member group in baseline measure of life skills. However, the room for positive or negative change for both groups was greater than the difference between the means of the groups. In other words, while there were differences in the baseline assessment profile for the two groups, it was possible to expect a change in scores for either group, in either direction.

Table 5.3: Initial Life Skills Assessment for the Comparison Group and Entering AmeriCorps Members[§]

(CS-1) On the average, the percent of respondents rating themselves in this skills' area before they joined AmeriCorps with	Comparison Group Mean = 3.98 n = 1,447 Standard Deviation = .60	Members Mean = 3.60 n = 324 Standard Deviation = .68
1-Little or No Experience	1%	1%
2-Not Very Good	1%	9%
3-OK But Need to Improve	18%	41%
4-Very Good, But Could Still Improve	65%	39%
5-Excellent	17%	9%
Total	100%	100%

Notes:[§] All skills areas combined. "n" shows the number of respondents who completed all questions on the survey (i.e. without missing data).

Table 5.3 presents the baseline ratings for all skill areas combined. A look at the members' baseline measurements of each individual skill area shows that they rated themselves lower in using information technology, understanding organizational systems, and analytical problem solving skills than in their communication and interpersonal skills.[15] These ratings suggest that members were generally socially engaged and comfortable interacting with others, but that they probably had had limited opportunities to develop skills in the technical and problem-solving areas.

Essentially, the initial life skill levels assessment suggests that programs did not select only elite member applicants with extensive qualifications but chose applicants who already had an adequate foundation of basic social skills. Programs appear to have been successful in their goal of recruiting members from diverse ethnic, educational, and work backgrounds, while screening them for skills and the ability to interact with their fellow team members, supervisors, and those in the community they would serve.

Survey Findings Indicate AmeriCorps Positively Impacts Members' Development of Life Skills

Our analysis of members' self-assessed life skills before and after their AmeriCorps program experience shows that program participation had a substantial positive impact on development of life skills. There is not only evidence that the AmeriCorps experience provided members with a chance to gain new skills and enhance existing skills but that AmeriCorps also provided this opportunity to most program participants, not simply to a small sub-set of AmeriCorps members. There is also evidence that these newly developed or enhanced skills are generic foundation competencies that will continue to be valuable to the individual members, to their employers, and to their communities in the future. In the context of members' own personal development, these skills will provide a basis for increased aspirations, sustained perseverance in achieving what may be difficult further objectives, and heightened self-confidence in confronting difficult new situations. Members'

[15] For more detail on baseline measurements for individual skill areas, see Table 3, *AmeriCorps Impact on Life Skills*, Corporation for National Service, 1998

involvement in service learning appears to have contributed to the skill area of "learning to learn" that has become so important in a society which increasingly demands and values lifelong learning.

The mean composite score of members in all five areas of life skills on entering the program (communication, interpersonal, analytical problem-solving, understanding organizational systems, and technology) was 3.60. Their mean post-program mean composite score was 4.00 – a mean gain of .40. Even though the average AmeriCorps members rated his or her overall life skills as "Good" (i.e., between "OK" and "Very Good") on entering the program, the average member felt his or her skills had developed significantly by the end of the program.

Most importantly, members reported gains in all areas of life skills. This indicates that the AmeriCorps service-learning experience provided balanced opportunities for skills growth. Table 5.4 shows the reported mean gains for each of the five areas of life skills. The gains in each of these are statistically significant.

Table 5.4: Mean Gains in Members' Life Skills by Functional Skill Area

Functional Skills Area (Number of Respondents)	Pre-Program Mean Score	(SD)[§]	Post-Program Mean Score	(SD)[§]	Mean Change	(SD)[§]
Communication (n=349)	3.74	(.78)	4.30	(.53)	+.56*	(.72)
Interpersonal (n=348)	3.62	(.77)	4.12	(.51)	+.51*	(.63)
Analytical Problem-Solving (n=347)	3.55	(.76)	3.99	(.56)	+.54*	(.56)
Understanding Organizations (n=346)	3.51	(.79)	3.97	(.59)	+.46*	(.61)
Using Information Technology (n=324)	3.37	(.93)	3.63	(.84)	+.26*	(.64)
Overall Skills (n=324)	3.59	(.68)	4.02	(.43)	+.43*	(2.56)

Notes:
[§]*Statistical significance analysis based on probability of rejecting the null hypothesis in paired sample T-tests. Statistical significance achieved in all cases at p<.05.*
**Rating Scale: 1 Little ability, 2 Not very good, 3 OK, but need to improve, 4 Very good, but could still improve, 5 Excellent.*

While the skills increases reported for use of technology are smaller, the overall patterns of gains in skills development indicate that the AmeriCorps experience provided an environment for overall skills development, not simply an ability to build skills in one particular area of functioning or expertise. Taken in conjunction with members' comments on their program experiences, these findings provide convincing evidence that service provides a means for members to engage in active learning and practical skills development.

Comparison Group Changes in Life Skills over the Year

The purpose of the comparison group was to establish the likelihood that the positive changes in members' life skills experienced over the course of a year is what one would expect based on comparison with individuals, not associated with AmeriCorps, who were selected following a random design. Table 5.5 provides a summary tabulation of the changes this comparison group experienced in life skills over the course of a year. It shows what one would expect if no intervention had taken place—no meaningful change in performance.[16] The change in overall skills for the members is reprinted from Table 4 in the shaded rows at the conclusion of the present table. As discussed above, in contrast to the experience of this comparison group, members showed significant change in their skills over the year. This supports the contention that AmeriCorps could and did serve as an intervention for many of the members. About half of the members showed dramatic skill enhancement and 70 percent showed substantial skill enhancement.

Table 5.5: Mean Changes in Comparison Group Life Skills by Functional Area[§]

Functional Skills Area (Number of Respondents)	Baseline Mean Score	Baseline (SD) [§§]	Time 2 Mean Score	Time 2 (SD) [§§]	Mean Change[§§§]	Mean (SD) [§§]
Comparison Group						
Communication (n=698)	4.02	.61	3.99	.56	.001	.56
Interpersonal (n=623)	3.88	.55	3.95	.49	.001	.47
Analytical Problem-Solving (n=551)	3.79	.66	3.90	.56	.0003	.52
Understanding Organizations (n=616)	3.83	.64	3.92	.57	.0002	.55
Using Information Technology (n=590)	3.43	1.06	3.74	.86	.0009	.74
Overall Skills (n=387)	3.96	.46	3.93	.46	.0001	.38
Member Group Reference—drawn from Table 5.4						
Overall Skills[§§§§] (n=324)	3.59	(.68)	4.02	(.43)	+.43[§§§]	(2.56)

Notes:
[§]Based on comparison group constituents who had all baseline and point 2 data appropriate to the analysis
[§§]Rating Scale: 1 Little ability, 2 Not very good, 3 OK, but need to improve, 4 Very good, but could still improve, 5 Excellent
[§§§]Statistical significance analysis based on probability of rejecting the null hypothesis through computing the t test. The null hypothesis could not be rejected—statistical significance achieved in all cases at p>.10—indicating there was no meaningful change over the course of the year in ratings of life skills in the comparison group.
[§§§§]Statistical significance analysis based on probability of rejecting the null hypothesis in paired sample T-tests. Statistical significance achieved below p<.05.

[16] That is, no statistically significant change, as measured by the calculation of a t-test.

Distribution of Skills Gains

Tables 5.4 and 5.5, above, show the survey respondents' mean (average) skill gains in each of the life skills areas. In fact, within each area, individuals lost or gained skills in varying amounts. In this section, the distribution of gains or losses in each life skill area is discussed. Findings on the characteristics of members who gained dramatically, moderately, not at all, or appeared to lose skills are also presented.

Overall Distribution of Skills Gains

Table 5.6 displays the overall pattern of AmeriCorps impact on life skills areas for members. In the shaded rows, Table 5.6 also shows the patterns of change in life skills for the comparison group over a one-year period. About 70 percent of the member survey respondents reported significant gains– evenly distributed between those with modest gains and those with dramatic. About one in seven (14 percent) rated their overall skills at the end of the program lower than when they had entered, although they may have gained expertise in one or more specific skills areas, such as communication, a useful vocational skill, or greater understanding of community service.

Table 5.6: Patterns of Change in Life Skills for the Member Group Contrasted with the Comparison Group

Functional Life Skills Area	% who Gained[§§] A Lot	% who Gained[§§] A Little	% with No Change	% who Lost[§§] A little	% who Lost[§§] A lot
Members Group[§]					
Overall Skills	39%	37%	10%	12%	2%
Communication	42%	17%	30%	9%	1%
Interpersonal	40%	32%	17%	10%	2%
Analytical Problem-Solving	42%	19%	27%	9%	2%
Understanding Organizations	32%	33%	23%	10%	2%
Using Information Technology	25%	14%	53%	7%	2%
Comparison Group					
Overall Skills	9%	18%	41%	25%	7%
Communication	<1%	12%	75%	11%	2%
Interpersonal	<1%	13%	71%	16%	0%
Analytical Problem-Solving	<1%	16%	69%	15%	0%
Understanding Organizations	1%	22%	56%	20%	1%
Using Information Technology	5%	10%	52%	29%	4%

Notes:
[§]Based on weighted data
[§§] Pre- to post- gains or losses within one standard deviation of 0 are reported as "no change." Gain or loss one standard deviation away from the mean is reported as "minimal"; and gain or loss more than one standard deviation away from the mean is reported as "large.."

In summary, Table 5.6 shows a good distribution of program impacts within the overall population of AmeriCorps members. In all cases, the member group showed much more skill enhancement over the period of the intervention and less skill loss than the comparison group.

The evidence from the survey suggests that some investments in increasing the quality of programs to facilitate skills development is still possible, despite the pattern of well-distributed gains. In Table 5.6, the reader can see that information technology was the skill area most likely to stay the same over the study period. This area would seem to benefit most from attention. Survey respondents often stated that having access to computers and other types of information technology was an important skill development opportunity within AmeriCorps. Thus, the slightly lower level of gains in the technology area seems to relate more to the limited incorporation of technology as part of the service assignment in AmeriCorps programs. In light of this finding, AmeriCorps grantees might be further encouraged to acquire, use, and provide members access as a part of their service-learning reflection.

In spite of the overall gains shown, not all the surveyed AmeriCorps members reported skill increases during their time in an AmeriCorps program. Some felt their skills were under-utilized; others felt their experience was worthwhile, but that they had not learned much that was new. Still others could not take advantage of the opportunities available in the program for a variety of reasons such as problems with supervision, workload, or personal issues. Members who made the greatest skills gain were likely to have been self-directed and well-prepared to engage in experiential learning.

On the other end of the spectrum, we experienced some difficulty interpreting the experience of members who rated their initial skills as being very well developed. Although some of the group who thought they had excellent skills when they began AmeriCorps may have experienced skill improvement or enhancement, it was difficult to discern these data. About one-fifth (20%) of the AmeriCorps members entered with a high level of SCANS skills and remained that way. Five percent (eighteen members) rated themselves as mostly "Excellent" in all areas. While they reported no significant change on the major measures, detailed analysis showed they may, in fact, have gained greater proficiency with specific elements of the skills identified, for example, in writing, but no in communication as a whole.

Distribution of Skills Gains by Functional Skill Area

Our analysis examined the distribution of skill gains reported by survey respondents. Skill gains were most dramatic among those members entering with the least developed skills but were not limited to this group. Ninety percent of the members who considered their initial pre-program skills to be deficient, (i.e., "Not Very Good") achieved substantial or dramatic gains in every area, except use of information technology. More than half of those reporting their initial skills as "OK but Needing Improvement," also made substantial or dramatic gains in every area, except for use of information technology. As might be expected, those who rated their skills as "Very Good" before enrolling in an AmeriCorps program reported less dramatic skill gains. However, even among this group, depending on the specific skill area, 10-20 percent reported substantial gains. Even in the area of information technology, almost half (45 percent) of those with deficient skills and almost one third (29 percent) of those "Needing Improvement" felt their AmeriCorps experience

had resulted in substantial or dramatic gains.[17] It is in this area where those who entered with "Very Good" or Excellent" skills simply did not feel they had opportunities to improve.

Aguirre International also examined the differential performance of subgroups within the comparison group on life skills over the course of the year. Those who did not have a strong employment history gained a significant amount, as did those who were younger (seventeen to twenty-one), and female. Level of schooling was not statistically significant, but those who did not have a college degree tended to gain more than those who did.[18] Individually, as well as together, these demographic factors accounted for only a very small amount of the gain in life skills. The baseline level of performance was the best predictor of change in life skills, although that only accounted for 22 percent of the variance. This is fairly similar to the patterns Aguirre International found when examining factors contributing the members' performance. In case of the members, job level was important as well as elements of their experience over the year.[19]

One issue explored was the "ceiling effect" of the research design, the fact that those who assessed their initial skill level as "Excellent" in an area (5.0 on the rating scale) could not achieve quantitative gains. In reality, it is possible that they might have improved their style of communication or problem solving in the course of service, but these improvements would not show up in the data. Therefore, there is no evidence of gains in this group and some apparent evidence of perceived decreases in skill levels. This phenomenon of decreased skills may stem from recognition by this group who initially rated themselves very high that they needed to reassess their competencies in light of real-world demands.

In general, members reported gains in each of the life skills areas, but gains were slightly greater in the functional areas where life experience provides a solid foundation (i.e., communication and interpersonal skills). More detailed assessments by survey respondents of the specific skills they gained suggest that some of these gains resulted from learning how their existing life skills play out within an organizational environment. For example, a number of members reported they had learned "public speaking skills" or "getting along with people different from me." In this regard, AmeriCorps represented opportunities for members to extend their repertoires of skills.

One interesting variation in the pattern of skills development is that a relatively high proportion of members who initially rated their interpersonal skills as being "Excellent" reported them as being slightly lower (e.g., "Very Good") after

[17] Of course for those who rated themselves as "Excellent" in all skills, there was very little improvement, as discussed in the previous section.
[18] These findings are for the overall comparison group. Analyses of those comparison group constituents who started low, medium, or high did not reveal any particular patterns.
[19] For more detail see Table Series 6 in *AmeriCorps Impact on Life Skills*, Corporation for National Service, 1998

completing their AmeriCorps program. This supports the view that, in some cases, the functional skills "losses" represent members' reassessment of their skills.

Members' Perspectives on the Skills Gained

In addition to scoring the AmeriCorps members' pre-program and post-program life skills changes, Aguirre International staff and consultants asked survey respondents an open-ended question, "What was it about your AmeriCorps experience that meant the most to you?" The responses to this question provide some additional insight into the nature and the process of members' individual life skills development in AmeriCorps. Three general themes emerged among the answers and are discussed below.

First, almost all of the surveyed members, both those with high and low levels of skill gains, were strongly committed to the ethic of service.[20] One respondent, for example, succinctly noted that what they got from AmeriCorps was, "Challenging myself and teaching." Another member in a program working in the schools said, "I was able to help children from urban settings. Gave them a sense of hope. Gave me one too."

Second, personal development or self-discovery emerged as an important theme. One member wrote that what was most important was, "the fact that now I know how I can best use my talents. I've found my niche." Another survey respondent specifically identified both program-based training and experience as important components of personal development, saying that what meant most was, "The empowerment given at the training sessions and the ability to go as far as I can."

Third, the experience of diversity proved an important and positive experience. Many respondents pointed to the value of better understanding the diversity of America, getting to know and work with people different than oneself, and getting to understand community problems that one had not been aware of previously. One respondent phrased this as follows, "I had the great opportunity to work with and learn about cultures different from mine – inner city and other city." One says simply, "Meeting many new people, working with people from all types of backgrounds" while another says, "Meeting and getting close to people I would otherwise never have met." These experiences are important in and of themselves, but also because they provide a foundation for future flexibility and versatility in working effectively as a member of a team, in communicating and negotiating in different social and workplace contexts, and in developing and exercising leadership skills.

For many AmeriCorps members it is likely that these three themes—commitment to service, personal development, and the value of diversity— come together when they can observe the impact of their own efforts on the beneficiaries of their service. In several different ways, survey respondents highlight how important it was for them to see personal development as something tangible. For example, one respondent said

[20] This theme is further explored in the c*hapter of this report entitled Does AmeriCorps Increase Civic Involvement?*

the most important thing was, "being able to help children and to see them master a skill they had a problem with." Another says, "Seeing results, for example, inmates getting GEDs, students passing classes with B's who didn't believe they could." Another member addresses this theme of external results, linking it to concerns typically linked to leadership skills, saying, "Helping new people in my community build my community!" Yet another member refers explicitly to developing leadership skills identifying as most important, "Learning to better communicate and lead others. Also, helping people and knowing it has an impact." Members' gains in life skills will likely provide a foundation for future progress. At the same time, they should be able to deploy these skills to more effectively pursue whatever course they undertake after completing their national service commitment – in pursuing a career or further education, or working to address community issues.

Patterns of Skill Gains in Relation to Member Characteristics and Program Context

The following section addresses the characteristics of the members among the 384 survey respondents whom gained or lost more than the average member and what factors seem to contribute to or account for their relative success or failure. These analyses examined the overall correlation between skill gains and members' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

· *Low-skill members with previous employment benefit more*

The most important finding is that these low-skilled members with previous employment experience seem to benefit more than members with no prior employment experience. This is an important reminder that AmeriCorps programs have not been designed to provide employment training for entry-level jobs. However, members who had more extensive life skills when they joined AmeriCorps do not develop as much as these lower-skilled members.

Apparently, there is a fairly complex relationship between educational attainment and the ability to benefit from service learning. In fact, low-skill members who had dropped out of high school benefited more than did those low-skill members who had completed high school. This dynamic of members' skills gains deserves further attention. It may have bearing on overall strategies to develop appropriate, alternative career pathways for young adults and others who may not have been able to fit into the standard sequence of movement through high school, college, and into a career.

· *All ethnic groups experienced substantial skills gains*

All ethnic groups experience substantial skill gains, although there emerged a hierarchy among ethnic groups regarding gains. Hispanic-Latino members who entered with low skill report the greatest skill gains, followed by Asian-Americans,

African-Americans, and Caucasians.[21] These relationships are much less pronounced among members of each of these ethnic groups who entered AmeriCorps with "mid-level" or average skills. These differences in the gains of AmeriCorps members of different ethnic backgrounds may represent the extent to which AmeriCorps provided each sub-population of low-skill members' alternative opportunities to develop their skills. It appears that while AmeriCorps provided similar opportunities for those who have done well in other learning environments to continue their skills development it provided somewhat better opportunities for some sub-groups among the low-skill members. In short, participation in an AmeriCorps program appears to have provided minority AmeriCorps members who had had limited employment experience and, in many cases, less than satisfactory school experience, extraordinary opportunities to develop new skills and enhance pre-existing ones.

- *Human services programs and strong program designs were associated with greater skills increases*

Finally, in light of the fact that in the literature on many educational interventions the factors associated with "outstanding" outcomes are often different than those associated with achieving more "ordinary" positive outcomes on skills, Aguirre International analyzed factors that appeared to be associated with the dramatic skills gains. This analysis serves to differentiate several additional personal and program characteristics associated with higher-than-average skills gains among members.

First, low-skill members enrolled in programs in the environmental area had lesser skill gains than the low-skill members did in other programs. This suggests that in some programs the emphasis on the hard physical work required to achieve positive environmental impacts may have constrained program's ability to develop members' life skills. Second, participation in a program operating in the human service area was associated with higher-than-average skill gains. Third, there also seems to have been a significant relationship between program design and positive impacts. This suggests that efforts at improving aspects of program design, such as training, supervision, recruitment, and selection, could further improve the positive impacts of service-learning.

As noted above, AmeriCorps programs appeared to yield more impacts that are positive for members who have some prior work experience. AmeriCorps programs should not, therefore, be considered to be "remedial" programs designed to improve the life skills of "hard-to-serve" youth or adults. AmeriCorps programs' greatest strength seems to lie in providing alternative pathways for developing high–performance skills among participants whose educational experience and employment history have not provided them adequate opportunities for skills development.

[21] While Asian-Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and members of "Other" ethnicity were adequately represented in the survey sample, their absolute numbers were low. It is therefore difficult to determine whether the relationship between ethnicity and skills gains was significant for these groups.

In summary, these analyses confirmed that several variables -- gender, age, performance in school -- which might have affected members' ability to secure gains in life were not, in fact significant factors. Rather, initial level of skills, prior work experience, program area, and program design figured more prominently in high levels of skill gains among members.

Some Members Who could have Experienced Skills Gains Reported No Overall Growth

About one-fifth (seventy) of the surveyed members who could have improved their overall life skills, either stayed the same or lost ground in the five life skills areas examined in the analyses.[22] Of these seventy AmeriCorps members, twenty members (29 percent) had assessed themselves at entrance as having "Excellent" (but less than perfect) skills; twenty-six members (37 percent) assessed their skills as "Very Good, but could still improve"; nine members (13 percent) had assessed themselves as "OK, but could still improve"; and fifteen members (21 percent) who said they had low ("Not Very Good") skills on entering AmeriCorps did not report gains.

While this one-fifth of members showed no overall increases in the skills assessed by the LSI, their AmeriCorps experience could still have had an impact on their ability to cope with the challenges of workplace, family, and community life.[23] In addition to questions about skill gains in the sub-skill areas of the LSI, Aguirre International staff and consultants also asked members other questions about the impact of their AmeriCorps experience. In these responses, of the seventy survey respondents with no overall gains, thirteen did not list any specific skills they had gained while fifty-seven identified some sort of ancillary skill gain. The group listing no gains at all clearly felt that they had reaped no personal benefits in terms of skill development from AmeriCorps. This is unfortunate in real terms, as it represents four percent of the overall AmeriCorps member population. From another perspective, this negative finding is heartening since these survey respondents apparently answered questions candidly, lending credence to the validity of the research methodology. Thus, the number of respondents who felt AmeriCorps did not improve their life skills is relatively small.

Table 5.7 provides further detail on the experience of the AmeriCorps members whose responses indicated they had not experienced overall gains in their life skills. It demonstrates the variety of specific or ancillary skills these members said they learned or developed, despite their overall sense of not having achieved overall skill

[22] Another 13 members reported essentially "perfect" skills (rating themselves as "excellent" on all 24 sub-scales) on entering AmeriCorps, placing them at a ceiling where it was arithmetically impossible to gain additional skills.

[23] It is possible for a survey respondent to report skills gains in several isolated, specific sub-skill areas which are balanced out by decreases in perceived skills in other sub-skill areas, yielding a "no change" score or a slight decrease in overall LSI score.

gains. This is not an exhaustive listing, which would be too lengthy to include in this report. [24]

Table 5.7: Specific Skills Acquired by Members Who Could Have Improved but Showed No Overall Gains

Specific Skills	Proportion indicating
No skill listed	13 (19%)
Communication	8 (11%)
Public speaking	7 (10%)
Listening skills	5 (7%)
Writing	1 (1%)
Interpersonal skills/working with others	9 (13%)
Cultural sensitivity or diversity	1 (1%)
Conflict mediation or resolution skills	4 (6%)
Teamwork	7 (10%)
Resource development	2 (3%)
Time management and organizational skills	3 (4%)
Leadership skills	3 (4%)
Project management	4 (6%)
Program development-implementation	4 (6%)
Learning to learn skills	2 (3%)
How to learn about community needs	2 (3%)
Community event organizing	1 (1%)
Case management skills	1 (1%)
Computer skills	5 (7%)
CPR skills	1 (1%)
Solid waste management	1 (1%)
Construction	5 (7%)
Teaching/tutoring	4 (6%)
Working with students, or preschool children, or their parents	4 (6%)
How to evaluate or work with youth	2 (3%)
Parenting	2 (3%)
Value of service	3 (4%)
Ambition	1 (1%)
Persistence and perseverance	7 (10%)
Patience and understanding/discipline	1 (1%)
Taking care of oneself	1 (1%)

Notes:
Members could list up to 3 skills—57 of the 70 members listed at least one skill; 50 listed at least 2 skills; and 42 listed 3 skills.

The range of skills listed in Table 5.7 suggests that the LSI captures only the more systematic foundation skills development experienced by members in the course of their AmeriCorps enrollment. Thus, the quantitative analysis of positive impacts from AmeriCorps is likely to be a conservative one. In addition to the vocational skills which fall outside the SCANS domain, it is very interesting to see that some of the broad characteristics included in the SCANS inventory (i.e., personal

[24] Table 5.7 is drawn only from the 70 members who fall in the group who didn't improve, but had room to change. Aguirre International also conducted the analysis for the members who started at the top and had nowhere to go as an artifact of the measurement strategy, and found they also listed specific skills they gained.

characteristics associated with success such as persistence and perseverance) are mentioned by AmeriCorps members.

Characteristics of Members with Low Skills Gains

Finally, Aguirre International looked carefully at the characteristics of the members who reported no skill gains or losses of skill. This is a small group, so it is difficult to make any conclusive statements about them. There were no statistically significant findings. Essentially, some of the same categories of individuals who gained a lot also experienced either no change or loss. For example, members serving in human service programs generally had higher skill gains but a sub-setting in the same program area also had lower gains. This suggests some variation in quality of program design and/or supervision. As mentioned earlier, program area is relevant to skills gain. More data is needed, however, to fully explain the relationship between members' life skill gains and program design.

Similarly, there appear to be important differences among African-American Corps members. Most African-American members report excellent experience in terms of skill gains while a sub-set reports no skill gain or skill decline. The differential analysis of gains – both the experience of the Corps members who benefited most and those who benefited least – suggest that race or ethnicity alone do have something to do with skill gain but that the relationship is not a simple one.

In summary, the analysis of stalled overall skill development for about one-fifth of the AmeriCorps members shows how diverse the overall AmeriCorps program experience is. While the majority of AmeriCorps members report impressive gains in life skills, attention to the "non-gainers" is appropriate. Such attention can serve to complement further efforts to describe fully the characteristics of the AmeriCorps members who experience the greatest life skill gains and to describe aspects of program design, which facilitate member skill development.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Aguirre International Survey of AmeriCorps members indicates that AmeriCorps participation resulted in substantial overall life skill gains for at least three-quarters of the members (76 percent). More than half of these members whose skills increased across the board showed *dramatic* gains in life skills. Life skills gains are not an incidental enhancement for AmeriCorps members; they are a significant program effect that provides members with valuable new skills.

The analysis of the comparison group data confirms that AmeriCorps participation acted like an intervention for strengthening members' life skills in ways ordinary life experiences do not. In comparison to the AmeriCorps members sampled at the baseline data collection, the control group members reported using higher level skills, a higher number of individuals were employed, and, although many did not provide

income data, those who did earned more. It is possible that members enter AmeriCorps with less self-confidence than their peers who choose other paths, and that the act of joining the program positions them in an active learning or skill acquisition mode. However, during the year that AmeriCorps members participated in service and showed some dramatic change in life skills, the comparison group constituents were more likely to stay at the same skill levels and did not show the type of dramatic skill gains achieved by the AmeriCorps members.
The sorts of skill growth assessed in the LSI developed for this study are those broad foundation skills which play a role in virtually every domain of interpersonal functioning in a high-performance society and economy. Participation in AmeriCorps can benefit members by increasing their abilities to:

- respond proactively to the challenges they face in the workplace,
- manage their personal and family lives, and
- work collaboratively with others in their community.

These benefits are likely to make a difference in members' ability to pursue their personal objectives and work productively, both in the short and long run. The life skills developed in AmeriCorps are not in any sense arbitrarily defined or linked to any specific educational curriculum, they are the skills our society needs to compete in a global economy and to overcome the social, economic, and environmental problems faced across the country.

The patterns of skills development observed suggest that there are, essentially, three broad domains in which life skills development takes place. One domain is that of general social interactions – interpersonal and communication skills – in which virtually all AmeriCorps members have some ordinary life experience. The other domain represents the problem-solving and organizational skills required to function not simply on a one-to-one basis but within the more complex social universe of team-based work, civic participation, and other group efforts. A final, ancillary, but crucial, life skills domain relates to use of information technology to support functioning in each of the other areas.

While AmeriCorps members gain in all of these life skills areas, the member survey indicates that additional attention to heighten use of information technology may be justified. Attention to strategies to assist AmeriCorps members in developing the skills required for understanding organizations and analytical problem-solving may also be valuable because optimal functioning in these areas is more or less "open ended." In other words, personal skill growth in these areas is a lifelong process and virtually anyone can continue to improve in dealing with novel and complex situations in the context of contemporary organizational systems.

From a policy perspective, it is very important to recognize that AmeriCorps participation does not simply benefit an elite sub-set of members. To the contrary, the members who benefit most are those who enter AmeriCorps with a relatively low skills level. Moreover, the ratio of members who report a significant increase in their

life skills to those who report no overall skills increase is quite favorable – about 3:1 on the specific skill area being considered. Virtually all members reported skill gains in some area of skill development or another. Even those who did not feel their overall life skills had improved significantly were able to identify some specific skill gains or learning (e.g., vocational skills) which resulted from AmeriCorps participation.

The AmeriCorps population was a diverse one in which most of the members had previous work experience, but few of them had worked in a job which paid very well or which had provided them much opportunity to develop and test new skills, and grow personally. Thus, AmeriCorps, while not the first job for most, was for most their first opportunity for upward career mobility and development of life skills. In terms of impact on these members' labor force participation and career development, AmeriCorps seems to have been an optimal investment. The skill members described acquiring will serve them well in pursuing either further education or a personally rewarding career.

Although AmeriCorps does benefit ethnically, educationally, and personally diverse members, the basic program design does not replace employment training programs or programs for at-risk youth, vocational rehabilitation, or in welfare-to-work programs oriented toward securing entry-level employment for participants with no previous labor market experience. In contrast, AmeriCorps seems best suited to providing opportunities for concerned and motivated individuals, who have some work experience. The skills secured by these members in AmeriCorps consist primarily of opportunities to extend and enhance a core set of basic skills. What is most exciting about these findings from a policy and planning perspective is that the AmeriCorps experience seems to work well even for individuals who have not done well in a formal educational setting. For these members, the service-learning experience can provide a solid basis for upward career mobility and an alternative way to fulfill their personal goals and potential.

CHAPTER 6: DOES AMERICORPS INCREASE CIVIC INVOLVEMENT?

KEY FINDINGS

- AmeriCorps service encouraged and increased members' interest in community service. At the end of their service terms, 99 percent of members planned to continue providing community service.
- AmeriCorps service motivated members to choose public service and community-oriented careers.
- AmeriCorps service enhanced members' leadership skills.
- Projects with clearly visible impacts reinforced members' sense of civic responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Civic involvement is the hallmark of AmeriCorps and forms the backbone of the service that members provide. It is intended to increase civic involvement and promote an ethic of service among members to benefit both the members and the service beneficiaries. As stressed in AmeriCorps programs, civic involvement includes becoming aware of local, state, and national issues; working collaboratively to address community needs; and a desire to continue community service. This chapter addresses the extent to which growth in civic involvement has occurred.

The very nature of the service year gave members the opportunity to do community service and see the impact of such service. Interviews showed that, for most members, participating in AmeriCorps proved to be a positive experience resulting in a desire to continue service, either as a volunteer or in a profession that supports the common good. In addition, supervisors and members reported an increase in community issue awareness; often a precursor to continued involvement and sustained commitment to making a difference in the lives of others or the environment.

An increased awareness and continued commitment to civic involvement was most obvious in members who were drawn to AmeriCorps by a desire to provide community service. However, the picture was more complex for members who were primarily drawn to AmeriCorps by the opportunity for financial support and to develop occupational or educational skills. These members generally came from inner-city areas, had less education, and fewer basic academic skills. Although many members from this group did leave with an increased sense of civic responsibility and a desire to continue participating in community service, others simply looked to AmeriCorps as a way to increase their own skills and opportunities. Reports from a

case study showed that in inner-city neighborhoods some members were overwhelmed and/or frustrated by the challenge that service posed and dropped out of the program (exact numbers were not available).

This dichotomy between those who see civic involvement as a means to an end and those who see it as an end in itself may be misleading without further analysis. First, an individual's attainment of skills and education--the pursuit of enlightened self-interest--is an important precondition to civic participation. Belief in the value of education, self-reliance, responsibility, honesty, civility, hard work, and competence is central to the socialization patterns known to play an important role in encouraging individuals to participate in civil society. The extent to which AmeriCorps helped inner-city members move in that direction deserves further consideration.

Second, further analysis brought to light a discrepancy between members' stated desire to continue to participate in community service and their actual engagement in community service. Although members with higher levels of education stated they would engage in community service upon completing their tenure at AmeriCorps, more members from inner-city areas (with less education) actually did engage in community service, usually paid positions, upon completing their tenure at AmeriCorps. While only by means of longitudinal studies would it be possible to precisely track and determine the civic careers of AmeriCorps participants, the data at hand clearly shows that AmeriCorps enriched members' ability to participate in community service, while simultaneously reinforcing their value of community service.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARENESS AND INTEREST INCREASED DURING SERVICE

By the end of the AmeriCorps service term, almost all members (99 percent) reported plans of engaging in future community service. One in ten AmeriCorps members was not sure to what extent he would be involved, two in ten said they probably would be involved, one in three said he would definitely be involved, and another one in three said they had applied or accepted a position with a community service organization. It is not clear to what extent AmeriCorps increased this high level of interest or simply encouraged an existing (if not previously expressed) interest. However, what is clear is that the AmeriCorps experience strongly reinforced members' burgeoning interest in community service.

Prior Involvement

Information regarding members' previous involvement in community service provides another means of analysis. Fifty-six percent of the members had been involved in community service before joining AmeriCorps and forty-four percent of members had not been. Members with lower education levels were less likely to have been involved in community service prior to their participation in AmeriCorps. One-third of members whose highest education level was a high school degree or less had community service experience, whereas two-thirds of those with at least a two-year

degree had prior community service experience.

Table 6.1: Prior Community Service Experience and Educational Level

Education Level	Percent of Sample	No Prior Community Service	Prior Community Service
High School	26%	64%	36%
Some Community College	18%	49%	51%
AA through BA	49%	33%	67%
Graduate Education	7%	35%	65%

Source: Member questionnaire. P<0.01

Increased Awareness of Community Issues and Increased Civic Involvement

As members became more familiar with the communities in which they served, supervisors reported significant changes in civic involvement. Members gained increased knowledge of the obstacles that low-income residents faced and learned how to help families access resources. In addition, they gained a greater appreciation of the diversity of a community, as many members came to know individuals with whom they had not previously had contact. One case study evaluator wrote:

> *A majority of the members indicated their participation in the project had increased their awareness of the problems and resources in the community. They were also aware of the need for collective or community actions to address these problems.*

Supervisors reported that among some members, serving in diverse neighborhoods decreased a tendency to stereotype. Others saw a deeper understanding of community issues as a precursor to ongoing civic participation. This awareness was not limited to local issues. Training and education helped to create a deeper understanding of the broader issues related to social issues, such as unemployment, illiteracy, homelessness, and environmental concerns. As one member stated:

> *I couldn't 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 things and we want more or less the same things. It also helped me to start caring for them as well.*

In one program with members tutoring immigrant adults in literacy and English, the members reported being better able to understand policy debates on welfare and immigration. Another program, mostly inner-city members, held a meeting each morning to discuss a local interest article from the newspaper, which helped educate members about community issues. Members in yet another program stated that in the past they had registered to vote past without any definite plans to cast their ballot; however, after their AmeriCorps service, they would be more likely to vote in the future.

Through direct involvement with local issues members developed a desire to use their new awareness outside the AmeriCorps service realm. For example, members in one inner-city program reported gaining an understanding of the effects of a community wasting water, while personally becoming more conscious of water usage. However, the impact on members goes beyond becoming aware of single issues. For some, participation in a local community had a profound effect. As one member writes:

> *Being involved in AmeriCorps has changed my life. . . The reason this job is so special is because it gives you an opportunity to start a career in any field, specially* [sic] *in the water field. . . without* [this program] *I don't know where I would be, either dead or in jail. . . with more programs like this people will at least have a chance to try and start a career. But as for myself, I am a young black woman determined to make it in life, with everything I am learning. . . such as water conservation, computer entry, water audits. . .*

Members who served with victims of crime, domestic violence, or natural disasters wrote of an increased sense of shared responsibility, and spoke of the need to "be there for each other" since "this could happen to any one of us."

Interviews, surveys, and focus groups make it clear that members gained a better sense of how much of a difference a single person can make, citing examples such as, "I was able to get through to this person (and teach her to read) when no one else could." However, as their service progressed members became aware of both the extent of need that exists in low-income communities and the level of sustained intervention it takes to make a widespread difference. At a literacy program, members reported an increase in their awareness of the barriers faced by children and adults whose educational opportunities have been limited. At least half of these members reported a desire to continue to work with children, many planning to make literacy education a career.

Interest in Community Service Careers

Interest in community service careers was strong among AmeriCorps members, with many stating that they had plans for careers involving some aspect of community service. Two-thirds of members said that they would probably or definitely become involved in community service as staff members, while only one-third said that they would probably or definitely volunteer in a community service agency. In terms of actions taken, one in five members had applied or accepted a volunteer position; one in eight had taken steps to secure a staff position. About half the members were tentative about their future volunteering plans, indicating that they would be involved in volunteer service, but were not able to say that they probably or definitely would be involved. Similarly, about one-fourth of members were tentative about their commitment to being a staff member in a community service agency.

Table 6.2: Likelihood of Future Community Service Involvement After AmeriCorps Service by Position

Highest Level of Involvement Checked	Volunteer	Staff	Either
Not Involved	2%	2%	1%
Might Be Involved	50%	27%	12%
Probably Involved	13%	33%	22%
Definitely Involved	16%	35%	33%
Applied/Accepted Community Service Position	21%	13%	32%

Source: Member questionnaire. P<0.05

Several members reported that AmeriCorps affected their career decisions as they considered occupations in areas that were linked to their service. Members wrote of being able to "try on" careers. One member, who planned to attend law school, noted that although his desire to become a lawyer had not changed, as a result of his experience in AmeriCorps he had decided to practice public service law or become an advocate for community-based organizations. Another member, who was working toward a college degree in chemistry, expressed concerns about choosing teaching as a profession because of a low salary as compared to other possible career options. However, serving with children during his AmeriCorps service convinced him that teaching would be worth the financial sacrifice. Yet another member wrote, *"I gained experience in the field I wanted to be in (environmental science)."*

Members with less-professional oriented aspirations also indicated a desire to combine community service with work. One member, who served with migrant farm workers, said that AmeriCorps had exposed her to things she did not know existed in the United States. In addition, her newfound knowledge made it difficult for her to relate to her friends who worked in restaurants or malls. This member preferred her lower-paid AmeriCorps stipend to her friends' work and said she doubted she could ever take a job without first asking "What good does this do anybody?"

The few members who chose not to enter careers related to community should not be seen as a negative indicator. No one is well served when an individual chooses the wrong career path. In many ways, the AmeriCorps experience helped clarify individuals' career decision, even if the decision was to move away from engaging in a career tailored to social service.

MEMBERS' BACKGROUNDS AND THEIR COMMUNITY SERVICE PLANS

There were significant differences in the types of community service that members thought they would be involved in as well as in their certainty about future service commitments. These differences were often related to members' community service experiences prior to entering AmeriCorps, their levels of education and their communities of origin.

Prior Community Service Experience

Members with community service experience before AmeriCorps were less likely to be tentative about their plans for service and more likely to have applied for a position in a community service agency (19 percent with experience versus 4 percent without). Similar percentages of individuals in both groups—those with prior community service and those without—stated that they (a) had accepted a community service position and that, (b) they probably or definitely would involve themselves in future community service.

Differences in Education Levels

Members who reported holding less than an associate's degree were more likely to be tentative in their commitment to volunteer service. At the same time, a higher number of those who had less than an associate's degree had taken concrete steps to secure a community service position. On the other hand, members with higher education levels were more definite in their commitment to future service, but fewer had taken steps to act on that commitment. At first glance, it might seem that those with lower levels of education might be driven by short-term economic needs to pursue immediate job opportunities in community service and not have ambitions beyond that goal. However, many members with low education levels expressed a commitment to use the education award, indicating long-term academic and career advancement plans.

Table 6.3: Likelihood of Community Service Involvement After AmeriCorps Service by Education Level[25]

	Prior Community Service		Education Level	
Highest Level of Involvement Indicated	**No Prior Service**	**Prior Service**	**Less than AA**	**AA or Higher**
Not Involved	1%	0%	1%	0%
Might Be Involved	17%	6%	20%	7%
Probably Involved	22%	22%	21%	23%
Definitely Involved	36%	33%	20%	43%
Applied/Accepted Community Service Position	24%	39%	38%	27%

Source: Member questionnaire. P<0.05 for each hypothesis

Members from Inner-city Neighborhoods

Members from inner-city neighborhoods differed from others in their views and perspectives on community involvement. In many cases, these members did not need to develop a sense of the challenges that confront communities, since homelessness, unemployment, and lack of access to resources were part of their everyday lives. As these members were from struggling families, they were looking for the community

[25] Analysts tested the interaction between prior community service and education levels. Results while significant are not reported because of low numbers of members in some categories. Visual inspection of results did not indicate any interesting cross-effects.

to help them reach their goals. At one site they were not primarily focused on the contributions that they themselves might make.

Asking if AmeriCorps members increased their civic responsibility is a complex question for programs where the majority of members are unskilled, unemployed, and homeless before entering the program. In many cases, these members see service as a way to improve their own lives; thus, service becomes a way of self-development as members ask, "what can I get out of this?" As a supervisor points out: "members have to deal with themselves and a society that isn't helpful; the school system isn't helpful and the judicial system isn't helpful. We try to teach them to see opportunities and take advantage of them; teach them to become optimistic about life." As one can imagine, it is difficult for these members to see themselves as part of a national team that gives something back to communities, feeling, as they do, that communities have failed them. This group of members is engaged in what might be called a "bottom-up empowerment process"[26] that those who live in the communities to be developed. Bottom-up empowerment evolves through several stages as residents:

- help themselves,
- gain the capacity to help others,
- acquire (and presumably use) the tools to help others directly, and
- become public leaders, able to influence policy makers so that they will make more intelligent decisions.

Interviews, discussions, and focus groups with inner-city members showed the process at work. One member described the effect of stage one succinctly, "What AmeriCorps does, it keeps you from sitting on your ass all day." Another member put if this way:

> *It [being part of a network of people] just lifts you up and keeps you going through difficult situations where otherwise you may not have been able to. In order to teach adults how to read, we go beyond that to help with the latest services, whether it be food stamps, whether it be glasses . . . to see that lives change for the moment and even further is to see that quite possibly one day they may be reading to a child. That's enough hope for me to really put forth the absolute best effort.*

If we accept the stages of bottom-up empowerment, AmeriCorps has been successful in helping members from low-income families to stage three during their AmeriCorps service. Although the capacity to help others that they gained may not necessarily translate into goals for continued volunteer service, AmeriCorps has been successful in putting a process of civic participation through social service into motion.

For inner-city members, the availability of a stipend made a great deal of difference, enabling individuals to participate in community service where otherwise they could

[26] This process was described by Jim Schultz of the San Francisco Development Center.

not have afforded to do so. The evaluator of one education program with a diverse group of members wrote:

> *Many of the people who participated in the AmeriCorps program were students and might have considered volunteering in other programs, but they needed money. Thus, volunteering was not a serious option. AmeriCorps was, perhaps, the only way they would have experienced volunteerism and gained the skills to contribute productively in that context.*

Yet by no means was the stipend the only factor that motivated members. One member wrote that "*the rewards I get you couldn't put on a paycheck because it feels so good to get it [the work] done*."

CIVIC INVOLVEMENT THROUGH SERVICE

Service in AmeriCorps allowed members to be part of a community and respond to the needs identified by the various programs. They participated in environmental cleanups, built houses, and conducted safety patrols. They made it possible for children to learn to read and succeed in school, for the elderly to live more independently, and for adult learners to gain GEDs or acquire proficiency in English. This direct service had a tremendous effect on members. The impact was most obvious for members engaged in projects where results were clearly visible or where a sustained one-to-one connection between a member and a project recipient was established. Members spoke in glowing terms about the experience of building houses for low-income residents, cleaning up rivers, or being there for children or elders who needed them. In cases where service was more diffuse, such as in drop-in assistance centers, members came away with doing something worthwhile, but their sense making a difference was not as strong.

Members made it clear that this sense of efficacy, of affecting the wellness of a community or the well being of a child, is likely to result in a continued desire to make a difference. This is not to say that members involved in long-range projects that did not yield immediate and palpable social benefits could not foresee the value and importance of their service. As one evaluator reported in her case study:

> *…[members'] enthusiasm was not of the dewy-eyed 'I'm here to save the people' variety. Because most of these people lived in the community, they knew that solutions weren't going to happen overnight. Instead, it seemed to be more of a determined energy, as if they were saying, 'We may not change the world, but we can and will fight for our neighborhood.'*

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

AmeriCorps affected members' leadership skills as well. Members report serving on committees, as well as attending and speaking at council meetings. Participating in

grassroots organizations gave members a better sense of how needs are identified, programs implemented, and activities assessed. In some cases, members participated in activities outside of their project, making presentations, training others, and increasing awareness of important issues. In the process, they increased their own capacity and learned to be part of the public debate and political process.

As members became more involved in designing projects and putting things in motion, they also gained first-hand experience with rules and regulations that govern agencies. Many spoke of the frustration they felt when things could not be done because of red tape, bureaucratic snafus, or regulations. However, they also expressed pride in being able to work through (and sometimes around) regulations to accomplish a task that they were told could not be done. When leadership skills were coupled with a clearer understanding of the ethnic and cultural underpinnings of a particular community, members were able to develop some of the skills needed to help residents become players in their own communities and make their voices heard. Several members talked about being able to become advocates for their clients who were homeless or victims of domestic violence. Others felt they helped create safer neighborhoods by organizing and participating in "Take Back the Night" marches. One member was so excited about her efforts to involve residents in public safety issues in her inner-city community, that she vowed to continue this involvement in the community after completing her AmeriCorps service. Another member from a small town reported that his experience, living and providing services in an inner-city environment, opened his eyes to urban problems. He planned to continue working with a community-based organization after finishing graduate school.

Programs that supported this kind of social advocacy were in the minority, since most shied away from activities that could be seen as political. Although members were strongly encouraged to register and vote in local, state, and national elections,[27] they often felt discouraged from activities such as organizing community residents or participating in voter registration drives. Consequently, several of those who viewed civic participation as including community action resented the apolitical approach. As one member told the evaluator,

> *It seems they* [both the program and CNS] *don't really care about making a difference in a community. All the leadership training is focused on are general attitudes and strategies… this rope course stuff* [a course designed to build team spirit and illustrate strategies for collaboration]. *What we really need if we want to make a difference is a better sense of how to address local issues. How to get people involved in making the changes* ***they*** *want. We never got that. All the rest is just Band-Aid stuff.*

This member was not alone in her unhappiness with the training, although the desire she expressed to see community service as a part of a coherent strategy for community development was noted only by a minority of members. In fact, initially,

[27] data on the extent to which they did is not yet available

evaluators heard a many complaints from members about training. Many saw much of the skill development being offered as too theoretical, too boring, or too diffuse.

As the training and programs became more focused, it was easier for members to see the relationship between service and community impacts and realize that they were making a difference in the community. In one case, the program decided to change the term community *service* to community *involvement* to make it easier for members to see themselves as part of the community in which they served. In quite a few cases, members realized they were role models for others who saw them as successful individuals who had made it and were now giving something back to the community.

AmeriCorps service itself may or may not be the sole cause of members' desire to continue civic involvement. However, it is clear from the high number of members interested in continuing community service at the end of their service tenure that AmeriCorps invigorated an existing desire to serve. By design, AmeriCorps involved members in the civic affairs of local communities. The lasting impact of this involvement remains to be seen, as does the extent to which members actually practice their stated interest in continuing community service. There is strong evidence that the AmeriCorps experience laid a strong foundation for future civic involvement.

CHAPTER 7: DID PARTICIPATION IN AMERICORPS INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OR ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR MEMBERS?

KEY FINDINGS

- Eighty-five percent of AmeriCorps members plan to use their educational awards.
- Five out of six AmeriCorps members, who planned to further their education, stated that the educational award was necessary to attain their goals.
- Forty percent of AmeriCorps members were enrolled in an educational program while completing their AmeriCorps service.
- All AmeriCorps members benefited from the educational opportunities offered by AmeriCorps.
- Academically disadvantaged members met with limited success earning high school diplomas or passing the General Education Development (GED) exam.

INTRODUCTION

Two of the AmeriCorps goals for member development focused on enhancing the educational achievement of members; AmeriCorps sought to increase members' opportunities to further their own education and to increase their attainment of specific educational goals.

Service in AmeriCorps provided multiple opportunities for members to achieve these goals. First, AmeriCorps provided members the opportunity to acquire specific skills related to their service area and to develop the background knowledge and life skills needed to achieve specific goals while making a difference in the communities in which they served. Second, AmeriCorps offered members an educational award that allowed them to access college (or other forms of higher education) or to pay back student loans. Third, those who entered AmeriCorps service without a high school diploma or its equivalent were offered the opportunity to work on a secondary school certificate (which is considered a diploma) or their General Education Development (GED) exam.

For purposes of the study, educational attainment was defined in terms of degrees obtained, GEDs completed, and academic skills acquired that facilitated transition to higher education. It also included attainment of technical vocational skills along with certificates obtained in these areas. An increase in educational opportunity was defined as training and learning provided by AmeriCorps to members, opportunities for professional and career development, and the availability of the educational award.

To find evidence of increase in educational attainment and opportunity, evaluators conducted a content analysis of the case study reports and they used data from the

Life Skills Inventory (LSI). One limitation in reporting educational attainment and opportunity stems from the timing of the data collection. In many cases it was too soon to know what ultimate educational achievement members might attain and how many would actually use their educational award. Therefore, much of the data presented in this chapter relies on members' plans for the future as listed on the LSIs and reported during case study interviews.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS OF MEMBERS

Upon entry into AmeriCorps, members' educational attainment spanned the full range from graduate-level degree holders to members without a high school diploma or its equivalent. Overall, AmeriCorps members exceeded the national average in terms of educational attainment in all age groups. Two-thirds of members had attended at least some college or other form of higher education beyond high school. An additional quarter of the members had graduated from high school. The rest had not completed high school or earned a GED. This group tended to be concentrated in urban programs and their previous lack of success with formal schooling hindered their academic progress as well.

Table 7.1: AmeriCorps Member Entry Educational Level

Educational Level	N Members	% Members
Missing Data	245.01	10%
1-Less Than High School Completed	320.91	14%
2-High School Graduate	416.23	18%
3-Some College	621.75	27%
4-College Graduate	316.46	14%
5-Graduate Study	74.63	3%
6-Graduate Degree	40.28	2%
7-Techincal School/Apprenticeship	44.58	2%
8-Associate Degree	91.43	4%
9-GED	169.8	7%
Total	2341.08	100%

Quite clearly, members' needs differed significantly. Those who had entered AmeriCorps with a solid foundation in academic skills merely needed an opportunity to apply and strengthen these skills. Those who lacked this foundation often needed much more than a chance to attend classes geared toward the attainment of a diploma. They needed help and support in overcoming the barriers that make academic progress a challenge (i.e., lack of experience in time management, complex lives with multiple responsibilities – especially with single mothers, lack of preparation and background knowledge needed to pass exams, learning disabilities, and difficulties staying on task).

Overall, AmeriCorps had a positive effect on members' desire to continue their education. In focus groups and on surveys, the majority of members (85 percent) cited their desire to use the educational award in the future to access or advance their education or to pay off loans. On the other hand, the one-third of AmeriCorps members, who had either not completed high school or not started college at their

time of service, did not show such clear increases in their educational skills attainment. While some members did succeed in obtaining their GEDs, evidence from the case studies indicated that many others did not. Similarly, many inner-city members, including those with high school diplomas, had problems in the transition to college. While some members had indeed enrolled in college or training classes during the end of their service year, others did not feel sufficiently prepared. Yet, completion of academic course work and transition to higher education should not be the sole measures of academic attainment. While the difficulties in obtaining diplomas and the GED remain a concern, members did receive educational opportunities of a different kind: they participated in workshops, went to lectures, took part in training, and went on field trips, gaining skills, insights, and background knowledge in the process. Most importantly, they benefited from an environment that endorsed and valued educational attainment. As one evaluator wrote:

> *"The determination to go back or continue with school was shared by all members . . . They said that after their participation in the program, they had a better idea of what they wanted to study in college or in vocational schools. Others were already convinced that they wanted to follow a specific career . . . mostly because they were encouraged by the training and courses offered by the AmeriCorps program."*

Other benefits ensued as well; the stipend and the possibility of participating as a part time member allowed those with lower income levels to earn some money while pursuing their educational goals. Childcare was another factor that aided members' pursuit of education. As one teenage mother stated:

> *"AmeriCorps pays for childcare, which enables me to work and go back to school. It would have been very hard if they didn't."*

Another mother stated it this way:

> *"I thank AmeriCorps because it pays for childcare. This enables me to work and go back to school. It would have been very hard if I didn't have child are paid for since it is just my son and I . . . This program really gave me hope in my future for my son. . ."*

Nevertheless, it must be made clear that there was not uniform program support of members with regard to outside pursuits was not always the case. One evaluator reported that program staff actively discouraged members from pursuing school during the term of their service. At this site, the program did not want members' classes to interfere with service. Both staff and members reported that this policy created a source of tension and problems. Some members felt that the program had over stepped its bounds . . . that this was, after all, volunteer work and they should be able to set their schedules and then serve [for AmeriCorps] in the remaining time.

EVIDENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT DURING AMERICORPS SERVICE

Enrollment in Courses

One indicator of educational attainment was the number of members enrolled in education programs during AmeriCorps. The LSI responses show that four in ten members were enrolled in an educational program while in AmeriCorps. Among these members, 23 percent were enrolled in part-time programs, 15 percent in full-time programs, and 62 percent were not enrolled.

Table 7.2: Enrollment in Education Programs While in AmeriCorps

Type of Program	Percent
Part-time Program	23%
Full-time Program	15%
Not Enrolled	62%

AmeriCorps members participated in educational programs, including participation in vocational/technical courses; certificate programs; academic course work at community colleges and universities and in high school diploma or GED programs.

Members Attain Vocational Technical Skills

AmeriCorps training provided members with vocational and technical knowledge and skills that prepared them for service and provided them with tools for the future. Supervisors and members reported skills attained in environmental studies, natural resources management, computer technology, water resource management, and other areas associated with the community services of the program. Frequently, as a result of this exposure, members decided to pursue further education in a specific area. As one member stated:

> *"I learned about the water industry through the training that we had to take. Now that I am getting close to graduate from AmeriCorps, I will be pursuing my education in the water industry in hopes of attaining a career . . . My goal is . . . [to] be ready to take the state exam, pass and be certified . . . and from there go. . . up, up, up. I am truly grateful for having been given the opportunity to become a member of [AmeriCorps]."*

Several AmeriCorps programs offered certificates to members who mastered a particular skill. For example, one program issued a Certificate of Mastery in either construction or environmental science. Another program provided training and certifications in phlebotomy, child development, and environmental hazards.

Certificates meant a great deal to members, because they felt the certificates could be marketed. As one member mentioned, "this certificate will look really good on my resume." Another spoke with enthusiasm of the certificate she received to advocate on behalf of domestic violence victims, saying such certificates were, "good because you now have something in hand that proves you know what you are doing." Courses

that built hands-on skills, such as construction and plumbing, had a triple effect: members who had previously not succeeded in school experienced success in completing these programs, the skills gained benefited communities, and members themselves increased their future employability.

AmeriCorps members across the board reported benefiting most from the training and courses related to their service. Many were sure that the knowledge they had gained would help them in their job search and would add to their career options. However, members were less enthusiastic about the more general training and development opportunities they received. For example, while some saw benefit in the training sessions on diversity and conflict management, others saw these trainings as overly general, too theoretical, and not meeting their needs.

AmeriCorps Members Attain Basic Skills

Although only 14 percent of members lacked a high school diploma or a GED, evaluators put considerable emphasis on discussing the challenges this group faced. As other research has shown,[28] it is extremely difficult for both younger and older adults to increase their basic skills and gain GEDs once they have experienced school failure. Some of these difficulties are due to resistance to participating in educational efforts that do not have practical outcomes; others are attributable to the complex lives led by many of those who do not complete their education that make a sustained commitment to education difficult. As one evaluator wrote:

> *The life stories and daily lives of AmeriCorps Members are chronicles of personal problems. These commonly include overcoming problems at home (with other family members), the general quality of their relationships with their families including their own children, having children and how many they have, custody battles over children, the need for housing, and dealing with deaths in the family whether from natural or violent causes. Several of the women in the Corps expressed a strong desire to use this experience to help them get off public assistance. Among the permanently disgruntled was a clear wish to get on with the rest of my life. There is always a nay-sayer in the group.*

Not surprisingly, supervisors reported mixed results in helping these members to negotiate the GED or succeed in school. While some members did indeed obtain their diplomas or made progress in that direction, others did not take advantage of GED classes, especially when participation was voluntary or were not able to make sufficient progress to pass all parts of the test. For these members, educational achievement proved elusive. Since continued negative or unsuccessful experiences with schooling are likely to result in even greater non-participation in academic areas, there is cause to worry that these members will fall even further behind their peers in

[28] "Rethinking Literacy Education: The Critical Need for Practice-Based Change (Allen Quigley, 1997)

academic achievement. Furthermore, those who do not complete the GED or obtain a high school diploma are unlikely to take advantage of the educational award, unless they get a great deal of assistance in transition to higher education. This means that those who most need help may be unable to use one of the strongest educational aids provided by the AmeriCorps program.

Not all reports were negative, however. Evaluators reported success for recipients of AFDC for whom AmeriCorps provided a limited income, work experience, and crucial childcare. Some of these members gained their diplomas and made the transition to college, while others found employment in the programs in which they served. For these members AmeriCorps provided a valuable experience and acted as a possible stepping-stone to self-sufficiency and continued education. In addition, several programs helped single mothers gain self-sufficiency, often by offering them paid employment after their service year ended.

THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL AWARD

Members who completed their service received $4,725 to be used to pay for higher education or to pay back student loans (see Table 7.3). Analysis of responses to questions on how members thought they might use the award showed that three-fourths of AmeriCorps members planned to use their award for future educational pursuits. One in ten members planned to pay existing loans. Of those, 25 percent were enrolled in a four-year college during their service year, 64 percent had already completed a four-year degree and 10 percent had completed a graduate degree. The remaining members said they had other plans or did not know what their plans were at that point.

Table 7.3: Plans for Members to Use Their Awards

Response	Percent
Use for Job Training	5%
Use for College Education	51%
Use for Graduate Education	18%
Pay Existing Loans	8%
Other	18%

(Note: "Other" designates members without firm plans for using the award.)

Nine in ten AmeriCorps members using their educational awards to pay school loans were planning to continue their education, strong evidence that AmeriCorps both attracts a group for whom education is important and provides individuals the means to continue academic pursuits. . As shown on Table 7.4, two-thirds of these members reported planning to go to graduate school. One sixth were expecting to complete a bachelor's degree and the remaining one sixth were equally divided among completing a two-year degree and completing a job-training course.

Table 7.4: Final Education Goal

Final Educational Goal	Percent
Job Training	8%

Two Year Degree	9%
Four Year Degree	17%
Graduate Degree	66%

Some critics have questioned the necessity of the educational award, since the overall educational attainment of members was already higher than the national average. Yet, seven in ten members repaying loans said that their education award was necessary to achieve their educational goals. Two in ten said that it was not necessary but would make it easier for them to achieve their goals. Only one in twenty felt that they did not need the education award. AmeriCorps members were clear on the high cost of higher education and did not think that their award would pay for the total cost. In fact, nine in ten members thought that they would have to work at least part-time while in school and six in ten expected to need additional financial aid (see Table 7.5).

Table 7.5 Necessity of Educational Award

Award Necessity	Percent
Award Is Necessary	73%
Not Necessary But Makes It Easier	18%
I Do Not Need It	4%
Other	5%

Plans to Use Award for Job Training

Only 5 percent of the AmeriCorps members were planning to use their awards to pay for job training. Among these members, 40 percent had an educational goal of completing job training and 40 percent wanted to complete a two-year college degree. About 40 percent of these individuals had completed or were still completing high school. Another 45 percent had taken some community college courses but did not yet have a degree. These members expected to pay two to five thousand dollars in addition to their education award for their job training courses. Nine in ten of them were planning to work while in job training, providing further evidence that the award does not go to a privileged group. Six in ten members thought they would work full-time and three in ten members thought they would work part-time.

Half of the members who planned to use their award for job training did not know whether they could expect to receive financial aid in addition to the award. One in four members thought they would not qualify for aid and only two in ten members expected to receive any. Of these, 20 percent thought they might get a grant, and 4 percent each thought they might receive a loan or work-study. The rest were not sure. The median amount of financial aid expected was between $500 and $2,000 annually.

College Education

Almost half (51 percent) of the AmeriCorps members expected to use their education award to pay for college. Among these members, 24 percent had a goal or completing a two year degree, 44 percent a four year degree, and 15 percent graduate

education. Currently, 35 percent of these members had completed or were completing high school, 26 percent had some two-year college experience, and 38 percent had completed their associate's degree or were already working on their bachelor's degree. These members expected to pay college costs of ten thousand to twenty thousand dollars in addition to their education award. Nine in ten members expected to work while in school. Six in ten members expected to work part-time, while three in ten members expected to work full-time.

The majority of members, six in ten, expected to supplement the awards with other types of assistance. Three in ten members did not know whether they could expect to receive such aid. One in ten stated that they would not qualify for financial aid. The median amount of financial aid expected was between $2,000 and $5,000 annually. Four in ten members thought they could expect aid in the form of grants, two in ten members expected to take out student loans, and one in ten each thought he would receive work study or some other form of aid

Plans to Use Award for Graduate or Professional School

About one in five (18 percent) of AmeriCorps members was planning to use the education award to pay for graduate or professional school. This was the final educational goal of most of this group. At the time of the study, five in six of these individuals were working on or had completed their four-year degree and the other one-sixth was already in graduate school. Members planning to go to graduate or professional schools expected to pay costs of twenty thousand to thirty thousand dollars in addition to their education awards. Nine in ten members expected to work while in school. Seven in ten members expected to work part time and two in ten members expected to work full time. Of this group, seven in ten members expected to use financial aid to pay some of their educational costs. Only one in four members said he did not know whether he would use financial aid. One in twenty members thought that he would not qualify for aid. Three in ten members thought they would receive grants, while six in ten members thought they would take out loans. Three in ten members thought they would use work-study and one in ten members would use other form of financial assistance.

Table 7.6: Members Expecting to Use Their Award to Pay for Future Education

	Job Training	College	Graduate School
Percent of Sample	5%	51%	18%
Current Education			
Attended High School	19%	11%	1%
High School Graduate	20%	34%	1%
Attended Community College	45%	15%	0%
Two Year Degree	8%	4%	0%
Attended Four Years	8%	23%	10%
Four Year Degree	0%	12%	86%
Graduate Degree	0%	0%	2%

Educational Goal			
High School	12%	3%	0%
Job Training	40%	35	0%
Two Year Degree	40%	3	0%
Four Year Degree	0%	44	4
Graduate Degree	8%	15	96
Award Necessity			
Award Is Necessary	86%	83%	83%
Not Necessary But Makes It Easier	8%	16%	13%
I Do Not Need It	6%	0%	1%
Other	0%	1%	3%

Table 7.6 (Cont): Members Expecting to Use Their Award to Pay for Future Education

Estimate of Total Cost To Complete Education			
Median Total Education Cost to Complete	$2,001-$5,000	$10,001-$20,000	$20,001-$30,000
Nothing	0%	1%	1%
$1-$2,000	21%	0%	0%
$2,001-$5,000	54%	12%	2%
$5,001-$10,000	4%	19%	5%
$10,001-$20,000	8%	31%	22%
$20,001-$30,000	0%	11%	33%
$30,001-$40,000	0%	8%	18%
More Than $40,000	6%	7%	14%
Do Not Know	8%	10%	6%
How Members Plan to Meet These Costs			
	Job Training	**College**	**Graduate School**
Work While in School			
No	10%	4%	6%
Full-Time	59%	32%	20%
Part-Time	31%	55%	68%
Do Not Know	0%	9%	6%
Annual Members Estimate of Financial Aid Needed			
Annual Median Aid Needed	$501-$2,000	$2,001-$5,000	$5,000-$10,000
By Category			
Nothing	28%	3%	5%
$1-$500	8%	1%	0%
$501-$2000	26%	17%	4%
$2,001-$5,000	8%	36%	10%
$5,001-$10,000	17%	19%	48%
$10,001-$20,000	0%	12%	16%
More Than $20,000	6%	4%	9%
Do Not Know	7%	8%	8%
Use of Financial Aid			
Grants, Loans, Work Study, or Other	20%	57%	72%

Do Not Qualify for Financial Aid	24%	9%	4%
Do Not Know	50%	34%	24%
No Answer	6%	0%	0%
Types of Additional Aid			
Grant	20%	37%	30%
Loan	4%	23%	60%
Work Study	4%	13%	27%
Other Aid	0%	15%	13%

CAREER AWARENESS AND TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Albeit a powerful tool toward helping members achieve educational goals, the educational award alone was not enough to propel members into further education. To facilitate transition to higher education, most programs tried to make members aware of the career and academic options available. Programs offered members help in writing resumes and searching for job opportunities; some organized field trips to colleges and universities where members could talk to admissions officers. For example, one program provided members with the opportunity to participate in the popular annual Traditionally Black College Campuses Tour. Members who had thought about both a career and college were able to gain valuable information from this type of activity. For others, especially potential first generation college students, the skills and information provided in workshops were not enough. They needed additional support and guidance. One supervisor became the liaison between her members and the local college, providing both moral support and information to the members. This helped demystify the process of entering and attending college for members who had never thought of themselves as "college material." Another program arranged scholarships at local schools for members, forming important links with the schools as well as helping members with the financial end of attending further school. A third established a partnership with a charter school. In a follow-up interview, one African-American member spoke enthusiastically about the assistance she had received from a Caucasian member as part of an informed knowledge exchange. She said: “It was great, he helped me with my college applications and I showed him something about surviving in a black neighborhood.” Not all members were ready to transition from AmeriCorps to higher education. Some members needed some "time out" before entering college or returning to graduate school. In addition, many of those who combined volunteer service with full-time college studies reported temporary burnout. Many wanted "time to breathe" before going back to school. One member used her experience serving with the Yupik and Tlingit tribal groups as background for pursuing a career in international relations. After AmeriCorps, she used her educational award to study graduate international relations in Russia. As one evaluator stated:

> *“She [a member] successfully completed her first semester at . . . University. She plans to major in social work. She went through the career development class . . . and worked closely with AmeriCorps. [She] credits the program for*

> *her changed life. After completing the course, the program helped her find a job . . .[she remarked]`I was going nowhere fast and this changed my life."*

Some members reported that AmeriCorps helped them to consider professional careers and gave them the confidence and skills to contemplate college. Several reported being the first person in their family to work toward a degree. One program trained parents of young children to effectively tutor and teach their children while attending college to receive a Child Development Associate certificate (CDA). A member said she had "waited all her life" for opportunities to work with children and to attend school; without the AmeriCorps program, she would not have been able to do either. Another example is of a farm worker who expressed a desire to study education, after learning she was an excellent public speaker and trainer, rather than return to farm work.

Ironically, while some members needed help in widening their horizons, others needed help in managing their expectations and setting short-term goals. Members who had weak academic skills had particular difficulties seeing the relationship between their current skills, further education, and stated their aspirations. One member stated:

> *"(The AmeriCorps program) has taught me that many of my goals are not attainable yet, and that's OK 'cause it means I've got some work to do."*

Quite clearly, AmeriCorps was most successful in moving members who had some college to higher levels of education and into professional careers while providing important vocational skills to others. This was particularly true for members from low-income families and those facing multiple barriers (both economic and social). Evidence from the case studies showed that career awareness training, and goal-setting exercises meant little to members who were new to higher education, unless they also received personal assistance.

SUMMARY

AmeriCorps was successful in increasing educational attainment of all members to the extent that programs provided focused vocational/technical training in areas that related to service, including environmental science, early childhood education, construction, etc. Members reported benefiting from training that resulted in certificates that enhanced both their service and their future employability. Members without a college education, or less than two years of higher education, especially profited from this format of training. The more training focused on the service to be done, the more successful it was.

For the most part, AmeriCorps was successful in supporting and advancing the educational attainment of members who were already in college. AmeriCorps was much less successful in increasing attainment and opportunity for those members who had not completed high school or who had fewer than two years of higher education.

As a rule, programs were not able to reduce significantly the barriers that educationally disadvantaged members faced in trying to get diplomas and transition to college, although there were some notable exceptions. Success proved illusive for the population in greatest need of educational achievement and opportunity.

The educational award will make it possible for members to continue their education and will facilitate entry into higher education for others able to make that transition. Members report that the award is necessary and express definite plans to use these awards to pay for tuition or payback loans. The vast majority will need to supplement the awards with other forms of financial aid and through part-time or full-time work.

SECTION IV. COST BENEFIT: WHAT IS THE RETURN ON THE NATIONAL INVESTMENT?[29]

CHAPTER 8: INTRODUCTION

One classic measure of the return on investment is the benefit-cost ratio. This method measures the relationship between the dollar-valued benefits of a program and its expenditures. Ratios of benefits to costs that are greater than one presume that the program delivered more benefits than the cost of the program.

By this measure, AmeriCorps*State/National Direct was a success. A dollar spent on the forty-four sampled AmeriCorps programs[30] returned $1.66 dollars of benefits to AmeriCorps members and America's communities.

The task of valuing AmeriCorps costs and benefits was a complex one. As with any benefit-cost analysis, the major concerns were to capture all the costs and benefits and to correctly value them. There were several types of program costs to be considered. There was the direct spending of federal funds as well as the Corporation for National Service's requirement that programs match specified portions of federal spending on member support and program operating expenses. To meet these requirements, programs sometimes used their own revenues, but often solicited donations from charities, foundations, businesses and local governments. Some donations were made altruistically with no thought of return and some were calculated decisions that included benefits to the donor such as the value of associating an organization or business with the service efforts of AmeriCorps. Sometimes donations were part of a company's marketing campaign.

While some of those donations to programs were direct cash donations, others were made in-kind. Correctly valuing in kind contributions was another challenge. One measure of the cost of such donations was the opportunity costs of some of the resources; for example, the market costs of materials or the rental value of meeting space. However, the value of the contribution depends on whether the item actually might have been used for another purpose -- would that meeting space otherwise have been empty? In many cases, some of the value of AmeriCorps was that programs sought out underutilized resources, empty space, unused materials, and economies in time that might have gone to waste. The cost of these would be hard to determine in

[29] Aguirre International thanks the researchers at Hazen and Sawyer who researched and computed the value of the AmeriCorps benefits presented in this section.

[30] The sampled program included forty-four Tier II programs that had complete cost & benefit data.

depressed communities where surplus space and other resources often waited for cash infusions to turn them into valuable assets.

Assessing the benefits of AmeriCorps was similarly difficult. AmeriCorps programs had objectives in three areas: member development, direct service, and community building. In achieving these objectives, AmeriCorps programs provided substantial benefits to their service beneficiaries, to their members, to the sponsoring and participating institutions and to the community at large. Many of these benefits were documented in previous chapters.

It was possible to value many of the direct service and member development benefits. While the AmeriCorps experience provided many benefits to members that are incalculable, three key benefits could be valued in dollar terms. These were the increased earning due to additional education resulting from the education award; (2) the training received by AmeriCorps members; and (3) the student loan interest avoided by using the education award. The valuation of member benefits drew on substantial research on the value of additional education on future earnings. The loan interest saved due to the education award and the skills training received by AmeriCorps members also had dollar-denominated market values that were easily researched.

There were several methods used to value the direct services of AmeriCorps. One was to look at the market prices for similar services. For example, what would it cost to purchase an hour of one-on-one tutoring or a visit by a home health worker, or what would a contractor charge for a similar environmental clean up. In other cases, the services were difficult to price, but the inputs, primarily labor, could be valued. What were the wages of a library assistant, a teacher's aid, or a health clinic worker?

Problems arose in valuing services that had benefits that exceeded the cost of inputs or the prices charged recipients. Such services were accrued in all areas. Typical reasons for this included; that the services were preventive: environmental abatement, preventive health, and crime prevention. Others had long-term impacts: tutoring, job training and environmental restoration.

Some of the service of AmeriCorps with long-term benefits had been studied and priced, but some of which had not. For example, what would be the value of the flooding avoided by a stream clean up or how should one value the disaster recovery that did not occur or what portion of those saved costs was due to AmeriCorps. Clearly, these would exceed the value of what a contractor would charge for similar work.

Some of these services had well documented benefits that exceeded the costs. This would apply to preventive health service that AmeriCorps members did. Assisting

with immunizations had long-term health benefits with well-documented positive benefit-cost ratios. For example, the value of immunization drives far exceeded the costs of the shots. In these cases, it would be fair to apply some of the value of the benefits that exceed costs to the effort of the AmeriCorps members. The challenge was to determine how much credit the AmeriCorps programs should take for the impact. For example, if AmeriCorps members were responsible for following up clinic patients and reminding them to immunize their children, it would be unfair for AmeriCorps to claim full credit for the immunization's impacts. Occasionally there was information that allowed researchers to determine what portion of these benefits should be attributed to AmeriCorps efforts. More often, AmeriCorps members played a small but important role in an ongoing process that exceeded the one-year period reviewed. In a few cases, information was available to value the imputed benefits and the inputs correctly. Unfortunately in many cases, the information available did not allow Aguirre International to go beyond valuing input prices. However, using only input prices of services rendered was probably overly conservative.

Some benefits could be fairly valued and others by necessity were undervalued, still others could not be valued at all. These included many of the benefits of AmeriCorps community strengthening objectives, such as building community alliances, strengthening institutions, raising community awareness or improving a community's knowledge infrastructure. These services contributed to the viability of the community and were acknowledged and remarked upon favorably by the community representatives Aguirre International interviewed. Unfortunately, it was almost impossible to assign these services a dollar value.

The next chapter discusses the benefit, cost ratio, and its interpretation. The remaining chapters explain how researchers addressed many of the issues introduced here as well as the methods used for the calculations involved in constructing the benefit-cost ratio. These include a chapter on costs, one on benefits to members, and one on benefits to communities.

CHAPTER 9: THE BENEFIT-COST RATIO

KEY FINDINGS

- Total program benefits of $53 million exceeded program costs of $36.7 million by $16.3 million.
- The benefit-cost ratio of the forty four sampled AmeriCorps programs was 1.66
- Direct service benefits alone exceeded total program costs
- The benefit-cost ratio presented here is conservative and understates the returns of the program.

OVERVIEW

The benefit-cost ratio expresses the value of a program as a ratio of the program costs to the dollar-valued benefits. Values in excess of one indicate that the program returned more benefits than its costs. The total value of AmeriCorps benefits[31] for the forty-four programs was $53 million. Program costs were $36.7 million. The average weighted benefit-cost ratio for the forty-four sampled AmeriCorps programs was 1.66.[32] This indicates that a dollar spent on these forty-four AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs returned $1.66 worth of benefits.

Total costs were $36.7 million. This included the education awards as well as member support and other program costs. The average cost of a full-time equivalent AmeriCorps member in these programs was $27,486. The federal share of this cost was $13,285 per member for member support and program costs plus $4,725 for the education award for a total federal share of $18,010.

Total benefits of the forty-four AmeriCorps programs were $53 million. The direct service benefits of AmeriCorps were $37.2 million. The remaining $15.8 million in benefits were member benefits. The overall benefit generated by an AmeriCorps member was $39,684. The value of direct service $27,855 per member. Member benefits include $1,767 in saved student loan interest, $2,878 in training and skills development and an average of $7,360 in increased future earnings.[33]

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[32] The correct benefit-cost ratio is not obtained by dividing the sum of benefits by the sum of cost (1.44). The forty-four AmeriCorps programs were part of a stratified random sample of AmeriCorps programs. As such, to accurately reflect AmeriCorps*State/National Direct, the correct benefit-cost ratio is the weighted average of individual program ratios.

Table 9.1: Benefit-Cost Ratio of 44 AmeriCorps*State/National Direct Programs[34]

Category	Per FTE member	Total
Costs		
Member support	$9,894	$13,204,215
Other program costs	$12,868	$17,173,866
Education Awards	$4,725	$6,306,127
Total Costs	$27,486	$36,684,208
Benefits		
Direct Service benefits	$27,855	$37,176,642
Student loan interest saved	$1,590	$2,122,462
Member training	$2,878	$3,841,459
Increased future earnings	$7,360	$9,822,428
Total Benefits	$39,684	$52,962,992

The average cost-benefit ratio among the sampled programs was $1.66 of benefit per dollar of costs. Among the forty-four programs studied, 58 percent had cost-benefit ratios that exceeded one and 42 percent had rations less than one.

Table 9.2: Distribution of Cost-Benefit Ratios Among Programs

Average value	**1.66**
Ratio value	**Percent**
Less than 1	42%
Between 1 and 2	37%
Greater than 2	21%

INTERPRETING THE BENEFIT-COST RATIO

The ratio presented here included the researcher's best attempts to fairly value all the costs and benefits of AmeriCorps. However, even the best attempts at calculation would include many assumptions that might tend to bias the results. See Table 5.2 for a listing of the various factors that might have introduced bias and the direction of the probable bias. In general, researchers were fairly conservative in their approach to constructing the estimate and believed that the estimate presented here, though done to the best of their ability, was a conservative estimate due to an inability to value many AmeriCorps benefits. The remainder of the chapter reviews the assumptions made and their probable impact on the final cost-benefit ratio.

[33] It should be noted that those members who received an earnings increase usually got a substantial benefit. However, since this benefit is average over all members - those who did and did not receive the benefit - the average value is much lower than the individual benefit.

[34] The forty-four programs had a total of 1,335 full-time equivalent members. All values are weighted.

Sources of Possible Bias in Cost Calculations

Costs could have been either overstated or understated. Since costs are in the denominator, they had an inverse affect. Overstated costs cause the benefit-cost ratio to be lower than it should and understated costs would cause it to be higher than it should.

Since the Corporation supplied budgeted costs and not actual costs, there was the possibility of omitted or overstated costs. The budgeted costs themselves accurately reflected program's spending plans and had no inherent bias. The biases occur when actual spending deviates from planned spending. The Corporation's contribution to first year programs was known to be overstated, since there were some 1994-95 programs that had not used all their funds by year-end. However, the problem was a little more complex for 1995-1996 year programs. Some programs may have had carry-overs from the first year when several programs failed to use their budgeted amounts. In these cases, programs could have understated the Corporation's costs during the second year. Again in 1995-1996 programs that did not spend all their funds would have their costs overstated by using budgeted costs (see Table 9.3).

Table 9.3: Direction and Magnitude of Possible Biases in the Benefit-cost Ratio

Type of benefit or cost	**Possible bias**
Costs	
Member support budget	Valued as reported
Other program costs budget	Valued as reported
Education awards budget	Overstated
Under spending of budgeted amount	Understated
Overspending of budgeted amount	Overstated
Total Costs	**Unknown but not a large effect**
Benefits	
Student loan interest saved	Overstated
Member training	Conservatively valued
Increased future earnings	Conservatively valued
On the job training – general skills (life skills)	Understated
On the job training – occupational skills	Understated
Value of civic experience/training	Understated
Reduced social costs of "at-risk" members	Understated
Institutional strengthening impacts	Understated
Community strengthening impacts	Understated
Direct Service benefits	Conservatively valued
Excess benefits of direct services valued at costs	Understated
Total Benefits	**Substantially understated**
Benefit/Cost Ratio	**Conservative / Understated**

The second cause of cost uncertainty is the relationship between budgeted program costs and actual program costs. Programs could have spent more or less than the funds that they budgeted. Unfortunately, there was no information on the extent of overstated and omitted funds due to discrepancies between budgeted and actual program costs.

It could be hoped that these two factors would cancel each other out. However it was not known whether programs that had carry-overs are canceled out by programs that had budget savings. It was not likely that the net effect of these two biases was very large. It would have been very difficult for AmeriCorps to operate if budgets were 10 percent under overall. In addition, a 10 percent net overspending was not likely on average.

Another possible area of cost bias is in the overstatement of the number of education awards that would be used. Aguirre researchers speculated that 100 percent of the awards would be exercised. It was highly unlikely that every AmeriCorps member would exercise his or her options. However, there was very little information to use in deciding some proportion less than 100 percent. The size of the possible overstatement could be estimated. Costs are overstated and could be reduced by somewhere between zero dollars if all awards are exercised and $1.8 million if only 70 percent of awards are exercised. This possible bias would have caused the benefit-cost ratio to be too low.

Overall, there were two possibly overstated costs and one understated cost. The net impact of these factors is unknown but probably not a large effect. Understatements in program spending would be offset by overstatements in the education award. Overstated program costs would make the ratio more conservative than it would be. Any understated program costs would be partially offset by the deliberate overstatement of education award benefits. The net value is unknowable but probably less than a possible understatement of the 10 percent maximum credible understatement minus the some proportion of the 1.8 million overstatement for education awards.

Possible Biases in the Benefit Calculations

Similar to costs, benefit values could be overstated or understated. Since the benefits are in the numerator, they have a straightforward effect. Overstated benefits increase the benefit-cost ratio while understated benefits would reduce it.

In general, researchers were very conservative in calculating the value of AmeriCorps member benefits. There should be little overstatement of member benefits. In terms of future earnings for members resulting from increased education, Aguirre International used a very conservative figure that only 10 percent of the AmeriCorps

members future educational attainment would be the result of AmeriCorps, whereas the general population pursuing future educational attainment could be 20 percent. In other words, AmeriCorps members would achieve only 110 percent of the education level of the general U.S. population. This was done in the face of evidence that the education award was an important incentive to AmeriCorps members. At the time they left AmeriCorps, 74 percent of AmeriCorps members had definite education plans based on the award. Further, at the time that this report was prepared approximately 70 percent of 1994-1995 members had begun using their award. These members still had a year to go on their award. This assumed that a low level of future educational achievements resulted in a correspondingly low level of related future earnings.

The only overstated benefit was the student loan interest saved. As explained above, researchers assumed that members would exercise 100 percent of the education vouchers. The value of this overstatement is somewhere between zero dollars and $700,000 dollars.

In terms of the other benefits to members, the training provided to members was valued at less than three thousand dollars per member. This is a reasonable and probably conservative number considering that it accounts for only reported skill training. Training varied across AmeriCorps from an orientation that lasted a few days, included the required Corporation trainings to extensive training with longer orientations, and formalized weekly training sessions that lasted almost a full day.

The valued training included only training that was reported and that occurred in formalized training sessions. It was likely that such formalized trainings were under reported. In addition, there was a high level of informal training. The value of on-the-job training was not valued because of the difficulty in finding pricing data that would accurately value these gains. Analysis of the life skills survey noted that AmeriCorps members had measurable skills advances that bested those of the control group. In addition to these general or life skills, many AmeriCorps members service assignments functioned as de facto apprenticeship where AmeriCorps members learned specific occupational skills from their supervisors as the provided service. These skills were not valued because of the difficulty in accurately pricing such learning.

Two additional member benefits were not valued due to difficulty in fairly valuing them. The first is the civic value of the service experience and the training in understanding environmental and/or social problems. Many AmeriCorps members remarked upon how these experiences, gained through AmeriCorps, were unique and transformative.

The second benefit was one that accrues to both society and members. It was the value of the reduced social costs for “at-risk” members who joined AmeriCorps and

contributed to their communities. A small portion of AmeriCorps members freely admitted that they had engaged in antisocial behavior before AmeriCorps and that while in AmeriCorps they resisted such behavior. The value of this benefit keeping them out of the penal system, not pregnant and off drugs was very hard to calculate. Because of the difficulty in collecting and evaluating such information, the Corporation and Aguirre researchers were not able to collect useful information on these topics. The result was the omission of an unknown but probably small benefit. In terms of the benefits of AmeriCorps to communities, Section I of this report detailed the volume of AmeriCorps service and its impact on service beneficiaries, institutions, and communities. Only a portion of those benefits was able to be monetarized resulting in a substantial undercount of the benefits of AmeriCorps service.[35]

While AmeriCorps made impressive strides in institution building, it was very difficult to value such efforts. There were few studies and measures to be used in gauging the effect of improved monitoring and accountability. While the effects were measurable and reported in the chapter on institutional impacts, they could not easily be dollar denominated. Researchers might have considered what would have been the value of this effort had it been provided by a management consulting firm. In those terms, it would have had considerable value. However, measuring these impacts at such a precise level was not done for two reasons. First, it was expensive and beyond the scope of this study and second, at the outset, it was not presumed that the institutional strengthening impacts of AmeriCorps would be so substantial. For these reasons the institutional building value of the benefits of AmeriCorps are omitted from this review.

Similarly, much of AmeriCorps impact on communities, aside from its impact on members and direct service beneficiaries, was difficult to value. While community representatives reported that community strengthening occurred in several measurable ways, it was not possible to assign dollar figures to these accomplishments. The value of institutions working better together, more efficient exchange of information and improved client service is hard to value in dollars. For this reason, these benefits of AmeriCorps are not included in these calculations.

The service benefits that were the easiest to value were the direct services provided by AmeriCorps programs. Researchers valued $37 million in service benefits. This included service in all four issue areas: education, other human needs, environment, and public safety.

[35] This undercount was confounded by the program staff's difficulty in reporting service accomplishments. As discussed in Section I, Chapter 1, direct service accomplishments tended to be undercounted.

Researchers took a conservative approach to valuing the direct service benefits. In general, they were valued at the cost of providing the services by the private sector. When there was a range of prices for the services provided, the researchers usual procedure was to use the lowest price. This was to counter concerns that AmeriCorps members might have had lower productivity than private sector service providers might. In many of the service sector pursuits such as preventive health and education, participating host sites remarked upon the effectiveness of AmeriCorps members and gave them very high ratings compared to private sector service providers. The greatest concern over productivity seemed to be in the environmental area and with teams of at risk AmeriCorps members. Fortunately concern over whether or not these crews match private sector productivity was muted by the fact that most of this work was valued at the price of a completed job, not an hour of effort.

In many cases, the services provided by AmeriCorps members are services that themselves have positive benefit-cost ratios.[36] For example, the value of early education in improving school success or the value of preventive health practices or crime reduction efforts went far beyond the value of the tutoring, immunizations or community policing provided. Similarly, environmental services aimed at disaster prevention have benefits that far exceed the costs of the service. In general, because of the difficulty in assigning the correct proportion of these excess benefits or the difficulty of valuing some of the excess benefits, researchers generally used only the cost of providing services. As such, an unknown but appreciable amount of benefit value was omitted from the calculations.

SUMMARY

After reviewing the assumptions that went into creating this benefit-cost ratio, it appears that it should be interpreted as a conservative effort to value direct service benefits and member benefits and express them in terms of the program costs. By this measure, the program was a success. It returned more in benefits than the cost of the program.

In weighing the issues of omitted benefits against a degree of cost uncertainty, it would appear that the value of omitted benefits, far outweighs the much smaller degree of cost uncertainty. As such the benefit-cost ratio presented here understates the total impact of AmeriCorps on AmeriCorps members and America's communities.

Future benefit-cost studies might want to examine ways to address the cost issues

[36] See appendix J for examples of the positive returns to services provided by AmeriCorps.

discussed in the introduction. Additionally, greater effort might be made to collect additional data that would improve the ability to value fairly some of the benefit values that were omitted here.

CHAPTER 10: PROGRAM COSTS

KEY FINDINGS

- Total program costs were $36.6 million dollars.
- Cost data reflect budgeted costs.

OVERVIEW

The value of a cost-benefit analysis is that it puts the value of a program into perspective by comparing it to the costs of the program. The costs associated with an AmeriCorps program were:

- stipends and benefits paid to members,
- other program operating costs
- education awards for members

The sources of funding for AmeriCorps programs included the government funds provided by the Corporation as well as funds contributed to the program from the sponsor's revenue stream and contributions to programs from private corporations, state and local governments and private foundations and individuals.

The costs of the forty-four programs reviewed were $36.6 million. Of these monies, $24 million came from the Corporation and $12.6 million from other sources.

Table 10.1: Costs of Sampled Programs

Expense category		Percent	Dollars
Member support			
	Corporation share	67%	$8,872,860
	Grantee share	33%	$4,331,355
Total member support			$13,204,215
Other program costs			
	Corporation share	52%	$8,862,984
	Grantee share	48%	$8,310,882
Total of other program costs			$17,173,866
Education Awards – Corporation share			
	Corporation share	100%	$6,306,127
Total costs			$36,684,208

COST DATA

The Corporation provided Aguirre International with data on the operating budgets of the 44 sites for the 1995-1996 program year. The Corporation believed that this constituted the most detailed data that was comparable across all the program sites in the sample. The data included the grantees and Corporation's share of member support expenses and other program operating expenses.

Since the Corporation supplied the cost data, their grant staff were the arbiters of many of the cost issues mentioned in the introduction: Was the value of the matching funds proposed by the program acceptable? Were the in-kind matches reasonably valued?

Using budgeted cost information had its pros and cons. Certainly, actual spending levels would have been more precise. On the other hand, the budgeted costs represented an upper bound on the spending of a program in terms of Corporation resources. Some programs spent less. Therefore, the return on the Corporation's spending is a conservative estimate. However, some programs may have received more donations than were budgeted. At this point, there is no consistent information that can be used to determine whether budget spending was greater or less than actual spending. Aguirre Researchers, when doing their site visits, did observe that there were more programs struggling to raise matching donations than there were programs receiving more-than-adequate private-sector support.

In addition to the cost data, some calculations required knowing the number of members per site. That information was taken from the 1995-1996 Annual Accomplishment Review.

MEMBER SUPPORT COSTS

AmeriCorps member support costs included stipends, health, and childcare benefits. The Corporation and its grantees shared the costs of member support. The Corporation was to pay up to 85 percent of basic member support costs. Programs had to raise at least 15 percent of the member support costs. In some cases, programs awarded a stipend that was greater than the federally required minimum stipend of $7,500. Programs were fully responsible for these additional funds. The program share of member support costs had to be cash funds. No in-kind contributions counted towards this responsibility.

Total member support cost for the forty-four programs was $13.2 million. The Corporation was to pay $8.8 million of this amount or 67 percent of member support costs. Programs raised funds to cover 33 percent of member support costs.

COST OF OTHER PROGRAM OPERATING COSTS

In addition to member support costs, programs had expenses related to operating the program. These additional operating expenses covered rent, administration, staff, supplies, communications and other costs essential to the running the program. The Corporation imposed a 5 percent cap on administrative costs.

Operation costs were split between the Corporation and the grantee. In 1995-1996 the Corporation paid up to 50 percent of program operating costs (other then member costs).
Program operating costs, other than member support, totaled $17.2 million for the forty-four programs in this study. The Corporation paid $8.9 million or 51 percent of program operating expenses. Programs were to raise $8.3 million for operating costs.

A small percentage of the funds used to match Corporation funds could be in-kind contributions. These often consisted of donations of space, tools, and materials obtained from donors. The remainder of the funds had to be cash contributions.

For most programs, the calculation of the operating expenses was the straightforward sum of the Corporation and grantee expenses. In the case of multi-site programs, the grantees parent operating expenses were also included in the costs of the program. These costs were prorated across sites proportional to the spending for each site.

COSTS FOR EDUCATION AWARDS

AmeriCorps members who successfully completed their service were entitled to an education award. The Corporation's education trust had the sole responsibility for paying the education awards that were valued at $4,725 per AmeriCorps member. Members had five years to redeem the award.

The costs of the education awards was calculated by multiplying the cost of the award by the number of full-time equivalent AmeriCorps members that were reported in the 1995-96 Annual Accomplishment Review. At the time of completion of this report, the first class of AmeriCorps members was in their fourth post-AmeriCorps year and more than two-thirds of the members had redeemed their education awards.

Since there is no data on the proportion of AmeriCorps members that will redeem their education awards and redemption rates were high, Aguirre International researchers assumed that all awards would be redeemed. Both the costs and benefits of 100 percent of the awards are included in this analysis. This resulted in a more

conservative benefit-cost assessment than assuming some proportion less than 100 percent were redeemed. The total costs for the education awards for the 1,335 full-time equivalent members of the forty-four programs were $6.3 million.

CHAPTER 11: BENEFITS TO MEMBERS

KEY FINDING

- Total member benefits were $16 million dollars

OVERVIEW

As stated in other chapters, members benefited from AmeriCorps in several ways. The process of providing service to America's communities resulted in measurable increases in member life skills and increases in their understanding of civic responsibility. Through opportunities provided by their programs, some members received educational credentials. In addition, all members who successfully completed the program received an education award to be used in helping them achieve their education goals.

While some of the value of the AmeriCorps experience was immeasurable, dollar values could be assigned to at least three aspects of member benefits.

- Increased earnings from receiving additional education due to the education award;
- Interest saved from using the education awards to pay off existing student loans; and,
- Value of the skills, training, and experience members received from participation in the program.

The total value of these member benefits was $16 million.

Table 11.1: Value of Benefits to AmeriCorps Members

Type of Benefit	
Increased earnings resulting from further education	$9,822,428
Student loans interest savings	$2,358,291
Training	$3,841,459
Total value of member benefits	$16,022,179

The education award provided several levels of benefits. First, there was the face value of the award for use in paying for education. For some members, the education award provided an incentive to undertake additional education. When members used their education award to increase their educational level, they were increasing their

lifetime earnings potential. For other members, the award allowed the member to pay off school loans or finance future educational expenses without borrowing money. Thus, the member avoided interest payments. To evaluate the full value of the award, both of these aspects were considered.

AmeriCorps*State/National Direct members benefited from participation in the program by obtaining experience providing service and additional training. The additional experience and training have at times directly resulted in members acquiring permanent full-time employment.[37] The additional benefits of training and experience must also be considered in the evaluation of the AmeriCorps*State/National Direct program.

VALUE OF INCREASED EARNINGS DUE TO HIGHER EDUCATION LEVELS[38]

Members had the option to use their education award to help finance future educational expenses. One of the benefits to members from increasing their education levels was an increase in future earnings. The level of future earnings attributed to the AmeriCorps*State/National Direct program depended on the number of members who furthered their education *only* because they received the education award. A survey of AmeriCorps members in a previous study indicated that 11 percent use their awards to pay off existing school loans, while 89 percent use the award to finance current educational expenses (Kormendi, *et al.*, 1995). Examination of the Aguirre International member survey indicated that 8 percent of members intended to use the awards to pay off loans while seventy 4 percent had definite plans to pursue additional education and 18 percent were unsure of their future educational plans at the time of the interview. In the two studies, similar numbers of members 8 percent and 11 percent were planning to pay off their loans.

Identifying Increases in Education Due to AmeriCorps Participation

In determining the value of the education award, it is important to note that, certain percentage of the members would have furthered their education regardless of the education award. Kormendi, *et al.* estimated that the percentage of AmeriCorps*State/National Direct members furthering their education solely because

[37] From observations of Bonneville Power Administration and the United States Forest Service.

[38] The method used to estimate the benefits of the education award follows closely the method and data used by Kormendi, Roger C., George Neumann, Robert Tamura and Cyrus J. Gardner, "The Benefits and Costs of National Service: Methods for Benefit Assessment with Application to Three AmeriCorps programs", 1995.

of the education awards was 10 percent.[39] It is assumed that the percentage is the same for the AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs evaluated here.

The number of members who were expected to receive additional education due to the education award depends on the members' probabilities of obtaining further education taking into account their existing level of education. This probability was equal to the probability that someone in the general United States population with a specific education level (some high school, high school graduate or equivalent, some college, college graduate or advanced degree) would go on to obtain more education multiplied by the 10 percent probability that AmeriCorps would cause a further increase in educational attainment as estimated by Kormendi, *et al.* The resulting number then represented the conditional probability that an AmeriCorps member who had a certain level of education would go on to obtain a higher education level.

For example, the probabilities that a U.S. high school graduate in the general population would obtain a higher degree of education were as follows: 29.4 percent of high school graduates went on to receive some college while 22.4 percent went on to receive a college degree and 9.6 percent went on to receive an advanced degree. If AmeriCorps increased educational attainment by 10 percent then the expectation would be for the percentage of AmeriCorps members with high school diplomas who go on to some college to be 110 percent of that of the general population or 29.4+2.94 percent. This 2.94 percent increase in the probability was considered a result of AmeriCorps participation.

For members of the AmeriCorps*State/National Direct program who entered with a high a school degree, the conditional probabilities that AmeriCorps is the cause of this educational increase is 2.94 percent for some college, 2.24 percent for a college degree and 0.96 percent for advanced degree. The same method was used to estimate the increased probability that a member who has some college training or a college degree would go on to receive a college degree or an advanced degree due to the education awards.

These increases in the probabilities were multiplied by the number of members with the corresponding level of education. The results indicated the number of members improving their education level solely due to AmeriCorps. The calculations are presented in Table 11.2.

[39] Kormendi, et al, used the results of a study on the GI Bill, which found that educational awards provided under the GI Bill increased post-secondary education by forty percent. Because the AmeriCorps*State/National Direct educational award is not as generous as the GI bill, the authors estimated that the education award provided by the AmeriCorps*State/National Direct program increases the probability of a member furthering his/her education by 10 percent (see p. 16).

Increases in Lifetime Earnings Resulting from Increased Member Education

Members who increased their education levels because of AmeriCorps participation could also increase their earnings from employment throughout their lifetime. This increase was then a measurable benefit of AmeriCorps participation that could be monetarized. For example, a person who obtained a GED could earn $25,023 more over his/her lifetime than someone who did not earn a high school diploma or a GED.[40] To determine the total increase in future earnings due to the education awards, these changes in income were multiplied by the number of members who would improve their education level. A total of $9.8 million in benefits was estimated during the second year of the program (see Table 11.3).

[40] The $25,023 was derived by subtracting the potential future earnings of a person with no high school diploma from the potential future earnings of someone with a GED.

SECTION V. CONCLUSION

In this section we summarize the main findings for each of the areas of analysis and evaluation: Community Impact, Member Impact, and the Return on the National Investment in AmeriCorps. Aguirre International's conclusions, though primarily related to the evaluation of AmeriCorps' impact over two years, also addresses organizational structure and process. Although not the focus of our evaluation, organizational management and processes of program implementation had a clear, and sometimes negative, effect on successful community and member impact and participation.

AMERICORPS' IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH THEY SERVED

The AmeriCorps programs underwent various stages of implementation and, more importantly, adaptation over the course of their first two years. Despite inevitable, and sometimes daunting challenges, program leaders made changes to improve the quality of service offered, provide the necessary support to its 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 adapted their organizations to meet needs and problems as they arose.

Getting Things Done

AmeriCorps accomplishments were numerous. Areas of accomplishment (representing the service of 11,099 members and 310 programs) included (1) education, (2) health and human needs, and (3) basic needs of low-income and homeless people for food and shelter. Populations serviced by AmeriCorps programs include: (1) impoverished children and youth in both urban and rural communities; (2) at-risk children; (3) low-income and homeless people; and, (4) disabled, elderly, and hospitalized individuals. Across the board and over the course of the first two years, AmeriCorps programs concentrated heavily in the area of education.

More than 9 million people benefited from AmeriCorps service. AmeriCorps members personally provided services to 5.5 million individuals. An additional 3.7 million individuals benefited as members of improved neighborhoods and communities.

In addition, there was service for which we could not determine the number of beneficiaries. This included the many environment restoration efforts undertook, including planting more than 80,000 acres or miles of trees, improving more than 90,000 acres of park and wild lands, and repairing 266 agricultural dams.

Beneficiary Impacts

In-depth reports based on the programs selected for Tier III studies showed that programs developed innovative services to meet social problems in their communities. For the most part, these services were well received and had high customer satisfactions. Moreover, these services had measurable positive impacts on service beneficiaries, although the level of impacts could have been higher.

There were several possible causes in cases where programs were not achieving substantial beneficiary impacts. First, in a few cases programs probably had demonstrable impacts but were unable to track and evaluate them properly. Secondly, while most of the services were addressing a community need, some of these were relatively ineffective. For example, assigning AmeriCorps members to assist in classrooms did not demonstrate measurable outcomes for any of the programs we studied. Rather, individual tutoring was a more successful approach to the same problem. Programs should select services that address a community need and that would demonstrate impacts within one year. The Corporation might want to consider more guidance to programs regarding effective outcomes.

Institutional Impacts

The institutional impacts of AmeriCorps were far stronger than expected. AmeriCorps excelled at 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.

AmeriCorps funds allowed programs and their service partners to expand, improve, restore, or add new service. Because of partnership with AmeriCorps, many institutions were able to streamline their service delivery within communities. In addition, 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.

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 more effectively and increased their ability to measure the effects of their services.

Community Strengthening

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

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 (8 percent) between AmeriCorps service activities and the work carried out by other community organizations. As stated previously, AmeriCorps presence enabled many communities to both share and expand on resources. AmeriCorps also brought new resources into communities by raising funds and recruiting volunteers. AmeriCorps member skills also proved to be a valuable addition to community enterprises.

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.

An important part of galvanizing communities is visibility. AmeriCorps members are important role models for their community. This is particularly true for members drawn from the communities served. Both disadvantaged members who are turned around by AmeriCorps and members who are successful on their own play important roles. It is important for communities to see members giving back to their communities. This occurs in several ways. For example, local students already enrolled in colleges serve as mentors to community youth or service day projects where members beautify or improve the physical appearance of the community.

AMERICORPS' IMPACT ON ITS MEMBERS

Life Skills

A majority of members responded that their participation in AmeriCorps had improved their life skills, which they reported was something they valued. Most members noted a skill they learned or improved upon with their AmeriCorps experience. While there were gains among all types of programs, some gained more than others did. Members commented about their experiences in making a difference and how being able to see different sides of an issue was meaningful to them. Members gained least in applied technology-related skills. There seemed to be some patterns in member assignment structure, experience, and supervision that more strongly support development of valued life skills.

The majority of members expressed a desire to continue community service in various forms. To what extent these plans will translate into increases in volunteerism cannot be established at this time. This was true for members who had previous experience with service and those who had not participated in such service previously (about one third).

Civic Responsibility

The opportunity to participate in service in communities had a strong impact on members. AmeriCorps increased the awareness of social issues and the need to address these issues. Members did gain experience in addressing local issues and had the opportunity to make a difference. The more focused the service activity, the more members reported benefiting. This experience strengthened a commitment to focus community concerns and be part of a civil society that deals with social issues. In many cases, such commitment influenced or reinforced the choice to prepare for a career in social service.

The chance to be involved in community service proved to be a boon for members from inner-city neighborhoods, most of whom had low educational levels and faced multiple economic and social barriers. Stipends provided this group the opportunity to perform service that made a difference (instead of being on the street or working in a low paying service job) and put members in touch with others from diverse backgrounds. Through training related to service, members acquired valuable vocational skills that increased their employability. Those with sound academic skills

were able to benefit from services that helped transition them to college. Although this group was less likely to see the benefits of continued volunteerism, they nevertheless saw civic involvement as valuable and were proud to make a difference.

A significant number of inner-city members were able obtain employment in the social service agencies where they served as members or in related agencies. AmeriCorps helped them develop the skills that made them employable and instilled in them a commitment to do work in areas related to community service. In focusing on developing skills that helped them advance above their current levels, members were able to lay the foundation needed to strengthen low-income communities.

Educational Attainment and Opportunity

AmeriCorps was successful in increasing educational attainment of all members to the extent that programs provided focused vocational/technical training in areas that related to service, including environmental science, early childhood education, construction, etc. Members reported benefiting from training that resulted in certificates that enhanced both their service and their future employability. Members without a college education, or less than two years of higher education, especially profited from this format of training. The more training focused on the service to be done, the more successful it was.

For the most part, AmeriCorps was successful in supporting and advancing the educational attainment of members who were already in college. AmeriCorps was much less successful in increasing attainment and opportunity for those members who had not completed high school or who had fewer than two years of higher education. As a rule, programs were not able to reduce significantly the barriers that educationally disadvantaged members faced in trying to get diplomas and transition to college, although there were some notable exceptions. Success proved illusive for the population in greatest need of educational achievement and opportunity.

The educational award will make it possible for members to continue their education and will facilitate entry into higher education for others able to make that transition. Members report that the award is necessary and express definite plans to use these awards to pay for tuition or payback loans. The vast majority will need to supplement the awards with other forms of financial assistance and through part-time or full-time work.

THE RETURN ON THE NATIONAL INVESTMENT

The results of the benefit-cost analysis show that AmeriCorps, even during its fledgling years achieved a positive return on the national investment. AmeriCorps direct service and member benefits returned $1.66 for every dollar spent. Direct Service benefits alone outweighed costs. These positive returns show that the program was a success in terms of not only its community and member benefits but also a successful investment of federal and community funds.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Upon examining the impacts of the sampled AmeriCorps programs, 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. There were some outstanding programs that achieved impacts in all eight 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, which often had less impressive service impacts. The remaining programs said a focus on service impacts. Similarly, these programs tended to have less impressive member impacts. There were one or two ineffective programs with few impacts in any area.

Altogether the efforts of these sampled programs are representative of the impacts of AmeriCorps*State/National. Overall, programs met the goal of achieving impacts in these eight areas. Although 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 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 as a whole. 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 previously been involved in service.

In contrast, programs were less effective in providing non-service related development for members. This particularly affected members with initial low levels of education. While most programs attempted to do so, members got very little effective support and monitoring in the area of completing a high school degree. Programs most often offered too little and/or failed to understand the level of effort needed to achieve success in this area. With the exception of a few AmeriCorps programs whose focus was providing opportunities for at-risk youth

In conclusion, the AmeriCorps*State/National Direct programs provided needed services that had positive impacts on America's communities. AmeriCorps members gained valuable skills and opportunities through serving in AmeriCorps. In weighing these outcomes and impacts against the cost of the program, AmeriCorps*State/National Direct provided a substantial positive return on the federal and local funds invested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, Aguirre International makes the following recommendations:

Implement Program Funding and Planning Strategies

The results of this study indicate that the Corporation for National Service can more effectively support AmeriCorps grantees in implementing programs that have impact on members, service recipients, and communities by incorporating the following funding and program planning strategies:

1. Assist programs in selecting service interventions that are of long-term benefit and capable of achieving short-term impacts within the one-year AmeriCorps framework.
2. Continue to take risks on small grassroots organizations and foster creative institutional arrangements. At the same time, provide guidance to these small institutions to move them towards sustainability.
3. Maintain a high community profile through visible service projects – even if they are only special one-day events. In addition, create a high visibility for AmeriCorps logos, t-shirts, etc.
4. Increase or maintain focus on strengthening community infrastructure.
5. Retain the educational award and encourage programs to create a culture where education is valued and academic pursuits, service, and future career choices are intentionally linked.
6. Discourage education programs that consist of outsourcing GED preparation and asking members to attend on their own time. Members' time spent in these programs should be part of their AmeriCorps hours. Programs that do outsource GED preparation need to use program resources for monitoring and support.
7. Encourage programs to integrate information technology into their service delivery strategies and provide AmeriCorps members with opportunities to use these technologies in the course of their service experience.

Upgrade Member Selection and Support

In addition to providing guidance that will encourage more effective program planning, the Corporation can also increase impacts on members and communities by designing funding and policy practices that support economically and educationally disadvantaged members. Aguirre International recommends that the Corporation:

1. Continue funding programs in low-income neighborhoods that attract and train members who have few opportunities. Special attention should be paid to help these members develop the knowledge, skills, and strategies that make them employable, particularly in the communities from which they come.
2. Require programs to train supervisors in encouraging participation in GED preparation programs and providing support to members participating in said programs.
3. For members with low education levels, consider transitions that link academic work with service; take advantage of peer support; and provide a bridge to higher education through guidance, support, and successful academic experiences.

4. Encourage programs to hire former members for paid positions.
5. Require programs to help members (for those who need it) gain access to higher education.

Improve Member Training and Service Experience

Beyond supporting disadvantaged members, the Corporation can improve impacts for members by encouraging programs to include the following elements into their member training and experience:

1. Support member training that links vocational/technical skills with service. Offer certificates where appropriate and provide access to such training for members whose skill gaps inhibit access to other kinds of educational opportunities.
2. Encourage programs to design projects that maximize life skills by providing members diverse opportunities to develop the skills in teamwork, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills, technology use, and problem solving.
3. Require program designs to include formal member reflection times, which members are encouraged to reflect on the skill they bring to their service, resources for enhancing these skills, and progress made. Train supervisors to foster development of life skills and service experience reflection in members.
4. Encourage programs to foster members in a broad definition of civic involvement. This definition should include continued commitment to address community needs in various forms (e.g., through volunteerism, on-going formal and informal civic involvement, social service or environmental career choices, and development of personal, life, and technical skills that benefit communities in need).

Provide Technical Support to Programs

Finally, the Corporation can ensure that programs have the technical support they need. Results from Aguirre International's study of programs during the 1994-95 and 1995-96 program year indicate that, in order to maximize documentable program outputs, outcomes, and impacts on beneficiaries, members, and communities the Corporation should:

1. Upgrade program members' skills in the area of monitoring service outputs and impacts.
2. Provide program development in the areas of assignment structure, supervision practices, and project communication.
3. Provide programs with models and guidance in developing education programs for members, particularly those who have not completed high school or obtained their GEDs. Program efforts should include sustained support and guidance, along with help in reducing significant barriers to academic success.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

The Aguirre evaluation employed a research methodology designed to obtain a multifaceted view of the impact of AmeriCorps programs on communities and of AmeriCorps service on members. The design afforded breadth of coverage as well as depth of understanding about how and why AmeriCorps has had an impact on communities and members.

The goals of this evaluation were to (1) gather complete, accurate information; (2) capture the diversity of programs, communities, and participants; (3) use a sound conceptual framework and high quality data collection instruments; (4) work efficiently, minimizing the burden on programs and participants; (5) cultivate active partnerships with our respondents; and, (6) report findings in a way that is easy to read and comprehend.

DATA SOURCES

During the first and second program years the evaluators, in the course of their on-site visits, collected a considerable amount of data. Two types of data sources were collected and evaluated for this report: 1) Existing documentation on AmeriCorps programs and operating sites, and 2) data collected by our evaluators in the course of their on-site visitations. These data sources are discussed in greater detail below.

TIER ONE DATA SOURCES

As part of the evaluation's effort to leverage monitoring and evaluative activities undertaken by the Corporation, grantees, and subgrantees, Aguirre International's evaluation staff collected and analyzed the pertinent documentation. This documentation, along with the Annual Accomplishment Survey (discussed below), forms the basis for the Tier One evaluation. Components include the following:

Grant Application

Each AmeriCorps program's grant application was its blueprint for action,

including objectives, methods, and evaluation plans. It usually provided a good overview of the program's history, resources, and its common interests with AmeriCorps.

Modified Objective Form

Programs awarded AmeriCorps grants were asked to restate project goals in this special format prescribed by the Corporation. This provided useful comparability of certain baseline data across some 300 program records.

Operating Site Quarterly Report

This report provided updated information on a program's AmeriCorps members, the services they were providing, and the extent of progress towards meeting program goals.

Operating Site Information Form

This form was the Corporation's primary source of demographic data on the members working at a particular site. Some State Commissions also required their subgrantees to submit an additional Operating Site Quarterly Report.

Members' Entry/Exit Forms

AmeriCorps programs collected information on these forms from members both upon enrollment and upon departure. Comparison of the information provided by members on each of these forms is useful for determining the impact of the AmeriCorps experience.

Annual Accomplishment Review Survey

Since September 1995, when the first AmeriCorps programs completed a year of operations, the Annual Accomplishment Review Survey has become the primary source of data collected in the evaluation's Tier One, supplemented by data supplied by the Corporation on programs and members. It replaced the Four-Month Accomplishment Review discussed below. The survey sought quantifiable, behavioral outcome measures of program accomplishments, including measures of quantity, quality, and dollar-denominated investment returns.

TIER TWO ON-SITE DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The Aguirre International evaluation team also developed its own series of data collection instruments, which were employed primarily in the Tier Two site visits. These data sources are discussed in greater detail below. These instruments are:

Four-Month Accomplishment Review

This is a preliminary version of the Annual Accomplishment Review Survey, which was not sent out to all sites until August 1995. This review was developed for use in the interim, when no site had yet been in existence for as long as a year. The Four-Month Accomplishment Review also served as a pilot test instrument for the Annual Accomplishment Review Survey and is the basis for the Cost/Benefit Analysis for the Community Impact Study.

The review took into account the goals that programs identified in their grant applications and the internal evaluation reports that they were required to send to the Corporation. The data collected in the review is primarily information that programs are already obliged to track for the Corporation in order to document progress toward their goals, such as number of participants, hours served, types of services provided, etc. The review contained seven sections: 1) Overall Description and Operating Site; 2) Recipients; 3) Review of Community Building Objectives; 4) Review of Collaboration/ Partners; 5) Review of Participant Development Objectives; 6) Review of Community Service Objectives; and 7) Description of Program Accomplishments.

Cost Benefit Data Collection Form

After the 60 sampled AmeriCorps programs completed a year of operations, the Cost Benefit Data Collection Form became the primary source of data collected in the evaluation's Tier Two, supplemented by data on programs and members supplied by the Corporation. It replaced the Four-Month Accomplishment Review discussed above. The survey was inclusive of all the data components sought in the Annual Accomplishment Review Survey for Tier 1 programs, but in addition, request more in-depth partner involvement and contribution information.

Administrator Interview Guide

The Administrator is the person who directs the program in which AmeriCorps Members are working. This is also the person who is responsible for completing the Corporation’s Operating Site Quarterly Report. The Guide

includes a worksheet designed to promote discussion of the month-to-month activities related to achieving program objectives. It covers planning, implementation, evaluation objectives, and barriers and facilitators related to these objectives. Interviewers were instructed to take into account changes in program objectives documented in the Corporation's Modified Objective Form. Subsequent changes are also noted.

Operating Site Supervisor Interview Guide

This questionnaire was administered to the individual who has direct responsibility for supervising AmeriCorps members at the work site. If the site has more than one supervisor, one is selected at random for the interview. The questionnaire is structured somewhat like the Administrator Interview Guide, but is more task-specific and seeks greater detail on the preparation, skills and work habits of AmeriCorps members.

Community Representative Interview Guide

Three to five community representatives were chosen for interviews that use this guide. Those chosen for interviews typically included representatives of the partner organization of the program being evaluated, local officials (such as a superintendent of schools), local government employees (such as health workers), and beneficiaries. Our interviewers were responsible for identifying individuals who have worked closely with AmeriCorps members and could offer an informed point of view on their service. The guide sought the community perspective on AmeriCorps members' performance.

The three interview guides shared a basic structure. Each included questions in the following areas: 1) planning and preparation; 2) implementation and revisions in plans; 3) policies, procedures, and program management; and 4) additional comments. The formats employed for interview questions included: 1) open-ended questions; 2) open-ended questions with probes; 3) questions with a forced-choice response; and 4) tables with forced-choice options. Handouts of the most elaborate tables were prepared to accompany the interview guides in order to make it easier for interview subjects to respond.

Interviews were taped if the interviewer thought it useful and the respondent was comfortable with the idea. Tapes were used only for research purposes

and were not shared with anyone who does not work for Aguirre International without the permission of the respondent.

Life Skills Inventory

This instrument was designed to collect information on the life experiences and opportunities AmeriCorps members had during their service. It also sought a self-assessment of skills and competencies. It included: 1) School and Work Experiences; 2) Community Service Experience and Perspectives; 3) Work Experiences and Skills; 4) Perspectives on AmeriCorps and on Program Experiences; 5) Personal Outlook on Education and Career; and 6) Demographic Information. A panel of 1,800 AmeriCorps Members were selected for the inventory from the 60 programs sampled in Tier Two, along with 750 non-member controls. The inventory was administered to AmeriCorps members by program site staff.

Service Activity Observation Guide

Interviewers observed AmeriCorps members for at least one hour and up to four hours, if possible. The Guide (see Appendix I) is designed to help interviewers collect specific information on: 1) the type of service offered; 2) how members interact with others; 3) logistics and supervisory issues; and 4) beneficiaries' responses. These data help to substantiate what was learned earlier from interviews or to raise issues that call for further investigation.

TIER THREE CASE STUDIES

The methodology for Tier Three was based on in-depth studies, both for the Community Impact Study and the Member Impact Study. Structured Observation and Beneficiary Panel Studies were used for the Community Impact Study, while the Member Impact Study relied upon a Life Skills Assessment, Journal Analysis, and Focus Groups. These components are described below.

Structured Observation

Evaluators visited the eight programs in the Tier Three sample several times over the course of the each year as part of the evaluation activities. Using a modified ethnographic approach, the interviewers used a case study guide to make observations and to maximize comparability among the case studies.

They observed programs, interviewed administrators, and staff held focus groups with members and interviewed beneficiaries.

Beneficiary Panel Studies

As part of their Tier Three case studies, evaluation specialists designed and carried out long-term beneficiary impact evaluations. The goal of the beneficiary studies was to measure the impact of the services provided by AmeriCorps programs. Some 1,500 interviews (approximately 187 per site) were allotted for studying beneficiaries. The actual allocation depended on the nature of the program being evaluated. For a beneficiary panel review, an evaluation specialist typically interviewed 60 participants (or 30 participants and 30 controls) three times: at intake, on completion, and for follow-up. Beneficiary control groups were appropriate when the service that AmeriCorps provides constitutes a human service intervention in the lives of recipients, because contrasting the experiences of beneficiaries and controls emphasizes the impact of the services provided. Whenever possible, beneficiary evaluations build on a program's own assessment activities.

Life Skills Assessment

The Life Skills Assessment (LSA) sought to provide a reliable, objective measure of AmeriCorps Members' actual workplace competencies prior to participation in their programs, at the completion of their programs, and one year later. It was designed to measure adult learners' basic skills according to the criteria developed by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving the Necessary Skills (SCANS), a joint federal initiative of three cabinet-level departments. Programs were asked to assess all members with this instrument (pre and post) and in some cases, Tier Three evaluators conducted the assessment while on site. Members were asked to respond to a hypothetical situation, by answering questions organized to reflect the competencies outlined in the SCANS framework. These included problem solving collaboration, decision making, basic skills (reading/writing and communication) and dealing with diversity issues. A sample of matching pre and post responses was analyzed and integrated into the Life Skills Analysis.

Journal Analysis

AmeriCorps members' journals were used not simply as anecdotal accounts, but also as important sources of highly personal information on the impact of AmeriCorps on its members (once the journals are structured to generate comparable data). A team of evaluators developed topics and questions that members were asked to respond in their journals. Responses were analyzed by using a content review method.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were employed in the Tier Three studies as another means of exploring the impact of AmeriCorps programs on communities as well as on participants, since such groups are particularly useful for the investigation of program interventions that have resulted in unanticipated impacts, both positive and negative. Tier Three focus groups with AmeriCorps members were scheduled on a quarterly basis in order to chronicle the changes that members experience as a result of service learning.

SITE VISIT SCHEDULES

Sites visits were an integral part of the Tier Two and Tier Three components of the evaluation. In Tier Two, each of the 60 sites in the random sample received three site visits, an initial one to gather baseline data and two follow-ups. The first site visit took place 3 to 5 months after program inception, with follow-ups scheduled for 12 months and 24 months after program inception. Tier Three sites received a minimum of six visits: a baseline visit at 3 to 5 months; plus quarterly visits at 12 months, 15 months, 18 months, 21 months, and 24 months.

DATA ANALYSIS

Four special techniques were being employed to make calculations, primarily from quantitative data obtained in the Four-Month Accomplishment Reviews, Cost Benefit Data Form, and Annual Accomplishment Review for the assessment of investment returns, both for the Community Impact Study and the Member Impact Study: 1) recording dollar values when these are known; 2) obtaining professional estimates of value (or savings) in cases where these

can be estimated; 3) calculating dollar benefits from leveraging; and 4) using contingent valuation in those cases in which benefits are hard to measure, such as the value of a new park or the impact of environmental improvement. There are also a variety of ways of measuring the return on investment in AmeriCorps members for the Member Information Study. Information from Entry, Exit and Follow-up Questionnaires have been employed to compare groups of AmeriCorps members and controls according to such traditional measures as: 1) post-program employment and earnings; 2) negative outcomes prevented; 3) government benefits not needed; and 4) additional lifetime earnings from educational benefits earned. Where observed, non-monetary returns on investment were also noted.

In most cost/benefit analyses, there is some degree of uncertainty to the calculation of either costs or benefits, or both. This is true of the AmeriCorps investment, too, because in many cases the evaluation is attempting to place a dollar value on things that do not have a market price. This is particularly true since the evaluation seeks to establish both the quantitative and qualitative benefits of AmeriCorps programs.

After cost/benefit calculations, additional information is supplied about intangible benefits, so readers are free to assign their own values to the results of the activities described and to adjust the dollar calculation in light of the non-quantifiable assessment.

APPENDIX L:
PROGRAM SAMPLING FRAME

The research design for the AmeriCorps Community and Member Impacts analysis in Aguirre International's National Study of AmeriCorps randomly selected 60 programs from the universal-list of AmeriCorps-funded programs. Moreover, it also would have been desirable to design the sample to give all members equal chances of selection. Because of the limitations of the available data, however, that was not possible. It was possible to come reasonably close to doing so by sampling programs approximately proportional to size and taking approximately the same number of members from each program.

The first step was to establish the sampling frame -- the list of programs. This was accomplished by editing an electronic list obtained from CNCS to eliminate duplicates and those sites that were not funded. Programs were divided into four groups according to type: Federal programs, National Direct programs, State programs, and Other programs. Although most programs were modest in size, some programs had or expected to have 100 or more members. An approximate index of relative size (2, 3, 4, or 5) was assigned to programs with more than 100 members. All other programs received a size index of 1.

The selection of programs proceeded as follows. The four sites (three Federal and one National Direct) with a size index of 5 were sampled with certainty. The other 56 sampled sites were selected at random from the remaining programs according to the size index and type as follows. The list of programs was first put in order according to type, with Federal and then National Direct programs at the top of the list. The State and Other programs were put in order by state and by number within state. A number giving the cumulative sum of the size index was associated with each program. This sum reached 370 across the 319 programs. A systematic sample was then drawn, proportional to the size index, by generating a pseudo-random number between 0 and 370/56 = 6.607 and then using that value and incrementing it successively by 6.607 to generate a sequence of numbers. The first program with cumulative sum greater than each of the numbers in the sequence was selected for the sample.

This systematic sample provides a random sample with known probability proportional to the size index of selecting a given site. It avoids the possibility that by very bad luck very few programs would be selected from among the Federal or National Direct programs. It also ensures that states with many programs will have at least one selected and increases the likelihood of geographic diversity.

Because 13 of the 60 selected programs were indicated as beginning in January 1996 or later and for purposes of the 1994 accomplishments report programs needed to have begun in December 1995 or earlier, 13 replacement programs were selected. They were selected from among the programs not selected in the original sample that were indicated as having begun in December 1995 or earlier. The systematic sample

for selecting those sites was done using the same algorithm as described above with a different sampling fraction to reflect the smaller sample of 13 and the reduced sampling frame. The number of programs of each type, by size index, is indicated in the table below.

Program Type by Size Index

Program Type/Index	4	3	2	1	Total	Weighted Total
Federal	0	1	3	11	15	20
National Direct	1	2	9	20	32	48
State	2	4	16	239	261	291
Other	0	0	0	11	11	11
Total	3	7	28	281	319	370

Within each program, the list of sites was permuted randomly. The sites were then sampled in order until the desired number of members had been sampled. For programs with groups of sites at widely dispersed locations, the sites were grouped into "supersites" and the supersites permuted, then the sites permuted within supersite. This approach ensured that the sites each had an equal chance of selection but that the sampled sites for a program were not impractically separated geographically. All sampling selections of sites or of individuals to be included in the sample were done personally by the statistician or under his direct supervision. In every case either computer-generated pseudo-random numbers or mechanical randomization devices were used. In no case were field personnel permitted to make sample selection decisions.

The selection of the Tier 3 sample from among the 60 programs was done as follows. The sampled programs were divided into seven groups or strata according to characteristics of the programs and then one (or in one case two) programs were sampled from the stratum at random. The strata were State IP (1 of 15), State MIP (1 of 15), State Team (2 of 15), National Direct IP/MIP (1 of 5), National Direct Team (1 of 4), Federal IP/MIP (1 of 2), Federal Team (1 of 4).

In the second year of the study, sampled programs that continued were kept in the sample. Programs that had closed were generally replaced by other programs of the same type, except that the number of State programs had dropped and the number of Other programs increased enough that the sample was shifted somewhat from State to Other programs. The replacement programs were selected using probability proportional to the size index.

Sampling weights were calculated as inversely proportional to the probability of selection. That selection probability was calculated as the probability of selection of the program (either certainty or with probability proportional to the size index) time the probability of selection of the member from that program (equal to the number of members sampled divided by the number of members in the program). The sampling weights were normalized to sum to the number of members in the sample (that is, to average 1.0).