STUDY OF RACE, CLASS, AND ETHNICITY IN AMERICORPS PROGRAMS

for

Corporation for National Service

by

MACRO INTERNATIONAL INC.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Macro study on "Race, Class, and Ethnicity in AmeriCorps Programs," requested by the Corporation for National Service, comes at a time when the topic of racial and ethnic diversity is prominent in the national discourse. The effects of socioeconomic divisions overlay and often appear more intractable than differences of race and ethnicity. Those involved in the debate over the benefits and challenges of diversity find little research available to support their arguments. Much of the data to evaluate the impact of diversity is anecdotal; research has focused primarily on college students and corporate employees in the management literature.

Since its inception, the Corporation has required AmeriCorps programs "to strengthen communities and encourage mutual respect and cooperation among citizens of different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and education levels, among both men and women and individuals with disabilities." Although the value of this emphasis is implicit, the Corporation sought to determine how programs are supporting this effort and to assess its impacts. The research approach chosen was qualitative. The research considered the varied and unique circumstances across the wide range of AmeriCorps programs, by in-depth inquiry into program operations, staff and Member perspectives, and the community served. Thematic cross-site content analysis was conducted to identify patterns and trends that support diversity. The following research questions guided the study:

- What elements are indicative of the successful support of diversity?
- What are the benefits of diversity?
- What effect does the AmeriCorps experience have on Members' tolerance of and attitudes toward others?

METHODOLOGY

A total of 12 AmeriCorps programs were selected for intense study by Macro researchers. The programs were selected on the basis of a diverse Member Corps, good performance in delivering service, and having actively reflected on the implications of diversity, although not necessarily having resolved the issues that had surfaced. As a whole, they represented the breadth of AmeriCorps programs with respect to urban vs. rural, size, geographical location, type, Member status, program model, and service area. A diverse team consisting of one evaluation specialist and one diversity trainer visited each program site. During the course of the 2- or 3-day site visit, the researchers interviewed program staff, host site staff, and service recipients. They moderated focus group discussions with Members and observed service activities. At the end of the program year, Members were asked to complete a written survey focusing on attitudes toward diversity.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS THAT INDICATED SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT OF DIVERSITY

There are eight program elements that had the potential to successfully support diversity in the AmeriCorps service delivery and Member development.

- **Program Design.** The first overarching consideration was the importance that the program placed on diversity in achieving its goals. This was accomplished by both explicit and implicit means. Ideally, programs integrate diversity into their policies and procedures and reinforce its importance in daily operations. When issues arise that appear to contradict these values, there are opportunities to discuss the situation openly.

- **Program Staff.** Programs could address the role of program staff in supporting diversity by having staff diversity reflect that of the Members to the extent possible; and importantly, by ensuring that all staff have the skills to interact cross-culturally with Members who differ from them. Staff who effectively support diverse groups of Corps Members have strong feedback skills, confidence outside of their own ✌comfort zone,✍ and team facilitation skills.

- **Member Recruitment.** Recruitment strategies to yield the desired diversity mix should be intentionally developed and implemented by program leadership. Furthermore, programs should recognize that their efforts in next year■s recruitment sends a message to current Members. Attracting a diverse Corps is only a precursor to the successful support of diversity; equally critical are elements that support diversity and promote Member retention.

- **Training.** Ongoing reinforcement of diversity training throughout the year is part of successful program efforts. But merely scheduling training is not sufficient to address fully the diversity issues that emerge. At only half the sites visited did Members report high levels of satisfaction with the diversity training they received. Training topics need to include workshops to improve communication and promote effective working relationships among Members. Specific areas found to be useful include conflict management, diversity awareness, sexuality and gender issues, team building, feedback skills, and facilitation skills development. Multiple methods are also advocated: varying in length and including experience-based approaches (discussions, role playing, and Member-led sessions). This variety appeals to different Member learning styles and different needs.

- **Assignments.** Member assignments can be structured to support diversity at two levels✍in host site programs and in teams. Assignments to and within host site programs usually depend on program goals and service needs. Often creating diverse teams within the program was used as a balance to promote diverse relationships among Members when homogeneity had occurred in placements at the host site.

- **Attention to Group Conflict.** This program element requires strategies and tools that programs can use on a daily basis to ensure that Members receive the skills necessary to work through conflicts constructively. These contentions can take a number of forms: inter-Member conflicts. Member-staff conflicts, and or Member-host site personnel conflicts.

- **Host Site Relationships.** The extent to which diversity was seen as important and reinforced by the host agencies was a critical factor in helping Members to feel supported.

When these host agencies are active in recruiting, selecting, and placing diverse Members, their value was more readily communicated to them. Supportive programs are also more inclined to intervene if a conflict or diversity issue arises at a host site.

- **Member Retention.** Programs that successfully supported diversity not only recruited, but also retained, a diverse group of Members. The retention of a diverse team of Corps Members had a direct impact on the morale and motivation to contribute of individuals, as well as team cohesion and group effectiveness. The perceptions among present Corps Members about attrition tied to race, class, or ethnicity can be detrimental even if the analysis of the numeric data on the race, class, and ethnicity of those who left does not support that link.

BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY

The benefits of diversity can be seen in their effect on the key participants in AmeriCorps programs: Members, service recipients, host sites, AmeriCorps program staff, and communities.

- **Members.** The Members reap the greatest number of benefits. The most basic benefit was simply the chance to experience diversity, being with and serving people from different communities. The extent to which Members appreciated this benefit was related in part to their own background. Members who grew up in homogeneous neighborhoods found this opportunity particularly beneficial. Other consequences can flow from this experience—dispelling of stereotypes, learning to approach things from different perspectives, developing self-confidence, and extending diversity lessons to the workplace.

- **Service Recipients.** In some communities, the diversity in the Member Corps may be the only people different from themselves to which service recipients are exposed. A service recipient's relationship with a Member may be the first long-term, intensive relationship that person has had with someone from a different background. Some service recipients benefit by having a role model—not simply when the Member is of the same race or ethnicity. Many host agencies request mentoring by college students or males, in particular, for youth in their programs. Beyond providing role models, service recipients benefit by: seeing that the willingness to help crosses cultures, gaining an opportunity to exchange perspectives, and being exposed to others different from themselves in a positive way.

- **Host Agencies.** Diversity in AmeriCorps Members helps host agencies in many ways. Specifically, host sites reported improved outreach to groups that had not previously been served; this was especially true for non-English speaking populations. An added benefit was that the diversity in the AmeriCorps program served as a catalyst to make connections between various community organizations who had not interacted in the past.

- **Program Staff.** AmeriCorps program staff have a dual role with respect to Member diversity: they both learn from the diversity of Members and support Member diversity.

Like Members, staff have a chance to develop relationships with people from various cultures with whom they might not otherwise have come in contact. Many also found that their skills in managing diversity, communication, and problem solving were enhanced.

- **Community.** As a whole, the community benefits from the sum of the benefits noted, especially enhanced service delivery. A direct positive impact can be observed when diverse Members work with each other and with service recipients, and that experience may be felt among the recipients' family and neighbors in disadvantaged communities. This benefit was noted more strongly in the more segregated communities.

MEMBER ATTITUDES

Macro developed an instrument that was administered at the end of the program year to capture the views of all Members. Questions related to Members' assessment of program support of diversity and the program climate, Member behavior and attitudes, and perceived benefits.

The following attitudes were most strongly reflected in the survey results:

- Members are very comfortable with interacting with service recipients from different backgrounds.

- Members think that getting to know Members from different racial and ethnic backgrounds has been worthwhile.

- Members strongly believe that Members of different racial and ethnic backgrounds contribute equally to service.

At the same time, the survey and the focus group uncovered difficulties in the experience. Working together with people from a wide range of backgrounds and providing service in disadvantaged communities is a very intense experience. Members are confronting—and not always successfully—what it means to interact with colleagues who are different from themselves.

The survey revealed other challenges to programs in working with diverse Members. Members appear to be more comfortable with differences based on race than social class. Some of the smaller subgroups within the Member population may be experiencing the program differently than the rest—specifically, those who classify themselves as "other" in terms of race/ethnicity, those who do not have a high school diploma, and those who identify themselves as coming from an upper class background.

The data also suggest that the program's performance in supporting diversity does, indeed, make a difference. When Members are involved in a program that successfully supports diversity through training, team building, and similar activities, their behavior and attitudes

appear more accepting of diversity and open to others. When programs were assessed by their Members to be doing a good job, a whole host of positive attitudes and behaviors tended to follow.

OTHER DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

An additional variant among programs was what constituted ✌diversity✍ in terms of their concerns and actions. Repeatedly the point was made that there were many facets of diversity that define a person and contribute to what they have to offer. There are many aspects of diversity beyond race, class, and ethnicity that challenge programs to respond and to make these differences benefit the program and their service.

The specific forms of diversity that staff and Members called to our attention, or that we observed as raising issues with which the program dealt, were all types of disabilities, gender, age differences, educational background, motivational differences, sexual orientation, religion, place of origin, and readiness to work.

NEXT STEPS

A standalone document on ✌Practical Applications✍ that stem from the research on this project will be sent to all State/National programs and NCCC campuses. It is intended to provide strategies for supporting a diverse group of Corps Members, based on the lessons gathered from the 12 programs that participated in this study.

CONCLUSIONS

Recruiting a diverse Corps is a necessary but not sufficient step for successfully supporting diversity. The program itself must set the tone and create an environment which values Member diversity throughout the program year. The diversity issues that surfaced in the programs we visited covered many facets of Members' cultural background✍beyond race, class, and ethnicity✍including gender, physical disability, learning disability, age, sexual orientation, nationality, and religion. There were complex inter-relationships among these facets, both within and between Members. Implementing strategies to support diversity that have not been tailored appropriately to a program's Members may be more divisive than taking no action. A successfully supported diverse Corps of Members can generate more benefits for all parties involved. We found that a diverse group of Corps Members, working together effectively, provided a range of benefits at the personal programmatic, and community levels✍beyond the service itself. Many of these gains, such as increased self-esteem, recognition of the impact of

personal biases, and cross-cultural communication skills, will benefit Members long after they complete their AmeriCorps service.

List of Exhibits and Tables

Page Number

Exhibits

Tables

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

> At the dawning of the twentieth century the eminent black sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois forecast that the defining problem of the twentieth century would be "the color line" (Du Bois, 1903). It is at once sobering and tragic that Du Bois's insight holds true as we are poised to enter the new millennium.—L. Bobo, *Public Opinion Quarterly (Spring 1997)*

> The emphasis on racial differences has obscured the fact that African-Americans, whites, and other ethnic groups share many common concerns, are beset by many common problems, and have many common values, aspirations, and hopes.—William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*

The dialog on race in this country has flourished and faded through various times in our national history—in political, public, and research arenas. Today, when we are more integrated racially and ethnically than at any previous time, the topic of race and ethnicity has again assumed a prominent place in our public consciousness. A glance at the peoples of the United States substantiates the importance of racial and ethnic diversity as a national issue. Entering the 21st century, our nation will be composed of an increasing proportion of people of color. By the year 2000, 85 percent of the workforce will be made up of women, people of color, and recent immigrants, according to projections by the U.S. Department of Education (1987) and others (Smith, 1989; Green, 1988; Wright, 1987; Thompson and Roberts, 1985). By the year 2050, the percentage of non-Hispanic whites in the United States will have fallen to 52 percent from 76 percent (*USA Today*, October 15, 1996).

In addition to racial and ethnic divisions, socioeconomic (or "class") divisions permeate our society. Some researchers characterize class divisions to be of more significance than those of race. They depict achievements by middle class African Americans unencumbered by their race, whereas the lower classes of every race and ethnicity have been left behind in today's postindustrial economy—often in isolated neighborhoods characterized by high concentrations of poverty (Wilson, 1996; 1989; 1978; Weiss, 1992; Jargowsky, 1997).

With the disappearance of this country's manufacturing base—which provided a middle-class income for high school graduates—opportunities diminished for unskilled labor to obtain employment providing a comfortable income (Wilson, 1996; Dudley, 1994; Lusane, 1994; Pohlmann, 1993; Weiss, 1992). Therefore, competition for even minimum-wage jobs has become extremely keen. A study of the fast-food industry in Harlem found that only one person was hired for every 14 applicants (Newman and Lennon, 1995).

One researcher, Richard Kahlenberg, has even proposed (Kahlenberg, 1996) that affirmative action should be based not on race or gender, but on class or socioeconomic status. As the basis for his argument, he cited Martin Luther King in *Why We Can't Wait* (1964):

> While Negroes form the vast majority of America's disadvantaged, there are millions of white poor who would also benefit from a bill of rights for the disadvantaged. It is a simple matter of justice that America in dealing creatively with the task of raising the Negro from backwardness should also be rescuing a large stratum of forgotten white poor.

In many ways, however, the divisions of race/ethnicity and those of class are inextricably linked. Although whites accounted for more than half of the 44.9 million poverty-stricken people in the United States in 1995 (57 percent, or 25.4 million white Americans), larger proportions of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans than whites live in poverty. Approximately 30 percent of all African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans live in poverty, compared to roughly 12 percent of whites (Harwood, 1997).

In the fast-food study cited above, employers differentiated among racial/ethnic groups in making hiring decisions—even when the applicants had similar educational qualifications. Low-income African Americans were at the greatest disadvantage when seeking employment opportunities. They were rejected at a much higher rate than applicants from any other ethnic group. When class was held constant, race still remained a factor (Newman and Lennon, 1995).

It was in that environment that the Corporation for National Service raised the research question, What are the benefits, if any, of diversity in AmeriCorps programs? In the frequent and often passionate national debates on diversity, the discussants make conflicting claims about the dangers and the benefits of diversity. The arguments, though, tend to rely on anecdotal information, because there has been little research to evaluate the impact of diversity in the programs.

There are two areas of exceptions to the paucity of research: studies of college students and studies of employees. Affirmative action is often the impetus for the studies. Higher education studies (such as, Astin, 1993 and Villalpando, 1994) found that socializing across racial lines had positive effects on a student's academic and personal development. Organizational studies showed that diversity of employees affected organizational components closely related to performance (such as communications, creativity, productivity, and problem solving). The results, however, have been mixed. Some studies showed that diverse groups and organizations, properly managed, had an advantage over homogeneous ones (Cox, Lobel, and McLeod, 1991; Mandell and Kohler-Gray, 1990; Marmer-Solomon, 1989; Esty 1988, Copeland, 1988). Others suggest that increasing diversity in organizations has a negative effect on group cohesion (Cox, 1991).

In designing and conducting this study on diversity in AmeriCorps programs, we remained open to the challenges that accompany diversity. As Neil L. Rudenstine, president of Harvard University, advised in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (1996):

> We should not romanticize diversity as we assess its value. We know that close association among people from different backgrounds can lead to episodes of tension, and that common understandings often emerge only slowly and with considerable effort, if at all. Yet we need to remember that the character of American society, from its very beginnings, has been shaped by our collective willingness to carry forward an unprecedented experiment in diversity, the benefits of which have seldom come without friction and strain.

In each chapter of this report, we explore challenges as they relate to the topic at hand.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The Corporation requires that each AmeriCorps program "strengthen communities and encourage mutual respect and cooperation among citizens of different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and education levels, among both men and women and individuals with disabilities." Implicit in that mission statement is an assumption that diversity affects both programs and their participants positively. The Corporation requested an evaluation of diversity in AmeriCorps to determine the effects exactly. The evaluation addressed the following research questions:

- *What elements are indicative of successful support of diversity?* We examined a wide range of program activities—such as recruitment, orientation, training, placement, and support and supervision—looking for elements demonstrating that the program had created a harmonious environment for diverse Members. We also looked at common diversity-related difficulties and how Members and staff overcame them.

- *What if any are the benefits of diversity?* We considered the benefits for Members, for staff, for programs, and for communities. We also explored benefits related to advances in the lifelong process of cultural awareness and tolerance, as well as benefits to the achievement of service goals.

- *What effect does the AmeriCorps experience have on Members' tolerance of and attitudes toward others?* We investigated changes in Members' perceptions and beliefs about others.

To answer the above research questions, we used a case study approach in which two Macro researchers made intensive two- to three-day visits to 12 programs. Each site visit team consisted of one researcher with experience in evaluating CNS programs and one diversity specialist. They interviewed program staff, host site program staff, and service recipients. They moderated a focus group discussion with Members. They observed Members performing their service. Finally, a

written survey of Members' attitudes was completed at program sites as a follow-up activity at the end of the program year.

Each member of the research team took extensive field notes during the site visit. On return from the site, the notes were typed, further annotated, and organized topically to be more useful in the analysis phase. Each researcher reviewed the notes of the other person in the team for that site, and clarifications and consensus were achieved for each site's data.

Thematic cross-site content analysis was conducted to identify patterns and trends related to diversity, indicators of its support, and its benefits. Multiple group sessions with all researchers assisted in the development, refinement, and interpretation of site data. Sessions were organized around each of the research topics. The process generally consisted of brainstorming, discussion and clarification, and reorganization of concepts and supporting data. In the group sessions, we recorded ideas on large sheets of paper that was later typed and distributed. The group then contributed to one or more refinements of the ideas through written and personal communication.

Several matrices were developed to summarize findings across sites about indicators of support and benefits observed. Each researcher completed the matrix independently, and the pair responsible for the site discussed any areas of disagreement to create final tools to assist further analysis of patterns across sites and frequency of occurrence.

At this point, one individual assumed responsibility for writing the material to be presented in a particular chapter. Further interaction and collaboration involved distribution of chapter drafts, group discussions, additional rewriting, and consultations on specific issues or sites. A final draft report was submitted to the Corporation for dissemination and comments. This report incorporates the revisions or expansions requested from CNS and subsequent review by the Macro study team.

The section below describes the process used to select the 12 AmeriCorps*State/National and NCCC sites visited.

SELECTING SITES

The research design called for in-depth site visits to 12 program sites. Each site had to meet three criteria:

1) The site was doing well in carrying out its service.

2) The site had a diverse Member Corps in terms of race, class, and ethnicity.

3) The site had deliberately considered the issue of diversity and its potential impact on the program in a variety of areas.

As a starting point, the Corporation defined diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and class. When we selected sites, we used Members' education level to represent class.[1] Corporation databases contain information at the program level on race, ethnicity, and education levels for Members.

To begin selecting sites, we used a list of the 420 AmeriCorps programs. Corporation program officers provided us with information on which programs were doing particularly well in carrying out their service. Macro narrowed the number of eligible programs from 420 to 257.

Then we examined Corporation databases to determine the extent of Members diversity for those programs. The information was available at the operating-site level. The sites ranged from those in which all members belonged to the same racial/ethnic category to those in which the largest racial/ethnic category comprised 25 percent of the Members.

We needed a minimum number of Members at a program to study aspects of diversity, so we excluded sites with fewer than 10 Members. We categorized the rest by the proportion of Members in the largest racial/ethnic group. The following pattern emerged.

Percentage of Members in Largest Racial/ Ethnic Group	Operating Sites		Cumulative Percent
	No.	Percent	
85–100%	164	30.1%	30.1%
70–84%	111	20.4	50.5
55–69%	137	25.1	75.6
25–54%	133	24.4	100.0

In analyzing the pattens of racial and ethnic groups within categories (especially the bottom three, in which there was some heterogeneity), we found great variety. The programs with the greatest possibility for diverse membership were those in the category in which no more than 54 percent of Members were in the *largest* racial/ethnic group. The corollary is that 46 to 75 percent of the participants were of other races and ethnicities—often multiple groups. In some programs (including those we visited), participants generally came from two racial/ethnic groups of approximately the same size. Other programs had a one-third, one-third, one-third division of African American, Hispanic, and white. Still others had different proportions and even more races and ethnicities included in the mix.

[1] During site visits, class background manifested itself in a variety of ways, particularly in residential program, but also in other programs. Educational level remained an operative factor, but other factors emerged in our discussions with respondents—such as parents' income, former welfare status, and inner-city residence. Throughout the study, we remained open to types of diversity proposed by respondents. These factors are discussed in Chapter V, "Other Dimensions of Diversity."

In our next step in the selection process, we considered the most diverse category, those sites where the largest racial/ethnic group comprised only 54 percent or less of the Members. Then we reviewed figures on Members' education level for each of those programs. Again we selected sites with the greatest diversity in Members' educational levels. We netted 40 sites from the process.

Through additional discussion with the CNS advisory group assisting in this study, Macro initiated telephone contact with 36 sites for in-depth telephone interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to determine the extent to which diversity was a factor the program deliberately considered in the different aspects of providing service. The interviews raised questions about diversity considerations in program philosophy, recruitment, orientation, training, assignments, and service. Program directors also discussed any diversity-related issues that had arisen and how they handled them.

The telephone interviews, which lasted about 20 minutes, provided a screening process. On the basis of the results, Macro was able to recommend to the Corporation a subset of programs that seemed to have been most engaged in supporting and/or addressing diversity, programs whose directors had been able to reflect on their program's experiences. The Corporation provided additional comments on the list of programs.

Finally, using a matrix format, Macro developed the final list of 12 programs that, as a whole, reflected the range of programs present in AmeriCorps in terms of urbanicity (urban, suburban, rural), size (large, small), geographical location, type (national direct, state), Member status (full-time, part-time), program model (individual, team), and service area (education, human needs, public safety, environment). Each of these programs was recontacted and agreed to participate in the study.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The chapters that follow are based on the data collection activities carried out at the 12 program sites. We have included examples and direct quotes from on-site observations. In writing the report we sometimes combined experiences from more than one site into one example—to develop some general point further and to protect the anonymity of the sites that agreed to participate in the study.

Chapter II discusses indicators of successfully supported diversity. Chapter III documents various benefits of diversity. In Chapter IV, we review the changes in Members' attitudes. Finally, Chapter V covers other dimensions and challenges of diversity (beyond race, class, and ethnicity) not addressed in the previous chapters. A separate document, "Practical Applications," that provides strategies based on the lessons learned from the program sites visited is another product of this study. It will be distributed directly to local programs.

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CHAPTER II. ELEMENTS THAT INDICATE THE SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT OF DIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

The second research question for this study asked, What are the elements that indicate the successful support of diversity? Data collected during interviews with AmeriCorps program staff and host site program staff and during focus groups with Corps Members provided a wealth of information in response. Before we review the elements indicative of successfully supported diversity, however, we will consider the significance and complexity of "diversity support" from the perspectives of the Member and the program staff.

Members

From the Members' perspective, the support of diversity had three key components. It entailed program staff 1) recognizing and appreciating the Members' contributions, 2) respecting Members' cultural norms and values, and 3) developing and implementing bias-free principles and policies in terms of Members' race, class, ethnicity, and other characteristics.

Program Staff

From the perspective of program staff, the support of diversity covered a larger focus, beyond recognizing and appreciating individuals' contributions and respecting their values. To program staff, support of diversity included acknowledging and embracing a connection between diversity and the accomplishment of goals and objectives of the program.

Diversity Factors and Interrelationships Among Factors

Although the original focus of this study was on race, class, and ethnicity (as discussed in Chapter I), we were open to considering other aspects of diversity that staff and Members brought up. Members

and programs included many attributes. Although some Members and staff did view diversity primarily in terms of race, class, or ethnicity, others viewed the diversity for their team or program as being based mainly on differences in gender, age, or region.

Others thought that diversity was based on complex interrelationships among those factors and others as well. We previously discussed the societal links between race/ethnicity and class. At the individual level, we noted interplay between other demographic variables. For example, age and the level of education were often associated, with younger Members having had less education. Issues of race and gender arose often, particularly between African American men and white women. Because of the complex interrelationships among the factors, participants often interpreted the causes of their disagreements differently. An African American male Member in a disputatious relationship with a white female Member in one program, for example, felt that the woman was reluctant to address a conflict with him because of his racial identity. From the woman's perspective, however, their conflict was gender-based: the African American Member was acting like a "macho male," and therefore she declined to interact with him.

We do not wish to underestimate the importance of the interrelationships among various diversity factors. However, the elements we discuss in this chapter that indicate diversity that has been successfully supported, as well as the accompanying strategies for and challenges in realizing such support, apply to diversity characteristics in general rather than to any particular factor or any set of interrelated factors. Thus, while the majority of examples we give in this section pertain to race, class, and ethnicity, the lessons to be drawn from them have broader application.

Approach to Diversity

All sites, by virtue of their inclusion in this study, had diverse Members and their staff were somewhat reflective about the program goal of diversity. Individual Members' attitudes, values, and perceptions unfolded in the context of the particular program's approach to forming a cohesive group from diverse individuals. In the 12 programs we visited for this study, attitudes toward diversity fell along a continuum.

At one end were the programs holding that the challenging and rewarding service AmeriCorps Members performed would in and of itself would bring people together and break down barriers of race, class, and ethnicity. These programs adopted an approach that stressed the common goal (providing service) that had brought the Members to the program, and the necessity of Members' focusing on service and not on themselves if they were to succeed in accomplishing their service objectives.

At the other end of the continuum were the programs holding that diversity issues permeate all aspects of service delivery and therefore must be addressed proactively if barriers are to be broken down. These programs adopted an approach that viewed supporting Members' needs as a prerequisite to accomplishing service objectives.

At most programs, the approaches fell at different points along the continuum, rather than at either extreme, as staff grappled with diversity issues and their relationship to program goals and service

delivery. Because each program is unique and the diversity issues at the individual and programmatic levels are complex, there is no one size-fits-all guideline for all sites to follow in supporting a diverse Corps of Members.

Elements Indicative of Support

Instead of offering a simplistic formula, we have studied multiple sources of data at multiple sites to glean elements that program staff (and others) can look for to determine the extent to which they are successfully supporting a diverse Member Corps. Specific strategies that programs may follow, based on the lessons of the visited programs, are collected in a volume of "Practical Applications" that will be sent directly to local programs.

Although different combinations of these elements will be appropriate to different programs, we have grouped the elements into eight broad areas that apply to all programs:

- Role of Diversity in Program Goals
- Role of Program Staff
- Member Recruitment
- Training
- Member Assignments
- Attention to Group Conflict
- Host Site Relationships
- Member Retention.

We begin discussion of each program area with questions that every program may want to consider to determine how they may successfully support Member diversity. In the remainder of the discussion we address the questions, noting elements indicative of successfully supported diversity as well as some of the strategies programs implemented within each area to support a diverse Member Corps. Finally, we identify challenges that the programs we visited for this study faced in each of the program areas with respect to supporting a diverse Corps of Members.

Role of Diversity in Program Goals

Considerations

What are the core values of this program? How are these values articulated to Members?

Are these values inclusive of all Corps Members, regardless of race, class, or ethnicity?

Are the actions of program staff and management, as well as the organization's policies and procedures, consistent with these core values?

One way in which programs successfully supported diversity among Corps Members was to emphasize the importance of diversity in achieving program goals. In 10 of the 12 programs we visited, diversity was linked to program goals. In 11 of the 12 sites we visited, Members reported feeling supported by the program .

How issues of diversity were linked to program goals and organizational values differed from one site to the next. The linkages occurred both explicitly and implicitly.

At the explicit level, programs formally included diversity in their missions, goal statements, and operating procedures. One program developed and produced an inspirational guidebook for Members to communicate the program philosophy, which included the following "tips and techniques" for getting things done:

- Learn how to get diverse input for designs and decisions
- Deploy for inclusiveness
- Find everyone's ***strengths*** and work with them
- Constantly put yourself in other people's shoes
- Seek to be as inclusive as possible
- Celebrate all holidays

Another program created "Ten Rules to Live By," the first of which was to "acknowledge and celebrate diversity." At the midpoint of this program, Members evaluated how well the program had abided by each of the rules, ranking compliance on a scale of 1 to 10.

One program communicated to Members that it did not support self-segregation (that is, socializing only with groups of people like oneself). The core value of inclusion, while transparent to many Members, caught the attention of a Member who had been in the military. The Member noted that in the military setting in which he had served, people had formed social groups based on cultural similarities, whereas in this program, mingling across groups was encouraged.

Challenges

Walking the Talk. Organizations that integrate diversity explicitly into their organizational policies and procedures must practice what they preach. When a program makes diversity an explicit value, any action on the part of the program that appears to contradict the valuing of diversity can have substantial impact on the perceptions of Corps Members. If too many contradictions arise and remain unaddressed, Members may lose faith in the program and its goals, and their commitment and motivation may decrease.

Time Investment. One program pointed out that it specifically acknowledges the time and effort it takes to deal with diversity. Program managers and staff ask themselves: "Can a program be

efficient and diverse?" They realize that at times there are tradeoffs, especially when conflicts arise. But according to one program manager, "what makes the difference is being proactive, not reactive."

Keeping the Philosophy Alive. Formal inclusion of diversity as a goal was the exception rather than the rule in the programs we visited. Most programs did not explicitly identify the links between diversity and organizational values but instead wove the philosophy throughout program activities and service delivery.

In programs where diversity is an implicit value, the staff have a heavier burden of responsibility to consistently reinforce the importance of diversity to the service goals. In an urban setting, where local demographics more naturally yield a diverse group of Corps Members, it is easy for a program to assume that the Members themselves will infuse a commitment to valuing differences and seeing diversity as a strength. In one of the programs visited, however, that was not the case—and there was no evidence of staff or program reinforcing the value of diversity among Members. When Corps Members came together for group meetings in this program, the meetings were seen only as information-sharing experiences, not as opportunities for group problem solving or team building. In contrast, at another program, the director said, "The status quo is not OK. The Members need to grow."

"Diversity is very important for the direct service piece . . . in part because of the nature of the program. We serve a diverse population of seniors, women, Latinos, and Native Americans. Host site staff want Members to reflect that."

"We need to work with the [host site] schools to get them to see the advantage of racial diversity—to educate them on diversity of Members and how it benefits them."

"Diversity is part of everything we do—from recruitment, to assignments, to team meetings, to service."

Ideally, programs integrate diversity into their explicit policies and procedures, consistently reinforce the importance of diversity through their actions and words, and create opportunities for dialog between Members and program staff when diversity issues arise that seem to contradict the program's explicit policies.

ROLE OF PROGRAM STAFF

Considerations

Is diversity among program staff representative of the diversity found among Members?

What skills and abilities do staff need to work with Members who are culturally different than they are?

Nine of the programs we visited demonstrated efforts to ensure diversity among staff. Two primary themes emerged from this study related to the role of program staff:

1) To help support diversity, program staff should reflect the diversity of the Members to the greatest degree possible.

2) All program staff must have the skills to interact cross-culturally with Members who are different from them.

The themes are interrelated. At the surface level, the presence of a diverse group of staff in and of itself sent a message to Members that the program valued diversity.

One group of Members recalled the strong sense of being on a team at the beginning of the program year, compared to the complete lack of team concept that had become the norm by the end of the year. "At the beginning of the year, we were all together and supporting each other," one Member remarked. "Now everybody just cares about themselves." When asked what had happened to cause such a drastic change in climate, the Members said that several of the staff had left the program:

> Now there's nobody who can relate to where we're coming from. Nobody is real with us. We have a lot of different ethnicities here, and the staff who left knew about our backgrounds and the neighborhoods where we lived. They'd been there. The new staff just pretend—they don't really know—so we don't respect them.

Staff at programs with diverse teams of Members will always find themselves working with Members from very different backgrounds. A program with two employees (besides the program director) ensured that there was racial, ethnic, and class (besides the gender) diversity between the two staffers. The staffers then modeled the principles of teamwork and collaboration that were expected of Members. The Members recognized differences between the two employees in terms of work styles, leadership styles, and other factors. By seeing the staff model teamwork, Members received the implicit message that it is possible to work well together across differences.

Programs that successfully supported diverse groups of Corps Members ensured that their staff were provided with training and support in developing skills for working cross-culturally with Members. The skills included:

· Feedback skills. Staff need to be able to paraphrase others' statements so as to gain clarity on their intent and to provide Members with honest feedback on the impact of their behaviors and attitudes on others.

- Confidence outside of one's personal comfort zone. Programs repeatedly reported that they asked Members to operate "out of their comfort zones" for the purpose of learning how to work effectively with people who were different. Asking that of Members required program staff and directors who were also at ease operating outside of their own personal comfort zones.

- Team facilitation skills. Staffers need to demonstrate skills ranging from the ability to help Members examine their own biases and stereotypes to a willingness to be available to Members outside of service hours for any reason. As one team leader said, "You become parent, priest, enemy, brother, friend, counselor, all at the same time—and you have to be ready to accept that."

Several characteristics typify staff who were supportive of the diversity of Corps Members:

- A belief that there is a critical connection between diversity and service goals. Program staff and directors who believed that diversity in and of itself creates a natural synergy among Members were less likely to emphasize the support elements outlined in this chapter. This study found that staff with that view may not be proactive when diversity-related issues arise, and hence, their Members may not always feel supported.

- Openness to learning about diversity. This study reinforced current literature in the field that illustrates the complexity of diversity issues in today's society. For example, we found that class issues cut across racial groups or that issues of sexual orientation, gender, or age at times took precedence over issues of race, class, and ethnicity in terms of their impact on team effectiveness. Those findings are discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

- Having a broad base of experience. Staff that supported diversity had worked in a variety of settings—diverse in terms of race, class, and ethnic differences, and often in terms of location and other factors that define populations.

Program staff who are not open to the multiple complexities of diversity issues often fall into the trap of stereotyping—believing that all African Americans share the same set of values, for example, or that all working-class people will be motivated by a stipend.

MEMBER RECRUITMENT

Considerations

What recruitment strategies will yield the greatest mixture of diversity for the program teams we wish to create?

What are the diversity dimensions of the populations that we will serve? Do we want representatives of those populations on our project teams? If so, why? If not, why not?

What message will our present recruitment efforts send to this year's Members? How might future recruitment efforts impact current Members' perceptions of the program?

To successfully support a diverse group of Corps Members, programs must first attract a group that is diverse. Nine of the 12 sites we visited for this study reported using active recruitment methods specifically designed to attract a diverse Corps. These sites were both urban and rural, residential and nonresidential.

Strategies that programs used for attracting a diverse Corps ranged from recruiting with the intent of "looking like America" to targeting a wide range of geographic locations that encompassed demographically diverse populations in terms of race, class, and ethnicity to simply assuming that a diverse community would yield a diverse group of applicants.
The programs that were successful in recruiting the most diverse group of Corps Members intentionally geared their recruiting strategies to different populations. Some examples follow.

- Enlist current Corps Members to promote the program in their communities and to refer people they know to apply for Member positions.

- Develop a list of local community organizations to be included on a program's mailing list and to be tapped for potential applicants. One program specifically targeted issue-based organizations such as AIDS prevention programs, job development programs, rehabilitation programs, and gay and lesbian organizations. Other programs targeted civic organizations such as the Rotary Club.

- Solicit referrals from host site programs. In a number of the programs we visited, staff at the host sites identified service recipients who they thought might benefit from the opportunity to serve as an AmeriCorps Member. For programs whose host sites serve diverse communities, the strategy proved very effective in adding to the diversity mix of Members. At one school-based host site, a minority recruiter referred qualified individuals who had applied for teaching positions but whom the school did not have resources to hire to the AmeriCorps program.

- Advertise in non-English language newspapers.

- Advertise in local newspapers—free newspapers available at stores, restaurants, and other community locations.

- Recruit at college campuses and through college newspapers, fraternities, sororities, and student cultural centers.

- Review race, class, and ethnic differences in different geographic regions and then target a wide enough range of geographic regions to attain a diverse group of Corps Members.

These focused recruitment strategies yielded several residual impacts that helped serve to support Corps Members once they began service:

- Intentional recruitment for the richest mixture of diverse groups ensures the greatest potential for learning opportunities for individual Members.

- Enlisting previous Corps Members and advertising through nontraditional media to recruit new Members creates a direct link to the communities being served and a builds positive image for the AmeriCorps program in those communities.

- In general terms, targeted recruiting efforts send a message to the present Corps Members that the program is committed to attracting diverse groups of people to the program, which in turn reinforces the present Corps Members' feeling of value to the team and to the program.

Challenges

Resource Allocation. The effort required to recruit diverse Members varied by the location of the program (rural area, segregated urban or suburban area, integrated urban or suburban area). For programs situated in areas that are not "naturally" diverse, recruiting a diverse Corps increased expenditures—not only of monetary and material resources but also of staff time and energy. A staff member at one program strove to recruit "at risk" Members. She observed that although the program gained class diversity through the participation of those Members, the recruitment strategies taxed program resources that were traditionally devoted to coaching and mentoring efforts.

Reaching Specific Groups. Programs indicated that certain populations were particularly challenging to recruit. One program reported that Southeast Asians are often responsible for supporting other family members and cannot afford a stipend-for-service position. Others hypothesized that men in general feel the need to be the family's breadwinner and find a more lucrative job. Some ethnic groups (among others, Hispanics) have a strong family orientation, and individuals from such groups may not be interested in (or would be discouraged from) joining a residential program.

The name of one AmeriCorps program suggested that the program was open only to Latino Members. The program, however, was trying to actively recruit Members from multiple racial and ethnic groups. In this case, the name of the program (emblazoned on a large sign hanging on the building's facade) thwarted the staff's recruiting efforts.

Programs that struggled this year to recruit a diverse Corps noted that they will start the recruitment process early next year.

Although we found the impact of effective recruitment to be evident in the 12 programs we visited for this study, we want to emphasize that attracting diverse Members is only a precursor to the successful support of a diverse Member Corps. The other elements outlined in this chapter are critical to the successful support of diversity.

TRAINING

Considerations

Based on the diversity mixture of Corps Members, what knowledge, skills, and abilities do Members need to work effectively together cross-culturally?

We found that 10 of the 12 sites visited provided reinforcement of diversity training throughout the year. At 10 of the 12 sites we visited, Members said that they were supportive of the need for diversity training as well. However, Members at only 6 of the 12 sites reported high levels of satisfaction with the diversity training that they received. On reviewing input from Members and program staff, we found that diversity training alone is not sufficient to fully address the diversity issues that may emerge in program teams and at host sites. We did, however, identify several characteristics of training programs that facilitated the support of diverse Corps Members. Those characteristics included the following:

Multiple Topics. To support a diverse group of Corps Members, programs offered a host of training workshops designed to improve communication between and promote effective working relationships among Corps Members. Training topics included conflict management, diversity awareness, sexuality and gender issues, team building, feedback skills, and facilitation skills development.

Multiple Methods. Forms of training ranged from week-long team-building retreats to day long interactive workshops, from informal staff-led sessions to formal presentations by experts on a particular topic. In assessing diversity-related training interventions, Members reported being most affected by experience-based training programs that allowed them to discuss their attitudes and values, as opposed to lecture-based presentations. Role playing was another method that Members rated highly, along with the opportunity to lead training sessions themselves. Programs that successfully supported diversity varied the length and methods of their training over time to appeal to Members' different learning styles and different needs.

Practical Applications. Training interventions that succeeded in supporting diverse Corps Members were those that focused on skills and knowledge that they could apply directly to their service delivery and team interaction. Feedback skills and skills in the identification of personal biases are two types of skills that Members reported to be very applicable in terms of addressing issues related to race, class, and ethnicity.

One program director, noting a dichotomy between "school smart" and "street smart" Members, developed an orientation program that included different topics to cover for Members from various educational backgrounds. (Topics included working with children, professionalism, anger management, and compassion fatigue.)

At another program, Members dissatisfied with the applicability of the training they were receiving took it upon themselves to form their own training committee, with the support of program management. This committee, composed entirely of Members, took responsibility for the selection of all future training topics and trainers, basing their decisions on training needs that they had identified.

Some host site agencies offered Members training specific to the service activity and service recipients at their site.

Ongoing Reinforcement. One of the most important aspects of diversity training interventions was that they were not delivered in isolation. Instead, they were reinforced throughout the year by other training workshops and other interventions by program managers and staff.

- **Ongoing Training.** One statewide program established monthly training sessions that provided Members with the opportunity not only to learn new skills but also to network and team-build with other Members from across the state. Another program established semi-monthly Leadership Development Days that focused on leadership and diversity skills. All the programs provided intensive team-building and orientation programs at the outset, and several reinforced those trainings with retreats throughout the year.

- **Reflections.** Reflection periods were used as a vehicle for reinforcing and raising awareness of diversity issues. One program sponsored a trip to the opera and purposefully framed it as a diversity activity the next day during reflections. Another program took Members to an exhibit on immigration and focused reflections that week on the subjects of immigration and Members' backgrounds. Providing Members with a pamphlet of reflections from the previous year's Corps was an effective strategy that another program used.

- **Teachable Moments.** In several of the programs visited, managers and staff actively sought "teachable moments" for increasing awareness about diversity issues. At one program, a local artist had designed a health-promotion poster that featured various symbols, along with a Rubenesque nude holding a banner of health. Staff used the poster, hung in the doorway of the program office, to generate a conversation on gender issues in the workplace.

Timeliness. Members across sites mentioned the timeliness of training as an issue. At sites where effective diversity training was offered early in the program year, Members felt that they could apply the skills to initial team formation and relationship-building tasks. Members at programs where diversity training was offered later in the program year expressed frustration at missing the opportunity to be exposed to diversity principles at the outset, before they had formed their opinions of others.

"Training is important and needs to be ongoing to further enhance Members' understanding of diversity."

"The more frequent the training,

the better the team building."

Challenge

Creating a Safe Learning Environment. There are risks inherent in diversity training. Sessions may become emotionally charged and may raise issues and feelings that are left unresolved. Some programs enlisted outside facilitators whose confrontational styles offended many Members. Others focused only on differences and offered no skills for finding common ground and building bridges—Members viewed such sessions as divisive. As one program director noted, "If you screw up diversity training, you can have a year of damage control."

Programs increased their chances of success by brainstorming with Members on the types of issues that the diversity training should address, contacting other programs to learn of their experiences with diversity training, and determining appropriate facilitators on the basis of the identified needs and dynamics of the program. In programs that reported successful diversity training the Members felt that they were able to express their opinions openly and develop specific skills that would help them work effectively with people from different backgrounds.

ASSIGNMENTS

Considerations

What is the value to creating diverse project teams?

What challenges will diverse teams face, and what support mechanisms will the program offer to enable the team to address those challenges?

For service delivery, what is the value to assigning Members to service recipients who are culturally similar to them?

What is the value to assigning Members to service recipients who are culturally different from them?

Assignments were a key element for supporting diversity at two levels: assigning Members to specific teams and assigning Members to particular host site programs. Diversity was a consideration in team assignments at six of the programs visited. It was a factor in host site assignments at six programs visited, as well. Only two of the programs visited factored diversity into both team assignments and host site assignments. Both of these programs were situated in very diverse communities, and their host sites served very diverse populations.

Assigning Members to Teams

One way in which programs successfully supported diversity was by creating diverse teams while providing team leaders and Members with the learning opportunities and training (outlined above) to acquire the skills for working together in those teams. In many of the team-placement programs that we visited, there were purposeful assignments to teams for diversity. The diversity/service balance was evident at the team level as well.

One program developed a system for balancing diversity and service provision for the purpose of creating diverse teams that could provide the highest quality service. This model included host site programs in articulating their service goals and activities to newly accepted AmeriCorps Members so that Members could make an informed decision about the type of service that most appealed to them. Members ranked their choices for programs, and then team leaders selected Members for their teams. The criteria adopted by team leaders included the Members' priorities as well as the diversity goals for the team.

Assigning Members to Host Site Programs

Assignments to and within host site programs varied according to program goals and service needs. At one after-school program for a diverse group of grade-school children, the program director matched Members with children who were culturally different from them in race, gender, and ethnicity. The matching was done purposely for the following reasons:

- To demonstrate that Members can be role models across cultures (e.g., an African American male can be a role model for a white child).

- To create opportunities for cross-cultural dialog to dispel stereotypes and expose biases. Host site partners at one program were organized as a coalition and met with Members to discuss service and cultural variables affecting service sites.

- To create learning opportunities for Members by drawing them out of their comfort zones.

- To emphasize that it is skills and abilities—not race, gender, and ethnicity—that are important for tutoring children.

This program assigned individual Members to children from culturally similar backgrounds *only* when fluency in a foreign language was needed for communication. For example, a Thai Member was assigned to a child who spoke only Thai. A child newly arrived from Francophone Africa was paired with a Member who spoke French.

Some programs, taking the opposite approach, assigned individual Members to service recipients because of similarities in race or ethnicity. An African American Member was placed in a program serving what he described as "hard-core 'hood kids" who were predominantly African American. Before his arrival at the program, there had been friction between the host site staff (most of whom were not African American) and the children receiving services. The Member attributed the friction to a perceived lack of respect on both sides. Host site staff, he explained, treated the children "just like any other kids" (e.g., shaking a finger at them, telling them what they could and could not do), failing to recognize that the children came from a violent environment in which respect was critical. The Member said that all that the children could see was "not your races in your face," and that the host site staff were frustrated because they could not communicate well with the children. This Member felt that his common racial identity with the children helped him to serve as an intermediary between them and the host site staff.

Challenges

Straining Resources. Focusing too much on diversity at the expense of an appropriate skill mix can affect service delivery and strain a program's training resources. One program that intentionally created diverse teams reported that it would look for a broader range of skills in its applicant pool

for the next year (while still striving to recruit a diverse pool of applicants), to lessen the requirement for so much up-front investment in training Members for the service to be provided.

Going It Alone. A white Member in a diverse school setting felt isolated, not only culturally but professionally. Being in an individual placement, she used the weekly team meetings to reconnect with others doing service and to regenerate her commitment. In fact, she carried her team-building exercises back to her school. However, she expressed a desire—which had not been met—to get together with others in the program who were working in a similar educational setting to share problems and ideas.

Attention to Group Conflict

Considerations

How will the program address team conflicts that cannot be resolved through training?

How will the program provide Members with skills for working through conflicts?

What is the role of the team leader and/or program director in addressing or preventing intergroup conflicts? How will the program support these individuals in terms of providing them with the skills that they need to effectively carry out this role?

Attention to group conflict refers to the strategies and tools that programs used daily to ensure that Members received the skills necessary to work through conflicts constructively. Eight of the programs visited seemed to be open to group problem-solving of Members' diversity issues, and 10 of the 12 programs offered some type of intervention to address issues that arose between Members. Programs responded to intergroup conflict at the inter-Member level, the Member/staff level, and the Member/host site personnel level. Examples of strategies used at each of those levels are outlined below.

Inter-Member Conflicts

- A program manager intentionally placed two Members in conflict with one other on the same team.

- A program director encouraged the team to have more patience and to reserve judgment when tensions developed within a group.

- Staff held feedback sessions in which Members were taught to be open, and to use communication tools such as "I" statements and paraphrasing. The sessions, according to the facilitator, were intended to improve communication among Members. The facilitator also said that improved communication was rooted in people "understanding each other's stories."

"Everybody has their own 'story,' which shapes the way they live and work. . . . It's important for Members to be able to understand each other's stories to work together effectively. Through training, we try to help Members do this."

Member/Staff Conflicts

Conflict often arose between Members and staffers when program staff failed to intervene as needed. After a team lost a number of African American Members, a rift developed between the one remaining African American Member and the rest of the team. Team Members reported that the team leader never discussed with them the departure of the Members or the rift that had developed since then. The team Members were left to resolve the conflict on their own, even though many of them felt the need for intervention and support from the team leader.

Another group of Members felt that staff were not well trained in facilitation techniques for intervening in disagreements caused by different viewpoints and value systems. The most common conflicts observed stemmed from age differences, with older Members objecting to 1) following directions from younger staff and 2) policies that they felt were geared toward younger Members. In one program visited, possibly racial and class differences, as well as age, contributed to a staff member's having a confrontation with a Member over participation in a group activity. The issue of respecting one another was the fundamental issue that needed to be resolved.

Member/Host Site Personnel Conflicts

- Program staff were supportive in reassigning an African American Member who had conflicts with a Hispanic host site supervisor who "could not deal with an assertive African American female."

- A number of programs reported conflicts with host site programs in which Members felt that their very status as AmeriCorps Members caused them to be viewed differently, in the sense of being "less than regular staff," at the host sites. At one program, Members perceived the matter as a class issue. The staff of the host site program providing community outreach and social services had stated several times that they were looking for "professional people" and did not view AmeriCorps Members as such.

Challenge

Inclusion. The complexities of intergroup conflict challenged programs and staff to truly listen to each side of the conflict and to facilitate win/win resolutions wherever possible. One program raised the issue of supporting one Member without excluding other Members. This challenge proves even

more complex when other dimensions of diversity (such as age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities) are added to the racial, class, and ethnic mix of Members.

HOST SITE RELATIONSHIPS

Considerations

How has this program communicated the value of diversity to host site programs?

How will this program intervene if a conflict or diversity issue arises between a host site and a Member?

Critical to Members' feeling supported was the extent to which the importance of diversity was evident in the approach of the host site program. At five of the programs we visited, host sites were active in recruiting, selecting, and placing diverse Members.

One elementary school principal said that the tutoring and mentoring would not have had as much impact on the schoolchildren (who were very diverse themselves) without a diverse group of AmeriCorps Members.

Another program required host sites to submit a position paper detailing their service requirements and the ways they would engage AmeriCorps Members in their programs. Potential host sites were given an overview and orientation to the AmeriCorps program before submitting position papers. In the orientation, the importance of diversity was emphasized to potential host site programs, and they were encouraged to incorporate the diversity philosophy into their papers.

Another host site agreed to accommodate the schedules of part-time AmeriCorps Members who were also students. That flexibility allowed for a broader representation in terms of the race, class, and ethnicity of Members serving the diverse community.

Challenges

Ongoing and Open Communication. A principal whose school was a new host site spoke of her experience with a diverse group of Corps Members who had made a significant impact on the school and molded the service program delivered there. She recommended that for the program/host site relationship to work well, both sides need to keep lines of communication open—otherwise, the interactions are set up for failure.

Open, ongoing communication is necessary even in programs where most people come from similar racial, ethnic, and/or class backgrounds. A group of African American women working at a host site with predominantly African American clients and staff felt that the host site staff had received insufficient training on working with people from different backgrounds. The Members felt that their contributions went unrecognized, so their job performance and self-esteem suffered.

MEMBER RETENTION

Considerations

Are the Members that a program is losing predominantly of one racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group?

If so, what impact will this trend have on the commitment and motivation of remaining Corps Members, especially those who represent the same racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group?

What strategies can be implemented to 1) address perceptions among present Corps Members, and 2) retain more Members of the identified group?

Programs that successfully supported diversity not only recruited but also retained a diverse group of Members. The retention of a diverse team of Corps Members had a direct impact on the individual Members' morale and motivation to contribute; it also affected team cohesion and group effectiveness. Members were very aware of the demographics of who left and who stayed with a program. When attrition applied to one specific racial, ethnic, or class group in a program, Members from that cultural group questioned whether their group was truly valued by the program. Even in cases where programs had numeric data to demonstrate that attrition was unrelated to race, class, or ethnicity, Members' perceptions nevertheless continued to affect not only their own motivation to contribute but also by extension, the effectiveness of their team.

Attrition rates in the programs we visited for this study ranged from 2 percent to as high as 23 percent, based on the number of Corps Members present at the time of the visit compared to the number who began the program. One way in which programs successfully supported diversity was by analyzing their attrition statistics to look for trends in terms of diversity dimension and then adopting specific strategies to address the trends. Some of the programs we visited had just begun to conduct this type of trend analysis, so it was too early to measure the impact of the strategies they were using over time. Some of the strategies various programs used are outlined below, with feedback from Members and staff on the utility of the approach.

One program, for example, discovered a high attrition rate among Members of color, primarily African American men. Four months into the year, this program created an African American Dialog Group as a support group for African American Members who might have been struggling. There was some discussion over the appropriate meeting times for the group, related to whether the group meetings could be considered "service." A compromise was reached that allowed the group to meet between 5 and 6 p.m., taking 30 minutes of "service" time and 30 minutes of "Member" time.

Other programs have sought to stem attrition by setting up child care referral systems, to supplement the child care stipend granted to Members, for parents who need the services. One program allowed a Member to bring her children to the after-school program where she provided service when she lost her child care provider.

Another program planned to experiment with GED summer preparation classes for Members needing their GED, to give those Members a "head start" on others who were entering the program in August.

A program at which attrition issues were never addressed, even through the recognition by a team leader that a Corps Member had left, reported lower levels of motivation on the part of remaining Members who were racially similar to those who had left, as well as increased team conflict.

Challenge

Competing Resources. Supporting diversity among Members often consumed time and energy that staff could have directed toward supporting other aspects of program operations, such as networking, fund-raising, or media relations. In other cases, increased demands to support Members related to diversity issues "bumped" other duties to evening and weekend hours, causing longer work weeks for staff. Furthermore, diversity support issues are arguably more physically and emotionally draining than other staff responsibilities. Extra efforts in retaining Members were encountered typically with those Members that did not have previous job experience.

CONCLUSION

The approach programs adopted to form a cohesive group from diverse individuals varied along a spectrum. At one end were the programs that believed the challenging and rewarding service performed by AmeriCorps Members, in and of itself, would bring people together and break down barriers of race, class, and ethnicity. Those programs adopted an approach that stressed the common goal (namely, service provision) that had brought Members to the program, and the need for Members to focus on service and not themselves if they were succeed in accomplishing their service objectives. At the other end of the continuum were the programs that believed diversity issues permeate all aspects of service delivery and therefore must be addressed proactively if barriers are to be broken down. These programs adopted an approach that additional emphasized the support of Members' needs as a prerequisite to accomplishing service objectives.

On the basis of our visits to the 12 programs in this study, we believe that

1) Stressing a common goal for Members and focusing their attention on service can be an effective approach. The challenges and rewards of service often do have a powerful synergistic effect in bring individuals together. Most programs will find, however, that diversity issues will nevertheless arise and that additional specific strategies will be required to handle them.

2) Addressing issues of diversity proactively can be an effective approach. Many programs discovered, however, that diversity is often a complex and sensitive matter. Individual strategies to resolve diversity problems can easily create more divisiveness. As several programs we visited had discovered, conducting a "bad" diversity training, for example, is worse than conducting no diversity training at all. Strategies for dealing with diversity issues

must be carefully thought out with consideration of Members' individual needs and must be tailored to Members' diverse backgrounds.

CHAPTER III. BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

In preparing to address the research question "What are the benefits of diversity?" Macro set the scope broadly. As discussed in Chapter I, we began by defining "diversity" in this study to focus primarily on race, ethnicity, and class. We considered benefits to encompass any advantages of diversity experienced by any of the key participants in AmeriCorps programs or those interacting with AmeriCorps programs. Those participants include the following:

- AmeriCorps Members
- Service recipients
- Host site programs
- AmeriCorps program staff
- Communities.

We used many data sources and data collection activities to respond to the research question: interviews with program staff, host site staff, Members, and service recipients; a focus group with Members; and nonparticipant observation of service activities and other Member/staff interactions.

The variety of data sources and data collection activities we included allowed us to examine the benefits of diversity for each of the participant groups listed above. Each group is discussed in turn, beginning with a brief overview of the rewards for that particular group and continuing with a detailed description of each specific benefit. (Exhibit 1 provides a listing of all the benefits we uncovered.)

Exhibit 1. Benefits of Diversity

The description includes examples (whether observed or relayed to us during our site visits) to illustrate a facet of the benefit and program characteristics that are related to the realization of that benefit. We also provide examples of challenges that might interfere with achieving the desired benefit. We have included quotations from various participants throughout this chapter, in an effort to convey not only our research findings but also a sense of the atmosphere at programs we visited and studied.

Members

Benefit 1: Gain the opportunity to be with and serve people from different communities

Benefit 2: Identify and dispel stereotypes about others

Benefit 3: Learn to approach matters from different perspectives

Benefit 4: Develop self-confidence

Benefit 5: Learn how diversity issues affect people's work

Service Recipients

Benefit 6: Provide role models

Benefit 7: Learn that the willingness to help crosses cultures

Benefit 8: Gain the opportunity to exchange perspectives

Benefit 9: Gain exposure to nonminorities in a positive way

Host Site Programs

Benefit 10: Experience improved outreach

Benefit 11: Acquire connections to various community organizations

AmeriCorps Program Staff

Benefit 12: Gain the opportunity to learn from people with different backgrounds

Communities

Benefit 13: Gain a better understanding of the host community and people in general

MEMBERS

In AmeriCorps programs, Members are the ones who engage in community service firsthand. Through that process, Members—more than any other key players— interact directly and intensely with each other, with service recipients, and with program staff. If there is diversity within those groups, we would expect Members to reap the greatest benefits. At the AmeriCorps programs we visited, Members encountered some or all of the following: diverse Members Corps (all 12 sites), diverse program staff (9 of 12 sites), and diverse service recipients (12 of 12 sites). Our research indeed uncovered more benefits for that group than for any other.

The most basic benefit Members gained was simply the chance to experience diversity firsthand to a greater extent than most individuals in the United States ever have the opportunity to do. It is for that fundamental benefit that we found the most evidence; and we could see most clearly the various ways that this outcome was fostered.

The other benefits of diversity to Members may be seen as part of a developmental process stemming from this initial benefit. The process begins almost immediately with the dispelling of stereotypes. Over time, Members develop the ability to appreciate the various perspectives with which people from different backgrounds approach matters. Then they develop self-confidence. In the long term, the process includes an awareness of the impact diversity issues have in a multicultural world beyond the AmeriCorps experience.

Whether or not each of these benefits was realized at a program could often be associated with different characteristics of the program and sometimes with those of the Members. That is, certain program environments were more conducive to Members' learning from the diversity they were exposed to, and certain traits in Members predisposed them toward learning from exposure to diversity. In the discussion of each Member benefit, we review program characteristics (and where appropriate, Member characteristics) that we found to be associated with realizing that particular benefit.

Benefit 1: Opportunity to be with and serve people from different communities

Perhaps most basically, diverse AmeriCorps programs offer Members the opportunity to be with and serve people from various communities. The benefit was realized at all 12 of the sites we visited (indeed, the programs had been selected for this study because of their diversity). The extent to which Members appreciated this benefit was related in part to their own background—that is, to the extent of heterogeneity in their own community—rather than to the community context of the AmeriCorps program. Members who grew up in homogeneous neighborhoods found this opportunity particularly beneficial. During our site visits, Members commented: "Before AmeriCorps, I had never met anyone who was black," or "Everybody at my school was black; I didn't know any white people."

Even Members who had lived in diverse communities noted qualitative differences in their AmeriCorps program. For instance, a white female at a large program commented that although the college she had attended was very diverse, the students there "hung out in groups where everyone was the same." In contrast, at her AmeriCorps program, Members truly served and socialized across racial, ethnic, and class lines. In another program, based at a diverse college, the director observed that the 40 Members who had truly bonded in the AmeriCorps program would not normally have been found together on campus.

Learning about others, learning about self

Interacting with diverse groups of people enables Members to learn about others who are different from themselves and to learn more about themselves. An example of the former is an African American male who had lived and worked exclusively in an African American section of a major metropolitan area. "One of the main reasons I joined AmeriCorps," the Member said, "was to get the chance to work with people outside of my own community." He gained the opportunity to work in different regions of his home city through AmeriCorps, tutoring a diverse group of grade-school children and conducting leadership training sessions at two high schools with diverse populations.

The experience of a white female is illustrative of Members who learned more about themselves as well as more about others. The Member was placed in an after-school program in a predominantly black school. For the first time, she found herself in an environment where her race was in the minority. While noting that she "learned a lot from the kids through the stories they tell about their home lives," the Member acknowledged more profound self-realization. She said of her experience, "I'm the only white person in the classroom. The kids don't understand why I can't braid my hair or do other things like that. This has made a big awareness for me that I am different."

> *"I wasn't thinking about the diversity of the group when I joined. I was thinking about tutoring. At first it was more like a job, but now I care about the camaraderie I have with others in the program."*

"Most of what I see is not differences, but what we are accomplishing."

Even some Members who joined AmeriCorps programs uninterested in its diversity aspects learned from their experiences interacting with others from a variety of racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds. They had the chance to become comfortable with, to develop relationships and friendships with, and to foster respect for people who differed from them. When a black male Member at one AmeriCorps program first talked to a white male Member on his team and learned about the reputed racist community the white Member came from, the two Members had problems. Later, they realized they had a lot in common—including that they are both stubborn! Once they came to have a better understanding of each other, they were able to work together. In fact, they became close friends. Referring to his AmeriCorps experience, the black Member said, "I'm 15 years older than when I started."

Learning through service

Importantly, the opportunity to be with others from different backgrounds was grounded in intensive, long-term, service-oriented actions. By serving with each other or helping others, minorities and nonminorities were exposed to one another in a constructive environment. They had a common goal, a shared service orientation that contributed to a positive experience and that enabled their mutual learning. To some extent, just the receptivity of the Members themselves and the recognition that they wanted to give to others made them open to learning and growing. In many programs, the staff consciously facilitated the process by holding group sessions in which Members could share those service goals (and also express their common frustrations).

Programs with individual placements (or with team placements in which Members were assigned to individual classrooms) did not learn through directly serving together but through relating their experiences to one another at meetings, reflections, and other get-togethers. Such components beyond direct service also offered rich opportunities to learn from one another and were valued highly by Members. For example, a mother who was caring for a son with a disability spoke positively about the encouragement from Members for her to participate in all activities, include the team-building scavenger hunt and mountain climbing. "Even if you want to step back," she said, you're included." Other Members commented that when the single mothers in the program were unable to participate, they felt less like a team.

Although many Members had previously interacted with people from other races, classes, and ethnicities, their interactions were not at the level of intimacy and intensity that comes from serving together. One African American Member explained that she had never experienced working with people from another culture before joining AmeriCorps. "I had never worked with Spanish-speaking people before," she said. "Now that I have, I learned that they have many of the same needs as African Americans in my home neighborhood."

Members also learned to value the knowledge and experience that people from different backgrounds had to offer. When white, upper middle class Members serving at a minority school encountered some difficulties working with students, they consulted with black Members in the AmeriCorps program for guidance in understanding and reaching out to the students.

"Working together in AmeriCorps is continuous collaboration—you get feedback from successful service."

Learning at different types of programs

Although all 12 sites had assembled a diverse Member Corps, the extent of the opportunities to learn from the diversity differed with certain program characteristics. Critical variables included type of placement, service area (which was often associated with placement type), residential or nonresidential status, and full-time versus part-time Members. Members placed into teams had a natural setting for learning from the diversity within the Corps. In some team-based programs, however, the collective component was not emphasized. We observed two reasons. In the first case, de-emphasis of the group experience reflected the type of service the Members performed. For instance, in the education area, teams placed in schools assigned Members individually to different classrooms so the Members had little contact with each other on a daily basis. An example of the second case was when two natural teams formed around the two areas of service Members were performing, but the program leadership did little to cultivate team spirit or to proactively encourage the group to interact and to build on their common experiences.

Individual placement may hinder Members from benefiting from a diverse Corps, but it certainly does not preclude them from doing so. One program with individual placement was so successful at maximizing the benefits of its diverse Corps that it could serve as a model for programs that have not been able to capitalize on their team components. This program held weekly Member meetings that included a reflection. During the reflection, each Member spoke about his or her service the past week and about events that were taking place in his or her personal life. The racial, ethnic, and class diversity among Members was so great, the population that each served varied so much, and the sense of "team" among the Members was so strong that they were able to learn a vast amount from the personal reflections Members shared during the meetings.

At residential programs or at programs where Members were new to the community (having relocated to serve in the program), Members had larger amounts of time to interact with each other. Living together meant not only a quantitative increase in time spent together but a qualitative expansion in the types of activities Members engaged in together. Besides serving together, the relocated Members roomed together, dined together, and attended social events with one another. That afforded Members rich opportunities to learn from one another. Full-time service is also more likely to foster this experience than part-time, where Members have many other commitments. However, one part-time program we observed was able to build a sense of team accomplishment through group service projects on the weekends.

Challenges

Differences in the value placed on diversity. Some Members were attracted to AmeriCorps in part because of the diversity elements; some grew through the diverse contact and the efforts of supportive staff. Others were unreceptive to the program's focus on diversity. In the case of the latter, their program may not have informed them explicitly of the program goals related to diversity. These Members either left the program or did not take advantage of the opportunity to learn from the diverse Corps. One program described an African American female who was very involved in and concerned with service, but would not engage in diversity issues. Other Members in the

program thought that race was a contributing factor in her reluctance. That Member ended up leaving the program. The Members who continued did not regret her departure. The group, which was racially and gender mixed, thought they had expended a lot of energy to help her grow and that she was affecting the morale of the team and their service by not being more open to diversity issues.

Differences in motivation to serve. Perceived differences in motivation for being in AmeriCorps seemed to cause greater difficulties for Members than racial and ethnic differences did (this is discussed further in Chapter V). One male Member who grew up on a farm particularly wanted to work with different types of people before attending medical school. He describes himself as less idealistic now. "I realize that some people will never care, will never work hard—and this is not based on their race or gender."

In some cases, the level of a Member's commitment to service was influenced by class-related issues, such as poverty and the distractions it presents (for example, problems related to child care and transportation). Although Members spoke freely about race and ethnicity, they were less likely to raise differences concerning class or to attribute perceived differences to socioeconomic status. For example, a white college graduate, excited by the diversity of Members in the second AmeriCorps program that she had joined, found that Members differed the most not with respect to race or age, but in their level of commitment to service. The Members who should less commitment, however, were local residents who were also single mothers. Those Members cited other obligations as affecting their ability to treat the AmeriCorps experience as more than a job. In another program, Members singled out those who were in the GED component; they felt that group (as a whole) was not focused on service.

Differences in external support. Sometimes, although Members might be willing and eager to be part of a diverse environment, their families are not supportive. As one Member noted, "It takes a lot of adjusting to work with people's diversity," and she wanted to make the effort. She lived at home, however, and her middle class family was less than accepting of her AmeriCorps activities. Their lack of support created friction for the Member. In another program, the director was confronted on more than one occasion by the parents of Members who objected to the racial or ethnic diversity of their child's colleagues, even though the Members themselves had no objections.

"You don't need to have a lot in common to be a friend of someone."

"I had no idea about bonding with team Members.
I now consider it a 'fringe benefit.'"

Benefit 2: Identifying and dispelling stereotypes about others

The most immediate result from their developing relationships with people from different backgrounds was that Members identified their personal biases and stereotypes that they held. The recognition helped them to dispel stereotypes and ignorance they may have had about particular groups. This benefit was noted at all 12 program sites, regardless of program characteristics or community context. Members learned through the experiences of interacting with "real people" of various races and ethnicities that not all Hispanics (or all Asians, all Native Americans, etc.) are a certain way.

Sometimes the learning process was encouraged through diversity training that challenged Members to acknowledge their stereotypes. During a diversity training at the beginning of one program, Members voiced their views on the foods of different racial/ethnic groups: "Mexican people like tacos," "Black people eat beans." There was "a stickiness in the air," the trainer recalled, "because they didn't know each other." A trainer at another program asked Members to say how they would know the race and ethnicity of a ghost in their house. White Members specified what foods a ghost would eat if he or she hailed from various racial/ethnic backgrounds, but were unable to describe foods for a white ghost. Members spoke favorably of how the trainings increased their awareness of stereotypes that they were unaware they had. In the case of some Members, training led them to consider their own self-definition.

Often the learning process occurred through the daily interactions during service. For example, an African American male from an inner city talked about his experience meeting a white male team Member. His initial impression of the white Member: "a typical white boy, with a ponytail." The black male had his assumptions about the white male challenged when he listened to that Member take a stand on an issue during orientation. Referring to his initial reaction, he later said, "I am not a racist, but I *was* racist to people who I thought were racist." The white Member, thereafter, became one of his closest friends through the AmeriCorps experience.

Outside the delivery of service, Members' interactions afforded opportunities for racial and ethnic biases to arise. A group of non-Hispanic females in a program that included a number of Hispanic males discussed their belief that "all Spanish men cheat on their wives or girlfriends." In that instance, program staff stepped in to facilitate a team discussion to clarify stereotypes at two levels: 1) not all Hispanic men "cheat" on their wives or girlfriends, and 2) not all Hispanic men are "Spanish"—in fact, none of the Hispanic men in this program were from Spain. The women gained from that experience, which challenged their stereotype and gave them a setting in which to discuss it with others—including Hispanics.

Challenges

Learning to deal with being stereotyped. Sometimes Members' learning experience grew out of finding themselves stereotyped. For instance, a white female who grew up in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area found herself serving populations in nonwhite sections of the city. She felt

comfortable in this environment because, despite her suburban upbringing, she had a diverse network of friends and spent considerable time doing activities in the city. She described her pre-AmeriCorps experience as "hanging out mostly with blacks and Hispanics." Even so, upon entering the AmeriCorps program, she found herself labeled a "rich white girl from the suburbs," and she had to make an effort to overcome that label.

Members found themselves having to overcome stereotypes not just on the part of other Members, but also from service recipients. An 18-year-old white male Member who had grown up in a white area noted for its racist attitudes, said he was originally regarded as a "white honkie from the suburbs who didn't know what he was talking about." The Member admitted to experiencing "culture shock" when he first began serving at an elementary school in a low income, minority neighborhood. It took several months before "the barriers were broken down" and he and elementary school children began to trust each other.

Learning to discuss stereotypes openly. When confronted with their own biases, some Members became defensive. They denied they were stereotyping others, and they were reluctant to discuss the issue. Their discomfort impeded the process of identifying and dispelling stereotypes. On African American Member lamented that at first, "people from the suburbs didn't want to learn from me." He felt they had preconceived notions and stereotypes that took a long while to overcome.

"Everyone has struggles. People may not be as privileged as they appear on the surface."

*"We are different in a lot of little ways—
but that is pretty superficial.
I feel that I can relate to the whole group."*

Benefit 3: Learning to approach matters from different perspectives

Over the more intermediate term, interacting with diverse groups of people enabled Members to observe how other people would approach issues from different perspectives. We noted this benefit at eight sites. In their search for common ground, Members learned to accept the validity of different points of view. Some Members even tried to expand the ways in which they themselves approached issues.

Group discussions generated opinions and exposed philosophies that Members were not used to hearing. That taught Members that they needed to be patient and to reserve judgment. They indicated that groups became stronger because of the diverse issues Members brought to team meetings. As one Member stated, "Conflict is good; don't be afraid of it."

A key "lesson learned" for many AmeriCorps Members was to value individual differences. "You have to accept what other Members have to offer," one Member said, "to respect them and their differences. You can't be close-minded."

At the start of one program, the Members found that they could not work well together; they could not plan a group community service project without arguments. Later in the program, as Members accepted each other for who they were, they were able to work together effectively in planning Saturday service activities that incorporated differing perspectives.

Class differences

A former teacher devoting a year to service observed that the biggest tension in the program revolved around class issues—money, experience, and education led to differences in how people saw things, and those differences emerged in discussions. "Sometimes the group can't come up with an answer because some people are being so rigid, " she noted. "I find myself being more tolerant and realizing that I can't judge anyone for the choices they've made."

Other Members agreed that differences in education levels had the greatest impact in terms of getting along with others different from themselves. The dividing line was often expressed in some version of "street smart versus school smart." In one program, Members found that the team leaders from different socioeconomic backgrounds provided good role models in working together and helped them smooth over their differences. They adjusted to their differences through the use of compromise and valuing what each brought to the equation.

"There are limits to communication," a Member commented. "You can understand how a person has developed a strong opinion but not see or feel it." The Member found that working to understand where people are coming from is emotion provoking and a good learning experience. "There is no right or wrong, just room for growth."

"When we see how we are all different we get different perspectives. We move beyond just thinking about MY way."

Challenges

Dealing with tensions caused by diverse views. With Members' different backgrounds influencing their reactions, the mix of Members in a program may lead to tension. When Members at one program discussed how a child in a movie was treated, major disagreements broke out. It took a while before some of the Members would accept others as knowledgeable about such matters as understanding children. Program staff worked on building Members' respect for each other through diversity training, conflict resolution, and communication exercises.

Individual differences. Some Members felt pressured by the emphasis on everyone getting along together. A black female Member at one program acknowledged that she did not like to participate in the program's physical activities, such as mountain climbing. She advised that programs need to look at people as individuals, in addition to valuing the team concept.

Differences that affect Members serving together also affect their achieving consensus outside of service. Members at one program conducted a survey to see how interested people were in doing after-hours activities together. Three of every four Members were interested; the others thought of their AmeriCorps experience as a job and wanted to leave it (and their coworkers) behind at the end of the day. They had other commitments—second jobs, children, school—requiring their attention.

A group of Members in another program clearly had differences in their "comfort zones," how much of themselves they wanted to reveal. One Member chided, "Caring can turn into an obsession. You have to know where the boundaries are."

"Breaking down social barriers is hard."

"We need to learn how to work as a team. 'I' should be 'we.'"

"I've learned so much, but I have a lot more to learn."

Benefit 4: Development of self-confidence

As Members served with and helped people from different backgrounds, their self-confidence grew. This point was widely noted at all sites we visited. The change was the most apparent in Members from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In carrying out their activities, in making a difference in the community among diverse people, the Members were viewed, by others and by themselves, as being leaders in the community. Members were encouraged to express themselves and felt accepted for who they were. That acceptance built up their self-esteem.

A common theme heard from Members was the growth they experienced in meeting challenges. When tackling difficult activities—such as their first group community project—Members took comfort in their working together and working out their differences. Similarly, individual accomplishments led to increased self-confidence. A Hispanic male Member with a family, struggling economically, was proud of his involvement with AmeriCorps. He organized a rehabilitation project for a neglected neighborhood street. In carrying out a community service project, he noted, "You become a leader in the community, not someone causing trouble."

Members at several programs found that it helped to confront problems head-on. A self-assured Member at one program received many positive comments about her contribution to a project, while an African American Member who worked with her was not included and lost self-esteem. It took a while before the Member who was not included could initiate a conversation about the problem; but when she did, the discussion improved the climate. She was validated about the contributions she was making and was reassured about their worth.

Some staff were surprised by the increased self-confidence on the part of some Members. The director of an AmeriCorps program concerned with gangs found that the best Member was not one of the college graduates but a teenage mother whose baby had been murdered in the midst of gang violence. The director said, "By becoming committed to work against gangs, the Member experienced tremendous personal and professional development."

Challenges

Different levels of self-confidence. Some Members entered AmeriCorps with self-esteem problems. As a host site supervisor said, "they're in transition from childhood to adulthood, and they need strong mentoring." For some Members, self-esteem—or lack thereof—was a factor in their dropping out of the program, particularly if the site did not provide a nurturing environment. For example, one Member, a young welfare mother lacking job experience, had a difficult assignment in a detention center. She quit the program, although was quite competent; staff observed that she did not realize how capable she was.

"We welcome the struggles that a team goes through—
it's growth through pain, like a marathon. I find myself

growing mentally, emotionally, and spiritually."

Program staff noted self-esteem problems particularly with Members who lacked work experience or college experience (usually younger Members and/or Members from lower socioeconomic backgrounds). Those Members often required the most support, but experienced the most growth. One program, for example, had developed an especially strong GED component to help in reaching out to a wide variety of individuals. When those individuals became Members, however, the program found that many had not had to be accountable before and experienced "sensory overload" in trying to meet both their service obligations and the GED requirements.

Torn between two worlds. Staff at one program noted a problem specific to the Members who had been affiliated with gangs. When they returned to their home neighborhoods each evening, their attitudes and demeanor had to adjust to fit in with the norms of that setting. Program staff thought that it was an especially difficult experience for that group. The Members worked together and developed an expanded consciousness of the value of others, but they also needed to "go along with" their peers in the neighborhood.

"*Service is an intense experience. The intensity frightens people.*
You shouldn't stop thinking about the experience.
You should be able to celebrate who you are and v

Benefit 5: Learning how diversity issues may affect work environments

In developing the necessary skills to interact with others from different backgrounds, AmeriCorps Members gained long-term benefits. They developed an awareness of the impact diversity issues might have on their future. Successfully carrying out their service activities required Members to understand that people from different backgrounds bring different experiences and different viewpoints to the table, and that they therefore form different perceptions of the situation at hand. Trying to understand differences in perceptions improved Members' interactions with others and provided them with tools for future interactions in diverse work environments. As one team leader pointed out, Members benefited the most from diversity, because it acquainted them with the "real world."

Members recognized that working closely with a diverse group of people would be good experience for many other aspects of life. Originally, they had had misconceptions about one another. "Some ideas we had about other cultures were right, some were wrong," a Member said, recalling how they grew to understand those who were different. A CEO heading an AmeriCorps advisory board also commented that the working relationships he observed in the program could serve as a model for corporate organizations.

Many programs required Members to keep journals of their experience. Staff contended that stressing reflection helped Members to gain more from their service and from their interactions with each other—and ultimately to create better-functioning groups. Members grappled with key issues: What is respect? What is acceptable in dealing with diverse people? Members learned not to focus just on unsettled issues, but to realize that relationships can never be perfect, and to accept people as they are.

Members at one program said that when they met others who were different, it took more time to appreciate what they could contribute. The group made the effort to understand each other. "It doesn't happen like a sit-com," a Member said, noting that over the long term, there were both contentious times and harmonious times when Members worked together.

In a racially diverse program, white Members gradually developed an appreciation for the prejudice some minorities feel in the city: taxi drivers not stopping to pick them up; lobby concierges asking them to leave a building lobby on a rainy day when they were waiting inside for a ride; police pulling their car over. One Member was shocked to learn about people shooting at colleagues' houses. Several white Members acknowledged that they could never relate to some of those problems. Some black Members felt that white people did not want to believe that there was that level of discrimination.

The AmeriCorps experience can also be seen as a greenhouse in which the positive aspects of diversity are cultivated—and that it may not be translatable to the workforce. "I'm scared to go into the work world. We won't find the same working together, the willingness to support each other," said a white college graduate who had been on the verge of quitting several times and stayed because of the strong support of her diverse team.

"Diversity is a strength, not a stumbling block."

Challenge

Support in learning from diversity. Some programs focused on the here-and-now and paid little attention to developing the skills and fostering the attitudes needed to facilitate the future working relationships of Members in multicultural environments. A few did not embrace the concept philosophically; others did not have staff with the skills to work on strengthening the team in regular group meetings through team-building and other developmental activities. If diversity training is to become infused in a program, it cannot rely on an outside consultant to conduct a one-time workshop.

As noted above, program differences centered around philosophy and resources. Independent of characteristics such as program model or service area, programs struck different balances between service to the community and Member development. If a program believed that its primary mission was performing service and that Member development would occur through the Members' activities and accomplishments, the staff did not follow up on learning opportunities that would translate into more common work settings. Likewise, even if a program sought to emphasize Member development objectives, concerted, skilled interventions were required to turn the experience into lessons that would be carried into their future workplace.

"It will not be an all-inclusive group if people do not feel valued."

"The more diverse Members are, the more we grow."

"We won't be successful as Corps Members if we don't accept diversity."

SERVICE RECIPIENTS

In some communities, the diversity of the Member Corps may be the only diversity service recipients are exposed to. In others, the diversity of the Member Corps may merely reflect the diversity within the community. Even in diverse communities, however, a service recipient's relationship with a Corps Member may be the first long-term, intensive relationship the service recipient has had with someone from a different background.

With respect to assigning Members to service recipients, AmeriCorps and host site programs fall into three categories. The first tried to assign Members to recipients from different racial and ethnic backgrounds; the second tried to assign Members to recipients with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds; and the third did not consider race or ethnicity in making assignments (but did engage in diversity training).

Benefit 6: Provision of role models

A key benefit of a diverse Member Corps was the provision of role models for service recipients—especially when the service recipients were school students. Although all AmeriCorps Members could serve as role models, certain groups of Members were viewed as particularly desirable by some AmeriCorps program staff, host site program staff, and parents of service recipients: college students, males in general, and African American males more specifically. They believed that the Members who were college students sent the message to schoolchildren that they, too, could go to college. Male Members were sometimes the only male role models in a boy's life.

Similar backgrounds

African American males were in particular demand as role models. In one program, a black male Member serving in an elementary school showcased a variety of talents—including computer skills and artistic skills—for the students. Encouraging the young black students to stay away from peers who get into trouble, the Member told the students, "Do what I'm doing, don't follow in your brother's footsteps." The Member helped to promote service learning in the school for the elementary students. Another Member was assigned to serve as a team leader at an elementary school with 98 percent African American enrollment. The Member, an African American homosexual college graduate, reacted strongly to sexist and homophobic remarks made by the students. He explained, "I won't tolerate any disrespectful language." Staff at another host program wanted Members to serve as mentors and make connections with the youth. An African American male Member established such a trusting relationship with an African American child that he was able to learn that the child was being abused in foster care, and he acted upon the information.

At another program where the Members served in school classrooms, the principal noted the powerful impact on a black, female elementary school student of an AmeriCorps Member who was African American, female, and in college. The AmeriCorps Member convinced the student, who had been doing poorly in math, that girls could indeed succeed in math. The student's math grades improved remarkably under the Corps Member's tutelage, and the student continued to do well in math even after the AmeriCorps Member had left.

Class was another factor considered in assigning Members to service recipients of similar backgrounds. One host program that provided health services to recipients in clinics said they looked for commonalities in a Member's background to fit in with the poverty of their clients—while also seeking Members with a sense of compassion and some contact with the community.

Members served as role models, and not only academically. They supplemented the diversity of teachers in schools with diverse student populations, and they fulfilled a role in students' lives that might not have been filled by teachers, families, or others. For example, an AmeriCorps Member who was a college student served as a tutor/mentor at an elementary school. Both the tutor and the student assigned to her were African American. The tutor showed the girl grooming tips (like how to fix her hair) and gave her a sense of what she could accomplish.

"They [AmeriCorps college students] are automatic role models—and you can't pay for their enthusiasm and dedication."

Other types of role models

Beyond race, class, and ethnicity, Members served as role models in other ways. One Member working in a school had cerebral palsy. Because of his athletic abilities, he was assigned to the physical education department. Despite his disability, he accomplished a great deal, serving as a role model to students with disabilities and inspiring others.

A program providing service in treatment centers viewed AmeriCorps service as an excellent way to support drug treatment. Most Members were in recovery—they were required to be off drugs for one year before being allowed to provide service. Service gave Members the opportunity to be a role model, to send the message: "I was once in the same place you are now; I changed my life. You can do it too."

Many people we interviewed stressed that Members could serve as role models for service recipients either within a same culture or across cultures. Members at one program reflected the diversity of the community. Because the program worked with at-risk youth, staff tried to find Members that could serve as role models for them. Staff looked for Members who were college students, but not necessarily of the same race or ethnicity. The same was the case at another program, which served teenage girls. An outgoing Member talked to the girls about her personal struggles to pursue her education. Her experience and candor impressed the teens.

Challenge

Creating realistic expectations. Some program staff had communicated to host site staff the importance of Member diversity to their program. In those discussions, either program staff or host site staff sometimes expressed preferences for assigning Members with certain backgrounds to service recipients with certain backgrounds. In some cases, though, programs were not able to supply a Member with the exact racial, class, and ethnic background that a host site wanted to assign to a service recipient. It is critical for both Members and service recipients that program staff and host site staff recognize the value of all Members in providing service. Accordingly, program staff must communicate clearly and openly that even though Members bring a variety of backgrounds to the program, they all are capable of performing the relevant service.

"The kids are isolated here. They meet people from their neighborhood only. AmeriCorps' focus on diversity is great."

Benefit 7: Learning that the willingness to help crosses cultures

The experiences of AmeriCorps Members whose background differed from that of the service recipients with whom they worked provided another lesson. They showed that commitment to community service is universal. People of many different backgrounds and life experiences find reward in service to others—even service to people different from themselves. Some interviewees said that that was not an important issue for the younger children; according to the same respondents, children do not notice race and ethnicity at least until after the fifth grade. What those children appreciated was having an adult (of any race, class, or ethnicity) take an interest in their lives. For the older children, however, cross-cultural support was often an eye-opening experience.

Members relayed several experiences that demonstrated this benefit. For instance, a white female Member began serving a school at mid-term. Originally, she had felt overwhelmed by the level of poverty and need in the predominantly African American (98 percent of the student body) school. She learned that the children felt that there were few people they could trust. The Member was in a wheelchair, which became a magnet for curious children and helped her to build ties with them. When a child confided to her that his father had just left the family, she knew that he was comfortable talking to her.

Members from racial, class, and ethnic backgrounds that differed from the service recipients' found other commonalities. Although a male Member who had immigrated from Israel did not speak any Spanish, he empathized with the immigrants in the English as a Second Language program at a housing project. He considered the immigration experience to give them a point of contact with each other (though he did rely on a Hispanic Member for initial recruiting of service recipients).

Challenge

Learning to deal with prejudice. Some children were not accepting of Members from different backgrounds. Those children resorted to name calling and other inappropriate behavior. In one school, the black AmeriCorps Members were first asked whether they were janitors. On some occasions, the Members engaged the children in a dialog about the matter. Other times, team leaders or host site staff had to handle the situation.

Members became frustrated when sites were not supportive of their diversity. One Member was disturbed with a comment from her site that "the only ones that work are the white ones." In that same program, another Member observed that it appeared that a very competent white Member was being overlooked in a mostly black school because of the prejudice of its principal. She complained that in the course of the year no change took place in the principal's attitude.

> *"Members reported a lot of racism and prejudice among the kids they worked with. They often don't know how to deal with it."*

Benefit 8: Opportunity to exchange perspectives

Some of the sites we visited were located in diverse, yet segregated, communities. Interacting with AmeriCorps Members from different backgrounds provided service recipients a chance to learn about other cultures, as well as a chance to teach about their own culture. Members and service recipients learned to consider views from a person who might communicate differently from their norm and might be from a different racial, class, or ethnic background. This experience broadened and enriched the environment of both the service recipients and AmeriCorps Members.

In an educational program, the female Korean Member differed greatly—on the surface—from the African American girl she tutored. The girl had a learning disability and was involved with gangs. Their dissimilarities receded in importance, however, as they made contact on a personal level. The Member noted, "We probably wouldn't have ever known each other's culture without this experience."

Challenge

Finding common ground. Some Members and service recipients do not succeed in exchanging perspectives. Others take several months to find common ground. For example, an older African American woman from the suburbs had difficulty with her first site assignment. The teenagers in the program—especially the African American males—intimidated her. She explained, "I had no strategies for action." (Later, though, this Member was named as the best worker in a program that involved homework and recreation for gang deterrence at an elementary school.)

Another an older Member also experienced initial difficulties with service recipients. She described the reaction of the "tougher youths" in the program as thinking she was a "filthy-rich woman." Her approach was to wait until they needed her help. Over time, they grew comfortable with her and valued her support.

"I grew up privileged and interacted in a world where everyone was like me. I never thought about what it is like to grow up poor and the challenges and struggle to survive."

Benefit 9: Positive exposure to people from different backgrounds

As in the case of AmeriCorps Members learning from each other through serving together, service recipients were also exposed to AmeriCorps Members from different backgrounds in a positive way. They met people who took an interest in their lives and were active in trying to make a difference.

That experience occurred most often at school-based programs. Elementary school children at one program asked an African American male Member whether he had ever been in jail and what jail was like. The Member, who had never been in jail, worked with the children to send the message that not all black males have been incarcerated.

At the start of another program, the elementary-school children interacted with the same-race Members from a diverse team. The minority students equated being white with being mean. As the program progressed, the students observed differences about the white Members: their skin has no color, their lips were pink, their hair was straight, and they did not use slang. But eventually the students saw the Members as a unified group. A Member observed that over time the children came to see not the different colors of the Members' skin, but the same color of their AmeriCorps shirts.

Challenge

Ensuring positive experiences. Positive exposure to people from different backgrounds presumes, of course, a positive experience. In some cases, however, Members did not fulfill their responsibilities in the spirit of AmeriCorps; and their lack of commitment sent negative messages to the service recipients. Several host site directors noted that some Members would fail to appear for service as scheduled (sometimes arriving late, other times not showing up at all without having notified anyone). One host site director observed, "The disadvantaged kids they deal with have been disappointed; lots of unfulfilled promises have been made to them."

"In schools, you don't need a racial or ethnic match to be successful.
You have to find your own way to approach a child.
Mainly, you need to be open and honest."

HOST SITE PROGRAMS

The benefits to the host site program from diversity among Members were, in essence, part of achieving the AmeriCorps program's mission. Notwithstanding the importance of developing leadership skills and a service ethic in Members, the primary goal of AmeriCorps programs is making a difference in the community. For many programs, service to the communities was provided through local host agencies. The diversity of the Corps made unique contributions to the service that the Members performed.

Benefit 10: Improved Outreach

When AmeriCorps programs brought in diverse groups of Members, they were able to draw in diverse audiences for service. Sometimes it was because the Members were more familiar than the host agency staff with where and how to reach certain groups of people. Other times it was because individuals needing services may have been more comfortable responding to someone from a similar background. Bilingual Members were able to serve as a liaison with non-English speaking service recipients and/or their parents. Programs were thus able to provide services to people that otherwise might not have been helped.

In a major metropolitan area, AmeriCorps Members provided classroom support and ran an after-school program for one of the most diverse elementary schools in the city. The principal, noting that a Vietnamese Corps Member was the only nonstudent in the school who spoke Vietnamese and that an AmeriCorps staff member was the only French speaker, said, "There is no substitute for a core group of diverse people." According to a teacher at this school, the diversity of the Members was important because it supplemented a teaching staff that was not as diverse. Corps Members' fluency in a second language and their identification with the home cultures of many students also enabled them to serve as intermediaries with parents who did not speak English.

Another host agency was able to serve Cambodian mothers with the help of a diverse Member Corps that included a Cambodian speaker. The local agency had recognized a need among the Cambodian group in its community and had made unsuccessful attempts at reaching them to offer service. But with the involvement of this Member, who could assist in understanding the language and culture, the agency experienced active participation from the women.

Staff at another host agency expressed satisfaction with being able to honor specific requests for bilingual support at tutoring sites thanks to the diversity of Members in the AmeriCorps program.

Challenges

Garnering support for diversity from host site staff. Sometimes Members struggled at host sites because the staff had difficulties with Member diversity. For instance, an African American male Member placed at a school found that the teacher to whom he was assigned was not accepting of black men. The students' parents, on the other hand, reacted positively to having a 21-year-old male be part of the classroom. Later, working with the Boys' Club and contributing to Martin Luther King Day at school, the Member had other opportunities to interact with parents. Those experiences reinforced his feeling of making an important contribution at the school.

When class differences affect work. Host site staff (and program staff, as well) had to make accommodations for Members from lower socioeconomic levels who were working a second job while in AmeriCorps. Staff asked themselves how strict they should be when there was a conflict: how to make adjustments and yet not diminish standards and the importance of the Members' service? Program staff were confronted with that question when Saturday service projects conflicted with Members' second jobs.

"You understand people more, you understand the

host community when you have diverse Members.”

Benefit 11: Connections to various community organizations

When host site programs expanded the different racial, ethnic, and class groups of recipients they served, they were more likely to develop common interests with other community organizations. Host site programs thus have incentives to establish connections with various other organizations.

The program director at one AmeriCorps program reported that it had functioned as a catalyst in connecting partners with each other. She noted that involvement with the AmeriCorps program had fostered communication among groups that previously did not talk to one another. "It's like weaving a blanket across the community," she said.

A host agency staff member indicated that working with AmeriCorps strengthened her program's commitment to the community. "The connection with AmeriCorps helps us be in these neighborhoods," she observed.

As host agencies reached out to more community members and organizations, they moved into the life of the community—beyond the 9-to-5 service. Host agency providers found themselves becoming more accepted by the community. They were viewed as being committed to the community and to the larger issues facing the community.

Challenges

"Turf" Tensions. Not all organizations will be supportive of the links that AmeriCorps programs try to create. When a Latino director of a program working on race relations reached out to African American community organizations, other Latino organizations tried to dissuade him. They accused him of sharing limited resources with African Americans that could have been used entirely to help Latinos.

"Our collaborations with other organizations have been mutually beneficial."

AMERICORPS PROGRAM STAFF

AmeriCorps program staff have a dual role with respect to Member diversity: they both learn from the diversity of Members and support Member diversity. According to one very diverse group of Members, the strength of the two supervisors directing their programs was the message they communicated to Members: "You can do anything." As a director at one program said, "It's our responsibility to make a place for a range of persons. That is how the program will thrive." At the same time, diverse Members Corps provide staff a chance to learn from others with different backgrounds.

Benefit 12: Opportunity to learn from people with different backgrounds

Like Members, staff have the chance to develop relationships with people from various cultures that they might not otherwise have come into contact with. From those relationships, staff can dispel stereotypes and learn new ways to approach matters. They also gain skills in managing diversity, and their problem-solving skills and communication skills are enhanced.

A staff member at one program that included gang members as AmeriCorps Members noticed that the Members had to turn their jackets inside out when traveling through certain neighborhoods, so as not to display an inappropriate color. The staff person had the epiphany that he had never lived in their world. As other staff members have commented, he explained, "It's hard to walk in someone else's shoes."

A program director said that the diverse Member Corps had given her "a better pulse on the community, particularly different racial and ethnic groups."

Challenges

Staff biases. Some programs have problems when staff stereotype Corps Members. At one program, for example, a Member believed that staff assumed that because she was a suburban white female, she had to be naive. The Member felt limited by staff's assumptions.

Even when there were no biases, Members were sometimes concerned about differential treatment of Members and assumed that it occurred because of latent staff biases. Program staff at a number of sites explained that concerns about privacy limited their willingness to fully explain some decisions that made it appear that some Members were receiving preferential treatment.

A program director working with a diverse Corps volunteered, "I'm excited to work with a group that is so rich and brings so much to the table."

COMMUNITIES

In a sense, the benefits of diversity to communities is a sum of the previous benefits. The personal growth of Members, service recipients, and program staff, and the increased interconnectedness of host programs with other organizations and with the community at large, fosters a climate of understanding and acceptance of diversity in general. Valuing differences and providing service in a culturally relevant way enhances community development efforts. Strong communities produce positive environments for people to live and work in.

Benefit 13: Increased understanding of the host community and of people in general

The impact of Members from diverse backgrounds working with each other and with service recipients was felt among the families of service recipients, as well as among neighbors in the community. This benefit was noted more strongly in the more segregated communities. For example, the program director of one AmeriCorps program said that because the city is so segregated, it is especially important to recruit diverse Members and mix them in teams. She observed definite attitude changes and increased tolerance on the part of individuals at host agencies and within the community who interacted with the diverse Member Corps.

This benefit was observed even at programs where the Corps Members hailed from the same community in which they were serving. A large number of AmeriCorps Members at one program were from the local community. They came from immigrant or first-generation families that instilled in them a commitment to give back to the community. They served as links between the community members and the programs that were working hard to better serve that community.

Both communities and Members gained from the realization of this benefit. Residents of a segregated neighborhood were surprised to see African American and Latinos from one program cleaning the neighborhood together. Members, many of whom themselves had not thought it would be possible, were proud of their accomplishment.

That program was able to turn adverse situations into a growth opportunity for the community. When two police officers (one black and one white), saw an African American Member outside of a school with Latino children, they seemed to assume that the black Member was doing something illegal. The police stopped and rather aggressively demanded to know what the Member was doing. A teacher quickly came out and explained that the Member was watching the students during recess. The Member and the program director brought this episode to the attention of the police commander. Doing so led to a roundtable discussion between a group of police officers and the Members, and it was followed by other joint activities (such as basketball games and swimming).

Challenge

Educating the community. Some community members look upon the growing cohesion with disfavor. AmeriCorps Members have had gangs throw rocks at them and at their cars, smashing windows and denting hoods. Neighbors have complained when Members painted over gang graffiti, because they feared gang retaliation.

"This is a racist community; the program is an excellent tool to break down barriers."

"The AmeriCorps program is a way to bring all kinds of people into our lives—different ages, economic backgrounds, single moms,

married moms. It makes us more open and understanding."

CHAPTER IV. EFFECT OF PROGRAM EXPERIENCE ON MEMBERS= ATTITUDES

In answering the third research question, AWhat effect does the AmeriCorps experience have on Members= tolerance of and attitudes toward others?≅ Macro researchers relied primarily on an instrument developed expressly for this purpose. Focus groups conducted during each site visit gave anecdotal information and references to some attitude change, but the Member survey provides systematic input from a large percentage of the Members from the programs under study. This chapter summarizes the survey results and relates findings to the more qualitative data from the site visits.

MEMBER SURVEY BACKGROUND

Purpose

In an effort to capture Members= experiences in interacting with diverse people (prior to service and within the AmeriCorps program); their attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about different racial/ethic groups and social classes; and their views regarding the supportiveness of the program for Members of different racial, class, and ethnic groups, a survey was developed. As no Apackaged≅ instrument was available to serve the intended purpose, Macro staff developed the questionnaire based on the literature related to diversity (primarily from higher education), other group interaction measurement tools, diversity-related instruments used with students at the University of Maryland, and the experience of the Macro staff from previous site visits to AmeriCorps programs. A pretest of the instrument was conducted at an AmeriCorps*NCCC site prior to using it for the entire study. A copy of the 2-page instrument may be found at the end of this chapter.

Diversity-related topics covered

The bulk of the survey consisted of 22 statements with which the Member was asked to agree or disagree on a 5-point Likert scale, where 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree. The instrument was designed to cover the major topic areas of interest with 3

to 7 statements in each section. The basic areas of inquiry were: program support, program climate, Member behavior, Member attitudes, and benefits. Statements were phrased in both positively and negatively. (In the latter case, to have a favorable attitude toward diverse situations, the respondent would have to have disagreed.) Statements that were cast in negative phrasing are: Questions 2, 4, 7, 10, 14, 15, and 22. Furthermore, some questions duplicated phrasing to ask the question first of race and ethnicity and then of class. These paired questions are: 9 and 19, 11 and 20, 13 and 21, 14 and 22. (For example, in the first set the statement was given as: AMy experiences since joining this program have led me to be more understanding of racial/ethnic differences≅ and then repeated as, AMy experiences since joining this program have led me to be more understanding of class differences.≅)

In an attempt to determine a person=s degree of exposure to diverse populations in a number of dimensionsXrace, ethnicity, class, gender, and religionXadditional questions were asked about Member experience before joining AmeriCorps. We also presented a slightly more open-ended and comparative question, asking AWhen people have difficulty working with an individual who is different from them, the individual is most likely of a different _____.≅ Responses supplied were race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, as well as Aother,≅ which allowed Members= full opinion to be expressed. Basic demographic information (race/ethnicity, class, education, gender) of the respondent, based on self-report, was also collected.

Methodology

The original intent of the survey was to administer a pre- and post-program survey, with the first being given to Members relatively early in the service experience, at the time of the site visit, and the second at the end of their service. The AmeriCorps*NCCC site was visited relatively early in the program year (November) and the survey given to program administrators to distribute to Members, collect anonymously, and then return. After the first site visit, it was determined that future program visits should take place after Members had a greater amount of experience with each other. This made the distribution of pre-program surveys problematic. Other issues arose about what constitutes Apre-program≅ timing and whether to administer the post-program survey in a design that compared results to other non-diverse programs. The approach finally employed was to treat the Member attitude survey as an exploratory instrument to get a sense of Members= attitudes and perceptions at the end of the program year. More rigorous comparisons could be made in future investigation into the topic of diversity in programs.

The result of these changes in methodology during the course of the research is that we have one set of responses from an NCCC site that was administered in December (n=207), and completed surveys at the end of the program year from 10 of the 12 sites visited.[1] In terms of the analysis, a total of 477 surveys were considered.

[1] It appears that the two sites that not return instruments failed to do so for administrative reasons: one AmeriCorps program will not be operating next year and the survey was not included into the end-of-the-year activities with Members, and the other site had the director leave at the end of the year and he did not follow through on overseeing its completion.

The surveys were administered with an attempt to provide anonymity, albeit at a distance. Near the end of the program year, the program director was sent a packet of surveys to be distributed to Members in some group activity. The instructions requested that the completed surveys be placed by the Members in the return envelope supplied by Macro, sealed, and sent directly to Macro. In this way, we hoped to encourage open and honest responses from the Members.

Ethnicity. Members were asked to classify themselves according to the standard five categories used in the U.S. Census (Asian American or Pacific Islander; Black not of Hispanic origin; Hispanic; Native American or Alaskan Native; White, not of Hispanic origin). In addition, we included an Aother≅ category, asking that the respondent specify. Eleven percent of the 477 respondents left this question blank. The proportions do not reflect national program demographics but rather describe the population responding to the Member survey. The largest group among survey respondents was whites, representing 53.1 percent of those answering the question. The next largest group was African Americans, with 17.2 percent; followed by Hispanics, with 15.1 percent. The less common groups were Asian Americans, representing 7.1 percent, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, with 2.1 percent. The Aother≅ category received 5.4 percent of the respondents. Members who selected that response frequently described themselves as multi-racial, or other categories that did not appear to fit into the labels supplied (e.g., West Indian, Cape Verdean, of Haitian parents raised in Puerto Rico, etc.).

Table IV.1

Ethnicity Breakdown of Survey Respondents

Racial/ethnic group	Percent	Valid Percent
Asian American or Pacific Islander	6.3%	7.1%
Black, not of Hispanic origin	15.3	17.2
Hispanic	13.4	15.1
Native American/Alaskan Native	1.9	2.1
White	47.2	53.1
Other	4.8	5.4
No response	11.1	.
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Social Class. Members were also given four choices in designating their own class background. The categories were: upper class, middle class, working class, and lower class. Respondents generally classified themselves into 2 major groups: 50 percent said middle class and 34.8 percent said they were working class. Additionally 21 percent declined to answer this question. The other two groupings had approximately equal numbers: 7.4 percent indicated they were in the upper class and 7.7 percent in the lower class.

Table IV.2 Social Class Breakdown of Survey Respondents		
Social Class	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**
Upper class	5.9%	7.4%
Middle class	39.4	50.0
Working class	27.5	34.8
Lower class	6.1	7.7
Missing	21.2	.
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Education. The breakdown of education levels in the questionnaire was: some high school, GED, high school graduate, some college, and college graduate. The largest number of Members indicated that they had some college (33.7%). A slightly smaller percentage were high school graduates (31%). College graduates constituted 25.3 percent of the respondents. The smaller categories were those with GEDs, with 8.4 percent, and a particularly small number of Members with only some high school (1.4%). Eight percent did not respond to this question.

Table IV.3 Education Breakdown of Survey Respondents		
Educational Level	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**
Some high school	1.3%	1.4%
GED	7.8	8.4
High school graduate	28.7	31.2
Some college	31.0	33.7
College graduate	23.3	25.3
No response	8.0	.
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Gender. Non-respondents on the question about identifying one=s gender constituted 8.4 percent of the survey population. Respondents broke down into 60.4 percent female and 39.6 percent male.

DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY DATA

Overall

Of all statements posed, Members appeared to be most open and comfortable about interacting with service recipients from different backgrounds. They also strongly supported the premise that getting to know Members from different racial and ethnic backgrounds has been worthwhile. They were also very positive in assessing that Members of different racial and ethnic backgrounds contribute equally to service.

There were a series of parallel questions that asked for the Member=s perspective related to race/ethnicity and then the identical statement with respect to class. Overall, the averages (means) were higher (i.e., in stronger agreement) to the positive statements about race and ethnicity. The only exception was in the question about social interactions with Members at this program being largely confined to Members of the respondent=s own class (which was only slightly more in favor of class diversity than the similar question that focused on the respondent=s race/ethnicity).

Seven of the 22 agree/disagree statements were phrased in the negative. In other words, the more favorable or desirable response in terms of support of diversity would be to disagree (i.e., have a lower mean). Examples of such questions are: AIt=s not easy to be tolerant when people have beliefs and attitudes that are very different from my own,≅ and AThere is interracial tension in the program.≅ To convert the means for comparison with the other positively-phrased questions, the mean can be deducted from 5.0. In comparing the responses to these questions with the others, all seven rank below the means of the positive questions. The best explanation is that this may be an artifact of the phrasing, which would lead Members to be less likely to express *strong* disagreement and/or to offer more a more neutral response. This result leads us to recommend the further testing of items in the instrument, specifically in changing the directionality of questions with similar groups to assess whether they influence the strength of the responses.

Presented below are the agree/disagree responses to the 22 statements and one other attitudinal question expressed in percentages of Members responding. In addition, means of each item are shown so that comparisons across statements may be more meaningful, giving the full strength of the respondent assessment (i.e., reflecting disagreeing responses and neutral responses).

Program Support		
Statements reflect what the program has done to encourage positive feelings about diversity and offer support to Members who are experiencing any challenges.		
Questions	**% Agree/ Strongly Agree**	**Mean**
1. The program has done a good job of providing training, team-building, and other activities that promote understanding of different backgrounds.	62.3	3.63
3. The program provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions, and beliefs.	55.9	3.47
5. The program promotes respect for diversity.	74.6	3.90
16. Staff respect Members of different racial and ethnic groups.	72.2	3.84

Program Climate		
These questions describe the program climate but do not point to specific actions or supports by the program. This area does capture the setting in which Members establish their attitudes and express their feelings toward others.		
Questions	**% Agree/ Strongly Agree**	**Mean**
4. The atmosphere in the program does not make me feel like I belong	68.8	2.83*
15. There is interracial tension in the program.	52.6	2.48*
18. Members respect Members of different racial and ethnic groups.	72.8	3.86

*is used to designate converted mean. When statement was expressed in the negative, the mean was deducted from 5.0 to provide comparability. (See discussion of negatively phrased questions on the previous page.)

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ABreaking down social barriers is hard.≅

Member Behavior		
Questions focus on specific things that Members do that reflect their interactions with others.		
Questions	**% Agree/ Strongly Agree**	**Mean**
2. I feel I need to minimize various characteristics of my background (e.g., language, dress, income) to be able to fit in.	62.7	2.69*
6 Since joining this program, I am more likely than before to initiate contact with people who are of a different background.	54.1	3.48
10. If I had a problem, I would feel more comfortable going to a staff member of my race/ethnicity.	61.3	2.69*
12. I am comfortable interacting with service recipients from a different racial/ethnic background.	88.4	4.25
14. My social interactions with Members at this program are largely confined to members of my own race/ethnicity.	63.6	2.70*
22. My social interactions with Members at this program are largely confined to members of my own class.	59.3	2.63*

AI=ve learned so much, but I have a lot more to learn.≅

Member Attitude		
This topic area contains attitudinal expressions toward people (especially other Members) who are different from the respondent.		
Questions	**% Agree/ Strongly Agree**	**Mean**
7. It=s not easy to be tolerant when people have beliefs and attitudes that are very different from my own.	63.8	2.70*
9. My experiences since joining this program have led me to be more understanding of racial/ethnic differences.	59.5	3.60

13. In my experience, Members of different racial/ethnic backgrounds contribute equally to our service.	75.4	4.07
17. I am comfortable in situations where I am the only person of my racial/ethnic group.	63.5	3.66
19. My experiences since joining this program have led me to be more understanding of class differences.	56.2	3.56
21. In my experience, Members of different class backgrounds contribute equally to our service.	70.8	3.92

A final question focuses on Member attitudes, but it was structured in a different format. Question 24 asks the following:

> In my opinion, when people have difficulty working with an individual who is different from them, the individual is most likely of a different: Race, Ethnicity, Class, Gender, Religion, Other *(please specify).*

The following responses were obtained:

- Race - 27.9%
- Class - 18.5%
- Gender - 8.6%
- Ethnicity - 6.5%
- Religion - 6.0%
- Other - 32.4%

The most interesting response to question 24 is probably the large number of Members who selected other. Some respondents just left the specification blank; others disagreed with the question itself, saying Anot applicable≅ or none. However, there were a number of clusters of responses that reflect some of the findings that we explore more fully in Chapter V on the other types of diversity that concern programs. The most common responses written in were personality (16%), attitudes (14%), and work ethic (7%). Additional responses were related to educational level, working style, educational background, maturity level, and the like.

AMost of what I see is not differences, but what we are accomplishing.≅

The benefits discussed in Chapter III reflects the project team=s assessment of Member benefits; these three statements gather the Members= own perspective.

Benefits		
Questions relate to Members= views on the benefits of diversity in the program setting.		
Questions	**% Agree/ Strongly Agree**	**Mean**
8. In my experience, you accomplish more when team members are from diverse backgrounds	38.2	3.26
11. Getting to know Members at this program with racial/ethnic backgrounds different from my own has been worthwhile.	81.5	4.14
20. Getting to know Members at this program with class backgrounds different from my own has been worthwhile.	69.9	3.91

COMPARISONS

In addition to describing the responses to each of the attitudinal and behavioral items in the questionnaire, in their own terms and comparatively, we wanted to understand the relationship of these opinions to other factors. We considered basic demographic differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, social class, educational level attained, and gender) from the responses given in the survey. We looked at how a person=s prior experience with diversity (from question 23) might have influenced these opinions. We also considered whether a Member=s appraisal of his/her program=s performance in promoting understanding of different backgrounds (question 1) might be associated with outcomes related to attitudes and behavior. Finally, we looked at differences in program support and Member attitudes by programs. All associations described (except for differences by program) were determined to be statistically significant.

Demographics

Ethnicity. In comparing the mean values of the responses (where 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree), the primary significant observation is that those that responded Aother≅ in the race/ethnicity category are distinctly different in their responses from other racial or ethnic groups. Differences occurred between the Aother≅ group and one or more

other categories (and at times, all of the other categories).[2] Since the Aother≅ category reflects a number of different racial and ethnic situations, the most accurate assessment is that Members who selected this designation **do** have different perceptions and that these perceptions or experiences are reflected in many of the survey statements.

General differences were detected for the question about there being interracial tension in the program (question 15). There were significant differences across racial groupings, with Asian Americans were most likely to think that there was tension and African Americans least likely to have this view.[3] The other question showing differences across racial/ethnic lines was that of a person feeling comfortable where he/she is the only person of the racial/ethnic group (question 17). Overall there were significant differences, and Asian Americans and Native Americans (often found in small numbers in AmeriCorps programs) were most likely to agree, and their responses were significantly different from African Americans.

Two other questions were shown to have significant differences along racial/ethnic categories: AIt is not easy to be tolerant when people have beliefs and attitudes that are very different from my own≅ (question 7), and AI would feel more comfortable going to a staff member of my race/ethnicity≅ (question 10). In the case of the tolerance question, whites were more likely to disagree (mean=2.09) and the Aother≅ group and Hispanics were less likely to disagree (means=2.61 and 2.59, respectively). For the question about a Member feeling more comfortable going to a staff member of their own race/ethnicity, whites were more likely to disagree (mean=2.12) and Hispanics were less likely to disagree (mean=2.68).

Social class. A good number of responses to the statements in the survey reflected a significant difference between the Members designating themselves as part of the upper class and another class. There was no particular pattern; the upper class simply responded differently than one class or multiple classes on 11 of the statements, as measured by Duncan test comparisons. There were four statements where overall class differences were statistically significant:

∃ Question 1 on the program=s performance to support understanding, where the means ranged from 3.79 for the upper class to 3.34 for the middle class. In other words, those calling themselves upper class were more positive about what the program was doing to promote understanding and those in the middle class the least positive.

∃ Question 3 about the program having an open environment, where significant differences were detected between the upper class and the middle class. The results were similar to the above question.

∃ Question 17 on one=s comfort level in being the only person of a racial/ethnic group, where the responses between all classes were higher and significantly different from that of the lower

[2] Pairwise comparisons were made using a Duncan Multiple Range Test. Differences were detected on questions 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 21, and 22. In these comparisons the Aother≅ group was more likely to be negative about benefits and less likely to feel that they belong. (Some caution should be exercised in interpreting these results as this is a relatively smaller group.)

[3] A pairwise difference was detected using a Duncan test.

class. In this case, those who classified themselves as being in the lower class were not as comfortable as others when they found themselves as the only person of their race or ethnicity.

- Question 19 related to whether one=s experience in the program had led a person to be more understanding of class differences, in which the upper class is shown to be more positive and statistically different from all other classes. In other words, those in the upper class stood out in their response in comparison to others in expressing that the program experience had helped them to understand class differences. This result is probably related to their relative low incidence in AmeriCorps programs and greater exposure to other classes, especially working and lower classes.

Educational levels. We also found significant differences in attitudes between the group of Members with only some high school education (i.e., without either a GED or high school diploma) and Members with other educational backgrounds. In general, they were less positive about the program experience and less positive about the gains they have received from others. However, caution should be exercised in interpreting these data as Members with no high school degree or equivalent are found in limited numbers in AmeriCorps programs and constituted a small percentage of our respondents.

We also considered the other (and larger) educational categories in analyzing differences in attitudes among groups of respondents. On the question of initiating contact with others (ASince joining this program I am more likely than before to initiate contact with people who are of a different background≅), there is a statistically significant difference by educational levels, and a difference between two pairs: those with a GED, who agreed most strongly that they would initiate contact, and the college graduate category, which was least likely to agree.[4] This finding seems to indicate that the AmeriCorps experience has been an expanding one for those with a GED, encouraging them to relate to people of different backgrounds. For the college graduate, the interpretation could be either that they are not inclined to have contact with those who are different, or they may feel that they had already established contacts with those who are different and that the program was not instrumental. There was also a statistically significant difference across educational levels for the statement that more is accomplished when team members are from diverse backgrounds (question 8). There were no significantly different pairs, but the GED group was most in agreement that more is accomplished (mean=3.67), and the high school graduates were least likely to agree (mean=3.09).

Gender. There were three questions for which a significant difference between male and female responses emerged. On the statement about program performance to promote understanding (question 1), males tended to respond more strongly than female Members (means=3.83 and 3.54, respectively). Males were also more likely to agree (less likely to disagree) with the statement (question 2) that AI feel I need to minimize various characteristics of my background to be able to fit in.≅ Finally, on the statement that asserts that it is not easy to be tolerant (question 7), females were more likely to disagree (mean=2.17) than male Members (mean=2.51).

[4] The means for the GED group and the college graduate category were 4.05 and 3.28, respectively.

Background Prior to Joining AmeriCorps

In order to test whether a person=s background influenced their responses to the statements presented in the survey, we considered question 23, which asks, APrior to joining AmeriCorps, to what extent did you interact with people who were different from you,≅ and provides 5 areas of difference (race, ethnicity, class, gender, and religion) on which to rate, using a 4-point scale (1=not at all, 2=minor extent, 3=moderate extent, 4=great extent). These items were combined to create a variable that broke into approximately two equal partsXthose with a great deal of experience with people who were different and those with less experience.

This background variable produced only two significant differences among the responses to the survey statements. On the statement about whether a Member is comfortable interacting with service recipients from a different racial/ethnic background, those with a more heterogeneous background more often reported feeling comfortable. Not surprisingly, on the statement that the Member=s social interactions at the program are largely confined to members of one=s class, those with heterogeneous prior experience were most likely to disagree.

Assessment of Program Performance

We also investigated whether Members who thought that their programs were doing a good job in providing team-building, training, and other activities to promote understanding of different backgrounds would express attitudes and behaviors that were more supportive of diversity than those who were not as positive about their program=s performance in promoting understanding. First, we divided responses to question 1 into two groups: those who were neutral or disagreed that their program was supporting understanding, and those who agreed that their program was doing a good job. The breakdown was roughly 38-62 percent, respectively. We found statistically significant differences on 18 of the 22 agree/disagree attitudinal statements. In other words, a whole cluster of statements about behavior, attitudes, and benefits is associated with the performance of a program. Obviously some of the statements are measuring approximately the same thing as question 1Xfor example, that a program provides an environment for free and open expression (question 3). It may also be interesting to note where there was *not* a significant association: whether a person feels the need to minimize characteristics in their background (question 2), whether it is not easy to be tolerant (question 7), whether a person is more comfortable going to a staff member of their same race/ethnicity, and whether social interactions are largely with members of one=s own class (question 22). For the last statement, we noted in the previous section a statistically significant association with a Member=s past personal experience.

Differences Across Programs

Following on the above analysis of how Member assessment of program performance is tied to other attitudes and behaviors, we investigated whether there were observable differences among the

response patterns by program. In other words, are there programs whose Members consistently have strongly positive attitudes about diversity and its benefits and who reflect that in their behavior? Conversely, are there specific programs among those visited where the Members do not express as positive sentiments about the diversity they have encountered in AmeriCorps. In analyzing the survey responses by program, we found a relatively clear pattern. Among the 10 programs from which we received surveys, three or four always tended to have the most positive responses to a question (measured by means, which summarizes the responses of all Members within a program), three would consistently have the lowest scores (means), and the remainder had averages that clustered in a middle range. In the highest group of programs, Members consistently gave responses that indicated support of diversity from their program experience, in their attitudes and their practices, and in their perception of benefits. Likewise, in another set of programs, the program support variables were low and many of the Members= attitude, benefit, and behavior statements showed a pattern of less change in attitude related to program experience. As the research team promised confidentiality and anonymity to individual programs that were open to our visits, we are not reporting data on individual program differences. However, this analysis points out that even among these programs selected for their interest in Member diversity, there are broad differences in both program support and climate and Member behaviors and attitudes.

CONCLUSIONS

- Members appeared to be most open and comfortable about interacting with service recipients from different backgrounds.

- Members think getting to know Members from different racial and ethnic backgrounds has been worthwhile.

- Members were quite positive in assessing that members of different racial and ethnic backgrounds contribute equally to service.

For many respondents, the diversity they found in their AmeriCorps program was very positive. But there are indications that not all Members feel they have benefitted, or some have not changed their attitudes as a result of this experience. The AmeriCorps experience is not without its difficulties. A year of working together with people from a wide range of backgrounds and providing service in disadvantaged communities is a very intense experience. Generally Members are confrontingXbut not always successfullyXwhat it means to interact with colleagues who are different from themselves.

Our analysis yields some specific observations. Members appear to be more comfortable with differences based on race than social class. Among some of the smaller subgroups in the Member population the AmeriCorps experience may be perceived or experienced differently.[5] Those groups

[5] The differences are discussed in the Demographics section. Generally the differences show that the small subgroup is less positive in their sentiments than others= response to the same questions, although in the case of

include Members who classify themselves as Aother≅ in terms of race/ethnicity, and to a lesser extent, Asian Americans and Native Americans, who are not heavily represented in the Corps; those who do not have a high school diploma; and those who say they are from the upper class, who also make up a small percentage of Members.

The data also suggest that the program does indeed make a difference. When Members are involved in a program that successfully supports diversity through training, team building, and similar activities (as measured by their own assessment of program performance), their behavior and attitudes appear more accepting of diversity and open to others. When programs were assessed to be doing a good job in providing training and other activities to promote understanding of differences, a whole constellation of other benefits, attitudes, and behaviors follow.

AIt some ways it is remarkable how we work together.

It=s a tough thing to do.≅

those from an upper class background, some of the differences tended to be stronger or more positive in terms of their attitudes or experiences.

CHAPTER V. OTHER DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

Although all the programs we visited had a fairly high degree of diversityXand were chosen for this study because of itXthere was a wide range of attitudes and behaviors when it came to promoting racial, ethnic, and class diversity. As described in the previous chapters, the continuum of commitment went from a laissez-faire or natural approach to a concerted effort at every step to recruit, nurture, and enhance diversity in the program. There was also variation among programs as to what constituted Adiversity.≅ Diversity did not always mean differences in just race, ethnicity, or social class. Time and again, program directors and Members pointed out to us how diversity in other dimensions had been valuable or had introduced difficulties that the staff or the team had to deal with.

Sometimes respondents told us that racial and ethnic differences are clear to see and plan for, but other forms of diversity are more subtle. A Member criticized a program for focusing on Adiversity that is safe and easy to swallow,≅ meaning primarily race and ethnicity. Members also asserted, AYou don=t know who=s really diverse.≅ The point they made was that there are many facets of diversity that define people and contribute to what they have to offerXnot just visible aspects. For a good number of programs, the less obvious forms of diversity warranted equal attention and energy. In the interest of fully capturing the programs= perspectives, we present the issues below.

Disabilities. In *Principles for High Quality National Service Programs* (CNS, January 1994), the Corporation early on identified people with disabilities as part of its effort to include diversity as a core element. Sometimes the service that AmeriCorps provides in local communities is aimed at helping children or adults with disabilities. Staff at local programs frequently expressed interest in being open to accepting people with various disabilitiesXboth physical and learning disabilities. At half of the sites we visited, we learned that the program had one or more Members with a disability, and we often spoke with them.

Although it was part of their philosophy that a diverse membership will enhance opportunities to serve, the programs did not generally go beyond a mere receptivity to having Members with a disability. Few accommodations had been made to ensure that the team activities or the service delivery activities could be as meaningful for Members with physical disabilities as for others. Likewise, although there had been conscious attempts to build a team and bring in Members who might have felt excluded because of racial or educational differences, there seemed to have been no team focus on facilitating the inclusion of a Member with a disability.

At one program, a Member with a number of disabilities, including being hearing impaired, asserted in a group discussion that Abeing handicapped is part of diversity.≅ She added that she felt discrimination both inside and outside of the program. The other Members in the group agreed with

her observation, indicating that they had not seriously considered the disability issue, although the program had been underway for 9 months. Although inclusion had not been explicitly expressed and dealt with as part of developing a working team, the program had been thoughtful in placing that Member in a school that included a large number of children with disabilities, on the assumption that she would have something special to offer them. When that situation proved too stressful, the program gave careful attention to a second placement. There were also areas of success: the placement of another Member with a physical disability resulted in his being an inspiration in physical education classes.

In another program, a Member who was in a wheelchair also reported a lack of acceptance by some of the Members in her program. She felt that about one-quarter of the Members thought that she was Atoo different≅ and found it hard to deal with her. On the other hand, the team she worked with at an elementary school was very supportive, and the group enjoyed a close bond and open communication. During the course of a day, she felt frustrated at not having her needs taken into account at the morning physical exercises, but then she felt validated by the warmth and acceptance of the school children and her team. The program staff acknowledged that although they had welcomed people with disabilities, they had not been especially active in accommodating them. Specific challenges they cited were in supporting Members who were hearing impaired, Members for whom there were physical barriers, and Members with learning disabilities.

In general, the issue is limited awareness of the complexity of including individuals with disabilities and little experience in doing so. In some cases, others may also feel discomfort, not knowing precisely how to support the person or how to talk about a disability. That reaction seemed to come up especially in working with Members who had a learning disability. Although we observed in a large group session where a Member with a learning disability participated actively and had the group=s respect, we also saw that the program was still struggling with how to fully integrate disabilities as a form of diversity. This may be an area in which the Corporation could support the programs better, so that they, in turn, might better support people with disabilities.

Gender. The sites we visited varied in their proportions of males and females. Given the higher percentage of women participating in AmeriCorps (59 percent), the programs were likely to have a greater proportion of women than of men. Regardless of the ratio, most sites mentioned some aspect of gender diversity. Sometimes the gender issue was a direct result of the proportions; in other programs the issue was independent of the specific numbers.

We observed or discussed a range of gender-related diversity issues at the program sites we visited. At times only one type of gender issue was present; at other sites, several were present simultaneously. The principal gender-related concerns programs reported were as follows:

- Internal program dynamics (beliefs that program operations would be different [better] if there were a better balance of men and women)

- Many interpersonal conflicts involving male/female interactions at some programs

- A strong need for more male role modelsXparticularly for working with young males

- An interest in recruiting more males and efforts made along those lines

- Specific difficulties in retaining males

- A perception raised by some (generally, female Members) that males in the program were treated more leniently than females.

Although we heard no reports of sexual harassment, we did repeatedly hear complaints of sexism and sexist comments at almost every level (Member, program staff, host agency staff, service recipients). As a staff member asserted in a group discussion with a number of other staff, AWe=ve learned to take the race issue seriously, but we still think sexism is funnyXand we=re proud to be homophobic.≅ Obviously, he was not speaking personally but relaying the current state of gender relations in society and the context in which AmeriCorps programs operate.

Age. AmeriCorps Members range in age from 18-year-olds to people their sixties. Some programs we visited were homogeneous, with Members being in their early to mid-20s; but other programs had quite a cross-section of ages. The age differences also translated into differences in outside responsibilities based on life stagesXwhether single mothers with up to three children, men with families to support, or a woman who had to care for her young adult son with a disability.

When Aolder≅ Members were on a team, they were frequently seen as offering wisdom or stability; they were often considered more reliable. At host sites, a person=s maturity or conveying a mother or father image was generally thought of as an asset in serving others. Conversely, younger Members complained about feeling that their judgment was not valuedXat host sites or by program staffXon account of their age (and their presumed inexperience or lack of knowledge). We also found well-functioning teams in which age differences, with their differences in approach and attitudes, made the Members feel enriched by the diversity.

Age differences also created tensions. Members may feel most comfortable with others their age, and cross-generational differences can emerge. Those differences may be physical (what one person is physically able to do or is interested in doing) or related to values and attitudes. Older Members might not feel like socializing after hours (an activity that often strengthens a team bond) or might have responsibilities that precluded their being available for such activities.

In some cases, age differences that we found created conflicts amounted numerically to just a few years. In a couple of programs, Members in the 18-to-24 range fell into natural categories of Ayounger≅ and Aolder.≅ The distinction seemed to be between those who had been out on their own for a while (often attending college) and those for whom this was their first major independent experience. Although this might seem to be an educational difference (and possibly even a class difference), it appeared to cut across education and class. It seemed to have to do with maturity. This categorization is based on observing how a person conducted himself or herself, what his or her range of experience had been, or what attitudes he or she expressed (juvenile versus worldly and mature).

Educational Background. Sometimes it was hard to separate social class from educational background. Indeed, in selecting programs to visits and analyze, we used the mix of educational

levels at a site as a proxy for indicating the presence of a range of social classes. The most dramatic breaches in working as a team or feeling part of a team occurred when there was a GED component (where Members were still studying to receive their GEDs) and other Members either were college graduates or had a few years of college. At one program someone expressly stated that Members in the GED program Aneed to be on the same page regarding service.≅ Some Members did not feel that those who were getting a GED were focused on serving the community.

The above example could be traced as much to class as strictly to educational experience. However, other programs described diversity in educational background simply as being the difference between high school graduates and college graduatesXin a good number of cases, where the year of service was an interruption in an educational career and the high school graduate would be going on to college. The distinctions and challenges that emerged from those groupings often involved different learning styles, working styles, approaches to problem solving, and types of contributions to group discussions.

On the other hand, in some community settings, college graduates were not considered the best contributors. More than one program expressed a need for Members to be Astreet smart.≅ A program working with gangs in an urban area perceived its service environment as being a dangerous situation. Staff tried to avoid recruiting as Members people were not astute and could not take care of themselves. Programs tended to find a balance in bringing together Members who were Astreet smart≅ with others who were Aschool smart.≅ Again, differences in degree of articulateness, learning styles, and methods of problem solving presented difficulties that programs had to confront.

Motivation. Almost all the sites we visited were wrestling with differences in Members= motivation. Although clearly Members may join AmeriCorps for a variety of reasons (altruistic, practical, personal), the primary issue is how Members manifest their motivations in their performance. Is the Member delivering service to the community? Is the Member contributing to the team, to the program? The difference was identified at one program as whether a person was in the program Ato give or to get.≅ Staff acknowledged that a core group of Aslackers≅ could affect the dynamics of whole group, and a major challenge they faced was how to instill the service ethic in Members who did not automatically bring one.

Another challenge was how to deal with the team or the Members who resented the others= perceived lack of commitment. Members were the most vocal in reacting to these differences in motivation: ASome people are committed 50 percent, some 150 percent. We need balance.≅ Differences in motivation alone caused divisive feelings that programs had to cope with. When the apparent lack of motivation was coupled with other diversity characteristics (for example, a particular group of Members seeming less engaged), it created extra problems for program management as well as for group interactions. It also exacerbated other diversity tensions for the Members.

Sexual Orientation. A long-term staff member at a program with 40 diverse Members said she thought that the Arace issues take care of themselves. It is the others, such as sexual orientation and religion, that are fought about.≅ She felt that the program was constantly being challenged to raise awareness, that there were hidden biases in those two areas.

Diversity in sexual orientation was an area that programs cited repeatedly as producing conflicts and as having ramifications for Members, service recipients, and host sites. Many programs could recall incidents in whichXwhether inside or outside the CorpsXhomophobic behavior and name-calling became a topic that the group had to deal with. Programs often had one or several gay and lesbian Members. The degree to which such differences were acknowledged, accepted, and became a topic for discussion varied considerably.

In terms of the working dynamics among Members, since our site visits came later in the program year, programs often had reflected on different sexual orientations and attitudes toward those differences. Conflicts or discriminatory attitudes had arisen and had mostly been resolved. In half of the sites Members offered examples of their change in attitudeXor that they had become more open and more accepting. In other cases, dissenters may have just learned to curtail their verbal challenges but had not actually changed their antihomosexual views. One example we observed was that of a Member who refused to go to a group activity in another Member=s home because the latter was a lesbian.

There were a number of other environments in which strong negative reactions to a person=s sexual orientation came up. Some were educational settings, where Members would have direct contact with children. Often a program or a Member would avoid facing a situation by trying to treat it as irrelevant to their service. One host agency, similarly, described its clientele as conservative and reactive to gays, but noted having recruited a gay Member despite that. In areas where some religious beliefs exerted a major moral influence, Members, staff, or recipients tended to be uncomfortable with confronting problems related to sexual orientation.

Religion. A number of programs talked about working through issues of different religions. The differences were manifested primarily in terms of how they affected people=s values and the judgments they made about issues that confronted them as Members. Often it was in the team meeting settings that differences and conflicts among Members became apparent. Although religious differences might be just part of an array of differences cited by Members as Athe way I was brought up,≅ Amy family=s values,≅ and the like, program staff readily cited those differences as being basic to a person=s makeup and as being a challenge to harmonious relations. It was one of the more intractable differences. One staff member pointed to religion (and related moral values) as producing the biggest conflicts in his diverse program. He noted that the topic had been ignored in workshopsXboth those that prepare staff and those that support Members.

Place of Origin. Many times Members would refer to their place of origin as an explanation for their beliefs, behavior mode, or personal preferences. Some programs drew strictly from the local neighborhood, and those Members were homogeneous in their environmental influences even if they were of different races or ethnicities. Other programs were designed to attract Members from a wide range of settings and had a broader geographic scope. In the latter type of group, differences often emerged between urban and suburban MembersXin areas such as level of exposure to diversity, use of language and slang, pace of living and working, aggressiveness or assertiveness in personal mannerisms, and loudness in talking or laughing.

Although at times geographic differences seemed associated with race or ethnicity, at other times they transcended those differences and became strictly an urban/nonurban split (viewed mainly in

terms of suburbia, but we postulate that it would be equally strong in terms of an urban/rural dichotomy). The result would be Members with urban backgrounds (black and white) having more in common with one other than with their racial counterparts from suburban origins.

The name of the place where someone is from can conjure up stereotypes or prejudicial attitudes, until barriers are broken down and Members have learned about one another as people. A Member at one program felt demeaned by the label Ajust a white girl from the suburbs.≅ Two Members who had become close friends reflected on the difficult process they had gone through in getting to know and appreciate each other. The black Member recalled that he had reacted negatively to Ahearing where [the white Member] was from≅Xa segregated and supposedly biased suburbXand that a wall had initially been set in place.

Readiness to Work. Some AmeriCorps programs are encouraging people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to assist their peers and to contribute to their local community by joining AmeriCorps. The benefits are seen to be both an inherent understanding by the Member of the community context and the problems that people in poverty deal with, and as an opportunity for Member development. For some Members, service in the Corps is intended to help them make the transition from welfare to work. This form of diversity, again, may be linked to race, ethnicity, and social class. It can also create challenges that are independent of those diversity issues.

Where differences emerge is often at the host site: some Members are relatively experienced and independent, and others are still learning and adapting. This type of difference can carry over to team interactions, where other differences are perceived. These differences can serve to expand the Members= awareness of others= views and situations, or it can create resentment of other Members who have trouble adapting to group norms and workplace requirements. The consequence of this form of diversity often depends on how the program supports itXboth materially (as with extra training or child care) and in terms of other efforts to promote empathy and team building.

Other. The list is exhaustive. Each program (through Members or staff) raised other areas of diversity that engendered differences and required programs to respond, especially in terms of facilitating communication and understanding among Corps Members. Respondents said that those other areas challenge a program and introduce issues that need to be resolved. Although the issues might seem trivial compared to major societal divisions, the intense environments of AmeriCorps*State/National and NCCC programs caused them to flare and affect the program or team relations.

We found the following other issues of differences reported at the 12 programs through the course of our site visits: recovery from drug or alcohol dependency, HIV status, openness to resolving conflicts, differing Acomfort zones,≅ levels of physical fitness, how people deal with problems, and work styles. In general, our experience was that if mechanisms were in place for dealing with some issues, they could be adapted for dealing with others.

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