

Impacts of Service: Final Report on the Evaluation of American Conservation and Youth Corps, Abt Associates, August 1996.

An evaluation of the participant and community impacts of the Conservation and Youth Corps, funded under Subtitle C.

This report presents findings from the evaluation of Conservation and Youth Service Corps funded under Subtitle C of the National and Community Service Act of 1990. The purpose of Subtitle C was to create and expand both full-time and summer corps programs for out of school youth between the ages of 18-25. Priority was given to programs that "provide long-term benefits to the public; instill a work ethic and a sense of public service in participants; are labor intensive and involve youth in work crews; can be planned and initiated promptly; and enhance skill development and education level and opportunities for participants."

The focus of this study, conducted by Abt Associates and Brandeis University Center for Human Resources, was on participant and community impacts. Eight of the 100 year-round corps programs receiving Subtitle C funds in the 1993-94 program year were selected for intensive study. Program-level data were collected to assess the impacts of eight programs on their communities. A participant impact analysis was conducted with the four larger, more mature programs in the sample. Using an experimental design, participants were randomly assigned to either a treatment group or control group. Members of the treatment group entered the program and members of the control group did not. Individual outcomes were estimated over a 15-month period. A cost-benefit analysis was conducted in these four study sites.

Community Impacts

For all study sites, the evaluation assessed the value of community services provided and the extent of satisfaction of service sponsors and beneficiaries. During the 14-month period covered by the study:

- Programs contributed over 1 million hours of service, generating an average of 435 hours per participant. Program completers averaged 1,130 hours of service.
- The value of program output averaged \$13.24 per service hour. The eight sites generated services worth nearly \$14 million.
- Sponsors of the service projects were highly satisfied with the quality of the service provided. Nearly 80 percent of the sponsors rated the quality of the corps member service as "good" or "excellent." Ninety-six percent of the sponsors indicated that they would be willing to work with the corps program again.
- Nearly seventy-five percent of the beneficiaries perceived improvement in the quality of life resulting from program services.

Participant Impacts

Improving the educational and employment prospects of participants was a primary goal of the youth and conservation corps, along with enhancing their personal development.

Participant impacts were measured in the four larger programs, using an experimental design and based on a 15-month follow-up period. The impact analysis was based on forty-one outcome measures in nine areas including education, employment and earnings, and personal and social responsibility. Significant impacts were discerned for four measures. Compared with the control group members, program participants:

- Were more likely to have worked for pay;
- Worker more hours (including time spent serving in the corps);

- Were less likely to be arrested; and
- Were less likely to earn a technical certificate or diploma.

Subgroup analyses of the data found significant positive impacts by gender and ethnicity. There were significant employment-related impacts for African American and Hispanic youth. African-American males also showed positive impacts on measures of personal and social responsibility, receipt of an associate's degree, and educational aspirations. Participation in the corps also led to decreased pregnancy rates for African-American females. White females demonstrated positive impacts on attainment of an associate's degree, education aspirations, and reduced use of alcohol.

In general, participants found the corps experience worthwhile. Eighty-six percent of the participants reported being either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their community service experience. Participants perceived their service as valuable to the community, with 95 percent rating it as "very helpful" or "helpful."

Cost-Benefit

The principal benefit generated by the programs was the value of services produced, the principal costs were operational, including member's stipends, and the earnings forgone by participants while in the program. The study found that large, mature programs produced a net monetary benefit of \$1.04, over and above costs, for each hour of service.