

# The AmeriCorps Experience: Transformation through Service



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## Executive Summary

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) helps over 80,000 AmeriCorps members find a service placement annually. CNCS also conducts research on the outcomes of its programming at universities across the country and has partnered with Morrison Institute for Public Policy for a second time to better understand the employability and employment outcomes of AmeriCorps members. This year's study expands upon Morrison Institute's 2016 analysis of Arizona's AmeriCorps programs to five states across the country. The findings from this study suggest that strong personal and professional networks emerge within the AmeriCorps program, which leads to positive employment outcomes.

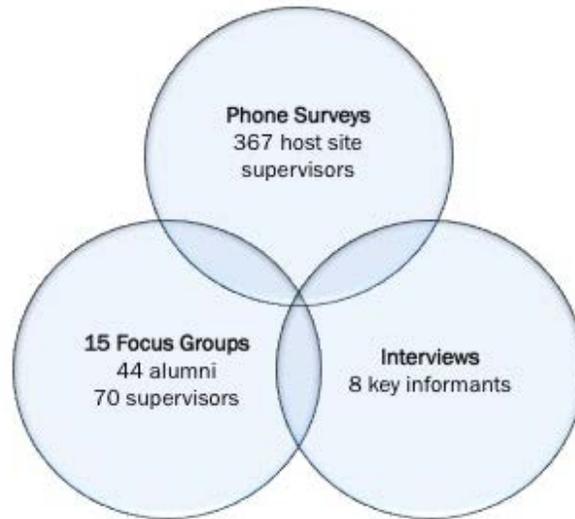
Findings from last year's *AmeriCorps: Arizona's Pipeline to Employment* show that AmeriCorps members enhanced their professional skills including communication, systems thinking, diverse experiences, leadership and confidence. Meanwhile, employers hired AmeriCorps members because of their teamwork, professional conduct and leadership capabilities. In the 2016 Arizona study, 82.7 percent of participating organizations had hired at least one former AmeriCorps member since 2012. Phone survey data also showed that 57.8 percent of these organizations hired service members from their own sites. Interestingly, AmeriCorps programs are not only training members to enter the workforce, but host organizations are actually creating new positions for their AmeriCorps members upon completion of their term of service.

CNCS wanted to know if these findings are true only in Arizona or if they are generalizable to AmeriCorps programs across the country. Morrison Institute sought to answer the following research questions in this year's study of other states:

- How do AmeriCorps host-sites benefit from AmeriCorps members?
- What are the employment outcomes of AmeriCorps alumni?
- Are new positions being created for AmeriCorps alumni at host-sites?
- What are the major challenges facing the AmeriCorps program?

In order to answer these questions and assess AmeriCorps members' employment outcomes across the nation, Morrison Institute selected five states to compare results: Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, Tennessee and Washington. Morrison Institute utilized a mixed-methods research and evaluation design that included 367 phone surveys, 15 focus groups with AmeriCorps alumni and supervisors, and eight interviews with AmeriCorps State Commissioners.

## Mixed Methods Approach



Overall, the findings from Morrison Institute's 2016 report were corroborated by this year's findings:

- In last year's study, 64 percent of AmeriCorps new hires were hired full-time and more than half of these positions were newly created
- In this year's study, 58 percent of organizations that hired AmeriCorps members after their service term hired them on full-time, and 37 percent of these positions were newly created
- In both years it is evident that the AmeriCorps program creates a strong employment pipeline through AmeriCorps networks: In 2017, 87 percent of host sites hired or helped AmeriCorps members find a job after their service term

Consistencies were found across large sections of last year's data, including but not limited to: personal and professional transformation of the service member; an impact in the community that could not be obtained without the AmeriCorps program; capacity building in AmeriCorps host sites; and real-world skill development for AmeriCorps members, which leads to job placements in host organizations and in the labor market. Both studies also found that AmeriCorps programming faces challenges in communication, coordination and continuity. Some of these coordination challenges are due to the fact that AmeriCorps spans all 50 states, each of which has a unique mix of host sites.

The key takeaway for service members and organizations involved in the AmeriCorps program can best be described by those who served in the program: Their service experience was transformative and it prepared them to work.

## Introduction

*“Invest in as much of yourself as you can. You are your own biggest asset by far. ... Anything you invest in yourself, you get back ten-fold.”*

– Warren Buffett, chairman of the board, president and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway Inc.

In both good and bad economic times, forward-thinking governments, businesses, nonprofits and individuals invest in their future by investing in themselves. Higher education, for example, is a counter-cyclical industry: During a recession, when there is a lack of job opportunity, more people are willing to pay for an education – even taking out loans, if necessary. They are aware they may miss out on an immediate paycheck, but in the long run they will be better off continuing their education in hopes of increasing their future wages when economies rebound and their skillsets are enhanced.

Investing in oneself is not only confined to periods of recession. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), national unemployment rates have fallen to pre-recession levels, at 4.2 percent in September 2017. The Great Recession of 2008 caused an increase in the number of people that went back to school (Hoxby 2015). Consequently, in the post-recession period, there has been a new influx of highly educated individuals competing in the labor market. This dynamic makes it increasingly difficult for individuals with less education and less experience to jumpstart and advance their careers without some other strategy and action.

They join the ranks of millions of Americans who, for numerous reasons and at various times, seek ways to invest in themselves. They look to boost their portfolio to give them a competitive advantage in first or second careers. In fact, developing marketable skillsets to achieve such goals are among the chief reasons individuals seek out service positions with the AmeriCorps program. Since being founded in 1993, AmeriCorps has helped more than 1 million participants via a program designed to build a “culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility” (AmeriCorps, 2017).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a “new federalism” was created by the U.S. Congress with the end goal of downsizing the federal government’s control over the direct provision of community services. This task was accomplished by allocating funds through block grants to state and local governments (Brookings Institute, pp 10). In response, there was a sharp increase in the number of 501c3 nonprofits entering the public sector to fill the needs previously met by government agencies. These additional service providers have created a federal service-delivery system with more federal contracts, making service coordination among providers and evaluators far more challenging (Brookings Institute, pp 8). Subsequently, these smaller “quasi-governmental” nonprofit agencies have a hard time measuring their impact. Public administrators in these nonprofits continuously cite talent management to be one of their biggest challenges (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation 2013). Furthermore, millennials’ interest in working for any level of the U.S. government

continues to fall, with only 2 percent of 2013 graduates wanting to pursue a career in government (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation 2013). These consistent and evolving problems add to the local and national need to attract and retain high-quality human capital that is dedicated to serving the public good.

For 24 years, the AmeriCorps program has generated strong cohorts of public servants and additional positive externalities for host organizations and communities, such as increased service delivery and organizational capacity in underserved communities. The AmeriCorps program has expanded networking opportunities for its service members, and has led to new job creation for AmeriCorps members at AmeriCorps host sites. In 2016 Morrison Institute found that from 2012 to 2016, 58 percent of Arizona's AmeriCorps organizations have hired AmeriCorps alumni after their term of service. Furthermore, AmeriCorps members have an advantage over non-AmeriCorps candidates for jobs with AmeriCorps host sites because employers believe that previous service members are better team players and have higher levels of professional conduct and leadership skills.

AmeriCorps programming creates a nationwide platform that meets critical community needs in areas of disaster services, economic opportunity, education, environmental stewardship, healthy futures and support for veterans and military families. The AmeriCorps program creates a bridge between the emerging millennial workforce and the technological and real-world skills needed to succeed in today's modern job market. In addition to the AmeriCorps program's role in developing the business acumen needed to meet the needs of the labor market, the program also gives service members the opportunity to fulfill their civic duty.

The AmeriCorps program nationally helps facilitate 80,000 AmeriCorps service members, who then mobilize millions of community volunteers for the organizations they serve. This adds much needed support and organizational capacity-building opportunities for communities nationwide. Public service has the potential to instill the value of community in our nation's future leaders, which is crucial to the development of a high-caliber, culturally aware and selfless U.S. workforce. Hence, the AmeriCorps program has the potential to create ubiquitous positive impacts on communities, service members and host sites.

Approximately 24.9 percent of the U.S. population volunteered at least once between September 2014 and September 2015 (BLS 2016). In order to increase America's commitment to helping others it is critical to understand the reasons why individuals join AmeriCorps, what their experiences are like and how their service term affects their careers. The intent of this study is to collect and analyze data on the AmeriCorps experience from five states to discern the employability and employment outcomes of AmeriCorps members after their term of service. In this report, Morrison Institute will lay out research questions, the methodology of the study, analyze results, provide insights and discuss the implications of findings for future AmeriCorps programming.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do host sites hire their AmeriCorps service members after their service term and, if not, do they help them find employment elsewhere?
2. What benefits do AmeriCorps alumni experience once they reach the job market?
3. Is there a pipeline to employment within AmeriCorps' network?
4. How can the AmeriCorps program be improved?

In order to answer these questions Morrison Institute conducted 367 phone surveys with AmeriCorps supervisors from five states, 10 virtual focus groups with AmeriCorps host-site supervisors, five virtual focus groups with AmeriCorps alumni and eight interviews with AmeriCorps State Commissioners.

Through a detailed analysis, this study highlights four underlying themes regarding the AmeriCorps program:

1. AmeriCorps members gain valuable personal and professional experience that leads to employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors
2. Public-sector organizations are able to increase their capacity and deliver services that are of value to their local communities
3. AmeriCorps members, host sites and communities inculcate public service into their cultural norms and values
4. The AmeriCorps experience is eye-opening for AmeriCorps members because they get to see the world through someone else's point of view

These were a few of many similarities in participant responses across states but one of the major differences is that states with more AmeriCorps host sites tend to have more support for AmeriCorps supervisors and less communication challenges within their networks. The AmeriCorps program, like most programs, has its challenges. Potential issues that could be detracting from its outcomes are:

1. The AmeriCorps program pays a very low wage, and this may inhibit the diversity of the AmeriCorps applicant pool because socioeconomic issues prevent some low-income individuals from taking a job that cannot immediately support themselves and their families.
2. There is a lack of direct feedback and communication between service members and the communities they serve with AmeriCorps administrators.

## **Data and Methodology**

In 2017, CNCS asked Arizona State University's Morrison Institute for Public Policy to expand the scope of the 2016 research project, *AmeriCorps: Arizona's Pipeline to Employment*, to see if findings in the Arizona study are generalizable to AmeriCorps program outcomes

across its national network. In conjunction with CNCS, Morrison Institute used a convenience sample to select five states: Nevada, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Washington.

### *Phone Surveys*

The objective of the phone surveys was to ascertain what employment opportunities are available to AmeriCorps members at the end of their service term. For continuity and comparison purposes, the survey questions for this year’s phone survey were taken from the survey instrument used in Arizona’s 2016 study. Supervisor survey questions addressed how many new jobs were created for AmeriCorps graduates at host sites, the reasons why supervisors do or do not hire AmeriCorps members and the extent to which supervisors helped past AmeriCorps members find employment in the labor market. A full list of phone survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

State Commissioners from all five states provided Morrison Institute with a full list of AmeriCorps host sites that had active programs from 2012 to 2016. Morrison Institute then selected a random sample of host sites from each state by randomizing the state-level contact lists. When a host site did not respond or was not able to be reached, the next host site on the randomized list was called. In total, Morrison Institute contacted a total of 2,056 supervisors, reaching 367 offices, for an overall response rate of 17.8 percent. The table below delineates the response rates by state.

Table 1 – Phone Survey Response Rate

State	Total unduplicated contacts	Unduplicated calls made	Completed phone surveys	Response rate of completed calls
Nevada	150	150	59	39.33%
Washington	1,496	485	100	20.62%
Tennessee	512	512	62	12.11%
Minnesota	1,555	384	64	16.67%
Massachusetts	618	525	82	15.62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,331</b>	<b>2,056</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>17.85%</b>

The response rate for the phone surveys was lower than anticipated, yielding 367 total responses instead of the goal of 1,000. For this reason, data collected from the phone surveys are to be used as descriptive data only and not to be generalized for the state or national levels.

During supervisor phone surveys, Morrison Institute research staff entered supervisor responses directly into a database. Data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software and

results were compared to the qualitative experiences expressed in alumni and supervisor virtual focus groups and in key informant interviews with AmeriCorps State Commissioners.

### *Supervisor Focus Groups*

After the completion of the supervisor phone survey, participants were asked if they would like to participate in a virtual focus group. If participants were interested, an email was sent to the email address they provided. The email contained information on how to sign up for the focus group and gave an option to select one of the two available dates for focus groups in their state. Per Institutional Review Board (IRB) specifications for this project, once supervisors confirmed and consented to participate in the study, a Vidyo software conferencing link was sent to their email address. If participants did not have access to, or could not download the Vidyo application, a phone number was provided so that participants could call into the focus group. A verbal consent was read to all participants before focus groups commenced. Participants were informed that they would receive a \$50 stipend for participation in the study, and checks were sent to the addresses that they provided.

Ten focus groups were conducted with present AmeriCorps supervisors who worked with an AmeriCorps program between 2012 and 2016. The intent of the supervisor focus groups was to take a closer look at the following questions:

1. Are new jobs created for AmeriCorps members at host sites?
2. What skillsets do employers think are the most valuable for AmeriCorps members to find employment?
3. How do host site supervisors perceive their AmeriCorps members during their service term?
4. What are supervisors' insights into how the AmeriCorps program works, and how do they think it can be improved?

### *Alumni Focus Groups*

State Commissioners from Massachusetts, Minnesota, Tennessee, Nevada and Washington sent emails to alumni that participated in the AmeriCorps program between 2012 and 2016 to determine if they wanted to participate in a virtual focus group. The email included a link to a Qualtrics recruitment survey. Respondents could then enter their AmeriCorps service term, personal information and a contact email. The survey also explained the objective of the study, the reason for the focus group, administered a consent agreement to participate and informed participants of the \$75 stipend they would receive as compensation. Morrison Institute received 388 responses to the survey and contacted the first 50 respondents to participate in focus groups. Five focus groups were held with 10 participants in each group. On the day of the focus group, alumni were sent a link to the Vidyo conferencing room. Participants could either join online or over the phone, with focus groups lasting approximately one hour.

The purpose of the alumni focus groups was to determine the employability of AmeriCorps members after their term of service, as well as service members' perceptions of the AmeriCorps program. Alumni focus groups solicited information from AmeriCorps members about:

- Why they joined the AmeriCorps program
- What professional skills they developed while being an AmeriCorps member
- What their post-service employability looks like
- What challenges face the AmeriCorps program
- What major takeaways and advice they have for future AmeriCorps members

Morrison Institute facilitated discussions with one moderator leading each virtual focus group, and two co-moderators present to ask follow-up questions at the end of each group discussion. After the completion of the focus groups, stipend checks were mailed to all participants. Focus group questions were derived from the focus group facilitation guide used in Morrison Institute's 2016 survey in order to preserve study validity. A full list of focus group facilitation questions for supervisors and alumni can be found in Appendix A.

### *Coding and Analysis*

Coding consisted of a three-part process:

1. Open coding to generate descriptive data
2. Axial coding and the creation of categories
3. Theme generation through selective coding

All virtual focus groups were recorded, professionally transcribed and analyzed with the qualitative analysis software program Nvivo. After each virtual focus group ended, researchers discussed the main themes highlighted by participants and written notes were typed up into memos for future reference during analysis. Qualitative coding drew out and analyzed key topics, major takeaways and underlying themes from focus group discussions.

Open coding methods were used to analyze participant responses in Nvivo software (Saldana 2009). During Nvivo qualitative coding, key categories were identified and generalizable topics were discussed among research collaborators. Final themes were collated through group analysis in order to maintain inter-coder reliability and avoid individual biases. It should be noted that focus group responses were analyzed and coded without the use of the coding framework created in the first year of the study. The rationale for creating new codes this year was to avoid placing new ideas and themes into categories derived from old schema because it could potentially lead to theme generation based on preconceived notions about the AmeriCorps program.

## Key Informant Interviews

After phone surveys and virtual focus groups were completed, Morrison Institute staff reached out to multiple AmeriCorps State Commissioners in each of the five states. Eight State Commissioners consented to being interviewed for the project. Commissioners provided a macro-level understanding of the AmeriCorps program, gave insights into the institutional legacy of the AmeriCorps program in their state and provided constructive comments on the study's general findings from both the alumni and supervisor levels. Interviews were recorded and Commissioners gave feedback on the project's summary of key findings.

## Phone Survey Results

Morrison Institute's intention was to complete 200 phone surveys from each state in order to conduct a comparative analysis across five states. However, after calling 2,056 host-site supervisors, only 367 responses were collected. Due to the lower than anticipated response rate, phone survey results were reported as an overall sample of n=367 from all five states. Morrison Institute did not apply state-level weights so this data is not representative of the national AmeriCorps employment experience. This data does, however, add descriptive value to the AmeriCorps experience.

From the master lists of host-site organizations provided by AmeriCorps State Commissioners, Morrison Institute recorded the organization's industry type. As shown in Table 2, the vast majority of the sample is comprised of human service provider organizations or educational organizations.

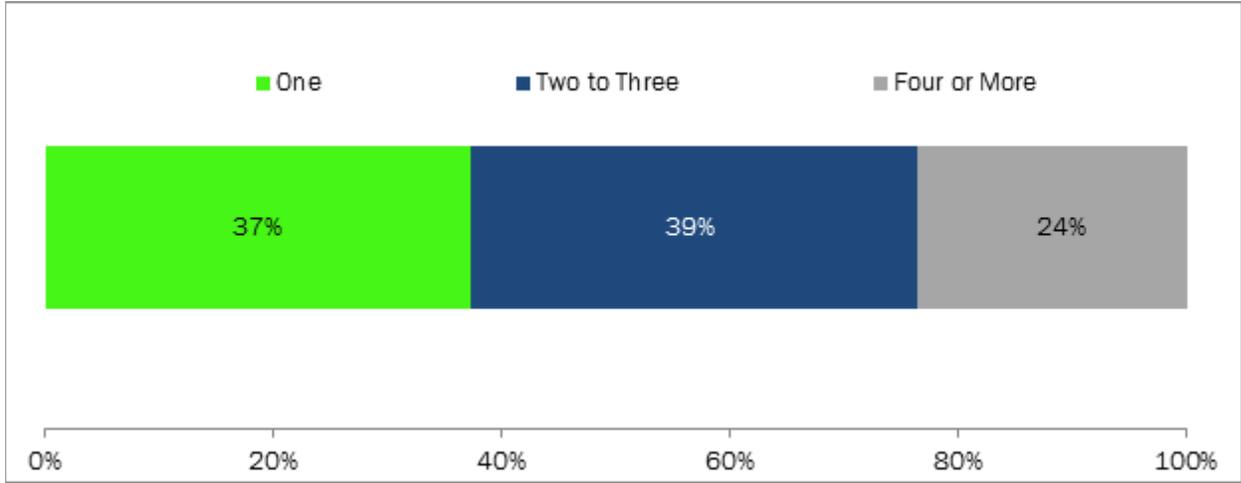
**Table 2 – Industry Make-up of Phone Survey Sample Organizations**

Industry of Organization	Percent of Sample (n=367)
Health and Human Service Providers	41.7%
Education	33.2%
Natural Resource and Mining / Environmental	21.8%
Information Technology	1.6%
Health Services	1.1%
Government	0.3%
Emergency Preparedness / Disaster Relief	0.3%

Morrison Institute for Public Policy

In this sample, 41.4 percent of supervisors have hired AmeriCorps members who served in their organization between 2012 and 2016. Figure 1 shows the following results: 37 percent of supervisors who have hired AmeriCorps alumni said that they hired one AmeriCorps member, 39 percent said they hired two to three members, and the remaining 24 percent hired four or more members.

**Figure 1 – Number of AmeriCorps Members Hired After Service Term**



When sampled organizations do hire former AmeriCorps members, they are most likely to be hired into full-time positions, compared to part-time positions. Figure 2 below shows the make-up of full-time and part-time positions hired within sampled organizations.

**Figure 2 – Proportion of Full-time and Part-time Positions**

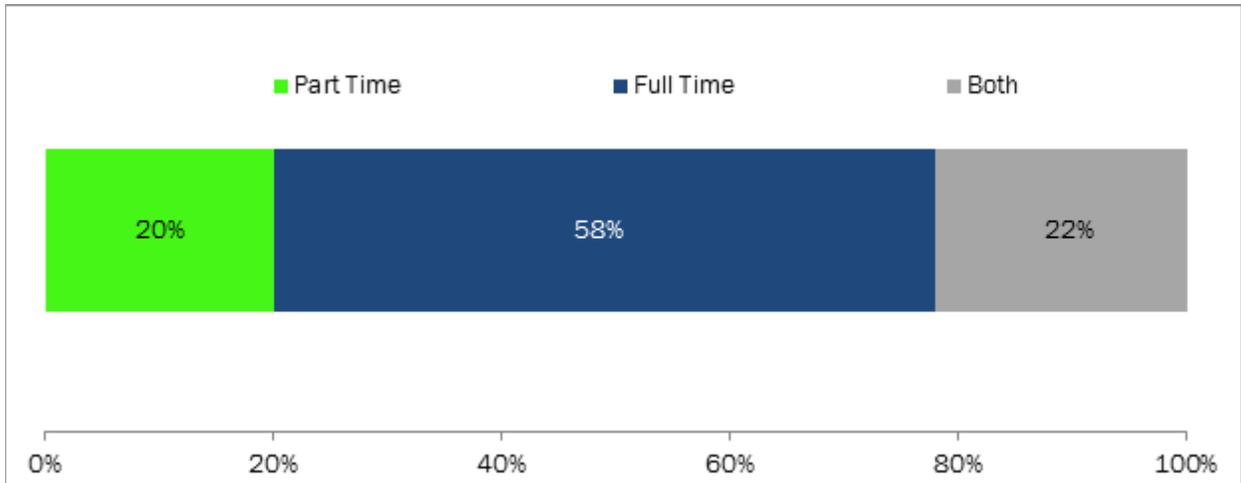
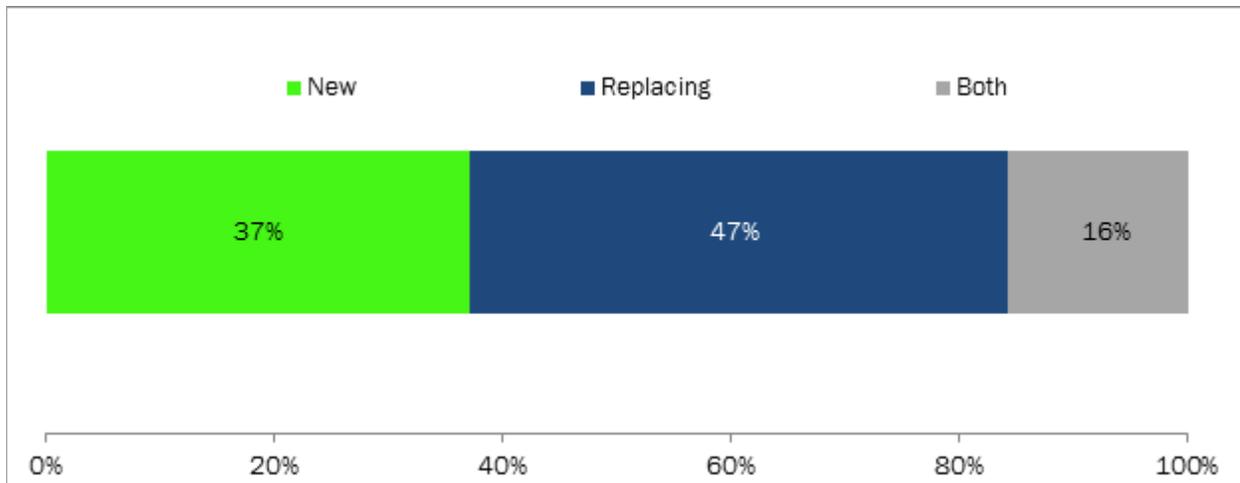


Figure 3 shows the proportion of jobs that were newly created or were replacing another position. Specifically, over half of the organizations that hired an AmeriCorps member after their service term created new positions specifically for those new hires. Furthermore, 56 of the 367 organizations in our sample (15 percent) also created additional paid positions as a result of hiring their AmeriCorps alumni. In some cases, a newly hired AmeriCorps member was able to create additional programming to respond to unmet community needs, which led to organizations hiring more employees to support those programs. This new job creation

speaks to the competence of their former members in creating new programs within their organizations and the value of AmeriCorps.

**Figure 3 – Proportion of New or Replacing Positions**

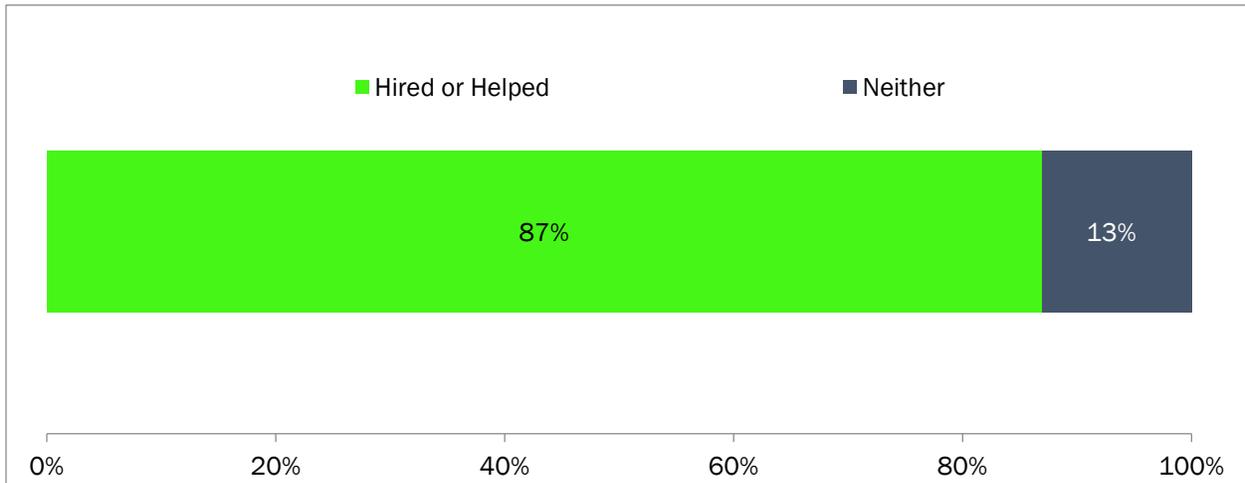


Supervisors were asked what their primary reasons were for hiring their former AmeriCorps members. Respondents from over 100 organizations mentioned that they hired their former AmeriCorps member for reasons related to the member’s strong work ethic, being a good worker and/or the individual’s skills and knowledge of the position. Other popular reasons for hiring a former AmeriCorps member included:

- The organization knew the member would be a good fit as an employee
- The member already had demonstrated excellent work in the role
- The organization needed help with specific tasks
- The organization recognized that the member was already trained, and therefore hiring was cost effective
- It was good timing for the organization and the member

Almost 75 percent of sampled organizations stated that if they did not hire a member themselves, they had assisted an AmeriCorps member in gaining employment elsewhere. Even more impressive, 87 percent of sampled organizations have either hired a former AmeriCorps member or helped a former member to gain employment elsewhere. Figure 4 shows this proportion.

**Figure 4 – Organizations that Have Either Hired or Helped AmeriCorps Alumni Find a Job**



Supervisors also were asked how they assisted an AmeriCorps member in gaining employment elsewhere. Over 160 supervisors offered recommendations and/or letters of reference for their AmeriCorps members. Other helpful ways of assisting their AmeriCorps members in gaining employment elsewhere included:

- Networking for their member and helping them make professional connections and contacts
- Forwarding specific jobs and connecting them to employment opportunities
- Help with editing resumes
- References and/or help with graduate school applications
- Interview preparation help

Respondents gave numerous reasons why they assisted their AmeriCorps member in finding employment. Mostly, organizations said they found their AmeriCorps member to be great to work with and to have an excellent work ethic. Over 150 organizations said that they wanted to see their AmeriCorps members succeed and that they appreciated their hard work. Other strong reasons for assisting their AmeriCorps member in finding employment included:

- Wanting to be helpful and thank them, especially cognizant of low pay
- They were committed to the AmeriCorps program and this was “the right thing to do” or “part of my job”
- Because the AmeriCorps member asked for help
- The supervisors were prior AmeriCorps members themselves and wanted to help

## FINDINGS

Management of any program or organization entails operations, benefits and job satisfaction of both front-line workers and administrators. In an effort to show both sides of the AmeriCorps story, the following 10 findings are organized by two distinct perspectives, those of the AmeriCorps alumni and those of their host-site supervisors.

### *Findings from Alumni Focus Groups*

AmeriCorps alumni have direct contact with AmeriCorps administrators, host-site supervisors and the populations that are being served through AmeriCorps programming. This enables them to see AmeriCorps service-delivery systems first-hand and give quality feedback about AmeriCorps programming. Overwhelmingly, alumni cited myriad positive outcomes from their time serving in AmeriCorps programs.

Alumni focus group participants said that their AmeriCorps experience:

- Was incredibly rewarding
- Led to personal and professional growth
- Exposed them to a new network of employment opportunities
- Catalyzed them to continue their education
- Allowed them to give back to their community, contribute to an organization that they care about and derive meaning from their work

During one alumni focus group an AmeriCorps member from Minnesota commented:

*“I was just thinking that I wish that everyone had to do an AmeriCorps service term, because I think it's so good for people to get out of your comfort zone, meet people you never would otherwise meet, be a little bit poor for a year and just get out there and experience it. ... And there's plenty of jobs out there that you could just make more money and you could be comfortable, but you wouldn't become a better person for it. And I really appreciate the experience and I wish that more people would do it because I think it has a great effect on people and their careers.”*

– An AmeriCorps member from Minnesota

### Alumni Finding 1: **Rewarding**

In general, AmeriCorps alumni believe that the AmeriCorps program is an incredibly exciting and rewarding experience. AmeriCorps members said they feel that they are having an important impact on the communities where they work, especially when they are working with children:

*“I've had the opportunity to just be a mentor and a friend to youth that are coming from on-the-streets or living in cars. And I just get to be their buddy and just kind of*

*invest in their life while they're here. So, this year has been a huge learning experience and huge change in perspective.”*

– AmeriCorps member from Washington

Alumni come from all walks of life, and despite their differing backgrounds, many feel that the AmeriCorps program can provide a sense of purpose. A veteran from Washington’s AmeriCorps program points out that his service term helped him find his mission:

*“It sparked something in me, and I’ve really – because when I got out, I was really down and really depressed, and I hadn’t found my mission yet. And so it took a lot to get that back, and that self-worth, and realize that I could still be a leader outside of the military.”*

– AmeriCorps member from Washington

## **Alumni Finding 2: Professional development and job exploration**

In addition to the intrinsic reward of public service, AmeriCorps alumni said the AmeriCorps program transformed their critical-thinking skills, increased their employment options and provided them insights into how to be a professional:

*“It was an awesome experience to transition from college to, now, my lab job. It was something totally different, something that I will never regret doing. I met a lot of great people, a lot of great kids, got a lot of professional experience. When I look back on it, most of my friends were other AmeriCorps members. So, the money was tough, but everyone’s in the same boat. Everybody knows what – you can’t go see a lot of new movies and then go out and do this. It’s like everybody’s kind of on the same page. And I totally recommend it. I loved it.”*

– AmeriCorps member from Washington

Alumni felt that if they stuck out their full service year they would be more adept at tackling something new in the future, while also setting themselves up for new work opportunities:

*“Supporting a family working full time on an AmeriCorps income was definitely a struggle. But it paid off. The experience that I got was worth it. I’m actually employed at the nonprofit that I served all four terms at now. So, and they paid for tons of trainings for me. I have certifications that I never thought that I would have. And I know what I am going to do for the rest of my life. So for me, AmeriCorps was a godsend.”*

– AmeriCorps member from Tennessee

### Alumni Finding 3: **Personal growth**

For many AmeriCorps members, their service year is the first time they are working and living outside of their parents' homes, and this can create overwhelming life-transition challenges. Learning to navigate a new job while simultaneously adjusting to major personal changes can be stressful, but the majority of alumni said it was worth the experience. Many service members garnered not only personal resolve but also tangible professional skills such as advocating for others, personal initiative, planning and organizing, and professional comportsment:

*"I think that for me, it was just a really good, like, personal growth experience, which was what I was looking for. ... I found it just to be like really eye-opening and more of a personal growth situation."*

– AmeriCorps member from Minnesota

Some AmeriCorps members said that their perceptions of the world changed throughout their service year, and some went even further to say that they have a newfound awareness of systemic and social issues in America, especially as they relate to cross-cultural and socioeconomic topics:

*"I also think going through AmeriCorps has helped me develop my critical awareness and especially in examining maybe some of the systemic issues of an AmeriCorps program and how that can somehow play a part in maybe perpetuating systems of oppression if we don't reflect on that and if we don't take the time to think about our role in that."*

– AmeriCorps member from Massachusetts

*"My actual service, two service years, were right after graduating college, and it was totally overwhelming. I don't even remember the first two months because I was just becoming an adult and having to balance this really rigorous program with learning how to cook for myself, and all that stuff in between [laughter]. But honestly, despite the challenges and despite, I think, some of the flaws that can exist in such a short-term type of job like an AmeriCorps placement, it really was so transformative for me. I'm still really close with all of the people I served with four years ago. They're still really good friends of mine. And it put me on the path that I'm on today. So it was a really awesome opportunity."*

– AmeriCorps member from Massachusetts

### Alumni Finding 4: **Continuing education**

Participation in an AmeriCorps service year also plays a large role in a member's desire to continue their education. Of the 44 individuals in alumni focus groups, eight service

members said that they wanted to go back to school and 10 already had gone back to school. AmeriCorps programs gave many of these new and future students the opportunity to explore a career they were curious about pursuing. The AmeriCorps experience either assured or redirected service members towards the education that best fit their future career goals. Many AmeriCorps members felt more confident in going back to school after their term of service because they felt they had a better idea of the profession they want to pursue:

*"Well, it [AmeriCorps] actually really kind of solidified my career goal. I was debating on if I wanted to go into social work after undergraduate, or if I wanted to get my degree in higher education in student affairs. And working with college students, specifically in first-generation, low-income college students, once you're in school, I realized how many issues they're having once they got there, acclimating. I'm a first-generation college student myself, and so, seeing kind of where the loopholes were, they were falling throughout the different public state and private state schools here in Washington, I decided to get my master's degree in higher education in student affairs. And I ended up, honestly, because of my AmeriCorps experience, at my employment that I have now."*

– AmeriCorps member from Washington

The AmeriCorps program also provides its members with experience that is highly valued by educational institutions. Once again, the full-year commitment to AmeriCorps shows potential employers, as well as graduate school admissions managers, that the individual is passionate about service and gains the skills and experience needed to be successful in future professional and educational endeavors:

*"When I was doing AmeriCorps, I was also applying to medical school. And AmeriCorps is something that medical schools value very highly because I think a lot of the traits that you learn from AmeriCorps and the traits of a person who does AmeriCorps are things that are really important in someone who's going to be a physician. People who are service-oriented, and who think of others, and who want to help others, and are dedicated to something for a full year, like AmeriCorps, is something that they really highly value. I got asked about my service in every interview I had, and I got very positive feedback on it, so I think it was definitely a big component of my application to school."*

– AmeriCorps member from Tennessee

#### **Alumni Finding 5: Employment network**

AmeriCorps members also developed a strong community among themselves through the AmeriCorps network and improved their personal and professional connections:

*“It was a great networking experience for me being tied into city government. ... We could go out and volunteer with other people's organizations on the weekends, which was a great way to kind of tie into the nonprofit and other groups there in Knoxville. So, overall, really good professional experience for me.”*

- AmeriCorps member from Tennessee

In several instances these professional networking experiences led to employment both inside and outside of AmeriCorps sites:

*“I started throwing my name in the hat and was like, ‘You know what? I am worth it. I can go and do better things. I can continue to help this community that I spent my whole life in.’ ... I’m on a fellowship right now with the House of Representatives. And so, I work for a congresswoman ... and I do all of her veterans' advisory work.”*

- AmeriCorps member from Washington

*“I wouldn't say that AmeriCorps pushed me in any direction but it helped me discover more about myself – what I was good at, what I was bad at, what I never want to do again. AmeriCorps has helped a lot. The organization I served I work for now.”*

- AmeriCorps member from Nevada

Figure 5 is a collage of the 30 most-utilized words in AmeriCorps alumni focus groups.

Figure 5



AmeriCorps programs vary significantly depending on each host-site’s operations and guidance. Alumni responses differed in details but the overall perceptions of the AmeriCorps programs are similar. Disparities exist based on project location, organizational rules, level of supervision and direction provided to AmeriCorps members. However, despite guidance

and communication differences, AmeriCorps members felt that their service was a worthwhile use of their time both personally and professionally.

Among alumni, the AmeriCorps experience was relatively similar across states, especially pertaining to personal benefits, professional development and exposure to potential career paths. Alumni also expressed similar frustrations regarding stipend amounts and the difficulties they faced trying to find affordable housing.

### *Findings from Supervisor Focus Groups and Phone Survey*

Overall, AmeriCorps' supervisors' perceptions and feedback on their respective AmeriCorps programs and service members were overwhelmingly positive. Supervisors cited multiple benefits of having AmeriCorps members at their organizations – chief among them, the ability to expand their programming and the array of services they are able to offer their respective communities. The five key findings from the analysis are:

- The ability to build organizational capacity
- Supervisors admire members' dedication to service
- Supervisors prefer to hire AmeriCorps members over outside candidates
- Supervisors have a vested interest in AmeriCorps member success
- AmeriCorps' networks create employment opportunities for alumni

### **Supervisor Finding 1: Organizational capacity building**

In many instances, supervisors said that their organizations would not be able to continue providing services at their present level without AmeriCorps service members. According to supervisors, AmeriCorps members build organizational capacity that allows organizations to better serve their communities:

*“In our organization, we operate totally with volunteer labor. And the AmeriCorps employees have helped us so much to provide a consistent presence of familiar faces to our clients. When they come in and they see the same person over and over, it's not like there's a different volunteer there every day. And we've found that our AmeriCorps employees are very dependable, they're very eager to help our clients. They work directly with assisting the veterans and the homeless and providing food, delivering food items and all to the senior citizens. So the senior citizens really depend on that familiar face. So that's very important to our program, to having their Corps workers with us.”*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Tennessee

*“As far as thinking about how integral Corps members are to our work, I mean, they are completely – they are 100 percent the people who carry out the work that our organization is trying to do.”*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Washington

AmeriCorps host-site supervisors hold their AmeriCorps members in high esteem and place significant value in their contributions to their respective organizations. In many instances, supervisors stated that their organization would not have been able to provide services to its communities if they did not have the AmeriCorps program in place. Many of the surveyed organizations are small nonprofits that do not have a big enough budget to hire additional full-time staff to do the jobs that their AmeriCorps members are doing:

*“I would definitely say that it improves our organization. The AmeriCorps members that we have currently make up about 25 percent of our workforce, and it makes a huge contribution in being able to provide services that we wouldn’t be able to afford to provide otherwise.”*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Washington

*“We could have never grown the program as quickly and as well as we did without the VISTA members, and now the state/national are there to do the direct service, actually do the teaching. They’re the ones that are in the classrooms and if we didn’t have the AmeriCorps members doing that, there’s no way we could fund staff to do the equivalent job.”*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Nevada

## Supervisor Finding 2: **Supervisor admiration of AmeriCorps service members**

Supervisors expressed a deep appreciation for their AmeriCorps members' commitment to service and to their communities, which led to supervisors investing their time and effort to helping members find employment after their service term:

*“I think really the caliber of AmeriCorps members has been terrific for us over the years. And a lot of them are extremely committed and go onto jobs of service-related positions.”*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Massachusetts

Supervisors noted the high caliber of their AmeriCorps members and continually expressed overwhelming admiration for the service members' commitment to public service and their passion for their communities. AmeriCorps members receive a relatively small stipend during their year of service, which often translates into financial strain, yet supervisors report that most of their members stay motivated:

*“They’re usually raring to go. They’re excited. And they have a lot of passion, which is what we look for in our volunteer workforce kind of across the board. So in terms of what the program has done for our organization, I really don’t think I’m exaggerating when I say they’ve been really invaluable for us getting things done.”*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Nevada

*“I think it shows a great deal of commitment and if they have served before they understand the commitment. I might think that they’re not making a lot of money, and so I generally like to stress if you’re serving as an AmeriCorps member, you’re not doing it for the money. You’re doing it for your community and so I think that I would absolutely recruit someone that had served before because they understand that it’s about service and about passion, not about the money.”*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Nevada

The admiration and respect that supervisors have for alumni is evident in their dedication to helping alumni succeed and find employment after their term of service:

*“I think without the AmeriCorps program and all the really bright, motivated people that come into it, we would be nowhere near where we are now.”*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Nevada

### **Supervisor Finding 3: Supervisors prefer to hire AmeriCorps members**

When looking to fill a position in their organizations, host site supervisors often prefer candidates that have had prior AmeriCorps experience, and consider AmeriCorps alumni to be of a higher caliber than non-AmeriCorps alumni due to their proven commitment to service:

*“I would love to see a prior AmeriCorps (participant). I would hire them probably over somebody that wasn’t. To me it shows that they have completed their year of service or plus. They’re totally and completely dedicated to the AmeriCorps philosophy, so absolutely. For me, if I could find a prior AmeriCorps then that would be a perfect situation for us because they know what they’re getting themselves into before we even have a conversation with them.”*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Nevada

*“So, if it goes to pros and cons in AmeriCorps, I think it does attract a caliber of person who believes in service and is willing to demonstrate their skills and*

*knowledge in order to get that recommendation to further their education or further their career.”*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Washington

#### **Supervisor Finding 4: Supervisors have a vested interest in AmeriCorps member success**

Many AmeriCorps host-site supervisors place a large emphasis on the professional development of their AmeriCorps members and have a vested interest in their professional future. Many AmeriCorps host sites do not have the financial capacity to employ their AmeriCorps members after their service term, but they are willing to help connect them to other sites. Survey results show that 87 percent of host-site supervisors have either hired or helped their AmeriCorps members find employment after their service term.

*“One of the big advantages that we have promoted for our AmeriCorps is the fact that, ‘Hey, if you do a good job here, we may not be able to hire you, but you can bet we’re going to help you find employment outside of the school district if we don’t have openings that you’d want to apply for.’ So that’s one of the really big (appeals) because we all know it’s who you know.”*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Nevada

*“I think it’s two-fold in that we have a well-thought-out recruitment process that has provided us with some stellar members and are committed to members’ personal and professional growth. That means we see the entire years as a way to build their professional and civic engagement skills. Ultimately, we see AmeriCorps members as community leaders and want to see them be successful and bring their skills to other organizations and continue on their ethic of service. This helps us achieve our agency’s mission and goals beyond Skagit County. Also, in terms of our organization and our partner organizations that hire on members – if someone is already doing excellent work, it’s beneficial to bring on someone who knows the agency’s mission and is already keyed into the work that needs to be done. Personally, I am committed to members’ future goals and want to do what I can to help them on their professional journey if they’ve had a successful term.”*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Washington

For the most part, supervisors claimed that they had built good relationships with their AmeriCorps members and wanted to see them succeed in their professional development endeavors and future careers. Often, host-site supervisors facilitated connections between AmeriCorps members, other AmeriCorps host-site organizations and potential employers:

*“My second part-time job is writing letters of reference [laughter], either for graduate school, which a lot of our AmeriCorps members have done, or for jobs.”*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Massachusetts

## Supervisor Finding 5: AmeriCorps network creates employment opportunities

Supervisors expressed a willingness to learn and expand their programs. They nearly unanimously agreed that they would not be able to continue with their present service provision without the support of CNCS's AmeriCorps service members. Furthermore, host sites play a large role in AmeriCorps job placement rates due to the interconnectivity within the AmeriCorps network. Some alumni said that their supervisors reached out to other organizations directly to ask about available positions and offer referrals:

*"One thing that we have set up in the last couple of years that we've had AmeriCorps are monthly meetings with our executive director so that our executive director can talk to them about their goals post-AmeriCorps, can reach out to their network and connect them to anyone who might be interested, setting up informational interviews, that sort of thing. So much of finding a job post-AmeriCorps is about, sort of, the connections you're making."*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Massachusetts

## Challenges and Opportunities for the AmeriCorps Program

Overall, AmeriCorps alumni and supervisors find their experience to be stimulating and gratifying, but there are several reoccurring challenges that face the AmeriCorps program:

- Inconsistent communication and feedback challenges
- Limited stipend, benefits and housing opportunities for service members
- Difficulties with recruitment and retention of service members
- Burdensome administrative duties

### *Alumni*

Figure 6 illustrates the circle of challenges that face AmeriCorps service members as they move through their AmeriCorps service term. The most resounding complaint from alumni was communication inconsistencies and feedback challenges pertaining to interactions with their host-site organizations and state and national offices. Some alumni did not feel that they were getting consistent information from AmeriCorps program administrators. Furthermore, alumni felt that AmeriCorps program officials should make a more concerted effort to listen to the communities that AmeriCorps programming is serving. One AmeriCorps member from Massachusetts pointed out:

*"I think AmeriCorps programs can do a better job about incorporating the opinions and thoughts and feedback from the people that they serve in the program. So for school-*

*based programs, incorporating more student choice and student voice into the implementation of programming. I can't speak to programs outside of school-based AmeriCorps programs, but thinking about ways to get the people who are actually receiving the service to provide feedback, not just testimony or success stories, but also like critical feedback about ways that the program can improve.”*

– AmeriCorps member from Massachusetts

Additionally, the living stipend is seen as a heavy burden on service members, and some members believe it might be prohibiting participation and diversity amongst applicants:

*“The reality of AmeriCorps is that with the living stipend, it is now possible for someone from a low-income background or someone with experiences like that to necessarily make that sacrifice. And those financial implications of AmeriCorps are deeper than if you're supporting your family, if you have younger siblings you need to help out, things like that. And so I think it did impact my personal experience in that we could better support our 2,100 high school students if we have a diverse team.”*

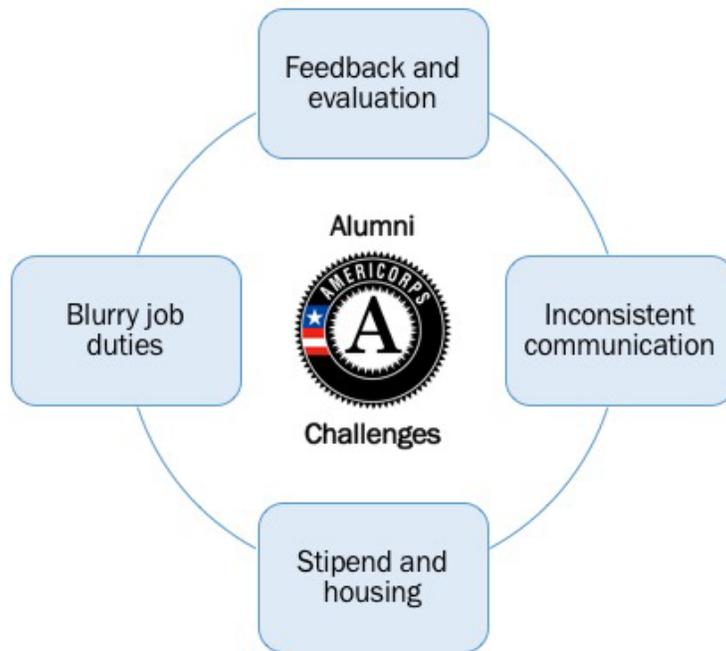
– AmeriCorps member from Minnesota

Alumni also expressed frustration at the fact that certain information is not readily available to them at the time of application, specifically, information regarding the taxation of their service awards. Although they did not mind being taxed, they would have liked to know beforehand so they could plan their financials accordingly:

*“Another challenge, definitely ... was how low the stipend is and how to stretch it across living in the Boston area. So I had to – I know I wasn't supposed to, but I had other work experiences [laughter] going on at the same time to pad my income. And the education award, I wasn't fully expecting that that was taxed. So that was a little difficult to readjust what I thought that I would be able to pay for student loans.”*

– AmeriCorps member from Massachusetts

Figure 6 Alumni Challenges



Blurry job duties posed additional challenges for AmeriCorps alumni. In some instances, job descriptions were too broad and led to uncertainty about which tasks fell within each member's job duties. Sometimes this could even lead to what some term as abuse of service members' time. In fact, there were several recounts of service members working well over 40 hours a week. Inconsistent oversight and job direction made it challenging for service members to clearly identify their job objectives. This also created discontent with some AmeriCorps service members because they did not feel like they were a cohesive part of their organization. Alumni mentioned feeling like they were isolated from staff, volunteers and interns because they did not know where they fit within their organizations. Usually members were incorporated into the decision-making process, but there are examples of members not knowing where they belong and what they should be doing:

*"I was an AmeriCorps volunteer, but all of the students that were enrolled in the program were also part-time AmeriCorps volunteers. And then, there was the full-time staff. So I kind of fit in between the full-time staff and then the part-time AmeriCorps volunteers, and then I was right here. So I wasn't allowed to go to any of the staff meetings. I wasn't allowed to take part in some of the more, like, coordinating or management part of the program's operations. So I felt like I was there to just assist where I could. And if there is always a blurry line between: Did I fit into the staff? Or did I fit into the students that I was also supposed to be providing direct support at the same time? So that kind of blurriness was a little difficult to manage that year."*

- AmeriCorps member from Massachusetts

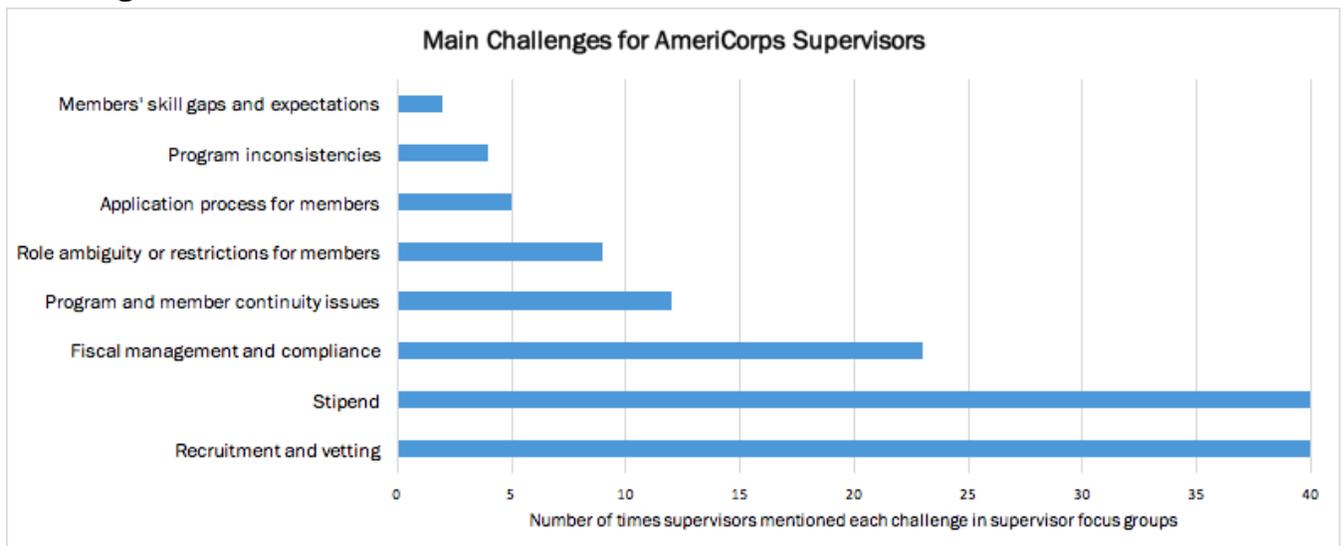
In order to combat these feelings of isolation in the work place, several AmeriCorps alumni expressed interest in additional trainings and onboarding processes that could help new AmeriCorps service members acclimate to their role and gain clarity of their objectives for their year of service.

### Supervisors

Supervisors believe that AmeriCorps service members are an invaluable part of their community service delivery systems and they value their passion and commitment to service. AmeriCorps supervisors rely heavily on AmeriCorps members when they are creating new programs or expanding existing services. Supervisors say that AmeriCorps members have a comparative advantage over non-AmeriCorps job candidates because of their high levels of motivation, ability to think differently and trailblazing attitudes. Overall, supervisors hold the AmeriCorps program in high regard, however, they feel that some parts of the AmeriCorps program could be improved.

Figure 7 shows the main challenges that AmeriCorps supervisors face when working with AmeriCorps members, based on the number of times that AmeriCorps supervisors mentioned each challenge during 10 supervisor focus groups. The three main issues that supervisors mentioned most frequently are the recruitment and vetting process, AmeriCorps living stipend and the fiscal management and compliance issues associated with being an AmeriCorps host site.

Figure 7



Morrison Institute for Public Policy, n=135

AmeriCorps host-site supervisors repeatedly mentioned the cumbersome amount of paperwork and fiscal compliance regulations that make it challenging for them to contract with state and national AmeriCorps programs:

*"My complaint is mostly on the fiscal management side. State/national grants are onerous and we take them very seriously every step of the way to make sure that we're in compliance on all aspects of the program. And we have never had any issues. But I just know from experience, or from the history of Nevada, that you find that some of the old sites that were here they had real issues with compliance. It can make or break an organization. I mean, it can really be detrimental. So there's nothing that can be done about it because it's something set by Congress as far as the law goes, but from my understanding, AmeriCorps grants are some of the most regulated monies that you can get out of the federal budget."*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Nevada

*"There's a program that left AmeriCorps, quit their AmeriCorps grant recently, not because they were doing anything wrong and not because they were having any problems, but just because the amount of time that goes into maintaining programmatic and fiscal compliance is astronomical and at some point if you can move away from that model and replace with staff that make a little bit more money but you hire less people, you're going to do that."*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Nevada

As the economy recovers, there is more incentive for recent graduates to enter into the labor market and take higher-paying jobs. Many host sites have felt this directly in their recruitment processes. Despite a resounding need for AmeriCorps service members in host organizations, some offices, especially in rural areas, are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit members that could be a strong fit for their organization. Some supervisors find that it is difficult to keep AmeriCorps members motivated throughout the entirety of their service term. Additional strain is placed on recruitment efforts because of the opportunity cost associated with small stipends offered by the AmeriCorps program, which cannot compare to what a potential member could make in the private sector. Furthermore, it can be difficult for AmeriCorps supervisors to find affordable housing, transportation and financial assistance options for their new members:

*"I think recruitment continues to be one of the hardest challenges for us, and I have been supervising AmeriCorps members and team and going through the recruitment process for almost eight years now. And it is still challenging, even though I've been doing it for a while. Especially out in communities where nobody really knows where Skagit County is, and there aren't as many housing options or just places to stay as maybe in a bigger city, or it's not as appealing to some people."*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Washington

*"So right now, we're struggling to find someone that's appropriate, because sometimes they misunderstand what the position is, despite having a very detailed*

*service position description. But also, it's just hard because we're trying to find a cultural match as well as the skill match."*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Massachusetts

Some AmeriCorps supervisors expressed concerns over the dubious future of AmeriCorps federal funding. States with a smaller AmeriCorps programming network rely heavily on federal funds, and would be hit the hardest if Congress decides to cut budgets in the next fiscal year:

*"If we had this almighty power, I guess, it would just be to retain funding each year to keep AmeriCorps alive. Very scary this year, obviously, and we don't know what's going to happen. But if we had that ability to keep it around, it'd be through funding projects that are done through AmeriCorps."*

– AmeriCorps supervisor from Massachusetts

The amount of host-site organizations in each state affects the level of support that supervisors receive from other host sites and state and national AmeriCorps programs. For example, in the Arizona study in 2016, there were 317 organizations that sponsored an AmeriCorps service member within the last four years. Of these organizations, 52 were surveyed and they cited inconsistencies in communication, administrative support and training for AmeriCorps supervisors. However, in states such as Minnesota and Washington, there are approximately 1,500 host sites, and AmeriCorps supervisors did not mention challenges in communication or in support for supervisors. Instead, they expressed a strong AmeriCorps network among host sites and larger state and national AmeriCorps systems.

### *Study Limitations*

This study's original goal was to conduct 200 phone surveys in each state so that a statewide comparison could be made about AmeriCorps hiring trends. Due to several obstacles and constraints, research staff received complete responses from less than half of the total number of phone surveys needed to generalize results. The ability to gather complete phone survey responses was inhibited by the following factors:

1. Many AmeriCorps supervisors were either new to their role or unaware of AmeriCorps hiring trends from 2012-2016.
2. From the states selected, a vast majority of organizations with AmeriCorps programming were educational facilities such as schools, and most of the faculty and AmeriCorps supervisors were not in the office during the summer.
  - a. Morrison Institute conducted phone surveys from May to September and therefore could not contact many educational host sites.

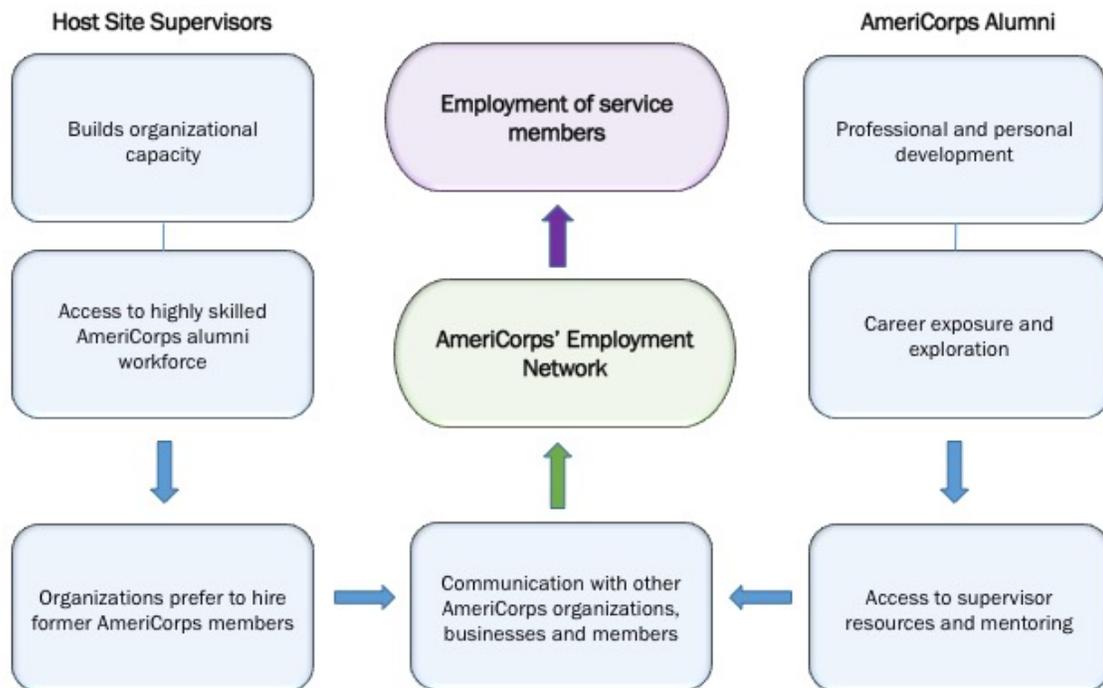
3. Of the 4,331 unduplicated contacts provided in the original AmeriCorps lists from State Commissioners, 3,802 did not include a phone number.
  - a. Morrison Institute staff spent several weeks researching and compiling a list of phone numbers from host-site organizations before phone surveys could begin.
  - b. When Morrison Institute called general host-site phone numbers they were usually not direct lines to AmeriCorps staff, and operators were not always aware that their organization had AmeriCorps programming or staff members, and could not connect researchers to the appropriate AmeriCorps personnel.

## Implications and Discussion of Key Findings

The findings from this year's study show that AmeriCorps members, host sites and host-site supervisors reap myriad benefits from AmeriCorps programming. Host sites have been able to build organizational capacity, creating new programs with the help and initiative of their AmeriCorps service members. Generally, host-site supervisors hold AmeriCorps service members in high regard and value their commitment to service and to their communities, especially considering the low stipend amount that they receive.

Supervisors also built strong relationships with their AmeriCorps members, and have a personal interest in helping their service members achieve their career goals. They assist members through recommendation letters, referrals and activation of their own personal and professional networks, usually with other AmeriCorps host sites. The creation of meaningful networks among supervisors and service members is a mutually beneficial phenomenon. Figure 8 explains the AmeriCorps employment pipeline through illustrating how AmeriCorps networks help move AmeriCorps alumni through a series of personal and professional connections that eventually leads to their employment. AmeriCorps networks facilitate job placements for AmeriCorps alumni by increasing service members' skill sets, while members simultaneously fulfill their civic duty. AmeriCorps host sites are then bolstered by hardworking service members, which helps organizations better serve their communities. This ultimately leads to an employment pipeline that prepares AmeriCorps alumni to be more competitive in the workforce, which benefits businesses.

Figure 8 - AmeriCorps' Employment Network



One supervisor from Minnesota spoke of the lasting effects that the AmeriCorps program is having on not only alumni employment outcomes, but also on their educational prospects:

*“One of our AmeriCorps members applied to six Ivy League grad schools. He got into five of them. And he said the reason why he got into them was because of his experience with our organization that AmeriCorps allowed him to have. And that was the hugest compliment that I’ve ever received. I just thought that was the best thing, and that’s what AmeriCorps is about giving those opportunities.”*

- AmeriCorps supervisor from Minnesota

One final theme that was consistently brought up in almost all focus groups and in interviews was the idea that AmeriCorps funding could disappear or be reduced substantially in the future. Several focus groups ended with alumni and supervisors providing stories about how the AmeriCorps is succeeding in creating public servants and improving the communities in which they work, and several expressed their hope that AmeriCorps funding will continue.

## Recommendations

The problems that face AmeriCorps programming are complex and directly tied to congressional federal budgets that are out of the control of AmeriCorps administrators. However, a few changes that could benefit operations, service members and communities are:

1. Encourage and increase peer-to-peer collaboration networks so that best practices can be shared and incoming service members can better understand AmeriCorps' institutional legacy and available resources.
2. Increase service member stipends based on local cost-of-living data, and provide a more thorough explanation of housing and transportation options, as well as state and federal benefits to incoming service members.
3. Facilitate direct communication between State Commissioners and both the communities that AmeriCorps serves and AmeriCorps service members in order to increase feedback and improve the AmeriCorps program.

## Conclusion

This AmeriCorps study used a mixed-methods approach that included key informant interviews with eight AmeriCorps State Commissioners, 15 virtual focus groups and 367 phone surveys in order to address the employment and employability outcomes of AmeriCorps members after their term of service. After analyzing this year's findings and comparing them to the 2016 study in Arizona, Morrison Institute found that the benefits of AmeriCorps programs are relatively similar across all states within the sample. Challenges, however, differed based on the density of host organizations in each state, especially in regards to communication and support for service members and supervisors.

Overall, both alumni and supervisors found that the AmeriCorps program is a transformative experience with numerous benefits to the service member, host organizations and their communities. Overwhelmingly, organizations stated that they would not be able to provide services to their respective communities without the help of their AmeriCorps service members, who continuously help them build organizational capacity. Most of these organizations are small nonprofits or educational institutions that have benefited greatly from their AmeriCorps members' hard work and commitment to service.

Furthermore, the AmeriCorps program has tremendous benefits for its service members, who garner valuable personal and professional networks and skills that help them find work upon completion of their service term. Alumni also said that the AmeriCorps experience is personally transformative and provides them with an opportunity to see other ways of life and potential career trajectories. Overall, AmeriCorps programming creates an employment pipeline and encourages alumni to further their education, which has innumerable benefits for service members, organizations and communities. The AmeriCorps program is not

without challenges, however, and it can be improved to better fit the needs of service members and host sites.

Service is a vital part of national unity and local community development, and this research affirms that the AmeriCorps program provides the necessary tools, financing and training opportunities for future public- and private-sector leaders. AmeriCorps helps participants expand and enhance their portfolio, while simultaneously improving our society overall. Of course any and all future success of AmeriCorps hinges on the continued support of governments, businesses, nonprofits and individuals in building a better tomorrow by investing in themselves today. Positive outcomes are shared by many:

*“Investing in yourself is the best investment you will ever make. It will not only improve your life, it will improve the lives of all those around you.”*

– Robin S. Sharma, author of *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari: A Fable About Fulfilling Your Dreams & Reaching Your Destiny*

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### Focus Group Interview Questions

##### *Supervisor Focus Groups:*

1. Tell us about your experiences with the AmeriCorps program.
2. How did you hear about the AmeriCorps program? How would you describe the AmeriCorps program to other employers? When would an opportunity arise for your org to talk to another org about AmeriCorps members or alumni?
3. When alumni seek jobs but there are no openings, how do you handle their requests? Are they referred? If so, to which orgs, and why?
4. What is your recruitment strategy for open positions? How do you decide whom to hire for full-time paid opportunities within your organization?
5. What role does being a former AmeriCorps member play into your decision to hire, and why? What role does voluntarism with other organizations play, and why?
6. How do your perceptions of AmeriCorps alumni compare or differ to other staff in similar positions?
7. If you are a service site, how do you view AmeriCorps members – as volunteers? Apprentices? Students? Staff members? What is your org's goal for these AmeriCorps members?
8. How do you prepare them? What can service sites do to better prepare AmeriCorps service members for a career?
9. What benefits does AmeriCorps provide to organizations – both host-site and non-host-site organizations? What are the weaknesses of this program? What should be improved?

##### *Alumni:*

1. Describe your AmeriCorps service experience.
2. Describe your post-service employment experience. What role has AmeriCorps played?
3. What has helped prepare you for these experiences? Where do you feel you are still lacking?
4. How do you present your AmeriCorps experience on your resume? In a job interview?
5. What have employers told you about your AmeriCorps-related experience in interviews?
6. How is/was AmeriCorps perceived within the organization where you work?
7. What can AmeriCorps service sites and CNCS do to help you in meeting your employment goals post-service? What can AmeriCorps and CNCS do to better prepare members during service?
8. What are the two most significant experiences through AmeriCorps that changed you or impacted your career trajectory?

## Appendix B

### Supervisor Phone Survey Questions

1. Have you hired any AmeriCorps members who served in your organization between 2012 and 2016?
  - a. If yes, how many members did you hire?
  - b. Were they part-time or full-time positions?
  - c. Were these newly created positions or were they replacing existing positions?
  - d. What were the primary reasons for employing your AmeriCorps member?
2. Have there been any additional paid positions created as a result of the hiring of the AmeriCorps alumni?
3. If you haven't hired an AmeriCorps member, have you assisted one with gaining employment elsewhere?
  - a. How did you assist? For instance, did you provide a referral or write a recommendation?
  - b. What were the primary reasons for assisting your AmeriCorps member in finding employment?



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