AmeriCorps: Arizona’s Pipeline to Employment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, 18-to-34-year-olds face many challenges. Millennials are pursuing advanced degrees in greater numbers than any previous generation, yet college graduates face significant job readiness issues in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Council of Economic Advisers, 2014). With higher rates of unemployment compared to other age groups (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), AmeriCorps is the pathway some young adults choose to build their employment skills, earn an income, and get a job. However, there is scant qualitative data that illuminates how these experiences translate into employment outcomes, and no data providing the organizational perspective on employing former AmeriCorps members. Thus, this pilot study conducted in Arizona sought to gain a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between AmeriCorps State/National Programs and organizations, and how these relationships influence individual career paths, and organizational capacity. Specifically, the study examined where job opportunities are created and how; how national service affects preparation and employment among working-age adults; how these AmeriCorps members are perceived and utilized by organizations; and if and how such organizations benefit.

To accomplish this goal, we adopted a mixed-methods approach to our study design. We surveyed 338 organizational supervisors with an on-line survey or a targeted phone interview to determine the hiring status of former members between 2012 and 2016. We also conducted a total of six focus groups with 52 organizations that have hired and/or placed AmeriCorps members, and we conducted three focus groups with 29 former AmeriCorps members who had completed a term of service from 2011 to 2015. The goal of these focus groups was to determine what types of conversations former AmeriCorps members have with the greater business community about AmeriCorps and what their experiences have been with their service site and finding a job.

On-line survey findings show that 82.7% of organizations hired at least one former AmeriCorps member since 2012; phone survey data found that 57.8% of these organizations hired members from their own sites. Supervisors noted teamwork, professional conduct, and leadership as the top attributes that informed their decision to hire. Former AmeriCorps members corroborated this, reporting growth in confidence, communication, systems thinking, diverse experiences, and leadership. The positions that are hired are typically full-time (64.3%), and more than half are newly created.

Two other noteworthy findings are: 1) An AmeriCorps employment pipeline has emerged that includes AmeriCorps service sites, affiliated non-AmeriCorps organizations, AmeriCorps Alum, and more recently, Employers of National Service. This pipeline aids in former AmeriCorps member employability via word-of-mouth, referrals, and close communal ties. 2) When former AmeriCorps members are hired into new positions, 44% of these positions result in organizational growth.

Thus, AmeriCorps can stimulate program expansion and contribute to an organization’s health; however, there are a few challenges that stand in the way. The AmeriCorps network would benefit from targeting its message to organizations and individuals outside of the network to grow the program’s opportunities and benefits.
Further, consistent training of members and organizations would ensure everyone receives consistent messaging regarding AmeriCorps and the resources available. Last, there are unintended program barriers that exclude some who could greatly benefit from participating. For example, a 100% retention rate of AmeriCorps members required of organizations acts as a disincentive to place those with little to no experience. This is an added burden for rural sites. All AmeriCorps rural programs require twenty members to apply, but recruiting members in these areas is difficult. Thus, staffing and retention challenges are significant issues. AmeriCorps members are creating a collaborative advantage for their service sites by filling gaps in services, reorganizing services, and creating and innovating services to meet the needs of the community. Organizations report their AmeriCorps members serve more people efficiently, try new projects and expand them, and maintain a larger community presence. In essence, these members help organizations build stronger ties with the community and connect more volunteers to serve their mission. Both current and former AmeriCorps members help strengthen organizations and build community.
INTRODUCTION

Overview of AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps is a federally-funded program of national service. It engages private citizens for the purpose of helping others, meeting unmet social needs, and strengthening communities. Created by President Bill Clinton, the 1993 National and Community Service Trust Act created the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to facilitate all domestic national service programs. The AmeriCorps program—envisioned as a “new GI Bill” of sorts—emerged as a novel idea (Magee and Marshall, 2005). This program offers an opportunity for U.S. citizens, or legal permanent residents to serve approximately a year of intensive national service and after their service term is complete, to receive a financial award to pay for college loans and other educational expenses. Steven Waldman concluded that, “...done properly, it [AmeriCorps] could be the public policy equivalent of a Swiss Army knife, performing numerous useful functions in one affordable package” (1995, p. 20).

The AmeriCorps program is guided by four goals:

• Mobilize the nation’s youth to tackle pressing social problems
• Bring Americans together across lines of class, race, and ethnicity
• Awaken a new spirit of civic duty and participation in the U.S.
• Open new paths to opportunity and upward mobility for young people who serve their country

AmeriCorps consists of three related but different programs: AmeriCorps State and National (AmeriCorps), AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps), and AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America). These programs have slightly different requisite service terms that shape the experience of the members. For example, typical positions for VISTA, NCCC, and some AmeriCorps National programs are full-time and require a mentoring component, while AmeriCorps State positions can also offer part-time positions with mentoring offered at the discretion of the service site. However, most AmeriCorps terms, regardless of program, can be served individually or in teams of various durations. The focus of all programs is to help solve community problems through direct and indirect services.

Opponents of AmeriCorps have criticized the program for offering payment for volunteerism, being an extension of big government into areas it shouldn’t be involved, and simply being a waste of government money (Magee and Marshall, 2005; Perry et al., 1999). However, the notion of paying individuals to volunteer obscures the true impact of the AmeriCorps program. First and foremost, these critiques fail to recognize or acknowledge the difference between volunteerism and national service. Volunteerism is demonstrated through occasional and diffuse voluntary acts of community service without financial reward. National service goes steps further than volunteerism by seeking to tackle higher level societal challenges through continuous, organized, and focused efforts.

National service also goes beyond volunteerism as it helps to build AmeriCorps members’ civic capacity. Civic capacity speaks to a person’s aptitude and ability to shape or influence policy, practice, and resources that
enable them to increase the effectiveness of their civic activities. Numerous studies on the impact of AmeriCorps on former AmeriCorps members have shown this to be true (Youniss and Yates, 1997; Barber, 1998; Simon and Wang 1999, 2000; Galston, 2001; Zaff and Michelsen, 2002). A 2007 CNCS study found a majority of former AmeriCorps members within the study period reported gaining life and job skills including leadership, teamwork, time-management, and hands-on experience within a field of interest (CNCS, 2007). Other studies have shown that AmeriCorps members acquired skills that are job-related during their service term such as time management, crisis intervention, decision-making, self-confidence, and social skills. (Van Til and Gallup, 1997; Perry and Thomson, 1997). In addition, a 2008 CNCS study showed that participation in AmeriCorps strengthened civic attitudes and behaviors, as well as made members more likely to choose careers in public service (CNCS, 2008). Benefits gained from service for both the agency and the individual are themselves considerable.

Another new benefit of the program has emerged: the creation of new employment opportunities among organizational service sites for AmeriCorps members who served there. The relationship between AmeriCorps service and the employment and employability of former AmeriCorps members has risen to significance as a result of several factors, which will be discussed in the following section. First, employment challenges facing Millennials have created a new reality, one different from previous generations and their employment prospects. Second, there continue to be challenges in the non-profit sector regarding capacity. Third, AmeriCorps members are being employed with their service site or networked sites following their service terms.

Millennial Employment Prospects
For Millennials, or individuals born between 1980 and 1997, the job market is tough. Many have graduated high school and college in the midst of the greatest recession since the Great Depression – the Great Recession. The loss of trillions of dollars of wealth, tens of thousands of homes, and millions of jobs in the U.S. has made the economy an unsteady place for new entrants into the workforce. Although the Great Recession officially ended in June 2009, it has shaped the landscape of employment and will have reverberating effects on Millennials for years to come.

The slow recovery left many Millennials without employment or in a weak labor economy, often competing with more experienced workers for a limited set of opportunities. This competition often meant that Millennials had to explore alternative paths to employment with positions characterized by low wages and part-time hours that do not require a college degree; in other words they face underemployment. Underemployment can occur when individuals are employed in a job that does not require a college degree. While underemployment is not an altogether new concept for young people who have recently graduated college, underemployment has increased over the years and has changed drastically in context and duration.

Prior to the recession, if a young person was underemployed, they were still likely employed in a career field which would eventually lead to advancement. However, underemployed Millennials are employed in jobs that have little to do with their career and that are more service-oriented such as barista, sales clerk, or bartender.
According to a 2013 study, 48% of U.S. college graduates worked in a job that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests requires less than a four-year college education; 11% were employed in occupations that required more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor’s while 37% were employed in occupations that required no more than a high-school diploma (Vedder, Denhart, and Robe, 2013). Research has shown that Millennials are also holding on to these jobs longer than previous generations (Abel and Deitz, 2014).

**Addressing Organizational Capacity**

The impact of underemployment has pushed some Millennials to explore alternative routes to defer loans and gain employment. Although Job Corps is a federal program that provides education and training to help young people with low incomes to find and retain jobs, AmeriCorps goes a step further. While the primary goal of AmeriCorps is not to employ people, it attracts community members of all ages to work in the community service field to help solve complex problems. It is also a program that offers scholarships for college to help members pursue advanced degrees. Thus, Millennials have turned to AmeriCorps to serve as an early career alternative.

The entrance of AmeriCorps members into the nonprofit sphere has proven timely. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, there are more than 1.5 million nonprofits registered in the U.S.—about 1.2 million have annual budgets of $1 million or smaller. Most non-profits have modest budgets that they utilize to address the unmet needs of their communities. Many face a long list of challenges that include a lack of funding and funding uncertainty, low employee retention, difficulty recruiting talent, inadequate performance measurement, difficulty meeting community needs, and many more.

Following the Great Recession, hard times and financial challenges created an increased need for social services, while funding for services declined. In a study conducted by the Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Listening Post Project to assess the impact of the economic downturn, 83% of non-profits reported some level of fiscal stress between 2008 and 2009; 40% of those non-profits categorized this stress as “severe” or “very severe” (Salamon, Geller, and Spence, 2009). These issues have exacerbated challenges for organizations that were already used to operating with few resources. They also made circumstances even more challenging for organizations to recruit and retain talented employees. The inability to address this human resource challenge incurs direct costs in training and recruitment, and indirect costs, such as losses in social capital, productivity, and institutional knowledge. In response, some non-profits have filled these gaps by hosting AmeriCorps members in their organizations, while simultaneously cultivating future leaders in public service.

**Benefits of AmeriCorps: What We Know and What We Don’t**

A large body of knowledge regarding employee retention in public and private organizations highlights the importance of training and development, among other influencers such as challenging or interesting work, and freedom for creativity and innovation (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Amar, 2004; Hays, 1999; Samuel and Chipunza, 2009; Smit and Cronje, 2002). The presence of AmeriCorps members within the organization serves as an informal training ground for non-profits. AmeriCorps members are gathering first-hand experience in the non-profit sector and gaining greater understanding of the effort it takes to meet community needs. They are also uniquely positioned to be creative and innovative. While regular staff positions are often pre-programmed with specific duties and tasks, AmeriCorps member position responsibilities are flexible and evolving. Oftentimes their sole purpose is to find new and improved ways to meet the critical needs of the community, serving as “trailblazers” for the organization. And when innovation and creativity occur, a collaborative advantage is experienced.

Chris Huxham defined collaborative advantage as the creation of something new and unusually creative, “that
no organization could have produced on its own” (1996, p.14). In essence, the relationship between non-profits and AmeriCorps members can create something unique that would not exist otherwise. The advantage is not found in the exchange of information or services but in the interpersonal connections and internal infrastructures that boost outcomes. Similar to the business concept of competitive advantage, collaborative advantage occurs when a condition or circumstance puts an organization in a superior position. It grows out of the value an organization is able to create that exceeds the cost to create it.

The emergence of increased employment outcomes is an exciting, added benefit of AmeriCorps. It serves as a collaborative advantage in the following ways:

- Employment of millennials
- Fulfilling non-profit capacity issues
- Creating new synergies for program
- Training new leaders
- Strengthening volunteer programs
- Meeting community needs in creative ways
- Creating community

However, how, why, and when this is happening is relatively unknown. Some young adults, with higher rates of unemployment compared to other age groups (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), choose AmeriCorps to build their employment skills, earn an income, and begin their career. However, there is scant qualitative data that illuminates how these experiences translate into employment outcomes. In addition, there is no data that provides the organizational perspective on employing AmeriCorps members or what the employment outcomes are at these sites. The study seeks to understand the collaborative advantage of AmeriCorps State and National programs.

This report is organized as follows. First, an overview of the study will include details about the research methodology in regards to the sampling strategy, data collection, and data analysis. Next, a detailed discussion of the study’s results will outline overarching themes. Then, challenges facing AmeriCorps and opportunities for growth will be presented. Finally, the implications of this research will be shared with recommended directions for future inquiry.
METHODOLOGY

Study Overview
This single-case research study took place in Arizona, a state with high levels of unmet community need. According to data from August 2016 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, it is one of the last states to fully recover from the recession with an unemployment rate of 5.8%, ranking it 45th worst in the nation. It also ranks 41st in childhood poverty, 46th in child food security, and in the bottom five for total per-pupil education spending, student/teacher ratio, and teacher salary. And despite the need for strong civic engagement to address some of these issues, it ranks 41st in volunteerism.

As the need has grown in Arizona’s communities, so have the number of AmeriCorps members enrolled in the program. As word has spread, the number of AmeriCorps members participating has generally been on the rise to a peak of 3,224 members in 2013; however, there has been a decline since the economy has improved (Figure 1). During the economic downturn, AmeriCorps attracted many more highly qualified candidates because they couldn’t find jobs. AmeriCorps gave them what Arizona’s AmeriCorps Director Bob Shogren called a “treading water option,” which allowed AmeriCorps members to defer payments of student loans while they served.

In the 2014-2015 program year, Arizona’s AmeriCorps program offered State- and National-funded programs at 317 sites utilizing 1,499 members. These members leveraged more than 20,000 volunteer support hours, served more than 8,000 under-privileged children, mentored more than 1,000 individuals, provided independent living services to more than 2,400 people, and provided housing placement services to nearly 2,500 individuals.

In this context, this one-year pilot study seeks to understand how involvement in AmeriCorps shapes former AmeriCorps members’ and organizations’ capacities, aspirations, and outcomes. The specific goals and objectives for this project are:

1. To determine how organizations perceive and benefit from AmeriCorps involvement:
   a. Determine economic benefits of the AmeriCorps program for organizations
   b. Assess impact on organization’s capacity, e.g., staffing, retention, training, use of informal resources, number of clients served, community outreach
   c. Identify other informal or unintended impacts of AmeriCorps involvement within organizations, e.g., innovation and networking
2. To learn how AmeriCorps experiences shape former AmeriCorps members’ career paths:
   a. Describe soft and hard skills former AmeriCorps members gained from their experiences and how they are used on the job market
   b. Understand how former AmeriCorps members identify with AmeriCorps post-service (e.g., what do they tell future employers?)
   c. Determine employment outcomes of former AmeriCorps members
   d. Assess what factors led to these employment outcomes

The research team utilized multiple methods and sources to triangulate report findings. Triangulation is a research technique that utilizes data from multiple sources to corroborate results and validate data. The following methods were used to collect data: 147 electronic 45-item organizational surveys, 250 five-question phone surveys, three 90-minute focus groups with 29 former AmeriCorps members, six 90-minute focus groups with 52 organizational representatives, and five key expert interviews. VISTA and NCCC were excluded from the study due to differences in service terms.

Electronic recruitment announcements for the study were sent through the Alliance of Arizona Nonprofits and the Public Allies and Teach for America affiliates, as well as AmeriCorps Alums. The State Service Commission in Arizona sent out a recruitment letter to former AmeriCorps members and program coordinators to recruit for the survey and the focus groups at least three times throughout the project; however, these lists did not include former AmeriCorps sites. The letter asked former AmeriCorps members to forward the survey link to their former site supervisors. Very little response from these requests was received; however, former AmeriCorps members’ responses for focus group participation were high. As a result, we obtained a list of Arizona service sites since 2011 from the CNCS website through Arizona’s state reports, and called each organization individually to obtain an email contact for the AmeriCorps liaison. The research team individually called and emailed each liaison to attend a focus group and/or fill out the survey. The survey was also forwarded to the Employers of National Service, and information about the study was presented to program coordinators in Arizona on a conference call.

Surveys
The sample frame included 380 AmeriCorps State- or National-funded organizations in Arizona that served as service sites over the last five years. They were asked to complete a 45-question survey on their AmeriCorps experiences and perceptions and the employment outcomes of former members (see Appendix A for survey instrument). The survey was piloted with approximately 40 respondents to ensure that any errors were corrected. Because the electronic survey response rate was low (147 participants), the research team was concerned about selection bias. Each of the 380 organizations was additionally contacted by phone; data was ultimately collected from 191 AmeriCorps service sites, yielding a response rate of 50.3%. The five questions asked on phone calls targeted employment, allowing verification of site employment outcomes:
1) Has your organization hired any of its former AmeriCorps members in the last five years? If so, how many?
2) How many of these positions are part-time and how many are full-time positions?
3) Were the positions new or did they replace a former employee? How many were new and how many were replacement positions?
4) Has this position grown to supervising additional employees? If so, how many?
5) How many AmeriCorps members have served at your site over the last five years?

Tables B-1 and B-2 provide summary statistics of key variables used in the survey and phone calls. In the survey 85.6% of the organizations that responded served as AmeriCorps sites. The mean organization size of survey respondents were on the larger side, 121.9 employees. Out of the phone interviews conducted, 55% had AmeriCorps National grants and 45% were from State. Most respondents in the surveys and phone interviews fell into the education or social service sectors. The majority hired at least one former AmeriCorps member as an employee since 2012, and when they hired, they usually hired more than three in that time period. The majority of the sites included were in urban areas, 26.3% of survey respondents and 18.8% of phone interviewees were in rural areas.

Focus Groups
The research team also talked to former AmeriCorps members and organizational supervisors to learn about their AmeriCorps experiences through a total of nine 90-minute focus groups. To participate, supervisors had to have either supervised an AmeriCorps member for at least one year or hired an AmeriCorps member. They could also be supervisors in for-profit organizations. Ultimately, supervisors who participated were only from non-profits and local governments, since our recruitment efforts focused on the network that AmeriCorps had. The team discovered that this network minimally includes for-profit organizations.

Of the nine groups, six were with AmeriCorps organizations and external organizations that have hired AmeriCorps members. These groups were held in Tucson, a region with a significant Latino population; Flagstaff, a city with a large Navajo population; and Phoenix, the state’s largest metropolitan area. To increase access, a virtual group was also conducted for those in outlying areas using the Vidyo conferencing platform and phone conferencing for those with no Internet. In addition, we conducted three focus groups with former AmeriCorps members between the ages of 18 and 64 who have served from 2011 to 2015 in Tucson, Phoenix and virtually. Participants were compensated $75 for their participation.

Each focus group was attended by five to 11 people. Flagstaff was difficult to recruit due to its small population size, so only one focus group was held there. Two groups scheduled to be in Flagstaff were instead held virtually and offered to those living in Flagstaff or outlying areas. Participants were recruited on a first-come, first-served basis. There were two moderators present at each focus group. The principal moderator played a key role in ensuring that the discussion proceeded and that core questions, prompts, and probes were covered. The second moderator raised questions, prompts or probes omitted by the principal moderator, and ensured that everyone was included in the discussion. Every focus group was recorded with

“(T)heir readiness is amazing. They’re hard working. They’re dedicated and they’re ready. They made an impact, at least in the nonprofit world, and we’re always willing to hire them.”

– Organizational supervisor
Each researcher identified themes within and between focus groups they viewed as important. These themes were compared and shared with some of the participants to assure reliability of themes that were uncovered.

Organizations were interviewed on themes that included their AmeriCorps experiences and perceptions, their networks, interactions with AmeriCorps members, hiring decisions, and benefits and weaknesses of the program. Similarly, former AmeriCorps members shared their AmeriCorps experiences – their benefits and challenges, their post-service employment search and placement, conversations with employers regarding AmeriCorps, and if or how they are changed through program involvement. The interview instrument is located in Appendix C.

81 individuals participated in the focus groups—29 former AmeriCorps members and 52 organization supervisors. Tables D-1 and D-2 in Appendix D provide the demographics of organizations and former AmeriCorps members involved in this project’s focus groups. We spoke with executive directors, others in leadership and volunteer coordinators across various fields in the organization groups. Only one participating organization was not an AmeriCorps site. Less than one out of three were large organizations employing 100 staff or more. In fact, most were smaller organizations with less than 20 staff. Due to large turnover within non-profits, supervisors had varying levels of experience with the program. The median number of years supervising AmeriCorps members was four years.

Initial intake data of these participants showed that supervisors have largely benefitted from job creation at their sites due to AmeriCorps. In many cases, supervisors had served as AmeriCorps members prior to their current positions, which may help explain the large number of former AmeriCorps members hired by supervisors in these groups. Organizations reported a median of two hirings of former AmeriCorps members in the last five years into mostly new full-time positions, which led to the growth of an average of at least one additional position supervised by the newly-hired, former AmeriCorps alum. Additionally, many of these supervisors also had good relationships with their members. They reported that “often” members stayed to volunteer after their placement even though it “seldom” led to employment. The members were dedicated to the mission of the organization and had formed a bond with staff and volunteers there.

The majority of former AmeriCorps member participants were Millennials (83%), all were employed—75% of them were employed in a full-time job. Over half were hired on by their service sites. The positions they were hired for were primarily full-time. Half were newly-created positions and half were replacement positions. Two individuals were self-employed. Out of the eight who continued to volunteer at their service sites, six were then offered employment at the site. The majority of participants were just beginning their careers while a small number of them became involved in AmeriCorps later in life to start a new career.
Data Analysis

Interviews with five key experts were conducted to discuss and substantiate preliminary findings, and to assure there are no gaps in the research. Included in this sample were Arizona’s State and National AmeriCorps directors and three AmeriCorps program coordinators. Through triangulation, we tried to offset limitations of each method by supporting data obtained from other sources, which in turn, strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings. Additionally, cross-checking was used throughout the study. As new issues were introduced in focus groups, they were either corroborated or refuted in subsequent focus groups, survey data, or expert interviews.

Rival explanations were also entertained to ensure that evidence had been collected to refute these competing claims throughout the data collection and analysis process (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). This helped to mitigate factors that could undermine the validity of study results. This involved a re-examination of the findings before the final report was written to ensure that the characteristics or properties of the emergent themes were applicable in most cases. When it was determined that there was no disconfirming evidence, the analysis was considered complete.

The focus groups allowed us to observe interactions to determine when there were points of agreement and disagreement regarding AmeriCorps involvement benefits, and opportunities. Also, new ideas introduced from the participants elicited more stimulating discussions so that more in-depth data could be obtained (Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook, 2006).

All nine groups were recorded and transcribed. Detailed notes and memos were taken from these transcripts. The content of these interviews and focus groups were coded in the software MAXQDA utilizing a specific coding strategy (Figure 2). The first round of codes utilized open coding and resulted in excerpts tagged with descriptive or process codes. The second round of coding re-organized the descriptive codes into broader themes or categories. The third and final round of coding organized these categorical codes into theoretical codes. This was based on how closely the categories and sub-categories were linked together and how much saturation there was, based on the frequency of codes applied. Analytic memos also were written and reviewed to ensure all of the team’s thoughts and ideas through the analysis were captured.

Throughout the coding process, we re-read the interview texts, analytic memos and initial codes, and used axial coding to form higher-level categories to organize text and ideas. If there were any unexpected categories that presented themselves, we conducted an additional literature review to uncover any emergent theories that would assist in the final phase of the coding process. Selective coding was the final stage of organizing and classifying the data. In selective coding, key variables were identified and the texts were coded based on these variables. These variables were developed from the axial codes, all analytic memos, and the additional literature review. They also helped to connect concepts that were not yet linked.

At least two researchers coded throughout this process to ensure agreement of thematic findings (e.g., inter-coder reliability).
In addition, we conducted quantitative analysis of the survey and phone interview data. We calculated an employment rate of the sites that hired former AmeriCorps members over the last five years versus the total number of service sites called. In addition, among those sites that have hired former AmeriCorps members, we determined how many have grown positions under the staff who were former AmeriCorps members. We also completed a descriptive analysis of the Qualtrics survey findings. Analytical memos were also created to document survey findings. Drawing from the analytical memos, there were consistent themes that arose across methods and sources.

**Results**

The results of this mixed-methods study points to the presence of an employment pipeline among AmeriCorps service sites and networked organizations. Not only has AmeriCorps placement led to employment for former AmeriCorps members, it gives organizations the opportunity to expand and innovate their programs and locate a talented workforce. AmeriCorps members who are not employed at their service sites have found opportunities through networked organizations.

The following figure shows there are several organizations included in the AmeriCorps network, which organizations and individuals both tap to access resources, information, and service and employment opportunities. CNCS administers funding and oversight of national service programs. AmeriCorps, designed as a federal and state partnership has a different administrator depending on the type of program. The State AmeriCorps programs are administered in each state by State Service Commissions. National AmeriCorps programs are administered by CNCS from Washington D.C. Both programs provide funds to eligible organizations, typically non-profits. These organizations then either directly administer their grant by placing AmeriCorps members at their own service sites, or the organization grant recipient acts as an intermediary and funds service sites external to the organization. Members gain their experiences from their service sites and other affiliated, networked organizations. These AmeriCorps members also have access to alumni organizations, such as AmeriCorps Alums. AmeriCorps Alums provides information on employment opportunities, benefits, and volunteer and networking opportunities.

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<th>Corporation of National &amp; Community Service</th>
<th>AmeriCorps Alums</th>
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<td>AmeriCorps Grant Recipients (Organization)</td>
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<td>State Service Commission</td>
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<td>Employers of National Service</td>
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Figure 4. The AmeriCorps Network. CNCS funds National AmeriCorps program grants to organizations operating in two or more states. State-specific grants are funded through State Service Commissions across the country.
Finding 1: Service Sites Are Hiring Former AmeriCorps Members

What the Data Shows
Central questions that guided this study were “Are service sites hiring their own AmeriCorps members after their terms are completed?” and “Are AmeriCorps sites hiring former members?” We researched this question a number of ways. Electronic surveys find that 82.6% of organizations have hired a former AmeriCorps member since 2012. When asked specifically about members who served within their program, phone survey data found that 57.8% of AmeriCorps service sites hired their former members since 2012. This indicates that organizations are hiring both former members who serviced within their program and former AmeriCorps members in the network. The positions that are hired are typically full time (64.3%).

Organizations also realize growth in their capacity. Since 2012, hiring service sites have employed an average of three former AmeriCorps members since 2012. The hiring rate among all AmeriCorps members placed at AmeriCorps sites is 24.5%. Among those sites that have hired at any time since 2012, the rate is almost double – 43.1%. This means that if a member served his/her service term at any AmeriCorps site, there is at least a one in four chance that he/she will be hired by that site. Interestingly, mirroring other studies (Spera, Ghertner, Nerino and DiTommaso, 2013), the hiring rate among rural organizations (28.2%) is higher than in urban areas (21.7%). This could be due to the limited talent pool in rural areas. AmeriCorps offers rural organizations an opportunity to find and recruit external talent.

Why Did They Hire Former AmeriCorps members?
Organizations are not just benefitting from members’ service, they are gaining quality hires. Supervisors were asked in surveys and in focus groups what attributes of members led to employment. Figure 5 shows that ‘teamwork’, ‘professional conduct’, and ‘leadership’ were among the top attributes listed.

| AmeriCorps Members Offer Substantial Attributes that Contribute to Employment Outcomes |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Written communication            | 15       |
| Other previous non-AmeriCorps work experience | 16       |
| Coalition-building               | 17       |
| Public speaking                  | 18       |
| Familiarity with the AmeriCorps member | 29       |
| Time management                  | 32       |
| Ethics                           | 34       |
| Problem-solving                  | 38       |
| Leadership                       | 40       |
| Professional conduct             | 52       |
| Teamwork                         | 64       |

Figure 5. Key AmeriCorps member attributes leading to employment (reported by number of supervisors)
When supervisors were asked to compare these attributes to non-AmeriCorps staff in similar positions, they reported AmeriCorps members demonstrated better teamwork, leadership skills, and problem-solving abilities.

Former AmeriCorps members’ experiences are consistent with what supervisors report about their abilities.

“I think it was within the second week of training and we did a chainsaw training. And I was terrified and I felt like there was no way they should put one of those in my hands or put me in charge of any kind of project like that. But as soon as I really started learning from the people there and trusting the people around me, and I actually became like one of their crew leaders and they had me lead saw projects, and eventually became their kind of mechanic and vehicle fleet manager as well.”
–Former AmeriCorps member.

These diverse experiences and exposure to unfamiliar areas, populations, and issues are what grew members’ skills. Not surprisingly, former AmeriCorps members said their level of confidence also increased significantly after involvement with AmeriCorps. The experience changed the way they tackled problems, gaining a better understanding of issues from a systems level.

In focus groups, organizational supervisors elaborated on the reasons for hiring their former AmeriCorps members and why they stand apart from those who don’t serve in AmeriCorps. Many discussed how important teamwork and relationship-building was, but employers noted that judging these qualities is difficult in a job interview. The placement experience gives employers insight on members’ abilities to work with others:

“We don’t have to train you. You already know our clients. They know you. You know our partners. Like they have trust in you. They know who to contact. They know they can rely on you…”
–Service site supervisor

“It’s like a really long job interview. You get to really see what somebody is capable of and how they communicate with other people in the organization, how they do when they’re doing like their community outreach and everything. You just get to see their skills ahead of time and you don’t always get that opportunity.”
–Service site supervisor

In addition to giving employers trial opportunities, AmeriCorps offers members opportunities for leadership that are not typical to many entry-level positions:

“They’re in that unique position they got to lead, and when you got to lead, you got to make decisions. And you got to move forward and there’s a whole kind of skillset that you develop as a result of being put in that position. And I often, often say that AmeriCorps members are really kind of trailblazers because they’re doing things that other employees or organizations don’t typically do. So many endear themselves to the organizations and end up getting hired.”
–State AmeriCorps representative

Perseverance was also a member trait that ranked high among employers’ reasons for hiring. Supervisors commented that there were significant barriers that stood in the way for AmeriCorps members – low pay, fast pace, stressful environments, limited resources – but members’ perseverance showed a level of commitment and dedication that other applicants may not necessarily bring to the table:
When survey respondents were asked “what is the likelihood that you would hire a former AmeriCorps member as a regular employee over another applicant with similar qualifications,” 88.6% were ‘somewhat likely’ or ‘very likely’ to do so (Figure 6). Among supervisors who had not hired anyone, 83.2% of these non-hiring organizations said they were ‘somewhat likely’ or ‘very likely’ to hire or recommend that a former AmeriCorps member be hired if they had an open position. They were also asked, “Upon finishing their AmeriCorps term of service with your organization, approximately what percentage of AmeriCorps members would you consider ready to enter into a career?” Supervisors reported a mean of 75% of exiting members were career-ready.

Finding 2:
AmeriCorps Facilitates an Employment Pipeline

What the Data Shows
AmeriCorps touches many organizations and individuals outside of the AmeriCorps program, expanding former AmeriCorps members’ and organizations’ access to social capital and positively influencing employment outcomes. According to Figure 7, the majority of survey respondents (81%) stated that non-AmeriCorps community organizations were connected to AmeriCorps service sites at least half the time. Over half of these AmeriCorps supervisors (59%) report that overall, former AmeriCorps members are hired by these networked non-AmeriCorps organizations at least half the time. And when the hiring rate among AmeriCorps service sites is included, this represents a large majority of former AmeriCorps members who get hired as a result of serving in AmeriCorps. A former AmeriCorps member reported, “Because of the business incubator, they [AmeriCorps service site staff] had a lot of different contacts with local businesses here in Flagstaff and I actually was then employed by an affiliate business.”

Outcomes are positive and point to a strong AmeriCorps employment network. In the focus groups, former AmeriCorps members and supervisor participants report that awareness of AmeriCorps programs, employment opportunities, and potential candidates for AmeriCorps sites are facilitated through word-of-mouth.
Members’ Impact Extends Beyond AmeriCorps

For example, an AmeriCorps supervisor stated that she used the AmeriCorps network to find other members, “…Tucson’s pretty well connected. Like if I ever need a project and I need something then I sort of, you sort of get to know who to call.” Supervisors also helped with the job search. A supervisor said, “we kind of guide them and steer them and say, I heard so-and-so’s got an opening over there, does this seem like it’s something that you’re interested in?” Some supervisors even took a more active strategy and “put out feelers with everyone who heard of any openings that might match [the former AmeriCorps member’s interests].”

Organization supervisors told researchers that when they access the network, they are often successful in finding or placing a candidate for employment. They also shared why they access the network:

“…if I’m considering an employee and I get somebody from [KC or Freda] that has been one of their AmeriCorps members, I would value them more, I mean, much more highly just because they’ve had that past experience, not just with me, but as a member ‘cause I know that they’re dedicated to and they have that commitment to service and that they have a broader idea of what a nonprofit, what the nonprofit arena is and what we do.” –Organizational supervisor

Organizations use the network strategically to fill positions:

“For us, obviously, being funded we already know the organizations are helping AmeriCorps programs. We have monthly calls with them, with the Governor’s office, and then outside we can get together with them. So like when I have positions available, if I need additional candidates, I’ll send an e-mail out to those people and say, hey, we have openings, if you know of anybody here’s a position descriptions, have them apply.” –Organizational supervisor

Figure 8 shows former AmeriCorps members have access to multiple resources and relationships to obtain employment through networked sites. If no job opportunities exist at the service site, some site supervisors and program coordinators help AmeriCorps members with the job search. With connections the site supervisors have at the local level and the connections the program coordinators have with AmeriCorps programs, the AmeriCorps member learns of job vacancies both inside and outside the AmeriCorps program network.
In addition, the newly created Employers of National Service and, to a lesser degree, for-profit organizations are approached by the AmeriCorps member completing her/his term. Employers of National Service connect former AmeriCorps members with employers from the private, public, and non-profit sectors. The organization AmeriCorps Alums also assist in locating employment and networking opportunities for former national service members.

Job applications both inside and outside of the network are typically supported by the site supervisor with a recommendation. Some former AmeriCorps members commented, however, that there needed to be more support in career placement by AmeriCorps and more awareness of career planning and placement resources available through AmeriCorps. Some former AmeriCorps members also needed assistance transferring what they did at their service site into measurable outcomes, so they could better sell themselves to a potential employer. Although information and resources are available on the AmeriCorps website and through AmeriCorps Alums, some were unaware of these resources:

“And I feel like AmeriCorps really needs something like that where if you’re an AmeriCorps alumni you can go and be like, hey, I need help with resume building, I’m looking for this, in this field for something, but I can’t find anything.” – Former AmeriCorps member

There was some inconsistency between site supervisors on assistance provided. For example, some supervisors navigated exiting members to AmeriCorps Alums for career placement assistance— others didn’t. The difference may be that supervisors who were former AmeriCorps members, or alumni supervisors, are aware of these resources, while supervisors newer to the AmeriCorps network are not. Alumni supervisors also play a critical role in creating employment opportunities or channelling exiting members to these opportunities. Former AmeriCorps members are often strategically placed in supervisory positions and they in turn, hire former AmeriCorps members into positions they supervise. This creates a chain effect of employment opportunities between former AmeriCorps members.

“We specifically look for national service alum because they understand the program and they understand the rigors and so they can identify with the actual members that are going through it. And so it’s also, too, having been an AmeriCorps alum myself, I can definitely understand. In three months you’re crying like what the heck did I do?” – Service site supervisor

Further, alumni supervisor involvement is a critical component to the sustainability of the AmeriCorps employment network. Their history in the program provides invaluable insight and experience. While not the main priority of AmeriCorps, supervisors know the importance of growing the cadre of trained employees in public service, as well as the resources available to assist former AmeriCorps members in locating jobs. They bring AmeriCorps to organizations where they are employed throughout their careers, and alumni supervisors understand the importance of networking to increase nonprofit organization involvement. This increases the
pipeline of available training and job opportunities for both AmeriCorps members and organizations that are not just limited to the AmeriCorps arena.

When asked how former AmeriCorps members and organizations learned about AmeriCorps, the response was overwhelmingly through word-of-mouth, personal connections, or their own prior experience with other AmeriCorps members or programs. There are multiple connections that strengthen and build AmeriCorps’ employment network through recruitment, and they are facilitated by the following relationships (Figure 9):

**Recruitment to AmeriCorps is a Collaborative Effort by Various Groups and Individuals**

![Figure 9. Diagram of recruitment into AmeriCorps](image)

- AmeriCorps organizations tell other non-profits struggling in their sector about AmeriCorps.
  "I’m like, oh, I’ve got so much work to do and I don’t have any help and, [the United Way Representative said] well, how come you don’t have any AmeriCorps workers?” – Service site supervisor

- Former AmeriCorps members tell other individuals about their AmeriCorps experiences.
  "I had a friend who worked there and he said you would be wonderful in this.” – Former AmeriCorps member

- The interactions between non-AmeriCorps organizations, AmeriCorps members and former members leads to AmeriCorps involvement of these organizations.
  “…we were working with a Navajo-based non-profit doing housing with different chapters. And part of our team was an AmeriCorps and she was fantastic and really impressive.” – Organizational member

- AmeriCorps organizations recruit individuals they are already interested in working with into the AmeriCorps program.
  “We did interviews and then they became AmeriCorps, so they made a choice to become part of the program and that’s how they’re vetted…that had helped us handpick our AmeriCorps.” – Service site supervisor

“I mentioned I’m AmeriCorps or have that past, there’s that certain level of like bond, of understanding, of like, hey, you’ve been through something that’s way more… than what most people have to go through when it comes to a job.”

—Former AmeriCorps members on relating to each other
AmeriCorps organizations and former AmeriCorps members strengthen the capacity of the network by bringing in more members and organizations through word-of-mouth. And when AmeriCorps-affiliated individuals move from one organization to another, these recruitment messages stay with them. Thus, former AmeriCorps members are strong stewards of AmeriCorps messaging and recruitment to those outside of the network. As one former AmeriCorps member said, “The community outreach and service to the community was the greatest and most rewarding I’ve ever experienced in my lifetime. And it still goes on. And I’m a part of that outreach still today.”

**Finding 3:**
**AmeriCorps Associated with Innovation, Job Creation, & Program Expansion**

**What the Data Shows**
AmeriCorps not only benefits former AmeriCorps members who participate in the program by exposing them to employment opportunities, it also builds the capacity of organizations. In some cases, programs are created and organizations are able to expand and create new jobs. For the purpose of this study, job creation is viewed as newly-created paid positions (e.g., not replacement positions) affiliated with and including the hired former AmeriCorps member. Program expansion occurs when the hired AmeriCorps position generates additional positions.

Organizational supervisors were asked if AmeriCorps members were hired to replace someone or if a new position was created. More than half (59.1%) of hired positions are newly-created. In addition, among all organizations that retained and hired former AmeriCorps members, phone interviews found that 38.6% of these hires generated additional job growth. The electronic survey put that rate at 44.4% when involving new positions. In fact, supervisors report that an average of 1.3 new positions filled by former AmeriCorps members generated additional full-time equivalent jobs at their sites. The phone interviews yielded an average of three additional employees hired where job creation occurred (Figure 10).

Thus, hiring former AmeriCorps members is associated with some job growth among hiring organizations. Former AmeriCorps members corroborated these findings in focus groups. One former AmeriCorps member stated, “…and so I decided to stay and my job grew. We took on a lot of more programs in my department.
It gave me a lot of valuable project management skills.” Organizations share how AmeriCorps helps expand its programs in three distinct ways.

1) They are given the space to innovate current programs and potentially grow new ones; many non-profits don't empower employees in this way:

“It's been a good way for us, too, to be able to expand our programming. We're 100% grant funded and sometimes those grants are very specific in what you can and cannot do with staff, but having AmeriCorps gives us a little opportunity to grow a little bit and maybe fail at something and just learn if we want to go into a different direction without having to go after large amounts of funding to try to do something new.” –Service site supervisor

“It helps us to expand into workplaces a little bit and see if workplace nutrition and physical activity education is something that would take hold and would be worth going after a larger grant to try to support a new kind of venture.” –Service site supervisor

2) AmeriCorps builds capacity for participating organizations. Organizations overwhelmingly affirmed that AmeriCorps members allowed them to reach more people and grow programs, as well as their volunteer base. These members also provide wrap-around services and other services that would not typically be provided without their help. A supervisor stated, “They’re taking on short-term kinds of things that make our community and our agency better.” Among gap services mentioned were transportation, child care, volunteer program development, and development of outcome measures. Another supervisor commented, “We’ve helped over a thousand people get jobs. It’s directly related to AmeriCorps services.”

3) Organizations are able to improve programs and service delivery processes to meet the needs of their populations more smartly and efficiently:

“Our AmeriCorps members identified a much better way to identify high-risk students than we were using in the past…So we have 60 hours a week basically where this group of volunteers just focuses on how do I identify dropout, high-risk dropouts, before they drop out, and it’s been eye opening. We were really doing it much more complicated than we could of and we’re impacting a lot more kids that we wouldn’t have been able to do.” –Service site supervisor

4) Some report that AmeriCorps members are used to developing entire new programs, starting from the ground up:

“Our entire branding campaign came from our Public Allies that is now our full-time brand manager… My Public Allies were my fourth and fifth employees. And so if you can imagine when I started it was just me and then I hired two folks and then I brought on two Public Allies. We didn’t have systems in place really at the time they came on board. And so they got a real hands-on training for how to build a non-profit organization from the ground up. Ours were just incredibly innovative in terms of developing measuring systems for us to be able to report economic impact…” –Service site supervisor

Thus, organizations are strengthened and supported as they expand the number of community members served, while innovating programs and services (Figure 11). When asked why this type of growth could not be facilitated by volunteers, there was consistent agreement that the small stipend offered to AmeriCorps members allows a higher level of commitment, retention and more accountability than a volunteer or unpaid intern:
AmeriCorps Members Contribute to Organizational Growth

Figure 11. AmeriCorps members’ contributions to organizational growth (reported by supervisors)

“That tiny little living stipend that they get is enough for them to feel vested and having it be a program that has national recognition gives them enough impetus to commit to it and complete it and do the program.”
–Service site supervisor

This also places them in positions with more responsibility where they learn and grow, addressing some of society’s most complex problems. Many supervisors mentioned it was “…worth it to invest, not just because like you think of them as somebody that you could potentially hire, but also because like you know that you’re doing a good thing in the community.” Indeed, the AmeriCorps program offers non-profit organizations with tight budgets a pool of committed members. These members provide organizations with “fresh eyes…ideas and energy” and have facilitated the growth of many organizations.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IMPACTING AMERICORPS’ GROWTH & OPPORTUNITY

These results highlight that AmeriCorps is a needed program for non-profits and individuals who seek more experience in the non-profit arena. More exposure to program benefits brings more service sites, diverse experiences, more members involved in public service, an increase in employment opportunities, and more employable individuals trained in public service. Survey, focus group, and interview findings point to factors that create an AmeriCorps cycle of growth and opportunity (Figure 12). The following factors characterize how this cycle operates:

• The level of growth of individuals and organizations involved in the program can either inhibit or promote recruitment of other individuals and organizations. They share their experiences primarily through word-of-mouth.

• The sustainability and expansion of the network is facilitated through networking and communication. The ideals and values of AmeriCorps should be shared and supported to assure consistency and promote awareness of goals and values, which helps motivate and expand the network.

• The expansion of the connected AmeriCorps members, former AmeriCorps members, and organizations increases human resources available for organizational capacity building and provides more training and employment opportunities with more organizations involved. In effect, this leads to the personal growth of AmeriCorps members and former AmeriCorps members and the growth and expansion of organizations.

This cycle fuels the sustainability of AmeriCorps. But this research finds some issues consistently introduced across focus groups as program challenges:

1. The administration of mentoring, training, and support for supervisors and AmeriCorps members is inconsistent.

2. Networking holes exist, impacting brand recognition of the program.

3. There is a lack of networking and communication between some AmeriCorps service sites and members.

4. Some members are excluded from the network and its employment benefits and capacity-building opportunities.

These challenges interfere with the growth of the program. For example, if a member or an organization does not have a good experience or believes the program to be too restrictive, there will be fewer recommendations for others to join. If networking is only limited to certain groups, the AmeriCorps brand and its benefits will never move beyond small networks.
If recruited organizations are not aware of others in the network, the network will be weak, making it more difficult for former AmeriCorps members to find jobs and for organizations to locate quality members and candidates. If certain members are left out of the network, they will not receive the benefits of AmeriCorps involvement.

1. Inconsistent Mentoring, Training, and Support for Supervisors and Members
CNCS requires that organizations accepted into the AmeriCorps program to complete an orientation and “Prohibited Activities” training for incoming members. There are no other training requirements for AmeriCorps program coordinators or service sites; supervisors training is important. The quality of the AmeriCorps experience between supervisors and members and the overall benefits to the organization are affected by the training and mentoring received.

Former AmeriCorps members stated that AmeriCorps experiences varied significantly from site to site. In some cases there was significant training covering the service site and population served, expectations, what it means to be an AmeriCorps member, mentoring, and employment search assistance. In these cases, AmeriCorps members reported rewarding experiences, which often led to their employment by the service site or a networked site:

“I saw all them as interns or volunteers when they first got there. That’s like, well, they can’t do what the staff are doing that, there’s no way they’ll be able to do all that. But, man, did we, we were overwhelmed….A majority of them were underestimated.”
—New AmeriCorps supervisor on AmeriCorps members

“She also tried to open my eyes to different volunteer opportunities and like serving on boards and things like that, as well as help me with what other areas of interest I have and how she could help me to get more experience in those things even if they weren’t at that specific organization.”
—Former AmeriCorps member

Those supervisors who were more successful in reaping organizational benefits from AmeriCorps members treated their members like staff. AmeriCorps members were invited to team meetings and included in communications. They were trusted, and treated with respect. Supervisors asked members what they were interested in doing, looked at organization needs, and matched their needs with members’ interests.

AmeriCorps members who had less enjoyable experiences shared the lack of support they felt they experienced from their supervisor. One member said her supervisor’s expectations were low: “You’re just a volunteer and this is what we need you to do. Just do this today. It was kind of more like the gopher position and I wasn’t invited to anything.” Another commented that his supervisor did not help him meet his own career goals.

“Even though I couldn’t do fundraising, they could have told me how I could do it so then that way I’d learn with that skill or that knowledge or learning how to operate a budget or understanding where the funds come from for a project rather than just being told, no, we don’t have the money.” — Former AmeriCorps member
Some supervisors reportedly had up to 25 individuals they were supervising in a cohort, which left them little time to mentor or provide in-depth training with each individual. Additionally, many supervisors stated that keeping up with paperwork requirements were overwhelming and really took a toll on their ability to properly supervise the members. One supervisor said, “That administrative burden just creeps up on you and is bigger and bigger. Then the operation side of things and the quality of the programing side of things takes a toll.”

If these supervisors were not former AmeriCorps members, they were often untrained about what AmeriCorps is. And with supervisors who are over-extended, many of whom turn over frequently, the lack of a required training element of site supervisor can negatively impact the experience and overall benefits to the organization:

“I think he was the CEO of the group, really loved Public Allies and AmeriCorps. And then he left, and so the person who was my supervisor, which wasn’t him, it was a manager below him, didn’t really care… So I was just kind of stuck there doing my own thing.” – Former AmeriCorps member

Because of the turnover among non-profits, new supervisors are left scratching their heads, trying to understand the program:

“[I] just understood that it [AmeriCorps] was kind of like Peace Corps, but for within their country. But I didn’t really know like what we were supposed to be doing like specifically. I went through the website where you report the hours and run through the whole thing, tried to like read through all the materials, but I didn’t really like, it didn’t click until a few months, a couple of months of like messing up until I realized exactly what we were supposed to be doing.” – Service site supervisors

Supervisors were asked what the goals were for the AmeriCorps members at their sites. The responses varied significantly, which impacted the type of training AmeriCorps members received. The answers ranged from contributing to the goals of the organization, personal and professional development, helping them find their career paths, and imparting skills and training that will help them jump start their careers. The perspective of the supervisor shaped the experience of the member and prospects for employment. Many supervisors understood “you have to give in to the program to get from it.”

In response, some supervisors are requesting AmeriCorps training to understand the goals and aspirations of AmeriCorps, as well as additional program coordinator support. Currently, many supervisors feel that they are “just all on their own.” A training program will hopefully provide some consistency between service sites on the quality of training and mentoring received, the type of jobs delegated to members, and the overall experience and benefits to the member and organization. In response, consistently positive experiences spread by word-of-mouth will bring in new AmeriCorps members and organizations and grow the AmeriCorps base.

2. Networking Holes
Both former AmeriCorps members and supervisors noted that there is an employment pipeline within the affiliated network. Former AmeriCorps members are placing AmeriCorps on their résumés, and if other AmeriCorps employers see it, they are likely to “look a little closer” at the résumé. Supervisors and former AmeriCorps members stated, however, that there still remains a lack of name recognition of what AmeriCorps is among many nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

For-profit organizations have access to resources that could support the goals of AmeriCorps. For-profits are increasingly exploring avenues to solve social and environmental problems by creating foundations and/or starting B Corporations. B Corporations are for-profit companies certified by the non-profit B Lab to meet
rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency. They typically invest more money and time into improving the quality of life of their communities than other for-profits. Similarly, some non-profits have become social entrepreneurs by developing for-profit arms of their organizations to diversify their funding and increase exposure of social issues. There is a need for for-profit and non-profits to align when solving wicked, or complex, social problems, despite AmeriCorps’ lack of name recognition across these organizations. In addition, B Corporations are not allowed to host members in their organizations because of their for-profit status.

However, there is a space for AmeriCorps to partner with for-profits. Conversations with for-profit corporations are happening between non-profits and for-profits already, but they are focused on development; very little information is typically shared. Businesses still walk away not understanding the full benefits of AmeriCorps to individuals, organizations, and entire communities. Opportunities to tackle social problems together are missed.

There has been a push by CNCS to include large corporations in AmeriCorps messaging, particularly as part of Employers of National Service, only recently created in 2014. However, often these messages don’t seep down to local levels where AmeriCorps members serve. Due to the newness of the program, local hiring managers from these employers often do not know what AmeriCorps is or even know that they are part of the program.

When former AmeriCorps members venture outside of the AmeriCorps network among organizations that didn’t know AmeriCorps are unsure how their AmeriCorps experience will be received. Most list AmeriCorps on their résumés along with the organization site where they served. These former members face good questions from some interviewers and act as ambassadors by describing the program to these organizations in response. Some former AmeriCorps members also worry listing AmeriCorps won’t make them “look as serious,” so they decide to leave it off. Other former AmeriCorps members shared experiences of non-profits not being aware of AmeriCorps. A former member stated, “There were a good majority of places that I’ve applied that weren’t even familiar with was or what it entailed, so it didn’t make a difference at all for me.”

Former AmeriCorps members looking for employment outside of the network struggle with selling themselves, educating others on AmeriCorps, and highlighting the valuable experience they received:

“I really am trying to highlight what it was I did specifically because if I just put AmeriCorps, it may not mean enough to get me where I need to go, even though I know the experience was valuable. You have to put it on paper somehow.” –Former AmeriCorps member
Former AmeriCorps members requested that more direct support from AmeriCorps be given as they develop their resumes and craft their message related to AmeriCorps for organizations outside of the network. A program coordinator said that former AmeriCorps members are frequently asking for “help articulating and translating the skills and what they learned during their time of service, to how that is valuable to employers.” These new alumni will likely be AmeriCorps’ ambassadors over their lifetimes, thus initial support is needed to assist them in framing their experience for years to come so that audiences will understand the full scope of their service.

The job search experience of these former AmeriCorps members also substantiates that there are still many non-profit organizations that simply don’t know AmeriCorps. The more non-profit organizations learn about AmeriCorps, the less difficulty former AmeriCorps members will have locating jobs in the public sector. This study found that the majority of AmeriCorps organizations and members learned about the program through their personal and professional connections, primarily through word-of-mouth. Supervisors were asked how they networked and whether or not they spoke about AmeriCorps to others outside of the network.

In most cases, the opportunities for networking were very sector-specific (e.g., education-education, conservation-conservation). There were spaces, however, to share AmeriCorps news and information, especially if the meeting leaders were connected to AmeriCorps. One supervisor connected and shared information regularly with about 40 to 55 different organizations focused on providing services to typically disengaged 16 to 24-year-olds, but these networking opportunities aren’t typical.

For many the AmeriCorps message to outside organizations is clear. Supervisors tell non-participating organizations, “This is your pilot, your wish list project, and for the cost of hosting a member, which is very minimal to you…you get a young person who’s really eager and can be creative and do all of this.” But, if entire sectors are not included in networking opportunities, large groups of non-profits will not hear this message and be less likely to appreciate the skill set of former AmeriCorps members seeking jobs, or the value to organizations AmeriCorps brings. The Alliance of Arizona Non-Profits helps to get the word out, but there needs to be more spaces for AmeriCorps to be shared in cross-sector networking opportunities. Although AmeriCorps only works with a small percentage of schools, non-profit, and governmental organizations, all organizations could benefit from hearing about how participating organizations are able to build capacity through the complex tasks that members complete. Spreading the message across organizations outside of the network and creating opportunities for partnership will provide more opportunities for both organizations and former AmeriCorps members to benefit, build the network of support, and provide more resources to tackle community concerns.

3. The AmeriCorps Network Inconsistent by Region

There is an informal AmeriCorps pipeline in some communities where organizational members are connected to one another through community ties, professional networks, hiring networks, and friendship. This pipeline increases AmeriCorps service site applications through word-of-mouth recommendations as more organizations benefit from the program. Serving in AmeriCorps also leads to positive employment outcomes of former AmeriCorps members. While the service site might not have the resources to employ former AmeriCorps members, the AmeriCorps network assists former AmeriCorps members through contacts and recommendations, offering tremendous social capital.

This network, however, is not equally strong in various areas throughout the state. For example, very rural areas and very large areas, such as Phoenix, encounter more barriers connecting to other AmeriCorps sites. This weakened network limits supervisor support and job prospects if a former AmeriCorps member is seeking employment outside of the service site. Some also mentioned a more creative use of the network, if one existed – to encourage project collaboration:
“I wonder if the Conservation Corps or 4-H would be interested in their AmeriCorps volunteer working with ours on that food desert. It’s just that kind of so that they can create a project together amongst themselves. That would be awesome. It would be great PR for AmeriCorps, but it would be awesome.” - Service site supervisor

But to strengthen the network in these rural areas, communication needs to be facilitated. Because the turnover of site supervisors can be high, neither the state director nor some of the program coordinators had up-to-date contact information for service sites. While local program coordinators serve as liaisons, there is a connection missing to the state and national office that increases legitimacy of the program and shows that AmeriCorps is connected to a larger movement. This contact information should be shared with the state office, if not the national office. There should also be an organization or website created for supervisors to motivate networking, facilitate access to information, and provide opportunities for support, collaboration, and cross-promotion. This will help organizations to access the information and support they need to meet the goals of the organization and AmeriCorps, while expanding opportunities to meet others in the process. This method can also help facilitate networking, regardless if the person lives in the most or least popular areas.

4. AmeriCorps’ Process Excludes Some

While not the primary goal of AmeriCorps, the program facilitates employment among many of the members involved. Recognizing these benefits, CNCS has targeted disconnected youth through its initiatives that promote economic opportunity. Disconnected youth are those, ages 16-24, living in poverty, and not in school. If they are employed at all, they are under-employed. Unfortunately, program requirements may unintentionally conflict with the success of recruiting this population. The Public Allies program faces significant challenges with disconnected youth joining and remaining in the program. Some feel out of place when they see others dressed in business attire, or other issues arise such as a lack of being welcomed into the organization or feelings of being ill-prepared interfere with their ability to complete the program. As a result, there is a problem with retention of these members. In fact, some members with little to no job experience require a little extra support to be successful and complete the placement.

AmeriCorps, however, places unintended barriers on these youth who could benefit most from the program. Over the past year, service sites are required to retain 100% of their members, or they do not receive funding. If sites don’t meet these CNCS requirements, they have to explain why, and plan to achieve 100% retention in the future. Thus, the overwhelming majority of organizations place members they think will be successful up front. Those with minimal job experience are usually not selected, while those with the most skills are. The following Figure 13 shows how supervisors rate AmeriCorps members’ qualities compared to others in similar positions. In many areas, AmeriCorps members stand apart, such as in teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving. In other areas, they are the same. In few areas, they are worse.

A supervisor touted, “We get lots of folks with Master’s and because we really fine tune our interview process we now get really, really good people each year.” Members were selected, because they were “bright”, “very
focused,” and “great communicators.” Other organizations confirmed they go through a stringent interviewing process to select the right candidates, including multiple interviews with different team members. And some organizations retain student interns and volunteers they know by having them apply through AmeriCorps to serve at their sites.

### AmeriCorps Members Stand Apart

![Graph showing skill level rating of AmeriCorps members compared to non-AmeriCorps staff in similar positions.](image)

Figure 13. Skill level rating of AmeriCorps members compared to non-AmeriCorps staff in similar positions (reported by % of supervisors)

One supervisor felt conflicted, and stated why he was so risk-averse to bringing in members with limited experience:

“We don’t want turnover, because then it doesn’t look good on the program. Well, now how do we give them that experience or kind of give them that screening and training before they actually are placed? And especially when you’re getting a lot of the younger ones that are fresh off of college and they want to do that and they really aren’t -- their experience hasn’t really been diverse enough?”

–Service site supervisor

A few organizations have figured out how to adequately train members with little experience, retain them, and still benefit. Much of it has to do with supervision and mentoring that focuses on lessons of service:

“I’ve had an AmeriCorps member that just comes in my office and literally break down in tears and just go, I don’t know if I can do this. I don’t know why I’m doing this. I don’t feel like I’m making a difference and being able to sit down with them and just hear their frustration. But at the same time I get them to a point to see that you’ve got a glimpse of what these refugees are facing and the obstacle that they have to go through to get to where they are today, and the impact that you will make in their lives. And almost every single one that I have supervised has signed up for a second year…”

–Service site supervisor
But for some, the barriers to bringing in inexperienced members had more to do with supervision:

“I probably wouldn’t hire somebody with no work experience. I just don’t have the time to micromanage all their whole day to day and that’s why I have AmeriCorps because our capacity is small. So if I spend all of my time managing someone really aggressively, then it kind of defeats the purpose.” –Service site supervisor

Some supervisors and former AmeriCorps members requested help before the placement began with training for AmeriCorps members on how to work in an office:

“So if there was just a little bit of the soft skills and even just answering an e-mail properly or picking up the phone and not coming to me and saying, I don’t know who it is. I don’t know what they want. They’re on the phone for you.”
—Service site supervisor

“There are additional program barriers that serve as a disincentive for rural areas to participate in AmeriCorps. Program grantees are required to have twenty AmeriCorps members to have a program. For some rural areas, that is quite a stretch both in terms of budget and human resources. Rural agencies have small budgets, and program coordinators have a very difficult time finding members willing to serve in rural areas:

“They wanted somebody to work in their parks and rec and we tried and tried and tried and tried to recruit somebody and never did. And so they just never had that position filled...And then another situation where it’s really next to a tiny little town we had trouble with housing. We could not find housing for them. If there is anything available for them, it is too expensive.” –Service site supervisor

“We have gone through a dozen interviews and a dozen people that we extended an invite to, not a dozen, 6 of the people that we extended an invitation to out of our 12 initial invites, that they all either pulled out of the program or decided to go somewhere else. And the number one thing we’re hearing is that they were unsure about living in a town with 11,000 people.” –Service site supervisor

Supervisors recognize that with limited things to do and with limited people to socialize, placements in rural settings are more difficult. Those who have been more successful have recruited members to serve from WITHIN those communities. One program coordinator recognized that high school students could be utilized and was successful with that strategy. It motivates young people to serve their communities, and it helps them with education expenses. But, at the same time, these high school youth have little experience. Both survey and phone interviews demonstrate that when members are placed in rural areas, they have a high rate of employment. The need is there for talent. They just need assistance accessing it.

These findings suggest that for some individuals and areas, placement in many AmeriCorps sites could be difficult, especially with a requirement of a 100% retention rate and twenty members to a program in rural areas. There should be special consideration regarding how AmeriCorps is administered regarding specific populations. AmeriCorps has always used fresh talent and energy to help organizations solve complex
problems. But, maybe part of the way to address communities’ complex problems is by making the following changes:

- Refine current requirements to ensure the under-served, such as disconnected youth and rural communities, are not excluded
- Lower the number of members required
- Allow agencies to replace vacant positions
- Reduce the retention rate so that agencies will be more likely to place some who are less experienced or disconnected
- Encourage rural organizations to think creatively about recruiting teams of local community members to address a specific community problem

These actions may help increase capacity-building and connect those with little experience to the employment network.
IMPLICATIONS

Discussion of Key Findings

This research has shown that service sites are hiring former AmeriCorps members at high rates. Specifically, 82.5% of all organizations hired former AmeriCorps members, and 57.8% of service sites employed their members following their service terms. AmeriCorps members' performance during their time within the organization served as an informal, extended job interview. There is also an informal AmeriCorps pipeline in some communities where organizational members are connected to one another through community ties, professional networks, hiring networks, and friendships. This pipeline increases AmeriCorps host-site applications through word-of-mouth recommendations, as more organizations benefit from the program. Serving in AmeriCorps also leads to positive employment outcomes of former AmeriCorps members through this pipeline. While the service site might not have the resources to employ former AmeriCorps members, the AmeriCorps network assists former AmeriCorps members through contacts and recommendations, offering tremendous social capital.

AmeriCorps members seem to succeed more when they are placed at service sites that are networked, and they are encouraged to build new relationships with those both inside and outside their service site. This social capital also benefits organizations. AmeriCorps members are often attending higher education, and serve at the sites energized by new ideas, concepts, and strategies. AmeriCorps members are in a unique position to drive new ideas, processes and services within their organizations. As one interviewee stated, they are "trailblazers" filling gaps in very needed services. They are able to do things that regular staff cannot. In turn, organizations are able to benefit, which can lead to sustainable innovation by offering programs and services.

AmeriCorps members are essentially creating a collaborative advantage for their service sites by filling gaps in services, reorganizing services, and creating new services to meet the needs of the community. As a result, organizations report serving more people more smartly, trying out new projects and expanding them, and maintaining a larger community presence due to their AmeriCorps members. These members are able to help organizations build stronger ties into the community and recruit more volunteers to help drive their mission. In effect, when former AmeriCorps members are hired into new positions, 44% of these positions result in growth. AmeriCorps can stimulate program expansion and contribute to an organization's health.

Similar to previous research, this study also finds that AmeriCorps is providing individuals who serve with work experience, mentorship, friendship and relationships that are shaping their futures – and in many cases leading to positive employment outcomes. This experience is transformative, because it is helping these
members recast their assumptions and images of society, determine their place in their communities, and learn how they can contribute, directly improving them. Supervisors regularly acknowledge the hard work, dedication and innovative ideas of AmeriCorps members. Thus, supervisors desire to give back to its members through training, mentorship, and assistance following their terms in the program (i.e., recommendation letters, employment advantages, networking). However, this is not always the case.

Former AmeriCorps members’ experiences and organizational benefits are directly related to the training, mentoring, and expectations of the supervisor. While some organizational supervisors are taking initiative to train their AmeriCorps members, due to turnover, some are new to their positions or to AmeriCorps and feel they lack guidance. They are not sure what it means, at the national level, to be a member of AmeriCorps. They are unclear about AmeriCorps’ goals and how members should be trained. Further, they are unsure if they are giving their AmeriCorps members all of the training they deserve. While this information exists, not all organizational supervisors know how to access it.

For smaller organizations, paperwork also poses a significant barrier for the many supervisors who want to adequately train members. There is also a vast variation in jobs and organizational structures that could impact supervisory experiences. Some AmeriCorps members are placed within an organization they work in every day, and they are likely to have more contact with organizational leadership. Others that work in the field – such as student teachers or social workers – are likely to have more episodic, less frequent contact with leadership. Regardless, consistent training and mentoring of both supervisors and members is an important part of reaping the full benefits of the AmeriCorps program for members, organizations, and former AmeriCorps members. Organizations and former AmeriCorps members both state “you get what you give.” AmeriCorps is mutually beneficial and has lasting impacts.

The value of the AmeriCorps program is threefold: it services urgent needs in the community, the organization, and former AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps has a significant community building and development component that happens throughout the course of member service and afterward. More clients are served in an improved capacity. The spillover effects of AmeriCorps members living and working in the community, combined with the transformative experience during their placement, is resulting in them becoming more engaged community members. These experiences should not be lost on for-profits with the monetary resources to address social and environmental concerns.

There is a need for for-profits and non-profits to align and partner when solving complex community problems. Unfortunately, there seems to be little name recognition of AmeriCorps among for-profits. Former AmeriCorps members state that employers that are not in the AmeriCorps pipeline often ask them, “What’s AmeriCorps?” While beyond the scope of this research, there should be an opportunity created for for-profit and non-profits to network and discuss how AmeriCorps operates, how these organizations may benefit by employing these former AmeriCorps members, and why AmeriCorps may be worth their investment. Partnerships with for-profit corporations may increase the number of volunteers and monetary investment that is required to address some communities’ most challenging problems. Thus, to increase the benefits, sustainability, and awareness of
AmeriCorps, more attention should be placed on partnering and extending the AmeriCorps network to include corporations and those non-profit and governmental organizations outside of the existing network.

**Study Limitations**

It is important to note that although methods were in place to ensure trustworthiness of this study’s findings, there were still some limitations. The findings that were derived from this inductive study were drawn from a small sample in one state. Thus, it should not be assumed that all non-profit organizations and former AmeriCorps members abide by the same beliefs and perceptions. We sought input from supervisors of both State and Nationally-funded AmeriCorps programs, with the exception of NCCC and VISTA. However, we found that the member experiences of some of the National AmeriCorps programs differed from the State AmeriCorps programs due to more hours served, which could potentially impact member experiences and employment outcomes. Additionally, AmeriCorps State and National program supervisors had difficulty differentiating VISTA from State-only members when submitting their responses. We also encountered a number of sites that did not know or have employment outcome data (23%). Further, approximately 30 organizations had no current AmeriCorps program or could not answer questions about their former programs, so they were dropped from the study. We attempted to recruit organizations across both for-profit and non-profit sectors, but there was only a 5% and 6% participation rate respectively of for-profit and non-profit non-AmeriCorps sites, due to limited connections within the AmeriCorps network.

Survey responses were potentially biased. Organizations that hired former AmeriCorps members may have been more motivated to complete a survey on employment. Similarly, focus group participants may have said what researchers wanted to hear, creating an unintended Hawthorne Effect. However, the phone and electronic surveys, as well as key expert interviews helped to triangulate focus group findings. Despite this study’s limitations, it does offer a strategy for analyzing organizational and former AmeriCorps member relationships and assessing their effects on employment moving forward. Results consistently reported across methods and sources were included.

**Next Steps**

This study pointed to several different research gaps that still exist. The for-profit perspective is missing from the national service discourse, although there is a growing movement of for-profits supporting social causes. In addition, this research provided numbers pertaining to employment. We still do not know precisely how programs are expanded as a result of AmeriCorps, the kind of “ripple effect” it is creating across communities, and if the findings obtained in Arizona would be the same across the country. More research in collective action with specific attention to how AmeriCorps members are leveraged in these processes is also needed to understand the impact of the program beyond traditional measurements, such as hours served. Finally, the impact of former AmeriCorps members serving as supervisors should be captured in future research to determine how they may affect employment outcomes of AmeriCorps members. The research team will examine some of these questions in year two of this study.

In year one, we found that rural settings had difficulty attracting and retaining members and experienced minimal employment networks. In addition, Arizona has a lower percentage of people 25 and over who have completed college (28.1%), which could make employment less competitive among former AmeriCorps members. To determine if what we found is transferable to other states despite these conditions, in year two of this study, Morrison Institute will use a purposeful, stratified sample of organizations to determine if specific state-level factors could impact employment outcomes of former AmeriCorps members in five states. Four states will represent a combination of low and high percentage college educated and population density to determine if a change in either of these factors influence service site employment retention of AmeriCorps members.
members. The fifth state selected will be comparable to Arizona to affirm its results. If there is variability, next year’s study will explore why, which could help target future AmeriCorps site placement and increase employment outcomes of former AmeriCorps members. In addition, the team will also further explore the impact of alumni supervisors on employment outcomes, as well as how and why job creation occurs among AmeriCorps-funded organizations.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this one-year pilot study of AmeriCorps employment outcomes in Arizona has provided important information. This study illuminated employment outcomes of former AmeriCorps members and how AmeriCorps contributes to these employment outcomes. Benefits of the program, such as the existence of an employment pipeline, and opportunities for AmeriCorps members to innovate programs, training, and mentorship, can be a real asset to everyone involved. But, these components also require continued attention and support to ensure AmeriCorps can grow to its maximum capacity.

The lives of young adults do not mirror that of their parents or their grand-parents. Millennials are faced with several economic and employment challenges that have shaped their employment landscape. Confronting adversity, several Millennials have risen to the challenge by entering the AmeriCorps program to achieve their goals and dreams, while serving others. In doing so, they are affecting the lives of people in areas ranging from nutrition, homelessness, legal services, education of non-profits, capacity building and strengthening communities. To continue to attract these members as the economy fully recovers, the public good stemming from AmeriCorps service should be broadcast to individuals and organizations both inside and outside the network. The effects of years of service performed through changing times in the United States has shown that this program is, indeed, “a Swiss Army knife” for communities that has served several functions:

“The energy of the young adults who are out there doing what they’re doing and serving. That, I think, is, I hate to sound pie in the sky Pollyannaish, but it sure is beautiful, especially given the politics and the tensions and things in the country. And to be able to affect people’s lives individually from anything from nutrition to serving the homeless and everything in between and building a nonprofit’s capacity, that has a value to it that I don’t know that you can measure, really…it affects the community as a whole.”—Organization supervisor
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. Organization On-Line Survey Instrument

We invite you to participate in a 5-10 minute survey of organizations and their perspectives of former AmeriCorps members. This research is conducted by Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University on behalf of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

By proceeding to the next page, understand that this survey is completely confidential and voluntary. Upon reporting, your answers will not be connected to you in anyway.

By filling out this survey you agree that:

- You have directly supervised an AmeriCorps member, that has completed their term of service site at any time between January 1, 2011 - December, 31, 2015.

- Your business or organization has hired and you directly supervise, or have directly supervised, a former AmeriCorps member at any time since 2011.

If you do not meet the above conditions, please forward this survey to those individuals who directly supervise AmeriCorps members or have hired former AmeriCorps members. We are seeking information from AmeriCorps State and National Programs; this survey is not intended for AmeriCorps VISTA or AmeriCorps NCCC programs.

If you meet the eligibility criteria, we appreciate your time and input in advance. You can obtain further information about this study from the Principal Investigator (PI), Erica McFadden, PhD (erica.mcfadden@asu.edu) or co-PI Linda Manning, PhD (linda.manning@asu.edu).

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Arizona State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance telephone (480) 965-6788.

The following survey will be organized into 3 sections:

- Questions for employers on employment of former AmeriCorps members
- Questions for service site supervisors on their overall perceptions of AmeriCorps members. For those service sites who hired former AmeriCorps members, there will also be questions regarding their employment decisions towards the end of this section;
- And final comments and optional contact information for follow up.

Recognizing that not all of these sections will apply to you, each of the sections will begin with screening questions that will allow you to skip the sections that don’t apply.

The survey can last anywhere between 2 minutes to 15 minutes depending on which sections apply to you. Thank you in advance for your time and your thoughtful feedback.

The next page will begin the survey.
Q1 Is your organization located within Arizona?
- Yes
- No

Q2 Approximately how many employees does your organization have in the state of Arizona? (Numbers only)
Please leave blank if you don’t know.
#____

Q3 Your organization is categorized under which of the following industries? (Note: You can check more than one).
- Transportation
- Business Services
- Financial Activities
- Education
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Natural Resource and Mining
- Leisure, Hospitality
- Construction
- Government
- Health Services
- Emergency Preparedness, Disaster Relief
- Social Services
- Other: (Please list) ________________

Section 1. Employment of Former AmeriCorps Members.
For the following questions the term former AmeriCorps member is defined as someone who previously served with AmeriCorps and was hired by your organization as a regular employee.

Q4 Have you heard of AmeriCorps?
- Yes
- No

Answer if: Have you heard of AmeriCorps? No Is Selected
AmeriCorps is a civil society program supported by the U.S. federal government, foundations, corporations, and other donors engaging adults in involved community service work with a goal of meeting critical needs in the community. Members commit to full-time or part-time positions offered by a network of nonprofit community organizations and public agencies, to fulfill assignments in the fields of education, public safety, health care, and environmental protection. The program is often seen as a domestic Peace Corps. With this in mind, the next several questions will ask about your perceptions of this program.

Q5 Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members as regular employees?
- Yes
- No
- I don’t know

Answer If: Between the years of 2011-2015, has your organization hired any AmeriCorps alumni? No Is Selected
Q6 Would you please explain to the best of your ability, why your organization has not hired any former AmeriCorps members?

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? No Is Selected
Q7 If your organization had an open position, how likely would you hire or recommend that a former AmeriCorps member be hired?
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely
Answer If: Your organization had an open position, how likely would you hire or recommend that an AmeriCorps member is selected...Somewhat unlikely to Very unlikely is selected
Q8 Please briefly explain your hesitation to recommend a former AmeriCorps member.

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected
Q9 Under what industry category are former AmeriCorps members primarily employed in your organization? (Note: You can check more than one).
- Transportation
- Business Services
- Financial Activities
- Education
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Natural Resource and Mining
- Leisure, Hospitality
- Construction
- Government
- Health Services
- Emergency Preparedness, Disaster Relief
- Social Services
- Other: (Please list) ____________________
- I don’t know

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected
Q10 Approximately how many former AmeriCorps members since 2012 has your organization hired as regular employees? (Numbers only - please skip if you don’t know.)
#____

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected
Q11 What is the likelihood that you would hire a former AmeriCorps member as a regular employee over another applicant with similar qualifications?
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected
Q12 Which of the following statements best describes your experience when comparing non-AmeriCorps staff and former AmeriCorps members who are employed in similar positions at your organization?
- Former AmeriCorps members remained employed longer at my organization.
- Staff who are not former AmeriCorps members remained employed longer at my organization.
- There is no difference in job retention between either group at my organization.
- I don’t know.

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected
Q13 Are there paid positions within your organization that are designated solely for former AmeriCorps members?
- Yes
- No
Answer If: There are existing positions within your organization that are designated solely for AmeriCorps members. Yes Is Selected
Q14 Please list the job title and program type of these designated positions for former AmeriCorps members. (Example: Community Outreach Manager for a Social Service agency)

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected
Q15 Between 2012 and 2015, approximately how many new full-time paid and part-time paid positions were created for former AmeriCorps members where no current employees were replaced? Please enter a number below. The number can be 0.

#____ Full-Time Positions
#____ Part-Time Positions

Answer If: Between 2012 and 2015, approximately how many new full-time paid and part-time paid positions were created between 2012 and 2015, approximately how many new full-time paid and part-time positions were created

Q16 Please estimate how many of these new positions have generated additional full-time equivalent paid jobs in your department. (This includes jobs for non-AmeriCorps members.) Please enter a number below.

#____

Answer If: Between 2012 and 2015, how many positions were created for, former or current, AmeriCorps members where no current employees were replaced. Please enter a number below if the response is greater than or equal to 1.
Q17 How often are jobs created to retain AmeriCorps members after their service time is completed?

☐ #____ Frequently
☐ #____ Sometimes
☐ #____ Rarely
☐ #____ Never

Answer If: How often is a job created to retain an AmeriCorps member after their service time is completed? Frequently, Sometimes, Rarely
Q18 What are the usual reasons to keep an existing AmeriCorps member? Check all that apply.

☐ Program growth
☐ Familiarity with AmeriCorps member
☐ Growth in revenue
☐ Other ____________________

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected
Q19 What is the average annual salary for former AmeriCorps members in your organization since 2012?

☐ 0-$9,999
☐ $10,000-19,999
☐ $20,000-29,999
☐ $30,000-39,999
☐ $40,000-49,999
☐ $50,000-59,999
☐ $60,000+

Answer If: Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected
Q20 How often do former AmeriCorps members who are hired at your organization start at a higher level position than when they served in the AmeriCorps program?

☐ Always/almost always
☐ Often
☐ About half the time
☐ Seldom
☐ Never
Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected

Q21 Please identify the key attributes that led to former AmeriCorps members being hired at your organization.

Your organization hires former AmeriCorps members because of their:

- Time management
- Teamwork
- Written communication
- Problem-solving
- Leadership
- Professional conduct
- Ethics
- Public speaking
- Coalition-building
- Other previous non-AmeriCorps work experience
- Familiarity with the AmeriCorps member
- Write your own

Section 2. AmeriCorps Members and Service Sites.

The next set of questions pertain to your overall perceptions of AmeriCorps members who serve at AmeriCorps service sites.

An AmeriCorps member is someone who is serving at your AmeriCorps-sponsored host site

***An AmeriCorps service site is a location of a program that utilizes AmeriCorps members.

Q22 Has your organization served as an AmeriCorps service site in Arizona at any time between 2011-2015?

- Yes
- No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block

Q23 Under what industry category are AmeriCorps members primarily assigned in your organization? (Note: You can check more than one).

- Transportation
- Business Services
- Financial Activities
- Education
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Natural Resource and Mining
- Leisure, Hospitality
- Construction
- Government
- Health Services
- Emergency Preparedness, Disaster Relief
- Social Services
- Other: (Please list)

Q24 Describe the location of your service site.

- Rural area
- Tribal community
- Suburban
- Urban

Answer If: Describe the location of your service site; Urban Is Selected or Describe the location of your service site; Suburban Is Selected

Q25 How often do your service members travel to rural areas or tribal communities to deliver services?

- Always/Almost always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Almost never/Never
Q26 How frequently do AmeriCorps members who have completed their terms of service continue to volunteer with the program, even though they were not hired on as a regular employees?

- Always/Almost Always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Almost never/Never

Answer If: How frequently do AmeriCorps members who served at your organization continue to volunteer with the program? About half the time Is Selected, Often Is Selected Or Almost Always/Always Is Selected

Q27 What areas do former AmeriCorps members typically serve in when they continue on as volunteers? Check all that apply.

- Board/Committee member
- Programs and services
- Fundraising
- Outreach
- Administrative functions
- Other: ____________________

Answer If: How frequently do AmeriCorps members who served at your organization continue to volunteer with the program? About half the time, Often Or Almost Always/Always

Q28 How often has continued volunteering helped former AmeriCorps members obtain employment from your organization?

- Always/Almost always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Almost never/Never

Q29 Approximately what percentage of your program staff are filled by AmeriCorps members- not including management and administrative staff? Please skip this question if you don’t know.

______ Percentage

Q30 Please rate the overall skill development of AmeriCorps members by the time they complete their terms of service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Development</th>
<th>Significant growth</th>
<th>Moderate growth</th>
<th>Average growth</th>
<th>Little growth</th>
<th>No growth</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
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<td>Written communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition-building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Answer If: Approximately what percentage of direct service positions are filled by AmeriCorps Members-- not including management and administrative staff? Percentage Is Not Equal to 100

Q31 How would you rate the skill level of AmeriCorps members compared to non-AmeriCorps staff in similar positions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Significantly better</th>
<th>Moderately better/ Duties the same</th>
<th>Both fulfill their duties</th>
<th>Little worse/ Worse</th>
<th>Significantly worse</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
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<td>Written communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition-building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other skill:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q32 How would you rate the overall ability of AmeriCorps members when they begin their service terms at your site.

- Superior
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Q33 Upon finishing their AmeriCorps term of service with your organization, approximately what percentage of AmeriCorps members would you consider ready to enter into a career?

_______ Percentage

Q34 How frequently are AmeriCorps members released for cause before the end of their terms?

- Always/almost always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Almost never/Never

Answer If: How frequently are AmeriCorps members released for cause before the end of their terms? Never Is Not Selected

Q35 Please briefly explain the major reasons they were released for cause before the end of their terms.

Answer If: How frequently are AmeriCorps members released for cause before the end of their term? Never Is Not Selected

Q36 Do you still utilize AmeriCorps members?

- Yes
- No

Q37 How often does your department or program share AmeriCorps members with other departments or programs within your organization?

- Always/Almost always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Almost never/Never
Q38 How often do outside community organizations that are not AmeriCorps-sponsored sites directly benefit from the work of AmeriCorps members placed at your organization?
- Always/Almost always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Almost never/Never

**Answer If:** How often do outside community organizations that are not AmeriCorps-sponsored sites directly benefit from the work of AmeriCorps service members placed at your organization? About half the time, Often Or Always/Almost Always is selected

Q39 How often do former AmeriCorps members get hired for paid full time jobs after their service terms are up through these non-AmeriCorps organizations that are beneficiaries of the AmeriCorps program?
- Always/Almost always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Almost never/Never

**Answer If:** Since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members as regular employees? Yes Is Selected and Has your organization served as an AmeriCorps service site at any time between 2011-2015? Yes Is Selected

Q40 You have indicated throughout the survey that you have both supervised AmeriCorps members, as well as hired at least one of these members as a regular employee. How often have you hired on former AmeriCorps members who served in your organization to work in departments/programs different from the ones they worked in as AmeriCorps members?
- Always/Almost always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Almost never/Never
- I don’t know

**Answer If:** Your organization is categorized under which of the following industries? (Note: You can check more than 1 and since 2012, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members as regular employees? Yes Is Selected and Has your organization served as an AmeriCorps service site at any time between 2011-2015? Yes Is Selected

Q41 How often have you hired former AmeriCorps members who served in your organization to work in a different industry from the one they worked in as members?
- Always/Almost always
- Often
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Never/Almost never
- I don’t know

**Final Comments and Follow Up**

**Answer If:** Between 2011-2015, has your organization hired any former AmeriCorps members? Yes Is Selected

Q42 Which option best describes your organization?
- For profit
- Not-for-profit

Q43 We are looking for additional locations that have hired former AmeriCorps members in Arizona. If you know of any of these organizations, and are willing to share, please provide the contact information below.
Q44 If you have any final comments that you would like to share, please feel free to do so below. (Note: This is your last chance to go back and modify any of your answers)

Q45 Would you be willing to be added to our pool of organizations that, upon random selection, could get selected for a focus group discussion? Please note that by choosing “yes” you will be redirected to a different form to keep your contact information separate from your survey responses to ensure anonymity.

☐ Yes
☐ No

Answer If: Has your organization been an AmeriCorps service site at anytime between 2011-2015? Yes Is Selected or Between the years of 2011-2015, has your organization hired any AmeriCorps alumni? Yes Is Selected

Q46 Are you willing to share any unique or notable experiences involving current or former AmeriCorps members? Please note that by choosing “yes, please follow up with me” you will be redirected to a different form to keep your contact information separate from your survey responses to ensure anonymity. (Note: This is your last chance to go back and modify any of your answers)

☐ No
☐ Yes, please follow up with me
☐ Yes, I would like to share my story in this survey

Answer If: We are looking for additional locations that have hired AmeriCorps alumni in Arizona. If you know of any of these organizations, and are willing to share, please provide the contact information. Name of Organization Is Selected

Q47 Please share your story below.

The Morrison Institute for Public Policy and Corporation for National and Community Service would like to thank you for your time and support. (Note: This is your last chance to go back and modify any of your answers) If you chose that you would like us to follow up with you, or that you would like to be part of the focus group, please proceed to the next screen.
## APPENDIX B. Survey Summary Statistics

### B –1. Demographics of Phone Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Relative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>191</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Locations (n=191)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>81.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Sector (n=191)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hired Former AmeriCorps Members (n=191)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Didn’t know</td>
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<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of Hired Position (n=71)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newly Created Position</td>
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<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement Position</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former AmeriCorps Member Hire Led to Job Growth (n=69)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### B –2. Demographics for Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Relative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization Sectors (n=183) (could check more than one)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Preparedness, Disaster Relief</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Locations (n= 110)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization Type (n=80)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For profit</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations Located in Arizona (n=140)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Former AmeriCorps Members Hired (n=109)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C. Focus Group Interview Instruments

**Organization:**
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 former AmeriCorps members?
3. When former AmeriCorps members 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 who 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 former AmeriCorps members compare with or differ from 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? How do you prepare them? What can service sites do to better prepare AmeriCorps service members for a career?
8. 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?

**Former AmeriCorps Members:**
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 D. Focus Group Demographics (9 groups)

### D –1. Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Demographics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Relative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Group Locations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flagstaff</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucson</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix</td>
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<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>71%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Site Locations (n=47)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity (n=51)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afr Amer</td>
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<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>39</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong># Years Supervised (n=48)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 2</td>
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<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<td><strong># Former AmeriCorps members Hired (n=48)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
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</table>

### D –2. Former AmeriCorps members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former AmeriCorps members Demographics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Relative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Group Locations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucson</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Education Completed (n=28)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity (n=28)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afr Amer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong># Years Work Experience (n=27)</strong></td>
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<td>3 years and less</td>
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<td>4-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
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<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
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<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>25-34</td>
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<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54-64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</table>