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Abstract

The Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University, a 2015 National Service and Civic Engagement Competition Grantee through the Corporation for National & Community Service, conducted a one-year, mixed-methods pilot study in Arizona to investigate employment opportunities and outcomes for AmeriCorps members engaged in the AmeriCorps State and National program.

Specifically, this study assessed where and how job opportunities are created for AmeriCorps members, how service affects preparation and employment, and how members are perceived by organizations.

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.

Methodology

Interviews
- 5 key informants

Focus Groups
- 20 alumni
- 52 organizations

Surveys
- 147 on-line
- 250 phone

Results

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 host sites, affiliated non-AmeriCorps organizations, AmeriCorps Alumni, and more recently, Employers of National Service. This pipeline aids in AmeriCorps alumni employability via word-of-mouth, referrals, and close communal ties. 2) Almost half of these new positions lead to additional job growth. The presence of AmeriCorps members in their host sites was shown to foster innovation, job creation, and program expansion. AmeriCorps members make service improvements, create new programs, provide fresh eyes to old problems, and basically serve as trailblazers within their organizations, sparking innovation.

Discussion

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 friendship. This pipeline increases AmeriCorps host-site applications through word-of-mouth recommendations, assists AmeriCorps members through contacts and recommendations, offering tremendous social capital.

AmeriCorps members seem to succeed more when they are placed in networked environments where they are encouraged to build new relationships with those both inside and outside their service site – and in fact, many are.

Conclusions

This one-year pilot study of AmeriCorps employment outcomes in Arizona has provided important information regarding the program.

The findings that were derived from this inductive study were drawn from a small sample in one state of one specific AmeriCorps program. Thus, it should not be assumed that all state organizations and former AmeriCorps members abide by the same beliefs and perceptions.

More research is needed to understand if these results are consistent across states or specific to Arizona.

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Chart 1. AmeriCorps Members’ Attributes that Aid in Future Employment.