

AmeriCorps*State/National Direct Five Year Evaluation Report: A Follow-Up, Aguirre International, September 1999.

A follow-up to the 1994-96 AmeriCorps study entitled, "Making a Difference"

This study examined five-year outcomes and impacts of AmeriCorps*State and National programs on institutional development and community strengthening, including impacts on program sponsors and community resources, infrastructure and members. The follow-up study replicated the three-tiered methodology used in the 1994-96 impact study entitled "Making a Difference." All programs were surveyed on annual accomplishments and supplemented with administrative data from the Corporation. A random sample of sixty of the 310 original AmeriCorps programs from program years 1994-95 was selected. Thirty-four programs (57 percent) were still in existence at the end of 1998-99 program year. At these sites, evaluators interviewed administrators, supervisors, members, and representatives of partners and other involved institutions. Intensive case studies were conducted at eight of the original 60 sites. Of the eight original case study sites, six were still in existence at the end of 1998-99.

Overall, the efforts of these sampled programs are representative of the impacts of AmeriCorps*State and National programs. The study found that programs had matured considerably by the fifth year. Overall, they had strengthened supervision, expanded and improved services, instituted more selective recruitment standards, and increased and enhanced their relations with other community organizations.

The institutional impacts of AmeriCorps were far stronger than expected. AmeriCorps brought together community organizations and helped them organize service delivery, particularly small grass roots organizations that had not received federal funding previously. These programs were often innovative and used their knowledge of the community to effectively address overlooked needs. In addition, the emphasis on professional standards, particularly accountability, led to institutional strengthening.

The principles of high quality service fundamental to AmeriCorps obliged many providers to change how they viewed their programs, provided services, and structured their administrative functions. Sponsors made changes in program design or implementation to meet AmeriCorps requirements, delivering more focused services and measuring their effects.

AmeriCorps funds allowed programs and their service partners to expand, improve, restore, streamline, or add services. Collaborations between agencies often resulted in the formation of a network of community organizations that pooled resources, shared organizational insights, and provided communities with more cohesive and comprehensive services. In some instances, AmeriCorps was a catalyst for change-enabling sponsors to expand and improve their existing organization and create new solutions to community problems along with private and public partners. AmeriCorps brought new resources into communities by raising funds and recruiting volunteers. Nearly 105,000 community members were recruited as volunteers for tutoring or other educational purposes. Programs reached out to local businesses in their communities. On average, two-three businesses were involved with each program.

There were measurable improvements to communities in terms of improved services and infrastructure, resulting in community strengthening. AmeriCorps programs found in severely-distressed communities helped develop and/or strengthen the actual infrastructure of those communities, including physical rehabilitation, environmental restoration, or

development of information systems.

AmeriCorps programs performed substantial amounts of direct service in all issue areas (i.e., education, other human needs, environment, and public safety) that substantially benefited communities. A survey of 522 AmeriCorps*State and National programs showed that during the 1997-98 program year, more than 17.6 million people benefited from AmeriCorps service. Members personally provided services to 10.1 million individuals. This included 2 million students that received educational services such as tutoring, mentoring, after-school programs, or received other services. In addition, nearly 250,000 young children received care, instruction, or immunization and 54,000 parents were trained in parenting skills. The remaining 7.8 million individuals received a variety of education, other human needs, and public safety services, or benefited from disaster relief activities.