

Final Transcript

FY24 AmeriCorps Impact Webinar 3

Katy Hussey-Sloniker:

Welcome to the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Evidence webinar series celebrating AmeriCorps 30th anniversary through our evidence story. Today's webinar, AmeriCorps ROI Studies - Proof that the Cost of Doing Good Benefits the Bottom Line. My name is Katy Hussey-Sloniker, and I'm the learning officer for the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation. Next slide. Today, let's talk about benefit cost analysis and AmeriCorps' return on investment studies. We'll have presentations by Dr. Emily Pindilli, Assistant Director Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital, Office of Science and Technology Policy, Executive Office of the President, sharing information from the Subcommittee on Frontiers of Benefit Cost Analysis. We'll also have Ben Miller and Dominic Modicamore sharing the trailblazing work AmeriCorps has commissioned in return on investment studies. Finally, members of our AmeriCorps team will ground the importance of this work by discussing our office and agency strategy as well as sense-making with our government relations reflection.

Next slide. Our learning objectives are to define ROI and how it helps AmeriCorps and grantees quantify the value of the program activities, describe how various agencies are exploring frontiers of benefit cost analysis, consider four of the fiscal year 23 AmeriCorps ROI studies, adding to the growing body of evidence on our AmeriCorps-supported programs, and reflect on how the ROI approach may be applied to programs you help to implement or may choose to study. The session will be packed, so we're encouraging participants to place questions in the chat that will be compiled and answered in our panel Q&A discussion towards the end of the webinar. Please be sure to place those questions and comments you might have in the chat throughout the webinar. Now I'd like to introduce Mary Hyde, the Director of the Office of Research and Evaluation.

Mary Hyde:

Thanks, Katy. Hello and thank you for spending your valuable time with us today. As Katy said, today's webinar is the third in our celebrating service and its evidence story series. The sixth webinar series is hosted by the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation and focuses on evidence and impact with partners in the field within the agency and leaders and communities and the nation. The webinar series is designed to celebrate AmeriCorps' 30th anniversary of harnessing the transformative value of evidence and its use. This showcase year will highlight AmeriCorps evidence journey and the evidence use movement sparked through the Evidence Act. Today's webinar and future webinars will share how AmeriCorps not only supports research, evidence, and evaluation capacity building that strengthens the local nonprofit missions to problem-solve and tackle community-inspired change, but also shows return in taxpayer dollars saved to local, state and national budgets. Next slide, please.

For those who may not be familiar with the AmeriCorps mission, it is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and learning. Given this mission, the Office of Research and Evaluation in partnership with the agency's program offices seeks to build evidence for the impact national service has on participants, partners, and the communities we serve. In addition, in partnership with organizations like the US Census Bureau, the National Conference on Citizenship, and Points of Light, we build evidence about the nation's civic health or the societal impacts of our work. At the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation, our vision is to understand how and what AmeriCorps does that can make a lasting and sustainable impact across these four domains of influence. Building evidence for national service is critical. Using this evidence and supporting a culture of learning

to advance our mission and to ensure we are effectively tackling the nation's most pressing social issues is even more critical.

As such, AmeriCorps and the Office of Research and Evaluation strive to use the knowledge we gain to improve the member and volunteer experience, strengthen the organizational capacity of our partners, support a community in their localized solutions, and contribute knowledge to the civic health of society. I invite you to check out the agency's learning agenda and our recent state of the evidence report to learn more about how we are building evidence for national service and what we currently know about the impacts of national service.

Today, our webinar is focused on an evidence-building strategy that is relatively new for our agency as well as others in the executive branch. These targeted return on investment analyses reflect how AmeriCorps evidence story has advanced over the years. Robust program evaluation evidence and the ability to monetize both the cost and benefits of specific national service initiatives has resulted not only in methodological advances, but also strides in our ability to demonstrate the value of taxpayer investments.

AmeriCorps and its grantees have invested significant resources in evaluating different agency programs and supported program models. AmeriCorps has commissioned an independent expert, ICF International, to conduct return on investment analyses to help measure program performance and build the base of evidence for future resource allocation decisions. Each targeted study helps AmeriCorps communicate the value of its program to relevant stakeholders. Spearheaded by Dr. Lily Zandniapour, an economist in the Office of Research and Evaluation, the return on investment studies project has produced 16 assessments between fiscal years 2020 and fiscal years 2023. We're excited to share this body of work with you because doing good at the local, state and national level is what AmeriCorps is all about.

We're also excited to be part of a larger federal effort to better understand and use cost-benefit analysis in our collective evidence-building endeavors. The Office of Management and Budget defines cost-benefit analyses as an approach that identifies and compares relevant quantitative and qualitative costs and benefits associated with a program, policy, regulation or organization expressed in monetary terms. These types of analyses are not easy for a number of reasons, but these types of analyses are important for answering the critical question. Do the benefits of a policy, program, regulation or organization exceed the costs? The experts joining us today will show us what is possible and where we need to go. Now I'd like to introduce our honored guest, Dr. Emily Pindilli.

Dr. Emily Pindilli:

Thank you so much, Mary. Good afternoon and thank you for having me today. I'm Emily Pindilli, Assistant Director for Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital in the Office of Science and Technology Policy, or OSTP, and Co-Chair of the Subcommittee on the Frontiers of Benefit Cost Analysis. OSTP's mission is to provide advice to the president and the Executive Office of the President on matters related to science and technology, and we hope to strengthen and advance American science and technology. We work with federal departments, which I'll be talking more about today, agencies, and with Congress to create bold visions, unified strategies, plans, policies and effective equitable programs for science and technology.

On his first week in office, President Biden issued a memorandum to federal agencies directing them to modernize the regulatory review process, enhancing public participation, and improving regulatory analysis. Recently, the Office of Management and Budget released Circulars A-4 and A-94, which provide guidance that reinforces and furthers this directive. As part of that modernization effort, OSTP established a National Science and Technology Council Subcommittee on the Frontiers of Benefit Cost

Analysis in March of this year. There's a lot of jargon in what I've already said, but essentially it's looking at benefits and costs, how can we do these things much better today, and use the cutting-edge science really to integrate into our federal decisions. If you're listening into this webinar series, you're probably already interested in the return on investment of federal decisions. Benefit cost analysis is a cornerstone of quantitatively evaluating the trade-offs associated with regulations and investments.

To assess benefits and costs, the links between an action and outcomes have to be measured. For example, what are the outcomes of an educational program on climate-related education? Do they lead to better health outcomes? Then, those quantities must be monetized or put in dollar terms, so as an extension, what's the value of those health outcomes? As you can see from this example, not all of the effects of federal decisions are equally easy to estimate and those that are more challenging to monetize and quantify could get left out. Continuing with our example, one can see the cost of implementing an education program would be fairly apparent. Measuring the full range of outcomes and putting them in dollar terms would be much more difficult. Earlier today, the White House announced and released the subcommittee's first-of-its-kind report, *Advancing the Frontiers of Benefit-Cost Analysis: Federal Priorities and Directions for future research*. I hope you get a chance to read the report.

Let me tell you a bit more about the subcommittee now. The subcommittee is co-chaired by the Council of Economic Advisers, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, and OSTP. There are about 75 subcommittee members from across the federal enterprise representing a whole-of-government perspective. It's interesting, during any given subcommittee meeting, the diversity of views from healthcare to infrastructure to environmental needs. All of these are affected by benefit-cost analyses, and many have similar issues in terms of assessing and valuing benefits and costs. The purpose of the subcommittee is to coordinate and advance efforts that harness the best available science and economics to address challenges in quantifying and monetizing a broad range of relevant impacts. The subcommittee's charter calls on the subcommittee to create an annual public report that identifies opportunities to advance the frontiers of benefit-cost analysis in federal practice. The report is intended to identify a subset of common effects that are currently difficult to monetize or quantify in analyses looking at regulations, projects, programs, or other types of actions.

The report summarizes current relevant guidance or examples related to challenges identified. To encourage progress, the report also summarizes how planned agency activities can help address the identified gaps and identifies recommendations for how these challenges could usefully be addressed by external researchers. The subcommittee and annual report are an important component to further evidence-based decision making as they're able to address the frontier of monetization and quantification issues facing federal agencies today. The report is intended to be state-of-the-practice, identifying gaps and opportunities for the federal government and the research community. In the inaugural report, the subcommittee identifies five focal areas that are challenging to monetize or quantify. In no particular order, these categories are non-fatal health effects such as liver disease, low birth weight, and mental health. Thinking about these effects other than mortality, things that are harder to come up with connections, when do these happen and then monetizing them, what's the value of these things happening? They don't necessarily get included into all of our decisions.

Another topic is ecosystem services effects. In other words, the benefits of nature to humans, and this could include recreation, subsistence uses, and climate mitigation. There's a lot of activity around ecosystem services as included in A-4 and A-94 that federal agencies should recognize and incorporate these to the best that they can, and there'll soon be ecosystem service valuation guidance coming out from the Executive Office of the President as well. That draft has been published.

A third topic, another one that's big in both the news and important to the Executive Office of the President is wildfires and extreme weather effects, including the benefits and costs of disaster relief, risk reduction, and resilience building efforts. Some of the challenges related to those look at if we do prescribed fire or other management activities, how does that change the outcome, and then how do we monetize those?

Another focal topic is information and transparency effects. In other words, what's the value of information that the government's providing? This could be consumer information, thinking about your food products, environmental, and risk as well as transparency, and so you can look at contracts and make decisions differently. Then finally, the effects of public benefit programs, and these would be more challenging effects like the long-term benefits to program recipients, paperwork costs, barriers to access, and cost savings related to government programs. The subcommittee also identified two cross-cutting themes, distributional analysis and risk analysis, as also needing advancement. Distributional analysis considers who's impacted by benefits and costs to better understand if there are inequities and decisions that wouldn't be clear from just looking at benefits and costs alone. Risk analysis seeks to incorporate uncertainty in estimates. For an example, the interagency working group on the social cost of carbon from 2010 first estimated a value providing estimates including high impact but low probability scenarios and recommended that agencies include those types of estimates alongside central values.

An intent of the report is to identify these data and analytic needs to find opportunities for the federal community and the broader research community to advance these topics and inform federal benefit cost analysis. To that end, the report includes recommendations for how federal agencies and the broader research community both independently and in collaboration can advance key needs for federal analysis. Specifically, it looks at incentivizing studies that are policy relevant. A lot of times these would be somewhat repetitive, doing the same type of study, so not a novel study in a different setting, and the traditional academic world may not incentivize those types of things or reward those types of things, so we need to look for opportunities to incentivize those studies. Prioritize funding and research that responds to the report's vocal categories if possible. Also, engaging early with agencies including on their learning agendas, strategic plans, and regulatory agendas. Consider serving through temporary assignments to the government to learn more about priorities and what types of data gaps might exist. Compiling or synthesizing available resources including cataloging, state of literature, and new meta-analyses on relevant topics like non-fatal health effects and nature-based solutions.

Then, finally developing new data, tools, and methodologies that supports use in various federal applications. The frontiers of analysis will continue to evolve and future reports could identify an entirely new set of focal categories. One thing that has come up is things like autonomous vehicles and how that's something that would be included in a benefit cost analysis. The report is a living document and next year's may be very different, which helps in that it is really the frontier of what federal agencies are facing today. In 2024, the subcommittee will continue its efforts and identify topics and forms for further knowledge sharing or collaboration, and we hope to engage the public on opportunities to advance the frontiers of federal benefit cost analysis more in the coming year.

Earlier today, the White House held a roundtable, which included agency and academic experts discussing the report. Please check out the report for additional details on all the topics I've mentioned, which includes many, many examples and specifics about data topics, especially for researchers, we'd love to hear from you about engaging and possibly about research that we don't currently know about. I want to mention the subcommittee does have an email box, frontiers@omb.eop.gov, and we look forward to hearing from you there. Thank you so much for your attention and the opportunity to talk about the Frontiers of Benefit Cost Analysis Subcommittee and first annual report today. Now over to you, Emily McDonald.

Emily McDonald:

Good afternoon. Thank you so much to Dr. Emily Pindilli for sharing a broader federal context with us. My name is Emily McDonald and I'm the project lead for AmeriCorps Return on Investment Studies, and I'm going to share more about our agency's strategy for taking on this type of evidence building. Next slide, please. Return on investment studies estimate the amount of benefit that a program generates for each unit of cost. An ROI estimate tells you what the payoff is for each dollar of investment, so simply said, you can think of an ROI as bang for the buck. To develop an ROI study, researchers capture program benefits and monetize them. Costs too must be measured, including contributions from various funding streams. One of the important things about ROI estimates is that they make comparisons possible. An ROI for one program can be compared to an ROI for another program, and that comparison works if the programs are similar, but it also works that the programs do very different things.

The ability to make comparisons can inform policy and investment decisions. It's important to remember that ROI estimates are based on the measurement of benefits and costs. As programs get better at measuring benefits and costs, ROI estimates can change and they can become more reliable. Not every program necessarily is ready for ROI analysis, so ROIs depend on prior research to effectively monetize the results. For example, you can show that kids' educational performance improved, but unless you have prior studies that link that kind of improvement to something like lifetime earnings, there's no way to show how much that improvement is worth in dollars. Next slide, please.

AmeriCorps' current approach to ROI is based on previous studies of national service writ large. You may be familiar with ROI research that has looked at the ROI of national service across multiple programs. A 2013 study by Columbia University looked at all youth and senior-based national service in the US, and a 2020 study by ICF looked at the return on collection of more than two dozen AmeriCorps programs combined. Then, starting in 2019, AmeriCorps began the ROI Studies Project, which is an initiative to estimate ROIs for specific programs that rely on national service. Our partners at ICF support this multi-year effort and it reviews AmeriCorps National Service portfolio for ROI-ready programs, selects programs for a deeper look at ROI feasibility, and develops four ROI studies per year. Next slide, please.

Here you can see the programs that were studied in fiscal years 2020, 2021, and 2022. You can see that the program selected for study focused on the diverse portfolio of interventions that AmeriCorps invests in. That's from environmental stewardship programs to early childhood development to education, housing, disaster services, and more. These individual return on investment studies can all be found on AmeriCorps evidence exchange. Next slide, please. Here you have our four latest studies. This last fiscal year in 2023, these were added to our portfolio of return on investment studies. It's Parent Possible, Green City Force, AmeriCorps Urban Safety Program Detroit, and the Montana Conservation Corps. Our partners at ICF are going to go into each of these programs in more detail in just a moment. Next slide, please.

But in addition to program focus area diversity, we're also focused on ensuring that the programs studied mirror the geographic reach of AmeriCorps. As you can see on this visual, each dot represents a program's operational area at the time the program was studied. This includes programs that are national in scope, such as Habitat for Humanity, and some that operate in just one area like Green City Force. We are constantly working to expand this reach by finding diverse ROI-ready programs and by further educating AmeriCorps grantees and partners about ROI possibilities. Next slide, please.

With these studies, AmeriCorps, the agency, gets a broader picture of the agency's monetary investments and returns. But these programs that our study can also use these results to elevate their evidence-based and demonstrate their impacts. Programs can speak to funders by articulating their economic value in a concrete measurable way, use their results for recruitment for members, broaden program support by showing diverse benefits that matter to different audiences, and adjust resource

allocations where that might be appropriate when interventions are shown to be more cost-effective. Next slide, please.

To put it simply, if your program is looking to do an ROI study, here are some questions you can think through. Do you have benefit and cost data that can make an ROI study possible? What's the counterfactual for your program that would help you estimate your program's impact? What are the gaps in the data that you could use for an ROI analysis for your program? Next slide, please.

We're going to be back at the end of this session for a Q&A that's open to all, but if you have questions about our existing portfolio of ROI studies or would like to learn more, my contact is listed below. Now I'm going to hand it over to our partners at ICF, Benjamin Miller and Dominic Modicamore, to share more about the four new studies that were published this year.

Benjamin Miller:

Great. Thank you so much, Emily. As Emily mentioned, now that we've got the ROI fundamentals down and talked about the basic concepts behind this type of analysis, we're excited to share a little bit about the four most recently published ROI studies. As we go, our colleagues are going to be posting links in the chat to the specific studies. But after today, if you ever need to get to this full set of 16 studies, you can just Google AmeriCorps ROI and it takes you right to that page.

The first of the four studies we're going to profile today is on Green City Force. Next slide, please.

Green City Force is based in New York City, and both the beneficiaries of the program as well as the AmeriCorps members are residents of New York City Housing Authority. Green City Force is essentially a workforce training program. A key purpose of the program is to prepare the AmeriCorps members that are the heart of the program for careers in the green economy. AmeriCorps members under Green City Force participate in green service projects, and through that experience gain expertise, knowledge, as well as certifications they can use to then pursue careers in the green economy. Next slide.

This slide is a lot of information, but we're going to use it to talk about a fundamental approach to ROIs that's consistent across all of our studies. You can see here that for each and every study, what we do is look across stakeholder groups to capture as complete a picture as we can possibly get of all the benefits and all the costs that go into a given program. Here you'll see off to the left the four stakeholder groups that we looked at with regard to Green City Force are AmeriCorps members, government, society at large, as well as NYCHA, the Housing Authority, residents. We won't have a chance to go through each and every one of these benefits that we looked at for this study, but we will be able to highlight a couple of them just to give you a sense of what these studies look at more generally. For AmeriCorps members in particular, we looked at the additional earnings they benefit from as a result of their AmeriCorps experience.

Green City Force had data on the earnings that AmeriCorps members go on to earn post-service, and so we were able to use that and compare that to earnings that similar people that didn't have the Green City Force experience and figure out what's the difference, what is the counterfactual, what are the additional earnings that AmeriCorps members are benefiting from that result to and can be attributed to Green City Force.

Similarly, we also looked at the additional lifetime earnings we can expect Green City Force participants to earn as a result of their additional educational attainment because of the education awards that they benefit from. With regard to government, we looked at, among other things, reduced lifetime spending on corrections, public assistance, and social insurance. We did that based on literature that connects reduced spending on those things to educational attainment. We also looked at the benefit and we estimated the benefit of reduced carbon emissions to society at large based on the social cost of carbon

and the reduction in carbon emissions that Green City Force generates by composting organic waste at Housing Authority properties.

Finally, for residents of New York City Housing Authority properties, they benefit from the savings. They have free organic produce that is a result of the urban farming of Green City Force. We weren't able to go through each and every one of the benefits, but hopefully that gives you a picture of the types of things we zero in on and rigorously estimate to get as complete a picture as possible of benefits and also costs of these programs. Next slide, please.

This table shows the bottom line results of the ROI study of Green City Force, and you'll notice there are three columns, a short-term column, a medium-term column, and a long-term column. The reason we have these is that we're looking at different estimates of how long the benefits from the program last because the literature doesn't always establish exactly how long earnings benefits and other types of benefits last post-program. For the short-term scenario, we're looking at just one year post-program. For medium-term, we're looking at what if benefits lasted for 15 years post-program. For long-term, we're looking at what if benefits extended to 30 years post-program. You'll notice also that we have three different rows with different ROI calculations. Each of these studies looks at total benefits per federal dollar, total benefits per funder dollar, and we also look at benefits just to the federal government over federal investments in the program. Let's look at the middle row in the medium term scenario, and that tells us that the ROI analysis estimates a \$4.09 return on each dollar invested in Green City Force over a medium term scenario.

I'll say that again. One way to articulate the results of this study is there's a \$4 return on every dollar invested in Green City Force. Next slide, please. The second program we wanted to share with you was our ROI study of the Colorado Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters program, also known as HIPPPY, as implemented by Parent Possible, a Colorado-based organization. Next slide. Parent Possible is based in Colorado, and they've implemented the HIPPPY approach since 1991. HIPPPY is a home visitation program. The overall purpose of HIPPPY is to build parents skills so that they can position their children for success in their educational lives and beyond. HIPPPY is a model used not only in Colorado, but actually throughout the United States and internationally. Next slide, please.

AmeriCorps is really the lifeblood of HIPPPY because AmeriCorps members are the ones doing the one-on-one weekly visits with parents. They use role-playing and other methods to build the skills of parents so that the parents can better promote their early literacy, social and emotional skill development, cognitive and physical development of their children. Next slide.

I'll just pull out and highlight a couple of the key benefits related to HIPPPY. One is to government. We looked at what is the reduction in lifetime government spending on corrections, public assistance, social insurance, not only for the AmeriCorps members that participate in HIPPPY, but also for the preschoolers who grow up and go on to attain more education, earn more, and therefore require less spending on the part of government. There's an important government savings element to this as well as the benefit to HIPPPY participants themselves, those preschoolers who then go on to earn more and we're able to estimate how much we think more they'll earn over their careers. Next slide, please.

The bottom line, most simple way to express the results of this study are the ROI analysis estimated a \$3.92 return on each dollar invested in HIPPPY over the medium-term scenario. Many details to dig into in all of these studies, but that's a quick overview. I'd like to now introduce Dominic Modicamore, my colleague at ICF, to talk about our two other studies.

Dominic Modicamore:

Thank you, Ben. The next study that we're going to highlight is Montana Conservation Corps. Next slide.

Montana Conservation Corps is an environmental service program that weaves together leadership development, teamwork, civic engagement, and work skills training with direct service to public lands. Each year, MCC participants deliver over 400,000 hours of service on public lands. MCC has partnered with AmeriCorps since 1993 with teams of AmeriCorps members implementing conservation interventions. The program operates in several states, supporting communities and public lands in the Northern Rockies. Next slide, please.

AmeriCorps members engage in several conservation activities in their service role with MCC. They develop beaver dam analogs, beaver dam analogs refer to man-made structures that generate similar environmental outcomes as natural beaver dams such as water retention and filtering, improve flow duration during droughts, and improve health of adjacent ecosystems. AmeriCorps members also engage in fuel reduction treatment activities. Fuel reduction treatments are actions that remove potential fuel from at-risk areas to reduce wildfire potential. These can include manually removing, such as cutting down dead vegetation or thinning ground cover. AmeriCorps members also treat and abate noxious weeds, they conduct post-fire reseeding to reintroduce native plants, and they implement trail management measures. Next slide, please.

MCC's conservation activities result in a number of benefits that can be quantified and monetized based on academic literature. As with all the programs, AmeriCorps members benefit from learning skills and gaining experience. This leads to improved employment outcomes, and the education awards that AmeriCorps members receive leads to improved educational attainment. Government benefits in much of the same way as the other programs that we've discussed, such as increased tax revenue and decreased spending on public assistance. For this program, government also benefits from a cost savings from the reduction in wildfires. The societal benefits of MCC include improved ecosystem benefits that result from the conservation activities such as the Beaver dam analogs. Ecosystem service values are used to measure the improved health of ecosystems and include the economic value to society from the various ecological outcomes that an ecosystem generates. Other benefits that were monetized for MCC include savings associated with reduced wildfires and improved health outcomes due to the recreational benefits of the trails. Next slide, please.

This shows the outcomes or the ROI results from the MCC program. For MCC, in addition to the short, medium, and long-term scenarios that Ben discussed, we also break out the ROI by low, average, and high ecosystem benefits. Under the average ecosystem benefit and the medium-term scenario, the ROI analysis for MCC estimated a \$23.83 return for each dollar invested in the program. Next slide, please.

The last program that we're going to discuss is the AmeriCorps Urban Safety Program or AMUS, which operates in Detroit, Michigan. Next slide. AMUS is a program at Wayne State University's Center for Urban Studies that works to promote public health and safety in the city of Detroit and Wayne County, Michigan. AmeriCorps members work with community stakeholders, including the Detroit Police Department, to identify crime hotspots. They organize neighborhood block clubs and community patrols. They implement safe routes for youths walking and biking to their schools. They secure vacant properties and they provide home safety assessments. AmeriCorps members also work on community public health issues such as installing water filters in homes to reduce exposure to lead and by distributing air purifiers and HEPA filters to improve home air quality. Next slide, please.

AMUS also operates a summer youth employment program. This is a three-month program where AmeriCorps members contribute to public service and attend weekly seminars to build college and career readiness. Next slide, please. This shows the AMUS program benefits that we monetized. In addition to the AmeriCorps member benefits, AMUS program reduces crime which reduces cost to government and victims of crime. Also, based on academic literature, the study captures the reduced cost of crime displacing some productive employment and the reduced economic losses associated with

crime victims. In addition, AMUS's work to install water filters that reduce lead exposure, literature has shown that that increases the IQ of young community members that receive these water filters, and as a result, community members earn more as they enter the workforce. Next slide, please.

Again, this is the slide that shows the ROI results. Looking at the medium term scenario and total benefits per funder, we estimated that there's a \$2.53 return on each dollar invested in AMUS. I will now pass it over to Tess.

Tess Mason-Elder:

Thank you so much. Thank you, the entire team, for all your work on these studies and for the great presentations today. My name is Tess Mason-Elder, and I have the privilege of leading the AmeriCorps Office of Government Relations. In this role, my team and I spend countless hours talking to policymakers at the federal, state, and local level to share how AmeriCorps is making an impact across the country and in their local communities. As those of you joining us today hopefully know well, national service is about local solutions to local problems. Through our unique structure, we're able to both incubate innovative solutions to some of our nation's most urgent challenges, and also invest in those solutions that have proven to provide real results in communities. We often talk about AmeriCorps as having a triple bottom line. It's good for the organization, it's good for our members and volunteers, and it's good for the community in our country.

Thanks to a rich body of evidence, including some of the ROI studies that were highlighted today and the work that the Office of Research and Evaluation and our grantees have done over numerous years, we can better demonstrate that impact to policymakers. We can demonstrate through evaluation studies from individual programs, including a large number of programs with high and moderate levels of evidence. We can illustrate how AmeriCorps service can be life-changing for those who serve, delivering new skills and experiences and helping them with workforce development and pathways long after they serve. Thanks to research like the ROI Studies highlighted today, we can demonstrate the value of how a modest federal investment can deliver a powerful return to communities.

The wide range of the 16 ROI studies, the four highlighted today and others that hopefully you'll go read online, have covered a wide range of the agency's focus areas. It helps my team and me as we engage with policymakers provide tangible resources to our stakeholders who are making critical decisions about how and where to invest their critical taxpayer dollars that they're making tough decisions on every day. When paired with stories of individual members and volunteers, evaluation studies from our program impact and return on investment like these federal return on investment studies, we can help policymakers at all levels better understand that service is not just the nice-to-have, but it's a need-to-have not only for those communities that rely on AmeriCorps, but for our country as a whole. We try and constantly tell the story of AmeriCorps, and it wouldn't be possible without that blend of the work that we know our members and volunteers are doing every day and right now as we speak, when paired with real data, real evidence, and things that make that modest federal investment real and tangible.

We're really excited to be able to lift up individual studies and the overall impact that we've found as you start to roll up each and every one of these studies over time. We've had the opportunity to share some of the ones that you just heard about today like Green City Force, HIPPOY Corps, Montana Conservation Corps, and AMUS with their delegations and members of Congress, mayors and state leaders, and help them see how they can continue to support, expand, and invest in programs like this. I really appreciate the opportunity to share a brief reflection, and I'm going to turn it back over to Emily McDonald to take us into Q&A.

Emily McDonald:

Thank you so much, Tess, for sharing your perspective from the agency. I'm going to invite all of our panelists to come back on camera.

Just a reminder, you can keep putting questions into the chat as we go, but one question... I think this could probably go to Ben and Dominic. How can we generalize the studies that have been done to other programs in engaging partners and stakeholders?

Benjamin Miller:

I would say there's a lot of potential to generalize and use these ROI studies to make points about the impacts of programs to the extent that ROI studies for a program that's similar to your own. I think with appropriate caveats, you can really highlight the results of a similar program somewhere else and say, "This is the kind of impact that this program is having, and our program is largely similar and you can expect something similar to that."

One other related point is often our methodologies are replicable, and each one of our studies has an appendix that in great detail talks about what was the approach to analyzing the ROI for this program. Programs could actually do their own analysis of their specific program using similar methodologies based on that roadmap from one of these ROI studies. Dominic, any additions to those thoughts?

Dominic Modicamore:

No, I think you covered it. We've covered a diverse set of programs. I think they could be generalized based on the type of activities that the AmeriCorps members are performing and similar programs out there could certainly use that as a gauge to gauge what the ROI would be for their program, but activities differ between programs, even if they're the same subject matter. But certainly, I think they could be generalized to a certain extent.

Benjamin Miller:

Dominic, that sparked something for me that probably among the studies, the most generalizable studies are those programs that are using a replicable program model. For example, HIPPPY is using the HIPPPY approach that's in use in other states, other communities, and even other countries. Since that's a consistently implemented approach and method, that study in particular is one that may be highly generalizable.

Dominic Modicamore:

Yes. [inaudible 00:46:57] the Conservation Corps and some of those as well have very similar program models.

Emily McDonald:

Awesome. Thank you both. We have another question that I think can be maybe tackled by... I can give a little bit of an answer and then pass to Ben, and we'll see if any other AmeriCorps staff would want to chime in here. But Laura asked, "I'd love to hear about an example of how AmeriCorps has used ROI studies to inform decision-making." This is in terms of AmeriCorps programs, but we have seen programs use their ROIs to then sort of refine their research agenda, so kind of broadening. Each study comes with the team at ICF, we'll talk about the limitations of the study, what hasn't been monetized, maybe possibilities for the future. We've seen programs expand their research agenda in that way. Of course, communicating with funders, a lot of our grantees and program studies have a match

requirement and we're always looking for new funders, so that's a great communication strategy there. Ben, would you like to tackle that question?

Benjamin Miller:

Sure, Emily. I can piggyback on that. In terms of using these studies to make the case for additional funding, we know of at least one program that based on their ROI study is making the case for programming expansion and program replication for what they do. Another interesting thing that I haven't seen done yet is sometimes our studies could be used to look at the different impact of specific activities within the same program. Just to take an example of Montana Conservation Corps, which Dom you walked us through, that program does different things, building beaver dam analogs on the one hand, but also trail maintenance and creating new trails on the other hand. It's possible with these studies to do an analysis that's deep enough to look at what is the relative impact of one activity versus another activity, so that's another way this analysis approach could be used to allocate resources. A single program could decide to invest more in one activity versus another.

Emily McDonald:

Mary, would you like to speak to this question from the agency side?

Mary Hyde:

Yeah. I don't know that I have as specific as examples, but I do think that the strength of this approach allows us to leverage scientific literature writ large as both Benjamin and Dominic have referenced in their presentation, that these estimates are grounded in direct empirical evidence of other studies, but we can bring it into our sphere and use that for monetizing and making estimates. It builds on the program evaluation work. For me, it expands the evidence tent and it expands the ability for others to come in and demonstrate their value from an empirical perspective that is not as perhaps focused on models of evidence building that are more specific or more appropriate for other fields, so example, education, you can do certain types of evaluation and certain types of evidence building.

In these areas that we've learned about today, that science is different, that evidence is different, and I think that the benefit cost types of analyses harnesses all of the strengths of different types of evidence and really brings it together in a way that can give you confidence in the value of a particular approach. Not a direct answer to that, but I think it opens up opportunities, expands the opportunity for other types of evidence to be included. That I think obviously has downstream impacts on the way in which we think about that as an agency and the ways in which we've embedded that in various policy and programmatic activities here.

Emily McDonald:

Thank you so much. This might be putting our methodologists a little bit on the spot here, but I believe in them. Can you speak about the cost benefit of the current living allowance stipend and educational award for members?

Benjamin Miller:

I can start, and Dominic you can add. We haven't looked at the analysis of the effect, like a sensitivity analysis, of stipend amounts, but we have incorporated the stipend into our analysis. The value of the stipend is a benefit to AmeriCorps members, part of that is taxable, so it's also accounted for in that way and counted as a government benefit. But at the same time, AmeriCorps and people are funding the stipend and that's coming out of program funds so in a way, it's kind of a wash when it comes to the

overall ROI analysis. But this actually connects to an interesting point, Dominic, I don't know if you want to talk about the opportunity costs that we incorporate into the studies because that relates strongly to the stipend and the amount of the stipend.

Dominic Modicamore:

Sure. As far as the stipend, as you mentioned, Ben, it's primarily a transfer from government to the AmeriCorps members. The education award does produce a significant return because we have data on the use of the education award. Some of it's used to pay off student loans, which again is primarily a transfer, but a significant portion of it is used by AmeriCorps members to increase their educational attainment so that they'll use it to further their education. In the ROIs, we're able to segment those two uses. For the portion of the AmeriCorps members that use the education award to further their education, that produces a significant impact. As literature shows, as your educational attainment advances, that leads to higher wages and improved employment outcomes. In that regard, the education award is important. As far as the use of... Sorry, so we wanted to... What was the last part of your question again?

Benjamin Miller:

Well, Dominic, all the talk of stipends reminded me of the opportunity cost [inaudible 00:54:03] methodology for...

Dominic Modicamore:

For these ROIs, we incorporate an opportunity cost, which looks at what the AmeriCorps members could have done or how much they could have earned specifically if they did not participate in the program. That opportunity cost is implemented in the ROI analysis and we use the stipends, the stipends are removed from the opportunity cost. We're looking at just the difference between there are opportunity costs, what they could have earned if they didn't participate and they were involved in the labor market, compared to what they earned through the stipends, so that gets netted out. Generally, what they could have earned in the labor market is higher than what their stipends are, so that's generally a negative for just the one year of participation, and then all of those benefits that occur after completing their participation in AmeriCorps that accumulate over time.

Emily McDonald:

Thank you so much. We have a question from Paul. If our AmeriCorps program is focused on the human impact, why are dollar signs the only way we measure return on investment? Are there other ways and some results way beyond monetary value?

Benjamin Miller:

Emily, I'll jump in and take that. I agree with Paul that there are other ways to measure the impact of programs. We view these ROI analyses as being an important part of the picture, but in no way did they replace other types of evaluation. In fact, these ROI studies build on evaluations that are done of the programs that look at a whole range of outcomes. For those that we're able to incorporate into an ROI analysis, we do that, but we are always cognizant of the fact that there's some benefits that we can't rigorously monetize. Those are ones that we describe in words in the report, but aren't able to incorporate into the ROI estimate. In some cases, our ROI estimates are conservative and may leave out important benefits that just we don't have the data to rigorously monetize them.

Emily McDonald:

Absolutely. Also, thinking about the broadened research agendas for grantees that have an ROI. Mary, would you like to speak to that as well?

Mary Hyde:

Yeah, I'll just add a couple thoughts, and Tess may want to weigh in as well. I completely agree with Ben's points. I would agree that this is but one way to measure value clearly, and it does build on other ways of assessing the value from a human perspective, from a social perspective. But I would just reemphasize I think that for these types of analyses, at the end of the day, funders like Congress, funders at the local level, they want to know what is the value of investing these taxpayer dollars. For those types of audiences, these are the types of analyses that matter. It's not to say that you can put a dollar price on human life, but it really is quite the practical case making of, "All right, we're going to give your agency this amount of dollars. What do we get in return? What do we save? What do we get?" I think it's just one important way among many to talk about the value of these types of programs.

Emily McDonald:

Let's have one more. If you collect program output data, is that enough for doing an ROI study?

Benjamin Miller:

I'll take the first stab at that. That is an important and necessary first step, but sometimes the output or outcome data needs to be monetized, it needs to be converted into a dollar value to be included in the ROI calculation. For example, the increased educational attainment that Green City Force AmeriCorps members go on to attain is an important outcome and something that can be measured, that then needs to be estimated in terms of dollars and cents of earnings, what the value of that additional educational attainment is. That's a process we go through for each study, not only looking at what are the key outputs and outcomes, but how can we walk from each one of those to a dollar and cents estimate of value that can be plugged into an ROI estimate, an ROI calculation.

Emily McDonald:

Thank you so much. Thank you so much to all our panelists. I'm going to pass it back to our learning officer, Katy Hussey-Sloniker.

Katy Hussey-Sloniker:

Next slide, please.

We're now at the close of our webinar. We'd like to thank each of our presenters for making the time to share their work with you today. We hope we hit our mark on the webinar objectives and that you walk away from the session with some new information on the objectives of the Subcommittee on Frontiers of Benefit and Cost Analysis, AmeriCorps strategy behind commissioning and selecting national service programs for return on investment studies, as well as the focus on the 2023 cohort.

We'll be taking a holiday hiatus and we'll be back in February with the Evidence and Impact Webinar 4 focused on voices from the field in AmeriCorps Healthy Futures Portfolio of Work. As always, we hope you join the Office of Research and Evaluation in our year-long webinar series that celebrates the evidence that supports AmeriCorps mission. I'd like to extend a thank you to our Guardians of Honor colleagues for their technical support and coordination. This webinar recording and support materials will be posted on the americorps.gov website under evidence and impact webinars within the coming

weeks. Please feel free to share with your colleagues and networks. It will also be posted on our AmeriCorps YouTube channel.

We'll be sending out a post webinar survey, so please let us know your thoughts on the webinar and any ideas for future webinars. We hope you'll have a wonderful rest of your day. Thank you very much for attending.