

AmeriCorps Alumni Issue Brief

Highlights from Studies of Alumni and Long-Serving Participants

July 2024

Background

AmeriCorps strives to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. It accomplishes this in part by helping AmeriCorps participants develop lasting skills and benefits that can support them even beyond their service program. AmeriCorps benefits both its **alumni**, which are generally former participants who previously served with AmeriCorps State and National (ASN), NCCC, or VISTA and have since completed or exited service, as well as its **long-serving participants**, which are AmeriCorps Seniors (formerly Senior Corps) volunteers, many of whom stay in their role for multiple years.^a

AmeriCorps alumni benefit from professional skills-building that can help launch their careers, lasting life skills to help them make an impact, cultural responsiveness and

competency to help them expand their worldviews, values of community and civic engagement to help them get involved, and health and well-being benefits to help them stay active, in alignment with AmeriCorps' theory of change, pictured in Figure 1. For AmeriCorps long-serving participants, AmeriCorps' benefits may include learning new skills or applying the skills they learned through their career to stay active and involved.

Within this brief, we focus on the ways AmeriCorps benefits alumni and long-serving participants beyond their term of service. Researchers have conducted a variety of studies to better understand the many ways these participants may benefit from their experience. While these studies use varying methodologies, focus on different benefits, and explore outcomes within different populations, each provide a better understanding of the experience of AmeriCorps alumni and long-serving participants. Some studies, such as those that analyze AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey data,^b help AmeriCorps initially track these outcomes as members complete their service. Other studies collect data from alumni to provide context

Figure 1. Alumni and long-serving participant outcomes



About the Studies

This brief provides an overview of findings from **eleven studies** or surveys exploring how AmeriCorps alumni and long-serving participants benefit from their service. Ten of the eleven studies provide insight into the experiences and outcomes of alumni; one highlights long-serving participants in AmeriCorps Seniors. Throughout this brief, the majority of findings are relevant to alumni, although we note where findings are applicable to long-serving participants as well. Though more work is needed to fully contextualize AmeriCorps alumni and long-serving participants' variety of experiences, each study provides important findings and context for initial exploration.

The studies we include in this brief vary in methodology:

- **Six** of the studies are outcome studies and use surveys, focus groups, interviews, and/or administrative data analysis
- **Four** of the studies are impact studies and use longitudinal surveys or experimental or quasi-experimental design
- **One** of the studies is descriptive, using data from AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey to describe alumni experiences

^a AmeriCorps programs refer to those who serve in two different ways. Individuals who join AmeriCorps NCCC, VISTA, or ASN programs are referred to as "members," while individuals who join the AmeriCorps Seniors programs (Senior Companions, Foster Grandparents, and RSVP) are referred to as "volunteers." The majority of AmeriCorps members are age 30 and under while volunteers are 55 years old and over.

^b AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey is only taken by AmeriCorps members. An overview of findings from this survey and from a study of Senior Corps' impact can be found at https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/32722_AmeriCorps_ORE_StepForward_Infographic_v08_RELEASE_Web_508.pdf

and insight into longer-term outcomes. A few studies also explore the benefits and outcomes of long-serving participants. We include details on the individual studies, including a summary of their methodology, in the “About the Studies” box.

This brief summarizes these studies and examines the short- and long-term outcomes of AmeriCorps service on AmeriCorps alumni and long-serving participants across several key themes: professional and educational outcomes, lasting life skills, cultural responsiveness and competency, community and civic engagement, and health and well-being. Throughout this brief, the majority of findings apply to AmeriCorps alumni (members who participated in VISTA, NCCC or ASN programs), although we note throughout where studies also explored findings related to AmeriCorps Senior volunteers, many of whom are long-serving participants.

Professional and Educational Growth

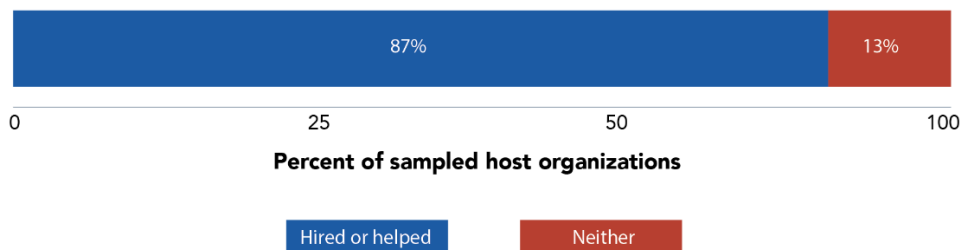
Research indicates that AmeriCorps service improves alumni’s professional and educational outcomes. In a study using AmeriCorps Member Exit survey data which surveyed AmeriCorps members from 2016-2021, 82 percent of AmeriCorps alumni said service was “a defining professional experience” for them after they complete it.¹ AmeriCorps service supports alumni’s professional skill development and their ability to find employment; increases their likelihood of working in public service, nonprofit, and government sectors; and supports their pursuit of higher education.

AmeriCorps service facilitates professional growth and skill building, offering opportunities for alumni to grow both their technical and soft skills. After completing service, one study found that almost all members agreed that service helped them build their resumes (93 percent of members) and the majority of members also agreed that service helped them chart a path forward to meet their career or professional goals (65 percent of members).²

Alumni and long-serving participants may have a better chance of finding employment. One study that used 2002-2012 Current Population Survey data found that volunteering in general is associated with a 27 percent higher likelihood of employment.³ In particular, volunteer service helped “level the playing field,” helping members without high school diplomas and those who live in rural areas find employment. When AmeriCorps alumni find employment, it is both in and outside of host organizations. Through surveys and focus groups with host site supervisors, one study found that 41.4 percent of supervisors said they have hired AmeriCorps members who served in their organization.⁴ When AmeriCorps members are hired by a host site, they are also more likely to be hired into full-time positions than part-time positions. More than half of the organizations that had hired alumni report that a new position was created specifically for them.

Additionally, **employers want to hire AmeriCorps alumni due to their strong work ethic, adaptability, and initiative.** Host site supervisors reported that they hired their former AmeriCorps member because of their “strong work ethic, being a good worker and/or the individual’s skills and knowledge of the position” and express a preference in hiring AmeriCorps members over non-AmeriCorps candidates.⁴ In an experimental resume study, Tufts University found that when employers become more familiar with AmeriCorps service, they have a greater interest in hosting a member or hiring an alum and consider AmeriCorps experience a “huge asset” on a candidate’s resume.⁵

Figure 2. AmeriCorps host organizations often report hiring AmeriCorps alumni or helping alumni find jobs



Adapted from Whitsett, A., et al., 2018. *The AmeriCorps Experience: Transformation through Service*. Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

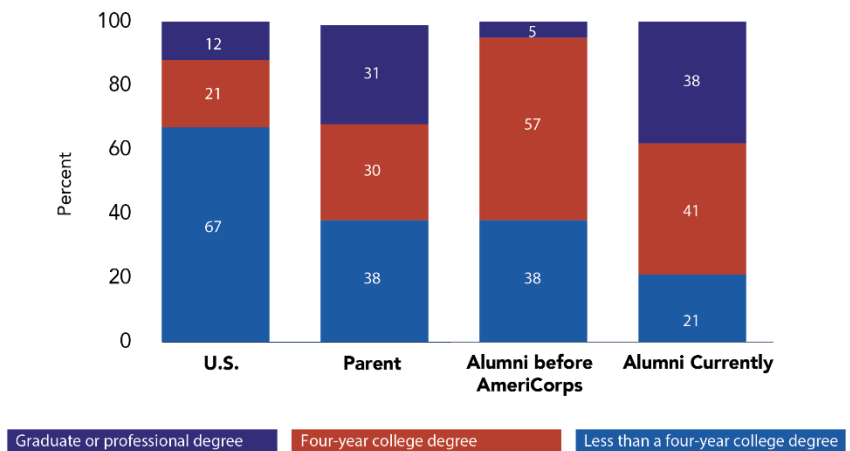
Integral to alumni and long-serving participants' ability to find employment, **the AmeriCorps network provides key support in their job search and professional development.** AmeriCorps partner organizations overwhelmingly reported that if they have not hired an AmeriCorps member themselves, they have helped alumni find employment elsewhere (Figure 2).⁴ Partner organizations support members' employment through writing recommendations and letters of reference, networking on behalf of their member, forwarding relevant job opportunities, editing resumes, and helping members prepare for interviews. A longitudinal study of alumni eight years after service additionally found that service introduces alumni to professional connections and opportunities.⁶ In the 2016 AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Study, 42 percent of respondents who found employment within six months of service reported "their employment resulted from a connection made during their AmeriCorps service" and 51 percent reported "serving in AmeriCorps opened up a career path for them that they might not have otherwise considered."⁷

After service, **AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to work in the public service, nonprofit, and government sectors.** One longitudinal study found that AmeriCorps is a pipeline for careers in public service, as AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to be employed in public service and the government sector than non-members.⁶ Similarly, the 2016 AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Study found that "almost two-fifths of employed alumni are working in the nonprofit or social service sector, while just over one-third are in the public sector and around one-quarter are in the private sector."⁷ This is consistent with the career plans that AmeriCorps members report as they exit service, which recently found that almost 40 percent of members who exited AmeriCorps between 2017-2022 planned to seek public or nonprofit employment.¹

AmeriCorps members also pursue higher education post-service, supported by the education award.

After successfully completing an AmeriCorps term of service, AmeriCorps alumni are eligible to receive the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which can be used to repay qualified student loans and to pay current educational expenses at eligible institutions and training programs.^c Data from the Member Exit Survey from 2017-2022 shows that about 25 percent of members plan to attend post-secondary school following service; about 25 percent of members plan to go on to graduate school after exiting.¹ Two studies have demonstrated that AmeriCorps alumni and long-serving participants are more likely to pursue higher education and are better educated than the average American adult (Figure 3).^{7,8} Consistent with this finding, alumni reported that service helped them explore the education path that best fit their career goals and expressed greater confidence in going back to school. In addition, host site supervisors noted helping their members with graduate school applications, further demonstrating the impact of the AmeriCorps network on securing post-service opportunities.⁴ Alumni frequently use the AmeriCorps education award in supporting their pursuit of higher education. For example, the 2016 AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Study found that just under half of all alumni report using the education award to pursue a college or graduate degree post-service, and for alumni who had already attended higher education, one-third report using the award to repay student loans.²

Figure 3. AmeriCorps alumni are more highly educated after service than the general U.S. population



Adapted from Friedman, E., et al. 2016. *New Methods for Assessing AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes: Final Survey Technical Report.* Abt Associates

^c For more information on the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, see: <https://americorps.gov/members-volunteers/segal-ameri-corps-education-award>

Lasting Life Skills

AmeriCorps service equips participants with lasting life skills (Figure 4). In particular, **alumni feel more confident and capable as a result of their service.** Research found that alumni experience increased self-efficacy and life skill during their service compared to their non-member peers in that same time period.² Specifically, nine out of ten alumni reported that their experience in AmeriCorps improved their ability to solve problems, and alumni shared that service promoted belief that they are able to “overcome opposition and deal with unforeseen circumstances.”² In a study using AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey data, 92 percent of AmeriCorps members said they could “efficiently deal with unexpected events” after they complete service.¹

Figure 4. AmeriCorps alumni report building many life skills through their service



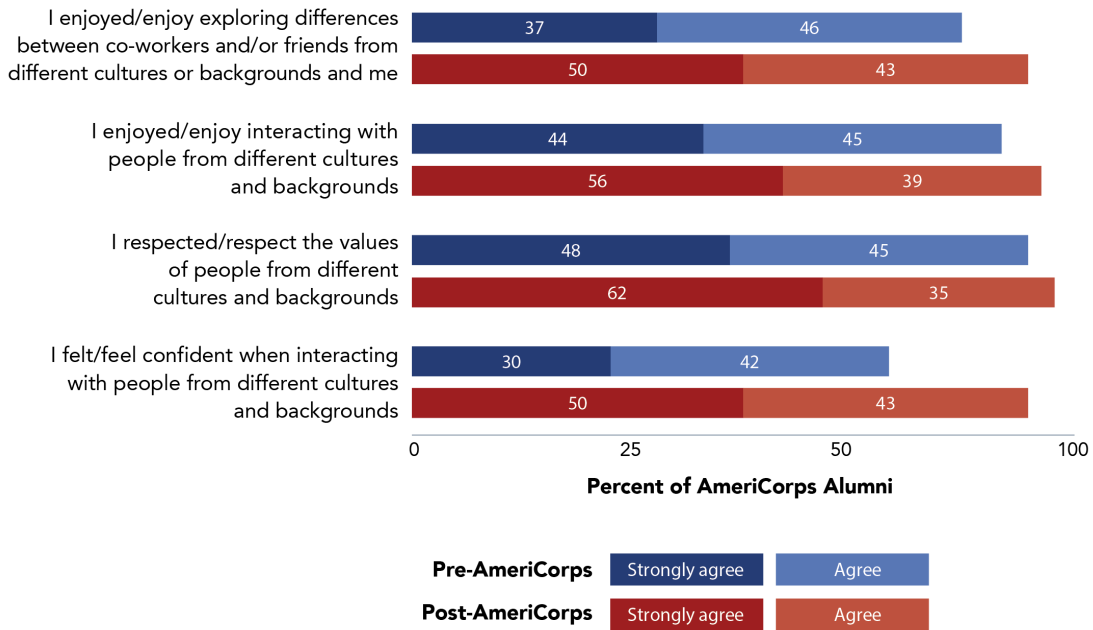
AmeriCorps also provides opportunities for growth and contribution. In a study of the Reading Partners program, funded by ASN, 61 percent of alumni reported they did things during their service years that they never thought they could do, and 96 percent felt they had made a contribution to the community where they served.² In one longitudinal study, alumni reported that this growth is facilitated by in-depth training and practice opportunities, mentorship, positive team leader experience, clarity of service purpose, and team building opportunities.²

Overall, alumni across studies shared that their AmeriCorps experience was “incredibly rewarding” and “led to personal and professional growth.” In particular, alumni gained “personal resolve and tangible professional skills such as advocating for others, personal intuitive, planning and organizing, and professional comportment.”⁴

Cultural Competency and Responsiveness

AmeriCorps promotes participants’ cultural competency and responsiveness through rich service and engagement opportunities. As a result of service, **alumni gain greater awareness of social and systemic issues; feel more comfortable engaging with people from a variety of backgrounds; and reexamine their beliefs and attitudes.** In one study, 96 percent of alumni said that service allowed them to interact with people different from themselves,² and in another, 97 percent of members reported “a respect for different cultures and backgrounds” after they complete service (Figure 5).¹ Alumni overall reported a “newfound awareness of systemic and social issues in America, especially as they relate to cross cultural and socioeconomic topics” following service.⁴ Another study found that alumni gain “confidence interacting with people from different cultures or backgrounds,” with 93 percent of alumni expressing cultural confidence after service compared to 72 percent of alumni before service.² In one study focused on alumni of the Reading Partners program, 75 percent of alumni additionally reported that they reexamined beliefs about themselves and 65 percent reexamined beliefs about others due to experiences serving in AmeriCorps.²

Figure 5. AmeriCorps participants report greater cultural competence after completing service



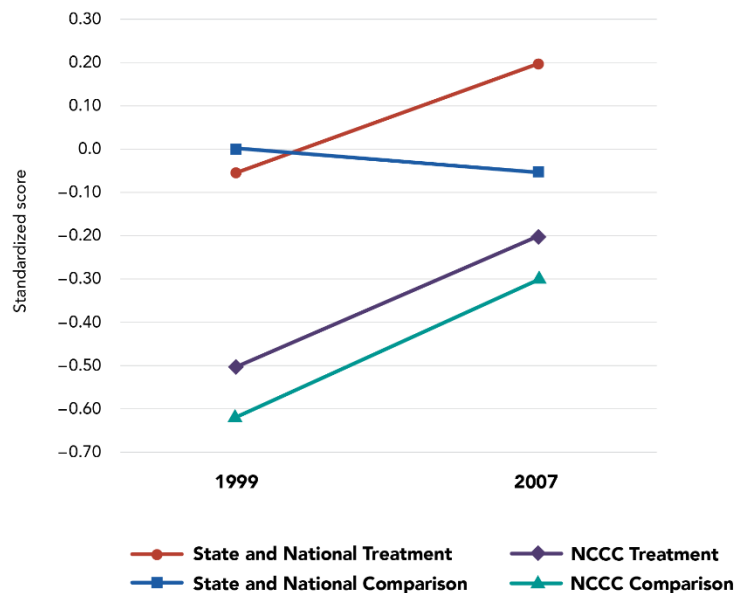
Adapted from Friedman, E., et al. 2016. *New Methods for Assessing AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes: Final Survey Technical Report*. Abt Associates Inc.

Community and Civic Engagement

AmeriCorps service fosters community and civic engagement. Service promotes alumni engagement with their community and civic activities and provides them with the skills to make a difference.

Findings demonstrate **that alumni feel better connected to their community and more civically engaged after service**. 85 percent of AmeriCorps members said they “felt part of a community” after they complete service.¹ Service positively impacts alumni’s sense of community where they live and facilitates their understanding of community needs.⁷ AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to identify, understand, and “reflect on the needs of their community” and demonstrate a greater commitment and attachment to their community compared to non-members (Figure 6).⁸ They are also more likely to believe in the importance of being active in the community and feel that working with neighborhood residents to solve local problems is feasible.¹⁰ Service also positively impacts AmeriCorps alumni’s participation in community service activities compared to pre-service; one study found that in 2012, 94 percent of alumni reported that they voted in the presidential election compared to the national average of 58 percent of eligible voters.⁷

Figure 6. AmeriCorps alumni are better able to identify and understand problems in their community, compared to non-AmeriCorps alumni



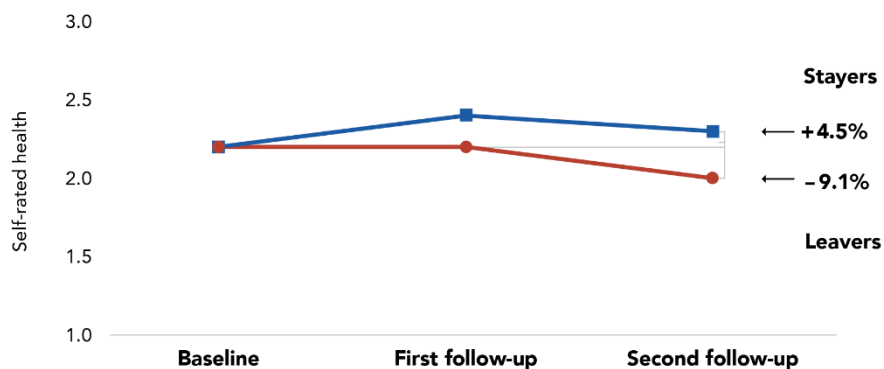
Adapted from Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development. 2008. *Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni*. Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development.

This sense of community is facilitated as **AmeriCorps service equips alumni with the skills and confidence needed to contribute to their community.** While service provides alumni with opportunities to contribute to their community,⁴ it additionally promotes members’ perception “of their ability to lead a successful community-based movement.”⁶ In a longitudinal study, alumni reported that service specifically provides opportunities to practice problem solving, communication, and collaboration, helping them effectively work with communities post-service.² In a study of ASN, NCCC, and VISTA alumni outcomes, eight out of ten alumni reported feeling confident they “can create a plan to address a community issue and get others to care about it” following service.⁷ Similarly, in another longitudinal study, AmeriCorps alumni felt more confident working with local government and were more likely to attend community meetings, support community organizations, and engage in public forums than non-members.⁶

Health and Well-being

Following service, **AmeriCorps alumni and long-serving participants report improved health and well-being.** AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers, in particular, reported improved perceptions of health and well-being during service, including feelings of health, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy, while those who exit their program before completing service report a decline in these feelings (Figure 7).¹¹ In a longitudinal study of AmeriCorps Senior (formerly Senior Corps) volunteers serving in the Foster Grandparent Program, 84 percent of surveyed AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers reported “excellent or very good health” after they complete service.¹ Recent longitudinal research found that alumni have greater life satisfaction after they complete service compared to non-members, including greater satisfaction with their careers, physical health, relationships with family and friends, religious or spiritual lives, and leisure activities.⁶

Figure 7. AmeriCorps Seniors participants who stay in the program self-report better health at follow-up, leavers self-report a decline in health at follow-up



Adapted from Georges, A., et al. *Longitudinal Study of Foster Grandparents and Senior Companion Programs*. JBS International.

Next Steps

These findings demonstrate the positive impact of AmeriCorps service on alumni and long-serving participants. Overall, AmeriCorps service provides professional and educational pathways to members, facilitated through skill development, support from the AmeriCorps network, and the education award. Service additionally equips participants with lasting life skills and cultural competency; fosters community and civic engagement; and promotes improved health, life satisfaction, and well-being after service.

As AmeriCorps alumni and long-serving participants have vast and diverse experiences, more research is still needed to fully contextualize the outcomes and impacts of national service on members. Continuing existing longitudinal studies of AmeriCorps members and alumni would support additional exploration of differences between AmeriCorps treatment and comparison groups as well as varied experiences within the AmeriCorps treatment group. Further disaggregation of data by program, demographic, or geography may also support this effort. Though some research on professional, educational, and life outcomes has been disaggregated by program, such as in the AmeriCorps and Abt Associates 2008 longitudinal study, *Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni*, future research can help us learn more about the outcomes, strengths and opportunities for change within each program, and explore the ways that participant demographics and geography impact experiences with service.

Disaggregating data based on the type of project participants work on, the timing of their service, and the length of their service term may also better illuminate the nuances of pre- and post-service experience and outcomes. This practice can be incorporated into the administration of the AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey and may also be applied to future research on AmeriCorps alumni. Disaggregation may provide more detailed insights into the way service projects, service timing and length contribute to participants' perceptions of service and the impacts of their specific experiences.

Future research on how long-serving participants apply their skills with AmeriCorps Seniors or use this experience as an opportunity for further skills building would also help us understand the unique experience of this group of AmeriCorps participants. Further research is also needed to better understand the health and well-being outcomes of alumni and participants. The upcoming enterprise-wide Pre-Post Participant Survey will serve as the next step and include questions to measure health and well-being of AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. This will provide us the opportunity to assess and understand both short and long-term effects of service on member's health and well-being.

Finally, future research may consider program implications based on the above findings and forthcoming data. Research may consider what specific features of AmeriCorps service are more conducive to positive outcomes and explore the ways that service may adapt best practices to maximize success for alumni and long-serving participants.

About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. **Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](#).**

Reference number	Title	Author and institution	Year published	Study Approach	Description
1	Post-Service Plans and Life and Career Skill Development of AmeriCorps Members	Dermanjian, S., et al., AmeriCorps	2024	Descriptive	This study uses data from AmeriCorps' Member Exit Survey from 2017-2022 to explore the life and career skills outcomes of AmeriCorps members. Between 77-80 percent of AmeriCorps members completed the Member Exit Survey during this time period.
2	Leadership through Service: AmeriCorps NCCC's Impact on Members	Georges, A., et al., JBS International	2023	Impact	This study draws upon data from the national longitudinal quasi-experimental design evaluation of AmeriCorps NCCC to understand the impact of service on members' leadership skills. The longitudinal study compares survey responses from 1,252 AmeriCorps members and a comparable group of 989 accepted applicants who declined to serve.
3	Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work?	Spera, C., et al., Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation.	2013	Outcomes	Researchers analyzed data from the 2002-2012 Current Population Survey (CPS) September Volunteer Supplement to determine the effect of volunteering on finding a job. The sample included respondents 16 years and older who were unemployed or not in the labor force but interested in working in Year 1 of their survey cohort and assessed whether they were employed at the end of Year 2.
4	The AmeriCorps Experience: Transformation through Service	Whitsett, A., et al., Morrison Institute for Public Policy	2018	Outcomes	Researchers conducted 367 phone surveys with AmeriCorps host site supervisors, 10 focus groups with supervisors, 5 focus groups with AmeriCorps alumni, and 8 interviews with AmeriCorps State Commissioners to understand employment outcomes of members.
5	The Impact of National Service on Employment Outcomes	Levine, P., et al., Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development and Abt Associates	2018	Impact	Researchers used a randomized control trial, creating 16 resumes and cover letters with varied amounts of service experience and submitted the materials to 1,990 jobs in the nonprofit and public sectors to test whether the inclusion of national service on application materials impacts the likelihood of getting a callback for a job.
6	Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni	Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development	2008	Impact	In this longitudinal study, researchers administered four waves of surveys to AmeriCorps' members in the eight years after they enrolled in 1999-2000 about the impact of the program on their civic engagement, careers, education, and life satisfaction. The study established a treatment group of AmeriCorps members and a comparison group of individuals who did not participate in AmeriCorps but were aware of the program and interested in service.

Reference number	Title	Author and institution	Year published	Study Approach	Description
7	AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes	Friedman, E., et al., Abt Associates Inc	2016	Outcomes	A 45-question survey completed by 3,772 alumni of ASN, NCCC, and VISTA on the impact that service had on their career pathways and employment, civic and community engagement, and skill development.
8	Results from the National Clearinghouse Data Match: New Methods for Assessing AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes	Zeidenberg, M., et al., Abt Associates Inc.	2016	Outcomes	Researchers assessed the outcomes of the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Study through a comparison of a sample of 3,150 alumni from 2005, 2010, and 2013 AmeriCorps cohorts to non-members by data matching with data held by the National Student Clearinghouse.
9	The Reading Partners Experience	Anderson, L., et al., Policy Studies Associates	2020	Outcomes	Researchers conducted surveys and focus groups with Reading Partners AmeriCorps and VISTA alumni to understand the impact of service on professional and interpersonal skills, educational and career pathways, and other outcomes. Researchers also comparatively analyzed findings from a 2015 AmeriCorps alumni survey with publicly available, national data.
10	Getting Things Done for Life: Long-term Impact of AmeriCorps Service for Diverse Groups of Members	Hudson-Flege, M., Clemson University	2018	Impact	Using the Cross-Cultural Year of Service Theoretical Model as a framework, this dissertation identified distinct member profiles within a sample of 1,424 AmeriCorps members and 1,216 comparison group members from the AmeriCorps Longitudinal Study and examined how outcome trajectories differed among these groups over time.
11	Longitudinal Study of Foster Grandparents and Senior Companion Programs	Georges, A., et al., JBS International	2018	Outcomes	Researchers surveyed 841 AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparents Program and Senior Companion Program volunteers over a two-year period to assess service impact on retention, satisfaction, and engagement with the program, and measures of health, life satisfaction, social isolation, depression, and self-efficacy.