



AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps Member Attrition

An Analysis of Factors Related to Early Program Exit



Issue Brief

April 2024

Background

Member recruitment and retention are the basis for AmeriCorps service delivery and program sustainability. Member attrition, defined as members terminating their service before the end of their designated term of service, represents a challenge to service delivery. When a member exits the program prematurely, services delivered to the community can be disrupted. This member attrition can mean the community being served must wait for new members to fill the position and other staff or members must cover additional work. Recruitment efforts – a time-intensive process in which it can be challenging to find a good-fit candidate – must increase to fill these empty positions. Given the availability of other employment options and the diminished power of AmeriCorps stipends as a result of inflation rates, this already challenging recruitment process has become even more difficult for AmeriCorps.

In this context, it is especially important for AmeriCorps to minimize the number of members who exit early. Member attrition can also point to areas for improvement in AmeriCorps programs and in the organization and indicate the need for changing recruitment strategies, additional training or support for members, or changes to compensation strategies.

AmeriCorps has defined and determined rates for two types of attrition:

- **Compelling:** early exit because of compelling reasons, such as health and family issues or a new job.
- **Non-compelling:** early exit not as a result of changing circumstances related to health, family, or employment.

The vast majority of members who exit early (96-97 percent) leave for non-compelling reasons. To better understand *non-compelling* member attrition, the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) analyzed member attrition rates among different programmatic and demographic groups. ORE chose to focus analysis on non-compelling member attrition because it represents the majority of member attrition, and because non-compelling early exit is more likely to be influenced by AmeriCorps actions and policies. The “About the Analysis” sidebar provides more information on the data used for this research.

About the Analysis

The analysis used service completion data from calendar years 2015-2021 to measure the member attrition rates for AmeriCorps State and National members, AmeriCorps members in the NCCC program, and AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program. This analysis focused on AmeriCorps member attrition as a result of *non-compelling* reasons. This type of attrition represents the majority of AmeriCorps member attrition and may be more preventable than attrition due to compelling reasons. The analysis did not include AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers because the program does not collect attrition data connected to these individuals. The analysis used demographic data from calendar year 2018 to investigate demographic differences in member attrition.

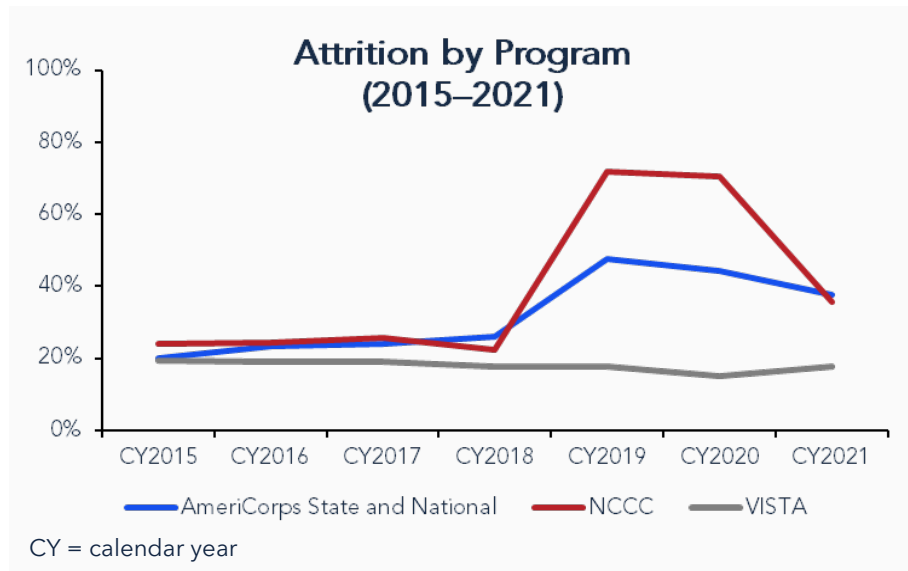
Attrition is measured from the time an individual reports for their first term of service until their agreed-upon term of service has concluded. Measurements of attrition for 2022 or 2023 members were not included in the analysis of member attrition by service program because members may not complete their service terms until the end of 2023 or 2024, respectively, so it is not possible to determine whether members have completed their full service term.

AmeriCorps began gathering data on member socioeconomic status in July 2021. Analysis of family income included only members who entered the program in July 2021 or later and ended their service before March 2023. A total of 40,114 members were included in the analysis of income.

Key Takeaways

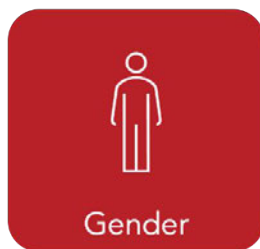
The **calendar years** a member served, the **AmeriCorps program** they served with, and the member's **service term** (e.g., part-time versus full-time) are related to different attrition rates.

- **Member attrition increased in 2019-2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic**, particularly for AmeriCorps members in the AmeriCorps NCCC program.¹ The rate of attrition in the AmeriCorps NCCC program during the pandemic may have been higher than in other programs because these AmeriCorps members live in residential group settings. They may have exited during the pandemic to move to a more isolated home environment and because the program was suspended during calendar years 2019 and 2020. In comparison, member attrition increased slightly for AmeriCorps State and National members and stayed fairly steady for AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program during this period.
- **AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program had the lowest attrition rate** of the three programs studied (AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps NCCC, and AmeriCorps VISTA).



Members who serve at three-quarter time, reduced half-time, quarter time, and one year half-time had higher attrition rates than the full-time, minimum time, and summer members.²

Certain **demographic factors** are also related to differences in member attrition rates.



Men were more likely than women to end their service term early
(women attrition rate: 23.4 percent; men attrition rate: 27.8 percent)



Veterans were more likely than nonveterans to end their service term early.
(Veteran attrition rate: 37.1 percent; nonveteran attrition rate: 24.5 percent)



Members who ended their service term early were **slightly older** than members who completed their service.
(Average age of members who exited early: 26.2 years; average age of members who completed their service term: 24.7 years)

¹ Attrition by calendar year reflects the year in which the member enrolled in the program. Attrition can occur anytime in the subsequent 12 months following entry; this is why membership in CY2019 is associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in late 2019/early 2020.

² AmeriCorps members may have different terms of service depending on the program's needs. The definitions of each service term follow:

- full-time member: up to 12 months of service with a minimum of 1,700 hours served;
- three-quarter time member: up to 1,200 hours served;
- half-time member: 12 to 24 months of service with a minimum of 900 hours served;
- reduced half-time member: up to 12 months of service with a minimum of 675 hours served;
- quarter-time member: up to 12 months of service with a minimum of 450 hours served;
- minimum time member: up to 12 months of service with a minimum of 300 hours served; and
- summer member: time commitment and hours vary by program.

Educational attainment and race/ethnicity are also related to member attrition rates.

- Those **without college exposure** are more likely to exit early than those with college exposure. AmeriCorps ORE has defined a member with college exposure as a member who has attended some college or has obtained an associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, or graduate degree. (Members with college exposure attrition rate: 20 percent; members without college exposure attrition rate: 36 percent).
- **Black, Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic, multiracial, Native American, and other non-white races (excluding Asian)** are also more likely to exit early than their white and Asian counterparts.

Attrition rates by race	Attrition rates by ethnicity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian member: 17.7 percent • White member: 18.9 percent • Multiracial member: 26.1 percent • Other races member: 28.7 percent • Native American member: 30.9 percent • Black member: 34.2 percent • Hawaiian and Pacific Islander member: 34.2 percent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Hispanic or Latino/a member: 23.7 percent • Hispanic or Latino/a member: 26.3 percent

Educational attainment and race/ethnicity, however, are also related to one another. AmeriCorps members who are Black, Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic, multiracial, Native American, and other non-white races (excluding Asian) reported having lower levels of college exposure compared with white and Asian AmeriCorps members.³ When trying to understand member attrition, it is important to consider this relationship between race and college exposure in addition to the relationship between the individual demographic factors and member attrition rates.

The race and ethnicity of AmeriCorps members **were no longer statistically significant predictors of attrition rates when comparing individuals with and without college exposure.** Analysis showed that **college exposure** was more predictive of member attrition than race and ethnicity overall.

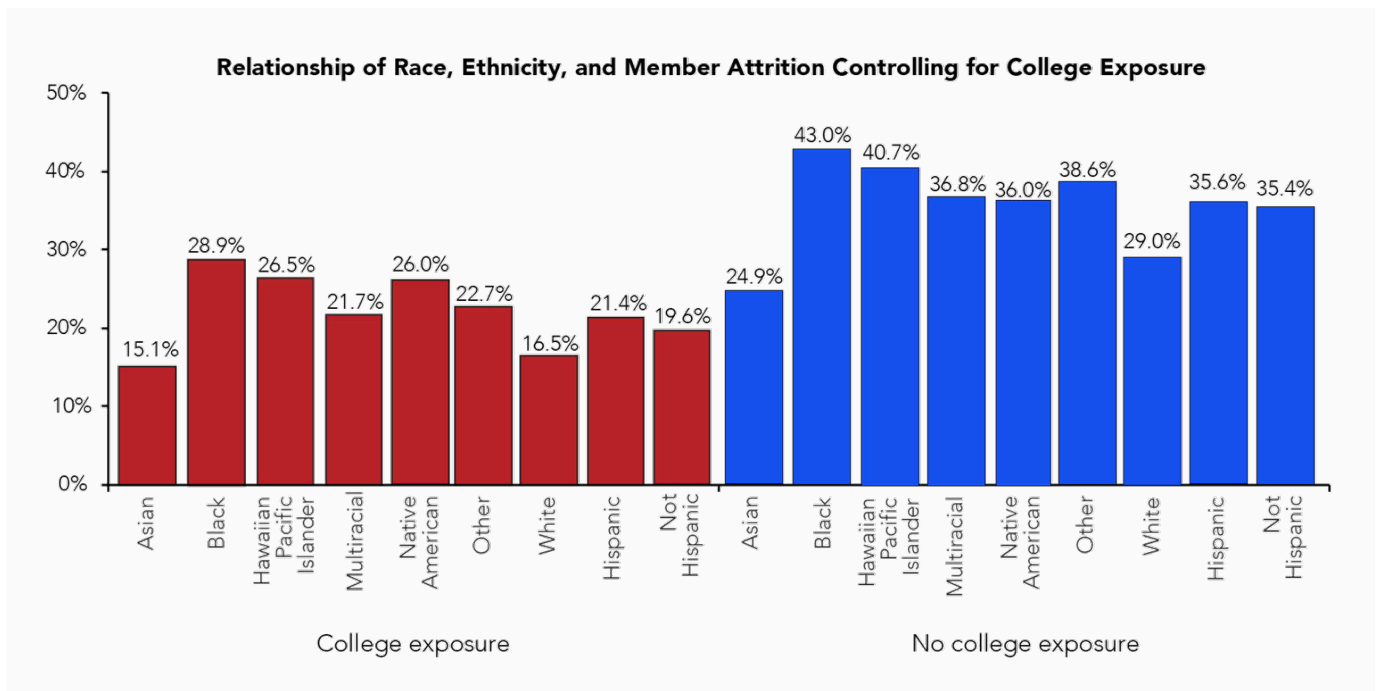
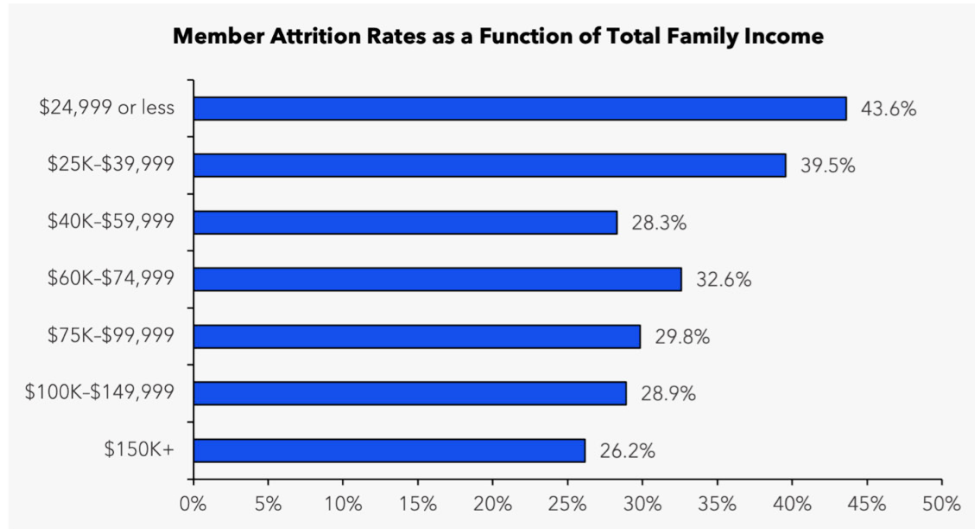


Figure note: AmeriCorps members with no college exposure were significantly more likely to exit early than members with college exposure. Differences in attrition rates by AmeriCorps member race and ethnicity were statistically insignificant when comparing AmeriCorps members of similar college exposure.

³ AmeriCorps analyzed demographic data from 2018 to determine the college exposure rates of members with different races and ethnicities. College exposure rates by race follow: white: 80.5 percent; Asian: 74.6 percent; multiracial: 71.3 percent; Black: 63.1 percent; other races: 63.1 percent; Hawaiian and Pacific Islander: 44.3 percent. College exposure rates by ethnicity follow: not Hispanic or Latino/a: 74.8 percent; Hispanic or Latino/a: 65.7 percent; no ethnicity data: 55.9 percent.

Family income is also related to member attrition rates. **Members with lower incomes entering AmeriCorps** are considerably more likely to leave early. This finding is especially strong for members with an annual family income of \$40,000 or less, compared with members with an annual family income greater than \$40,000.



Similar to the relationship between race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, family income is also related to other demographic characteristics. AmeriCorps members who have a lower income also have lower levels of college exposure compared with white and Asian AmeriCorps members.⁴

How the findings will inform AmeriCorps

Analysis of member attrition data and programmatic factors showed that the individual program attrition rates and member attrition overall increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The hours worked by a member (e.g., part-time or full-time) also was associated with member attrition, with those serving in part-time positions more likely to exit early.

Analysis of member attrition and demographic data showed that attrition is higher for men; veterans; Black, Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic, multiracial, Native American, and members of other non-white races (other than Asian); lower income members; and members without college exposure. Those who exit early also tend to be older than those who remain. Further analysis showed that when considering race and college exposure, which are related, college exposure was more predictive of attrition rate and diminished the effects of race and ethnicity on attrition.

These findings may suggest that some members require additional training by AmeriCorps to thrive in their positions. They may also point to a failure of organizational socialization and/or ineffective integration of members of different races and ethnicities. Study results may also indicate AmeriCorps' compensation is not sufficient for members with lower income to continue. Further qualitative analysis through surveys, interviews, or focus groups with members who exit early is needed to better understand the underlying causes of attrition among these groups. A causal analysis of attrition using qualitative data can inform future recruitment efforts and program improvement strategies.

For more information about these attrition analysis findings, please reach out to the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation at evaluation@americorps.gov.

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/](https://www.americorps.gov/).**

⁴ AmeriCorps analyzed demographic data from 2021 to determine the college exposure rates of members with different family incomes. The income ranges and their corresponding rates of college exposure follow: income of \$24,999 or less: 56.4 percent; \$25,000-\$39,999: 60.5 percent; \$40,000-\$59,999: 71.7 percent; \$60,000-\$74,999: 67.4 percent; \$75,000-\$99,999: 70.2 percent; \$100,000-\$149,999: 71.1 percent; \$150,000 or greater: 73.8 percent.