

Civic Engagement

How do we understand civic engagement?

AmeriCorps' mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster **civic engagement** through service and volunteering.

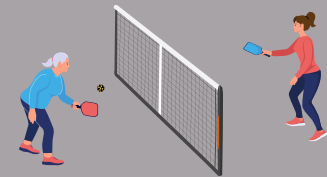
The term civic engagement has no standard definition,ⁱ but AmeriCorps uses it to describe **the constellation of activities individuals engage in to make a difference in their communities and promote the common good**.ⁱⁱ This definition recognizes that people imagine community and the common good in various ways including and beyond geographic boundaries and formal institutions.ⁱⁱⁱ Volunteering through an organization is a prominent example of civic engagement, but it also includes activities like participating in a national service program, attending public meetings, and neighbors doing favors for each other.

Civic engagement activities can include...

Participating in a national service program



Joining a pickleball team



Picking up groceries for a neighbor



Giving blood



Discussing the news with your family



How is AmeriCorps building our understanding of civic engagement?

Tracking Civic Engagement Trends in America. AmeriCorps partners with the U.S. Census Bureau to take the pulse of our nation's civic health through a robust longitudinal survey about volunteerism and other civic behaviors in the United States. The Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement of the Current Population Survey has been administered biennially since 2017 with related datasets going as far back as 2002. The data supports evidence-based decision making and efforts to understand how people make a difference in communities across the country. CEV data and findings are publicly available at <https://data.americorps.gov/>.

Examining the Civic Engagement of National Service Participants and Partners. At the end of service, AmeriCorps invites each member to take a Member Exit Survey (MES) that includes eight questions related to the Civic Engagement pathway of the AmeriCorps member experience. An [analysis of MES data from 2017-2021](#) finds that national service participants report high levels of civic engagement along many dimensions. The AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) has also conducted several evaluations that suggest participating in national service has long-term impacts on civic engagement of members, such as the [NCCC Longitudinal Study](#).

Funding Scholarship on National Service and Civic Engagement. ORE funds and promotes scholarship to learn more about how to grow and support civic engagement through its [research grants program](#). In 2018, ORE funded a cohort of research grantees that used [participatory research](#) methods to engage communities in

identifying priority challenges and developing actionable solutions. This cutting-edge methodology is built on three pillars: community, research, and action. By cultivating participatory research, AmeriCorps help fosters a unique form of civic engagement.

Conducting Evaluation Research. ORE’s research and evaluation demonstrates how AmeriCorps national service programs benefit communities, [organizations](#), and the participants who serve – both quantitatively and qualitatively. AmeriCorps’ [2023 State of the Evidence Report](#) summarizes recent evidence built in these areas. From a program standpoint, ORE evidence demonstrates that members and volunteers have a measurable impact on communities and helps reinforce the value of national service for society. ORE evidence also shows how members and volunteers themselves benefit from participating in AmeriCorps programs. For example, a [Longitudinal Study of AmeriCorps Seniors](#) demonstrates that volunteers experience improved health outcomes and social connection. Learn more on AmeriCorps’ Evidence Exchange at <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/evidence-exchange>.

How does AmeriCorps foster civic engagement through our programs?

AmeriCorps facilitates civic engagement by promoting volunteerism and engaging individuals to serve in local nonprofit organizations. [AmeriCorps](#) and [AmeriCorps Seniors](#) place members and volunteers in organizations dedicated to helping others, providing opportunities for citizens to be agents of positive change and dedicate themselves to making a difference in communities with the support of local stakeholders.



AmeriCorps also encourages individuals and groups to get involved and contribute to their community through national days of service on [Martin Luther King, Jr. Day](#) and on [9/11 Day](#). AmeriCorps provides grant funding to organizations who create service opportunities, recruit volunteers, and encourage participation in national days of service.

The wide range of service options allows members and volunteers to follow their own interests and engage with other civic-minded people in [constructive collective action](#). AmeriCorps participants serve as “force multipliers” who leverage their unique perspectives and collective passion to build more inclusive, engaged, and equitable communities.^{iv} National service also has the potential to shape participants’ long-term civic attitudes and behaviors and cultivate long-term civic leaders.

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://americorps.gov).**

ⁱ Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE) (2022). America + Civic Language: Provocations from PACE’s Civic Language Perceptions Project. <https://app.box.com/s/5blrkyrtf1apmko9dbduwz2mw473js1e>.

ⁱⁱ National Research Council. (2014). Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion: Measuring Dimensions of Social Capital to Inform Policy <https://doi.org/10.17226/18831>.

Language about promoting the common good is informed by insights from AmeriCorps’ ongoing scan of the civic engagement research landscape.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lichterman, P. and Eliasoph, N. (2014) Civic Action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 120(3): 789-863.

^{iv} C-SPAN. (2022, January 16). *Michael D. Smith on National Service and Volunteerism* [Video]. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?517193-4/washington-journal-michael-d-smith-discusses-national-service-volunteerism>.