



## RESEARCH BRIEF – ROI PROJECT

# Nevada Conservation Corps

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### Program Description

Nevada Conservation Corps (NCC) is an environmental service program of the Great Basin Institute dedicated to promoting field research and direct conservation service. NCC has utilized AmeriCorps support for its conservation work since 1999. NCC supports Nevada's communities and public lands by deploying forestry teams to mitigate fire threats, reduce the spread of invasive species, and restore and re-designate trails. In addition, monitoring and assessment teams capture critical data on the condition of forest and rangeland health.

### Return on Investment Analysis

To better understand the impact of the program in relation to costs, AmeriCorps commissioned a return on investment (ROI) analysis by ICF, an independent research firm. ROI analyses of national service programs estimate the monetary value of benefits that a program generates per dollar invested.

**AmeriCorps, the federal agency for volunteerism and national service, 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 invests more than \$800 million in grants for local nonprofit, community, tribal, and state organizations; places more than 250,000 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.**



The ROI analysis of *total benefits per funder dollar* estimated the Nevada Conservation Corps program's ROI to be between \$0.98 and \$78.04, depending on a) how long AmeriCorps members experience increased earnings as a result of the program and b) whether low, average, or high estimates of ecosystem benefits to society are used. *Total benefits per federal dollar* are higher, between \$2.58 and \$32.02. These results are driven by favorable employment and education outcomes for AmeriCorps members following their service, as well as by favorable environmental conservation outcomes due to program benefits to society.

## Overview of Benefits and Costs

To calculate the ROI, the program benefits were identified, quantified, and compared to the program's costs. Benefits of NCC include:

- **Benefits to various stakeholders of reduced wildfire damage, environmental benefits, and trail access.** NCC uses AmeriCorps members to perform fuel reduction treatments on at-risk sites to reduce severity of wildfires, remove invasive species to increase benefits to society from ecosystems, and build and maintain trails that provide health and recreational benefits.
- **Additional earnings by AmeriCorps members.** Serving in AmeriCorps leads to increased wages and reduced unemployment post-national service through skill acquisition, as well as increased educational attainment post-service.
- **Living allowances, stipends, and education awards.** AmeriCorps members receive living allowances and stipends during their national service and receive Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards after successful completion.
- **Increased tax revenue for government.** The government receives more income tax revenue from increased AmeriCorps member earnings post-service, as well as additional sales tax revenue related to those earnings. Government also realizes tax revenue from the taxable living allowances, stipends, and education awards provided to AmeriCorps members.
- **Reduced lifetime spending on corrections, public assistance, and social insurance.** Because of the increase in secondary and post-secondary educational attainment for AmeriCorps members, government spends less on these items.

Program costs for NCC program totaled \$1,921,647 and were funded by AmeriCorps, other federal government sources, state and local government, Tribal governments, private funders, and other sources.

## ROI Results

The table below shows the ROI results. Each row represents a different ROI calculation depending on which benefits are considered (all benefits or only benefits to the federal government) and which funding is considered (federal funding only or all funding). The ROI estimates are presented as dollars returned for every \$1.00 of investment. The analysis used three different scenarios to estimate benefits under different assumptions. Specifically, the study assumed that increased earnings attributable to the programs last for one year (short-term scenario), 15 years (medium-term), or 30 years (long-term). The analysis also used low, average, and high estimates of ecosystem benefits to society based on the literature.

The program produces strong returns for the medium- and long-term scenarios when benefits to AmeriCorps members, society, and state/local governments are included. This is indicated by the results of the *total benefits per federal dollar* and the *total benefits per funder dollar* ROI calculations for these two scenarios.



ROI Calculation	ROI Scenario		
	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
Total Benefits per Federal Dollar*			
With low ecosystem benefits	\$1.17	\$8.35	\$11.48
With average ecosystem benefits	\$2.58	\$24.02	\$32.02
With high ecosystem benefits	\$6.57	\$68.46	\$90.28
Total Benefits per Funder Dollar*			
With low ecosystem benefits	\$0.98	\$7.08	\$9.75
With average ecosystem benefits	\$2.20	\$20.66	\$27.55
With high ecosystem benefits	\$5.66	\$59.17	\$78.04
Federal Government Benefits per Federal Dollar	\$0.04	\$0.17	\$0.23

\* These ROI estimates are provided based on low, average, and high estimates of ecosystem benefits to society.

In the short-term scenario—which only includes benefits for one-year post-program—the ROI of \$0.98 for the *total benefits per funder dollar* calculation with the low set of ecosystem benefit estimates is just below the break-even point on funding invested. All other total benefit scenarios and ecosystem benefit levels show positive returns. An ROI that is below \$1 in the first year post-program is common in programs where there is an initial one-time investment made and benefits accrue in the following years. This is because it often requires several years of benefits to recoup the initial investment and generate positive returns.

The magnitude of the positive ROI estimates in the medium- and long-term scenarios are driven by the following factors:

- **Reduction in wildfire-related costs.** Societal benefits from reduced severity of wildfires accrue, but diminish over time as potential fuel reaccumulates.
- **Increased benefits from ecosystems from reduced invasive species.** Societal benefits accrue, but diminish over time as invasive species return.
- **Benefits from trail maintenance and creation.** Societal benefits from access and use of trails accrue, but diminish as trails naturally deteriorate.
- **Additional earnings by AmeriCorps members.** Serving in AmeriCorps leads to increased wages and reduced unemployment post-national service through skill acquisition, as well as increased educational attainment post-service.
- **Reduced lifetime spending on corrections, public assistance, and social insurance.** Because of the increase in secondary and post-secondary educational attainment for AmeriCorps members and program participants, government spends less on these items.

For more information, please contact [evaluation@cns.gov](mailto:evaluation@cns.gov).

The report summarized in this research brief was commissioned by AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation under Contract # GS00Q14OADU209 and Order # 5332A20R0013. Information in the report is in the public domain. Please, direct communications related to the report to Lily Zandniapour at [lzandniapour@cns.gov](mailto:lzandniapour@cns.gov) and Sarah Yue at [syue@cns.gov](mailto:syue@cns.gov). Cite the report as follows: Voigt, G., Borgida, J., Clark, D., Kulka, L., Miller, B., Modicamore, D., Pershing, J., Thompson, P., & Sarwana, M. (2021). *Return on Investment Study: Nevada Conservation Corps*. ICF.