



2015 National Service and Civic Engagement Competition Research Grant Executive Summaries

Group 1: Dissertators

Tulane University

Title of Study: AmeriCorps Crowd Out Study

Summary: Should the government pay people to do charity work? This question is central to the debate over funding for the AmeriCorps Program. AmeriCorps is a network of service programs throughout the United States, with much of its membership embedded in 501(c)3 nonprofits. The AmeriCorps Crowd Out Study examines the AmeriCorps program through the lens of a growing economic literature on the interaction between private charitable giving and government funding for public goods. In its analysis of the relationship between the AmeriCorps program and private donations to its nonprofit partners, this is the first analysis of whether government funded labor might crowd out or crowd in private capital. Our research matches data on the placement of AmeriCorps with financial data from IRS filings to create a large panel of nonprofits with and without AmeriCorps members. Fixed effects regressions show that nonprofits experience higher levels of contributions in years in which they sponsor AmeriCorps, whether State and National or VISTA. However, instrumental variables analysis suggests that AmeriCorps State and National have a crowding out effect on contributions. A ten percent increase in the number of AmeriCorps State and National, within a given organization, is associated with a one percent decline in contributions. This level of crowd-out is similar to those estimated for other forms of government funding for the nonprofit sector. Estimates of the impact of VISTA rule out large levels of crowd-out.

Supplemental Grant Title: What Happens When AmeriCorps Leave? Assessing the Long-term Impact of Hosting AmeriCorps for Non-profits in Disaster Services

Supplemental Grant Summary: This study explores how nonprofits fare after their AmeriCorps programs end. We are interested in the relationship between hosting AmeriCorps service members and disaster-recovery nonprofits' long-term outcomes, measured by changes in yearly revenue and salary expenses after their AmeriCorps programs come to an end. Using a fixed-effects econometric model, we compare the ex-post financial outcomes of AmeriCorps sponsors working in disaster recovery to similar organizations that did not host AmeriCorps service members up to that point.

Our preliminary findings suggest that being an AmeriCorps host has heterogeneous impacts on the organization, based on budget size. Smaller organizations (budget < \$100K) seem to fare better ex-post than the control groups, hiring more staff and increasing their income, along with their operating budget. In contrast, larger organizations (budget > \$1M) seem have lower staff expenses but higher revenue levels than their control groups after they wrap up AmeriCorps programs. The organizations with mid-size budgets see their staff size, income and operating budget shrink, in comparison with their control groups.

Understanding and measuring this relationship is important for those on both sides of the program. Policy decisions such as determining funding levels dedicated to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) can be supported by a clearer picture of the potential those funds have to produce lasting benefits to communities affected by disaster. In addition, disaster recovery nonprofits deciding whether or not to apply for AmeriCorps grants can use this information to make decisions of time and personnel allocation which help maximize the benefits of the program.

Group 2: Scholars

Arizona State University

Title of Study: AmeriCorps: Arizona's Pipeline to Employment

Summary: The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) helps over 80,000 AmeriCorps members find a service placement annually. CNCS also conducts research on the outcomes of its programming at universities across the country, and has partnered with the Morrison Institute for Public Policy for a second time to better understand the employability and employment outcomes of AmeriCorps members. This year's study expands last year's analysis of Arizona's AmeriCorps programs to five states across the country, and finds that strong personal and professional networks emerge within the AmeriCorps program, which leads to positive employment outcomes.

Findings from last year's AmeriCorps: Arizona's Pipeline to Employment show that AmeriCorps members enhanced their professional skills including communication; systems thinking; diverse experiences; leadership; and confidence. Meanwhile, employers hired AmeriCorps members because of their teamwork, professional conduct and leadership capabilities. In the Arizona study, 82.7% of participating organizations had hired at least one former AmeriCorps member since 2012. Phone survey data also showed that 57.8% of these organizations hired service members from their own sites. Interestingly, AmeriCorps programs are not only training members to enter the workforce, host organizations are actually creating new positions for their AmeriCorps members upon completion of their term of service.

CNCS now wants to know if these findings are true only in Arizona, or if they are generalizable to AmeriCorps programs across the country. Morrison Institute sought to answer the following research questions:

- How do AmeriCorps host sites benefit from AmeriCorps members?
- What are the employment outcomes of AmeriCorps alumni?

- Are new positions being created for AmeriCorps alumni at host sites?
- What are the major challenges facing the AmeriCorps program?

In order to answer these questions and assess the impact of AmeriCorps employment outcomes for AmeriCorps members across the nation, Morrison Institute selected five states to compare results: Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, Tennessee and Washington. Morrison Institute utilized a mixed-methods research and evaluation design that included 367 phone surveys, 15 focus groups with AmeriCorps alumni and supervisors, and eight interviews with AmeriCorps State Commissioners.

Overall, the findings from Morrison Institute's 2016 report, *AmeriCorps: Arizona's Pipeline to Employment*, were corroborated by this year's findings:

- In last year's study, 64% of AmeriCorps new hires were hired full time and more than half of these positions were newly created.
- In this year's study, 58% of organizations that hired AmeriCorps members after their service term hired them on full time, and 37% of these positions were newly created.
- In both years it is evident that the AmeriCorps program creates a strong employment pipeline through AmeriCorps networks: In 2017, 87% of host sites hired or helped AmeriCorps members find a job after their service term.

Consistencies were found across large sections of last year's data, including but not limited to: personal and professional transformation of the service member, an impact in the community that could not be obtained without the AmeriCorps program, capacity building in AmeriCorps host sites, and relevant real world skill development for AmeriCorps members, which leads to job placements in host organizations and in the labor market. Both studies found that AmeriCorps programming faces challenges in communication, coordination and continuity. Some of these coordination challenges are due to the fact that AmeriCorps spans all 50 states, each of which has a unique mix of host sites.

The takeaways for service members and organizations involved in the AmeriCorps program can best be described by those who served in the program: Their service experience was transformative and it prepared them to work.

California State University San Marcos

Title: *Cultivando Liderazgo* (Cultivating Leadership) study

Summary: The *Cultivando Liderazgo* (Cultivating Leadership) study examines changes in civic engagement behavior, including traditional forms of political involvement (e.g., voting, volunteering for candidates or political organizations, contributions to campaigns) and non-traditional civic engagement activities (e.g., grassroots efforts aimed to shape local initiatives or produce positive social change at the community level) among Latino/a adults and youth. *Cultivando Liderazgo* seeks to understand the civic engagement of participants who are learning the curriculum alongside their families (adult parents/grandparents and youth) and those who

are attending the class as individuals. We also explore the dynamics of geographical infrastructure and accessibility on the effects of civic engagement curriculum.

To date, we have 306 Latino/a participants, ages 7 to 70+ years old, who are primarily low income. Most of the adults have low formal educational levels. The primary data collection tool is a survey comprised of 180 questions and based on the supplemental US Census survey on civic engagement, along with questions from other civic engagement surveys and original NLRC questions. Participants take the survey three times. Time 1: Pre-test that is administered before taking the *Cultivando Liderazgo* eight-week class; Time 2: Post-test taken on the last day of class; and, Time 3: Extended post-test taken three months after the completion of the course. We hypothesize that linguistically and culturally relevant curriculum on civic engagement will promote increased civic learning and activity for Latinos/as.

Year three will focus on completing data collection and analyzing data; broadly disseminating our research findings to practitioners, stakeholders, and scholars; and, scaling up the *Cultivando Liderazgo* approach to contribute to CNCS outreach and training, in addition to connecting with other interested organizations. Year three also includes a summit on Latinos in Civic Engagement for the San Diego region.

The *Cultivando Liderazgo* research team at CSUSM's National Latino Research Center is comprised of faculty, staff researchers, student researchers, a data manager, a project manager, a statistical analyst, and community educators. Aside from the faculty, members of the NLRC team are not university employees but are exclusively grant funded, so the work for this grant is done at a great cost saving. (None of the CSUSM's research centers have university or state funding.) The team has been in place since the beginning of the grant, therefore their time in year three helps the work be more efficient and effective.

Supplemental Grant Title: Community Conversations: Building New Narratives about Civic Engagement in the Latino Community

Supplemental Grant Summary: *Cultivando Liderazgo* engaged in Community Conversations which allowed community members to become co-creators of knowledge and allowed them to share their civic behavior in ways that made sense to them. Photo-elicitation interviews brought student researchers and community members together to brainstorm the ways that they solved problems in their communities and then depict them with their photography. Oral histories featured detailed *testimonios* about civic engagement and contributions of Latinos/as in our community; they were filmed by the NLRC media team. Participants brought artifacts from their homelands and discussed their current activities which, together, showcased the depth of civic engagement. In total, 15 college students and 25 community members participated in the Community Conversation projects. Our research questions were:

- 1) To what extent do non-traditional research methods, such as photo-elicitation interviews and oral histories, successfully measure Latino civic engagement?
- 2) What are the diverse forms of civic engagement undertaken by Latinas/os as depicted in photo-elicitation interviews and oral histories?

Preliminary analysis found that the photographs they shared reflected varied forms of civic engagement and included sewing and delivering blankets for hospitalized patients and veterans; volunteering for mobile pantry; giving rides to neighbors to attend community meetings; translating at medical appointments for a family member; going through the naturalization process; helping neighbors to register to vote; participating in rallies; attending community forums; and, participating in regional education conferences for immigrant parents.

Case Western Reserve University

Title of Study: Development of a Program to Address Tobacco Use in Primary Care with AmeriCorps Service Members

Summary: Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States. Primary care interventions to help smokers quit - namely counseling and medications - are proven to be effective and are strongly recommended by national guidelines. Nevertheless, these interventions are not routinely delivered in primary care practices. In Ohio, in 2016, for example, only 5% of smokers reported receiving pharmacotherapy, and only 3% received counseling to help them quit. Providers cite time constraints as the principle barrier for not delivering tobacco cessation interventions. Indeed, primary care providers face numerous competing demands on their attention in the brief office visit; the number of patients able to see a doctor has increased with the Affordable Care Act; and there is a growing shortage of primary care providers for the population.

University Hospitals, the largest healthcare provider in northeast Ohio, teamed up with AmeriCorps, a national service organization, to train service members as coaches, to deliver a tobacco cessation intervention in primary care practices to patients who smoke. We have measured the impact of the coaches on providers' likelihood of addressing tobacco use in the visit; the quit rates of smokers at 6-month phone follow-up; and revenue generated by practices who bill for the referral to AmeriCorps service members for smoking cessation.

We have found that providers are 10 times more likely to address tobacco cessation to smokers in the visit when a coach is available; that patients quit at a rate of 40% at 6-month follow-up; and that the average revenue generated for a referral to the service member, across all insurance types, is \$11 per referral.

In conclusion, our research shows that AmeriCorps service members have a significant positive impact on the behavior of providers relative to addressing tobacco use; that coaches are highly effective at providing tobacco cessation interventions; and that with a high volume of referrals, the program can be cost neutral to the organization.

George Mason University

Title of Study: Civic Engagement in Seven Cities

Summary: This research focuses on the extent to which higher levels of social capital, civic engagement and volunteering among immigrants are associated with greater economic opportunity and success for individuals and communities. The mixed-methods project includes in-depth quantitative analyses of survey data on college educated immigrants in seven cities in the United States. The analyses examine the sequence and timing of volunteer activities, social networks, and economic success to clarify whether community engagement and social ties are driving economic success or are consequences of success. Further analysis assesses the influence of the cities themselves on the relationships among community engagement, social ties, and economic success. These quantitative analyses have guided and been supplemented by a series of 75 qualitative follow-up interviews with survey participants, permitting a consideration of the mechanics of the relationships between civic engagement, volunteering and economic success. The aim is to examine the relationships identified through the quantitative analyses to specifically consider how, for example, volunteering translates into greater employment and earnings potential, and how the character of a city shapes that process. This work is identifying the need for a richer concept of civic engagement—something that we are calling “intentional public engagement”—that gets at the wide ranch of activities through which individuals participate in public life. This need was motivated by our analyses of immigrant professionals; however, it has encouraged us to think more broadly than traditional forms of civic engagement, e.g., volunteering, charitable donations, and voting, to consider a wide range of political, economic, social, cultural and religious practices that influence the well-being of all individuals and communities. Through our mixed method approach our qualitative interviews and analyses have highlighted areas where different types of survey data would aid in further understanding the relationship between economic activity, civic engagement, and intentional public engagement. Finally, this work is revealing the extent that the intentional public engagement of individuals extends beyond the local to include the translocal and transnational.

Supplemental Grant Summary: Supplemental funding for year two was requested and approved. This funding added graduate student support to assist with the transcription and coding of all qualitative interviews. This effort was being wrapped up at the end of the year two cycle and is feeding into current work to integrate the quantitative and qualitative findings. Additional funding was also received to integrate address-level IRS data on nonprofits with our survey data and data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The National Center for Charitable Statistics was to provide us with the data but stopped this service. Instead we have merged data from CNCS on AmeriCorps. This alternative source of data also allows us consider how the location of these volunteer activities shapes the “opportunity structure” available for the civic engagement of New Americans.

Tufts University

Title of Study: Testing the Impact of National Service on Employment Outcomes: A Resume Experiment

Summary: The Tufts University research team conducted a field experiment to test whether including national service (AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA) on a job candidate’s application materials (e.g., resume and cover letter) has a positive and significant impact on the

prospect of getting a job. In our study, we operationally defined a positive impact as getting a callback for a job. We created 16 different types of resumes and cover letters with fictitious applicants and varied service experiences. In Phase I, we applied for 1,120 jobs in the nonprofit and public sectors and in Phase II, we applied for 870 jobs with a total of 1,990 jobs applied for in two years.

Of the job applications sent in Phase I (N=1,120), we received callbacks from 19.4% of jobs where a national service resume was used (N=532) and 18.7% of jobs where a national service resume was not used (N=588). We found that a college credential was the strongest predictor of getting a callback for a job; the effect of this education credential overpowered the effect of listing national service on a resume. Findings also indicated that listing national service on a resume has a positive and significant effect on the likelihood of getting an interview offer if the national service alum had a college degree (24% of college graduates with national service experience received an interview offer vs. 17% of college graduates with no service record), but had no impact if the service alum had no college experience. We also found the education gap for callbacks to be larger for nonprofit sector jobs compared with for-profit sector jobs. Another major finding was that for nonprofit sector jobs, callbacks were the highest for White applicants without service and lowest for Black applicants, regardless of whether they had national service listed on their resumes or cover letters. In general, Black applicants had the lowest callback rates regardless of educational attainment, national service experience, or sector. The private sector tells a similar story of callbacks for an interview (particularly for service resumes), but a more equal distribution for applicants in the private sector with no service on their resumes.

In Phase II, the fictitious applicants continue to receive callbacks from potential employers. Preliminary analyses suggest similar trends in some areas where more applications were sent in the for-profit sector in both metro areas, particularly in Boston. We made some modifications to the resumes and cover letters as well as the job application process, so the rates of callbacks by sector, education qualification, and race and ethnicity may slightly differ in the second phase. The major modification in the resume was to add an additional year of non-service employment after the AmeriCorps experience. This change stemmed from the hypothesis that potential employers might view AmeriCorps members as less employable than their non-AmeriCorps peers. By adding an additional year of non-service employment, we hoped to counteract that bias.

Supplemental Grant Title: Hiring Managers Perception of AmeriCorps Service for Entry Level Job Applicants

Supplemental Grant Summary: The Tufts University research team received a supplemental grant to study the perceptions of hiring managers regarding AmeriCorps service. This study has three elements: (i) a survey sent out to a sample of hiring managers across the country; (ii) in-depth interviews of hiring managers; and (iii) a resume-based experiment with a subsample of organizations in the employers of national service network.

The survey asked several questions about employers' initial perceptions of AmeriCorps service compared to volunteering. It also included an experimental section where employers were randomly asked to react to a short description of a candidate with or without service

experience. We have 116 responses so far from a list of 10,076 hiring managers in the private and nonprofit sectors as well as 496 hiring managers from the employers of national service network. Most respondents had heard about AmeriCorps and around two-thirds of them served as AmeriCorps sites. Once employers knew more about AmeriCorps they were more likely to say their organization would be open to hosting an AmeriCorps member in the future. Respondents were also asked to rank which traits would stand out when considering a job candidate and some of the highest ranked traits were, “experience working with diverse people,” “taking initiative to lead a project,” “adaptability to learning new skills and concepts” and, “accountability and transparency in their work.” However, once respondents were given more information about AmeriCorps and asked to rank the same traits again, they also ranked “commitment to solve social issues in their community” highly as well.

From these surveys we recruited hiring managers who were willing to have in-depth interviews about their expertise in hiring and their perceptions about national service, particularly AmeriCorps VISTA. To date, we have conducted 13 interviews which include eight employers in the national service network and five employers outside of it. Emerging findings show employers, particularly those familiar with the AmeriCorps program, favorably considered such experience on a candidate’s resume as a “huge asset” and knew how it would tie into their organizational needs. Employers who weren’t familiar with AmeriCorps were likely to consider it positively if it demonstrated initiative taking, dedication to give back to community, and skills that could be adapted for their organizational context. The third portion of the study is experimental where a service resume and non-service resume is sent to a single job opening in organizations within the national service network. The aim is to send a pair of 100 set applications in the coming weeks. So far, we have sent resumes to 48 employers in the network (excluding public and government organizations).

University of Texas at Austin

Title of Study: Nonprofits, Civic Infrastructure, and Health and Well-Being

Summary: How can local administrative or digital networking data complement and extend our existing survey measures of social capital and civic engagement at the community level? Does social capital at the community level influence important economic and health outcomes? Using the measurement technique Confirmatory Factor Analysis we create a new multiple-indicator, county-level measure of social capital. And, using cross-lagged panel models, we relate aspects of social capital and community engagement to various outcomes including subjective well-being and self-reported health. Several papers have resulted from the project. First, “Revisiting Declines in Social Capital: Evidence from a New Measure” introduces a new measure of social capital derived from previously underutilized survey data from the Civic Engagement Supplement of the American Community Survey. We use this measure of social capital to evaluate theories of social capital decline and find that associational social capital appears to have declined during the great recession, but has since rebounded to stable levels. A second paper, “Nonprofits, Tweets, and Subjective Well-Being,” explores whether communities with higher numbers of nonprofits per capita exhibit greater subjective well-being in the form of more expressions of positive emotion, engagement, and relationship. We use novel measures of

subjective well-being—positive and negative tweets in U.S. counties—and relate them to per capita nonprofits in relevant fields, such as the arts. We find that most categories of nonprofit organizations (e.g., arts, education, and health care) are associated with decreases in tweeted expressions of negative emotions, negative sentiments about relationships, and disengagement. A third paper, “Do National Service Programs Improve Communities?” addresses the connections between AmeriCorps presence in a county and that county’s subjective well-being. We find that AmeriCorps VISTA programs are significantly associated with increases in subjective well-being and AmeriCorps programs more generally appear to reduce the expression of negative subjective well-being in a county.