



## EVIDENCE SNAPSHOT

# An Evaluation of AmeriCorps–Supported Programs Tackling Climate Change



BUNDLED EVALUATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

## Background

In 2021, President Joseph Biden announced new greenhouse gas targets for the United States that call for the country to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by 50–52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 (U.S. Congressional Research Service, 2021). This announcement came during a period of unmistakable evidence of climate change; the past 7 years had been the 7 warmest on record and global sea level rise had accelerated since 2013 and reached a new maximum in 2021 (World Meteorological Organization, 2021). Furthermore, extreme weather events such as wildfires across the western United States, the Mediterranean region, and eastern Russia; extreme flooding in Europe, China, and India; and droughts across the world illustrated the Earth’s changing climate. Given the warming that has already occurred, some changes to the climate system are irreversible (The White House, 2021).

To support efforts to meet these national greenhouse gas targets, in late 2023, the White House announced it was launching the American Climate Corps jobs and training program (The White House, 2023). Modeled after

the Civilian Conservation Corps used during the Great Depression to increase work opportunities, the American Climate Corps expects to provide work and service opportunities in the environment for approximately 20,000 individuals. Responsive to climate concerns, the program will funnel individuals toward projects that focus on land restoration, community resilience, and clean energy. Additionally, the Biden administration characterizes the effort as an opportunity to “open up pathways to good-paying careers” and make communities “more fair, sustainable, and resilient.” Many projects included on the recently launched American Climate Corps website include existing AmeriCorps projects focused on addressing aspects of climate change (The White House, 2024).

AmeriCorps has long sought to respond to climate change and related environmental impacts by funding national service projects that specifically target extreme weather events and other disasters, sustainability and energy efficiency initiatives, and disaster recovery programming. Civic engagement, such as through AmeriCorps’s national service projects, has been identified as “essential” for dealing with the impact of climate change because it can address “not just mitigation but eventually also adaptation needs” (Moser, 2009, p. 298). Moreover, civic engagement through national service has the potential for long-term benefits to the communities served. Through national service activities, members help individuals in the community engage in climate action such as mitigation and resilience (K. Scheuer, [Local Government Commission] climate change project director, personal communication, February 16, 2022). AmeriCorps members play important roles in preparing and implementing strategies to address climate change within communities. They serve as trusted sources to deliver climate information and monitor changes within the community environment as a result of activities to address climate change (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015).

In 2020, AmeriCorps contracted with an independent consulting firm, ICF, to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of AmeriCorps projects that explicitly connect their work to climate change to learn more about them and to build evidence in this high-priority area. The definition of climate change in the study’s context was based on AmeriCorps performance measures as well as areas of interest and recommendations from AmeriCorps (e.g., preparation for green jobs, direct reference to climate change, equity, and recruitment) and includes the “big areas” of disaster response, conservation, wildfire mitigation, other forms of mitigation, energy efficiency, education and training, and community resilience.

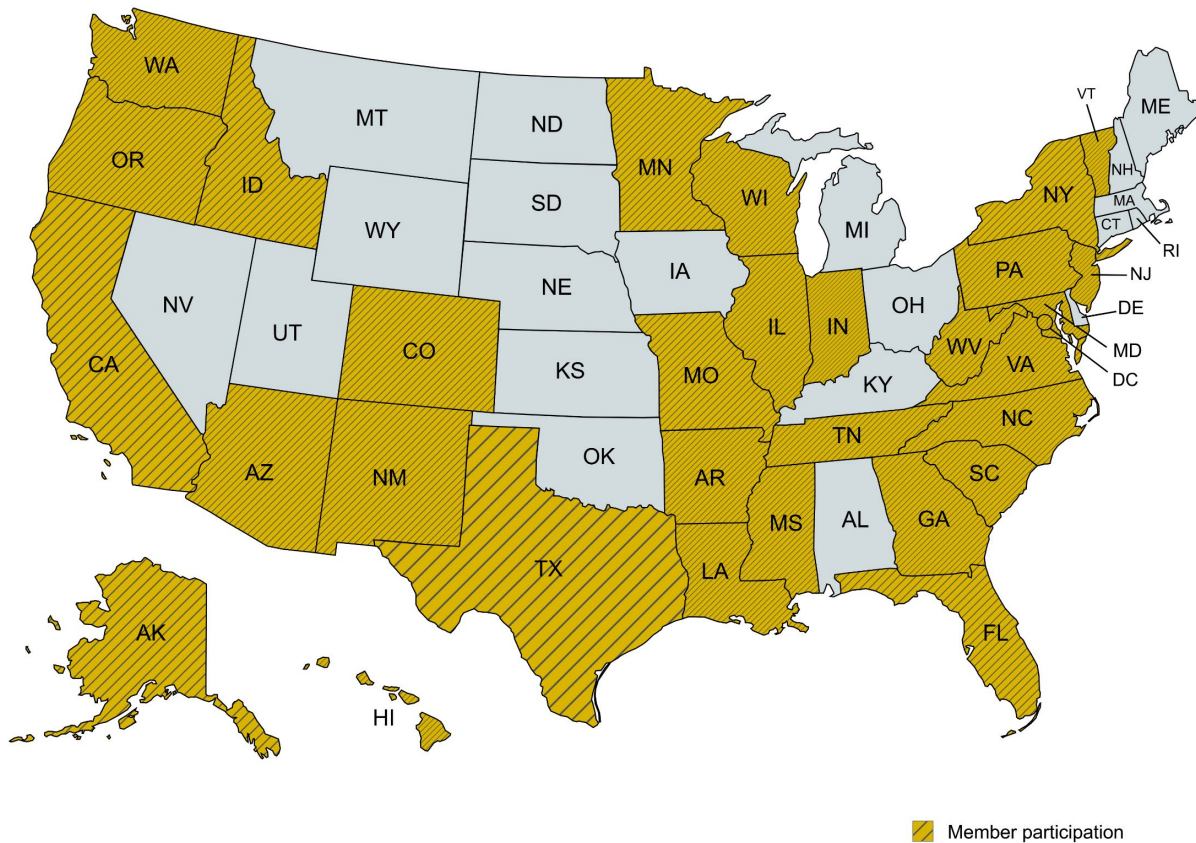
The study used a “bundling” approach that pooled together projects across AmeriCorps funding streams with similar program models and outcomes for the evaluation. This contract also included delivering evaluation capacity-building sessions to project staff from the bundle of participating organizations to support their efforts to build their own evidence and encourage knowledge sharing on this important topic.

## About the Climate Change Evaluation and Capacity Building Project

This evaluation—the first ever for AmeriCorps that synthesizes information about climate change approaches and models across funding streams—provides insights on the implementation and outcomes of a range of activities related to education and training, disaster response, conservation, wildfire mitigation, and energy efficiency. Eighty-nine AmeriCorps State and National and VISTA project applications from fiscal years 2020–2022 were reviewed. Applications that made an explicit reference to climate change in the project narrative or theory of change/logic model were included in the sampling pool. Applications that focused on conservation activities with no reference to climate change were excluded. The project directors and sponsors for the 15 projects that met the selection criteria were contacted to invite their participation (21 AmeriCorps State and National grantees and 3 VISTA sponsors). Study recruitment occurred in fall 2022 and resulted in 13 AmeriCorps State and National grantees and 2 AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors agreeing to participate. Exhibit 1 shows the 30 states and Washington, DC, where members in the 15 projects are serving and exhibit 2 provides

information summarizing each project.

**EXHIBIT 1.—Map showing states where members serving for 15 participating projects**



Created with mapchart.net

## EXHIBIT 2.—Overview of participating projects

Project Name (Organization) and Type	Project Mission, Focus and Member Service Year Objectives, and Areas Serving	Number of AmeriCorps Members and Services Provided	Federal Funding Amount (Fiscal Year, Funded Year)
<p>California GRID Alternatives SolarCorps (GRID Alternatives)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> Build community-powered solutions to advance community and environmental justice through renewable energy</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship and Economic Opportunity: Energy Efficiency and Employment</p> <p><b>Area serving:</b> California (currently); has previously served throughout United States with AmeriCorps support</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 35</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Solar installation (construction), workforce development, and community outreach</p>	<p>\$537,180 (FY20, Y3)</p>
<p>Colorado Youth Corps (Colorado Youth Corps Association)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To serve on behalf of Colorado conservation corps that transform lives and communities through service, personal development and education statewide.</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p><b>Areas serving:</b> Colorado</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 451 from 8 corps</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Disaster mitigation and relief; conserve and steward public lands; energy and water weatherization and retrofitting</p>	<p>\$1,775,104 (FY20, Y1)</p>
<p>Colorado Climate Corps (Colorado Youth Corps Association)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To serve on behalf of Colorado conservation corps that transform lives and communities through service, personal development and education statewide.</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship and Disaster Services: At-Risk Ecosystems, Energy Efficiency, Disaster Assistance Provided, Awareness and Stewardship</p> <p><b>Areas serving:</b> Colorado</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 240 from 8 corps</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Disaster mitigation and relief; conserve and steward public lands; public awareness on climate change; provide resources to marginalized communities; energy and water weatherization and retrofitting</p>	<p>\$2,226,848 (FY22, Y1)</p>

Project Name (Organization) and Type	Project Mission, Focus and Member Service Year Objectives, and Areas Serving	Number of AmeriCorps Members and Services Provided	Federal Funding Amount (Fiscal Year, Funded Year)
<p><b>DC Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (The Corps Network)</b></p> <p><b>AmeriCorps State and National</b></p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To provide education and conservation service experience to young people experiencing barriers (e.g., poverty, unemployment, past justice involvement, physical or learning disability)</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> 18 states throughout the United States</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 928 members from 16 corps</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Improve public lands, trails, and waterways; weatherize and retrofit low-income housing units</p>	<p>\$6,723,600 (FY21, Y3)</p>
<p><b>Hawai'i Conservation Leadership Development Program (Kupu)</b></p> <p><b>AmeriCorps State and National</b></p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To empower youth to serve their communities through character-building, service-learning, and environmental stewardship opportunities that encourage <i>pono</i> (integrity) with <i>ke Akua</i> (God), self, and others</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p><b>Areas serving:</b> Hawai'i and the U.S. Pacific Islands of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 235</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Invasive species removal, native habitat restoration and protection, watershed management, marine conservation, lab work, research, environmental education, outreach, and leading volunteer groups</p>	<p>\$3,561,257 (FY22, Y1)</p>

Project Name (Organization) and Type	Project Mission, Focus and Member Service Year Objectives, and Areas Serving	Number of AmeriCorps Members and Services Provided	Federal Funding Amount (Fiscal Year, Funded Year)
<p>Hawai'i Office of Climate Change, Sustainability, and Resiliency (Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency)</p> <p>VISTA</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To support the City and County of Honolulu in its vision of a more economically self-sufficient and safer Island of O'ahu</p> <p><b>Focus:</b> Capacity building in AmeriCorps focus areas: Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures, and Environmental Stewardship</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> City and County of Honolulu</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 17 VISTA members and 1 VISTA leader</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Research, data analysis, and visualization; partnership development; program development; grant writing; and resource development</p>	<p>--</p>
<p>Hawai'i Office of Coastal and Conservation Lands (Department of Land and Natural Resources)</p> <p>VISTA</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To promote ambitious, climate-neutral, culturally responsive strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation in a manner that is clean, equitable, and resilient</p> <p><b>Focus:</b> Capacity Building through Community Awareness and Engagement, Expansion and Strengthening of Partnerships</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> Hawai'i</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 10</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Identify resiliency gaps and solutions to provide greater mobility and economic opportunity for most vulnerable low-income communities</p>	<p>--</p>
<p>Minnesota Climate Impact Corps (Ampact)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To transform lives; as leaders and innovators, Ampact is working to demonstrate the power of national service to address complex social issues</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems, Awareness and Stewardship, and Energy Efficiency</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> Minnesota</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 100</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Community forestry through preservation and enhancement of state's tree canopy, community resilience through implementation of locally defined projects, and home energy audits and weatherization</p>	<p>\$2,880,000 (FY22, Y3)</p>

Project Name (Organization) and Type	Project Mission, Focus and Member Service Year Objectives, and Areas Serving	Number of AmeriCorps Members and Services Provided	Federal Funding Amount (Fiscal Year, Funded Year)
<p><b>Minnesota GreenCorps (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency)</b></p> <p><b>AmeriCorps State and National</b></p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To ensure that every Minnesotan has healthy air, sustainable lands, clean water, and a better climate</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship: At-Risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> Minnesota</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 48</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Implement locally defined environmental projects in host communities</p>	<p>\$993,165 (FY22, Y2)</p>
<p><b>Missouri AmeriCorps St. Louis (Partnership for Youth, Inc.)</b></p> <p><b>AmeriCorps State and National</b></p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To enhance the professional skills and lifelong service ethic of those who serve; to respond to critical unmet needs in the areas of emergency response and environmental conservation; to leverage service of volunteers; and to build the capacity for our partnering agencies and communities we serve</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Disaster Services and Environmental Stewardship: Disaster Assistance Provided and At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> Missouri and disaster services nationwide</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 42</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Disaster response/recovery support and tactical field support, improve public lands and trails, fire mitigation</p>	<p>\$684,600 (FY21, Y1)</p>

Project Name (Organization) and Type	Project Mission, Focus and Member Service Year Objectives, and Areas Serving	Number of AmeriCorps Members and Services Provided	Federal Funding Amount (Fiscal Year, Funded Year)
<p>North Carolina Project Conserve (Conserving Carolina)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To serve Western North Carolina by building stronger, more educated, and more informed communities</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental stewardship: Awareness and Stewardship, At-risk Ecosystems, and Capacity Building and Leverage</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> Western North Carolina</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 35</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Education; volunteer engagement; create/improve public lands, rivers, and trails</p>	<p>\$499,990 (FY21, Y1)</p>
<p>Virginia Service and Conservation Corps (Virginia State Department of Conservation and Recreation)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To develop the next generation of environmental stewards, providing them with a deeper understanding of park operations, management, and environmental conservation</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> Virginia</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 74</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Improve public lands and trails</p>	<p>\$743,694 (FY22, Y2)</p>
<p>Washington Conservation Corps (Washington State Department of Ecology)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To protect, preserve and enhance Washington's land, air, and water for current and future generations</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Environmental Stewardship and Disaster Services: At-risk Ecosystems and Disaster Assistance Provided</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> 18 Washington counties and disaster services nationwide</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 285</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Invasive species removal and increase native species/biodiversity, trail restoration, and disaster response and recovery</p>	<p>\$2,105,224 (FY22, Y3)</p>



Project Name (Organization) and Type	Project Mission, Focus and Member Service Year Objectives, and Areas Serving	Number of AmeriCorps Members and Services Provided	Federal Funding Amount (Fiscal Year, Funded Year)
<p>Washington Service Corps (Washington State Department of Employment Security)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To contribute to healthy communities by providing people equitable access to resources that improve economic security</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Healthy Futures, Environmental Stewardship, Education, Economic Opportunity, Disaster Services, and Veterans and Military Families: Obesity and Food, K-12 Success, Awareness and Stewardship, Employment, At-Risk Ecosystems, Other Economic Opportunity, Disaster Assistance Provided, Veterans and Military Families Served</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> Washington</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 450</p> <p><b>Services Provided</b> (related to Climate Change): Improve public lands, remove invasive species, and perform other services to mitigate pollution impact and environmental degradation; deliver education and training in environmental stewardship</p>	<p>\$6,369,300 (FY22, Y2)</p>
<p>Washington Vets Work Environment and Land Stewards project (Mt. Adams Institute, Inc.)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p><b>Mission:</b> To provide veterans with skills and knowledge related to natural resources management, public lands, and the environment</p> <p><b>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives:</b> Veterans and Military Families and Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p><b>Areas Serving:</b> 17 states throughout the United States</p>	<p><b># of members:</b> 95</p> <p><b>Services Provided:</b> Improve public lands, trails, and public structures</p>	<p>\$1,119,904 (FY19, Y1)</p>

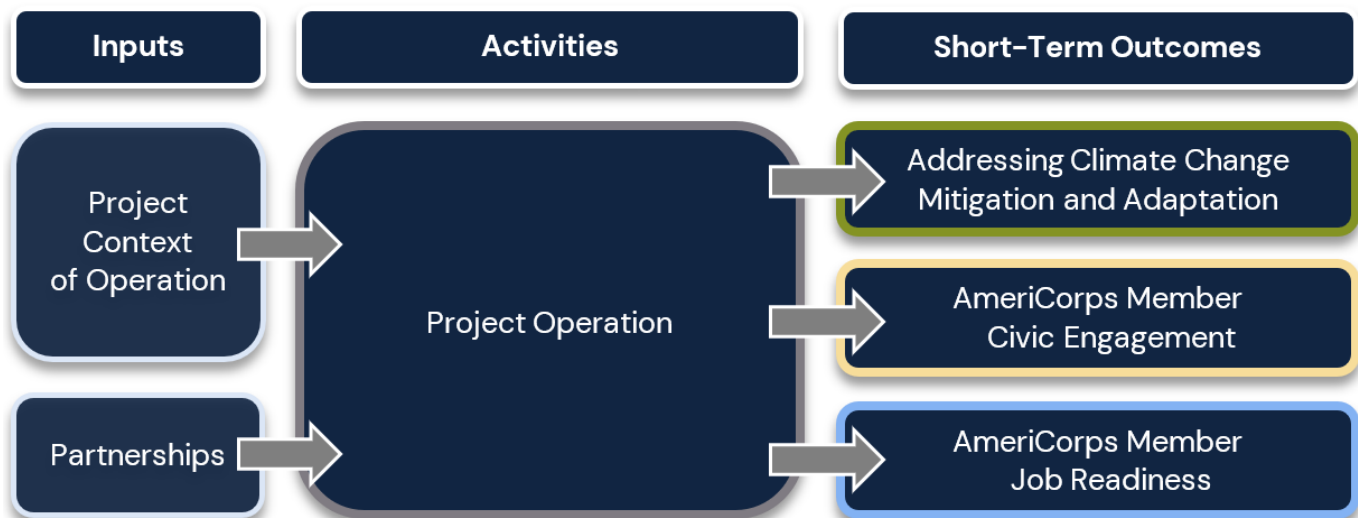
As a framework for the evaluation, a logic model was developed based on a document review of the AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors included in the study (for more information about the study, including the logic model, see the [evaluation of AmeriCorps work in climate change page](#)). The logic model outlines the relationships between activities, expected outputs, and their desired short- and long-term outcomes. The logic model is intended to be comprehensive, covering a broad list of strategies across all related projects rather than representing strategies from any specific program funding stream. The logic model informs the overall evaluation approach, from research questions and evaluation design to instrumentation design and data collection. While the logic model includes long-term outcomes, the evaluation priorities of this study focus mostly on short-term outcomes.

AmeriCorps identified 19 research questions of interest that are organized around 5 areas:

1. project context of operation,
2. project operation,
3. partnerships,
4. project outcomes (addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation, AmeriCorps member civic engagement, and job readiness), and
5. lessons learned.

Exhibit 3 shows the general relationship between the research question areas and the logic model components (e.g., contextual factors, inputs, activities, outcomes).

**EXHIBIT 3.—Alignment of research questions with logic model components**



## Data Sources and Analysis

A mixed-methods approach was used to gather the perspectives of project directors, community partners, and members and included three data collection methods:

### Surveys

- All stakeholders (i.e., grantees/sponsors, community partners, and members) were asked to complete one 20-minute survey.
- Surveying occurred March–June 2023.
- Response rates were as follows: Project directors – 100%, community partners – 49%, AmeriCorps National Service members – 22%.<sup>1</sup>
- The purpose was to understand project models and strategies and assess project implementation and respective outcomes.

### Interviews and Focus Groups for Case Studies

- Five AmeriCorps State and National grantees were selected for a 2-day site visit that occurred in late fall 2022 and winter 2024.
- Interviews were conducted with 22 project directors and staff, 7 partner agency staff, and community members. Focus groups included a total of 32 members.
- Site visits provided an opportunity to get an in-depth look at each project’s context and operations, partnerships and outcomes—both for members and the community—and informed individual case studies (case studies are published on the [evaluation of AmeriCorps work in climate change page](#)).

### Project Documents

- Project applications
- Project progress reports (site visit participants)
- Training materials (site visit participants)
- Project documents furthered an understanding of the activities and status of each project’s work and provided a basis for corroboration with stakeholder perspectives gleaned through other forms of data collection

Analysis included basic descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) for closed-ended survey items. Responses to the qualitative survey data were reviewed and responses were inductively coded using qualitative software. During the initial review of responses, a preliminary list of themes was developed that was further refined throughout the review process. Once themes were established and defined, responses were coded using the qualitative software. Theme presence was calculated by dividing the number of responses with a theme present by the total number of respondents to the question.

With the permission of interviewees, all site visit data collection was audio recorded and recordings were transcribed. Transcripts were coded and analyzed with qualitative analysis software. Two levels of coding were used. For Level 1 coding, a researcher selected the entire response to a question in the transcript and identified the response as a singular theme. For Level 2 coding, specific elements within an entire question response were coded using a codebook developed by one of the researchers. Individual researchers reviewed

<sup>1</sup> Representatives from all 15 projects responded to the Project Director Survey. One director serves two projects, thus the total number of surveys completed was 14. Of the 98 partners from 13 of the AmeriCorps projects, 48 respondents participated for a response rate of 49 percent. Of the 1,993 unique members surveyed, 432 responded from all participating projects for a respectable response rate of 22 percent.

the transcripts and applied the codes to each transcript. Data collection from each site visit was analyzed and a case study developed. Interview and focus group data were also included in the overall evaluation findings.

Data across the various sources and methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, and documents) were triangulated to generate cross-cutting themes that emerged across the findings.

## Limitations

The study's purpose was to provide insights on the implementation and outcomes of a range of activities related to projects that AmeriCorps supports focused on climate change. The study included a robust sample of AmeriCorps State and National and VISTA projects that provided member experiences in the following climate areas: education and training, disaster response, conservation, wildfire mitigation, and energy efficiency. Nevertheless, several limitations were identified during the study's implementation that readers should be aware of when interpreting the findings.

**The study represents 15 projects and thus should not be considered to be inclusive or representative of the totality of AmeriCorps-funded projects in the climate space.** Further, only two VISTA projects participated in the study and neither one of them was selected for a site visit and featured as a case study. One of the VISTA projects concluded prior to the site visits and the second project declined participation due to capacity issues.

**The findings presented in this report are subject to self-selection bias and should not be considered representative of all stakeholder groups.** Site visit projects were selected to represent the different areas of climate solutions being examined in this study. Researchers met with the project director and/or another project point of contact to review the purposes of the site visits and identify the stakeholders to be interviewed (e.g., project staff, partners, members, and community representatives). Each site invited the individuals to participate in the interviews and so they could have invited participants with favorable perceptions of the project.

**Some survey findings are based on a small number of respondents since certain survey items were specific to program focus areas (e.g., energy efficiency, disaster response, etc.).** In these situations, items applied to a small number of survey respondents. This is particularly true for project directors and partners. When percentages of respondents are reported, the reader should consider the number of respondents to the items.

**The study is not causal.** This study describes the implementation of projects by AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors and the self-reported outcomes by members, project staff, and partners. It does not examine the impact of the projects, meaning that it does not answer the question of whether community and member outcomes were the result of any training received and services performed by the projects.

Not a limitation, per se, but **it is important to understand that the findings are not intended to be generalizable but instead describe some of the models and approaches AmeriCorps supports to further climate change solutions.** Great variation existed in the size of the AmeriCorps State and National projects. Some received national competitive awards while for others funding came from state formula funds. Projects varied widely in the dollars awarded, number of members, whether the members served only in the state or it was a multistate project, number and types of partnerships, and organizational infrastructure to support the project. With these considerations in mind, caution should be exercised in generalizing findings across all AmeriCorps projects receiving funding to support climate change solutions.

## Strengthening Evaluation Capacity

Evaluation capacity building activities were provided to AmeriCorps State and National grantee and VISTA sponsor participants (e.g., project directors or staff, evaluators) as a strategy for strengthening evidence building. In particular, the evaluation capacity building helped participants stay engaged with the bundled evaluation through 1-hour long monthly capacity building sessions from March 2023 to April 2024. Across the 12 sessions, a total of 28 AmeriCorps State and National grantee and VISTA sponsor representatives attended at least 1 of the evaluation capacity-building sessions, with an average of 10.5 participants attending each session. In addition to providing technical assistance on evaluation planning, implementation, and reporting, evaluation capacity building included dedicated sessions to provide updates about and seek feedback on key evaluation activities. In this way, the evaluation capacity building strengthened the bundle evaluation and the evidence it produced. For example, participants recommended approaches for obtaining higher response rates on surveys and focus groups and later, after data had been collected, discussed the study's implications for their work, such as how the study's findings could contribute to more effective community engagement in their programs. The knowledge gained during the evaluation capacity building, coupled with the opportunities to build relationships and engage the data together, can extend the impact of the study and ensure it does not merely sit on a shelf, but rather contributes to practice.

## Summary of Cross-Cutting Themes

The full report includes findings organized in five areas: (1) description of climate change services and activities, (2) role of partners and community involvement, (3) members, (4) member and community outcomes, and (5) strengthening evaluation capacity building. A cross-sectional analysis of findings from the study's focus areas highlighted several themes. Using the *AmeriCorps State of the Evidence* framework (2023), the themes are organized around three of the four domains on which AmeriCorps is seeking to make an impact through its investments in national service and volunteerism: (1) AmeriCorps members, (2) AmeriCorps grantees or sponsor organizations (referred to as partners in the framework), (3) communities, and (4) society. The scope of this study focused on outcomes in the first three domains.

### AmeriCorps Members

Three cross-cutting themes emerged from the study that focus on members. The first theme relates to service as an opportunity for career development. The second theme refers to opportunities for diversifying members and enhancing recruitment. The third theme illustrates the impact of service on members' civic engagement.

#### Member Service is a Meaningful Pathway for Career Development

**AmeriCorps climate projects are viewed by members as a valuable way for members to build upon prior education and gain skills necessary for pursuing employment in job sectors related to climate change and beyond.** Members often join AmeriCorps-supported climate projects to acquire skills aligned with their preferred career fields, demonstrated by an overwhelming 90 percent of members that expressed interest in obtaining a climate-related job following their service. Organizations within these career fields are increasingly requiring prior experience and technical skills for entry-level positions. While exceptions may exist, service provides an entry point for gaining industry recognized skills and experience through federally supported projects. These skills are essential for careers in environmental stewardship, disaster relief, community resilience, and energy efficiency. Partner organizations value practical experience, especially when prospective employees lack a directly relevant educational background.

**AmeriCorps-supported projects in the climate space play a crucial role in skills development and career pathways.** Project staff and partner organizations emphasized the importance of project recognition among

respected climate organizations, including the U.S. Forest Service; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; National Park Service; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; Federal Emergency Management Agency; and state departments of natural resources, energy, and emergency management. Partner organizations have broad networks and frequently act as potential employers for AmeriCorps members or help members connect with similar organizations. By serving both with AmeriCorps and these partner organizations, members acquire practical experience and network with industry professionals. AmeriCorps service enhances members' education and employment prospects.

*The networking—it's probably the biggest thing for me because of how many people you meet. Whether it's the contacts or the community members that you run into or staff, there's just a lot of people with a lot of experience and a lot of knowledge.*

AmeriCorps member

### Opportunities Exist to Diversify Membership and Enhance Recruitment

Across the participating projects, a common takeaway from the site visits and survey responses was the challenge experienced with recruiting members with diverse backgrounds. Only half of surveyed project directors and members said the project effectively recruited diverse members. The most frequently mentioned reasons for the difficulty in recruiting a more diverse member population were the stipend and membership criteria (e.g., background checks, citizenship requirement). This difficulty with recruiting a diverse membership is especially concerning for the larger implications on career readiness and economic mobility among diverse communities. As described in the section above, AmeriCorps-supported projects that focus on climate change function as career development for many members and, in some cases, can result in full-time sustainable employment. As such, it is important to consider how to address recruitment challenges so that individuals from diverse backgrounds have these career opportunities.

*When it comes to, say, recruiting for racial diversity, what we have found is the best way to do that is when we intentionally reach out and engage, you know, form partnerships with community-based organizations that are really focused on supporting BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Color] communities. And then work with them closely around identifying individuals within their community who may be good candidates to hold those positions.*

AmeriCorps project staff

Despite this challenge, some projects have implemented successful strategies to diversify and support members during their service. For instance, GRID Alternatives SolarCorps focuses on recruiting members who reflect their local communities by engaging with diverse individuals in spaces where they are already active.

Specifically, as part of SolarCorps programming, members assist with GRID's Installation Basics Training (IBT) program, which has been a successful pipeline for recruiting SolarCorps members. The IBT is a 200-hour program designed to develop skills relevant to entry-level solar installation jobs and construction fields. IBT program participants are recruited from the communities that GRID Alternatives serves, predominantly low-income and people of color who are

looking to enter the solar workforce or those from construction-related fields looking to acquire solar installation skills. Throughout the program, IBT participants learn more about serving as an AmeriCorps member with SolarCorps to gain further experience within the solar field. Project staff cite the IBT program as a vital source for SolarCorps recruitment, especially for its ability to draw members already residing in the community, and it allows targeted efforts for identity-based cohorts (e.g., women's IBT groups).

Another example is Washington Service Corps, where the project introduced measures to make service more accessible for individuals from low-income backgrounds. Specifically, they implemented a program called

Member Equity Enhancement now in its second year (Washington Service Corps, n.d.). After receiving approval from the state legislature, the project provides an enhanced living stipend to members whose incomes fall below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (Serve Washington, 2023).

Apart from recruitment efforts, projects offer various support services to members. Common areas of assistance include having staff knowledgeable about housing rights advocacy groups and facilitating connections among incoming members to simplify housing searches. Additionally, some projects, such as AmeriCorps St. Louis, maintain an emergency fund that members can apply for, receiving up to \$500 to cover unexpected expenses (such as medical needs, housing, or car repairs).

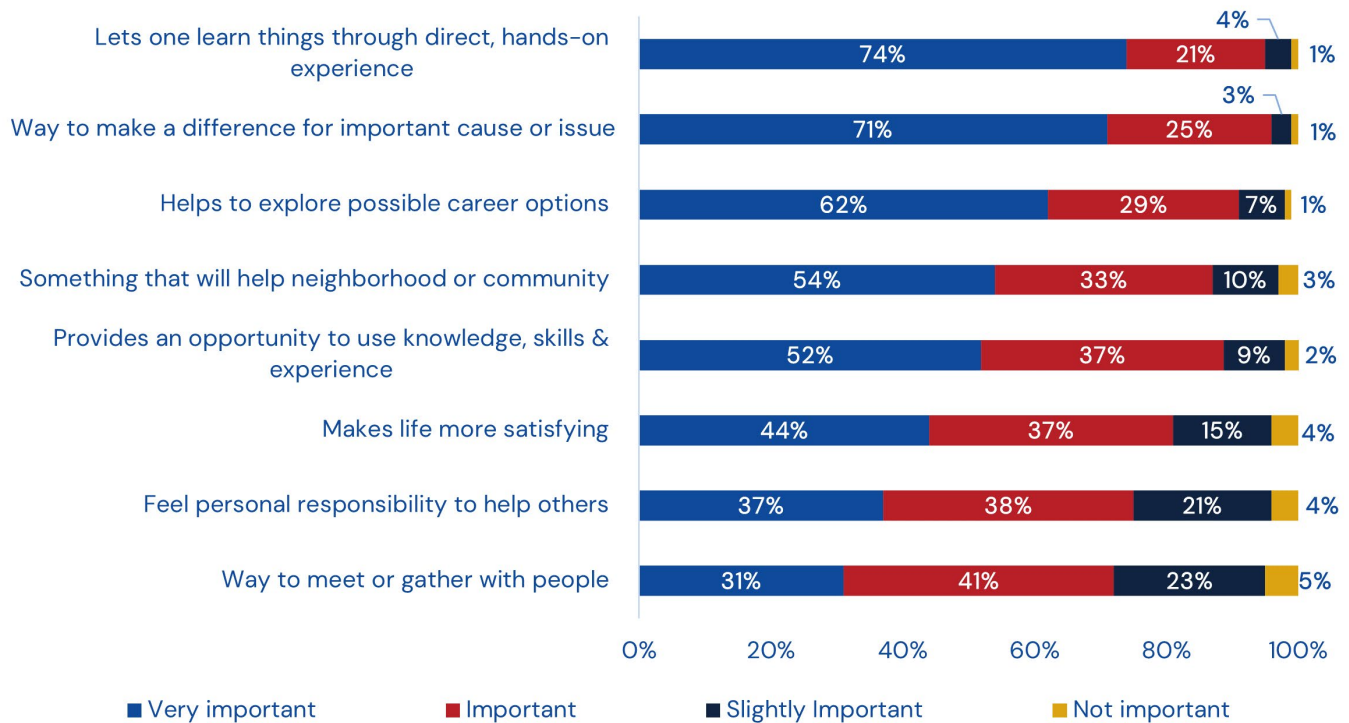
### **AmeriCorps Members are Passionate about Serving and Improving Climate Change Outcomes**

Members frequently cited the chance to contribute to climate change mitigation as a primary motivation for joining service programs, demonstrating a propensity for civic engagement. During site visit focus groups, members expressed agreement that service provided an opportunity to actively engage in addressing climate change directly. While they recognized the practical skills gained through service, their focus often centered on improving physical environments and their inhabitants. This alignment with program mission and dedication to service was evident prior to the beginning of their term.

More than 90 percent of surveyed project directors agreed that their project was either effective or very effective at supporting attitudes and behaviors toward civic engagement. While interviewed project staff acknowledged that AmeriCorps service positions likely draw members who are already somewhat disposed to the value of civic duty, they explained that AmeriCorps terms provide members the opportunity to serve in projects that had missions focused exclusively on service.

Member survey responses on why they volunteer emphasized their desire to serve and help others (exhibit 4). Nearly all members expressed that volunteering was important because it allowed them to make a difference in causes or issues that were important to them or in which they were interested (96 percent). Additionally, they believed volunteering benefited neighborhoods or communities (87 percent), and they felt a personal responsibility to help others (75 percent).

**EXHIBIT 4.—Member reasons for volunteering (n=411–432)**



Note. Items adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps’ Civic Engagement Volunteer Experience Survey and the Volunteer Motivation Scale. The survey item had a “don’t know” response option that was excluded from the analysis.

### AmeriCorps State and National Grantees and VISTA Sponsors

Three cross-cutting themes emerged for AmeriCorps State and National Grantees and VISTA sponsors. One theme related to partners while the second and third themes pertained to measurement and funding cycles. Across both is the importance of community partnership for the success of projects and VISTAs. AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors leverage relationships with federal government agencies (e.g., U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), state and local governments, institutions of higher education, and other community nonprofits to accomplish their project objectives. Partners can have many roles in supporting an AmeriCorps project although most frequently they serve as placement sites for members and provide significant training and skill development. Most of the surveyed project directors reported they partner with between 10 and 25 organizations to provide activities or services for the project. Three project directors reported they partner with 85–100 organizations. Project directors reported that most of the organizations were host sites for members while some partners also provided training to members.

#### Supportive Partnerships are Critical for Success

**Mutually beneficial partnerships play a key role in the success of AmeriCorps-funded climate projects.**

Collaborations among AmeriCorps projects serve various purposes, but the common thread is meeting each other’s needs. For instance, placing members with partner organizations allows the members to contribute to tasks aligned with the partner’s mission while also providing valuable real-world experience and skills development for AmeriCorps members. Similar to other projects, Kupu’s Conservation Leadership Development Program

*[Our organization] wouldn’t be where it is today without our partners.*

AmeriCorps project staff



serves as a career pathway for members. A unique aspect of this program is that local community partners that serve as host sites to members emphasize the interconnection of the Hawaiian cultural practices with the service while members learn how to *malama 'āina* [care for the land].

**A shared understanding of each organization’s mission and priorities is a critical component to successful, mutually beneficial collaborations between AmeriCorps–funded projects and partners.**

AmeriCorps–funded project staff emphasize the importance of recognizing overlapping and distinct priorities as essential to establishing a healthy ongoing relationship. Identifying areas that each organization can advance collectively and avoiding misleading expectations is important. Regular meetings, check-ins, and forums facilitate effective collaboration. Reciprocal support ensures a long-term partnership that advances environmental, community, and member outcomes.

**Measurement and Funding Duration Limits for AmeriCorps–Supported Projects**

**AmeriCorps–identified outputs and outcomes can inhibit projects from fully capturing the impact of their services.** Specifically, project staff across focus areas—such as energy and water efficiency, renewable energy sources, forestry, disaster response, and community resilience—struggled to accurately demonstrate their impact using the performance measures outlined by AmeriCorps. This limitation arose from the inability to incorporate estimates of future impact resulting from current service activities. Addressing climate change involves critical actions such as tree planting for carbon sequestration or installing solar power technology, both of which yield long-term impact. Project staff recognized the importance of reporting performance during each grant cycle but sought intermediary measurement options to better reflect their performance. For example, projects that utilize solar power installations listed estimates of household cost savings and projected decreases in energy grid consumption as measurements more reflective of their impact, as opposed to the “number of structures retrofitted.” Similarly, in community resilience projects, the outputs and outcomes aimed at knowledge and behavior changes may not accurately capture where the change is occurring. It might be beneficial to reframe the focus and consider how the member service functions as what Farallon Strategies (2023) refers to as a catalytic outcome. In other words, focus on the role of the member in creating community connection and community engagement which may result in addressing root causes and lead to fundamental changes in systems as well as create ripple effects of positive changes across the systems members are serving.

Project staff also expressed difficulty aligning project services with the outputs and outcomes associated with their focus areas. For example, environmental stewardship outputs and outcomes are framed in terms of numbers of acres treated and improved. The terms “treated” and “improved” may not be universally operationalized in the same way by all projects; further, measuring acres is not as applicable in urban settings. Additionally, for projects that focus on tree preservation since climate impact is destroying the tree canopy, how can a project use this performance measure to accurately capture the project’s outputs and outcomes? Similar issues were expressed for the other performance measures.

**Community resilience projects may benefit from longer-term grant agreements.** Based on experiences from members and project staff focused on community resilience, residents may hesitate to engage due to lack of trust and familiarity with the projects. AmeriCorps programs frequently focus on marginalized communities which are disproportionately affected by climate change. While short-term interventions can benefit these communities, residents often perceive them as temporary projects rather than the sustained

support needed to develop resilient communities. Moreover, for the types of community impacts hoping to be achieved it takes longer than a 3-year grant cycle.<sup>2</sup>

## Evaluation Capacity Building Can Spur Peer Learning among AmeriCorps-Supported Projects Working in the Climate Space

During the evaluation capacity-building sessions, project staff frequently mentioned the unique challenges of conducting program evaluations in this focus area, especially due to the expected time frame for their intended member and ecological outcomes. Feedback on the post-session surveys consistently reflected project staff's interest in learning from each other about how to address these challenges. Participants also said they appreciated thoughtful prompts to kickstart these conversations and that breakout groups provided a good environment for productive conversations.

### Communities

Two cross-cutting themes emerged from the study that are specific to the communities the projects serve. The first theme is related to how the projects are designed and implemented to be responsive to community needs. The second illustrates the impact members' service has on the communities.

### Projects Involving the Community are Responsive to Specific Needs

**Interactions with community residents varied in format and frequency, but a common theme emerged: a commitment to involving the community based on its specific needs.** As mentioned, the diversity of AmeriCorps-funded projects addressing climate change cannot be understated. This extends to the communities they serve.

- Environmental education or community resilience projects may have a service plan that focuses on "connecting community wisdom with infrastructure, investment, and preparation to create communities that are more resilient to climate change impacts." Projects such as these actively involve their community through the presence of community-based organizations integral to a project's partnership base.
- In projects that provide energy and water retrofits or household solar installation, AmeriCorps State and National members have the opportunity to engage with community residents on an individual basis. During these interactions, members share information about their installed technology and provide additional insights related to energy efficiency and climate solutions. These ongoing interactions with community residents, along with their feedback, contribute to enhancing project design and service delivery. Furthermore, the visibility of AmeriCorps members actively participating in community services can serve as a recruitment strategy, fostering community involvement.
- Climate change interventions in remote environments (e.g., habitat restoration, forestry, trail building) may have limited community interactions and involvement of the community based on the specific

*[Project] provide a capacity to these [partners] that just don't have that [for community connections]. And [for] a local municipality there was just so much I was able to do for them in terms of engaging with schools and outreach to residents that they wouldn't have time carved out to do that work [because] their day-to-day operations take up all their time.*

AmeriCorps member

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that AmeriCorps generally receives one-year appropriations, making this recommendation challenging to implement. Rare exceptions occur when AmeriCorps receives funding in an apportioned manner that provides multi-year funding.

services they aim to provide. These projects are essential for the well-being of outdoor environments, which in turn contribute to the overall well-being of surrounding communities. Some initiatives within these projects—such as community tree planting events, volunteer days for trail building projects, and guided community walks—actively seek community involvement whenever possible.

**Projects emphasize the use of innovative strategies to engage with communities based on their specific needs and each project’s capacity to achieve community impact.** As community buy-in plays an increasingly important role in implementing climate solutions at both local and global levels, projects have seemingly responded to this shift by tailoring their strategies to align with project objectives and community needs.

For example, Mile High Youth Corps’ Energy & Water Conservation program is operating a new project called “Promotoras Climaticas,” a model adapted from Latin America that is based on the idea of learning from the community and strengthening connections to local neighborhoods. Translating to “Climate Promoters,” Mile High Youth Corps has three Community Climate AmeriCorps members who work closely with Denver’s Office of Climate Action, Sustainability and Resiliency to conduct public outreach about climate change, increase awareness and access to solutions for climate vulnerability, and evaluate adoption of these solutions in Denver’s Neighborhood Equity & Stabilization, or NEST, neighborhoods. When asked about promising practices to engage with vulnerable and/or diverse communities, both members and project staff involved with the Promotoras project reported the essential focus on “going to the community where they are” rather than trying to “pull the community in.”

This sentiment was similarly reflected by Climate Impact Corps’ novel community stewardship facilitator program. Once placed with their partner sites, community steward facilitators are often tasked with the organization of community-based events and initiatives that seek to increase environmental awareness and action in the communities the partner site serves. Specifically, community steward facilitators are trained to organize events and content that focus on connecting “people to people” and “people to places” to increase attitudes and behaviors toward the spaces they inhabit.

### **AmeriCorps–Supported Projects Demonstrate Member Services’ Positive Impact on the Communities Served**

Across the defined focus areas of AmeriCorps–supported projects that address climate change, members, project staff, and partners generally felt that member services contribute to positively impacted communities. In the case of projects focused on environmental stewardship member services, projects such as Climate Impact Corps’ Community Forestry initiative seek to protect and improve Minnesota’s tree canopy and

*Now we have the opportunity with a small subset of our program to go out and say, “Hey, what do you think about this climate change? What are the things you’re saying you want to see changed in your community?” It’s shown us we can strengthen our connection to those neighborhoods or communities right around us.*

AmeriCorps project staff

*When I started this job [service] I realized that change does not start from a global [level]. It starts—not nationally, not [at the] state—but in your backyard, like in a neighborhood. I think of the Amazon burning down and ocean levels rising—just climate change in general, but these things happen and can be changed from a really small level.*

AmeriCorps member

community health through tree planting and care. Meanwhile, projects focused on disaster response such as AmeriCorps St. Louis seek to help communities recover from a natural disaster through member services such as homeowner intake and needs verification, survivor intake, damage assessments, case referrals, and crisis cleanup, to name just a few.

These two examples demonstrate the wide array of impact AmeriCorps-supported projects provide to communities, with the common prevailing theme across projects demonstrating that members, project staff, and partners perceive their services as impactful to their communities. To better ensure projects were aligned to needs community-based projects conducted formal and informal needs assessments.

These two examples are further supported by findings from surveyed project directors, partners, and members. Below are highlights by study focus area (see exhibits 21–25 in the final report for more specifics):

- Environmental Stewardship and Conservation: 90 percent or more of surveyed project directors, partners, and members said the project was effective at protecting and/or restoring biodiversity and preserving public lands and/or waterways.
- Community Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors: 65 percent or more of surveyed project directors, partners, and members felt they increased community members' positive attitudes toward activities that mitigate climate change.
- Energy Efficiency: 100 percent of surveyed project directors and partners and nearly 80 percent of members responded that the project was effective or very effective in improving energy efficiency.
- Community Resiliency: Approximately 80 percent or more of surveyed project directors, partners, and members said the project was effective at helping the community become more resilient to a changing climate.
- Disaster Response: 100 percent of surveyed project directors and approximately 80 percent of partners and members said the project was effective or very effective in preparing for, responding to, or recovering from natural disasters.

## Recommendations

Based on a comprehensive analysis of findings presented in this report and the cross-cutting themes identified above, several recommendations are offered for consideration by AmeriCorps as well as suggestions for future study.

### Recommendations for AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps-Supported Projects

The following three recommendations are offered for consideration by AmeriCorps and the projects they support. The first recommendation aims to address the long-standing challenge of recruiting a diverse membership. The second recommendation highlights the tension that exists between relatively short grant terms (e.g., 3 years) while striving to have community impact. The third recommendation suggests identifying additional peer learning opportunities for AmeriCorps-supported projects that are focused on climate change

*I think one of the things that has always struck me about our members and our organization is that we can get a lot of work done—or service done—very quickly. Whether it's just a team of five or the whole corps, you throw them at it [and] assuming they have direction and oversight, they can move very quickly and very thoroughly and want to do a good job and get it done very well. The impact is obvious from having them there.*

AmeriCorps project staff

to come together and share lessons learned and promising practices for addressing challenges commonly experienced by the projects.

### **Explore and Share Ways to Diversify AmeriCorps Membership**

Across the projects, staff and members expressed concerns about their ability to recruit members from diverse backgrounds who may be interested in service and cited the stipend amount as an inhibitor. Several projects have shared strategies they are using to support members during their service (e.g., emergency assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program application assistance). To increase the capacity of projects exploring adoption of these strategies, AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors may be able to share innovative strategies they are using that could be replicated by other projects. For example, through the facilitation of a third-party technical assistance provider, interested projects could participate in recurring meetings (i.e., monthly, quarterly) to discuss their challenges and promising practices related to incorporating and scaling inclusivity and equity-focused project practices. As the meeting recurs, participating projects may request specific meeting topics of interest related to diversifying membership (e.g., collaborating with state legislatures, supporting LGBTQIA+ members, using community partners to recruit from local communities).

In this scenario, a technical assistance provider well-versed in the diversity of AmeriCorps-supported projects that address climate change may identify projects that demonstrate success in developing and sustaining creative strategies focused on diverse membership. Additionally, the technical assistance provider can facilitate the matching of projects of similar funding levels and operating contexts if the projects prefer particularly focused sessions. Using this knowledge, identified projects may provide useful insights for projects participating in the recurring sessions, notably important contextual factors to consider throughout design and implementation, resources that assisted approval and implementation, and narratives about navigating the challenges that may arise in implementation as well as field questions from projects interested in adaptation. Furthermore, the technical assistance provider may serve as a supporting source of gathering and documenting promising practices/tip sheets for project staff.

### **Consider Flexible Grant Terms that may Facilitate Measurement of Longer-Term Impact**

For projects focused on community resilience, especially those involving member activities embedded within communities for the purposes of sharing climate resources and seeking input and involvement from residents, it is important to have a sustained period of funding. With 3-year grant awards that only guarantee funding for the first year (continuation dependent on performance and available funds), projects in this area may feel pressured to design, implement, and evaluate services quickly. Trust and relationship building, especially in marginalized communities, require sufficient time to develop. Additionally, community resilience efforts need sustained, long-term commitment, and a 3-year period may not be enough to accurately evaluate the impact of resilience-building activities on communities. To effectively support projects focused on community development and resilience, further research is recommended to identify the needs of these projects in light of AmeriCorps requirements. Policymakers should also consider allocating multi-year funding for high priority topics such as climate change that necessitate more than one year to validly measure the outputs and outcomes.

### **Provide Forums and Facilitation for AmeriCorps-Supported Projects Focused on Climate Change to Share Ideas and Lessons Learned with Each Other**

Project staff participating in the evaluation capacity-building sessions expressed appreciation for the peer learning opportunities, especially through breakout discussions and report-outs. In particular, project staff stated that thoughtful conversation starters—especially those that invited them to wrestle with the unique challenges of evaluation in this space—contributed to meaningful dialogue among projects. When there are

events or other forums where projects gather, AmeriCorps could consider facilitating discussions among project staff focused on climate change. To make these discussions most valuable, AmeriCorps could include projects with varying evaluation strategies and experiences, and use open-ended prompts to invite project staff to reflect on what has worked well and what lessons they have learned as they navigate evaluation challenges in this space. Sharing could extend beyond evaluation topics and include discussions around program designs and structures, budgets, logic models, and evidence bases grantees and sponsors use to develop their programs. Facilitating peer exchange and access to documents would promote more program to program learning and growth overall.

## **Recommendations for Future Study to Increase the Evidence Around Member and Community Outcomes**

Two considerations are offered for further research. The first focuses on developing the evidence around member outcomes and long-term impact of service on members' career pathways. The second focuses on performance measurement and evaluation to more effectively assess the impact of projects supported by AmeriCorps.

### **Systematically Document Career Outcomes of Members Following Service**

AmeriCorps currently administers a national member exit survey to all members across the three service streams (e.g., AmeriCorps State and National, NCCC, and VISTA). However, the survey domain related to employment and education only documents members' "plans" following their service term. To understand actual career and education outcomes, further data collection from AmeriCorps alumni is necessary. Given the scale of this effort, there could initially be a pilot. For instance, researchers might identify projects and collaboratively develop and administer surveys or tracking systems, reporting on members' career outcomes. Lessons learned from these projects can inform instrumentation and data collection methods applicable to AmeriCorps projects nationwide.

### **Conduct Further Research on and Explore Alternative Approaches to Performance Measures and Evaluation**

In the context of AmeriCorps projects within the climate solutions space, project staff face challenges related to performance measures and evaluation requirements. These challenges have produced interest in exploring additional or alternative approaches to monitoring and evaluating project performance. As described earlier, the diverse nature of AmeriCorps projects within climate solutions makes aligning the services and actual outputs and outcomes of each project to AmeriCorps' standard performance measures difficult.

To address these challenges and identify potential solutions, further research is suggested to better understand how projects:

- Approach the selection of performance measures,
- Navigate difficulty with performance measures, and
- Develop strategies to make performance reporting reflective of the broad variety of AmeriCorps climate projects.

Additionally, this research could examine the challenges associated with rigorous evaluations (such as the lack of a suitable control group), document projects with unique approaches to evaluation, and share promising practices for developing evaluation designs in the climate field—especially those intended to develop community capacity and resilience.

Addressing concerns around adding performance measures due to limited staff capacity is crucial. Research can help identify factors that facilitate scaling new or additional performance measure guidance. For example, consider creating a specialized member role focused on internal evaluation capacity. This role would offer unique insights from a member's perspective while supporting career development through valuable experience in program evaluation, which could benefit both employers and higher education programs.

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### 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).

### 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.

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### About ICF

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