



→ An Evaluation of AmeriCorps-Supported Programs Tackling Climate Change

Final Report



BUNDLED EVALUATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

July 2024

Prepared by ICF for the AmeriCorps
Office of Research and Evaluation



Acknowledgements

The ICF evaluation team would like to acknowledge the many members of the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE)—Dr. Lily Zandniapour, Dr. Jehyra Asencio Yace, and Dr. Megha Patel—and the participating AmeriCorps-supported organizations, as well as the AmeriCorps members, VISTAs, and community partners who contributed to this study. They have provided valuable information and feedback to ensure the evaluation team is able to fully capture varied approaches to tackling climate change and how projects are able to leverage AmeriCorps national service models to address this critical priority. The evaluation team looks forward to continued collaboration with ORE on high-quality evaluation work that can inform policy and practice regarding how national service may be used to address national priorities. Finally, we would like to thank the esteemed members of the Technical Working Group—Rachel Bruns, Dr. Leslie Goodyear, Dr. Kathryn Newcomer, Gabriel Rhoads, Dr. Herbert Turner, Dr. Abraham Wandersman—who advise and provide feedback to improve the quality and clarity of this evaluation.

We also want to thank BCT Partners for their external evaluation of the evaluation capacity building component of the project and contributions to this report on this topic. Their outside perspective was vital in supporting the outcomes of the work.

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Suggested Citation

Good, K., Rakes, E., O’Conner, R., Holbrook, B., Shepard-Moore, H., MacDonald, A., & Fitzgerald, K. (2024). *An evaluation of AmeriCorps-supported programs tackling climate change*. ICF.

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This report was commissioned by AmeriCorps’ Office of Research and Evaluation under Contract # GS00Q14OADU209 and Order # 95332A20F0068. Information in this report is in the public domain.

Produced and published at U.S. taxpayer expense.

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Executive Summary

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.

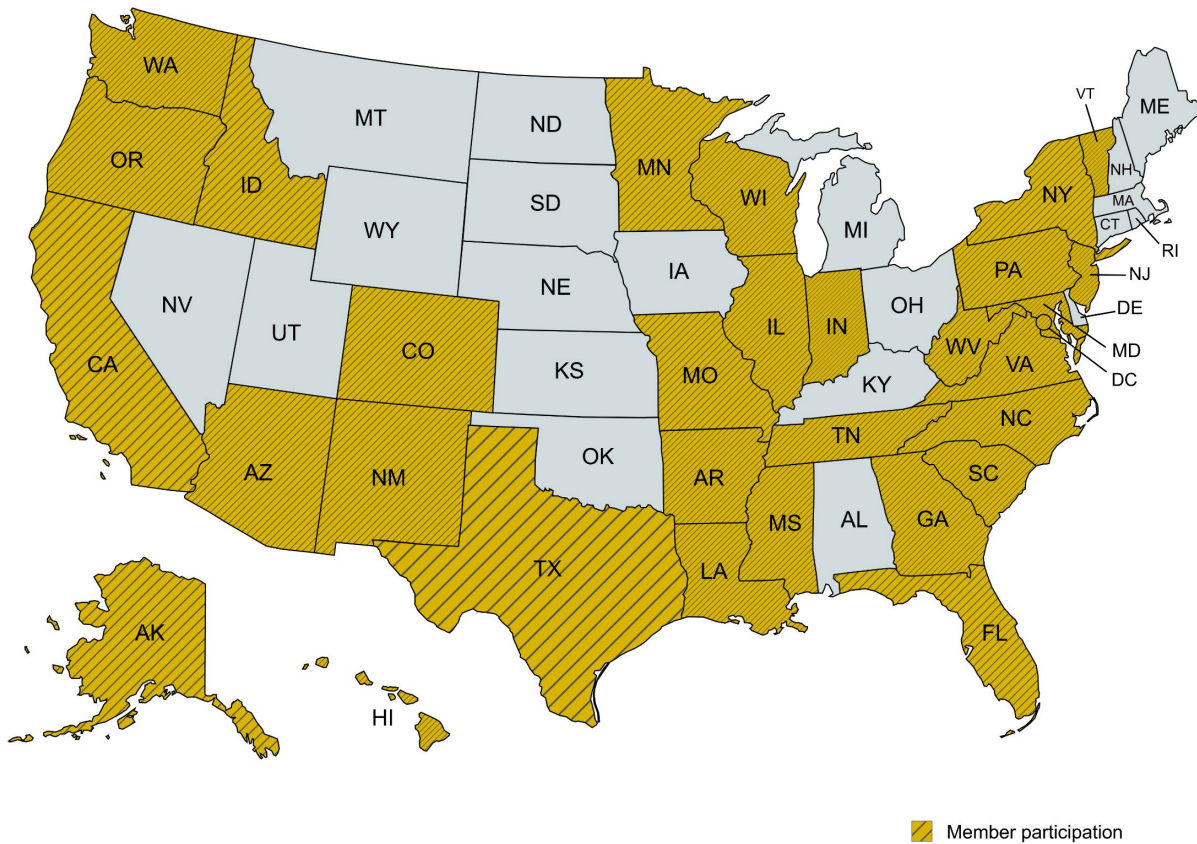
The study used a “bundling” approach that pooled together projects across AmeriCorps funding streams with similar program models and outcomes for the evaluation. This contract also included delivering evaluation

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 ES-1 shows the 30 states and Washington, DC, where members in the 15 projects are serving and ES-2 provides information summarizing each project.

EXHIBIT ES-1.—Map showing states where members are serving for 15 participating projects



Created with mapchart.net

EXHIBIT ES-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>Mission: Build community-powered solutions to advance community and environmental justice through renewable energy</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship and Economic Opportunity: Energy Efficiency and Employment</p> <p>Area serving: California (currently); has previously served throughout United States with AmeriCorps support</p>	<p># of members: 35</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: To serve on behalf of Colorado conservation corps that transform lives and communities through service, personal development and education statewide.</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Areas serving: Colorado</p>	<p># of members: 451 from 8 corps</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: To serve on behalf of Colorado conservation corps that transform lives and communities through service, personal development and education statewide.</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship and Disaster Services: At-Risk Ecosystems, Energy Efficiency, Disaster Assistance Provided, Awareness and Stewardship</p> <p>Areas serving: Colorado</p>	<p># of members: 240 from 8 corps</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>DC Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (The Corps Network)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: 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>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Areas Serving: 18 states throughout the United States</p>	<p># of members: 928 members from 16 corps</p> <p>Services Provided: Improve public lands, trails, and waterways; weatherize and retrofit low-income housing units</p>	<p>\$6,723,600 (FY21, Y3)</p>
<p>Hawai'i Conservation Leadership Development Program (Kupu)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: 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>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p>Areas serving: Hawai'i and the U.S. Pacific Islands of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas</p>	<p># of members: 235</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: 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>Focus: Capacity building in AmeriCorps focus areas: Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures, and Environmental Stewardship</p> <p>Areas Serving: City and County of Honolulu</p>	<p># of members: 17 VISTA members and 1 VISTA leader</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: 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>Focus: Capacity Building through Community Awareness and Engagement, Expansion and Strengthening of Partnerships</p> <p>Areas Serving: Hawai'i</p>	<p># of members: 10</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: To transform lives; as leaders and innovators, Ampact is working to demonstrate the power of national service to address complex social issues</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems, Awareness and Stewardship, and Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Areas Serving: Minnesota</p>	<p># of members: 100</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Minnesota GreenCorps (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: To ensure that every Minnesotan has healthy air, sustainable lands, clean water, and a better climate</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-Risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Areas Serving: Minnesota</p>	<p># of members: 48</p> <p>Services Provided: Implement locally-defined environmental projects in host communities</p>	<p>\$993,165 (FY22, Y2)</p>
<p>Missouri AmeriCorps St. Louis (Partnership for Youth, Inc.)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: 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>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Disaster Services and Environmental Stewardship: Disaster Assistance Provided and At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p>Areas Serving: Missouri and disaster services nationwide</p>	<p># of members: 42</p> <p>Services Provided: Disaster response/recovery support and tactical field support, improve public lands and trails, fire mitigation</p>	<p>\$684,600 (FY21, Y1)</p>
<p>North Carolina Project Conserve (Conserving Carolina)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: To serve Western North Carolina by building stronger, more educated, and more informed communities</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental stewardship: Awareness and Stewardship, At-risk Ecosystems, and Capacity Building and Leverage</p> <p>Areas Serving: Western North Carolina</p>	<p># of members: 35</p> <p>Services Provided: Education; volunteer engagement; create/improve public lands, rivers, and trails</p>	<p>\$499,990 (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>Virginia Service and Conservation Corps (Virginia State Department of Conservation and Recreation)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: To develop the next generation of environmental stewards, providing them with a deeper understanding of park operations, management, and environmental conservation</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p>Areas Serving: Virginia</p>	<p># of members: 74</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: To protect, preserve and enhance Washington's land, air, and water for current and future generations</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship and Disaster Services: At-risk Ecosystems and Disaster Assistance Provided</p> <p>Areas Serving: 18 Washington counties and disaster services nationwide</p>	<p># of members: 285</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: To contribute to healthy communities by providing people equitable access to resources that improve economic security</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: 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>Areas Serving: Washington</p>	<p># of members: 450</p> <p>Services Provided (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>Mission: To provide veterans with skills and knowledge related to natural resources management, public lands, and the environment</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Veterans and Military Families and Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p>Areas Serving: 17 states throughout the United States</p>	<p># of members: 95</p> <p>Services Provided: Improve public lands, trails, and public structures</p>	<p>\$1,119,904 (FY19, Y1)</p>

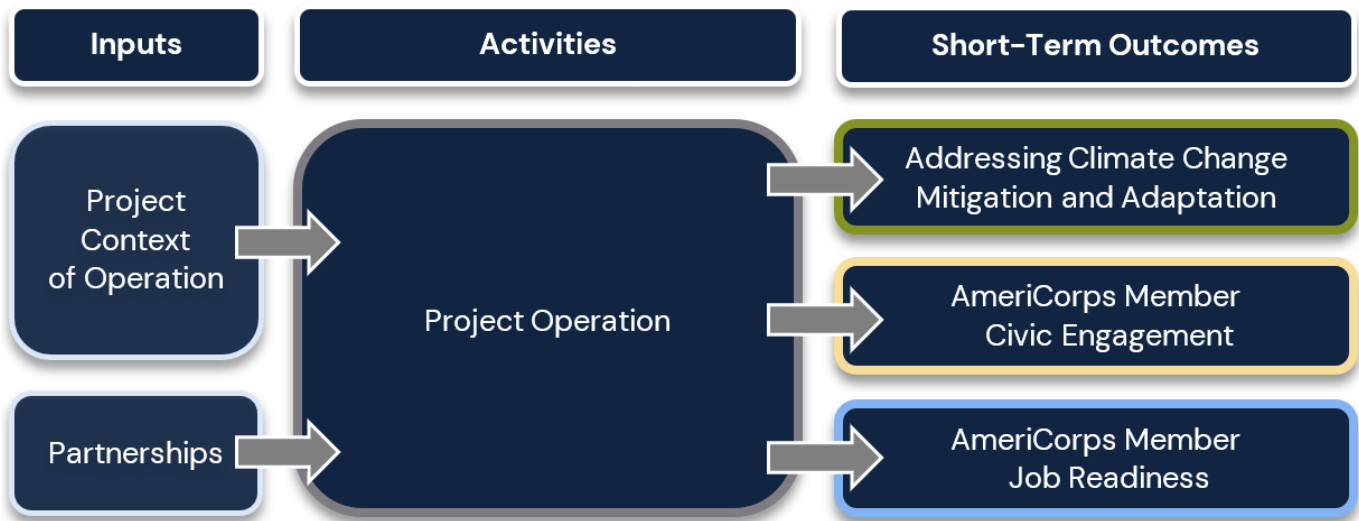
As a framework for the evaluation, a [logic model](#) was developed based on a document review of the AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors included in the study (see [Appendix A](#)). The logic model outlines the relationships between activities, expected outputs, and their desired 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 ES-3 shows the general relationship between the research question areas and the logic model components (e.g., contextual factors, inputs, activities, outcomes). See [Appendix A](#) for the research questions.

EXHIBIT ES-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%.¹

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 the individual case studies (see [Appendix B](#) for case studies.)

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

¹ 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.

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 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. The cross-cutting themes are presented in the Discussion and Recommendations chapter of the report.

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.

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

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

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).

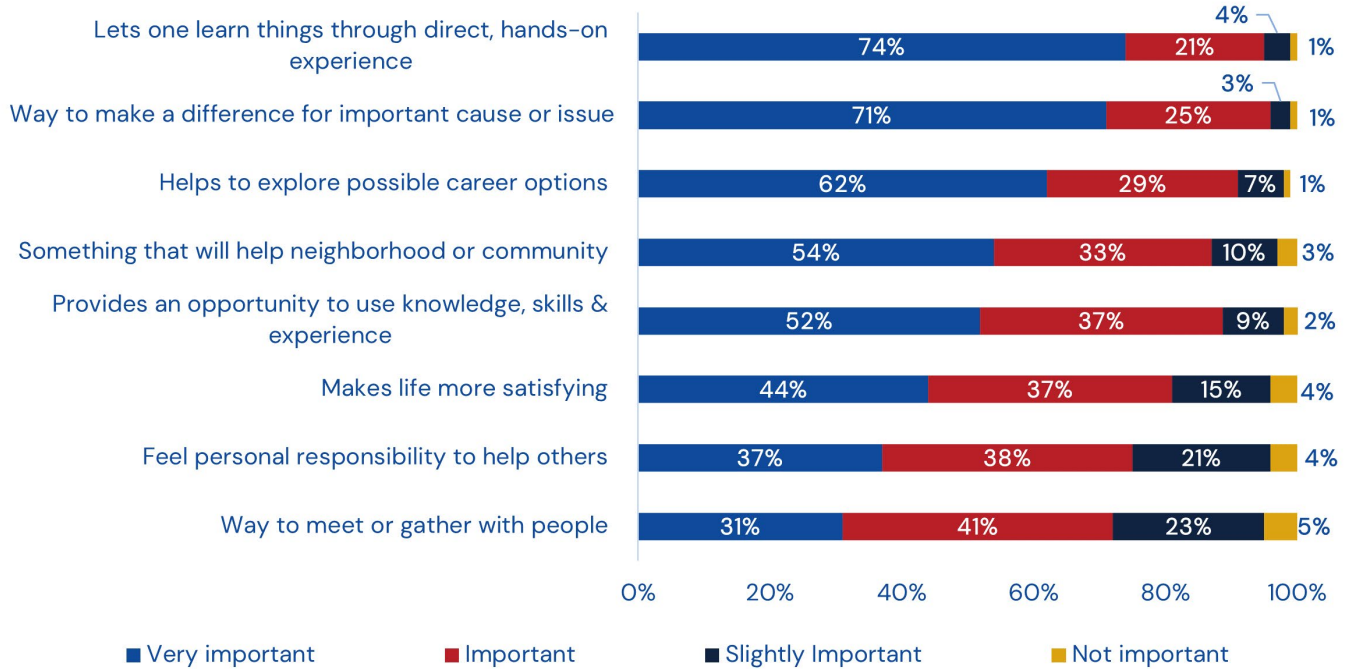
AmeriCorps Members are Passionate about Serving and Improving Climate Change Outcomes

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 ES-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 ES-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

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

Development Program 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.²

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.

[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

² 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.

- 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 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 Climacticas,” 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.”

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

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 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 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.

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

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 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.

Chapter 1: Introduction

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).

Prior Research on Volunteer Programs to Address Climate Change

This section provides an overview of prior research that falls under the focus areas of climate change defined for this study: (1) energy efficiency, (2) disaster response, (3) environmental stewardship and conservation, (4) community resilience and (5) education and training. The majority of research and evaluation focused on programs that address aspects of climate change with the use of volunteers consists of quasi-experimental designs and non-experimental designs (i.e., descriptive studies, case studies, etc.), which aligns with findings from AmeriCorps’ *2023 State of the Evidence Report* (Richman et al., 2023).

Energy Efficiency

To decrease greenhouse gas emissions, improving household energy efficiency has been globally recognized as a key strategy for communities to address the impacts of climate change (Nadel & Ungar, 2019). Primarily, volunteer-based programs focused in the area of energy efficiency provide minor to major household retrofit services, including but not limited to LED-lighting systems, low-flow showerheads and toilets, and installation of solar photovoltaic systems. Prior research shows that interventions of this nature tailored to households and their energy demands yield increased knowledge and increased dedication to energy efficiency plans within communities, especially among low-income households (Reames, 2016).

While useful for minor household retrofitting services, the use of volunteers is particularly effective for interventions that employ major retrofit technology such as solar power systems. As international and national agreements and legislation to implement renewable energy infrastructure struggle to pass, volunteer and nonprofit agencies have been used primarily as community ambassadors to increase household renewable energy use and decrease greenhouse gas emissions (Gillingham & Bollinger, 2021). Research on the accessibility of household renewable energy primarily focuses on solar photovoltaic sources and identifies a lack of education regarding the benefits and technology of solar energy as a key barrier to community adoption (Gai et al., 2021; Noll et al., 2014). Using volunteers as community ambassadors for renewable energy builds upon a wealth of economic and social behavioral research that indicates the importance of meaningful social interactions with trusted community members to increase adoption of new technologies within the household (Noll et al., 2014).

Disaster Response

For many years, the emergency response field has recognized the importance of disaster response support through the combined efforts of governmental agencies (e.g., Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA]) and volunteers to begin community resilience efforts following a disaster (Whittaker et al., 2015). Services are typically dependent on the type of disaster that occurred (e.g., hurricanes, tornados, flooding events), but tend to focus on volunteer search and rescue efforts, coordination and provision of food and shelter, clearing debris, and staffing disaster relief centers in support roles.

Within the context of AmeriCorps projects that focus on disaster response, members aim to help communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural and human-made disasters through the services described above (Richman et al., 2023). Volunteer programs that specialize in the area of disaster response are essential especially for their ability to reliably manage individuals who offer their support as informal volunteers (Twigg & Mosel, 2017). Through this approach, trained volunteers (such as AmeriCorps members in a disaster response project) can effectively supervise and support volunteers who provide vital disaster services such as staffing resource centers, managing donations, shelter provision, and creating and distributing care packages to individuals affected by the disaster.

To illustrate the specific outputs that volunteer programs that specialize in disaster response achieve through disaster response efforts, an analysis of AmeriCorps projects between 2012 and 2019 showed that disaster assistance projects yielded the following outcomes: 583 informational documents and training materials developed in efforts to assist in disaster preparedness, 454 resource guides or reports produced on disaster recovery efforts, and 371 service facilities staffed to aid in disaster responses (Sum et al., 2020).

Environmental Stewardship and Conservation

Across the environmental stewardship and conservation domain, the primary activities suitable for volunteer organizations and/or entry-level professionals include mitigating invasive species, improving wetland habitats,

trail maintenance, and introducing or improving healthy vegetation within ecosystems (Casazza et al., 2016). The primary focuses and methods of environmental stewardship and conservation practices vary widely according to a project's natural environments and regionally identified areas of importance. The literature base supports the need for conservation activities to be determined by the ecosystems in which programs are regionally located, thus requiring volunteer programs and their partners to have awareness of the most pressing stewardship demands and techniques effective for conserving habitats in their surrounding areas (Strassburg et al., 2020).

Volunteer programs such as those funded by AmeriCorps are vital players amid the current operating contexts of public land agencies. Underfunded and under resourced public land agencies in regions across the nation have accumulated a backlog of stewardship and conservation projects and thus require additional supports to begin these projects, such as trained volunteer organizations that focus on conservation (Ding & Schuett, 2020). Programs such as the Great Basin Institute (Christiansen, 2020) and the Washington Conservation Corps (The Watershed Company, 2015), which use service member crews trained in restoration strategies, have contributed to effective outcomes such as:

- Significantly reducing catastrophic wildfire risk through eliminating natural fire threats and thinning forest canopies.
- Improving biodiversity levels through the reduction of invasive plant species and planting of native plant species.
- Conducting trail maintenance to increase community engagement with public lands.

Community Resilience

As public awareness increases about the climate change related harm that specific populations may face, initiatives within volunteer programs have also been created to address the greater need for resilience that some communities may require. These populations often include older adults, low-income communities, and communities of color. To assist these populations in developing the capacity to prepare, respond, and recover from the effects of climate change, prior research indicates the primary strategies as building strong partnership networks of organizations embedded in local communities and trusted resource sharing (Plough et al., 2013; Yuen et al., 2017).

Community resilience initiatives such as these are essential to establishing and using connections with other community organizations to provide coordinated services, identify populations that may require increased services, and share information about available resources that individuals and families can receive to build and maintain resilience to climate effects (Roberts et al., 2021). Many prominent community resilience activities relate to the need to prepare for natural disasters; however, resilience activities increasingly include services aimed at altering behavior that may contribute to increased natural disasters and/or the provision of resources that raise awareness of risks posed by climate change.

With regard to implementing community resilience initiatives, effective, equitable approaches typically include the following:

- Developing a connective network of organizations to build community resilience in a cohesive approach.
- Communicating with populations of focus to develop culturally relevant communication strategies to reach populations at significant risk.

- Providing resilience outreach services and informational materials in multiple commonly spoken languages.
- Establishing and facilitating ongoing community programs to create disaster kits and report needs in the event of a disaster.

Across the spectrum of resilience building activities, prior research commonly notes the importance of soliciting input from communities to understand their resiliency needs by conducting events in populations of focus hubs (e.g., community centers, markets, retirement communities, etc.) to increase turnout and engagement with material (Yuen et al., 2017). Additionally, emerging research from resilience efforts in North Carolina suggests that volunteer programs such as AmeriCorps and their emphasis on functional outcomes may be a hindrance to building resilience through service (Farallon Strategies, 2023). Researchers noted that the historical emphasis on program outputs and outcomes has influenced the ability (or lack thereof) to invest in long-term strategies that benefit communities. To address this hindrance to authentic community resilience building, study authors suggest the importance of expanding opportunities for volunteer service that is focused on increasing community understanding and engagement with resilience activities, rather than restricting service to volunteer-centered interventions (i.e., community engagement with flood prevention versus the act of flood prevention).

Education and Training

Prior research on environmental interventions through the use of education and training primarily focuses on developing and delivering content to K–12 students and adult populations. While the recommended approaches to each audience had variation, delivery methods most often focused around classroom-based or hands-on formats. The external literature related to environmental and conservation education did not synthesize results on singular effective education activities but focused on identifying strategies for communities to self-identify the most effective methods of educating their community.

In a literature review focused on identifying climate change education strategies, two common themes of effective approaches were (1) programs focusing on making climate change information personally relevant and meaningful for learners and (2) education activities designed to engage learners (Monroe et al., 2019). To achieve the first aspect of effective education programming, research suggests that while learners can recognize the impact of climate change effects that are more apparent in other regions of the world (i.e., polar/island regions), contextualizing the effects of climate change to an audience's local environment can help to influence their understanding and motivation to alter their behaviors that contribute to climate change (Monroe et al., 2019).

To achieve the second aspect of effective education programming identified by prior research (engaging learners), literature suggests the use of several interventions such as small group discussions, hands-on learning, and field-based experiences (Monroe et al., 2019). An important clarification when developing educational and training content is to ensure that the intervention is active, learner-centered, feasible with the resources provided, and able to achieve expected educational outcomes. Interventions such as small group discussions, hands-on learning, and field-based learning were identified as particularly effective for their collaborative nature, allowing learners to work together, share ideas and observations, and arrive at new understandings as a result of their engaged learning (Monroe et al., 2019).

Overview of Study

To learn more about AmeriCorps projects that explicitly connect their work to climate change and to build evidence in this high-priority area, AmeriCorps contracted with ICF to conduct an evaluation study. 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 (i.e., preparation for green jobs, direct reference to climate change, equity, and recruitment) and includes the "big areas" of disaster response, conservation, wildfire mitigation, and energy efficiency.

AmeriCorps State and National and VISTA project applications from fiscal years 2020–2022 were reviewed, including:

- 49 applications from fiscal year (FY) 2020,
- 31 applications from FY 2021 AmeriCorps State and National grants and VISTA projects, and
- 9 FY 2022 AmeriCorps State and National grant applications.³

The review of applications illustrated the diversity across projects and funded projects with variation in activities, outcomes, community-level partner organizations, and populations of focus. 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.

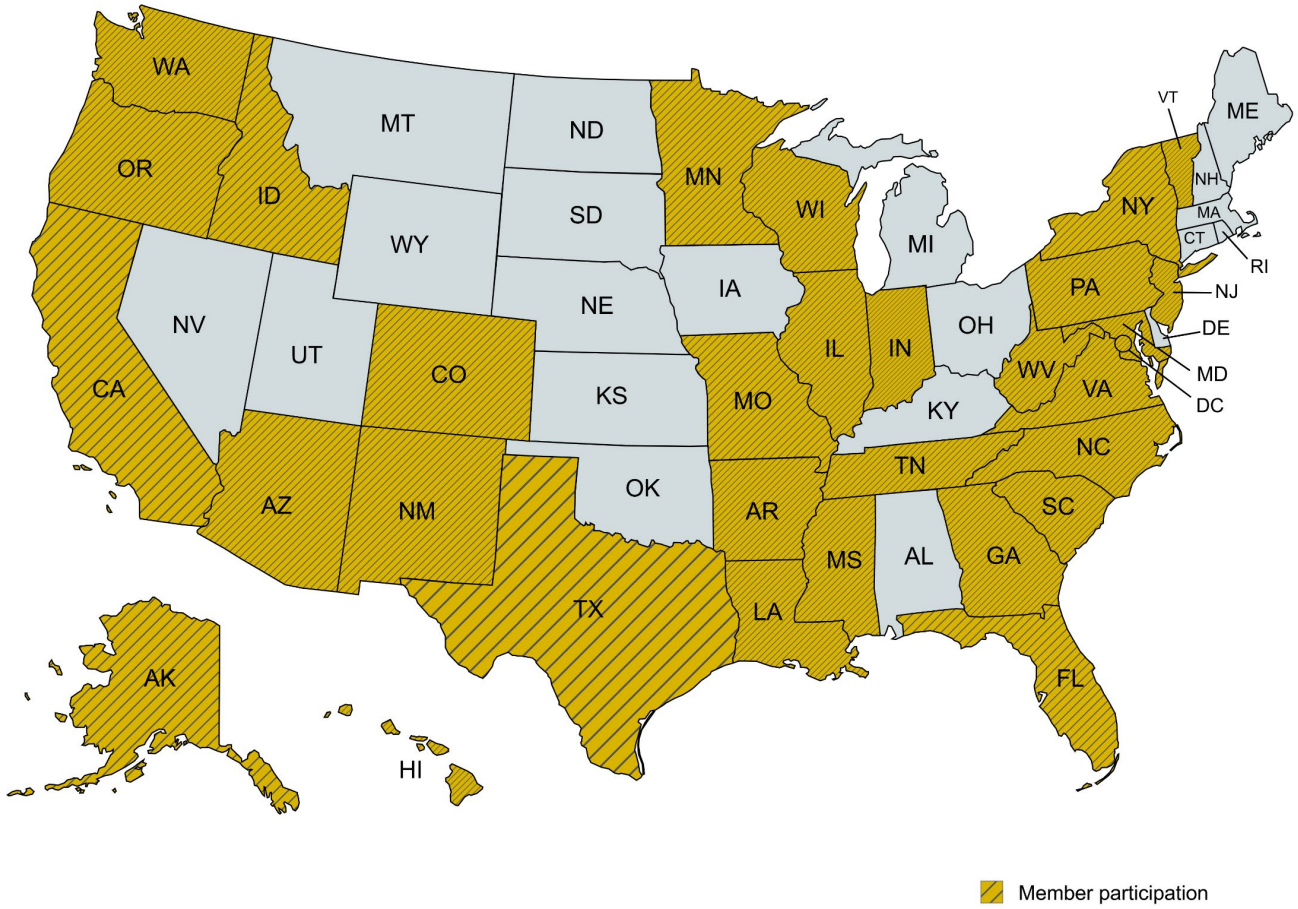
The project directors and sponsors for the 15 projects that met the selection criteria were contacted to invite their participation: 21 AmeriCorps State and National grantees and 3 VISTA sponsors. Study recruitment occurred in fall 2022 and resulted in 13 AmeriCorps State and National grantees and 2 AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors agreeing to participate in a bundled evaluation approach where projects across AmeriCorps funding streams with similar program models and outcomes are pooled together.⁴ 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.

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. The 15 AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors are implementing programming in one or more of the big areas of climate defined for this study (e.g., disaster response, conservation, wildfire mitigation, energy efficiency).

³ AmeriCorps Seniors and NCCC were excluded due to the differing length and scope of service projects.

⁴ Five AmeriCorps State and National project directors did not respond to multiple requests inviting participation in the study and 3 AmeriCorps State and National project directors declined participation citing reasons such as not having the capacity. One VISTA sponsor declined saying they did not currently have any AmeriCorps members.

EXHIBIT 1.—Map showing states where members are 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 and Funded Year)
<p>California GRID Alternatives SolarCorps (GRID Alternatives)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: Build community-powered solutions to advance community and environmental justice through renewable energy</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship and Economic Opportunity: Energy Efficiency and Employment</p> <p>Area serving: California (currently); has previously served throughout United States with AmeriCorps support</p>	<p># of members: 35</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: To serve on behalf of Colorado conservation corps that transform lives and communities through service, personal development and education statewide.</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Areas serving: Colorado</p>	<p># of members: 451 from 8 corps</p> <p>Services Provided: Disaster mitigation and relief; conserve and steward public lands; energy and water weatherization and retrofitting</p>	<p>\$1,775,104 (FY20, 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 and Funded Year)
<p>Colorado Climate Corps (Colorado Youth Corps Association)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: To serve on behalf of Colorado conservation corps that transform lives and communities through service, personal development and education statewide.</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship and Disaster Services: At-Risk Ecosystems, Energy Efficiency, Disaster Assistance Provided, Awareness and Stewardship</p> <p>Areas serving: Colorado</p>	<p># of members: 240 from 8 corps</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>
<p>DC Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (The Corps Network)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: 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>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Areas Serving: 18 states throughout the United States</p>	<p># of members: 928 members from 16 corps</p> <p>Services Provided: Improve public lands, trails, and waterways; weatherize and retrofit low-income housing units</p>	<p>\$6,723,600 (FY21, 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 and Funded Year)
<p>Hawai'i Conservation Leadership Development Program (Kupu)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: 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>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems</p> <p>Areas serving: Hawai'i and the U.S. Pacific Islands of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas</p>	<p># of members: 235</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>
<p>Hawai'i Office of Climate Change, Sustainability, and Resiliency (Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency)</p> <p>VISTA</p>	<p>Mission: 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>Focus: Capacity building in AmeriCorps focus areas: Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures, and Environmental Stewardship</p> <p>Areas Serving: City and County of Honolulu</p>	<p># of members: 17 VISTA members and 1 VISTA leader</p> <p>Services Provided: Research, data analysis, and visualization; partnership development; program development; grant writing; and resource development</p>	<p>--</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 and Funded Year)
<p>Hawai'i Office of Coastal and Conservation Lands (Department of Land and Natural Resources)</p> <p>VISTA</p>	<p>Mission: 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>Focus: Capacity Building through Community Awareness and Engagement, Expansion and Strengthening of Partnerships</p> <p>Areas Serving: Hawai'i</p>	<p># of members: 10</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>Mission: To transform lives; as leaders and innovators, Ampact is working to demonstrate the power of national service to address complex social issues</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-risk Ecosystems, Awareness and Stewardship, and Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Areas Serving: Minnesota</p>	<p># of members: 100</p> <p>Services Provided: 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>
<p>Minnesota GreenCorps (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency)</p> <p>AmeriCorps State and National</p>	<p>Mission: To ensure that every Minnesotan has healthy air, sustainable lands, clean water, and a better climate</p> <p>Focus and Member Service Year Objectives: Environmental Stewardship: At-Risk Ecosystems and Energy Efficiency</p> <p>Areas Serving: Minnesota</p>	<p># of members: 48</p> <p>Services Provided: Implement locally-defined environmental projects in host communities</p>	<p>\$993,165 (FY22, Y2)</p>

Research Design and Methods

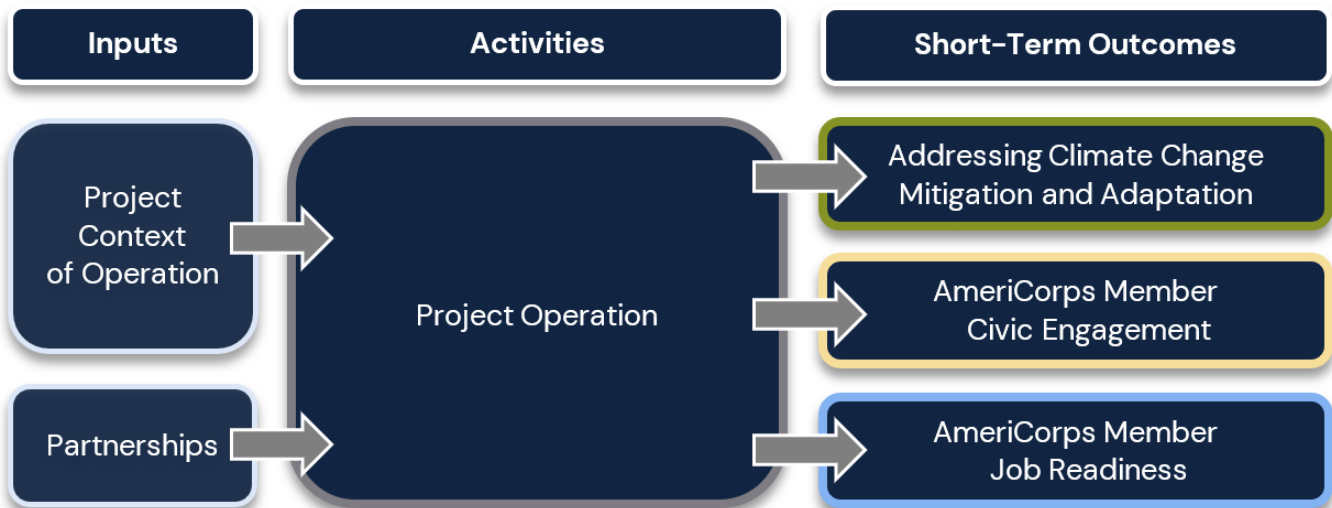
As a framework for the evaluation, a logic model was developed based on a document review of the AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors included in the study. The logic model outlines the relationships between activities, expected outputs, and their desired short- and long-term outcomes (see Appendix A). 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:

- Project context of operation,
- Project operation,
- Partnerships,
- Project outcomes (addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation, AmeriCorps member civic engagement, and job readiness), and
- 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). See Appendix A for the research questions.

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



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 a 20-minute survey to understand project models and strategies and assess project implementation and respective outcomes.

- Interviews/focus groups: Five AmeriCorps State and National grantees were selected for a more in-depth evaluation consisting of interviews and focus groups. The 2-day onsite visits occurred in late fall 2022 and winter 2024 and provided an opportunity to get an in-depth look at each project's context and operations and partnerships and outcomes—both for members and the community.
- Document review: Grant applications, project progress reports, and training materials were collected and systematically reviewed to better understand each project. Grant applications were reviewed as part of the study sample selection. These 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.

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.

Organization of This Report

Chapters 2–5 present the results obtained and key findings about the climate change projects in the study; including the services and activities (Chapter 2), role of partners and the community (Chapter 3), description of the AmeriCorps members (Chapter 4), and AmeriCorps member and community outcomes as well as facilitators and barriers in meeting community outcomes (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 presents findings on the evaluation capacity building services provided to participating climate change grantee and sponsor organizations. The report concludes with a discussion of the study findings and recommendations for AmeriCorps (Chapter 7). The appendices contain information about the evaluation methods and data sources (Appendix A) and the participating AmeriCorps State and National grantee case studies (Appendix B). Instruments used in the evaluation are included in Appendix C.

Chapter 2: Climate Change Services and Activities

This chapter describes the climate change services and activities of the 15 projects participating in the study. Survey data from project directors, partners, and members along with data collected during the site visits to five projects inform the findings.

Surveyed project directors were asked about the climate change services their organizations provide (exhibit 4). The majority of projects provide services related to environmental stewardship and conservation (79 percent) or education and training (79 percent).

EXHIBIT 4.—Organization services provided designed to impact climate change

AmeriCorps Projects	Environment Stewardship/ Conservation	Education or Training	Mitigation Activities	Energy Efficiency	Community Resilience	Disaster Response
California GRID Alternatives SolarCorps	-	✓	-	✓	-	-
Colorado Youth Corps and Colorado Climate Corps	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
DC Opportunity Youth Service Initiative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawai'i Conservation Leadership Development Program	✓	✓	-	-	-	-
Hawai'i Office of Climate Change, Sustainability, and Resiliency	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawai'i Office of Coastal and Conservation Lands	-	✓	-	-	✓	-
Minnesota Climate Impact Corps	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-
Minnesota GreenCorps	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Missouri AmeriCorps St. Louis	✓	-	✓	-	-	✓
North Carolina Project Conserve	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Virginia Service and Conservation Corps	✓	✓	-	-	-	-
Washington Conservation Corps	✓	-	✓	-	-	✓
Washington Service Corps	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Washington Vets Work Environment and Land Stewards project	✓	-	✓	-	-	-
Totals	11	11	9	7	7	5

As a follow up to the previous survey question—which asked about services provided to impact climate change—project directors, partners, and members were asked to describe specific activities they are doing. The open-ended responses were analyzed and organized by the six service areas (exhibit 5). Activities related to education/training and environmental stewardship/conservation were most frequently mentioned by all three groups. Following is an in-depth discussion of the subthemes of specific activities for each service area.

EXHIBIT 5.—Activities provided designed to impact climate change

Service Areas for Which Activities Described	Project directors (n=11)	Partners (n=34)	Members (n=262)
Environmental Stewardship and Conservation	82%	79%	65%
Education and Training	73%	50%	41%
Mitigation Activities	64%	41%	50%
Energy Efficiency	27%	29%	9%
Community Resilience	18%	15%	10%
Disaster Response	9%	6%	2%

Note. Responses could be categorized in more than one service area. A small number of responses were singular in nature and not able to be categorized as a theme.

Environmental Stewardship and Conservation

The majority of project directors (82 percent), partners (79 percent), and members (65 percent) described activities that were related to environmental stewardship and conservation. Within this service area there were four subthemes identified by the research team: **land-based stewardship**, **water and wetland-based stewardship**, **monitoring activities**, and **public lands maintenance**. The findings are organized by each subtheme:

- **Land-based stewardship.** Activities included restoration and conservation activities performed on public and private lands, inclusive of methods such as planting trees and native species. The following member response provides a detailed explanation of the land-based stewardship practices and the significance to climate resilience:

One example of a project that I feel directly addressed climate change is an “oak release” project we participated in on San Juan Island [Washington], alongside [project name]. While certain conifer trees, like Douglas firs, are potentially facilitated in growth by the impacts of climate change (they are growing faster and more concentrated in this area than ever), other trees, like the Gary oak, will face a more threatening destiny. Gary oaks are not “straight up” growing trees. They grow up, but also out, and they require a large amount of canopy space to thrive. With the Douglas firs growing so rapidly and effectively, Gary oak savannas are in danger. The oaks are losing their canopy space to the firs before they even stood a chance. This, to me, is a prime example of why publicly funded conservation work is very important. A private company has no incentive to tackle this problem because there is no profit incentive. Without the [project name], nobody would be saving the Gary oak savannas that make San Juan Island such a unique biosphere.

- **Water and watershed-based stewardship.** Activities included restoring riparian zones (land surrounding water responsible for biodiversity, groundwater filtration, and flood mitigation), beach clean-ups, and restoring native species such as shellfish to these environments. A partner response explains the restorative work on river communities and the cascading impact their efforts resulted in for other river communities:

We have done a lot of invasive removal and tree planting on river corridors. This has helped to restore the riparian habitat on the rivers we have worked on. This has helped multiple river corridors to have a more self-sustaining, diverse, and resilient trajectory.

- **Monitoring activities.** Activities included monitoring aspects of the project environment such as water quality, temperature, native species, and tree populations. A member response details the specific activities used to monitor local habitats:

We monitor nearshore aquatic habitats (and one freshwater lake) within Puget Sound [Washington] that are designated as aquatic reserves by the Department of Natural Resources. All of our projects are focused on ecology and habitat trends that are impacted by climate change but one in particular includes servicing sensors that are specifically measuring water quality in and outside of eelgrass beds to explore the impacts of ocean acidification on these spaces.

- **Public lands maintenance.** Activities included maintaining the well-being of and accessibility to public lands as a means of conservation. The two main activities were recreational trail maintenance and efforts to prevent erosion within the local environment. One partner response encompassed the majority of services captured within this theme:

Our field crews and members work on public lands (national forests, national parks) to complete a variety of conservation projects. Examples include trail maintenance (and decommissioning of unofficial social trails, OHV [off-highway vehicle] routes, etc.) [and] erosion control (water crossing stabilization, hillside strengthening).

Education and Training

Approximately three-fourths of project directors (73 percent) and half of partners (50 percent) and members (41 percent) described activities related to education and training. Within this service area there were four subthemes: **community education, development of resources, K–12 education, and developing skills/providing training services.** The findings are organized by each subtheme:

- **Community education.** Activities focused on educating the local community. Because each project serves a unique community, efforts varied. The most common activities included tabling events; social media outreach; guided field activities such as nature walks or tree planting; interpretative talks/presentations; and volunteer events to educate the community on local and global environmental topics such as climate change, habitat restoration, energy use, and conserving natural resources. One member response provides an example:

Generally, my participation as a community education specialist involved disseminating information to community members regarding climate change and adaptation and resilience strategies. In some circumstances, building relationships was best done through personal connection to the work of other community members, such as boots-on-the-ground volunteering.

- **Development of resources.** Activities included the development newsletters, web-based materials, blog posts, and summary reports. One member response illustrates an example:

I write in newsletters and the newspaper about climate change to teach people about the science, its importance, and what they can do about climate change.

- **K–12 education.** Activities typically consisted of educating school-aged children in a variety of settings such as school classrooms and field trips, often to educate youth on their local environment with an emphasis on the importance of conserving the environment and becoming literate in climate change issues. One partner response provides an example:

The project's mission is to provide students service-learning projects that link Washington State learning goals and standards with local environmental issues, inspiring stewardship of the Nisqually Watershed and the world. Programming we provide includes student tree plantings, salmon carcass tossing (to restore marine-derived nutrients to riparian corridors), water quality monitoring, nearshore monitoring, and other field-based service-learning activities.

- **Developing skills/providing training services.** Activities included developing natural resources-focused skills, knowledge, and certifications for both members and the communities. The majority of these services centered on increasing the potential workforce for roles that indirectly or directly address climate change, such as training members and the communities in solar panel installation, providing chainsaw certification services, and exploratory opportunities for students and teachers interested in the field. One partner response provides an example of technical training provided:

We provide both environmental and conservation field technician training to urban individuals who usually have no clue about how our environment is impacted by the things we do as humans and how important conservation is to our local community. They receive both technical training as well as participate in environmental and conservation stewardship building activities. This increases their knowledge and stewardship regarding climate change.

Mitigation Activities

Activities related to mitigation were organized into three subthemes: **fire mitigation**, **flood mitigation**, and **invasive species management**. Mitigation broadly refers to activities that aim to reduce or avoid adverse effects from climate change on the environment (e.g., decreasing forest fire fuels), while adaptation broadly refers to activities that involve adjusting to expected future climate conditions (e.g., raised flood barriers). The findings are organized by each subtheme.

- **Fire mitigation.** Activities included but were not limited to forest thinning, fuels reduction, prescribed burns, and actively responding to wildfires. One partner response describes several of these activities and the impact they have on the climate:

Prescribed fire helps to reduce fuel loading (less wildfire danger) and helps to increase species richness, preserving as many pieces of the environment as possible, hopefully making habitats more resilient to climate change. The Department of Conservation also has been involved in wildfire suppression for 85 years.

- **Flood mitigation.** Activities to mitigate the effect on local environments from flooding water were less commonly reported than the other two subthemes. A member response illustrates an example:

The other forestry crew ... focused a lot on repairing and preventing flood damage in the Big Thompson River Canyon [in Colorado].

- **Invasive species management.** Activities included the removal of invasive animals/insects, fungi, and plant species through a variety of methods such as chemical, biological, mechanical, and physical removal. One member response illustrates the use of mechanics to remove invasive species and its impact on climate change:

My work focused on removing invasive tree species using chainsaws in order to start to restore a more native balance of species. In particular, we removed a lot of Russian olive, which outcompetes native tree species for water, which is a more threatened resource due to climate change.

Energy Efficiency

Activities related to energy efficiency were categorized into two subthemes: **Energy use reduction** and **renewable energy**. The findings are organized by each subtheme.

- **Energy use reduction.** Activities to curb the household use of energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions included the use of home energy audits to identify opportunities to increase energy efficiency; removal of inefficient equipment and installation of efficient fixtures such as LED lights, insulation, and toilets; and promotion of behaviors among community members to increase energy efficiency. A project director response provides an example:

Crews are going into low-income housing and doing energy and water conservation work such as installing faucet aerators; insulating water heaters; installing LED lightbulbs, high-efficiency toilets; and other measures to both lower costs and reduce energy and water consumption and carbon footprint.

- **Renewable energy.** Providing renewable energy resources is the sole goal of one project within this evaluation and a primary focus for another, resulting in this subtheme being informed primarily by respondents from those two projects. Activities typically included connecting community members to resources to obtain solar energy, installation of solar panels for low-income households, and spreading information about transitioning to solar-powered energy. One member response identifies the activities employed by their project and the impact they have on community members and the environment:

We focus on continuing a path toward environmental justice, both socially and to address climate change, by providing impacted communities with clean energy in the way of affordable solar. This helps mitigate the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere and provides some financial relief to communities.

Community Resilience and Capacity Building

A small percentage of project director, partner, and member responses related to community resilience and capacity building. Community resilience is defined as a community's "ability to reduce exposure, prepare for,

cope with, recover better from, adapt and transform as needed to the direct and indirect effects of climate change” (Twigger–Ross et al., 2015, p. 2).

Within this service area there were two subthemes: **initiatives focused on equity and environmental justice** and **collaborations between organizations to increase organizational resilience**. The findings are organized by each subtheme:

- **Initiatives focused on equity and environmental justice.** Activities focused on connecting with the local community and collaboratively discussing and developing initiatives to address local effects of climate change. This theme is distinct from community–focused education largely due to its emphasis on soliciting and incorporating feedback from community members, especially communities that are historically or currently marginalized. Efforts within the category included developing community resilience and mobility hubs, hosting events to celebrate Indigenous populations and their environment, codeveloping resiliency plans, and holding communal field–based events. The following member response illustrates an example:

[I worked on] creating programs to address inequities in access to information, programs, and resources [and] convening working groups and discussions around community resilience and mobility hubs.

- **Collaborations between organizations to increase organizational resilience.** Because climate change is a universal concern, any efforts to effectively address the issues climate change presents cannot be singular to one field or organization. Activities within this subtheme included collaboration with other organizations to share and develop programs and policies to make their communities more resilient to climate change effects. Examples of these efforts included connecting organizations with relevant grant opportunities to conduct climate preparedness work, sharing and coproducing research with community organizations on community resiliency and sustainable practices, and providing technical assistance for organizations to increase their resiliency. One member response provides an example:

[I worked on] researching and building a model to connect small businesses with solar resources and convening stakeholder meetings to talk about how to design a program for energy efficiency for small businesses.

Disaster Response

Activities related to disaster response were the least frequently cited of the six service areas. There were no subthemes identified. Of the responses reporting activities within disaster response, common responses included first–responder services to natural disasters such as wildfires and hurricanes, removing debris in public areas following a disaster, and “mucking and gutting” (i.e., removing) materials from destroyed and damaged homes following a disaster. A member response that includes several of these specific activities provides an example:

[I provided] disaster response to Florida for hurricane relief activities (mucking and gutting homes, helping homeowners with downed trees, etc.).

Case Study Snapshots

Site visits provided an opportunity to learn more about the specific services members are performing in five AmeriCorps State and National–funded projects. The five case study sites were selected in consultation with



AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation staff. Each site was purposefully selected because its programming focused on one or more areas of climate change as defined by this study. The five sites included projects funded under the AmeriCorps State and National project and were located throughout the country (California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Minnesota, and Missouri).⁵

Following are snapshots for each project that highlight each organization's mission, description of how services relate to climate change, and the services in which members engage. Complete case studies for each project are in Appendix B.

GRID Alternatives SolarCorps

What is the organization and AmeriCorps project? GRID Alternatives is the nation's largest nonprofit installer of clean energy technology and, as such, pursues many initiatives to make renewable energy more accessible to communities with economic and environmental justice inequities. GRID Alternatives began in 2001 during the California energy crisis. SolarCorps, in 2023, recruited and retained 35 members across the 8 affiliate offices throughout the state in major cities to assist GRID Alternatives staff (approximately 450 across the organization) with the no-cost solar installation services, solar workforce training, and clean mobility outreach.

⁵ One of the two VISTA projects in the study concluded in spring 2023 and therefore this sponsor opted to only participate in the first part of the study (i.e., survey data collection). The other VISTA was invited to be a case study site but declined due to limited staff capacity.

What is the mission? To build community–powered solutions to advance economic and environmental justice through renewable energy.

How do the services relate to climate change? These services directly mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing the consumption of resources such as natural gas that produce emissions harmful to the local and global environment. Furthermore, incorporating SolarCorps members in the services that a renewable energy organization provides serves to extend valuable training and experience to members from communities served in a field with growing employee demand and a growing role in climate solutions.

What services do members engage in to address climate change? Members are integrated alongside teams of GRID Alternatives project staff to assist with no–cost solar installation service, solar workforce training, and clean mobility outreach. Members conduct rotations in three service areas, each of which is described in detail below. This approach allows members to have exposure to various focus areas in the solar industry and develop technical skills in valuable topics to better inform their future career exploration and knowledge of solar overall.

- **No–Cost Solar Installation:** Members who assist with no–cost solar installation for low–income households within the Sacramento, CA, service area spend time working throughout the various stages of GRID Alternatives solar installation. These are known as the Construction Teams within the organization.
- **Workforce and Volunteerism:** Members serving on the Workforce and Volunteerism Team assist project staff in recruiting, training, and managing prospective trainees and volunteers. Workforce members assist with GRID Alternatives' Installation Basics Training (IBT) program—a 200–hour introductory course to acquire the skills to pursue employment in solar 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.
- **Outreach:** When serving on the Outreach Team, members educate low–income families on the benefits of household solar systems and available resources in their community to pursue solar installation and increase household energy efficiency. SolarCorps members spread awareness of GRID Alternatives' no–cost solar installation, determine if homeowners are eligible for GRID Alternatives' projects, communicate with families throughout the solar installation process, and help eligible families locate and apply for energy assistance programs.

Mile High Youth Corps Energy & Conservation Program

What is the organization and AmeriCorps project? The Energy & Water Conservation program is one of four programs implemented by Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC), which is located in Denver, CO.⁶ Other programs include Land Conservation, YouthBuild Construction, and YouthBuild Health and Wellness. Across its four programs, MHYC has a membership of approximately 250, with the Energy & Water Conservation program typically accounting for 25 members each year. At the time of the site visit, MHYC was in its thirty–first year of operations overall; within MHYC, the Energy & Water Conservation program was in its

⁶ Colorado Youth Corps Association's (CYCA's) serves as the legal applicant for the Youth Corps for Colorado and the Colorado Climate Corps AmeriCorps programs, while the implementation of AmeriCorps–funded activities occurs at eight distinct corps that are serving as subgrantees with CYCA. Mile High Youth Corps is one of the eight Corps.

seventeenth year of operations. MHYC is one of the two Colorado corps that have an Energy & Water Conservation program. MHYC serves 23 counties in metro Denver and the southern Front Range regions.

What is the mission? To help youth make a difference in themselves and their community through meaningful service opportunities and educational experiences.

How do the services relate to climate change? The project’s services directly mitigate climate change through the focus on energy and water conservation while serving those from low-income households. The Colorado Youth Corps Association’s (CYCA’s) grant application states that “by 2060, there could be as much as a 35 percent increase in water demand and a 25–50 percent increased risk of water shortages” and that in Colorado the precipitation is decreasing and temperatures are increasing. Energy and water conservation are critical concerns statewide. Per the CYCA’s logic model, residential buildings consume more than 21 percent of the total energy in the United States. Low-income individuals draw more energy because of inefficient homes and realize the greatest economic consequences.

What services do members engage in to address climate change? To promote environmental values and sustainability and positively impact the community, MHYC Energy & Water Conservation program members provide services designed to save energy and water in low-income households within the program’s service area at no cost to the income-qualified beneficiaries. As part of these services, members largely engage in energy audits and retrofitting or the addition of new technology or features to existing energy and/or water use systems within the households of low-income communities. Trained members begin service projects within income-qualified households with an energy audit to determine the baseline energy and water use of each client residence and identify technology that can be installed to improve the efficiency of energy and water appliances.

Following the audit, members are deployed to single housing or multifamily complexes to install energy- and water-saving technology such as ultra-high-efficiency toilets, low-flow aerators, low-flow showerheads, programmable thermostats, and LED light bulbs. Following installations, members have conversations with residents about operating and maintaining the new technology, suggest behavioral changes to reduce energy and water use, share available resources for utility assistance, and as able, refer residents to external resources to continue assistance in the area of increasing energy efficiency (i.e., major weatherization projects such as heating systems). Each year, the Energy & Water Conservation program completes 1,100 to 1,200 in-home service visits to income-qualified households.

Ampact and Climate Impact Corps

What is the organization and AmeriCorps project? Ampact, a national nonprofit in Minneapolis, MN, was founded as the implementation arm of ServeMinnesota, Minnesota’s AmeriCorps Commission. The first project, Reading Corps, was launched in 2003. Specializing in managing and scaling high-quality AmeriCorps projects, Ampact currently has 10 evidence-based AmeriCorps projects in 3 areas: education, environment, and healthy futures. Climate Impact Corps is situated in the environmental area of Ampact. Corps members use evidence-based strategies to help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change.

What is the mission? Organizationally, Ampact’s mission is to transform lives. As leaders and innovators, Ampact is working to demonstrate the power of national service to address complex social issues.

How do the services relate to climate change? Minnesota is experiencing higher temperatures, more extreme weather, flooding, and changes in the ecosystem. These climate changes are a result of increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In the Twin Cities, annual average temperatures

increased by 3.2 degrees from 1951 to 2020, which was faster than both the national and global rates of increase.

What services do members engage in to address climate change? Within Climate Impact Corps there are three initiatives to address climate change in Minnesota: (1) Community Forestry, (2) Community Resilience, and (3) Home Energy. The three initiatives align with Minnesota’s Climate Action Framework, which is the state’s climate action plan.

- **Community Forestry:** The Community Forestry program focuses on preserving and enhancing Minnesota’s tree canopy. Approximately 50 members are serving in this initiative. Having a strong urban tree canopy is a climate solution that can have several impacts. Trees provide shade, which can have economic impacts in terms of decreasing costs for cooling buildings. Trees clean the air from wildfire smoke because they will both trap particulate matter and remove ground level ozone from the air, which has positive health impacts. In their placement sites, members plant, maintain (e.g., water), and inventory trees. With Minnesota’s increasing amounts of invasive pests, such as the emerald ash borer, some members manage the tree canopy by marking infested trees so that they can be removed. Members also plan events and do community outreach.
- **Community Resilience:** Members with the Community Resilience initiative are implementing various climate solutions and collaborating with the community to create cohesion that strengthens the community and makes it more resilient. The approximately 45 members have position titles of community steward facilitators or sustainability coordinators. 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. Sustainability coordinator member positions are often tasked with developing and/or maintaining initiatives to increase the sustainable practices of a partner organization.
- **Home Energy:** AmeriCorps also has a smaller number of members (approximately five) serving in its Home Energy initiative, which historically places members within the state’s weatherization assistance program to complete home energy audits and weatherization work. Those service activities tie into the state’s clean energy and efficient building goal within Minnesota’s Climate Action Framework.

AmeriCorps St. Louis

What is the organization and AmeriCorps project? AmeriCorps St. Louis, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1994 in Missouri under the name Partnership for Youth Inc., provides training and development opportunities to AmeriCorps national service members through service on the Emergency Response Team (ERT). The ERT project has three areas of focus: (1) disaster response, (2) environmental stewardship, and (3) wildland fire. Member terms are 11-month positions and service is performed in all three areas.

What is the mission? 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 the communities they serve.

How do the services relate to climate change? Through the provision of disaster response rapid deployment teams, AmeriCorps St. Louis is serving communities that have experienced extreme weather events as a result of climate change. The environmental stewardship activities respond to the effects of

climate change on different ecological systems. Fire mitigation services are focused on preventative measures to support areas that are more susceptible to wildfires due to changing weather patterns such as increased temperatures and less precipitation.

What services do members engage in to address climate change? Members serve in all three project areas, each of which is further described here. When AmeriCorps St. Louis is called for natural disasters and is able to respond, disaster missions become their first priority. During other times in the 11-month service term, members are serving on conservation projects.

- **Disaster Response:** Given the unpredictability of natural disaster occurrence, members are deployed when the project receives a mission request from federal, state, and/or nonprofit organizations with concentrations in disaster relief. Upon AmeriCorps St. Louis determining they can accept the request; project staff identify members (often those who express interest in disaster response) to deploy to the disaster. Deployments typically last up to a month in which members work 6 days and receive 1 day off. To avoid member burnout, the project intentionally limits teams to 30 continuous days of service. If further support is needed within the community and funding is available, the project occasionally sends a replacement team of members to continue service.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** For both environmental stewardship and wildfire response service projects, members are usually deployed for 5 days or, in some instances, 10-day periods. Service project locations are often several hours from St. Louis. Members primarily perform services related to habitat restoration and invasive species management.
- **Wildfire Response:** To assist with wildfire management, members conduct several activities to contribute to vital wildfire services. Primarily, members assist partner organizations through the construction of fire lines, which are dug to contain a burn within a specific area. Members also assist partner agencies with prescribed burns to remove invasive species, restore nutrients to the habitat, and manage forest health. Members frequently help partners ignite burns, maintain the fire line, and extinguish burns that encroach the fire line. Occasionally, government agencies request the assistance of members to respond to wildfires due to a lack of government personnel.

Kupu Conservation Leadership Development Program

What is the organization and AmeriCorps project? Kupu, a nonprofit in Hawai'i that recently expanded into the U.S.-affiliated Pacific, was established in 2007 by the chief executive officer, chief operating officer, and one of its board members. Two of the three founders were former AmeriCorps national service members. Kupu promotes sustainable practices, environmental education, and community engagement through hands-on experiences. Partnering with more than 200 organizations, Kupu operates numerous projects and two are AmeriCorps-funded. Previously, Kupu was an AmeriCorps VISTA sponsor.

What is the mission? To empower youth to serve their communities through character-building, service-learning, and environmental stewardship opportunities that encourage *pono* (integrity) with *ke Akua* (God), self, and others.

How do the services relate to climate change? The climate change problems plaguing the region served by Kupu are well-known and documented in its logic model:

1. The area has unique and fragile native ecosystems and ecological services that are exceptionally vulnerable to decline and degradation results from invasive species, climate change, and natural disasters.
2. Invasive species are one of the most pervasive threats in the U.S. Pacific.
3. Excessive trail usage and a backlog of trail maintenance threaten user safety and damage sensitive natural environments.
4. The U.S. Pacific is susceptible to climate change impacts such as catastrophic weather events and wildfires.
5. General public information about environmental issues is limited.

What services do members engage in to address climate change? Recognizing a lack of information on career pathways to conservation fields, entry-level experiences are provided to AmeriCorps members to prepare them for future careers. The project lengths are 6 and 11 months. Members may serve for up to two terms. In its current 3-year grant, Kupu has a goal of having 235 AmeriCorps members who will remove invasive species, establish native vegetation, and remediate streams and trails at approximately 100 service sites. Service sites include federal, state/territory, and community-based nonprofit conservation agencies that manage parks and public lands in Hawai'i and in the U.S. Pacific Islands of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Members are placed in host sites where they are trained to address one or more of the five problems identified in Kupu's logic model and mentored to be the next generation of leaders in conservation. The initiatives and member duties vary depending on the host site at which the member is placed.

Initiatives include invasive species removal, native habitat restoration and protection, watershed management, marine conservation, lab work, research, environmental education, and outreach and leading volunteer groups. Members are exposed to a broad array of professional opportunities within several environmental fields: ornithology, botany, natural and aquatic, resource management, biology, marine biology, and Hawaiian cultural studies. By working side-by-side with conservation professionals, members gain insights into the conservation field and how to give back to the community. The services members provide are varied and tailored to the conservation mission and needs of the host sites.

Chapter 3: Role of Partners and Community Involvement

This chapter describes the role of partners in working with AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors and broader community involvement.

Role of Partners

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. 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. One project director explained the diversity of the many partners:

I think we're right around 60 site partners across those three initiatives ... we have nonprofit partners, higher education partners, government partners at the local, county, and state levels. ... We are in rural, urban, and suburban areas. I mean we're really varied and really spread out, which adds some complexity in terms of how you're supporting all these places. But I think one of the kind of highest potential ... systems level impacts that AmeriCorps can have is the fact that you have all these members placed with all of these different organizations, implementing different solutions, different perspectives ... really developing that systems level holistic view among these people, many of whom are going to go into careers and will have a much better understanding of the entirety of the problem and potential solutions.

Surveyed partners—which included regional organizations or branches of the program, city and county offices, and federal agencies—were asked to indicate the types of activities and services they provide (exhibit 6).

EXHIBIT 6—Partner provided activities and services (n=48)



Note. Respondents could select more than one response.

Nearly three-fourths of the partners (71 percent) reported that they collaborated on **supporting members or volunteers while on the job**. One interviewed partner explained:

This year I spent an afternoon giving them several programs virtually and discussing fire ecology and invasives and why we do what we do. Then when they're down here on some of those rainy, miserable snowy days when they can't get out, I use that opportunity to give them programs and have ecological discussions with them and just have them ask questions. I gave safety talks in the beginning of this year with tick safety and other venomous snakes and poison ivy and all that kind of stuff that they can encounter down here. So I do a fair bit of training with them all the time. Even on just an ordinary workday when we're out there at lunchtime we're all sitting around and I'll talk with them and explain what the project is and why we're doing this.

A majority of partners also reported that they collaborated with a grantee/sponsor on **coordinating program activities** (69 percent). This includes activities such as coordination of services to communities. For example, a partner in the energy conservation space said they coordinate with the AmeriCorps–funded project on installations. In another project, the partner coordinates all the entities who are helping with disaster recovery services.

Approximately two-thirds of the partners said they train members or volunteers to develop required skills (65 percent) or identify knowledge and skills for job requirements (65 percent). One project staff shared:

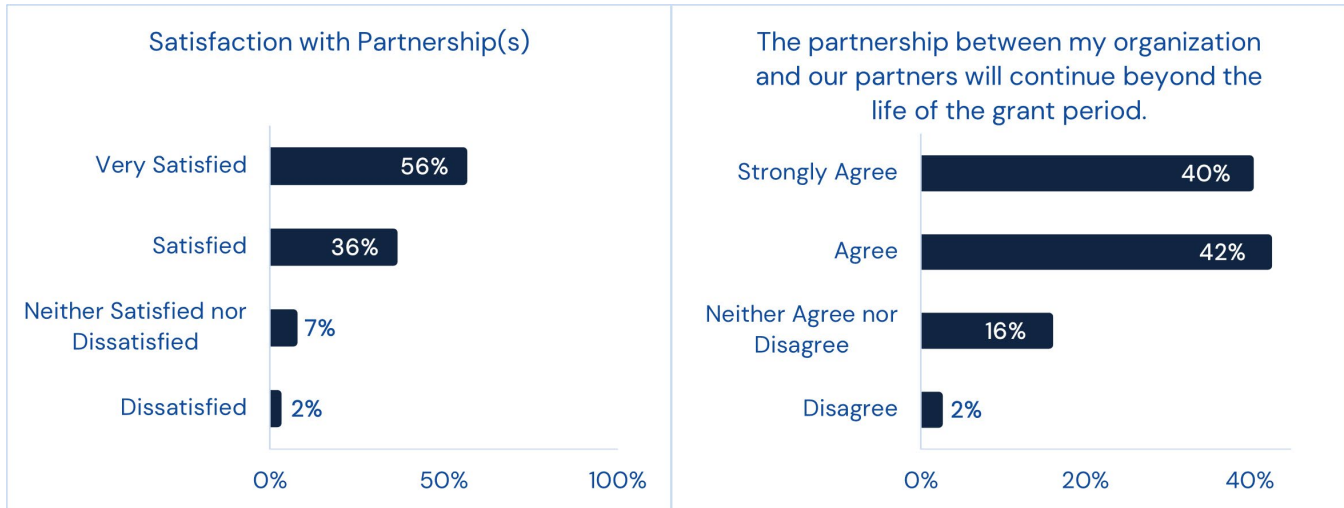
They're [partner] giving our members new information, new knowledge, new education, or connections that they otherwise wouldn't get. So, our members can then say, "Hey I've always been interested in a wildlife biologist job. I don't know anything about it, let me go serve on this project where I can talk to a wildlife biologist and determine if this is something I am interested in." ... it also gives our partners the opportunity to potentially, down the line, recruit alums of our program because they have seen what our members are trained on and how they operate. They trust the skills and experience of our members and alums to say that's someone that I feel comfortable now taking on as an employee.

More than half of the partners reported **providing facilities or equipment for training activities** (58 percent). An example of the latter was shared by one project staff, "They [partner] have given us a NABCEP [renewable energy certification organization] curriculum to help our fellows who are interested in NABCEP certification. They have a study group and really work through the content together."

In some situations, **partners contract with the organization for AmeriCorps members to provide services**. One partner said:

We'll do the bid walk where we'll solicit proposals for that work and Mile High—that's when we partner with them to do those installations ... in terms of our partnership with Mile High Youth Corps, it's typically in the [housing] units and it involves the shower heads, aerators, LED bulbs, and the CO [carbon dioxide] detectors."

Nearly all of the partners (91 percent) reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their partnership (exhibit 7). More than 80 percent of partners either agreed or strongly agreed that their partnership would continue beyond the grant period.

EXHIBIT 7.—Partner satisfaction and likelihood to continue partnership (n=45)

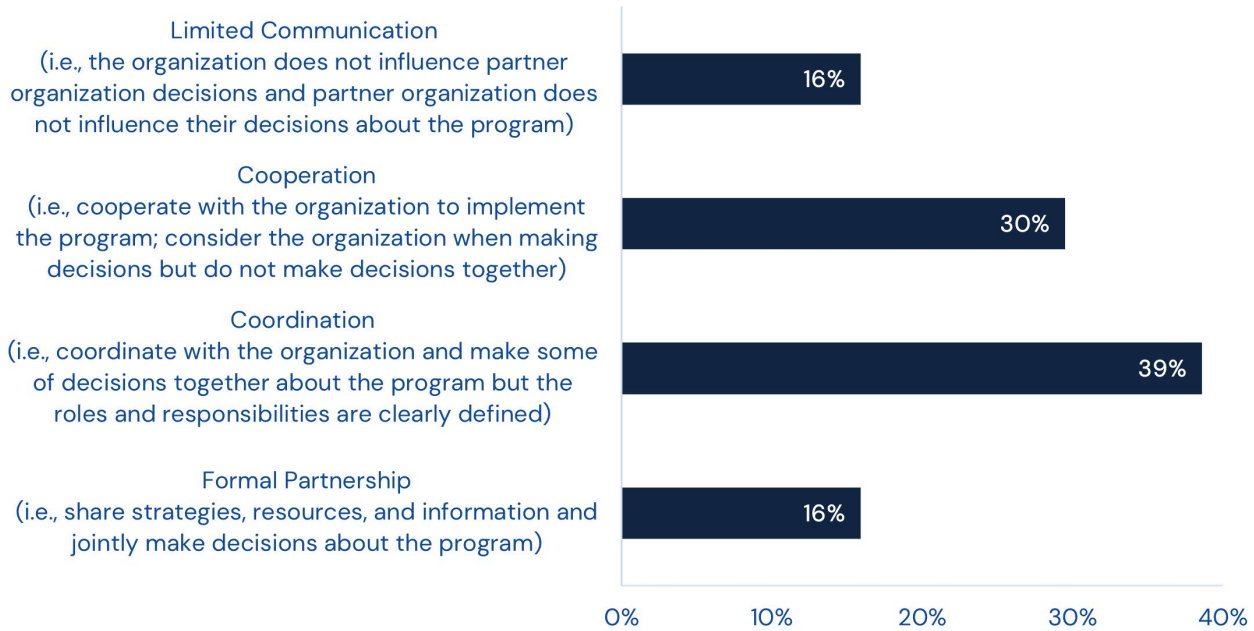
Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Partners indicated that the nature of their organization’s relationship with the AmeriCorps projects varies depending on the ways the partner was supporting the project (exhibit 8). Partners most commonly categorized them as coordination (39 percent) with some joint decisions made; followed by cooperation where the organization is considered when making decisions, but decisions are not made together (30 percent). Formal partnerships, where decisions are made together and resources, strategies, and information are shared, are only evident in a small percentage of partner responses (16 percent). One interviewed project director provided an example of how a formal partnership looks in practice:

[It is about] how can we provide a contribution to this effort and recognize that the site itself has a lot and knows the community better than we do. They understand the people who they’re trying to serve better than we do. So can we provide additional tools that help them do things better that they can pull from and make a true partnership, rather than just asking them to implement the program.

A small percentage of partners characterized their partnership as one that had limited communication (16 percent). That is not necessarily a negative as it again depends on the intended relationship. For example, one AmeriCorps project partner organization provides financing to nonprofits so they can transition to solar systems, said, “Everything else is on email. We rarely do Zooms because the relationship is already built. They email us the proposal, we’ll run it through our calculator and email it back.”

EXHIBIT 8.—Type of partnership (n=44)



In response to an open-ended survey item about what made partner relationships successful, two surveyed project directors shared that **having AmeriCorps members who are alumni working for the partner organizations contributed to the strong relationship**. One project director explained, “One aspect that makes the partnership particularly successful is having multiple alumni of the project serving as supervisors. They are more aware of project requirements and provide a good experience for current members.”

Three project directors cited the **value of partners providing career pathways and skills training to members**. One project director shared:

The Bureau of Land Management is one of our keystone partners in hiring AmeriCorps crews to perform fee-for-service activities on the public land they manage. They invest approximately \$1 [million] per year in deploying conservation service corps crews, which is: critical match on the grant; critical workforce readiness experience for members; critical income to keep the overall program solvent; critical networking partner for the corps-to-career pathway for members; and critical partner to ensure our members have opportunities to execute life-saving climate change activities.

A few project directors shared instances where partner relationships were **challenging**. Three project directors mentioned **budget and timeline challenges**. One project director said:

Their budget timelines are different than ours, and when your program is dependent on their decision-making, it can be hard to navigate or plan. I know that our partners there are doing the best they can based on their own spheres of control, however, there is a lot that their leadership is needing to consider from regulations to politics.

Another project director noted challenges with the “fit” of AmeriCorps service activities and that of the partners’ service delivery models. This project director explained:

The challenge has been that their work doesn't fit neatly into our program model. They have established programs in community forestry and green careers youth training that can benefit from the added capacity of AmeriCorps, but I know that they feel our outlines, position descriptions, and member activities are too specific. This is a common conflict with several of our sites, especially those that are working in innovative ways to promote environmental justice and equity. They want more flexibility in the kinds of activities that members can do. It can be a challenge for us to navigate, but one that we are committed to because the work that they are doing aligns very strongly with our mission, if not necessarily with the program model.

Interviews with project directors and staff and partners selected for the site visits provided additional insights on the role of partners with the AmeriCorps State and National projects. **Most frequently, the role of partners was that of a placement site for AmeriCorps members and the partners provided training to members.**

All AmeriCorps–funded projects have a strong focus on AmeriCorps member development and preparing them with skills and career pathways. Partners are integral to fulfilling the project's goals as it relates to equipping members with the skills and providing learning experiences. One partner noted, "I do a fair bit of training with them all the time. Even on just an ordinary workday when we're out there at lunch time, we're all sitting around and I'll talk with them and explain what the project is and why we're doing this."

Partner organizations have rich networks and frequently either become a place for AmeriCorps members' future employment or aid in helping members become connected with similar organizations.

One member explained the value, noting:

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. I find that there are a lot of people who are eager to teach you, to bring you into the things that they're interested in. And they want to share that knowledge. They are very supportive of you, regardless of what your interest is ... because of our program's training and the amount of time and energy they put into member development, you have all those technical skills and people skills to back up whatever path you want to take.

One project staff said:

The most effective thing is that we're able to connect our members with people who know what the jobs are and who've been in these roles. They're learning from experts and often local experts from Hawai'i or the areas that they're from. I think that's the strength of our

Case Study Highlight: Mile High Youth Corps

In 2023 and 2024, Mile High Youth Corps began a new initiative called "Promotoras Climacticas," a model adapted from Latin America that is based on the idea of learning from the community and strengthening connections to local neighborhoods. Corps member serving as Community Climate Ambassadors in Promotoras Climacticas work closely with Denver's Climate Action, Sustainability and Resiliency Office 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 Equity and Stabilization neighborhoods.

program by far But at the end of the day, it's the connections they make with the people who are doing the work. And I think the people who are doing the work. They're connected to the land. In Hawai'i, the culture and the land are one thing. It's not really separated. And so a member experience in working in the land is—I want to say a little different than a member experience maybe on the continent ... here it's embedded ... from our orientations, we really ... from the start to the end, we have a [Hō'ike] or end-of-term celebration.

Partners are crucial for AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors to meet their grant objectives and achieve performance targets. Project staff shared, “[Our organization] wouldn’t be where it is today without our partners. ... They provide the opportunity to be in the land or in the ocean and they provide that skill set [training].”

One partner explained that the benefit to their organization of working with the AmeriCorps–funded project was that it enhanced their capacity. “There is no way without them that we could have people working in all these communities across the state. Like I was saying, the onboarding help, the hiring help, all of that is not something we’d ever be able to replicate.”

Community Involvement

Information on community involvement was obtained through site visit interviews with project directors and staff, partners, and community members. For three of the five sites, the communities were primarily benefactors of the services versus being involved with planning for or implementing climate solutions. For example, recipients of energy audits and retrofits, solar installations, trail restoration, wildfire mitigation, and disaster response services.

For community resilience and sustainability initiatives, **meeting the communities where they are and recognizing context is important for entry into the community, engaging the community in the service projects, and developing community capacity.** Project staff shared:

It's safe to say the majority of the host sites we work with are community-led. Kupu's role is to come in and support that leadership at the end of the day, especially with the nonprofits. ... that's how we try to enter other areas of the Pacific as well like Guam, American Samoa ... we still want to get to those local organizations, who know their backyards and know what the community needs. We just want to support that and with, hopefully, a young adult from that same community. It is sometimes slower than you want, because not everyone is quick to trust the new guy in town. It makes the relationship so much richer and lasts so much longer if you're like, "Hey, you are the community and I only want to lift you up. You tell me what you need." And I think that's how we try to enter every situation.

Project staff from Climate Impact Corps shared their approach:

We train all of our members in the community resilience position on community asset mapping ... look from an assets-based approach at what's right in the community. What are the different organizations and leaders? ... Then, how can you use that to advance partnerships and advance the work that's happening? That is something I don't think is happening at a lot of our sites prior to us coming there. And so that is a tool that we can provide to advance the work happening there.

AmeriCorps-funded projects target their services to vulnerable and diverse communities. For example, the MHYC program (part of the Colorado Climate Corps) and GRID Alternatives, provide services only to individuals who fall into a lower-income category. One program staff explained:

For us in [the] Energy & Water [program] we work with low-income households to identify and retrofit materials within a home that are going to save energy, save water for the household, but also ultimately save money for the households. So that's important for the low-income residents in the Front Range. It's also sort of an entry point for us to have a conversation with residents about additional services that maybe they're not aware of. Or that are sort of evolving and becoming available to homeowners. ... we work with the LEAP office, which is the Low Income Energy Assistance program. They have a log of individuals that sign up for bill assistance. We know by the way of income qualifications that those folks would qualify for our services ... we can actually call out to that contact list and make contact that way.

For GRID Alternatives SolarCorps, the primary way the community is involved is that the project largely recruits and has AmeriCorps members from the communities they serve. Further, the members remain in their communities and often obtain solar energy type positions afterwards. One project staff said, "We also have an emphasis on recruiting from the communities that we serve as well. Not from outside; we're really intentional about that. And a lot of fellows reflect on that just being a meaningful part of the experience; they're coming back and serving in their own community."

Chapter 4: Members

Recruitment and Selection

Across the projects receiving a site visit, common strategies for recruitment of members included word-of-mouth referrals, online job boards, and “pipeline” sources (i.e., training programs, local high schools and universities). Online job boards such as Indeed, Handshake, and Service Year were commonly mentioned by project staff and members as effective due to their accessible reach and ability to post member positions on job boards focused on nontraditional positions. Specifically, job boards such as Service Year were mentioned by four of the five projects selected for site visits as a recruitment strategy for the ability to target recruitment toward prospective members with a dedication to service and, in some cases, referral incentives for members who refer people in their network to apply and obtain member positions posted on Service Year.

Word-of-mouth is also an effective recruitment strategy within the AmeriCorps–funded climate projects. Beyond members and alumni sharing their experiences with family, friends, and others in their personal and professional networks, this form of recruitment can happen when members from different projects serve on a joint effort (e.g., disaster response deployment) and during interactions with service beneficiaries from the community (see Case Study Highlight: AmeriCorps St. Louis). Interactions between members and residents of the community who benefit from member services can increase both the awareness of AmeriCorps and indirectly be a recruitment strategy while simultaneously providing services to underserved projects.

Project staff in three of the case studies also cited the importance of tapping existing “pipeline” sources to recruit members. Sources may include local universities and secondary schools, partner organizations focused on youth development (e.g., YouthBuild), and training programs operated by the grantee sponsor organization.

This approach can serve to recruit members from local communities and those with an established interest/skills in the area of project services. It also shows the community that entering the climate field is a viable pathway for them. One project that exemplifies the intentional benefits of this approach is Kupu’s Conservation Leadership Development Program (CLDP), which offers programs to middle and high school students in Hawai‘i and the Pacific Islands to introduce conservation skills and career pathways, including the ability to apply and serve as a CLDP member upon eligibility. The

Case Study Highlight: AmeriCorps St. Louis

When disasters occur and AmeriCorps St. Louis is called to respond, members are deployed on disaster response teams to assist in recovery operations. During these deployments, members frequently interact with organizations and individuals engaged in similar activities or other AmeriCorps members. These interactions provide an opportunity to promote the project and the training and skills development that service provides. Project staff shared that these interactions serve as an effective recruitment strategy: “It gives people the opportunity to build upon what their current or previous service term looks like in a way that enhances what they already know ... when they have previous experience with the Corps life it is easier for them to acclimate to our Corps life because they have a baseline understanding of it already.”

project staff state that this effort functions in support of their organization’s goal to reach students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

Only half of surveyed project directors and members reported the project was able to effectively recruit participants from diverse backgrounds. Project staff interviewed during the site visits shared that when trying to recruit members from diverse backgrounds, the most effective strategy is to work through their partnerships. One project staff explained:

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.

Why Members Join

Members reasons for choosing to serve in an AmeriCorps project are largely because of the career development opportunities provided by the projects. Analysis of members’ responses to an open-ended survey question indicated that members saw the service as an entry point to the job sector, as a way to develop skills provided through the training and service, and as an opportunity to explore jobs (exhibit 9). Interestingly, a higher percentage of members who graduated from college or had a higher level of education (51 percent) were more likely than those who did not have a college degree (27 percent) to provide a response that was categorized as an entry point to the job sector.

EXHIBIT 9.—Reasons members served

Theme	Members (n=330)
Career Development/Training Opportunities (entry point to job sector [42%], skills development [18%], job exploration [13%])	73%
Project Mission	39%
Project benefits	12%

Note. Responses could be categorized in more than one theme. A small number of responses were singular in nature and not able to be categorized as a theme. The percentage of career development/training opportunity responses does not include subtheme responses.

Case Study Highlight: GRID Alternatives SolarCorps

As part of SolarCorps programming, members assist with GRID’s Installation Basics Training (IBT) program. The IBT program is a 200-hour program designed to develop skills relevant to entry-level solar installation jobs and construction fields. As part of the IBT program and SolarCorps, members assist IBT participants toward the end of the program with job search and pathways activities. During this time, 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. Three of five members participating in a focus group were recruited through the IBT program.

Members often referenced service as an **opportunity to gain experience needed for entry-level green jobs, obtain specialized skills and certifications, and explore potential job opportunities** during transitions from education and/or an unrelated career field. The following responses from the survey are representative of those sentiments.

- *It gave me a chance to broaden my skills in a career field I am interested in and provided a lot of educational opportunities.*
- *I saw it as an opportunity to gain access to experience and personnel to help me start a career as a park ranger.*
- *I thought it would be a great opportunity to explore different career paths and work with experts in the field of ecology.*
- *It provided me the opportunity to learn and develop skills within my area of interest/future career path. It is a great way to learn without pressure of prior knowledge or experience and connects you to people in the industry.*

Similarly, one member participating in a focus group said their service allowed them to explore within their field of interest while simultaneously conducting activities that aligned more with the requirements of employers in the field:

I chose to serve with AmeriCorps because I was not getting interviews for the job that I wanted in the environmental sustainability field. I have a background in political science, a lot of government work, a lot of nonprofit work through board involvement, but no paid work. And I feel like when I transitioned or wanted to transition to sustainability, I wasn't able to. I wasn't getting interviews. So I heard about this program and I thought it was great for the opportunities that it was going to offer me in sustainability.

Another prevalent theme was **project mission**; 39 percent of members responding to the survey item decided to serve in part because of the project mission. Within the survey responses, there was variation in what specific aspect spoke to members, including the environmental mission, the community, and a broader goal to serve, as demonstrated by the responses below. Some respondents emphasized they more actively wanted to give back (i.e., being an active versus passive participant in the work and participating through hands-on service). Additionally, some responses mentioned climate anxiety or concern as a motivation to serve, as shown in the following quotes.

- *I chose to serve in the [project name] because I have a passion for trees and I want to help engage my community in learning about and sustaining our local ecosystems by planting more trees.*
- *I feel a responsibility to the people, plants, and animals that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and [project name] was the most accessible route to direct action, for me at least.*
- *[Project name]'s mission of advancing economic and environmental justice through renewable energy on a community level was also very interesting and motivating to me.*
- *I wanted to spend a year giving back to my community.*
- *As a young adult who will have to live the rest of my life impacted by climate change and environmental degradation, I wanted to spend as much time as possible mitigating these issues. My main reason for joining was to make a difference for the environment every day, even if that difference was a small one.*

- *[I felt] climate doom, and I felt the need to do something rather than just sitting and feeling helpless.*
- *I wanted to serve my community in an impactful way that also helped combat my own climate anxiety.*

Some members participating in the focus groups echoed the same desires of wanting to be able to take action, especially considering the sense of urgency imposed by issues such as global climate change. These members shared that they saw serving as an opportunity to give back to their community and address the larger problem of climate change through actionable local climate solutions. When describing these sentiments, members often appreciated the ability of AmeriCorps service to contextualize their individual passions within the mission of project service and eventual career paths, with one member explaining:

So that is what lured me, as I went through orientation, then I learned more about, “Oh, this is about AmeriCorps, this is about serving and helping our community.” And so that was my first experience with [project name] and it really impacted the trajectory of my life to be honest. Because it was my freshman year of college, I didn’t know what I wanted to major in ... I always knew that I was connected to nature and I really cared about my home but I didn’t know how to funnel that drive and that passion to something purposeful. And so that was kind of the overall theme, growing theme of my career or journey with [project name].

Finally, some member survey respondents (12 percent) mentioned **project benefits as a factor in their decision to serve**. As demonstrated in the following responses, these included benefits provided to them as an AmeriCorps member, including the stipend and Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, and the broader benefits of the project, including the location and social experience.

- *I really needed the education award to complete my degree.*
- *I like the forest as my office.*
- *I’ve always wanted to live in the [Pacific Northwest].*
- *I wanted to work outdoors and work in a team of like-minded peers.*
- *I was also on a queer crew and that was a huge selling point.*

Description of Members

Background characteristics of the members (including alumni) and additional information about the member experience for those who completed the survey provide insights into the individuals that serve as AmeriCorps members in climate projects.

Member Characteristics

More than half of the survey respondents (56 percent) were current members. More than half of members (53 percent) identified as female. A large majority of members (85 percent) were between the ages of 18 and 29. Most members were White (81 percent) and were not Hispanic or Latino (90 percent). The majority of members had graduated college or completed education beyond college (87 percent) (exhibit 10).

EXHIBIT 10.—Member demographics

Category	Characteristics	Percent
Current Status (n=432)	Member	56%
	Alumni	42%
	Both	2%
Gender Identity (n=322)	Male	36%
	Female	53%
	Nonbinary/Nonconforming	12%
Age (n=332)	Under 18	<1%
	18–29	85%
	30–39	10%
	40–49	2%
	50–59	2%
	60–69	<1%
	70–79	<1%
Race (n=313)	White	81%
	Multi-racial or Multi-ethnic	7%
	Asian	5%
	Black or African American	4%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
	Other	1%
Ethnicity (n=315)	Not Hispanic/Latino	90%
	Hispanic/Latino	10%
Education (n=329)	Some High School	<1%
	High School Graduate or Equivalent	7%
	Some College or Technical School	23%
	College Graduate	64%
	Some Graduate School	2%
	Completed Graduate School	5%

Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Gender was a select all response. “Don’t know” responses from race and ethnicity and “prefer not to say” were excluded from gender, ethnicity, and education analyses. Gray highlighted rows denote highest percentage of respondents for the item.

For members who were college graduates, they were asked to share their major area of study. There was a broad range of college majors reported but the three most commonly cited majors were environmental studies, biology, and wildlife sciences with approximately half of the members (51 percent, n=95) responding to this question indicating one of these was their college major. Majors reported by other members included fine arts, engineering, business, English, political science, and education.

Anecdotally, when asked to describe the general characteristics of members, project staff and partners often focused on the positive attitudes and dedication to climate work that members typically possess. Staff and partners with comments of this nature often described this characteristic as a key component to the success of members, with several descriptions following here.

- *I think a typical member can be, can on their surface level, be pretty different. But I think a successful typical member at least has a very strong ethic of service. And also is looking for a different experience than what they would otherwise get in a traditional job or school environment. So, it's often an individual who likes being outside or likes moving around, feels like they are being—they are contributing to something beyond just themselves but are doing it in a way that is a little bit more individualistic than say the military or anything else.*
- *I think their passion, you know, and their willingness to do anything. They always want to take on the challenge, no matter what the challenge is, whether it's big or small. You know they don't see any job they're tasked with doing as unimportant. You know they give every task, whether it's helping to set up a mass vaccination clinic, directing traffic at a mass vaccination clinic, or cutting down trees and mucking, gutting a house, removing dry wall from a house. They're just always very enthusiastic about what they do. ... They just seem to really be committed to helping people.*



Member Experiences

Nearly one-fourth of the members (22 percent) had been with the grantee/sponsor for less than 6 months while more than half had served for 6 months to less than a year (exhibit 11). The majority of members (90 percent) served more than 30 hours a week. More than one-third of the members served in a city (38 percent) while approximately another one-third (36 percent) served in a rural area.

Members were evenly split between those who lived in their service community (51 percent) and those who did not (49 percent). Likewise, members were split between whether their hometown was similar (52 percent) and not similar (48 percent) to their service area. Most members reported their hometown as being a suburb (40 percent).

EXHIBIT 11.—Member experiences

Category	Members	Percentage
Time with Grantee/Sponsor (n=361)	Less Than 6 Months	22%
	6 months–less than 1 year	54%
	1–5 years	24
	6–10 years	<1%
Hours Served Per Week (n=358)	Less than 5 hours	4%
	5–10 hours	3%
	11–20 hours	1%
	21–30 hours	2%
	More than 30 hours	90%
Member of Service Community? (n=354)	Yes	51%
	No	49%
Service Community Type (n=355)	City	38%
	Suburb	10%
	Town	16.3%
	Rural Area	36%
Hometown Similar to Service Area? (n=331)	Similar	52%
	Not Similar	48%
Hometown Type (n=159) (Only asked of respondents who did not indicate similar to service area type)	City	22%
	Suburb	40%
	Town	22%
	Rural Area	16%

Stipends

In both the surveys and site visit interviews, project staff, partners, and members alike described the challenges posed by the AmeriCorps stipend amounts. While grateful for the stipend, each interviewed and surveyed group contributed examples of stipend barriers. Most often, survey respondents and interviewed site visit participants referenced the **stipend as the most pressing challenge to achieving equitable membership and project outcomes**.

This sentiment was seen in several responses characterizing service with AmeriCorps as a “**privilege**” for many members with existing supportive networks (e.g., family support or savings accounts). For example, one member explained:

It’s not a livable stipend. So, I feel like it is extracting those people who want to do good from the community that deserve so much more. And the other thing is it’s extracting the

people that have the opportunities, their resources, that back up; not the people that represent the community. And that is something that is not equitable.

Members and project staff especially stressed the **barrier to service the stipend imposes in urban service areas and communities with existing housing crises**. For members who do not consider themselves “privileged” in these areas with a high cost of living, they often mentioned conditions that were essential for them to pursue service instead of a paid job. Seeing as housing is often the largest expense members face, examples of these conditions that allowed for service included the necessity for members to live with a partner/family member with paid jobs to ensure a level of housing security and financial justification to join an AmeriCorps projects. Additional conditions that members explained included “sacrifices” necessary to sustain the cost of living during their service term, as one member explains:

As a [project name] member, I had two other jobs. I worked at the school [service site] during the day and at nights I would work at a restaurant. I had a totally different energy level back then and I was perfectly happy to juggle those things and to be able to live here in Honolulu. I guess, to be blunt, it wasn't enough because I had to have a second job to pay for my rent and bills. Again, I felt my term felt so important to me and I was so passionate in it...I get to have this opportunity to build bridges and work with the next generation. At the end of the day when I have to go into the restaurant it was harder for me to be there because I wasn't passionate in it. I was just doing the most meaningful work and now people are yelling at me because their fries are cold.

Staff and members from **several projects mentioned strategies aimed at supporting members amid challenges with the stipend amounts**, Examples described by project staff and members included supportive services provided by project staff, accessible to current members. Frequent areas of support included staff with knowledge of housing rights advocacy groups and connecting incoming members with each other to streamline housing searches. One project had an emergency fund for which members could apply to receive up to \$500 to help them with unexpected expenses (e.g., medical need, housing, car repairs). Another project was able to secure discounts to a local outdoor clothing store so members could obtain needed gear for their service. Additionally, project staff frequently mentioned the importance of maximizing a member’s service term to develop their individualized skills and interests in order to make the stipend “worth it.”

Training

Members receive training and certifications throughout their service terms to prepare for and reinforce the skills needed to conduct service activities. Additionally, projects often emphasized individualized training as an opportunity to strengthen the topic–area knowledge and employability of members following their service.



Project staff and members interviewed during the site visits said training was usually given in several phases. **At the beginning of service terms, members receive orientation training** over the period of several days to introduce them to AmeriCorps requirements, project specific structures and expectations, and introductions to topic-area information required to conduct service activities. For example, AmeriCorps St. Louis members complete the baseline AmeriCorps required trainings through an online platform. At the beginning of their service term, project staff organize extensive training sessions during the first month. Training topics delivered during this period extend beyond the AmeriCorps required training to include prerequisite information in the primary areas of service projects such as emergency management basics, chainsaw maintenance, fire management basics, first aid, and CPR.

Throughout the service term the AmeriCorps–funded projects and their partners provide additional training. For example, Kupu’s CLDP has Kupu Days, which occur on two Fridays during a member’s yearlong term where members from across the Pacific Islands gather for training and team building. Similarly, GRID Alternatives has virtual SolarCorps Days once a month to facilitate personal and professional development across the cohort, and a midyear in-person retreat at which members placed throughout the state network and learn.

Climate Impact Corps has a training pacing guide that depicts the in-person, online, and asynchronous training that is offered at the beginning and throughout the member’s term. Similar to other AmeriCorps projects, all members participate in AmeriCorps required training and Climate Impact Corps has a required Climate Foundations training, designed to build proficiency in understanding and skills around climate

change action and communication. Other training is specific to each initiative (aligned to their member positions).

All projects have an emphasis on member career development and opportunities are provided during the service term. For example, MHYC organizes training offerings for members to pursue according to their individual interests and career pursuits. These individualized training pursuits are known as the Career Pathway Certificates and focus on six core areas of training. The core areas include water management, outdoor conservation, outdoor education, renewable energy, green building, and environmental compliance and social governance. MHYC project staff described this individualized approach to training as an opportunity to offset the trade-offs members experience regarding the stipend and as a strategy in line with investing in the development of individual member interests and green workforce needs alike. Throughout their service terms, though often on Fridays, called Programming Days, members have the opportunity to progress through a wide variety of flexible, self-paced training courses within the six core areas of Career Pathway Certificates.

At the conclusion of the service term, projects have training sessions that focus on life after AmeriCorps and information on the Segal education award. Nearly all project directors (93 percent) reported they provide 17 or more hours of training to members.⁷

Surveyed project directors reported providing training in a number of different areas (exhibit 12). All project directors (100 percent) reported providing training in technical skills and career preparation. Across the projects and their respective focus areas, members receive technical instruction to align with the specific service activities they complete. To illustrate the various forms of technical skills members develop across the broad spectrum of project focus areas, a project such as SolarCorps provides training surrounding the skills needed to install household solar systems. One SolarCorps member provided specific examples of the technical skills they developed through project training, explaining:

So now I can go on a roof and literally install solar and the combine box by myself. And just do a whole bunch of different things. ... I never heard of wire strippers, how to strip wire. Like, yeah, I'll say A-plus training for sure. I like the hands-on training on the roof out in the field.

Whereas a project such as Climate Impact Corps' community stewardship project trains their members through developing the skill of community asset mapping, as described by project staff:

We train all of our members in the community resilience position on community asset mapping and to be able to get actually kind of log all their contacts and their engagement to look from an assets-based approach at what's right there in the community. What are the different organizations and leaders? And we actually make a visual map. And then how can you use that to advance partnerships and advance the work that's happening. And that's something I don't think is happening at a lot of our sites prior to us coming there. And so that's a tool that we can provide to advance the work happening there.

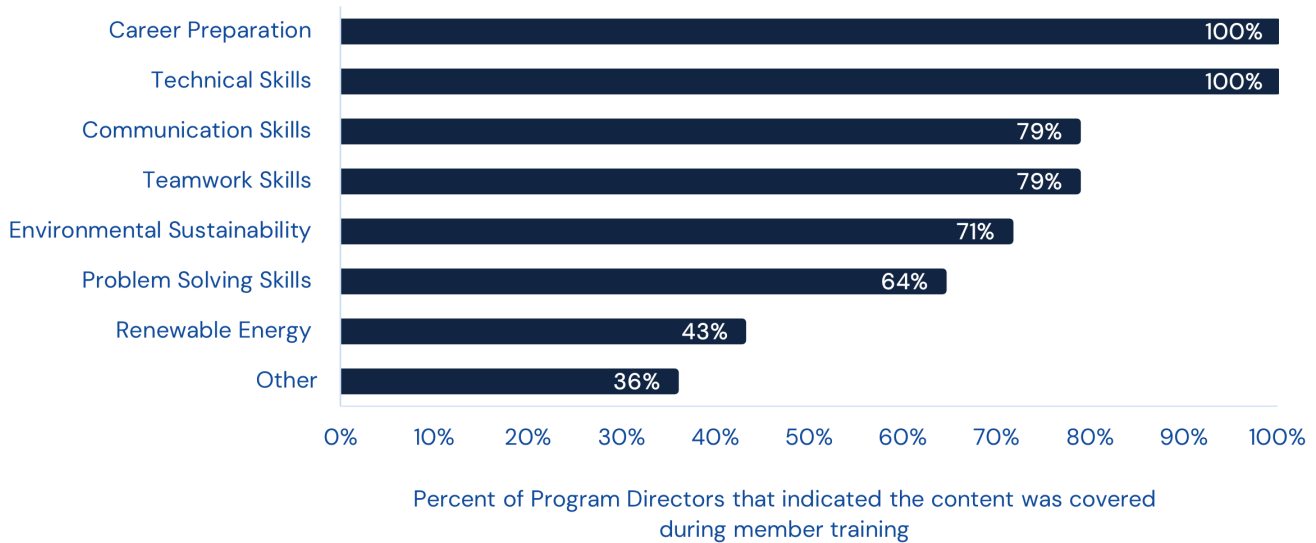
Approximately three-fourths or more of the project directors said members were also provided training in teamwork skills (79 percent), communication skills (79 percent), and/or environmental sustainability (71 percent). These skills were particularly visible throughout the site visit held at AmeriCorps St. Louis. Researchers observed several instances of members completing training in teamwork and communication

⁷ One VISTA sponsor reported providing 1–4 hours of training.

skills through a training focused on providing and receiving constructive feedback in a team-based setting. Project staff discussed the importance of developing these skills:

Our team leads [second-year members] understand that part of their responsibility is looking for training moments in the field. So that you should be addressing whatever services, or performing whatever services our partnering agencies are asking of us. But you're also balancing, you know, that work getting done with your member's development. So you say, "Hey, sometimes we're going to focus on learning a new skill while also getting the daily objectives done for today. ... We're going to try to engage you in a dialog to say what do you know, why do you know it, how do you learn, how do you like to learn, or what is effective for you." And then using that information and what comes from that dialog to show—to guide them through whatever training it is.

EXHIBIT 12.—Member training (n=14)



Note. Project directors could select more than one response. Project directors reported other training was provided, such as training opportunities are offered à la carte to members and it depends on what the members sign up for; diversity, equity, and inclusion (2), CPR, first aid (2), managing climate grief and anxiety, and budgeting.

When surveyed about how helpful the training received was in preparing them for their role as a member in the project, **three-fourths of member respondents (74 percent) said the training was helpful or very helpful.** Members participating in focus groups explained that the formal training provided by project and partner staff provided a good foundation to begin activities in their respective project focus, but a large amount of valuable knowledge was gained “on the job.” Members frequently mentioned the impact of practical learning and the significant value of serving with professionals in the field (including both project and partner staff). For example, a member from GRID Alternatives SolarCorps expressed appreciation for significant support when engaging in service activities alongside project staff (in this project, members are part of teams that also include full-time experienced professionals):

I feel like there's a lot to be learned and anybody that's here that is staff is more than willing to help in any way they can. ... just all of that has been ... such a positive influence, that I've just barely gotten a start in renewables, but I can already tell that it's something



that I have ... I know I've had a passion for, for things around environmental justice and such. But this definitely gives me a bit more power where I felt like I didn't exactly have before.

Similarly, a member from Climate Impact Corps shared the value of supportive professionals working alongside members at their partner site. The member described that through their assisted forest migration project, their partner network supported additional training and certification, explaining:

This job has carved out a niche for me. I got with my site supervisor and my coworker and some other folks and we got to go to Canada to get this seed certification that doesn't exist in the U.S. And now we are training professionals in the [Department of Natural Resources] how to collect seeds.

Within the context of Climate Impact Corps, this value on interactions with professionals within their field of service was further substantiated by the project's evaluation report findings that showed 82 percent of members from the previous year found a mentor and planned to stay in contact with that individual following their service.

Chapter 5: Outcomes

Performance Measurement and Evaluation

To better understand how the AmeriCorps–funded climate projects were measuring performance and evaluating their projects and AmeriCorps interest in knowing how they might improve upon the performance measurement and AmeriCorps State and National evaluation requirements (VISTA sponsors do not have an evaluation requirement), project staff participating in the case studies were asked to describe their experiences in both areas and the challenges.

Projects Experiences with Performance Measurement

AmeriCorps requires all AmeriCorps State and National applications to include at least one aligned performance measure (output paired with outcome) that corresponds to the proposed primary intervention. This performance measure may be a National Performance Measure or a measure developed by the applicant depending on the project’s theory of change. Applicants are also able to include additional National Performance Measure outputs without having associated outcome(s) as long as the output measures a significant project activity. AmeriCorps has one capacity building, five disaster services, and five environmental stewardship National Performance Measures.⁸

Interviewed project staff described **several shortcomings with the AmeriCorps climate change projects**. One common dilemma among three projects included a **lack of alignment between AmeriCorps–defined performance measures and the service activities projects implement to address their area of climate focus**. For example, project staff who focus on urban forestry felt that the standard performance measurement of “acres treated and/or improved” was overly applicable to a broad spectrum of conservation projects, explaining:

I am just curious how other urban tree programs define acreage treated and improved/. ... What does that mean? I’ve worked with a couple of programs who’ve tried to use that measurement for non-conservation corps kind of programs. And I think—I am guessing—if you asked every single program that uses that performance measure, everyone would be thinking and defining it differently. And no one ever seems to know what it means for something to be treated or improved or what the difference is.

For a project focused on disaster response, project staff explained:

Not only do they [performance measures] not always align ... but because we are unable to predict what types of services our members will actually be performing, we sometimes are worried we will be constrained or are constrained to accurately report what the numbers are ... if members go on three different deployments doing a variety of different services but do not align with metrics ... there is inflexibility of what we can share cleanly in the framework.

Additionally, projects with core service areas focused on addressing components of the climate that change over time described **shortcomings of the performance measures in capturing the full impact of service activities on their intended outcomes**. These included projects focused on community resilience, reducing

⁸ Environmental stewardship performance measures are in the areas of at-risk ecosystems, energy efficiency, and awareness and stewardship. The awareness and stewardship area has one output and two outcomes. For more specifics on the AmeriCorps performance measures see [AmeriCorps' State and National Direct Grantees web page](#).

carbon emissions and reducing energy costs. Staff from two projects that seek to reduce carbon emissions via tree planting and household solar renewable energy systems both mentioned frustration around the inability to include estimates of long-term carbon emission reduction and reduced energy consumption or reduced energy costs in the available outcomes for their projects, respectively. Both projects felt that the accompanying output and outcome for the selected performance measure of number of trees planted or solar systems installed did not reflect the full impact of member service activities. One project staff said:

Our target output is 1,500 housing units or structures ... can't in the moment say the impact because the impact happens over time. So it's not a false outcome but it doesn't feel like an accurate illustration of the impact. And we're doing a lot of work to figure it out, because we said 80 percent of the structures will show a reduction in grid energy consumption by a minimum of 60 percent. And we're doing all this math and all these numbers things to match that.

Similar to the challenges of narrow outputs and outcomes associated with AmeriCorps performance measures, staff from one project described difficulty with the **inability to alter their performance measure details during the grant cycle**. Projects dedicated to implementing responsive climate solutions according to the needs of their local community can face difficulty in adapting to evolving climate priorities not previously described in the project's grant application.

When **projects are not able to fill their AmeriCorps member positions, it is challenging to meet the performance measure targets**. Not being able to fill the positions frequently ties back to the equity issue with the stipend. One project staff explained:

I know that 100 percent we're tied to all the work that we are doing is ... to affect climate change. ... We're tracking the acreage cleared, which ties in with invasive removal, plants and animals, riparian buffer, coastal restoration, and also native planting. So we are doing that with all our partners; everyone is different. Their type of work in the field is different ... conservation is a broad word in itself. ... But when we don't fill our positions, then that work that could've been done by that body cannot be counted. So that's why recruiting is so important, filling positions is so important, having these added benefits for members is important. ... Part of the reason we don't fill our positions is because [the] cost of living here is so expensive.

Projects Experiences with Evaluation

AmeriCorps State and National grantees are required to have an evaluation. However, the **type of evaluation and whether it must be conducted by an independent evaluator depends on the type of AmeriCorps State and National award**. National, Tribal and State Competitive grantees with an annual award of \$500,000 or more are required to have an impact study and an independent evaluator. Four of the five projects that were part of the site visits met these criteria. Two of those projects are part of The Corps Network's Public Lands Service Coalition, comprising 10 to 15 AmeriCorps national grantees who have contracted with an external evaluator to conduct a rigorous study in which data were aggregated from multiple conservation corps nationwide. The evaluation examined the impact of participating AmeriCorps Conservation Corps projects on hosting agencies' capacity. The study used a quasi-experimental post-hoc comparison group design to determine where there was evidence that conservation corps' host partners demonstrated higher levels of engagement, efficiency, and environmental stewardship than similar non-hosting agencies.

The evaluation study found that Conservation Corps had a positive impact on land management partners compared to other types of partner organizations. Specifically, Conservation Corps were valuable in helping partners achieve trail management goals, resulting in higher levels of resource enhancement. Additionally the Conservation Corps were considered irreplaceable due to their high-quality work relative to the agency resources requirement for management (McCreary et al., 2022).

The third project was initially planning to conduct an impact study, but in a continuation application submitted an Alternative Evaluation Approach request. The external evaluator is conducting a mixed method process and outcome evaluation. The fourth project also requested an Alternative Evaluation Approach and in their application noted it can be challenging to conduct an impact evaluation (i.e., inability to have comparisons).

The fifth project is formula-funded and as such is required to conduct an evaluation as specified by the state commission. The organization for this project has a unique relationship with the commission in that it functions as the implementation arm of the commission's strategic initiatives. The state commission is conducting the project's evaluation using a mixed methods approach and is employing some innovative tools such as Ripple Effects Mapping to determine the impact of its community capacity building initiatives on the systems the initiatives are operating (see Case Study Highlight: Climate Impact Corps).

In general, the five projects have multiple ways to collect feedback from AmeriCorps members and partners including midterm and exit surveys and interviews. They also have tracking systems for collecting and reporting on performance measurement data. **A challenge has been systematically collecting data from alumni and tracking career pathways. An additional challenge with AmeriCorps evaluation requirements has been designing and implementing impact evaluation studies** (i.e., experimental and quasi-experimental) due to the unique contexts in which the projects are operating and the difficulty in finding appropriate comparison sites.

Member Outcomes

Following are member outcomes in the areas of civic engagement, technical and functional skills, and career preparation and green jobs. Project directors, partners, and members were asked about their perceptions of member outcomes in the surveys and in the interviews and focus groups conducted during the site visits.

Case Study Highlight: Climate Impact Corps

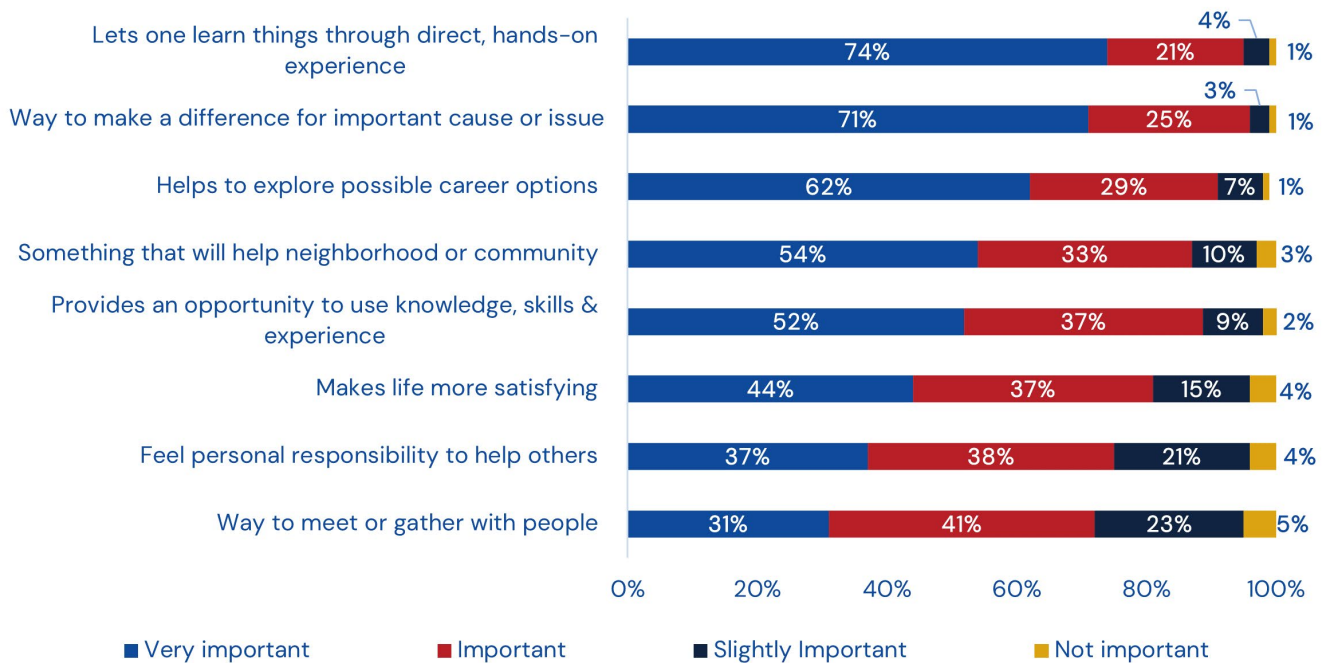
Climate Impact Corps staff and ServeMinnesota evaluators piloted Ripple Effects Mapping, an appreciative inquiry data collection approach designed to measure the impact of projects. Climate Impact members are community stewardship facilitators who use evidence-based strategies to help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change. Members are placed at Minnesota nonprofits and public agencies that have a mission to preserve and protect the environment. With a focus on building the capacity of community members, ripple mapping is an innovative evaluation approach that is designed for programs working in complex systems. During the pilot, community representatives and members created mind maps to show the “ripple” of projects on the systems they intended to impact.

Civic Engagement

To understand initial attitudes toward civic service, members were asked to indicate the importance of eight reasons to volunteer within the context of their individual experience (exhibit 13). Approximately three-fourths or more of the members reported that the eight reasons for them personally to volunteer were important or very important.

Nearly all of the members said it was important because it is a way to make a difference for a cause or issue that was important to them or in which they were interested (96 percent) and it is way to learn things through direct, hands-on experience (95 percent).

EXHIBIT 13.—Member reasons for volunteering (n=411–432)



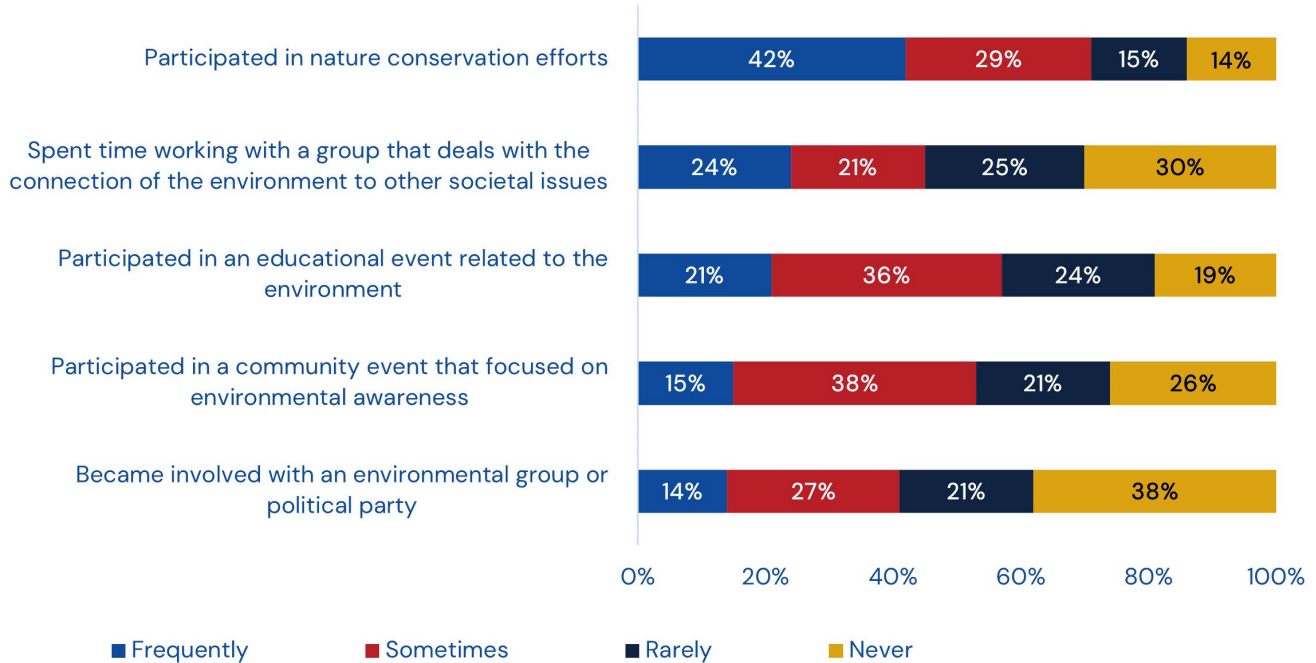
Note. Items adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps’ Civic Engagement Volunteer Experience Survey and the Volunteer Motivation Scale. The survey item had a “don’t know” response option that was excluded from the analysis.

Members participating in the site visit focus groups expanded upon these survey findings. The members agreed that service was an opportunity to actively engage in interventions designed to explicitly address climate change. Several projects built upon their members’ interest in civic engagement through organized service days and coordinated volunteer efforts with local community organizations. Because of this, members shared they planned to continue with civic engagement activities. One member explained:

I think the most that I was civically engaged was when working with students and bridging that gap between government and school. Even though I was bringing a lot of awareness to the students, I feel like I was teaching myself also how to be engaged in our community ... it was a whole new world of how to be engaged as a citizen here in Hawai’i. Not just how to have your voice be heard but also how to find that resource, how to find knowledge. Learning that you really have to break out of your day-to-day norm to find information and resources to make educated decisions.

To understand how their service influenced participation in civic engagement activities, surveyed members were also asked to indicate which activities, if any, they participated in the 6 months prior. Approximately three-fourths of the members (71 percent) reported they sometimes or frequently participated in nature conservation efforts (e.g., planting trees, restoration of waterways) in the last 6 months (exhibit 14). Members were least likely to become involved with an environmental group or political party, with 41 percent reporting they had sometimes or frequently participated in that type of activity in the 6 months prior to survey response.

EXHIBIT 14.—Member engagement in climate change activities in last 6 months (n=335–337)



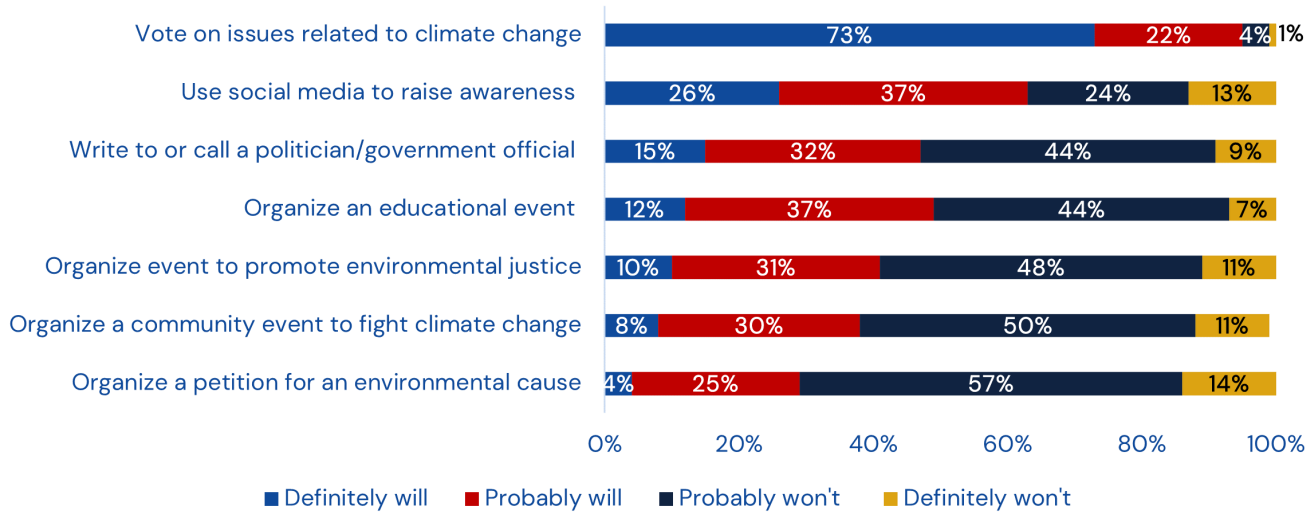
Note. Items adapted from the Environmental Action Scale.

Focus group members frequently spoke about their engagement in conservation volunteerism. Members indicated they had an interest in this area prior to their service and the experience reinforced the desire to continue conservation efforts. One member explained:

My previous AmeriCorps fellowship was more like civic engagement, doing climate planning, doing electrification. I really did enjoy that but I’ve always just been drawn to conservation. Whenever I have time, volunteering at the aquarium or the random side jobs I’ve picked up have all been super involved in conservation. [Project name] was just a great way to engage with other people interested in the same things I was.

When asked about the likelihood to take action on climate change, nearly all survey members (95 percent) said that they probably will or definitely will vote on issues related to climate change (exhibit 15). Two-thirds of members (63 percent) reported that they probably will or definitely will use social media to raise awareness about climate change issues. Less than half of the members reported they probably or definitely will take any of the other five actions.

EXHIBIT 15.—Member likelihood to take climate change actions (n=332–338)



Note. Items adapted from the Environmental Action Scale.

Although members participating in focus groups did not explicitly share their intentions to take action on the climate change items listed in the survey, several members expressed a general desire to continue climate action through volunteering. For example, project staff relayed the intentions of a member to continue climate volunteer work as a result of their service activities, explaining, “One of my members—through this work, she thought it was really gratifying—she goes and volunteers with some of the community partners that we’ve had, even when it’s not part of work, specifically with food banks.”

More often however, members expressed interest in continuing their involvement in climate solutions through pursuing future employment in the same or similar fields of service (see Career Preparation and Green Jobs section).

More than 90 percent of surveyed project directors (92 percent) 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 that are already somewhat disposed toward 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. Similar to the responses from members regarding their desire to continue service in the form of employment, one project staff explained:

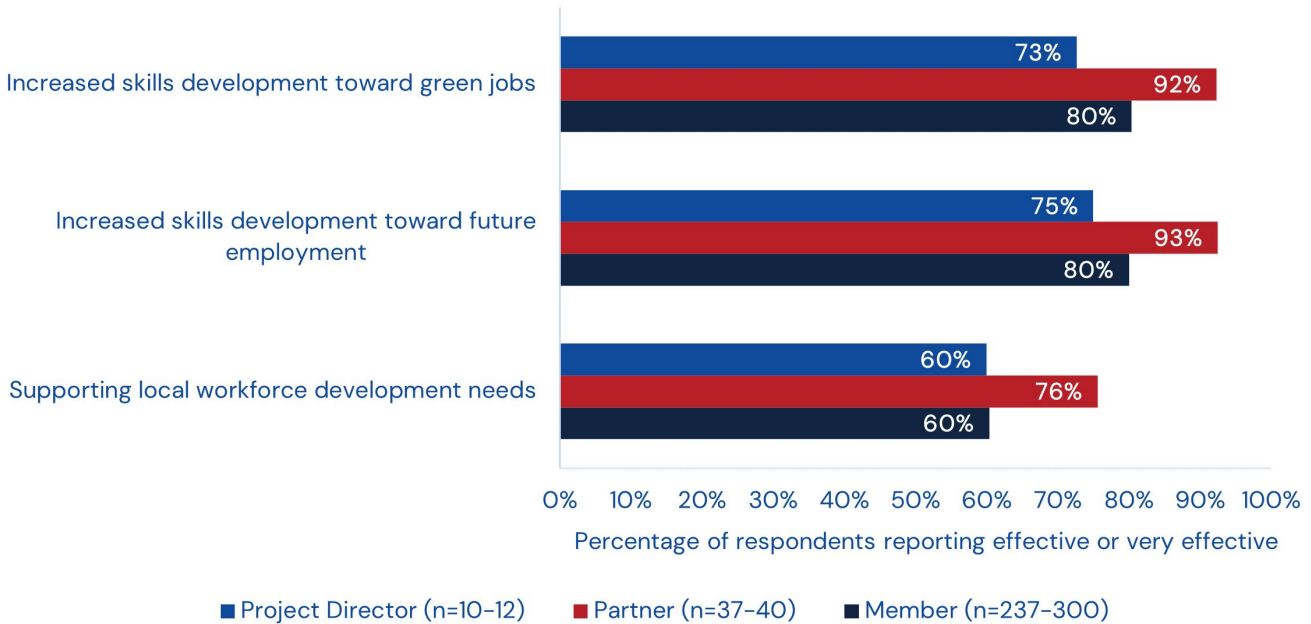
The first thing that came to mind was an interview that I did with one of the fellows, where he was like [project] showed me that service can be a profession. Service doesn’t have to be volunteering on Saturday morning. It can be a career in serving communities as a viable option. I think in that way, showing folks the value of community engagement, and just the value of community period.

Technical and Functional Skills

Project directors, partners, and members generally agreed that the project was effective at increasing workforce and skills development outcomes (exhibit 16). Three-fourths or more of survey respondents from

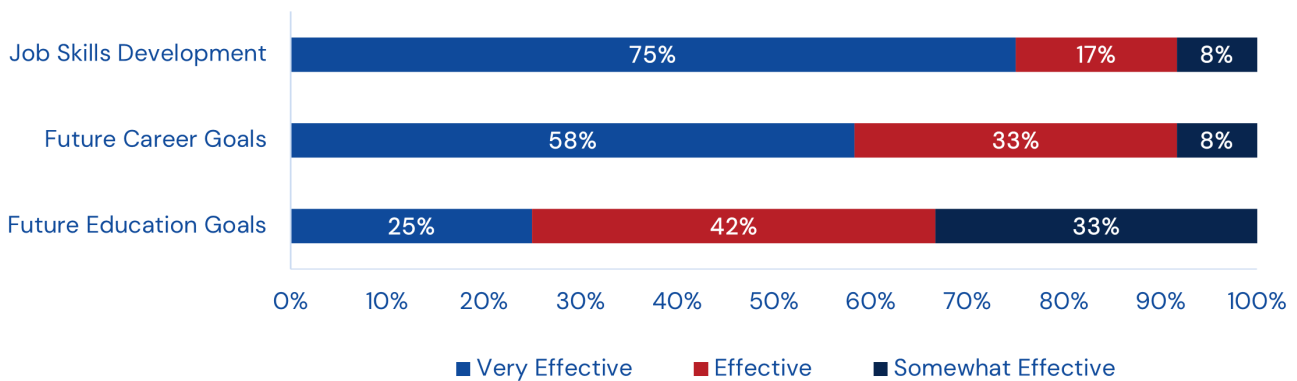
all groups perceived that the project was effective or very effective at increasing members’ skills development toward green jobs and increasing skills development toward future employment.

EXHIBIT 16.—Project director, partner, and member perceptions of project effectiveness on workforce and skills development outcomes



Furthermore, nearly all project directors (92 percent) thought that their project was effective or very effective at job skills development and addressing the future career goals of members (91 percent) (exhibit 17). Two-thirds of project directors (67 percent) thought their project was effective or very effective at addressing members’ future education goals.

EXHIBIT 17.—Project director perceptions of project effectiveness on member job skills and goals (n=12)

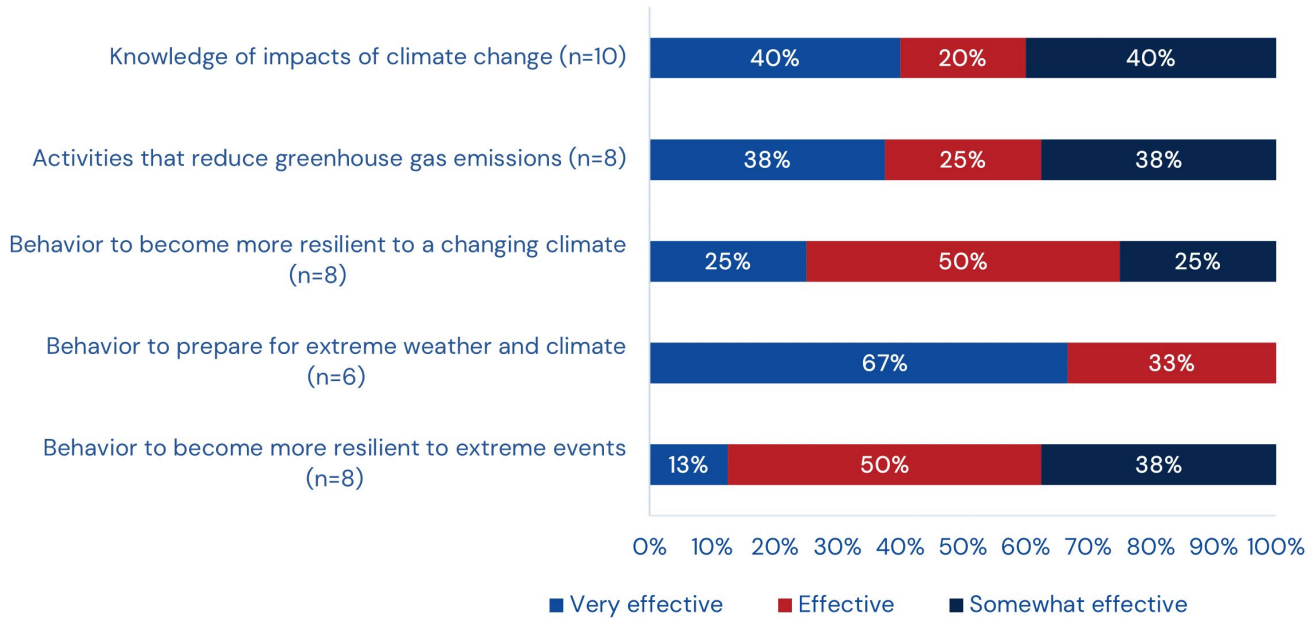


Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. The survey item had a “don’t know” response option that was excluded from the analysis.

Six out of 10 project directors (60 percent) reported their project was effective or very effective with increasing members’ knowledge of the impacts of climate change (exhibit 18). All six project directors who

responded to the item about increasing members’ behaviors to prepare for extreme weather and climate indicated their project was effective or very effective.

EXHIBIT 18.—Project director perceptions of project effectiveness on members’ knowledge, activities, and behavior



Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. The survey item had a don’t know response option which was excluded from the analysis.

When discussing the technical skills members acquire throughout their service terms, the projects selected for site visits emphasized the importance of approaching service as an opportunity to embrace professional development, especially considering the personal hardships members may experience as a result of their decision to pursue service.

Whether participating members had prior experience or education related to their service or were using service as a means to transition to or enter a new career path, members often discussed the importance of developing technical skills through “doing” in addition to the traditional training courses they received. One member shared:

It’s a very unique experience to be in someone’s house, see how they live, and see how energy prices and heat and cold is affecting their day-to-day life. Obviously, you learn about it in the classrooms ... like heat island, and all the technical terms. But you never see it, so when you’re going house to house, going to these appointments and hearing the client ... it applies the knowledge that I have about environmentalism and [I’m] able to put a direct face to issues and anecdotal examples to the theoretical knowledge that I have.

Site visit project staff similarly described the impact of intentional technical skills development on member employability post-service. In addition to the on-the-job experience that members gain during their service, project staff described the importance of providing opportunities to members to obtain industry-

recognized certifications in the field related to their project areas and, when possible, certifications of interest to individual members.

One project staff explained the value for members to have these certifications related to employability:

I think one of the things that we do that sets us apart as an organization is our members receive a lot of training and, in particular, a lot of certifications that they need that future employers are looking at ... they'll look at our members when they leave here and they'll say, "Oh this person already has this cert that we would have to give them. And now they have their Red Card or now they have [U.S. Fire Administration Incident Command System] ICS300 and higher level ICS course taken care of. And I don't need to worry about devoting time and resources to getting this person through this process." I think it provides our members with not only a good baseline understanding of a lot of these different areas for future career opportunities but also a lot of the actual certifications that they either will need as a [prerequisite] for a job, or they will need to get when they have that job.

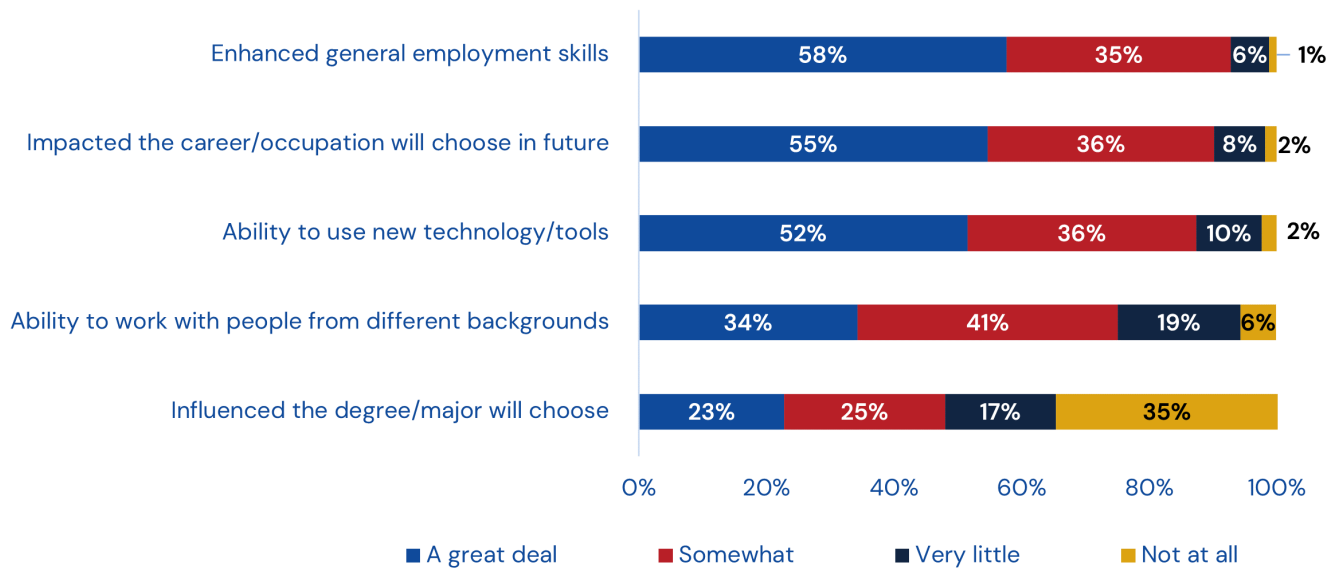
Career Preparation and Green Jobs⁹

Three-fourths or more of the surveyed members reported that the project impacted their future education and career goals either somewhat or a great deal in all of the areas except one as shown in exhibit 19. Slightly less than half of the members (48 percent) reported that participation in the project influenced the degree or major they will pursue. However, that is not surprising given that 87 percent of the members reported they were already college graduates.

Rated highest was the impact of the project in enhancing general employment skills. More than 90 percent of members reported that the project was impactful in terms of enhancing the general employment skills either somewhat or a great deal.

⁹ A standard definition of green jobs does not exist. However, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics developed a two-pronged definition of green jobs (2010): (1) Jobs in businesses that produce goods and provide services that benefit the environment or conserve natural resources and (2) Jobs in which workers' duties involve making their establishment's production processes more environmentally friendly or use fewer natural resources.

EXHIBIT 19.—Impact of project on members’ future education and career goals (n=334–338)



The majority of members participating in the focus groups also cited their service as an influential factor in their decision to pursue employment in a similar field and/or further education and training toward their intended occupation. Often heard during the site visits was the emphasis on providing member services experiences that contributed to a career pathway (see Case Study Highlight: Kupu Conservation Leadership Development Program for specific example). One member shared how their service equipped them for a future career:

Some of the technical training I got last year, like the ATV/UTV [all-terrain vehicles and utility terrain vehicles] certification, was great. I was able to physically handle endangered species, which is wonderful. Just using this equipment is so important for career growth. So being able to say, "Yeah I work with this specific laboratory set and this is what we did working in aquaculture." If I wanted a career in aquaculture it's definitely a lot easier now that I've got the experience. It's tricky to gain that experience because entry-level does not mean entry-level anymore. You already have to have 3–5 years' worth of experience, so I definitely think it's been really helpful to do that.

Additionally, members explained the impact of using their service as an opportunity to explore future employment in the climate field, often adding that their experiences solidified their decision to pursue a career in a field that addresses climate change. One member shared:

I can't imagine working for anything else other than to support climate work. It [my AmeriCorps service experience] has affected me greatly in that I love going to work every day. And I feel like I am contributing to a very just cause.

One member who did not yet have a college degree explained how their service and the Segal education award will help them achieve their career goals.

To me the education grant at the very end is going to help me tremendously get into a better electrician's program than I was planning on doing. I was going to do the IBEW 5-year apprenticeship but that's going to take 5 years to get through the whole program. And if I use that grant, it's going to pay for half of my schooling, and then it'll take me about 2 years, instead of 5 years to get to where I want to be at. So the actual program is going to help me in the very long run get my career going.

For members who already had a college degree, the AmeriCorps project enabled them to enhance their skills and confirm interest in pursuing a career aligned with their major. One member shared:

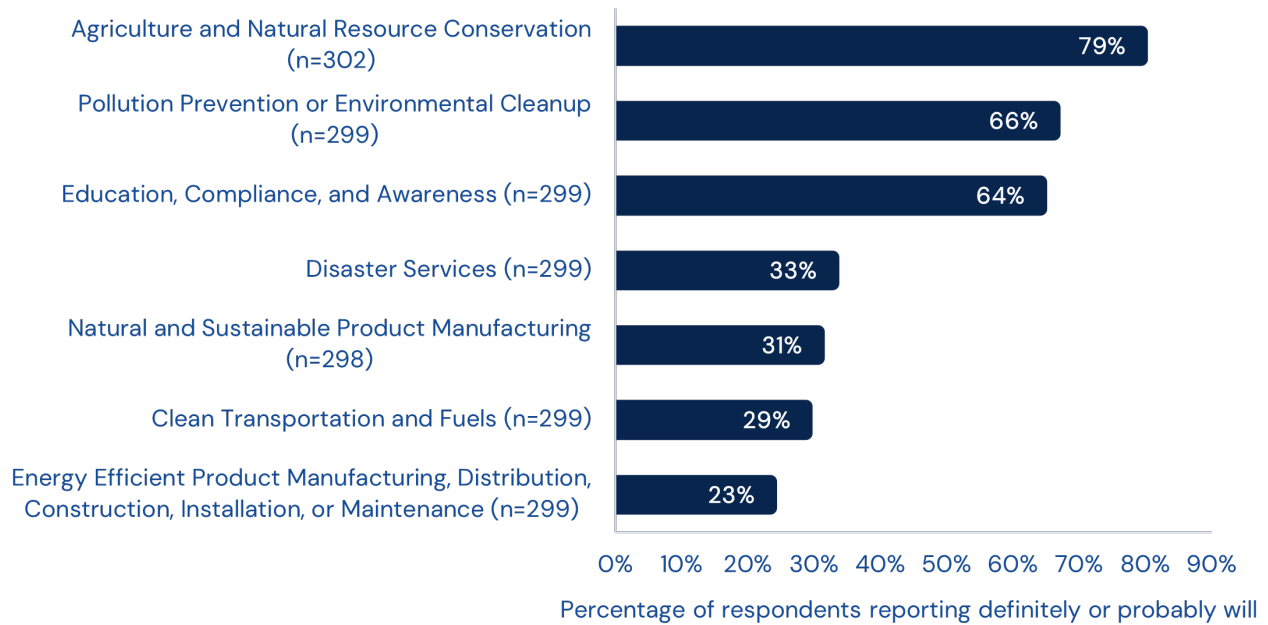
I had just graduated from [university] with an environmental science major. I grew up here in [city] so I've been here my entire life. And a big part of my work philosophy in terms of what I want to do is being able to give back to the community. And I feel like this job in particular was like a merger of having an environmental focus while also doing that really front line community work, given the fact that we do go into client's homes and we do work with them directly.

An overwhelming 90 percent of members expressed interest in obtaining a climate job following their service. Of the members interested in obtaining a climate job, three-fourths were interested in pursuing a career in agriculture and natural resource conservation (79 percent) (exhibit 20). Two-thirds of the members reported interest in either pollution prevention/environmental cleanup or education, compliance, and awareness careers (66 and 64 percent, respectively).

Case Study Highlight: Kupu Conservation Leadership Development Program

With a mission to empower youth to serve their communities, Kupu's Conservation Leadership Development Program prioritizes member career development. Significant emphasis is placed on ensuring members have experiences that prepare them for attaining careers in conservation, which includes opportunities to earn certifications, having diverse field experiences, developing leadership skills, and networking with professionals in the conservation field. Kupu also places special emphasis on members developing connections with host site partner staff to strengthen their conservation resumes and potentially secure future employment. Project staff indicated that this approach is critical to developing a strong conservation workforce overall and invaluable for individuals from local communities who may not have the prior experiences necessary to obtain sustainable employment.

EXHIBIT 20.—Member willingness to pursue careers in climate change



When asked about their willingness to pursue careers in a climate change field, members from site visit projects that shared their future plans varied in the specific focus areas of green jobs they planned to pursue. While the spectrum of careers mentioned by members were spread among the many focus areas under the umbrella of climate change, common among responses of this nature was the value of service in guiding them toward specific careers. Whether these respondents planned to pursue employment in the same field as their service activities or not, members typically agreed that they felt well equipped to navigate employment in the green jobs field as a result of their service. The three quotes below demonstrate the different fields members plan to pursue.

- *I am definitely going to continue pushing down the path of marine conservation. ... And even if I don't continue being able to work at this specific host site, I want to look around marine conservation organizations; we have a lot of great nonprofits. And even government and local agencies that focus specifically on the type of aquatic invasive species management that I have really enjoyed learning about and want to focus on.*
- *I was talking to some of the people who were teaching us there [for the chainsaw and Red Card certification], and I became really excited about an apprenticeship with the forest service and doing wildland fire. That is very different from what I had originally planned. My idea was get my master's, get my Ph.D. and then go to the workforce. And now I am thinking master's and then maybe coming back to wildland fire ... I think the program has really helped me realize that there's so many options out there. And as long as you've got the skills and you enjoy what you're doing then you can do anything.*
- *I would love to work for the city or some sort of local government and contribute that way. I think government work is a great way to improve a lot of the lives of the community.*

Community Outcomes

The following are community outcomes in the following areas: environmental stewardship and conservation; community members’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors; energy efficiency; community resilience; and disaster response. Project directors, partners, and members were asked about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the AmeriCorps projects for addressing community outcomes in the surveys as well as the interviews and focus groups conducted during the site visits.

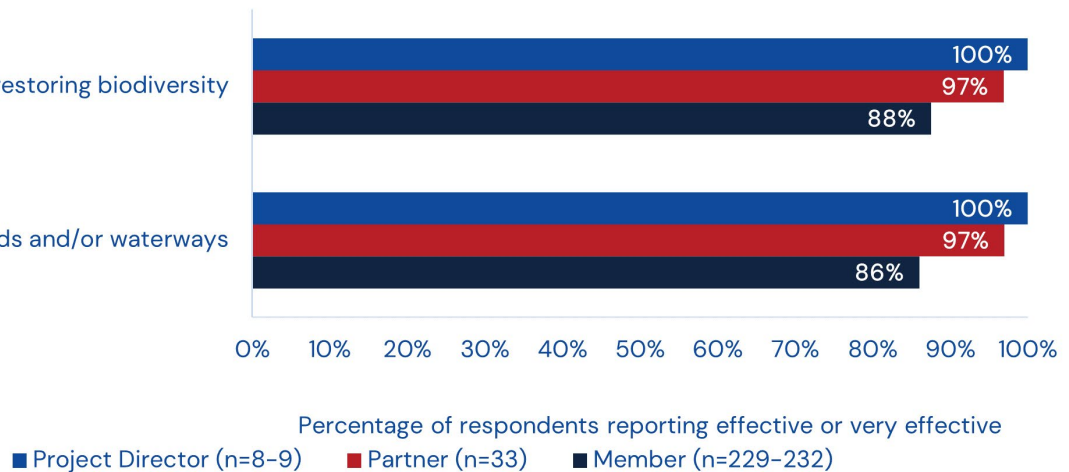
The analysis of survey data included responses for respondent groups that indicated they provided services in each of the study focus areas (exhibit 4). For example, if a respondent indicated they only provided services in energy efficiency, then any responses to the other areas were excluded. To better understand how the projects were working with their communities in these areas, findings from the site visits are included as illustrative examples.

Generally, partners were more likely to have higher perceptions of effectiveness compared to project directors and members. Eighty percent or more of partners said the project was effective or very effective for 10 of the 14 outcomes.

Environmental Stewardship and Conservation

Twelve of the projects participating in the study had services that focused on environmental stewardship and conservation (e.g., erosion control, invasive species removal). All surveyed project directors (100 percent) and nearly all partners (97 percent) responded that their project was effective or very effective for protecting and/or restoring biodiversity and preserving public lands and/or waterways (exhibit 21). Likewise, a high majority of members responded similarly.

EXHIBIT 21.—Project director, partner, and member perceptions of environmental stewardship and conservation outcomes



Three of the five projects participating in the site visits had member activities that focused on environmental stewardship and conservation. Featured below is a description of the Kupu CLDP, its impact on the communities, and a qualitative description of the impact. Quantitative data from performance and evaluation reports are presented for the other two projects, AmeriCorps St. Louis and Ampact’s Climate Impact Corps.

Kupu CLDP

Kupu’s application to AmeriCorps describes in detail the magnitude of the invasive species issue in Hawai‘i and the U.S. Pacific Islands and the threat to the unique and fragile native ecosystems. Furthermore, rising temperatures and variable rainfall cause catastrophic weather events and increased risk of wildfire.

According to Kupu project staff, stewardship of the U.S. Pacific’s native wildlife and their habitats is critical to natural resources and ecological services, including watershed protection, wetland mitigation of pollution and storm runoff, coastal protection from erosion and storm surge, climate control, and outdoor recreation. To help address these issues, Kupu has partnerships with approximately 100 federal, state, and local organizations and places members in communities throughout Hawai‘i and the U.S. Pacific Islands.

Many of the partnerships are with smaller community organizations that operate with limited resources. At the center of Kupu’s work with community partners is the focus on needs as it relates to the priorities identified in Kupu’s AmeriCorps application. Members participating in the focus groups cited a variety of examples illustrating how the communities have been impacted by the services they, as members, provide at host sites. Impacts include invasive species removal, native habitat restoration, and outreach and education.

An important part of the service Kupu members perform is intertwining the culture with their service work. Additional emphasis is placed on educating the public on climate change impacts as well as sharing with youth about career pathway opportunities in the area of environmental stewardship. Following are two examples shared by the members that illustrate that a large part of what the CLDP does is both address environmental stewardship and conservation outcomes and educate the broader community about climate change.

- *We focus on making the reefs better and making sure the invasive algae isn’t really a problem. So the corals and fish and all of the other important parts of those biospheres have the chance to grow, which also helps out the surrounding communities who need to fish. ... What we’re doing is really helping the environment so these people can continue to have their livelihoods and hopefully they’re less impacted than they would be. And even with limu algae ... it used to be that all the aunties and everyone could go out and pick the algae that they wanted and take it home and cook with it. But now there’s so much invasive algae that the natives that are important to Hawaiian culture aren’t there anymore. So by clearing up this room for these native species to go back, we’re also trying to help maintain that part of the culture, because there are less people who understand different algae species and that kind of thing now than there used to be.*
- *I know a big issue with climate change is that its leading to unhealthy habitats and ruining people’s livelihoods, destroying their homes, and things along those lines. I think in addition to the outreach and inspiring people, every Kupu project is aimed at improving the land and improving the water.*

AmeriCorps St. Louis

AmeriCorps St. Louis members serve with the project’s partners to improve and maintain the health of various ecosystems and improve recreational access in Missouri, Illinois, and Montana. These projects include invasive species removal, natural habitat restoration, and timber stand improvement. The following statistics from their 2022–23 *Impact Report* provide a snapshot of AmeriCorps St. Louis’ impact on the communities they serve in the areas of environmental stewardship and wildland fires.

- 2,236 trees felled for habitat restoration, fire line, or hazard removal

- 874 acres cleared of invasive species
- 197 miles of trail constructed or maintained
- 77 miles of fire line prepped/created
- 11,6000 acres of prescribed burning
- 1,792 acres of wildfire response

Climate Impact Corps

Climate Impact Corps' has a Community Forestry initiative that is focused on protecting Minnesota's tree canopy carbon sink. Members serving in this initiative are placed at nonprofits and public agencies. Members are involved in direct activities related to managing trees (e.g., tree plantings and care) as well as activities considered to be more indirect. Those types of activities include tree distribution to community residents, which can include an education component, managing events where volunteers plant or mulch trees on public land, and managing areas close to trees for optimal tree longevity. The following statistics from the *2022–23 Annual Evaluation Report* demonstrate the impact the Community Forestry initiative is having.

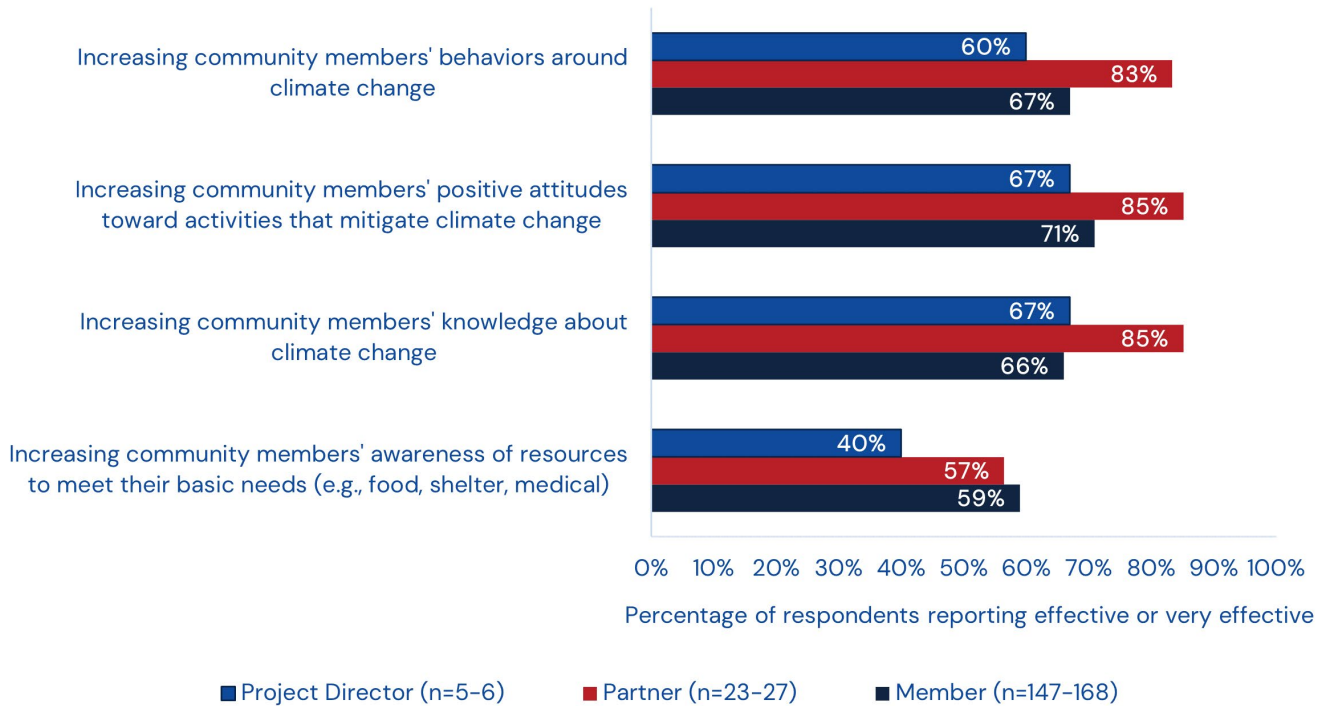
- 102,319 trees managed, which equates to 28,722 pounds of carbon sink¹⁰
- 58,081 trees inventoried
- 4,893 trees planted
- 39,345 trees cared for
- 8,458 trees marked for removal, predominantly due to emerald ash borer infestations
- 3,238 volunteers mobilized, of which 1,951 were first-time volunteers

Community Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors

Twelve of the projects had services that provided education or training, which was intended to increase community knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around climate change. More than 80 percent of the surveyed partners said the project was effective or very effective for 3 of the 4 items while approximately two-thirds of project directors and members responded similarly (exhibit 22). For all three groups, between 40 and 60 percent responded that the project was effective at increasing community awareness of resources to meet basic needs.

¹⁰ The calculation assumes that the average juvenile urban tree sequesters a similar amount of carbon to a 1-inch Kentucky coffee tree, which is estimated to have a 1-year carbon sink of 5.87 pounds. Ampact's evaluators calculated this figure using the i-Tree tool.

EXHIBIT 22.—Project director, partner, and member perceptions of community knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors



Examples from Case Study AmeriCorps Projects

Four of the five projects that participated in the site visits provided education or training to the community. For example, Kupu’s CLDP has an environmental education initiative where some members are placed with partners whose focus is on educating the broader community or more specifically K–12 education. Through their service, members are able to bridge the gap between the schools and the partners who are working in the climate change space. One member participating in a focus group specifically mentioned that through their role as an environmental education leader they were able to connect the students to different environmental education opportunities and expose them to the different career pathways in Hawai’i and the U.S. Pacific Islands. Another member shared their experience of working with elementary students to further students’ knowledge about climate change:

I worked in visitor services for [U.S.] Fish & Wildlife and had mostly elementary school groups ... we talked about our endangered bird species in the wetland that I worked. It was really great to connect with the community and explain why what we do is so important, why climate change is so important, and we have to take it seriously.

Both SolarCorps and MHYC provide community education in an informal way where members discuss how to use the energy efficient technology that has been installed in residents’ homes and the ways it will affect their utility bills and the positive effects on the climate.

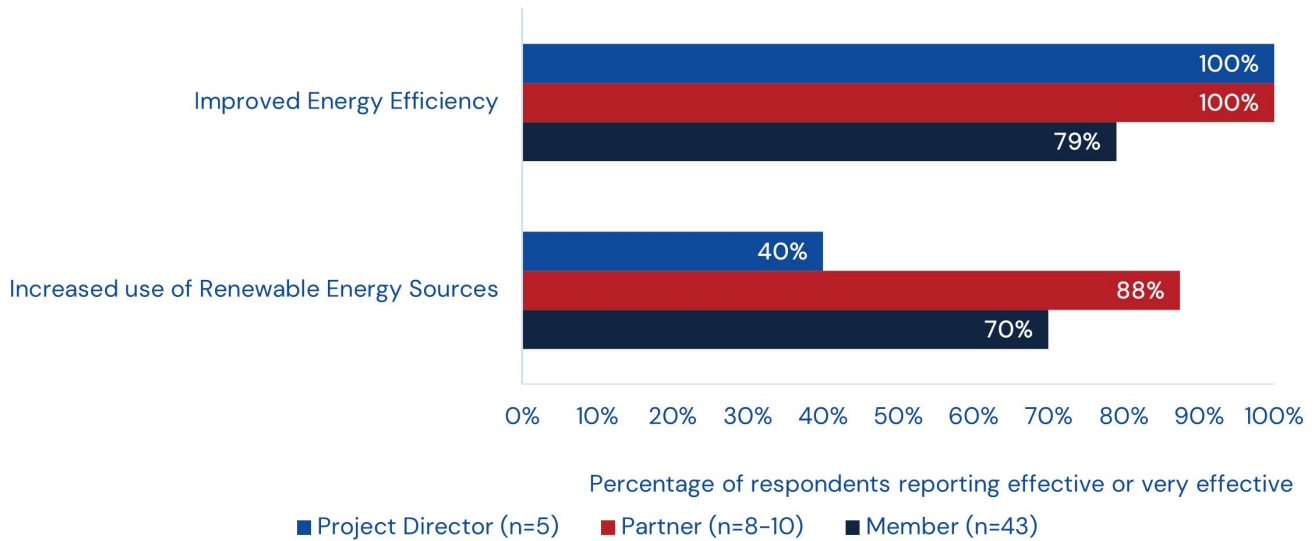
The Climate Impact Corps’ Community Resilience initiative trains its members in the use of a Grounding–Learning–Acting–Reflecting model, which members use as they are implementing their environmental action activities in the communities they serve. Through the implementation of the processes embedded in the

model, the community increases their knowledge and engages in action around climate change mitigation activities.

Energy Efficiency

Eight projects participating in the study have services targeting energy efficiency (e.g., installing energy efficient equipment in homes). All surveyed project directors and partners responded that the project was effective or very effective in improving energy efficiency (exhibit 23). A high percentage of members responded similarly (79 percent).

EXHIBIT 23.—Project director, partner, and member perceptions of energy efficiency outcomes



Two of the projects that were visited had a focus on energy efficiency. The following describes how the community is impacted by AmeriCorps services for each of those projects.

GRID Alternatives SolarCorps

SolarCorps improves community outcomes by lowering the energy costs of low-income households and decreasing usage of energy sources that emit harmful pollutants through no-cost solar installation.

To demonstrate the numerical impact of these services, the GRID Alternatives *SolarCorps Fellowship Impact Report for the 2022–2023 Cohort* reported 336 trainees served by SolarCorps members; 1,686 households received solar from SolarCorps members; and, across the 8 affiliate offices, SolarCorps created \$26,891,697 in energy savings that resulted in 67,120.39 tons of carbon emissions reduced. To illustrate the impact of these services from a family perspective, one community resident explained:

I would say the solar has helped immensely for helping us cut down our costs, so that we can actually buy the food we need. It relieves my parents' stress a lot too about the bills, because my dad did stress a lot about the [Pacific Gas & Electric] bill. But now that he sees we're only paying \$80–90 that's not too bad. You know, I could save this cash for when we really needed it, for like an emergency fund.

Colorado Climate Corps: MHYC

MHYC’s Energy & Water Conservation program improves community outcomes by increasing household energy and water efficiency in the Denver metro area. Amid several severe droughts in recent years in Colorado, the installation of fixtures such as low-flow showerheads and water-efficient toilets serve to decrease the water usage of Denver households.

For the income-qualified households the program serves, installation of efficient technology lowers utility bills. Members and program staff noted that low-income communities are often at increased risk of experiencing the effects of climate change while simultaneously less likely to have access to the technology and resources needed to withstand the effects of a warmer, drier climate. One program staff shared estimates of community savings and described the individual impact services can provide:

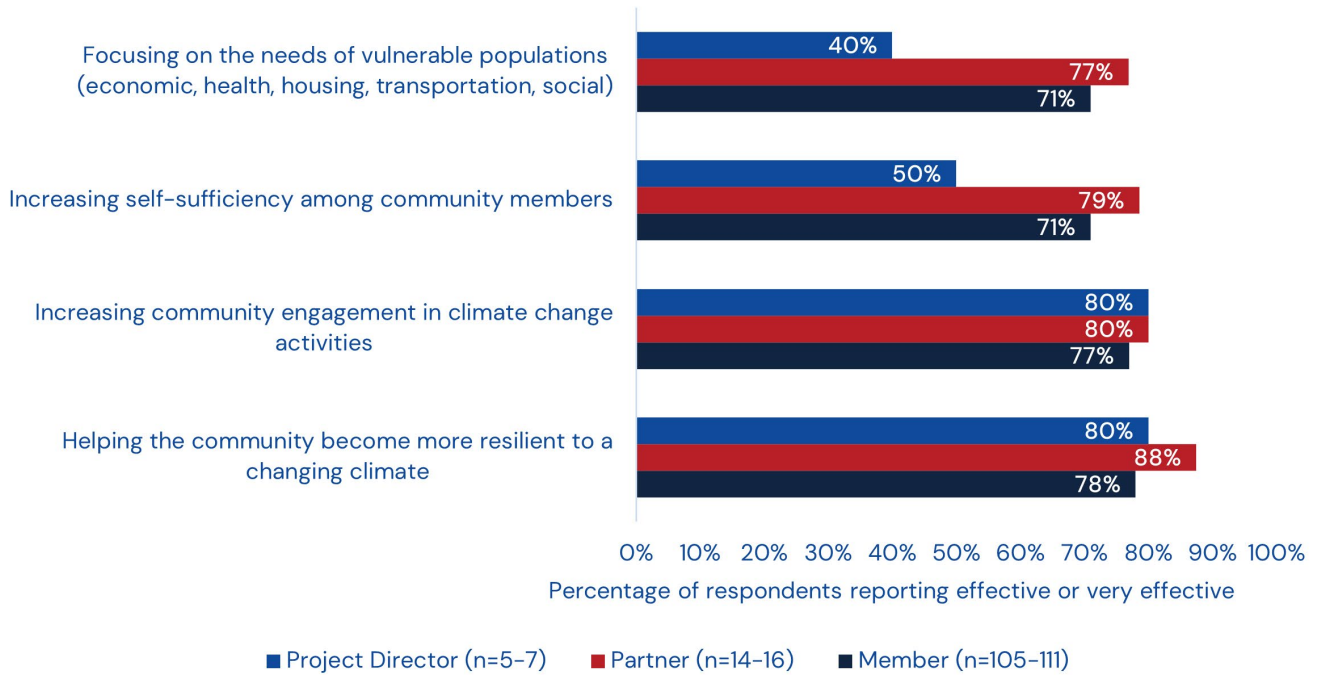
Average household savings has been anywhere between \$150 to about \$250 over the past few years. It kind of has varied depending on rate of installs and what materials we’re using. But those are real-world savings for individuals that may be paycheck-to-paycheck. And then beyond that there’s this sort of trickle effect of connection to other resources. So, we’ve been able to provide somewhere in the range of I think 26 to 35 referrals to bigger ticket items, which can include insulation, window sealing, and things like that, which again could hopefully help people longer term financially.

Data provided by program staff for a 6-month period in 2023 provides an additional perspective on the impact. MHYC in partnership with the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the City of Westminster installed 313 high-efficiency aerators, 70 showerheads, and 92 high-efficiency toilets in single and multifamily homes. Staff reported that annually, these measures will conserve over 4.862 million gallons of water for 428 clients in the Denver metro area and the water conserved would fill more than 7.3 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Community Resiliency and Capacity Building

Eight of the projects participating in the study had services focused on developing community resilience and capacity building (e.g., efforts to strengthen communities, communication, services). Approximately three-fourths or more of the surveyed project directors, partners, and members responded that the project was effective or very effective in increasing community engagement in climate change activities and helping the community be more resilient to climate change (exhibit 24). Partners and members also said the project was effective or very effective in focusing on the needs of vulnerable populations and increasing self-sufficiency among community members. A smaller percentage of project directors responded that the project was effective in these two areas.

EXHIBIT 24.—Project director, partner, and member perceptions of community resiliency outcomes



Climate Impact Corps

Climate Impact Corps has a Community Resilience initiative and members serving with this initiative have position titles of either community stewardship facilitators or sustainability project coordinators. This initiative was launched in 2022–2023 and members are placed in partner communities around the state of Minnesota. Project staff shared that the rationale for the approach is that research shows when there is both increased social capital and sense of place this will lead to protective community actions (Krasny, 2020). The member goal is to build people-to-people connections and people-to-place connections in order to create the conditions that lead to more community action.

Community stewardship facilitators build community sense of place and social capital by facilitating environmental action activities. One member explained the services they provide:

They [Climate Impact Corps] 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.

Sustainability project coordinators are often tasked with developing and/or maintaining initiatives to increase the sustainable practices of a partner organization. Using their community asset map training, members are equipped to consider all strengths and needs in their local community, such as members or institutions that can add a lens of equity when developing and implementing climate solutions. For example, project staff described how one member identified the need for more sustainable programming dedicated toward historically marginalized communities, explaining:

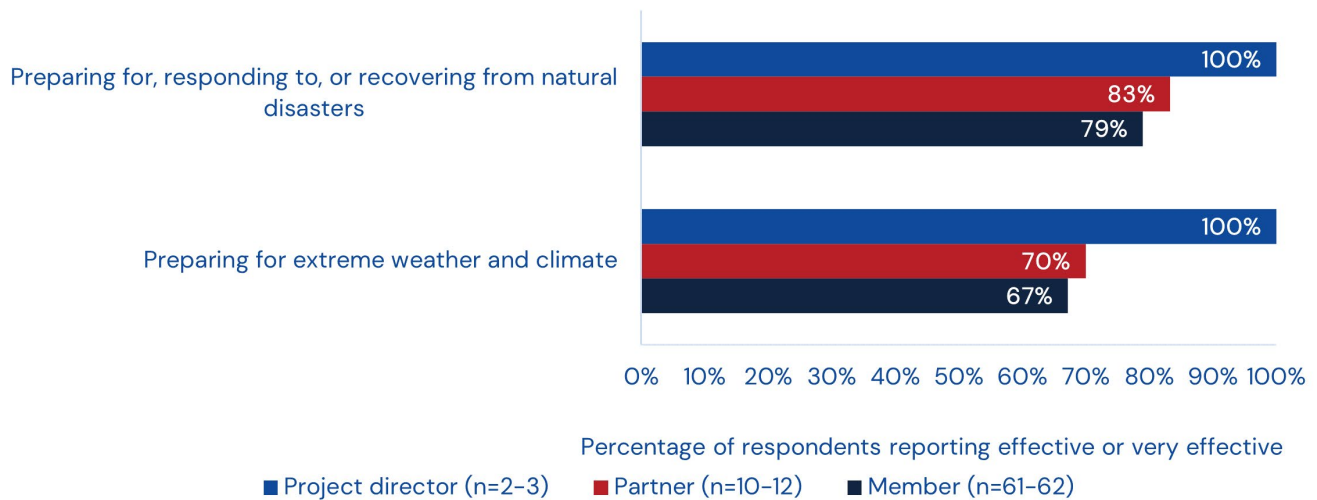
In [community], [member] did some work in a park that was in a primarily Black, low-income neighborhood [and] the park has been under-resourced and not kept up to the same extent as other places in the city. So, [member] worked with their sustainability contact or maybe parks contact in the city to revitalize that area a little bit and clean it up and add some new stuff to the park.

To learn how the Community Stewardship initiative affects the community organizations in which members served, project evaluators piloted the use of Ripple Effects Mapping (Chazdon et al., 2017). Ripple Effects Mapping is a participatory approach that uses appreciative inquiry questions and gathered data from the members, staff, and some partner site supervisors. Evaluators coded the responses using the intended project outcomes from the Community Stewardship theory of change. Of note, 40 percent of the responses aligned to linking social capital (i.e., community members engaged with and/or trust organizations and systems), 27 percent aligned to bridging social capital (i.e., community members with different social backgrounds engage and/or trust each other), and 25 percent aligned to sense of place (i.e., community members identify with, are dependent on, or are attached to their physical place).

Disaster Response

Five projects participating in the study have services targeting disaster response (e.g., clearing storm debris, distributing supplies). All surveyed project directors said their project was effective or very effective in preparing for, responding to, or recovering from natural disasters and in preparing for extreme weather and climate (exhibit 25). Partners responses were similar while members were less likely to perceive the project as effective in both these areas.

EXHIBIT 25.—Project director, partner, and member perceptions of disaster response outcomes



AmeriCorps St. Louis

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reports that the frequency and financial impact of natural disasters are on the rise. In 2023 alone, the United States experienced a record-breaking 28 weather and climate disasters with costs exceeding \$1 billion each, totaling at least \$92.9 billion (Smith, 2023). This escalation is attributed to a variety of factors, including increased climate volatility, which intensifies certain extreme events. The data underscore the urgency for enhanced resilience and adaptation strategies to mitigate the effects of these disasters on communities and economies. AmeriCorps St. Louis has been

responding to disasters since 1995 and has experienced firsthand how a natural disaster can devastate a community, especially those who are often already vulnerable.

One of their mottos is “See the need, meet the need” and an informal motto is assisting what they call the “least served,” “last served,” or “never served.” AmeriCorps St. Louis project staff shared that for their disaster services, they focus pretty much exclusively on populations that are at risk or have high vulnerability. Project staff shared:

So, the under-insured, the uninsured, those that have health and safety risks in the home, those with children or elderly. We operate under the mindset that if people have resources and insurance and connections to recover, that’s not our priority area. Our priority areas, especially if we have our own limited time and resources, should be on those that need further assistance in some way. We try to prioritize different damage assessments and needs assessment and really focus our efforts on those that we feel like if not for us will not receive any other services. Or at least not as adequate services without voluntary support agencies.

AmeriCorps St. Louis members are deployed when the project receives a mission request from federal, state, and/or nonprofit organizations with concentrations in disaster relief. In its most recent impact report, AmeriCorps St. Louis reported responding to three federally–declared disasters in three states (flood, hurricane, and tornado) and two locally–declared disasters in Missouri (tornados). Using trainings from the National Incident Management System and promising practices from Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, members performed services such as homeowner intake and needs verification, survivor intake, damage assessments, case referrals, and crisis cleanup, to name just a few.

More recently, two members who participated in a site visit focus group had been deployed to Kahului, HI, to assist with recovery from the 2023 Maui wildfires. Those two members contributed to the following outputs as part of their impact on the community: estimated 593 households assisted; estimated 2,967 individuals assisted; 90,706 pounds of food collected, sorted, and distributed; 9,050 pounds of clothing collected, sorted, and distributed; 14,860 pounds of other supplies collected, sorted, and distributed; 72 volunteers registered; 152 volunteers supervised; and 478 volunteer hours leveraged.

Contributors and Barriers

Surveyed project directors and partners were asked open-ended questions about the contributors and barriers to achieving the desired outcomes in the community. Likewise, project staff and partners participating in the site visits were asked a similar question.

Contributors

Survey data were thematically analyzed and four themes emerged on the open-ended item on contributors to achieving desired learning: **members hands–on learning and application to service, collaborative relationships, member characteristics, and recruitment** (exhibit 26). These same themes were also heard during the site visit interviews.

EXHIBIT 26.—Contributors to achieving desired outcomes

Theme	Project Directors (n=11)	Partners (n=33)
Members Hands-On Learning/Application	55%	21%
Collaborative Relationships with Community Partners	46%	36%
Members Characteristics and Attitudes	27%	27%
Recruitment	9%	15%

Note. Responses could be categorized in more than one theme. A small number of responses were singular in nature and not able to be categorized as a theme.

The most commonly identified theme among surveyed project directors (55 percent) was the **importance of members receiving hands-on learning and practical application** to enable them to contribute to community outcomes. One project director responded:

We provide hands-on support and training for both our members and our partner supervisors. In supporting this program like we do; we are having an ongoing positive impact on our natural resources and public lands while promoting the stewardship ethic as they become the next generation of land/resource managers.

Approximately one-fifth of surveyed partner responses (21 percent) indicated that the member's application of learning and skills training in the field contributes to project outcomes. A partner shared:

Our member is providing a lot of support in carrying out fieldwork and program development that not only informs educational interactions with the community, but they are also developing educational materials which will eventually be actively used to teach community members about the importance of the work they are doing and what members of the community can do to benefit natural resources around them.

Surveyed project directors (46 percent) and partners (36 percent) placed a similar emphasis on the contributions that **healthy, strong community partner relationships** have on the achieved outcomes of each project. Partner organization respondents typically valued relationships due to their ability to use pre-established relationships with different stakeholders, such as government agencies, environmental organizations, or the community. One partner responded:

Partnerships with organizations that have pre-establish[ed] relationships with the community and using those connections to educate on and assist community members with climate change actions, such as our partnership with [name,] [have contributed to our achievements].

Similarly, a project staff interviewed during a site visit explained:

A facilitator is our network of partners. It's still amazing to see all that they [members] could choose from. You could do ocean work, you could do lab work, you could do nursery work, ... you could do aqua culture They get to check off in their application what they're interested in. ... I think we've also grown to a point where one of the facilitators is that work often comes to us at this point versus us going to them.

Surveyed project director responses (27 percent) and partner organizations commonly emphasized (27 percent) the **importance of members and the impact of their personal/cultural beliefs, motivation, and dedication** to battling climate change on the success of project outcomes within the community. One partner responded:

Members are typically focused on serving the environment and so they are highly motivated to do well in their roles. I've seen this with several members I've known over the years.

Likewise, one project staff during a site visit interview explained:

What first comes to mind is the ability to leverage a lot of energy, enthusiasm, and commitment that our members have. And focus or channel that energy and commitment and enthusiasm towards areas that require some sort of service. ... 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.

Regarding factors that contribute to project outcomes within the community, the least common theme among partner and project director responses was recruitment. While responses were limited, the common theme was local community recruitment. For example, one partner said:

Community-based efforts to inform project work and recruit young adults from the communities we serve [have contributed to our achievements].

While one project director reported:

[The organization] has a strong commitment to representation from the communities we serve and ensuring equity and inclusion are at the center of all decisions we make.

Barriers

Surveyed project directors and partners identified five types of barriers to achieving the desired outcomes in the community: **AmeriCorps compliance requirements, stipend, capacity, time to achieve tangible results, and community attitudes** (exhibit 27). These same themes were present in the site visit interviews with project staff and partners.

EXHIBIT 27.—Barriers to achieving desired outcomes in community

Theme	Project Directors (n=12)	Partners (n=36)
AmeriCorps Compliance Requirements	58%	17%
Stipend	42%	44%
Capacity	33%	31%
Tangibility and Timeliness of Results	25%	11%
Community attitudes	8%	11%

Note. Responses could be categorized in more than one theme. A small number of responses were singular in nature and not able to be categorized as a theme.

The most frequently reported barrier by surveyed project directors related to **compliance requirements** in order to receive AmeriCorps funding (58 percent). Within the broad category of AmeriCorps requirements, common barriers listed by project directors and partners were background check compliance, membership requirements, timing of member enrollment and exit periods, and performance measures that do not reflect the services provided by local projects. For example, one project director explained:

We are looking at applying using a capacity building metric in the hopes that it provides us with more flexibility. However, the capacity building metric also seems to draw a hard line between direct service and indirect service. The on-the-ground reality is that both direct and indirect service are needed on any given effort or intervention in order to accomplish the intended outcomes.

The most common barrier described by both surveyed partners (44 percent) and project directors (42 percent) related to the **stipend**. Both groups noted that the compensation associated with member positions is typically lower in local comparison, unrealistic for the cost of living, and affects the ability for diverse populations to engage in AmeriCorps–funded employment and environmentally focused work. One response from a partner that articulates the many facets of this barrier is as follows:

The frustratingly low AmeriCorps living wage stipend (at “Tier 1”) does not at all match the cost of living in areas such as [name]. Every single AmeriCorps member I know that is currently serving at this level either comes from a privileged background (which allows them to serve as a member) or is actively becoming impoverished as a result of them choosing to serve as an AmeriCorps member—both of which are NOT equitable outcomes. AmeriCorps members serving their community while earning a poverty “wage” only creates financial burdens and traumas that people who only want the best for their communities carry with them for the rest of their lives. We would be able to recruit more equitably and serve our community more equitably if we were to be able to offer AmeriCorps positions that paid a living wage, not a poverty wage.

Another common barrier cited by surveyed partner organizations (31 percent) was **capacity**, referring to both internal capacity of the organization and/or capacity of the external factors within the community, such as a lack of public transportation or affordable mental health resources. For example, one partner responded:

[A barrier is] limited staff capacity. I've been happily surprised to find several other staff within nearly all county departments who are interested in the topic and would like to help us take more action but they do not have spare time for added tasks. The member has observed that planning for and taking action to address climate change is not a high priority for those in leadership, all of whom are hired to tackle some other big effort. We are hopeful this will be solved by creating a new sustainability lead position that works directly with leadership.

Surveyed project director responses coded to this theme were similar (33 percent) but focused on the existing lack of capacity due to insufficient training opportunities. For example, one director responded:

Capacity is certainly a barrier to achieving the intended outcomes in our communities; there's a well-known and documented skilled trades gap, and even if we have a robust network of volunteers, we need an equally robust staff of skilled trades professionals to provide the mentorship, training, and supervision of members.

The lack of timely and clearly observable results related to addressing climate change within the community was also reported as a barrier by surveyed project directors (25 percent) and partners (11 percent). Respondents explained that the time required to make and observe impacts within the community and government settings can be discouraging to members and their desires to continue working toward targeted outcomes within the community. One respondent shared:

[A barrier is] funding—the city only can spend money on certain things and it can take a long time to secure funds and spend funds/procure services. Many times, these timelines are longer than a VISTA service period so it can feel deflating to a VISTA in a 12-month service term. Work in a city setting can sometimes be very fast-paced or very slow. VISTA members can sometimes not see the success they'd like within just a 1-year term.



Attitudes of local communities were a less frequently reported barrier by surveyed partner organizations (11 percent) and project directors (8 percent), but this item still provided important nuance to the challenges facing climate change projects. One partner explained how the existing beliefs of the community are a barrier:

One major barrier to contributing to climate change actions in local communities is a resistance from some communities to believe that climate change exists or is the driving force behind things such as increased wildland fires, ecosystem changes, and weather pattern changes.

Chapter 6: Strengthening Evaluation Capacity to Build Evidence on Climate Change

Evaluation capacity building was provided through 12 hour–long technical assistance sessions delivered on a monthly basis between March 2023 and April 2024. The overall purpose of the evaluation capacity building was to enhance participants’ capacity as evaluation practitioners.

Evaluation capacity building sessions were divided into three modules:

1. Planning Evaluation,
2. Implementing Evaluation, and
3. Reporting and Using Evaluation.

The curriculum was based on AmeriCorps Evaluation Core Curriculum with extensive tailoring to the recovery coaching context, especially through examples and discussion prompts that invited participants to apply evaluation concepts to their experiences. Sessions included a mix of Microsoft PowerPoint presentations and demonstrations, whole group discussions and activities, and breakout discussions. Participants’ contributions, especially responses to and insights about discussion questions and report-outs from breakout rooms, were recorded by a notetaker.

The evaluation capacity–building component of the project was designed to complement the bundled evaluation and support evidence building for the recovery coaching model. In the short term, evaluation capacity building helped participants stay engaged with the bundled evaluation. Every session included discussion prompts that encouraged participants to draw connections between evaluation concepts presented in the session and their own experiences participating in the bundled evaluation or other evidence building activities. Additionally, there were three sessions specifically designed to elicit participants’ feedback on the bundled evaluation, such as their input on data collection activities in their context. By fostering participant engagement and providing a venue for grantees to voice feedback on their experience participating in the bundle evaluation, evaluation capacity–building sessions strengthened the bundled evaluation and the evidence it produced. In the longer term, evaluation capacity building supported participants’ knowledge and confidence in evaluation topics. In turn, participating organizations would be better equipped to generate future evidence on recovery coaching in the long term by planning and implementing evaluations in their own specific contexts going forward.

An external evaluator, BCT Partners, conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of the evaluation capacity–building sessions to achieve two primary objectives: (1) to provide formative feedback to help enhance the curriculum and delivery of the sessions to better align with participating organizations’ needs, and (2) to provide summative feedback regarding the degree to which the sessions led to changes in participants’ knowledge of and attitudes toward evaluation. Data sources for the evaluation included the following:

- A session-specific post-survey administered at the conclusion of each presentation. Results from these surveys were used to calculate a composite satisfaction rating on a 1–5 scale for each session. The post-session surveys also included open-ended opportunities for participants to describe what they liked and what could be improved in the session’s content or delivery.
- Direct observations of all sessions by a member of the BCT evaluation team.

- A pre- and post-survey that assessed participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward evaluation topics at the beginning and conclusion of the entire curriculum.

Implementation of Evaluation Capacity Building

Throughout the evaluation capacity building there were 28 representatives from a total of 15 projects who attended at least one session. These representatives included project directors, project coordinators, data and operations managers, evaluators, and other organizational staff. The median number of attendees per session was 10.5 and the range of participants per session was 6–19. Although the first session had the highest number of attendees, the number of attendees was fairly stable throughout the year (exhibit 28).

EXHIBIT 28.—Attendance per module

Module	Session	Attendees	Survey Responses
Planning Evaluation	Introduction and Evaluation Basics	19	12
	Theories of Change	13	6
	Logic Model	9	7
	Evaluation Planning	12	9
Implementing Evaluation	Feedback on Bundled Evaluation	10	9
	Preparing to Collect Data	6	5
	Data Collection Techniques	7	4
	Data Analysis	8	4
Reporting and Using Evaluation	Deep Dive: [Subject Matter Expert] SME Presentation on Climate Evaluation	11	3
	Evaluation Reporting	9	6
	Using Evaluation for Program Improvement and Continuous Learning	13	5
	Interpreting Data from the Bundled Evaluation	11	3

Satisfaction with Evaluation Capacity Building

The post-session survey assessed satisfaction through six items:

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with this module?
2. The information I learned in this module was useful for me.
3. The instructor(s) clearly explained the material covered in this module.
4. I felt comfortable voicing any questions I had in class.

- 5. The activities were helpful to my understanding of the material.
- 6. I understand how to apply this material to my own program.

Response options were a 5–point Likert–style scale, where 1 meant very dissatisfied and 5 meant very satisfied. An overall satisfaction rating was calculated based on the average response across these items.

In general, participants were moderately satisfied with the learning experience provided through the evaluation capacity–building sessions, and all sessions had a mean satisfaction rating higher than 3.5 (exhibit 29). The sessions with the highest mean satisfaction ratings were:

- Interpreting Data from the Bundled Evaluation (4.28)
- Data Collection Techniques (4.27)
- Theories of Change (4.00)

EXHIBIT 29.—Mean satisfaction with evaluation capacity building sessions

Module	Session	Mean Satisfaction
Planning Evaluation	Introduction and Evaluation Basics	3.54
	Theories of Change	4.00
	Logic Model	3.86
	Evaluation Planning	3.88
Implementing Evaluation	Feedback on Bundled Evaluation	3.94
	Preparing to Collect Data	3.77
	Data Collection Techniques	4.27
	Data Analysis	3.67
Reporting and Using Evaluation	Deep Dive: SME Presentation on Climate Evaluation	3.58
	Evaluation Reporting	3.83
	Using Evaluation for Program Improvement and Continuous Learning	3.78
	Interpreting Data from the Bundled Evaluation	4.28

Note. Scale was 1=very dissatisfied to 5=very satisfied.

Each post–session survey also provided space for participants to leave open–ended comments about their experience, including aspects they liked and what they thought could be improved. Much like other bundle evaluations, a major theme across sessions was that participants valued opportunities for discussion and interaction, especially during breakout sessions. For example, one participant wrote they “appreciated the small group aspect and that there was ... freedom to discuss issues that were specific” to their programs during breakout sessions. Another participant praised the “great breakout session prompts [and] time to

discuss with the group.” Another common strength that participants appreciated was the balance of presentation and discussion. For example, one participant wrote that their favorite part of the evaluation capacity building was the balance of “information, application, and discussion—having all three parts.” The BCT observer also noted that the instructor was clear in explaining material and helpful in supporting participants’ understanding of the material and fostering engagement in the session. BCT also observed that participants were engaged during breakout sessions.

Participants’ recommendations for improvement were primarily requests for more opportunities for peer learning and more examples tailored to climate change interventions. In response, ICF added more time for breakout discussions with prompts for participants to share evaluation challenges they have faced and solutions they have implemented. In response to requests for more tailored content, ICF added a session during which subject matter experts in climate change research led a conversation about the unique challenges and opportunities for research in this focus area.

Insights into Climate Change Evaluation Challenges and Opportunities from Session Discussions

Every session included opportunities for participants to discuss their evaluation challenges and opportunities. Key insights from these discussions included the following:

- Climate change projects often struggle to set an appropriate scope for their AmeriCorps evaluations. In particular, participants felt like the 3-year AmeriCorps grant cycle was too short a time to measure their intended outcomes. Several participants also commented on the complexity of climate change, which made it difficult to conceptualize and measure outcomes from their program. Consequently, some participants said their evaluations focused on smaller, more trackable aspects of their program, but said they felt like they were not able to evaluate the most important program impacts.
- Many participants were unsure how to write a theory of change that reflects all the diverse activities their projects do, especially when they are involved in both environmental stewardship and disaster response and recovery.
- Participants commented that data collection often relies on AmeriCorps members themselves, and described some challenges in training and enforcing consistent data collection techniques from members in the field.

Outcomes

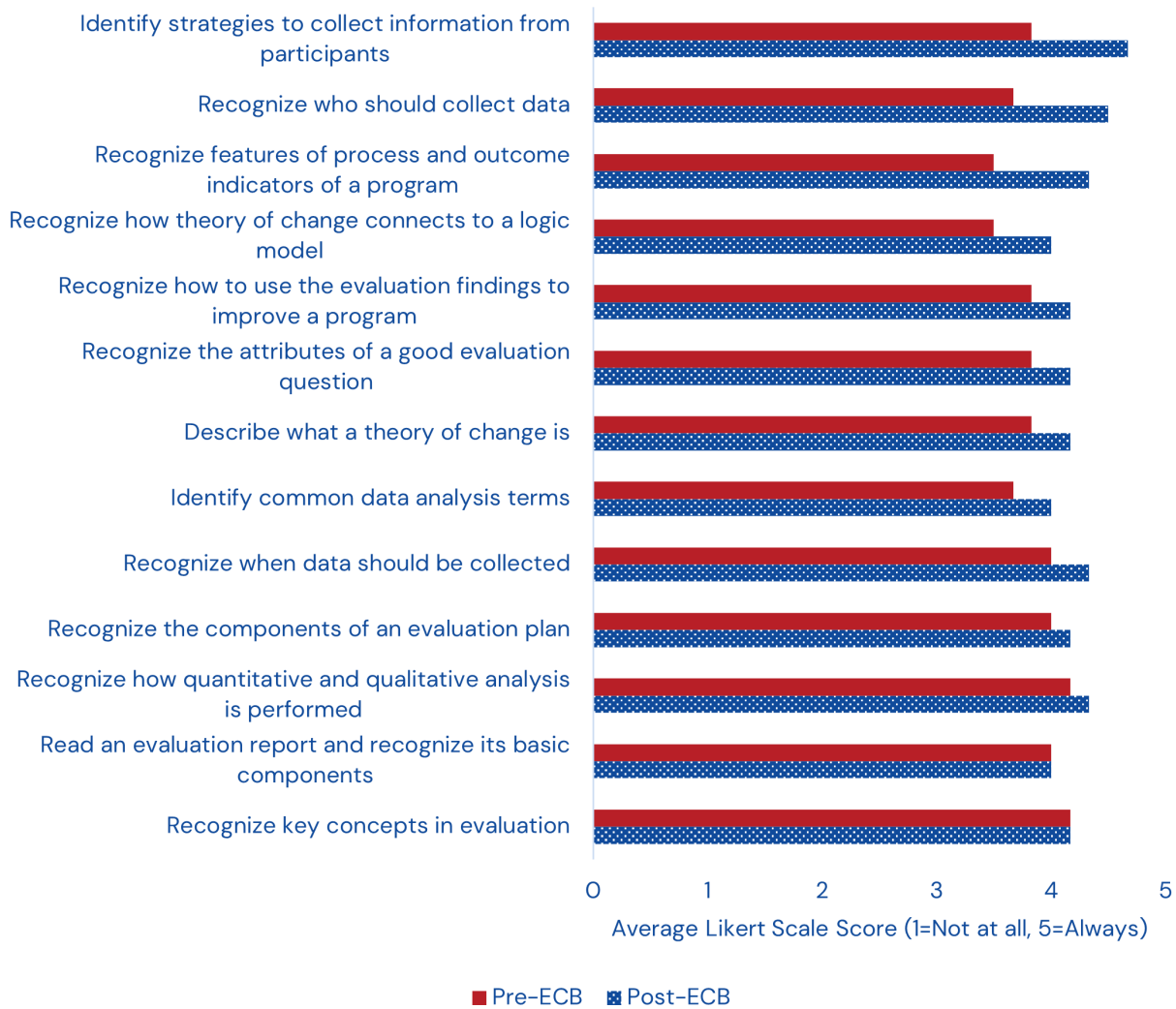
The pre- and post-capacity building assessment survey assessed participants on five outcomes:

1. Perception of their knowledge of evaluation.
2. Frequency of evaluation behaviors.
3. Attitudes toward evaluation.
4. Motivation to conduct evaluation.
5. Barriers that prevent engaging in evaluation.

The following analysis is based only on responses from the six participants who took both the pre-assessment and post-assessment. The inclusion of only matched pairs allows for a direct comparison of their scores before and after the evaluation capacity building efforts.

Perceived knowledge of evaluation topics. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with several statements about their knowledge of evaluation topics, where 1 meant “not at all” and 5 meant “always.” Participants’ perceived knowledge of evaluation topics increased between the pre- and post-survey on 11 out of 13 topics and did not change on 2 topics (exhibit 30). The topics on which participants’ perceived knowledge increased the most were identifying strategies to collect information from participants, recognizing who should collect data, and recognizing features of process and outcome indicators of a program. The only topics on which participants’ perceived knowledge did not change were recognizing key concepts in evaluation and recognizing the basic components of an evaluation report.

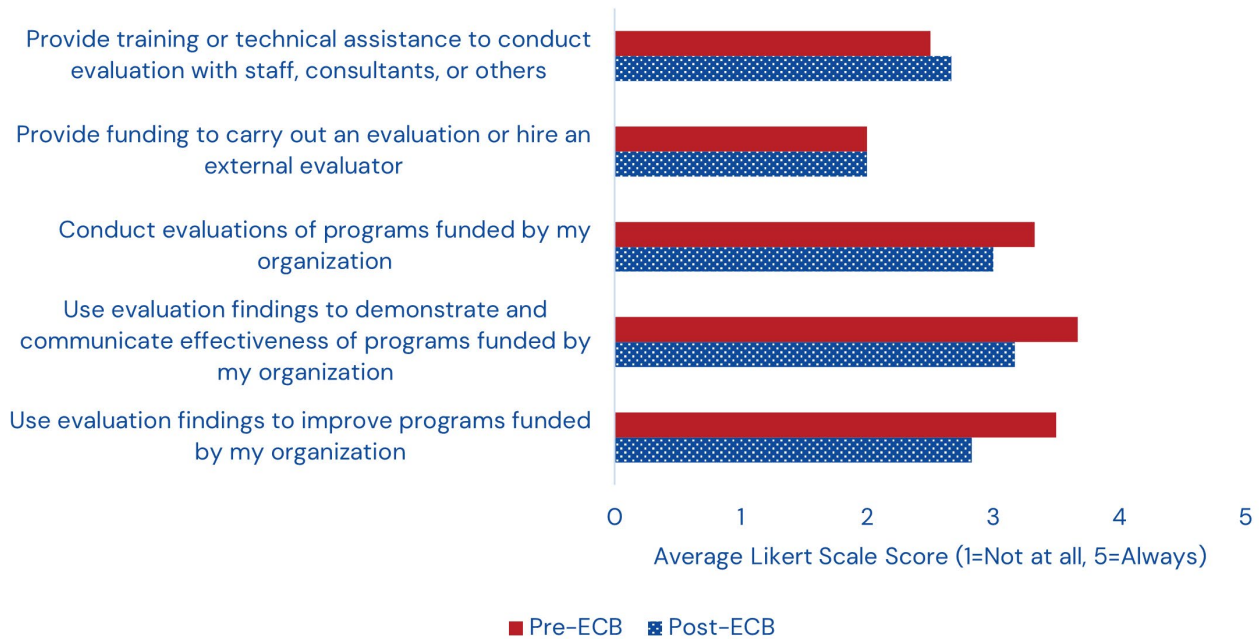
EXHIBIT 30.—Participants’ perception of their knowledge of evaluation topics (n=6)



Note. ECB is evaluation capacity building.

Frequency of evaluation behavior. Participants were asked how often they helped their organization engage in evaluation behaviors in the past year, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (always). Participants’ self-reported frequency of evaluation behavior increased on one topic (Provide training or technical assistance to conduct evaluation to staff, consultants, or others), stayed the same on one topic, and decreased on three topics (exhibit 31). Caution should be exercised in interpreting the findings, given the small number of respondents.

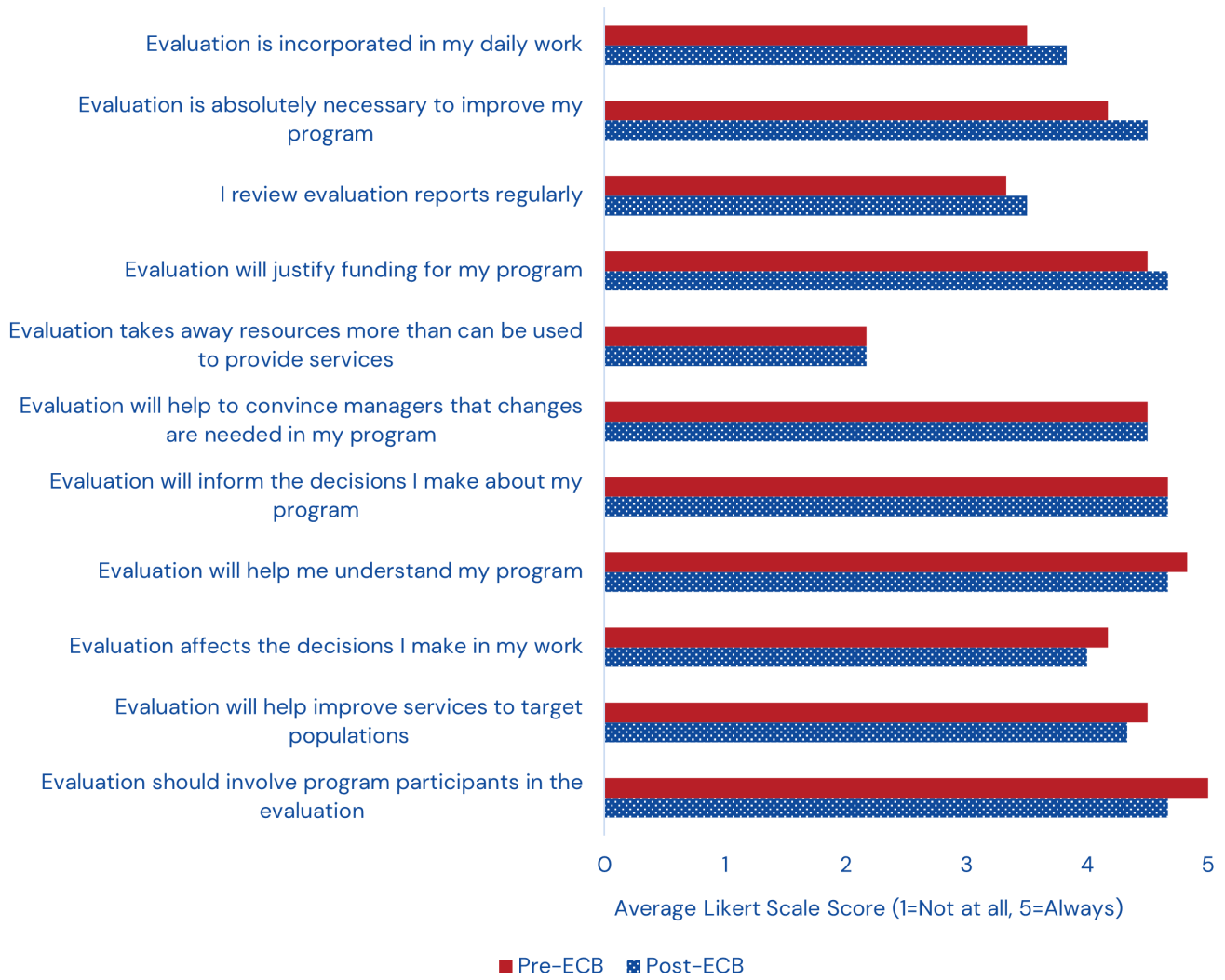
EXHIBIT 31.—Participants use of evaluation behavior and evaluation-related skills (n=6)



Note. ECB is evaluation capacity building.

Attitudes toward evaluation. Evaluation capacity-building participants rated their agreement on 10 statements about evaluation in the pre-post survey. These statements included a mix of positive and negative sentiments, such that in some instances agreement indicated an improved attitude toward evaluation and on others disagreement with the statement signaled an improved attitude toward evaluation. On four of the ten items, changes from pre to post indicated more positive attitudes toward evaluation, with the largest positive change associated with the statement “evaluation is incorporated in my daily work” (exhibit 32). There was no change in attitudes between pre- and post-surveys on three items, and there were four items for which attitudes toward evaluation were more negative on the post-survey than the pre-survey.

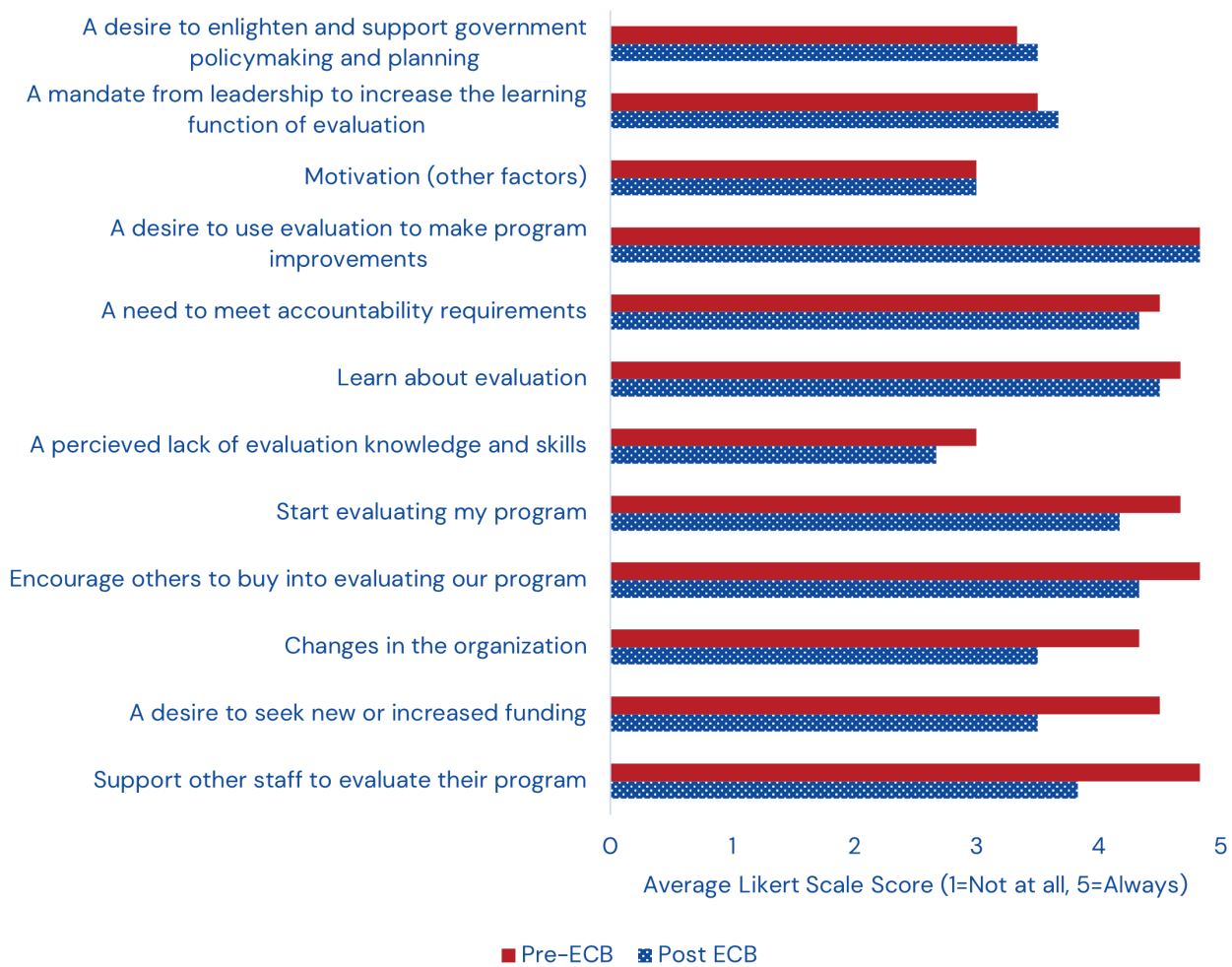
EXHIBIT 32.—Participants’ attitudes toward evaluation (n=6)



Note. ECB is evaluation capacity building.

Motivation to conduct evaluation. Participants were asked to rate the importance of various reasons why they may engage in evaluation activities, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (always). Before the evaluation capacity-building series, participants were most motivated to use evaluation to make program improvements, encourage others to evaluate their program, and support staff to evaluate their program (exhibit 33). After the evaluation capacity-building series, participants’ motivation to conduct evaluation or engage with evaluation generally seemed to decrease across most topics, except motivation to support better government policy and to respond to their organizational leadership’s interest in evaluation. Decreased motivation may be the result of participants learning more about the process of evaluation and recognizing the time required.

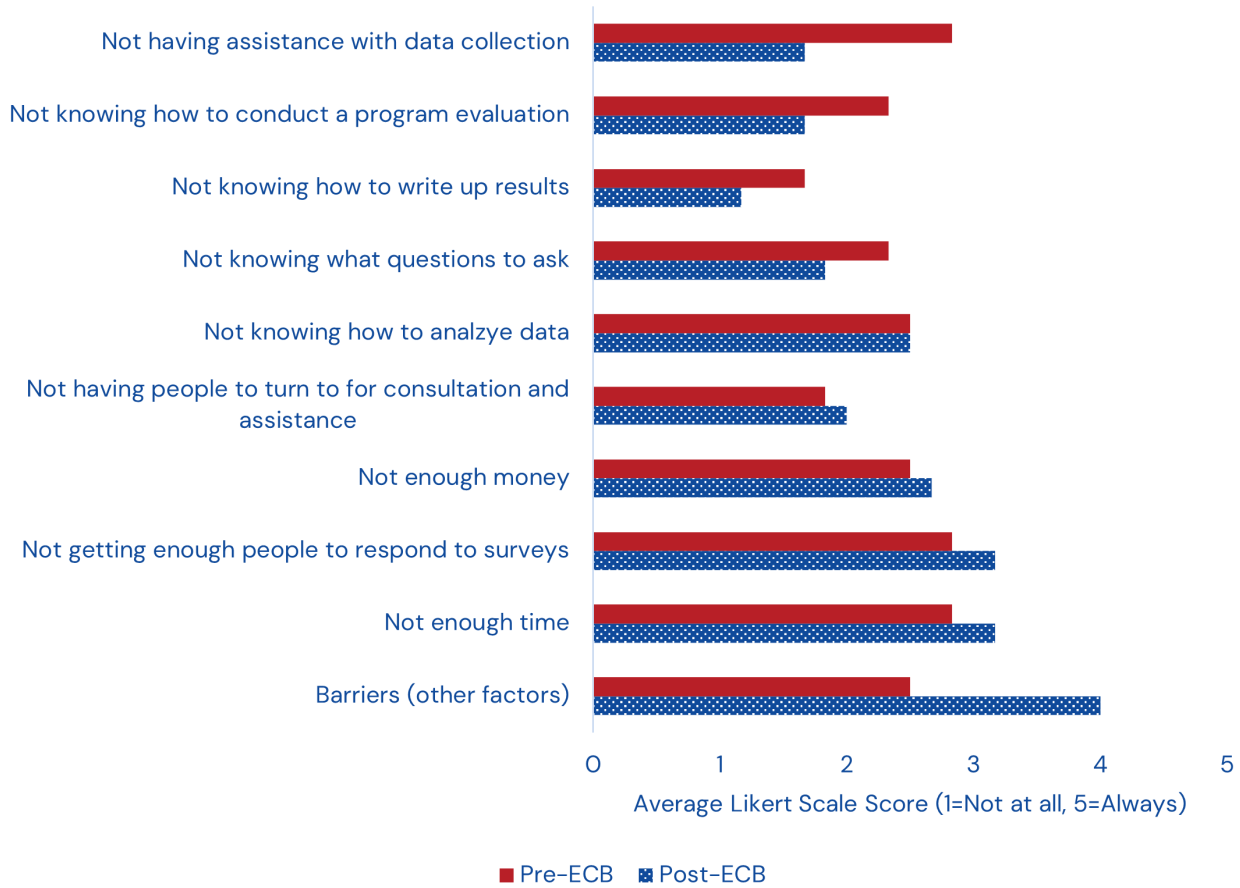
EXHIBIT 33.—Participants’ motivation to conduct evaluation (n=6)



Note. ECB is evaluation capacity building.

Barriers to evaluation. Participants were asked to respond to the extent to which they experience 10 specific barriers to evaluation, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (always). Participants reported a decrease in experiencing four barriers, no change in one barrier, and an increase in five barriers (exhibit 34). The barriers that decreased the most from pre to post were related to assistance with data collection, knowing how to conduct a program evaluation, knowing how to write up results, and knowing what questions to ask.

EXHIBIT 34.—Barriers to evaluation (n=6)



Note. ECB is evaluation capacity building.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Recommendations

The diversity of AmeriCorps–funded projects participating in this study—including their project focus areas, service activities, and relationships with partner organizations and the community—is central to their capability for addressing climate change. This diversity enables projects to tailor climate solutions to the specific needs of local communities, thereby enhancing community resilience and mitigating the local effects of climate change. However, while this diversity is essential for place–based climate action, it also presents challenges when attempting to characterize the overall nature of AmeriCorps–funded climate projects. Although the results presented in this report are based on thorough data collection and analysis, it is important to recognize that each project offers diverse climate services through various project models. Consequently, some of the cross–cutting themes and recommendations provided below may not fully encompass the entire range of projects and their operational contexts.

Cross–Cutting Themes

The 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.

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.

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 13). 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).

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 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.

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 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 Climacticas,” 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 the 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 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 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 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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Appendix A. Methods and Data Sources

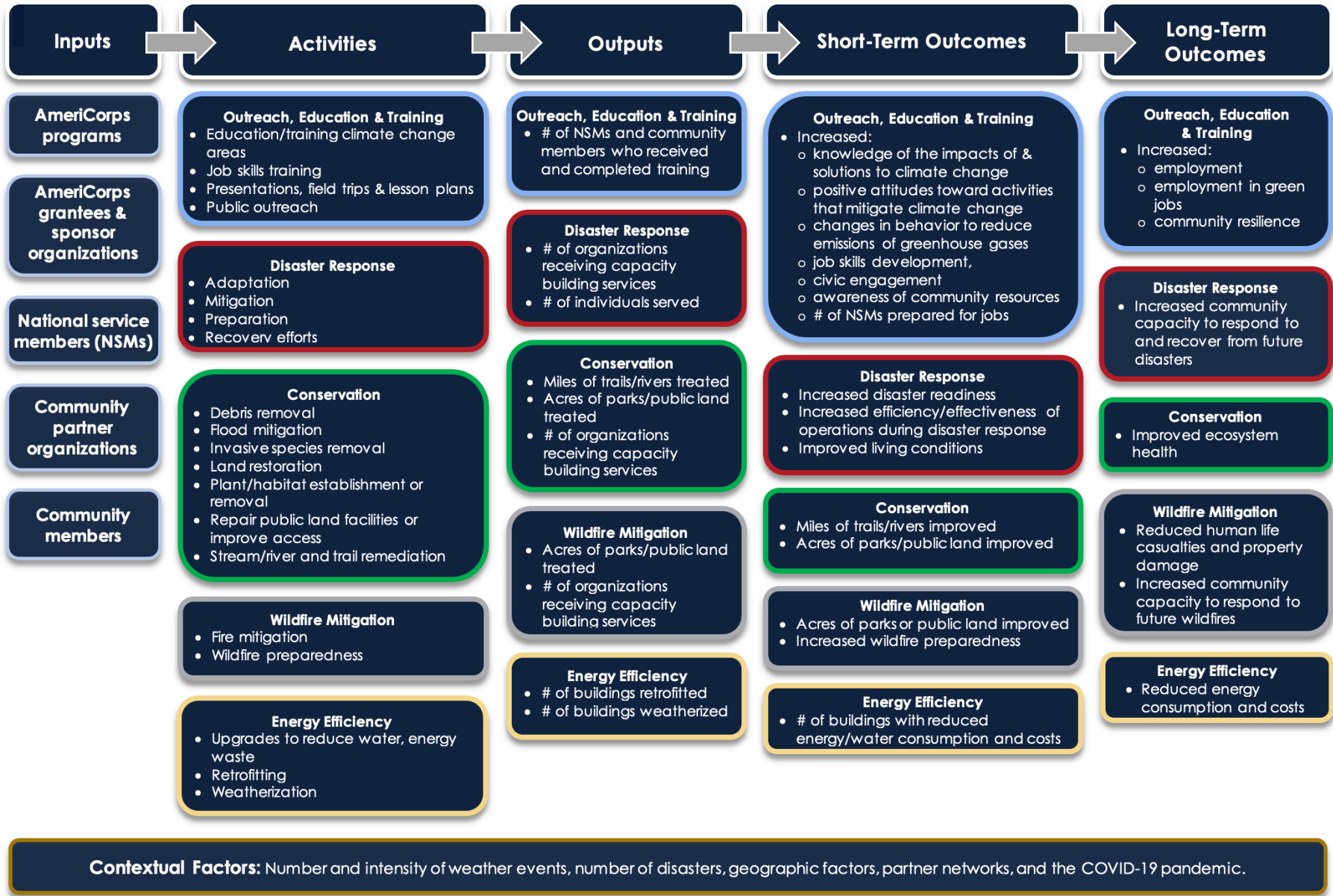
Appendix A provides a project logic model as well as a description of the evaluation design, the study sample, data sources, and data collection methods. The analytic approach is described as well as a discussion of the limitations of the methods and data sources.

Project Logic Model

As a framework to guide the study, a logic model (see exhibit A-1) was developed that outlines the relationships between activities, expected outputs, and their desired short- and long-term outcomes. The logic model was informed by both a literature review and review of AmeriCorps applications. ICF reviewed AmeriCorps State and National grantee, AmeriCorps VISTA, and NCCC service project applications from fiscal year (FY)2020 and FY2021. The NCCC applications were excluded due to the differing length and scope of service projects. 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 logic model is intended to be comprehensive, covering a broad list of strategies across all related projects rather than representing strategies from any specific project funding stream. The logic model informs the overall evaluation and data collection. While the logic model includes long-term outcomes, the evaluation priorities of the current study focus mostly on short-term outcomes.

EXHIBIT A-1.—Climate change bundle overarching logic model to evaluate AmeriCorps-supported projects using national service members



Research Questions

Project Operation

1. How do projects/members connect their work to climate change?
 - a. What are the considerations and priorities?
 - b. What activities are being implemented to address climate change?
 - c. How are project outcomes being measured?
2. To what extent does the project include opportunities to increase equity?
3. To what extent is the project operating as intended?
4. What are some promising practices and challenges in implementing the climate change grant projects?
5. What promising practices were most effective for vulnerable and/or diverse communities?
6. What were the barriers and facilitators to meet the intended outcomes of the project?
 - a. What are the lessons learned that can inform the field or be useful for practitioners that work in this space?
7. What is the likelihood that the project will be sustained beyond the grant?

Project Context of Operation

8. How were the communities and community members impacted by climate change prior to the project?
9. What types of communities are being helped by the climate change grant projects?
 - a. What are the characteristics of the communities and community members served through the project?
 - b. Where are the gaps by demography and geography?
 - c. To what extent are there differences in outcomes across communities?
10. To what extent are projects focused on socially vulnerable populations and communities that are effected by climate change?
 - a. What roles did vulnerable communities have in developing and implementing the projects?
11. What are the demographic characteristics of national service members (e.g., gender, age, race, ethnicity, education)?

Partnerships

12. What partner organizations are involved (i.e., community organizations, local agencies)? What are their roles in the project?
13. What is the breadth (# and type of partnerships), quality, and quantity of the partnership(s) (# and frequency of joint activities and the strength)?
14. How were partnerships built and maintained?

15. How do grantee and sponsor organizations collaborate with partners to build community resilience?

Project Outcomes: Addressing Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

16. To what extent do the climate change grant projects:

- a. improve energy efficiency and increase the use of renewable energy sources?
- b. help communities prepare, respond, and recover from natural disasters and other climate change effects?
- c. help communities prepare, respond, and recover from natural disasters and other climate change effects?
- d. help communities prepare, respond, and recover from natural disasters and other climate change effects?
- e. build capacity of the community to be resilient?

Project Outcomes: AmeriCorps Member Civic Engagement

17. To what extent do the climate change grant projects lead to increased civic engagement?

- a. To what extent does participation in the climate change grant project improve national service members' attitudes and behaviors toward civic engagement?

Project Outcomes: AmeriCorps Member Job Readiness

18. In what ways does participation in the climate change grant projects influence national service members' job skills development toward green jobs?

19. To what extent does participation in the climate change grant projects:

- a. increase national service members' functional and technical job skills?
- b. increase national service members' interest/willingness to pursue a career in a green job?
- c. lead to a job after their service?
- d. lead to a career in a green job after their service?

Evaluation Design

This evaluation—the first ever for AmeriCorps that synthesizes information about climate change approaches and models across funding streams—seeks to provide insights on the implementation and outcomes of a range of project activities related to education and training, disaster response, conservation, wildfire mitigation, and energy efficiency. Other areas explored include the ways in which the projects influence community resilience, changes in attitudes and behaviors toward civic engagement among national service members, and the development of job skills, including skills for green jobs. Projects across AmeriCorps with similar project models and outcomes were “bundled” together to better understand their work, but also to encourage knowledge sharing and capacity building around issues such as data collection, measurement, and evaluation.

Recognizing the definition of climate change is broad, in the initial stages of this project, research focused on some of the big areas of climate change based on AmeriCorps performance measures (e.g., disaster response,

conservation, wildfire mitigation, energy efficiency) as well as areas of interest and recommendations from AmeriCorps (i.e., preparation for green jobs, equity, and recruitment).

Study Sites

Many AmeriCorps State and National grantees and VISTA sponsors perform activities that can fall under the scope of climate change-related work. However, this study is not a census of all climate change-related programs and activities, but rather a sample. Researchers reviewed AmeriCorps State and National grantee applications and VISTA project applications from FY2020–2022.¹¹ 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. AmeriCorps and ICF contacted the project directors and sponsors for all identified projects to invite their participation. The study includes 13 AmeriCorps State and National grantees and 2 AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors. Exhibit A-2 provides an overview of the 13 grantees and 2 sponsors that participated in the study.

¹¹ AmeriCorps Seniors and NCCC were excluded due to the differing length and scope of service projects.

EXHIBIT A.2.—Study Participating Organizations

Participating Organizations	
California GRID Alternatives SolarCorps (AmeriCorps State and National) GRID Alternatives	Minnesota GreenCorps (AmeriCorps State and National) Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Colorado Youth Corps (AmeriCorps State and National) Colorado Youth Corps Association	Missouri AmeriCorps St. Louis (AmeriCorps State and National) Partnership for Youth, Inc.
Colorado Climate Corps (AmeriCorps State and National) Colorado Youth Corps Association	North Carolina Project Conserve (AmeriCorps State and National) Conserving Carolina
DC Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (AmeriCorps State and National) The Corps Network	Virginia Service and Conservation Corps (AmeriCorps State and National) Virginia State Department of Conservation and Recreation
Hawai‘i Conservation Leadership Development Program (AmeriCorps State and National) Kupu	Washington Conservation Corps (AmeriCorps State and National) Washington State Department of Ecology
Hawai‘i Office of Climate Change, Sustainability, and Resiliency (VISTA) Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency	Washington Service Corps (AmeriCorps State and National) Washington State Department of Employment Security
Hawai‘i Office of Coastal and Conservation Lands (VISTA) Department of Land and Natural Resources	Washington Vets Work Environment and Land Stewards project (AmeriCorps State and National) Mt. Adams Institute, Inc.
Minnesota Climate Impact Corps (AmeriCorps State and National) Ampact	--

Data Sources and Data Collection

Surveys were administered to project directors, partners, and members of all 15 participating projects. Survey data were collected in spring 2023. For each of the five projects selected for the case studies, data collection included project director and staff interviews, partner interviews, and a service member focus group. Project documents were also collected and reviewed. Site visits occurred late fall 2023 to winter 2023.

Project Director Survey

The Project director Survey included 36 items, several of which had subitems, organized across 5 sections. Four items were background questions designed to gather information about respondents’ roles and their organization. Two items gathered information about the service member training. Four items asked about services and activities provided by the organization. Ten items gathered information about partnerships. Respondents were asked to answer one set of questions about a partnership they considered successful and

the same items about a partnership they identified as challenging. Four questions measured respondents' perceptions of outcomes. Finally, two open-ended questions asked about recommendations they had for other organizations implementing a similar project and other comments.

A personalized invitation with a unique link was sent to the project director or their designee. The survey was launched on March 15, 2023, and closed on May 15, 2023. Multiple follow-ups were conducted with nonrespondents. Representatives from all 15 projects participating in the study responded to the survey for an overall response rate of 100 percent. Important to note is one project director serves two projects; thus the total number of project director responses is fourteen.

Partner Survey

The Partner Survey included 18 items, several of which had subitems, organized across 5 sections. Eight items were background questions designed to gather information about respondents' roles and their organization. Five items gathered information about services provided by the partner organization and relationship with the AmeriCorps project organization. Three questions measured respondents' perceptions of outcomes. The last two items were open-ended questions and asked about recommendations they had for other organizations implementing a similar project and other comments.

Each project director was asked to provide the study lead with the name, email address, and organization name of the point of contact of their partner organizations. Ten partners were randomly selected from each organization to survey and, for organizations who identified eleven or fewer partners, all were surveyed. Prior to the official survey launch, project directors sent a message to the partners that shared information about the forthcoming survey and encouraged response. The message content was provided by the study lead.

A personalized invitation with a unique survey link was sent to the partners on May 3, 2023. The survey closed on June 17, 2023. Multiple follow-ups were conducted with nonrespondents. The AmeriCorps projects also conducted follow-ups. Of the 98 partners from 13 of the AmeriCorps projects, 48 respondents participated for a response rate of 49 percent.¹²

National Service Member Survey

The National Service Member Survey included 26 items, several of which had subitems, organized across 5 sections. One item was a background question about members' reasons for volunteering. Seven items gathered information about current role and services provided. Three questions asked about training received. Six items measured respondents' perceptions of outcomes. Eight items pertained to demographics. The last item was open-ended and allowed members to share any other comments they had.

Each project director was asked to provide the study lead with the name and email address of current members and, if readily available, contact information for alumni from the last 6 months.¹³ Prior to the official survey launch, project directors sent a message to the members that shared information about the forthcoming survey and encouraged response. The message content was provided by the study lead.

A personalized invitation with a unique survey link was sent to the members on March 20, 2023. The survey closed on May 15, 2023. Multiple follow-ups were conducted with nonrespondents. The AmeriCorps projects also conducted follow-ups. An incentive to complete the survey was provided. Members who completed the

¹² The 48 respondents to the Partner Survey represent 12 programs; 1 program did not have any respondents and 2 AmeriCorps programs did not identify partners.

¹³ Project directors provided contact information for 2,092 members, which included 1,235 alumni and 857 members. The contact information included duplicate entries and entries for individuals who were both alumni and current members.

survey had the option to provide their contact information and be entered in a raffle drawing for 1 of 10 \$25 Amazon gift cards. Of the 1,993 unique members surveyed, 432 responded for a respectable response rate of 22 percent.¹⁴

Site Visit Data Collection

The five case study sites were selected in consultation with AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation staff. Each site was purposefully selected because its programming focused on one or more areas of climate change as defined by this study. The five sites included projects funded under the AmeriCorps State and National project and were located throughout the country (California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Minnesota, and Missouri).¹⁵

Researchers conducted 2-day site visits to each selected project from November 2023 through January 2024. Each case study was informed by interviews, focus groups, and document reviews. Researchers observed member training at three sites and service delivery for one site. Interviews conducted with the project director, project staff, partners, and community were 30–60 minutes in length and AmeriCorps member focus groups were 60–90 minutes.¹⁶

Documents such as grant applications, progress reports, tracking data, and training materials were also collected and reviewed. These documents helped the study team to better understand the activities and status of each project's work and provided a basis for corroboration with stakeholder perspectives gleaned through the interviews and focus groups.

Across the five participating organizations, data were collected from a variety of respondents to gather a comprehensive picture of organizations' experiences. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 22 staff/project directors, 7 staff from partner agencies, 32 AmeriCorps State and National members, and 5 individuals from the community.

See exhibit A-3 for an overview of the site visit participants by role and interview and focus group data collected at each of the participating organizations. Exhibit A-4 includes additional information about the organizations and their projects.

¹⁴ Duplicate member contact information received from project directors was removed. The number of respondents excludes the three members who responded they did not consent to participating in the survey and thirty-one members who answered the consent question (agreeing to participate) but did not respond to any other survey questions.

¹⁵ One of the two VISTA projects in the study concluded in spring 2023 and therefore this sponsor opted to only participate in the first part of the study (i.e., survey data collection). The other VISTA was invited to be a case study site, but declined due to limited staff capacity.

¹⁶ Four interviews were conducted by ICF staff using Microsoft Teams before or after the site visit.

EXHIBIT A-3.—Site visit participants

Organization/Program	Project director and Staff	Partner Agency Staff	AmeriCorps Members	Community
Ampact: Climate Impact Corps	4*	2	8	2
Colorado Youth Corps Association: Colorado Climate Change Corps: Mile High Youth Corps' Energy & Water Conservation Project	7**	2	6	1
GRID Alternatives: GRID Alternatives SolarCorps	4	1	5	2
Kupu: Conservation Leadership Development Program	4	-	6***	-
Partnership for Youth Inc. (Legal Name): AmeriCorps St. Louis	3	2	7	-
Subtotals (n) = 66	22	7	32	5

*Includes an interview with an external evaluator.

**Includes group interview with three project staff representing an organization receiving an AmeriCorps grant (i.e., parent organization).

***Includes group interview with three alumni.

EXHIBIT A–4.—Overview of case study sites

Organization	Profile	AmeriCorps Members	Number and Types of Partners
<p>Ampact Location: Minneapolis, MN Project Name: Climate Impact Corps Current Funding: State</p>	<p>Mission: Ampact's mission is to transform lives; as leaders and innovators, Ampact is working to demonstrate the power of national service to address complex social issues</p> <p>Case Study Focus: Environmental Stewardship and Community Capacity Building</p> <p>Services Provided: Community forestry, community resilience, and home energy</p>	<p># of members/year: 100</p> <p>Areas serving: Climate Impact Corps serves the state of Minnesota; other AmeriCorps-funded projects serve states beyond Minnesota</p>	<p># and types of partners: 60 sites across the 3 service areas (community forestry, community resilience, and home energy); partners located throughout the state vary widely in organizational makeup to include nonprofits, higher education institutions, local/city/and state government administration, and soil and water conservation districts</p>
<p>Colorado Youth Corps Association Location: Denver, CO Project Name: Climate Change Corps: Mile High Youth Corps' Energy & Water Conservation Program Current Funding: National</p>	<p>Mission: Help youth make a difference in themselves and their community through meaningful service opportunities and educational experiences</p> <p>Case Study Focus: Energy and water conservation</p> <p>Services Provided: Energy audits and retrofitting, or the addition of new technology or features to existing energy and/or water use systems within the households of low-income communities (e.g., ultra-high-efficiency toilets, low-flow aerators, low-flow showerheads, programmable thermostats, and LED light bulbs)</p>	<p># of members/year: 25</p> <p>Areas serving: Denver metro area and southern Front Range regions</p>	<p># and types of partners: 7 community partners—which are the municipalities in the Denver metro area and southern Front Range regions—local government agencies, Colorado's Water Conservation Board, and community nonprofits</p>

Organization	Profile	AmeriCorps Members	Number and Types of Partners
<p>GRID Alternatives Location: Oakland, CA Project Name: GRID Alternatives SolarCorps Current Funding: State</p>	<p>Mission: Build community-powered solutions to advance community and environmental justice through renewable energy Case Study Focus: Renewable Energy Services Provided: Solar installation (construction), workforce development, and community outreach</p>	<p># of members/year: 35 (have additional 12 fellows through other funding) Areas serving: California (7 regional offices)</p>	<p># and types of partners: National network of 100+ affordable housing developers, workforce development projects, local government housing agencies, weatherization providers, and community based organizations in communities across the country; LinkedIn and Service Year</p>
<p>Kupu Location: Honolulu, HI Project Name: Conservation Leadership Development Program Current Funding: National</p>	<p>Mission: 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 Case Study Focus: Environmental Stewardship Services Provided: Invasive species removal, native habitat restoration and protection, watershed management, marine conservation, lab work, research, environmental education, outreach, and leading volunteer groups</p>	<p># of members/year: 235 Areas serving: Hawai‘i and the U.S. Pacific Islands of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas</p>	<p># and types of partners: Approximately 100 federal (e.g., U.S. National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), state, (e.g., Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources), and nonprofit community-based</p>

Organization	Profile	AmeriCorps Members	Number and Types of Partners
<p>Partnership for Youth Inc. (legal name) Location: St. Louis, MO Project Name: AmeriCorps St. Louis Current Funding: National</p>	<p>Mission: 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>Case Study Focus: Disaster Response</p> <p>Services Provided: Disaster response: response and recovery support and tactical field support; other climate change services provided in environmental stewardship and wildfire response</p>	<p># of members/year: 42</p> <p>Areas serving: Missouri and nationally (deployed to respond to disasters in over 30 states and 65 of Missouri's 105 counties)</p>	<p># and types of partners: 22 partners; for disaster response services primarily partners with the State Emergency Management Agency and Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster; for environmental stewardship wildfire management, partners with government agencies (e.g., U.S. Forest Service and Missouri Department of Natural Resources) and local nonprofit organizations</p>

Analysis

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 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. The cross-cutting themes are presented in the Discussion and Recommendations chapter of the report.

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.

Appendix B. Case Studies

AmeriCorps St. Louis Case Study

Introduction

AmeriCorps St. Louis, headquartered in St. Louis, MO, was selected as one of the five programs to include as a case study for the AmeriCorps Climate Change Bundled Evaluation study given its focus on Disaster Response services both within Missouri and nationally (e.g., volunteer management and training, donations, and warehouse management). AmeriCorps St. Louis has received several state and national awards for their Disaster Response services. Most recently, they received the 2023 Outstanding Disaster Response Team Award from AmeriCorps (federal level). AmeriCorps St. Louis also works in the area of Environmental Stewardship through its work in conservation and wildfire response.

During a 2-day site visit in November 2023 to AmeriCorps St. Louis, researchers conducted individual interviews with

- 1 program director,
- 2 program staff, and
- 2 partner staff from 2 different organizations.

A focus group with seven current AmeriCorps St. Louis members was also held, comprising five members with at least 1 year of AmeriCorps service (inclusive of members that served terms with other AmeriCorps programs) and two members who more recently started their first year of AmeriCorps service. Throughout the visit, researchers observed AmeriCorps St. Louis training sessions, toured the facility, discussed daily program operations, and learned more about the tools AmeriCorps St. Louis uses to track and evaluate program outcomes. This case study primarily focuses on the program's activities within the area of Disaster Response to reflect the original purpose of including the program as a case study. However, it is important to note that the program and members also conduct many projects within the areas of Environmental Stewardship and Wildland Fire management and response, and as such, details of these activities are included throughout the case study to maintain a larger picture of the organization's goals and operating context.

Description of Program and Context

AmeriCorps St. Louis, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1994 under the name Partnership for Youth Inc., provides training and development opportunities to AmeriCorps national service members through service on the Emergency Response Team (ERT). The primary focus of AmeriCorps St. Louis is hosting AmeriCorps members and therefore the nonprofit has only one program (versus being one of many programs within the organization). The ERT program has three areas of focus:

- Disaster Response,
- Environmental Stewardship, and
- Wildland Fire.

Members serve in all three areas. When AmeriCorps St. Louis is called for natural disasters and is able to respond, disaster missions become their first priority. During other times in the 11-month service term, members are serving on conservation projects (i.e., Environmental Stewardship and Wildland Fire). Program staff explained:

- *We have our primary function to serve as a rapid deployment team. So when we think about climate change, that really intersects within the areas of extreme weather events and how they can inflict damage on different communities. Our members will often be deployed as part of the short- or long-term response, and then transitioning to the recovery after a natural disaster, although it can also be manmade disasters as well.*
- *Year-round when there is not a deployment occurring, we do a lot of different habitat restoration and just Environmental Stewardship programs that I think either directly or indirectly can be connected to the climate and its effects on different ecological systems and everything like that. ... we do a lot of mitigation efforts around wildfire risk. So a lot of our Environmental Stewardship programs in the fall and into winter really look at how to decrease the potential negative impacts of wildfires by removing a lot of those fuels ahead of time through prescribed burning. So, it's really where the fire aspect comes in as our third focus area.*

AmeriCorps St. Louis only offers full-time member positions with one or two start times (i.e., enrollment is not rolling), with very few exceptions. Due to the nature of their service projects and the investment in training, staff shared it is difficult to include members who would require a less than full-time position. For example, the chainsaw and fire trainings are provided by partners between September and November. If a member were to miss these trainings, their field experience would be limited to only certain activities.

Services Performed

The following section describes the services provided by members. Members are usually deployed in teams of 6–8, which also includes a crew lead. For some Disaster Response deployments, teams may be much smaller (e.g., 2–3 members). Although not directly related to the AmeriCorps St. Louis climate change programming, members also volunteer at the shelter for the unhoused population located at AmeriCorps St. Louis.



Disaster Response

Given the unpredictability of natural disaster occurrence, AmeriCorps St. Louis members are deployed when the program receives a mission request from federal, state, and/or nonprofit organizations with concentrations in disaster relief. Upon AmeriCorps St. Louis determining they can accept the request, the program staff identifies members (often those who express interest in Disaster Response) to deploy to the community experiencing the disaster. Deployments typically last up to a month where members work for 6 days and receive 1 day off. To avoid member burnout, the program intentionally limits teams to 30 continuous days of service. If further support is needed within the community and funding is available, the program occasionally sends a replacement team of members to continue service.

The services that members provide during each disaster deployment vary depending upon the needs of the local communities and coordinated relief efforts. In light of the training that members receive, services often include activities under the umbrella of Response and Recovery Support, such as donations management, volunteer management and training, shelter support, public information support, unified command support, case work and information referral, long-term recovery support, and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Voluntary Liaison Support. Members also provide Tactical Field Services in the community and buildings affected by the disaster (e.g., managing water within buildings and clearing debris, temporary roof

repair, minor and emergency home repairs, fire fuels mitigation, hazard tree removal, health and wellness checks, and home assessments).

For example, two teams were sent to Hawaii in support of the 2023 wildfire response. One member shared:

We were focused on donations management ... we were sorting through raw donations making it so we could send to Maui what was actually useful for people to get, with the idea being that Maui is an island with finite space. So if they outsource some of the sorting to a neighboring island, Maui could focus more on the donation side.

A member from the second team added:

We were set up in a warehouse to sort toiletries, kitchen and household items, baby stuff like that, more specific stuff ... we'd talk to survivors, get a list of things that they're hoping to get, and actually go do that. We call it shopping for them, so you're serving one-on-one with them. We'd see up to 300 people in a day between the teams that were there ... and it was California Conservation Corps and Minnesota, Iowa, and Montana Corps as well.

Describing the Disaster Response services, one program staff explained, "We're really coming in and filling a gap, until the recovery and response can get to a more stable place." Members conduct needs assessments, which include contacting lists of affected individuals to understand and document the primary needs of community members. This activity is vital to inform an equitable and coordinated response of Disaster Response organizations and yet many organizations are not able to prioritize the activity due to a lack of staffing or training. Through the service of members, AmeriCorps St. Louis supports the coordinating organizations (e.g., FEMA, State Emergency Management Agency [SEMA], and Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster [VOAD]) and, in turn, the community members in need by informing the response with the actual priorities of contacted community members affected by each disaster.

From a partner's perspective, members are willing to perform a variety of services, make sacrifices, and are dedicated:

They always want to take on the challenge, no matter what the challenge is, whether it's big or small. You know they don't see any job they're tasked with doing as unimportant. They are very enthusiastic about what they do, whether it's helping to set up a mass vaccination clinic, directing traffic at a mass vaccination clinic, cutting down trees, mucking, gutting a house, or removing drywall from a house. And they're young so they can work a lot of hours. And they don't mind sleeping on the floor of a church gymnasium and eating disaster food three meals a day. They just seem to really be committed to helping people.

Over the last 30 years, AmeriCorps St. Louis members have been deployed to respond to disasters in over 30 states and 65 of Missouri's 105 counties. Key deployments include the 2011 Joplin and Good Friday tornados, 2016 statewide flooding, 2019 Missouri and Mississippi River historic flooding, 2020 coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and the July 2022 flooding in St. Louis.

Environmental Stewardship

For both Environmental Stewardship and Wildfire Response service projects, members are usually deployed for 5 days or, in some instances, 10-day periods. Teams for week-long projects depart on Monday mornings and return Friday afternoons. For 10-day projects, teams depart on Monday and return the following Wednesday afternoon. Service project locations are often several hours from St. Louis. Members use

company-owned vehicles to drive to the sites. They are provided a small food allowance and the partner provides housing such as state park cabins.

Similar to the practices of other organizations with a focus on Environmental Stewardship, AmeriCorps St. Louis members primarily perform services within the categories of habitat restoration and invasive species management. Members, program staff, and a partner organization specifically focus activities on restoring a native habitat to Missouri, known as glades. Glades provide thin soiled grass and rock clearings in forests, allowing rare species to thrive. Members restore these habitats through clearing the canopy, environmental surveys, removing brush, planting activities, and restoring dams. Additionally, members frequently manage the challenge of invasive species by removing non-native species to natural environments and improving structures that are a frequent source of introducing non-native species (improper trail indication, trail building, and other maintenance programs).

Wildfire Response

To assist wildfire management, members conduct several activities to contribute to vital wildfire services. Primarily, members assist partner organizations through the construction of fire lines, which are dug to contain a burn within a specific area. Through the members' attention to detail, these lines are constructed with a focus on preserving the natural, native species within the area of a fire line and prescribed burn. Members also assist partner agencies with prescribed burns to remove invasive species, restore nutrients to the habitat, and manage forest health. Members frequently help partners ignite burns, maintain the fire line, and extinguish burns that encroach the fire line. Occasionally, government agencies request the assistance of members to respond to wildfires due to a lack of government personnel. During these projects, members use hand tools such as fire rakes and leaf blowers to lessen the spread of fire and monitor wildfires through fire towers.



Shelter Services

In a repurposed portion of the AmeriCorps St. Louis location, the program operates a shelter for the unhoused population of St. Louis. While not the primary focus area of members, the program allows members to opt in to volunteer with the shelter during Outreach Tuesday services and emergency winter warming periods. On outreach days, individuals have access to showers, meals, laundry, mail, and further referral to community resources. Additionally, in connection with the rise in extreme weather events facing St. Louis in the winter, the

City of St. Louis mobilizes AmeriCorps St. Louis to operate the shelter for 24 hours and provide emergency shelter on days when the temperature goes below 20 degrees.

Summarizing the values that AmeriCorps St. Louis staff and members embody and which inform their services are two mottos that were visible throughout the office (e.g., on the walls and print materials). One program staff explained:

One of our mottos is "See the need, meet the need." But one of the other areas we try to focus on, our more informal motto, is looking to assist what we call the "least served," "last served," or "never served." When we're providing our disaster services, we focus pretty much exclusively on populations that are at risk or have high vulnerability. So the under-insured, the uninsured, those that have health and safety risks in the home, those with children or elderly. We operate under the mindset that if people have resources and insurance and connections to recover, that's not our priority area. Our priority areas, especially if we have our own limited time and resources, should be on those that need further assistance in some way.

Role of Partners and Community Involvement

This section describes the role of partners in working with AmeriCorps St. Louis and broader community involvement.

Role of Partners

At the time of the site visit, AmeriCorps St. Louis reported partnerships with 22 organizations. For Disaster Response services, AmeriCorps St. Louis primarily partners with SEMA and VOAD to provide a coordinated response to disasters.

AmeriCorps St. Louis is designated as an AmeriCorps Disaster Response Team site (A-DRT, which is part of the AmeriCorps Disaster Services Unit [DSU]). Therefore, AmeriCorps St. Louis will receive mission requests from national disaster organizations such as FEMA to provide Disaster Response services. When assigned to a mission, AmeriCorps St. Louis enters into cooperative agreements with the DSU and funds are received from FEMA for services provided. Noting AmeriCorps St. Louis' dedication, a state partner said:

We've had a lot of little disasters that didn't receive individual assistance declarations through FEMA. That is when AmeriCorps really shows their worth because there is not going to be any money for these survivors to help move these trees off their houses or clean their basements that were flooded.

In the areas of Environmental Stewardship and Wildfire Management, AmeriCorps St. Louis partners with government agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and Missouri Department of Natural Resources, as well as local nonprofit organizations such as Great Rivers Greenway and Forest Park Forever. AmeriCorps St. Louis members complete "service projects" for these partner organizations. The projects are coordinated with the partners by AmeriCorps St. Louis program staff and service contracts are executed.

For more recent partnerships, program staff explained the efforts to ensure the partner's readiness to host members, including visits to build relationships, discussing feasible service projects, and identifying preliminary work to set the members and partner organizations up for a successful collaboration. The primary roles and responsibilities of partner organizations and their contacts are to oversee service program sites, introduce and provide initial supervision to member teams, complete member timesheets and paperwork, and as applicable, internally process payments to AmeriCorps St. Louis. Occasionally, partner organizations also

provide task-specific trainings to members, as described later in the section focused on member training. While members are on site performing service projects, the partners are providing ongoing learning opportunities. One program staff explained:

I think one thing that we very much try to emphasize in our partner relationships is that it is a two-way relationship. We are providing them with a service that they need to be met and they might not have the capacity to take care of on their own. But they are also providing a service for our members in that they are giving them practical hands-on experience. They're giving them networking opportunities and they're also engaging our members and taking the time ... to say not only what the program objectives are and the goals, but say why those are the objectives and what the background is to understand why we will then ask members to perform specific tasks.

Community Involvement

Within its three areas of focus—Disaster Response, Environmental Stewardship, and Wildland Fire—nearly all interactions with the community are in Disaster Response services. However, the role of community is primarily as a direct or indirect recipient of services. Since communities are primarily a benefactor, additional information from the interviews is in the Community Outcomes section.

National Service Members

This section describes the member recruitment and selection processes, members' reasons for joining the program, and member demographics. Also included are perceptions about the stipend and training received.

Recruitment and Selection

AmeriCorps St. Louis' recruitment goal for an 11-month cycle is typically 40–42 members. During the most recent cycle, the program received 150 applications, eventually filling 42 member positions. Posting member positions on nontraditional job boards is one of the main strategies used by AmeriCorps St. Louis because of its ability to naturally filter applicants to those who may be an ideal fit for AmeriCorps positions, specifically for disaster and Environmental Stewardship activities. Users of these job boards are typically seeking nontraditional opportunities (i.e., not an office or desk space job) and would ideally have a mindset and/or experience that matches well with the member experience at AmeriCorps St. Louis. Although the use of social media and the program website has not netted as many applicants as other strategies, program staff view it as an important tool for raising program awareness.

Program staff and members alike frequently mentioned the success of recruitment through word-of-mouth among members and alumni. As a program that frequently deploys Disaster Response teams, members often encounter members from other AmeriCorps programs and similar organizations. During these interactions, members and staff reported conversations on their respective program opportunities and focus areas, acting as an opportunity to advocate for AmeriCorps St. Louis and their training and service activities as a future opportunity for skills development.

Program staff carefully review applications and select individuals who are deemed to have the best fit with the program's values and nature of the work. At the same time, attention is given to diversifying the membership. One program staff explained:

We really try to look at someone not so much for what their background or their education is, but really what the intent behind them wanting to join is. And if we feel like they meet that,

their values and their ethic of service meets what we want, we want to try to remove any barriers that are there. So whether that's financial or whatever it is.

Speaking to the demands of the services, especially as it pertains to the disaster deployments, program staff added that members have "to be really solid and stable and able to handle long days, able to handle stressful situations, and able to be very adaptable and flexible."

Additionally, to address issues of inequity and more effectively recruit members from the St. Louis community, the program is exploring the creation of a member position that remains in the St. Louis metro area. This idea was conceived from feedback that local community members may not be able to justify service in a program that often requires travel to remote locations each week. This reliance on travel in combination with the AmeriCorps stipend amount presents several inequitable barriers to local community members who may have family obligations restricting them from service requiring travel.

Why Members Join

When asked about their reasons for joining AmeriCorps St. Louis, the seven members participating in the focus group expressed their desires to serve additional AmeriCorps terms, explore career pathways, and gain experience in program focuses such as Disaster Response and wildfire response. The members were from states throughout the United States and none were from Missouri.

Three members joined AmeriCorps St. Louis for the program's training opportunities and service activities related to wildfire management. While the programs they previously served with included activities such as fire fuels management through the use of chainsaws, AmeriCorps St. Louis was perceived to be unique by the members for its ability to place members on service projects



that involve the construction of fire lines, assisting with prescribed burns, and assisting with wildfire response. Additionally, two members pursued service with AmeriCorps St. Louis due to the program's focus on Disaster Response, namely for the ability to assist communities in need and the potential to travel across the country on deployments.

Member Characteristics

Program staff said that the majority of AmeriCorps St. Louis members are within the 18 to 25 age group, approximately one-third have bachelor's degrees while most other members are either recent high school graduates or younger adults who have opted not to continue their education. The 2023–2024 ERT members

include 26 percent identifying as Black, Indigenous or people of color—or BIPOC. Beyond demographics, the reported characteristics of AmeriCorps St. Louis members who were successful during their service focused on a strong work ethic and dedication to volunteering, preference for hands-on work, adaptability and comfort in the outdoors, and the ability to work with others.

Program staff and partners shared AmeriCorps St. Louis members' possessed passion, energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to the improvement of the environment and more specifically, understanding how AmeriCorps St. Louis aims to improve the environment. One partner described the members as "hard workers" and said they "have a great heart and are really enthusiastic and compassionate with individuals impacted by disasters.

Members participating in the focus group generally felt that the stipend (\$1,800/month before taxes) provided was enough to sustain themselves during their term due to the low cost of living in St. Louis. However, members noted several caveats surrounding equity to consider, with members clarifying that their ability to sustain themselves would not be attainable without additional resources and supports from program staff. Notably, the program provides members with instructional materials and support to apply and receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits. The members explained that without these benefits, they would likely not be able to sustain their nutritional needs. Furthermore, while the members are able to meet their basic shelter and food needs, the stipend amount is not conducive to contributing to a savings account of any kind.

Unlike other AmeriCorps programs such as NCCC, AmeriCorps St. Louis does not provide housing for members when they are not on service deployments outside of St. Louis and thus members are responsible for housing. Given it is rare for AmeriCorps St. Louis members to be from St. Louis, the program makes efforts to connect with incoming members before their arrival to assist with housing arrangements. Members frequently "pass down" leases to other returning and incoming members and several members live together. However, some members experience difficulty in locating a lease that will accommodate an 11-month term.

Since the program did not provide a relocation fee for out-of-state members, focus group members agreed this was a significant challenge compounded by the need to wait for their first paycheck a month into service. The only method for overcoming this challenge involved drawing from their savings accounts, which may not be a reality for everyone interested in serving with AmeriCorps programs. Overall, members and program staff alike agree that increased stipends and additional program supports are vital to increasing the diversity of AmeriCorps programs and worthwhile for members and staff who are required to take on many responsibilities to ensure the program functions as planned.

Training

This section describes the training provided to members both through AmeriCorps St. Louis and partners. Additional professional development is provided to members who remain on as a fellow.

AmeriCorps St. Louis Training

Program staff provide training through a multi-staged approach. Prior to their service term, members complete the baseline AmeriCorps-required trainings through an online platform. At the beginning, program staff organize extensive training sessions during the first month of the member term. Training topics delivered during this period extend beyond the AmeriCorps required training to include prerequisite information in the primary areas of service projects such as emergency management basics, chainsaw maintenance, fire management basics, first aid, and CPR. Later in their term, members also receive in-depth training that spans 8 days at a state park to learn about personal protective equipment practices, starting and using chainsaws

safely, and the complex skill of felling trees. Additionally, members attend an annual service trip in Montana to learn from the U.S. Forest Service and receive wildfire training (constructing and working in fire lines) with the opportunity to receive a federal certification called the Incident Qualification Card (also known as a Red Card), which is required to conduct any Wildland Fire work with the U.S. Forest Service.

During the first month of a member term and throughout the term, AmeriCorps St. Louis also provides training to develop and enhance the interpersonal skills of members with a focus on strengthening employability beyond their service, including topic areas such as giving and receiving constructive feedback, working within a team, diversity, equity, and inclusion training, and mental health management trainings. The first month of service baseline training is provided in many areas related to the member's service (e.g., chainsaw safety, tree felling). Program staff explained that the members oftentimes feel unsure of their ability to serve in environments that require skills they are more recently learning. To develop a member to be a more resilient learner, the program staff emphasize a culture of learning that acknowledges the inevitability of mistakes and embraces an attitude of learning from their mistakes. Program staff said:

We try to very much instill in our members critical thinking around why you're doing something and if you don't know why you're doing something, often the default is you should not be doing it. If you can't explain why you're doing something, you need to stop and evaluate and ask questions. So, really, trying to cultivate a learning environment where someone can say we're going to share our mistakes, we're going to share our lessons learned, and we're going to use knowledge as a way of empowering each other. And as a way of making sure our standards stay high and stay accountable.

Beyond the formal training provided, AmeriCorps St. Louis identifies and provides informal learning opportunities before, during, and after service projects. For example, before a project team is deployed on an environmental service project, teams receive task-specific training the Monday morning before they depart from AmeriCorps St. Louis. Additionally, members receive on-the-job training from partner organization staff and AmeriCorps St. Louis field supervisors when they accompany members on service projects. Members that serve as crew leads are members with at least one service term with AmeriCorps St. Louis or other AmeriCorps programs; crew lead members receive additional training from program staff to identify teachable moments in the field to continue to refine the initial training information members receive and contextualize lessons learned in a field setting. Program staff explained:

Throughout the term we try to avoid the mindset of, "Okay your training is done and now you have your service term." We want to incorporate trainings throughout the whole service term. It is making sure our team leads understand that part of their responsibility is looking for training moments in the field. So that you should be addressing whatever services—or performing whatever services—our



partnering agencies are asking of us. But you're also balancing, you know, that work getting done with your member's development.

Following each service project, the teams come together as a full group to discuss the highs, lows, and areas for improvement for future projects. Through the establishment of a continuous improvement culture, members are encouraged to recommend additional trainings or resources in areas they want additional supports.

When asked about how sufficiently prepared they felt to perform service activities after their training, focus group members responding to the question reported that the information presented in trainings was sufficient to prepare them for service to the extent possible. The members added that the nature of services provided in disaster relief programs is highly dependent upon the individual characteristics of each deployment and thus requires tailored, on-the-job learning about aspects such as the terrain and geographical considerations, cultural best practices within the community, and even new activities within emergency management depending on the needs of each deployment. Despite the ever-changing skills and information needs of disaster service deployments, the members felt equipped to enter each disaster deployment due to their trainings on managing mental health and burnout, cultural awareness trainings so members are more aware of culture norms when providing disaster response services (e.g., Hawaii), emergency management basics, and comfort with being adaptable and supporting their fellow members.

Partner Training

Members also receive specialized training from partner organizations at the beginning of service terms and throughout their term as applicable. One partner explained their provision of fire ecology and invasive species training as an introductory discussion to the fundamental services of the agency and contextualized the expected services of members within the organization's goals. As applicable, the same partner provided programming during service days with poor weather, often leading discussions about ecological and safety topics of interest to the members. Furthermore, the members receive task-specific training from partner staff, which prepares them to provide quality service.

Additional Member Development

When possible, AmeriCorps St. Louis provides fellowships to members returning for a third or fourth term. Program staff and a participating fellow in the member focus group described the fellowship as a unique opportunity to operate largely individually in service to the program as an important form of training prior to the fellow's next step in their journey to education or employment. Currently, AmeriCorps St. Louis has one fellow.

The fellow is interested in furthering their wildfire response skills with AmeriCorps St. Louis. During the current term, AmeriCorps St. Louis has provided the fellow with one-on-one advanced training with the field staff supervisor on equipment maintenance and technology, placement in external advanced fire trainings, and leadership opportunities on member crews during the fire season. One program staff explained that this focused position allows the fellow to both explore their interest in a specified pathway to employment in conservation and gain access to valuable training and experience to advance their likelihood of obtaining employment with a relevant organization or agency. To demonstrate the wide variety of experience that the fellowship position can provide, the program director explained that a former fellow used their software development skills and created a database to streamline AmeriCorps St. Louis' ability to schedule service trips and track member activities and outcomes.

Outcomes

Details regarding the outcomes from AmeriCorps St. Louis services are provided in this section. The information is informed mainly from interviews with program staff, partner organizations, and the members themselves, obtained through the member focus group. This section concludes with the barriers and facilitators to meeting the expected outcomes of AmeriCorps St. Louis and by extension, the partner organizations and communities they serve.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation

When explaining the process of gathering data for measurement and evaluation, program staff focused on programs related to Disaster Response to explain the difficulties associated with measuring and evaluating activities to address disaster services. Due to the variance of natural disaster events (i.e., hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes) and their impacts on the local environment, from a program standpoint, it is difficult to:

1. Determine the expected outputs for AmeriCorps grant requirements that will most likely align with the actual outputs of disasters (which are dependent on the type of disaster and evolving needs of each deployment) and
2. Develop systems to track the wide variety of activities that members may provide according to each deployment.

To address these difficulties, program staff developed a tracking system that uses a Google form that members complete at the end of each day of their disaster deployment. The form requires members to enter the types of services they completed; the estimated number of households assisted; the estimated number of individuals assisted; and qualitative information about their daily highlights, challenges, and interactions with partners to inform program staff of their daily activities.

Data from these daily submissions are then used to populate a tracking spreadsheet with information on all disaster deployments occurring during the 11-month term. The data informs federal and state grant reporting requirements. Staff are also able to compile all of the data and produce a master document summarizing all disaster services since the beginning of AmeriCorps St. Louis. Program staff use the aggregated data to develop a summary of services for the partner organizations. The partner summary report is accompanied by a feedback request survey in which the partners provide their input on what is working and where internal processes could be improved.

AmeriCorps St. Louis has a small evaluation contract (slightly more than \$15,000 across all 3 years of the grant period) with an external evaluator. The process and outcome evaluation draws upon data described above and also includes interviews with both Disaster Response and Environmental Stewardship partners.

Member Outcomes

As described previously, AmeriCorps St. Louis has a strong emphasis on continuous quality improvement. They have several processes and tools where data are collected while members are serving including After-Action Reviews, member self-evaluations, midyear check-in meetings, and exit interviews. In the future, AmeriCorps St. Louis hopes to bolster their existing surveys of alumni to learn more about concrete outcomes such as job attainment, however, they acknowledged the difficulty of this given staff capacity constraints. This section describes member outcomes in the areas of civic engagement, technical skills, and career preparation.

Civic Engagement

Both program staff and the members were asked about how AmeriCorps St. Louis improved members' civic engagement. One program staff shared that service with AmeriCorps St. Louis noticeably impacts the pursuit of individuals to address areas of concern that affect the public. Program staff went on to explain that AmeriCorps St. Louis has an extensive alumni network that overwhelmingly shares positive experiences from the program, whether they continued in the green jobs field or not. While program staff shared that it is difficult to draw a line directly from their service to what members may do in the future, the robust alumni network and sharing of positive member experiences exhibits that members feel they have made a contribution to the public in a way that is meaningful to them.

When asked about their relationship to civic engagement as a result of their experience with AmeriCorps, four of the seven members explicitly stated that they plan to continue volunteering in some fashion after their service term ends. Each member with these sentiments explained that they expect post-service volunteering will provide the opportunity to use skills acquired through service in conservation or disaster related efforts. One of the four members went on to add that their experience with AmeriCorps revealed the opportunity to explore their interests and grow their skillset through volunteering.

Technical Skills and Career Preparation

Important to AmeriCorps St. Louis is providing its members with the technical skills needed to pursue a career in a service area. Program staff said the training and certifications provided by AmeriCorps St. Louis set them apart from other organizations. For example, members have the opportunity to receive training from the U.S. Forest Service and eventually obtain their Red Card certification, which demonstrates an individual is qualified to perform tasks on a Wildland Fire incident. Other certificates AmeriCorps St. Louis members can earn include the following:

- First Aid/CPR
- Mental Health First Aid
- Wildland Firefighting
 - Missouri Level 1 Fire Training
 - S-212 Wildland Fire Chainsaws
 - S-130 Firefighter Training
 - S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior
 - L-180 Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service)
- Disaster Response
 - IS-100 Introduction to ICS
 - IS-200 ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents
 - IS-700 National Incident Management System (NIMS)
 - An Introduction; IS-800 National Response Framework, An Introduction

Returning members are also able to earn additional certificates including Wilderness First Aid and ICS-300, Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents.

Beyond providing members with a baseline understanding of information necessary to progress in the areas of conservation and emergency response, these certifications exhibit a valuable level of experience to future employers and also decrease the resources required to onboard the member as an employee. One program staff explained:

I think one of the things that we do that sets us apart as an organization, is our members receive a lot of training and, in particular, a lot of certifications that they need that future employers are looking at ... they'll look at our members when they leave here and they'll say, "Oh this person already has this cert that we would have to give them. And now they have their Red Card or now they have [U.S. Fire Administration Incident Command System] ICS300 and higher level ICS course taken care of. And I don't need to worry about devoting time and resources to getting this person through this process." I think it provides our members with not only a good baseline understanding of a lot of these different areas for future career opportunities but also a lot of the actual certifications that they either will need as a [prerequisite] for a job, or they will need to get when they have that job.

One program staff added that their trainings are bolstered by training and experience that occurs in the field, explaining that these service activities often expose members to a variety of skills heavily used in conservation and Disaster Response fields. They went on to explain that the field experiences often motivate members to pursue a career related to their service area. Program staff shared that four members from a previous cycle are employed with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

Three of the seven members who participated in the focus group shared that following their service term they wanted to pursue a career in a related field. One member shared that the training and technical skills of the program were vital to their decision to pursue a green job, noting that training and activities associated with the chainsaw certifications, Red Card, and Wilderness First Aid certification provided a clear idea of what the pathway to a green job would entail in terms of external certifications, additional experience, and characteristics that would suit a career in the green jobs field. Two members shared this sentiment and went on to



explain the value of networking during their service when deciding to pursue a green jobs pathway. One of these members stated that the contacts from partner organizations and program staff are eager to share their knowledge of their career field and support the member in their future endeavors, often through the form of pursuing certification opportunities or serving as trusted references for members during their job search. The other member who described the importance of networking went on to share the value of continued support from partner contacts, noting that staff from a partner organization shared their contact information with the member to maintain a relationship if they were interested in pursuing a position in Wildland Fire. The member summarized the value of their member experience in the field, stating:

You spend so much time with them [partners] over the course of a week or 2 weeks that you just connect on a deeper level and you can form relationships for the rest of your life that might make a really big difference, even if it's just a recommendation letter.

Community Outcomes

In describing their involvement with the communities they serve, one member described this through a direct and indirect service distinction. The member explained that direct service with members of the community can often be entirely focused on obtaining necessary goods (resource kits) or performing physical services (clearing debris), which reduces the burden on the community member experiencing fallout from a disaster. The member's perception of indirect service for community members included the conversations they had in their exchanges as an opportunity to inform the community of available resources, and vitally, recognize the increased severity and occurrence of natural disasters as a result of climate change. Another member continued this explanation of community involvement, stating that these interactions with members of the community are essential to providing them with necessary physical resources and bringing about awareness of climate change happening in their community rather than the global, abstract challenge to which it can often be restricted.

Through their Disaster Response deployments, program staff discussed several practices and lessons learned when engaging with diverse communities. Program staff explained that in natural disaster events, communities may have a distrust of federal organizations such as FEMA. To overcome these associations and assure community members of their intentions, one program staff said that conversations with community members to explain the program's goals and offered services are important. During these conversations with community members, individuals often become more comfortable with AmeriCorps St. Louis, identify neighbors who may need help, and occasionally provide contact information for community members who are in need. Program staff also said churches in the community are beneficial to identifying community members in need and coordinating with other organizations providing relief.

While the members did not explicitly discuss community outcomes as a result of their service on disaster deployments, the estimated impact of members was culled through AmeriCorps St. Louis' History of Disaster Deployments document (note that these metrics include the services of members not present for the focus group). During the month-long deployment to Kahului, HI, to assist with recovery from the 2023 Maui wildfires, two of the participating members contributed to the following outputs as part of their impact on the community: estimated 593 households assisted; estimated 2,967 individuals assisted; 90,706 pounds of food collected, sorted, distributed; 9,050 pounds of clothing collected, sorted, distributed; 14,860 pounds of other supplies collected, sorted, distributed; 701 pounds of donations sorted; 72 volunteers registered; 152 volunteers supervised; and 478 volunteer hours leveraged.

AmeriCorps St. Louis staff and a partner representing an organization focused on Environmental Stewardship said the way the services provided by the members impacted community outcomes was through assisting

the partners in cost-effectively achieving their targets. From the partner's perspective, having members complete services such as invasive species management, habitat restoration projects, and Wildland Fire line construction at a quality level allows the government agency to divert limited staff resources and budget to activities that necessitate the education and experience of hired and contracted partner staff.

Barriers to Meeting Intended Outcomes

The most pressing barriers to the program relate to staff capacity and available funding, especially considering the high operating costs of Disaster Response organizations and Environmental Stewardship activities of AmeriCorps St. Louis. Namely, due to AmeriCorps St. Louis' dedication to member development, the program's Environmental Stewardship focus area heavily features the use of chainsaws and thus carries associated high costs of workman's compensation insurance, equipment, equipment maintenance, and fuel in addition to vehicle and food costs.

On top of these high-cost burdens, AmeriCorps St. Louis is also required to front costs for Disaster Response deployments and is only reimbursed if the mission is declared a federally recognized disaster. The program is required to front the funds to reserve housing and provide a food budget for the member teams to stay and serve at the disaster site. Disregarding the financial difficulties this imposes on the program when the disaster is not federally recognized and thus reimbursed, disasters that are federally recognized require time to process and approve reimbursement requests. This time associated with processing reimbursement from the federal government can sometimes take up to several months, causing the program to hold the financial burden of these expenses for longer than feasible.

In recognition of these barriers, program leadership is in the process of identifying additional funding streams to build cash reserves if they need to incur expenses and strengthen the capacity of program staff through the creation of more positions so staff don't have to "wear so many hats."

Facilitators to Meeting Intended Outcomes

A theme that is consistent throughout the case study is AmeriCorps St. Louis staff's dedication and priority of advancing member development which, in turn, drives many of the facilitators to meet the program goals and outcomes. It is noteworthy that five of the eight staff members are AmeriCorps St. Louis alumni. One of the interviewed staff members explained their reason for staying was because AmeriCorps St. Louis had a culture that supported ongoing learning for both members and staff.

The commitment to learning and service facilitates the program being known for its safety standards, procedures, and training opportunities, which contribute to member development and the ability of the organization to effectively expand the capacity of its partner organizations. One member shared their reason to continue a second year of service with AmeriCorps St. Louis and their belief that the program was effective was due to the staff's prioritization of the member experience in their program services and its focus on developing the members, regardless of their intended career path. One member shared that the program staff have open and candid conversations with them about the hopes, learning interests, and service preferences of each member, with the ultimate goal of tailoring the service activities to align with member preferences to the extent possible. The member went on to explain that centering the member experience was instrumental in their decision to pursue another year of service with the organization and to continue to enthusiastically contribute to the missions and goals of AmeriCorps St. Louis.

Through AmeriCorps St. Louis' dedication to building a culture of learning and continuous development, partner and program staff responses indicate that this focus may attract or develop members with a positive and enthusiastic attitude that is necessary to meet the program outcomes. Specifically, one partner shared

the members' abilities to take on any task during a disaster deployment regardless of "how dirty or how hard it is" as invaluable to meeting the needs of a community, noting, "I've seen them do it all." Program staff shared similar sentiments regarding the importance of member attitudes in meeting intended outcomes of the overall program, and more specifically, the goals of each service program, noting:

What first comes to mind is the ability to leverage a lot of energy, enthusiasm, and commitment that our members have. And focus or channel that energy and commitment and enthusiasm towards areas that require some sort of service. ... 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.

Closing

The mission of AmeriCorps St. Louis is "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."

Through the 2-day site visit and analysis of member, program staff and director, and partner interview responses, it is apparent that the program is dedicated to achieving its mission of developing the skills and



service ethic of the AmeriCorps St. Louis member. Aside from the many training offerings, certification pathways, and professional development opportunities AmeriCorps St. Louis organizes, program staff and members alike contribute to a strong culture that emphasizes lifelong learning. Whether members are serving in the field on disaster deployment or partner-supervised Environmental Stewardship service projects, it is evident that members largely feel supported to pursue their goals during and beyond their service term with AmeriCorps St. Louis.

The program aims to achieve its focus on supporting member development through several avenues, such as predetermined training days each month, weekly After-Action Reviews, networking events with green career professionals, individual goal setting, routine feedback surveys, and midyear reviews. The outcomes of these activities are reflected in the following quote from a member choosing to stay for a second term:

Why I decided to stay This goes back to why the program is effective. Our staff are really hardworking and genuinely care about us and want us to develop as people and people in this career path That is something you don't always get. That is why I was inclined to stay another year You feel like your voice is heard.

The investment and focus on member development seemingly contributes to the outcomes of not only members themselves but also the missions of their partner organizations and thereby the outcomes of the communities they serve. Aside from their ability to act as “force multipliers” for the partners (i.e., expand the ability to make a greater impact) and provide services at a feasible rate, members impact the communities they serve (according to the partners) through their willingness to take on any task regardless of how challenging or seemingly unimportant it appears. When thinking about communities recovering from disaster, this is a vital quality to ensure that the community members are receiving the services they require in a coordinated, effective fashion. Moving forward, AmeriCorps St. Louis aims to strengthen the services they provide by locating additional funding streams to bolster staff capacity and continue their responsive approach to member development.

Climate Impact Corps Case Study

Introduction

Climate Impact Corps, one of the ten AmeriCorps programs implemented by Ampact and headquartered in Minneapolis, MN, was selected as one of the five projects to include as a case study for the AmeriCorps Climate Change Bundled Evaluation and Capacity Building study given its focus on Environmental Stewardship and Community Capacity Building.

During a 2-day site visit in November 2023 to Ampact, researchers conducted individual interviews with:

- 1 program director,
- 1 evaluator,
- 2 program staff, and
- 2 staff members from two separate partner organizations.¹⁷

A focus group with eight Climate Impact Corps members was also held, comprising five members with at least 1 year of AmeriCorps service and three members who more recently started their first year of AmeriCorps service. During the visit, researchers were also able to observe Climate Impact Corps on-site and field-based training sessions. This case study largely focuses on the program's activities within the areas of Environmental Stewardship and Community Capacity Building to reflect the original purpose for including the program as a case study. However, the project also has a smaller initiative for Home Energy and information about that focus is included. Documents such as grant applications, progress reports, tracking data, and training materials were also collected and reviewed. These documents helped to better understand the activities and status of each program's work and provided a basis for corroboration with stakeholder perspectives gleaned through the interviews and focus groups.

Description of Program and Context

Ampact is a national nonprofit that was founded as the implementation arm of ServeMinnesota, Minnesota's Service Commission. The first program, Reading Corps, was launched in 2003. Specializing in managing and scaling high-quality AmeriCorps programs, Ampact currently has 10 evidence-based AmeriCorps programs in 3 areas: education, environment, and healthy futures. Organizationally, its mission is to transform lives. As leaders and innovators, Ampact is working to demonstrate the power of national service to address complex social issues.

Climate Impact Corps is situated in the environmental area of Ampact. Members serving in this corps use evidence-based strategies to help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change. According to Ampact's grant application, Minnesota is experiencing higher temperatures, more extreme weather, flooding, and changes in the ecosystem. These climate changes are a result of increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In the Twin Cities, annual average temperatures increased by 3.2 degrees from 1951 to 2020, which was faster than both the national and global rates of increase.

Within Climate Impact Corps there are three initiatives to address climate change in Minnesota:

- Community Forestry,

¹⁷ For purposes of anonymizing responses, references to project staff include responses that may have been made by project staff and the evaluator from ServeMinnesota Service Commission.

- Community Resilience, and
- Home Energy.

The three initiatives align with Minnesota's Climate Action Framework, which is the state's climate action plan. Through Climate Impact Corps, organizational capacity of the partner sites is being built by increasing their reach, efficiency, and effectiveness as defined by AmeriCorps operationalization of those three metrics.

At the time the site visit was conducted (November 2023), Climate Impact Corps was in its fourth year. The first year's focus was Community Forestry, with the addition of Home Energy in the second year, and Community Resilience in the third year. Currently, the program hires four types of members: Community Forestry, Home Energy, and community stewardship facilitators and sustainability project coordinators under the umbrella of Community Resilience. Starting next year, the focus areas will remain the same, but there will be one position type titled climate impact project coordinator. The target number of national service member positions is 100 and as of the end of November 2023, the program had 88 members serving. With rolling start dates of August, October, and January, Ampact anticipated filling those remaining openings in January 2024.

Services Performed

This section will describe the primary services performed by members in each of the three initiative areas described above.



Community Forestry

The Community Forestry program focuses on preserving and enhancing Minnesota’s tree canopy. Approximately 50 members are serving in this initiative. According to project staff, having a strong urban tree canopy is a climate solution that can have several impacts. Trees provide shade, which can have economic impacts in terms of decreasing costs for cooling buildings during the summer. Trees in the community also clean the air from wildfire smoke because it will both trap particulate matter on the tree and remove ground level ozone from the air, which has positive health impacts.

Members placed in organizations associated with Community Forestry mainly focus on planting trees, tree maintenance (e.g., watering), and tree inventory. Minnesota has increasing amounts of invasive pests such as the emerald ash borer. The role of some members in managing the tree canopy is to mark the trees that have been infested so that those trees can be removed. Members also plan events and do outreach with the community on forestry practices. Project staff explained, “They’ll also do outreach education around what is the emerald ash borer. They speak with community members if their tree is infested.”

Community Resilience

Service members who are a part of the Community Resilience initiatives are providing services to implement various climate solutions and collaborating with the community to create cohesion that strengthens the community and makes it more resilient. The approximately 45 members serving in this initiative have position titles of either community stewardship facilitators or sustainability project coordinators. Project staff shared that research shows when there is both increased social capital and sense of place this will lead to protective community actions. The member goal is to build people-to-people connections and people-to-place connections in order to create the conditions that lead to more community action.

Once placed with their partner sites, community stewardship 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. One project staff explained:

Their [members'] goal is to help build Community Resilience through community members themselves, trying to help people get that sense of connection with people to people and people to place. When people care about the space and they're in it, they're more likely to take action to take care of it. Like, 'Why we are here, what's this space, what's the history?' So doing those types of activities ... doing things like storm drain clean-ups or river ... pollinator garden installations and things like that. It's a wide variety and it kind of depends on what kind of site they're placed at too.

Sustainability project coordinator member positions are often tasked with developing and/or maintaining initiatives to increase the sustainable practices of a partner organization. While these two member position types have differing technical titles and outlined tasks, both position types generally function to lead community-engaged sustainability projects, climate conversations, and environmental stewardship activities that “produce positive individual behavior change and community environmental action.”

Examples of projects implemented by community stewardship facilitators and sustainability coordinators included these two descriptions, the first from a member and the second from a partner:

- *I started my service this time in October so I am just through onboarding and [asset] mapping I do have my first project on the calendar and it's going to be [part of] a smart salting workshop, which is with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency program. That one is primarily directed toward larger business owners and apartment building owners. But I am going to do a smaller workshop for just residents and small business owners such as the local grocery store ... to teach them that you don't need to use as much salt as you think and it doesn't work if it's below zero so don't use it at all. And then be sure you sweep it up when you're done so it doesn't end up in the river or the lake.*
- *One of my favorite projects from last year is our steward [who] worked with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. They were building a big high tunnel greenhouse to provide fresh food to the nation members. And [this member] wasn't Ojibwe. So [this member] went in and helped and everyone was like why is the White person here? They just thought it was kind of weird. But towards the end they really built up trust. And actually at the very end the person who was leading the project couldn't help out any more. And [this member] ended up being appointed to help out so they really built a lot of trust with the Tribal nation, which was really cool.*

Home Energy

Ampact also has a smaller number of members (approximately five) serving in its Home Energy initiative, which historically places members within the state’s Weatherization Assistance Program to complete Home Energy audits and weatherization work. Those service activities tie into the state’s clean energy and efficient building goal within Minnesota’s Climate Action Framework. There are more than 500,000 eligible households for this program, which is a low-income energy assistance and weatherization program and only 9 percent of them have been weatherized since 2005. Project staff explained that weatherization is important because it helps decrease people’s energy bills and then the household uses less energy, which directly mitigates climate change. There are also impacts on Community Resilience and health because it makes indoor air quality better.

Role of Partners and Community Involvement

Presented in this section is a description of Ampact's relationships with its partners and involvement with the broader community.

Partner Overview

At the time of the site visit, Climate Impact Corps reported partnerships with approximately 60 sites across the 3 initiatives (Community Forestry, Community Resilience, and Home Energy). Partners throughout the state vary widely in organizational makeup, including nonprofits, higher education institutions, state and regional extension offices, local/city/and state government administration, and soil and water conservation districts. Ampact accepts site applications from partners on a rolling basis and continues to expand its partner network. Examples of site partners include Project Sweetie Pie, a community-based organization in Minneapolis that engages residents in urban agriculture and social justice; and Clean Energy Resource Teams, a statewide partnership that supports clean energy projects and Community Resilience efforts.

For each partner site that “receives” members in a program year, members live within the communities they serve. AmeriCorps members placed in each site have a service plan that outlines the expected activities the member will conduct during their term with the partner. Given the wide variety of partner organizations, Climate Impact Corps staff work closely with the site partners to ensure each service plan aligns with the partners’ programs and goals to create mutually beneficial partnerships. Additionally, the AmeriCorps program manager conducts two site visits and annual reviews to monitor the alignment of the member and partner relationship.

Throughout the member’s placement with a partner site, a site supervisor is responsible for supervising their assigned members, which may include administrative requirements (member service hours); locating resources required for members to complete their service plan activities; and, as able, some partners may provide training relevant to member activities such as tree pruning, inventorying, and identification or seed planting.

The resources and member activities vary widely according to each partner site, and as such, allow exposure to a spectrum of focus areas in the green jobs sector.¹⁸ In the words of one member, this creates a valuable experience to explore specific skill areas in a supervised environment:

¹⁸ A standard definition of green jobs does not exist. However, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics developed a two-pronged [definition of green jobs](#): (1) Jobs in businesses that produce goods and provide services that benefit the environment or

On a professional level, this job has carved out a niche for me ... my site supervisor and my coworker and some other folks got to go to Canada to get this seed certification that doesn't exist in the U.S. They are training professionals in the [Department of Natural Resources] how to collect seeds My parents have been like, "Get a real job!" And I'm like, "Oh, I do have a job after this and there are opportunities for me." I am just excited to continue doing this work and grateful for the things I've been able to learn on the job.

Through interviews with two partner organizations, staff shared that one of the benefits of their collaboration with the Climate Impact Corps was that the members enabled them to provide added value toward their organizational missions. Apart from Impact offsetting the burden for individual organizations to recruit, screen, and "hire" members, the presence of members over an 11-month term reportedly allows partners to conduct needed tasks and information gathering that have been previously neglected due to a lack of capacity or resources to hire permanent staff. For example, a partner shared that the presence of members allowed for the creation of an inventory of ash trees. Through this inventory, the organization will now be able to determine which ash trees may die due to invasive emerald ash borers and mitigate the problem by planting new trees and understanding where problems might concentrate in the future.

Community Involvement

The services members provide—especially as it relates to the Community Resilience initiative—are focused on capacity building and based on local needs. Project staff explained, "Because we provide that kind of flexibility and menu of different approaches, members are able to work on whatever needs to happen in that particular city." For example, one member completed the first tree inventories for two cities; their needs were around increasing the tree canopy and responding to emerald ash borers. "That ability to adapt to what the truly local need is, I think, is a really strong part of our program. And really, I mean—fundamental—to climate resilience and what needs to happen in communities."

Through the service projects that are implemented, members build the capacity of the individuals in the community to sustain the projects and climate solutions long-term. Although much of the program emphasis is on coalition building with other organizations to facilitate the connectedness of climate-focused organizations, members seek to involve individuals in the community by establishing relationships with residents and engaging in dialogue about climate solutions or priorities of the individuals. Additionally, members and project staff mention the simple practice of open offerings for assistance and having a presence in the community at spaces where individuals already feel comfortable is beneficial for involving their communities and by extension, building resilience. For example, project staff described a member who serves with a community-based Indigenous coalition and the member's involvement with the community as follows:

So, for example, the person that's working in [town name] with that Indigenous environmental network—[member] is literally just showing up once a week to help them on their projects. And not, like, leading the action or anything at all; but just providing assistance. And I think that goes a long ways.

A sustainability project coordinator member described their community involvement with Minnesota's Forest Assisted Migration Project:

conserve natural resources and (2) Jobs in which workers' duties involve making their establishment's production processes more environmentally friendly or use fewer natural resources.



I work with the Nature Conservancy and other organizations that are trying to reforest Minnesota with climate-smart seeds. I just collect tree seeds most of the time and process them. We work with a farmer's cooperative that just formed to grow our seeds for us.

A community member who is a member of her county's Master Gardener program and is involved in this same project added:

We [Master Gardeners] decided since one of our target areas or focus areas is climate change or adapting to a changing climate, the Forest Assisted Migration Program seemed like a good fit for us. So for the past couple of years, I have been the project lead for a tree seed collection project for master gardeners in [county name] ... we collect tree seeds in central and southern Minnesota that will then be grown by designated growers into seedlings that are then planted up in northern Minnesota to replace the dying arboreal forest up there. The past few years we have undertaken collection of tree seeds from various tree species and delivered those to the state program that then sends them on their way through the process.

For the Community Forestry initiative, community involvement was often observed through tree planting events. Project staff said, “The members’ sites will ask them to plan a tree planting event and they will organize it, they’ll get volunteers. Then they’ll teach those volunteers how to properly plant a tree. Then they’ll go out and do the tree planting as a group.”

Summing up the capacity building approach that Climate Impact Corps is using, one project staff shared:

We’ve really tried to be innovative about creating a program design that allows partners to do the type of climate work that’s most impactful in their community. And I mean that’s really at the heart of this transition to capacity building. And so I feel like it’s not like rocket science, but it’s also kind of hard to do at times, the way that our typical program design happens.

National Service Members

The section describes the member recruitment and selection processes, members’ reasons for joining the program, and member demographics. Also included are perceptions about the stipend and training received.

Recruitment and Selection

One of the benefits of Climate Impact Corps being part of a large organization like Ampact is they have departments such as human resources, marketing, and compliance that can be leveraged to support the project. For example, Ampact has a recruiter assigned to work with Climate Impact Corps and the marketing department has launch kits, which include flyers, posters, and other materials that are sent to the partner sites so that they can advertise the member positions. Ampact also posts positions on its website and through other social media such as Indeed, Handshake, and area climate-specific job boards. Staff also use tabling at events and attend job fairs and, although staff indicated these latter two strategies are not the most effective for recruitment, they do provide name recognition. Project staff said most applications come through seeing postings on social media or the site-specific recruitment. However, project staff said the most successful strategy to recruit for diversity is when they intentionally reach out and engage partnerships with community-based organizations that are focused on supporting Black, Indigenous, and people of color—BIPOC—communities and work with those organizations to identify individuals within their community who may be good service member candidates.

When a prospective member submits a completed application it is screened and, for those applicants selected to be interviewed, an interview is conducted by Ampact staff. Because “fit” of a member to a site is so important, Ampact meets with each site individually in advance of the interviews to understand the site, their needs, and the projects that members will be supporting. This allows Ampact to match members effectively while also managing their recruitment process at scale.

For each of the initiatives, members are placed in sites throughout the state. The number of members at each site typically ranges from one to three. Climate Impact Corps project managers visit each site twice throughout the service term and conduct performance reviews. Site managers also provide feedback on each member’s performance.

Why Members Join

Half of the eight focus group participants said they became aware of the positions they serve in through social media sites and job postings. One member had a sibling who was an AmeriCorps member. One member was at a tabling event representing a board they serve on and Climate Impact Corps was in attendance. One member became aware of the service position through volunteer work they were doing and met the founder

of one of the nonprofit partner sites. Yet another member heard about it through a presentation made by the project director.

When sharing their interest in climate change and prior involvement in community activities, all focus group participants spoke passionately about their desire to make a difference. They had been involved in volunteer efforts to the extent their schedules would allow and wanted to do more. One member shared:

I'd already sort of been through the personal struggle or realizing that climate change was happening. And [I was thinking], like, "Can one person make a difference?" ... I feel like that started it off and it was like a snowball effect to how can I help and what can I do.

Another member added:

I had a similar experience where I would see the same infographic about the world ending, and so I was, like, well I might as well say I am contributing to something good. So I figured, like I said, it would be a worthy way of starting life outside of college.

Member Characteristics

Project staff said the majority of the Climate Impact Corps members are recent college graduates and in their 20s. For those members serving in the Community Resilience initiative, most are from the communities they serve, which is the preference because they have an existing connection.

Of the eight national service members participating in the focus group, five were returning for a second term with Climate Impact Corps. Members represented all three initiatives and were placed in sites throughout the state. Their educational backgrounds varied and they ranged in age from their early 20s through mid-60s. Types of educational and work experiences included political science, school paraprofessional, communication/journalism, sustainability, and editor/writer.

Stipend

For Climate Impact Corps members who serve full-time a stipend of \$1,100 is received every 2 weeks and part-time members are paid half of that amount (\$650). Ubiquitously, members said the stipend was insufficient to meet their living needs and some shared examples of needing to obtain a second job to have sufficient resources. One member in their mid-30s shared that they tapped into their retirement savings and had a second job so they could "make ends meet." Project staff shared that in some instances members have had to exit early because financially they could not finish the term. Both project staff and members said the compensation is an equity issue and being able to serve is a privilege. One member said:

The pay, we have the privilege of doing this ... for me, my spouse is a teacher and he has good salary and ... so, like, we have equity that not everybody has. So then I can work for the pay level that we work for. And that is my privilege so that is difficult. I don't know how it could be an equitable program without a change in the stipend.

Project staff added:

Because of historical inequities, a lot of people who come from those diverse backgrounds can't always serve with AmeriCorps because sometimes that privilege of financial stability is almost a requirement. We have a member benefits team that can help support. We try to make connections when we can.

Some of the benefits and services Impact staff connect members to include assistance with signing up for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, providing health insurance, and providing access to

a Member Assistance Program (free mental health services). Ampact also provides a \$150 gear stipend for members to purchase clothing needed to work in the elements. They have also arranged for members to receive Outdoor Prolink gear discounts.

Members who complete their service term receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of up to \$7,395. Members appreciate this benefit. One member said she would be using the education award to make a career change. She had a bachelor's degree in an unrelated field. The service term confirmed her interest in forestry and allowed her to build her resume. She planned to attend a technical college and attain an urban forestry associate degree.

Training

This section describes the formal training provided to members both through Climate Impact Corps and the partners. Additional individual-specific training is available as well as opportunities for networking.

Climate Impact Corps Training

Climate Impact Corps has a training pacing guide that depicts the in-person, online, and asynchronous training that is offered at the beginning and throughout the member's term for each of the four positions. All members participate in AmeriCorps-required training as well as a Climate Foundations training, designed to build proficiency in understanding and skills around climate change action and communication, which is led by the project director.

Initiative-specific training is provided by both the project director and partners including the North American Association for Environmental Education; University of Minnesota Extension; Trees and Me, LLC; Tree Trust; and the University of Minnesota Urban Forestry Outreach & Research Lab. The community stewardship facilitators training builds competencies in volunteer management, environmental education, community asset mapping, environmental action activity facilitation, and others. The sustainability project coordinators training focuses on skill building in project management, community engagement and outreach, and community asset mapping. Community forestry members training focuses on skills such as tree identification, inventorying, pruning and planting, environmental education, and volunteer management. Some of these trainings result in certifications such as identifying and managing tree pests and diseases (Minnesota tree inspector). Home energy members participate in training that provides them with industry-recognized certification.

Corps Days are held three times in a member's term when a 1.5-hour synchronous training is offered. At the beginning of the term there is a session on planning for a successful service year, midyear is service reflection, and at the end the session is on life after AmeriCorps and the Segal education award.

Members generally felt like the training was worthwhile and equipped them with important skills. They acknowledged that it must be challenging for Ampact to plan training since all of the sites had unique missions and it would not be possible to customize for each member's work experiences. For example, one member worked with Indigenous populations and would have liked training in how to interact with Indigenous members in their community, noting:

I think the trainings that they've done are helpful, but it doesn't really translate into the service that we're doing ... I feel like there's not a lot of guidance when it comes to how, especially, like, look around the room, we don't look like the groups that we're trying to bring equity to for the most part.

A Community Forestry member shared that because her site was different from those of other Community Forestry member placements, the trainings didn't relate and that was challenging. With the approval of Climate Impact Corps, the member was able to create a training module so that other members could collect tree seeds themselves and send them to the Forest Assisted Migration Project. The members also recognized that the Community Resilience initiative, which encompasses the community steward facilitator and sustainability coordinator positions, was fairly new and project staff had made improvements to the training from last year to this year.

Networking

A Discord online chat has been set up by Climate Impact Corps staff that includes the members and training members. There are different channels (e.g., Forestry Channel) where members and trainers can interact and stay connected. For example, a member may take a picture of a tree and ask for assistance in verifying its identity.

Climate Impact Corps also hosts optional monthly virtual meetups for members. Given the members are dispersed across the state, project staff said it is important to have space to check in and keep members connected. Breakout rooms are used and members can share what they are doing at their sites.

Outcomes

This section includes information about performance measurement and evaluation, including any challenges. Program outcomes, both member and community, are described along with a discussion of the facilitators and barriers to meeting the intended outcomes.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation

Ampact functions as the implementation arm of ServeMinnesota's strategic initiatives and, as such, their evaluation team is responsible for conducting evaluations of Ampact programs. Ampact's evaluation focuses both on continuous improvement and determining impact. Climate Impact Corps has continually focused on responding to community needs, which necessitates a certain amount of adaptability to the program model. Originally, the program built in adaptability by creating additional member positions (expanding from 1 to 4 positions during the first 3 years). Based on the evaluation data, the model has shifted, and in years 4–5 the program will consolidate into a single position, but use the capacity building performance measure to allow members to engage in project-based activities adaptable to their local context.

The evaluation uses multiple methods and sources and includes weekly data entry by members into a position-specific database application, member and site surveys, member and site focus groups, and ripple effects mapping—a participatory approach to look at program effects on the communities served. One year follow-up surveys with members are also planned for next year.

Program and evaluation staff identified several challenges with AmeriCorps performance measurement and evaluation requirements. The main challenge largely concerned the difficulties in measuring the impact of program activities on climate change outcomes in the span of one to two grant cycles. Specifically, with program interventions such as Community Forestry members planting trees in urban areas, the total output and climate outcomes reported for the cycle in which the planting occurred will not account for the true impacts that accrue over the span of 30-plus years. Continuing the example of tree planting in urban areas, the current feasible approach to performance measurement and evaluation may entail reporting the direct measures (e.g., number of trees planted) and estimates of immediate calculations available in the grant cycle that tree planting occurred (i.e., cumulative pounds of carbon sequestered). However, this focus on immediate

outcomes neglects the reality that forestry climate solutions such as tree planting will display their impact over a long period of time.

For example, a pressing effect of climate change in urban areas known as the urban heat island effect occurs due to these areas relying on dense concentrations of pavement, buildings, and infrastructure that absorb and retain heat, leading to increased demand for energy consumption, increased air pollution, and increased illnesses related to heat. Since planting trees to increase the canopy in dense areas is a primary method to address the urban heat island effect, the program felt as though being restricted to defining the outcome of tree planting as estimates of carbon sinks provided in a year is not an accurate representation of the true outcomes that each tree will achieve as they mature long-term.

In addition to concerns with requirements to report on short-term outcomes from program activities, staff reported challenges with aligning the prescribed performance measure options to the activities of Community Resilience programming. While it is exciting from the perspective of Ampact to have AmeriCorps members implement sustainable practices and coordinate events to increase the connectedness of community residents to their surrounding environment, the applicable performance measures do not fully account for the activities in which members engage. Particularly the environmental output that tracks the number of individuals receiving education or training in environmental stewardship and the outcome that tracks the number of individuals with increased knowledge of environmental stewardship are narrowly defined performance measures for the activities members from the Community Resilience initiative conduct. To more accurately measure and reflect the impact of member services on Community Resilience, it would be helpful to have more options to align performance measures with the evidence-based approach Climate Impact Corps implements. One project staff explained:

If the goal is to increase the bonds of those working together and the organizations that came to help them with the “it” [e.g., putting together a pollinator garden], then the knowledge/training performance measures don’t fit and don’t align with what the research says needs to happen, which is the social capital sense of place to move forward the goal of increasing environmental quality in communities.

Internally, Climate Impact Corps is working to develop operational definitions for reach, scale, and effectiveness. This pursuit aligns with the program’s interest in more specific definitions and measures of the significant, impactful “indirect” activities required to achieve the goals of individual member service plans, the Climate Impact Corps, and partner organizations. These indirect activities often include tasks required to begin and maintain direct activities, such as relationship building to understand the current landscape of sustainability practices in a partner organization or developing an outreach and communications plan to effectively communicate and advertise community stewardship facilitator events to the local community residents.

With regard to AmeriCorps evaluation requirements, Climate Impact Corps is currently funded as a state formula grantee and therefore is not required to do an impact evaluation (i.e., quasi-experimental and experimental research designs). However, concerns were expressed about doing an impact evaluation for a program like Climate Impact Corps given the nature of the projects and inability to have comparison sites.

Member Outcomes

This section describes member outcomes in the areas of civic engagement, technical skills, and career preparation.

Civic Engagement

Both project staff and the members were asked about how participation in the Climate Impact Corps improved members' civic engagement. Staff shared that member involvement in service with the program is a likely indicator that members already have an interest in serving communities or pursuing public-facing issues such as climate change. Although the members are reportedly often likely to be involved with community-facing service when they begin their term, through the nature of the program, many members often feel their connectedness to the community increases.

For example, members of the Community Resilience initiative become well-versed in community asset mapping and as a program staff describes, this process helps members recognize their importance and role:

They map out the connections in the community: What relationships are already existing? What relationships can be made? Who knows who? What organization is already doing this type of work in the community? ... And they mentioned just doing that activity in the first couple months of their service made them realize how connected they already are in stuff. And that really gave them some more confidence to get involved and to make those connections with the projects.

Technical Skills and Career Preparation

Through Climate Impact Corps' dedication to specialized training for each member position and the program model's placement of members at individual partner sites, members and staff both report considerable knowledge gains in the field of climate solutions and preparedness to pursue careers in similar job sectors. Because members are often placed at partner sites with a maximum of one to two other members, they often have the opportunity to develop relationships with staff from partner sites and thus become familiar with the responsibilities and requirements of full-time roles in a career field similar to their service focus. Similar to a job shadowing experience, exposure to careers in the green jobs sector—whether the partner organization has an explicit focus on climate solutions or not—is valuable from the perspective of staff and members to explore member career interests, obtain real-world experience, and identify required pathways to secure careers of interest (i.e., entry-level positions, further education and training).

In addition to exploring the workplace environments and responsibilities of potential career pathways, members gain access to valuable certifications and skill-building opportunities. Particularly for members participating in the Community Forestry initiative, they obtain the skills and certifications necessary for entry-level employment in forestry such as tree pruning, planting, and certification in tree identification. Salaries for entry level careers in forestry average \$38,714–\$43,729 annually, often dependent upon skill level and private/public employer status.¹⁹

Furthermore, forestry members have the potential to identify and pursue niche topics in the forestry field, serving to more specifically develop technical skills and help members stand out in their future career pursuits. One member illustrated this:

My project, the Forest Assisted Migration Project, is pretty new, but we received a \$5 million grant. It feels really good to collect hundreds of gallons of seeds and to know that that it is going to go directly to reforestation efforts. And it is just going to keep getting bigger ... and on a professional level, this job has, like, carved out a niche for me.

¹⁹ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's [Forest and Conservation Workers Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics](#); ZipRecruiter's [Forestry salary in Minnesota](#).

Members serving under the Community Resilience initiative do not currently have a certification option, however, their experience gained through being largely responsible for organizing/facilitating community-facing events focused on local climate and influencing sustainable practices of community-based organizations and governments is a valuable entry point into career fields of this nature. Beyond the valuable community asset mapping trainings they receive, members of the Community Resilience initiative report invaluable experience with navigating an office environment, taking a new and increased level of responsibility within their partner site, and developing meaningful methods to implement evidence-based climate solutions programming and practices within local communities. One member shared, "I can't imagine working for anything else other than to support climate work. It [my AmeriCorps service experience] has affected me greatly in that I love going to work every day. And I feel like I am contributing to a very just cause."

Another community stewardship facilitator member explained how their particular position and member experience greatly impacted their future career pursuits:

When I started this job 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. When I became exposed to the networks of nonprofits in Minnesota that are all working together and realized that there truly is a fire hose of financial support to greater Minnesota from legislation; [it is like] somebody said, a climate haven There is a lot to enjoy about this work. I can't imagine working for anything else other than to support climate work.

In addition to verbal interest in pursuing a career in a related field of service, program staff have efforts in place to track the career preparation and attainment of Climate Impact Corps members. Namely, the program's member survey recently reported in the 2022-23 Annual Evaluation Report that "85 percent of the members either agreed or strongly agreed that their role was supportive of their career goals and similarly, 85 percent of members said they had an intention to work or pursue further training in the climate field." To follow up on the career outcomes of members following their service, the program will administer a 1-year follow-up survey to gather information on their individual career/education outcomes. Additionally, program staff aim to supplement this information with available position descriptions/titles from member LinkedIn accounts.

Community Outcomes

Climate Impact Corps improves community outcomes through increased energy efficiency, access to healthy forestry in urban areas, connectedness of residents to the natural environment surrounding communities served, and increased resident knowledge of local climate change effects and solutions. Continuing the case study's interest in interventions designed to promote Community Resilience, this section will focus on outcomes from projects the community stewardship facilitators implement in the communities they serve to contribute to a more informed, connected, and thereby resilient community.

According to staff and Community Resilience initiative members, the primary outcome for communities served by partner sites is increased connections. Increased connections as a community outcome refers to two major types of connection: 1) community residents connecting to the physical spaces they live in and recognizing links to individual/community behaviors and local climate change effects/solutions and 2) developing or strengthening connections among local organizations to collectively address climate change in a way that utilizes the assets of a local community. One member explained the services they provide:

They 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.

Additionally, members focused on building sustainable, resilient communities have the opportunity to integrate residents from their local communities that have been historically disenfranchised. Using their community asset map training, members are equipped to consider all points of strengths and needs in their local community, such as members or institutions in the community that can add a lens of equity when developing and implementing climate solutions. For example, program staff described how one member identified the need for more sustainable programming dedicated toward historically disadvantaged communities, explaining:

In [community], [member] did some work in a park that was in a primarily Black, low-income neighborhood [and] the park has been under-resourced and not kept up to the same extent as other places in the city. So [member] worked with their sustainability contact or maybe parks contact in the city to revitalize that area a little bit and clean it up and add some new stuff to the park.

Barriers to Meeting Intended Outcomes

When asked about barriers to meeting their intended program outcomes, project staff discussed the difficulty of onboarding many new partner sites. While project staff acknowledged the importance of increasing their reach and service to communities across Minnesota, it can be difficult to communicate the logistics and requirements of AmeriCorps-funded service to many new partners at once. For example, project staff explained:

There's particular tension a lot of times with local equity-focused community nonprofits around advocacy and learning where that line is when members can't participate. Because we'll have sites that are [community-based organizations in Minneapolis] but when there's so much activity in Minneapolis as a response to the George Floyd protests, that organization sees itself as a justice organization and wants to be involved in that. So how do we communicate to the site that the member can't engage in that during site time and some of [the things like] that?

Additionally, project staff and members alike explained frustrations with AmeriCorps requirements, noting that climate change affects every facet of society and requires all of society to problem solve and implement solutions (e.g., nonprofits, government agencies, for-profit businesses). This can be challenging in light of AmeriCorps regulations and restrictions on AmeriCorps-funded projects to not benefit businesses. There are times when the local needs, as defined by the partners, will benefit small businesses and this can be frustrating to the partners that "the system doesn't get it." A project staff said:

There's no national framework that we can base our work on. Now we have a state framework And you know climate is political. ... And also climate solutions often are very close to the line, like on AmeriCorps compliance. We really have to constantly be scrutinizing things related to, like, advocacy, applying for grant funding, the benefits of business There are projects that I really wish our members could be doing and organizations that I wish they could be engaging in and they just can't because of some of those really strong compliance issues ... last year we had some members working with some rural grocery stores and that

had to be stopped because ... technically [they] were for profit, even though this function they're serving in their community is really such a critical ... food justice kind of a thing.

Facilitators to Meeting Intended Outcomes

While the recent influx of new partnerships was listed as a barrier in the section above, project staff and members frequently mentioned the effectiveness of strong relationships with partner organizations in achieving the goals and missions of Climate Impact Corps. Beyond the partner sites' presence in communities across Minnesota providing a space for members to complete service activities, partners are vital to a successful member experience and by extension, more resilient community. Namely, a partner site engaged in the success of their member(s) can provide invaluable training and real-world experiences for members as they navigate implementing feasible local climate solutions in their current and future communities. One project staff explained:

I think a lot of the bedrock of what we can be successful on relies a lot on our sites. We rely on a lot of our sites, because that's where the members are getting the local experience. We provide the supports we can to the sites that help them with the uniqueness that comes with hosting an AmeriCorps member. They're not on staff but they're not an unpaid volunteer. That site partnership and relationship is really important, so that's something we try to prioritize as [staff managers]. Because we know it means a lot to the member experience if they have a really supportive site supervisor that can mentor them through that experience.

From a programmatic perspective, project staff shared similar sentiments regarding their strong relationship with ServeMinnesota. According to project staff, the support from their state service commission is valuable because:

It gives a little bit of wiggle room to try new things, to feel like you can be innovative and take some risks. Because climate work is so new and there's so much innovation happening across the entire field, there is an element of needing to take risks and try things. Having that support has been huge.

Closing

In response to higher temperatures, extreme weather, flooding, and changes in the Minnesota ecosystem, the Climate Impact Corps seeks to implement climate solutions that promote change at a local level. A major component of this goal materializes through the service of members placed at partner sites across the state, regardless of population size or demography. Climate Impact Corps has also strategically aligned its initiatives with the priorities of the Minnesota Climate Action Framework, the state's plan to address and prepare for climate change, and is building the organizational capacity of the partner sites around those priorities (e.g., resilient communities, clean energy, and efficient buildings.)

During the 2-day site visit and analysis of member, project staff, partner, and community interview responses, researchers gathered valuable insights into the structures and supports the Climate Impact Corps offers members and, by extension, partner organizations with similar goals toward climate awareness and solutions. Through their approach to developing the capabilities of members to identify the available and needed assets of particular communities, members are adequately equipped to support partner organizations in a wide variety of service needs.

Members of the Climate Impact Corps and specifically the Community Resilience initiative serve as an invaluable resource to implement flexible, community-engaged solutions to the localized effects of climate change. Recognized by interviewed partner staff and project staff alike, the ability of members to identify the

specific climate priorities of the communities they serve is essential to both the sustainability of implemented solutions *and* behavioral willingness of community residents to engage with climate solutions at all.

Colorado Climate Corps Case Study

Introduction

Colorado Youth Corps Association's (CYCA's) Colorado Climate Corps was selected as one of the five projects to include as a case study for the AmeriCorps Climate Change Evaluation Bundle study given one of its corps' focus on energy and water climate solutions. Important context for understanding the case study is that CYCA serves as the legal applicant for the Youth Corps for Colorado and the Colorado Climate Corps AmeriCorps programs, while the implementation of AmeriCorps-funded activities occurs at eight distinct corps that are serving as subgrantees with CYCA.

The mission of CYCA is "to serve on behalf of Colorado conservation corps that transform lives and communities through service, personal development, and education statewide." CYCA implements this mission by

1. Securing resources for the corps,
2. Assuring quality through annual accreditation,
3. Managing Colorado's largest AmeriCorps grants,
4. Developing high-quality professional development opportunities, and
5. Communicating the important and impactful work of the corps to audiences throughout the state.

The focus of the case study is on one of the eight corps, Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC), which has one of its four programs focused on energy and water efficiency. During a 2-day site visit in November 2023 to Denver, researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with:

- 1 project director and 2 project staff from CYCA,
- 1 project director from MHYC,
- 3 project staff from MHYC,
- 2 staff from an organization partnered with MHYC,
- 1 community resident who received services from MHYC, and
- 6 current MHYC members participating in the Energy & Water Conservation program.

Documents such as grant applications, progress reports, tracking data, and training materials were also collected and reviewed. These documents helped to better understand the activities and status of each program's work and provided a basis for corroboration with stakeholder perspectives gleaned through the interviews and focus groups.

Description of Program and Context

The Energy & Water Conservation program is one of four programs implemented by MHYC, which is located in Denver. The other three programs include Land Conservation, YouthBuild Construction, and YouthBuild Health and Wellness. At the time of the site visit, MHYC was in its thirty-first year of operations overall; within MHYC, the Energy & Water Conservation program was in its seventeenth year of operations. Across its four programs, MHYC has a membership of approximately 250, with the Energy & Water Conservation program typically accounting for 25 members each year. MHYC is one of the two Colorado Corps that have an Energy & Water

Conservation program. The other corps is the Larimar County Conservation Corps. MHYC serves 23 counties in metro Denver and the southern Front Range regions of Colorado.

The services provided through the program directly mitigate climate change through the focus on energy and water conservation and serve those from low-income households. The CYCA grant application states that “by 2060, there could be as much as a 35 percent increase in water demand and a 25–50 percent increased risk of water shortages” and that in Colorado the precipitation is decreasing and temperatures are increasing. Energy and water conservation are critical concerns statewide. According to information presented in CYCA’s logic model, residential buildings consume more than 21 percent of the total energy in the United States. Low-income individuals draw more energy because of inefficient homes and realize the greatest economic consequences. In an effort to help mitigate energy and water usage issues, the MHYC Energy & Water Conservation program conducts energy and water utilization audits and retrofits for low-income households to reduce resource consumption and utility bills.

The mission of MHYC is to “help youth make a difference in themselves and their community through meaningful service opportunities and educational experiences.” According to MHYC project staff and members, the organization’s mission emerges through the empowerment of youth in green jobs with skills development and educational opportunities, completion of impactful service projects in the community, and personal and professional development.²⁰ In recent years, the Energy & Water Conservation program has sought to expand its program priorities for greater alignment with the mission of MHYC. To do this, the program has recently focused on expanding training and certification for program membership. Project staff explained:

A piece of that is to offer baseline certificates when it comes to building efficiency and home efficiency. But we’ve also, with the support of the City of Denver, been able to set up individualized career pathways that would get corps members positioned into good green jobs. And that’s a priority of the city; it aligns with what we are trying to do in terms of that corps member experience and that stepping stone into the “real world.” And that’s been a key focus for us, particularly in the last 2 years, to implement that sort of programming for corps members.

To promote environmental values and sustainability and positively impact the community in Denver, the Energy & Water Conservation program provides services designed to save energy and water usage in low-income households within the program’s service area (primarily metro Denver) at no cost to the income-qualified beneficiaries. As part of these services, members largely engage in energy audits and retrofitting, or the addition of new technology or features to existing energy and/or water use systems within the households of low-income communities. Trained members begin service projects with income-qualified households with an energy audit to determine the baseline energy and water use of each client residence and identify technology that can be installed to improve the efficiency of energy and water appliances.

On a later date following the audit, members are deployed to single housing or multifamily complexes to install energy- and water-saving technology such as ultra-high-efficiency toilets, low-flow aerators, low-flow showerheads, programmable thermostats, and LED light bulbs. After these installations, members have

²⁰ A standard definition of green jobs does not exist. However, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics developed a two-pronged [definition of green jobs](#): (1) Jobs in businesses that produce goods and provide services that benefit the environment or conserve natural resources and (2) Jobs in which workers’ duties involve making their establishment’s production processes more environmentally friendly or use fewer natural resources.

conversations with residents about operating and maintaining the new technology, suggest behavioral changes to reduce energy and water use, share available resources for utility assistance, and as able, refer residents to external resources to continue assistance in the area of increasing energy efficiency (i.e., major weatherization projects such as heating systems). Each year, the Energy & Water Conservation program completes 1,100 to 1,200 in-home service visits to income-qualified households.

Within the context of MHYC, project staff generally felt that the commitment to link workforce development with direct services to communities in need should be considered a promising practice for climate change grant programs implementing similar services. A suggestion from MHYC's Energy & Water Conservation project staff to enhance this practice and strengthen the sustainability of climate change grant programs was to consider presenting climate services implemented by AmeriCorps members as a mutually beneficial model for the local government, community members, and local labor markets rather than only focusing on the benefits for addressing climate change. One project staff further explained:

I think that could be an interesting way for other AmeriCorps agencies to look at how they stay sustainable long term because they're positioning themselves not only for good service work in the community but also for those participants coming through. It's not just a feel-good story for folks, but it actually is tied to real outcomes for the individuals [members] coming through.

Role of Partners and Community Involvement

This section describes the role of partners in working with MHYC and broader community involvement.

Role of Partners

At the time of the site visit, the MHYC Energy & Water Conservation program had approximately seven community partners, which are the municipalities in the Denver metro area and southern Front Range regions. Other project partners include local government agencies, the Colorado Water Conservation Board, and community nonprofits. The partners' roles include identifying qualified households for services (i.e., Low Income Energy Assistance Program or LEAP); providing program funding streams for MHYC; and contracting with MHYC to provide installation services for water- and energy-efficient showerheads, toilets, and lightbulbs.

Largely, partner organizations are not responsible for oversight of the members. For partnerships that solicit member retrofit services through contract vehicles, the organizations primarily communicate with Energy & Water Conservation project staff to coordinate scheduling and logistics for retrofitting in predetermined households, multifamily housing complexes, affordable housing complexes, and so on. One partner explained:

We are trying to get energy-efficient equipment for residents ... we partner with Mile High Youth Corps to do the direct installation such as the shower heads, the aerators, the LED bulbs. They'll come in and they're the ones who will do the installation for the residents Mile High coordinates with us and the property to be able to create a schedule for the residents and communicate all of the things that are going inside of their unit. Because when you get something new, you're curious about it. So they do a good job helping us with that as well and making sure that the tenants are educated on the new program that they're receiving.

Project staff and partners said that the services performed by the Energy & Water Conservation members were a value-add because of the work quality and cost savings through lower labor costs. According to partner staff interviews, these cost-saving measures allow partner organizations to implement higher-cost energy and water efficiency measures, such as newer heating and cooling systems, to further reduce consumption and utility bills for low-income households.

Within the Energy & Water Conservation program, MHYC 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,” MHYC 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.

The Energy & Water Conservation program also partners with community-based organizations that provide resources, such as food, and organize farmer’s markets and other on-site services for community residents. In addition to fulfilling volunteer service hours for MHYC members, these partnerships help to increase the visibility and outreach of the Energy & Water Conservation program in the community.



Community Involvement

In addition to income-qualified residents of the Denver community being involved with MHYC’s Energy & Water Conservation program through direct receipt of household retrofitting services and referral, the program has several examples of initiatives to increase meaningful connections between the Energy & Water Conservation program and the communities they serve. The Energy & Water Conservation program primarily implements these community initiatives through the Community Climate Ambassadors/Promotoras Climaticas project, referred to as “the Promotoras” by project staff and members. Members who serve on the Promotoras project are responsible for public outreach about climate change and increasing awareness and access to resources for communities at increased risk of climate change effects.

When asked about the best practices to engage with communities, especially those with a disadvantaged background, 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.” For example, Promotoras and the other Energy & Water Conservation members volunteer at tabling events, neighborhood events, and through partnerships with other organizations that have similar service population demographics (e.g., LEAP). Beyond providing information on the many resources available to vulnerable communities (in English and Spanish) in a setting that community residents will already be attending, this project seeks to gather feedback on community perspectives of climate change in their local environment and changes they

would like to see related to their surrounding environment. Both initiatives—specific to the Promotoras project and more broadly through Energy & Water Conservation programming—aim to authentically engage with communities through direct service and soliciting their feedback, thus mutually serving the needs and desires of the community. One project staff summarized this:

Now we have the opportunity with a small subset of our programs 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. We’re learning that it could present us new opportunities for service projects in the future with our corps members. It’s been a unique way to approach it, so that’s new for us. We just started it this year.

National Service Members

This section describes the member recruitment and selection processes, members' reasons for joining the program, and member demographics. Also included are perceptions about the stipend and training received.

Recruitment and Selection

Each corps, including MHYC, is responsible for recruiting membership for their respective programs. Project staff from MHYC explained that they have a team responsible for the recruiting and hiring of members across their four programs. From their insights into this process, successful recruitment across all programs occurs through their organizational website postings, job board postings, and sharing recruitment information with their alumni networks. Of the six members in the focus group, each member was “recruited” either by online job postings, job boards, or a referral from a previous employer aware of the program.

The program also reported recruitment strategies unique to the Energy & Water Conservation program through the nature of its services and member interactions with community residents. Namely, as the members conduct home energy audits and retrofitting services within households of income-qualified communities, members increase program awareness in the communities they serve. Project staff shared:

And because we are in these communities, I think Energy & Water has a higher chance of coming across people’s paths, client-wise. If there’s a client that received the services, they could share with a family member that has a young person in their family that’s a young adult looking for a job. Whereas land [conservation programs], they’re out in forests and sometimes parks and things, but they have less connection directly with the community members to talk about more recruitment type stuff. It’s more insulated from the actual community population.

Recognizing their ties to the community through direct service, the Energy & Water Conservation program members have recently become more intentional in their efforts to incorporate equitable recruitment goals and strategies. The goal is to focus recruitment toward residents of the communities that the Energy & Water Conservation program serves (i.e., income-qualified households in Denver). Beyond member interactions with beneficiaries during household audits and installations, project staff are in the process of identifying opportunities for strong connections with local school districts, neighborhood associations, and other nonprofits with aligned missions to strengthen awareness of the Energy & Water Conservation program among the surrounding Denver community.

Project staff explained these recruitment strategies within the context of the Promotoras project (this project is under the umbrella of the Energy & Water Conservation program) as follows:

The Promotoras model ... originated in Latin America and it revolves around established, well-known trusted members of the community that then communicate resources to people that they're familiar with and help them navigate them to bridge that gap between government and people that the government is serving. So, with that in mind, we're really mindful about trying to recruit people that are from Denver that would already have some of those connections with the community—and especially if they could be from the neighborhoods that we're serving. At least from Denver, and preferably if they could speak Spanish, but that's not a dead-set requirement. We have tried different things; we attend the Registered Neighborhood Organization meetings every month and have tried to leverage that connection with the people that are already really well-connected in the neighborhoods and try to get them to spread the word out about our corps members. And then we put up flyers around a small local grocery store, our recreation center, and libraries, but especially around this area that we're working with.

Since the shift to the overall equitable recruitment strategies is recent and the Promotoras project has only been in effect for 1 year, the program does not yet know the effectiveness of these strategies.

Why Members Join

When asked about their reasons for joining the MHYC Energy & Water Conservation program, responses include location and wanting to give back. Three of the six members in the focus group were from the Denver area, while the remaining three moved to Denver more recently (i.e., in the past 5 years) for school or work and wanted to stay in the Denver area. Four members wanted to pursue an opportunity that focused on addressing climate change through the intersection of energy efficiency and income-qualified communities. The other two members were primarily interested in “giving back” to the Denver community through service.

Description of Member Characteristics

As stated earlier, MHYC's Energy & Water Conservation program typically comprises 25 members each year, while the other 3 MHYC programs have a membership of 250–300 per year. The majority of the Energy & Water Conservation service members are between the ages of 18 and 24; have either a GED, high school diploma, or college degree; and occasionally are second-year members. In the future, MHYC hopes to strengthen connections between the YouthBuild programs and the Energy & Water Conservation program as a continued service pipeline and opportunity to equip youth who recently obtained their GED with energy and water efficiency skills.

Stipend

According to the members participating in the focus group, the provided stipend (approximately \$880 every 2 weeks after taxes) in the Denver community seems to be a “deciding factor” for interested applicants in joining the program or pursuing other opportunities that pay more, regardless of their passion for participating in service.

As the members were discussing the stipend, they were appreciative of any funds provided for voluntary service but offered context that the current stipend may be in contrast with program goals to recruit from diverse communities and the income-qualified communities they serve. For example, one member explained that the stipend's equivalent hourly rate is \$13–\$14 an hour, while Denver recently increased the minimum wage within the city to \$18.29 an hour.

As the Denver cost of living continues to rise, the members expressed concerned understanding that prospective community residents ultimately may prioritize their immediate financial well-being over pursuing

an AmeriCorps-funded program that seeks to address climate change. While the program aims to address member needs that may not be sufficiently met by the stipend (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, application assistance; supportive services), members reiterated that affordable housing can be difficult to secure with the stipend even while MHYC offers assistance to members in finding less expensive housing. Project staff discussed why it is so important that as a program they offer additional supports in order to attract diverse members:

We try to assist with all of these other things because we know that accepting a position within Mile High Youth Corps is kind of a privilege because you're accepting a position that's less than minimum wage. So you know we have to support them in other ways in order to allow people that have other responsibilities or just, you know, being a single person, just trying to pay rent and things is really difficult within that stipend. We try to support people in those other regards so that people from all walks of life are able to participate if that's what they want to do.

Looking at the stipend and recruitment issue from a macro level, CYCA said that the corps with more consistent and strong recruitment numbers were often located close to colleges and universities, serving in locations with lower costs of living, and/or included guaranteed housing for the duration of member service terms. One staff member shared that corps who experienced more successful recruitment tended to be 24-hour program models in which the nature of the service includes housing (i.e., backcountry camping crews).

Three of the six members said that they would not be able to justify their service if they were not currently living with their parents or partner. Describing the challenges with the stipend, one member explained that prospective members “look at the stipend and then they look at the pay of even just working in a restaurant and they look at the comparison and they say, ‘Why would I ever pick this job that pays less?’ ” The member continued:

For me, experience is super important. But it's been very tempting to go and get a job that would pay more I know there are a lot of corps members that we currently have that support kids on this income and it's tough. They're paycheck-to-paycheck, and it is incredibly difficult for them to be stable in this job. A lot of them have conversations like, “Well I need to get a different job or another job so that I can support my family in this.” And even if you're not supporting kids, you have to be really strategic with your money. And I think if you don't have the education on how to manage your money, you're going to be even more unstable.

Training

MHYC is the primary provider of training to Energy & Water Conservation service members. Members begin their service receiving AmeriCorps-required training and workplace safety training through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour course, a first aid course, and CPR training. Members also complete installation training to learn about the knowledge required to complete home energy audits and install toilets, low-flow technology, and energy-efficient measures such as LED lightbulbs. Additionally, members undergo a program through the U.S. Department of Labor to receive a Building Science Principles Certificate of Knowledge. When asked about whether this training adequately prepared them for the services they provide through the Energy & Water Conservation program, two members responded by explaining that the training program prepared them well enough to perform services, but much of the knowledge is accumulated through completing services in the field.

Beyond the primary trainings required to navigate requirements of AmeriCorps membership, operate in the workplace safely, and complete home energy and water installation and retrofitting services, MHYC organizes training offerings for members to pursue according to their individual interests and career pursuits. These individualized training pursuits are known as the Career Pathway Certificates and focus on six core areas of training: Water Management, Outdoor Conservation, Outdoor Education, Renewable Energy, Green Building, and Environmental Compliance and Social Governance.

MHYC project staff described this individualized approach to training as an opportunity to offset the trade-offs members experience regarding the stipend and as a strategy in line with investing in the development of individual member interests and green workforce needs alike. Throughout their service terms, though often on Fridays during “programming days,” members have the opportunity to progress through a wide variety of flexible, self-paced training courses within the six core areas of Career Pathway Certificates. MHYC project staff explained:



Within those categories, you can have everything from LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] Green certification to ArcGIS [software], which is tracking and data management to solar panel install. We have a preset sort of menu under each of those six categories. But we also want to hear from corps members about what interests they have. If we can make the case that it fits into that category and it's going to give them a leg up to get into—again—a good green job, then we've had the support to be able to offer that out. And that's very, very unique. That sort of freedom to be able to offer that up to corps members is awesome. Because again it's that sort of experience piece that says you're doing excellent service to the community, now invest time in yourself and get something out of this for yourself.

Throughout member service terms, MHYC organizes times for professionals with expertise relevant to the interests and needs of members to engage with Energy & Water Conservation service members. For example, past professionals have visited MHYC offices to discuss mental health, housing advocacy, renter's rights, financial planning, and professional pathways into climate policymaking. Members can suggest additional visits of this nature to learn more about a topic area of interest; network with potential future employers; and to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion information throughout their service term and beyond.

Speaking about the mix of full group and individualized training, MHYC staff said:

I think giving people freedom of choice and options and letting them do what they are most interested in as far as, like, with the certifications and the courses, that has been really

effective. It can be difficult too. It can be overwhelming for some corps members who are like, "I've never even looked at any of this." But then also doing group activities, having them be very discussion-based—the things that we are doing all together are not lectures. It's not just throwing information at them. It's very interactive.

Outcomes

This section includes information about performance measurement and evaluation, including any challenges. Program outcomes, both member and community, are described as well as a discussion of the facilitators and barriers to meeting the intended outcomes.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation

The Energy & Water Conservation program measures performance by tracking the number of housing units retrofitted to improve energy efficiency, using AmeriCorps National Performance Measure outcome EN 1.1. MHYC collects the data through member-completed logs and then computes an estimate of the energy and water savings achieved using industry-recognized formulas. In addition to sharing the information with CYCA for AmeriCorps reporting, MHYC also shares the information with their partners to demonstrate a "return on investment."

While the MHYC project staff did not report any specific challenges with AmeriCorps performance measurements, CYCA staff provided insight into some of the various challenges reported across the other seven corps. CYCA staff mentioned that corps staff express frustration with the inability to alter the required performance measures during a grant cycle. These frustrations stem from desired alterations to implemented programming and resulting misalignment with the performance measurements chosen at the beginning of each grant cycle.

CYCA's AmeriCorps programs are part of The Corps Network's Public Lands Service Coalition, comprising 10–15 AmeriCorps national grantees who have contracted with an external evaluator to conduct a study where data are being aggregated from multiple conservation corps nationwide. The coalition is a broader effort to develop and implement standard measures for conservation corps. During the current funding cycle, the evaluators are using a Before-After-Control-Impact quasi-experimental design to strengthen evidence of environmental stewardship.

Member Outcomes

As mentioned, the Energy & Water Conservation program has a strong emphasis on tailored individualized professional development of each member and on strengthening ties to their local Denver communities through service. This section describes member outcomes in the areas of civic engagement, technical skills, and career preparation.

Civic Engagement

Both project staff and the members were asked about how the Energy & Water Conservation program improved members' civic engagement. Staff shared that member involvement in service with the program is a likely indicator that members already have an interest in serving communities or pursuing public-facing issues such as climate change. One staff member said, "We do attract people that are already interested and generally they continue [serving] in their community." Additionally, the program has recently sought to build familiarity with civic engagement by organizing opportunities to make up member hours through volunteering with local nonprofit organizations. Staff went on to describe an example of one member who volunteered beyond the required service hours: "One of my members—because through this work, she thought it was really

gratifying—she goes and volunteers with some of the community partners that we’ve had, even when it’s not part of work, specifically with food banks.”

While the staff acknowledged that Energy & Water Conservation service members may not pursue the same type of service to their community that they experience during the service term, the program highlights the concept of embracing civic engagement through the career they pursue. For example, two members described the impact their service to the community has had on their desire to pursue a career in service or continue service as follows:

- *Anyone will tell you when I come in, I am really excited, I am really happy to be here. I don’t know, I feel like the way I described my job to other people is that you know I really care about what I am doing. And that’s always what I’ve put first above anything else in terms of a career or a job that I do want. Like, I am not really that concerned with making it to upper echelon, like making six figures. I want to care about a lot of the work that I do. And because it is so community-focused and because it is my community, I feel like I get a lot of fulfillment in the work that I do.*
- *I feel very similar to [member name]; trying to figure out where I fit in a place, socially and physically. So it’s been interesting to be in a job where I am in the right sector, that I am learning and I do see the application of it. Very sort of purpose-driven I guess. And I’ve worked in restaurants all my life. And I’ve never been able to see the higher purpose of being able to be in a sector in an organization, where there’s a purpose and I make an impact. It’s different.*

Technical Skills and Career Preparation

Essential to the Energy & Water Conservation program is equipping each member with the technical skills and certifications to pursue employment and/or education following their service. While the program aims to provide insight into industries related to energy efficiency and water savings, MHYC maintains a commitment to the individualized development of each member by expanding its skills-building and certification offerings in other focus areas in the green jobs sector. It is possible that Energy & Water Conservation members may use their Building Science Principles Certificate of Knowledge to pursue employment after service in the construction industry. Entry level construction jobs in Denver, Colorado have an average salary of \$51,340 per year.²¹



Beyond providing members with a baseline understanding of information necessary to progress in the areas of constructing and maintaining buildings that are energy and water efficient, the program’s impact on training, certifications, and career skills (i.e., resumes and interviewing) is frequently mentioned by project staff and members alike. MHYC also offers career fairs several times a year where members have opportunities to network with potential employers. According to Energy & Water Conservation project staff, in the past 2 years of

tracking, total placement in green jobs following member service was approximately 40 percent. Anecdotally, these placements have historically been in roles such as environmental educator, park ranger, nonprofit

²¹ ZipRecruiter [Entry Level Construction Worker Salary in Denver, CO](#).

employee, and so on, however, the program is hoping to increase representation in industries related to renewable energy and policymaking in the coming years in response to funder priorities and labor market needs.

For context, positions not directly related to sustainable construction or focus on community outreach, education, and engagement pay an average yearly salary as follows:

- Environmental educator – \$40,396
- Park ranger – \$49,412
- Nonprofit employee – \$44,652²²

When asked to describe the impact of the Energy & Water Conservation program on their technical skills and career readiness, one member spoke about the leadership skills they acquired through their role as a crew lead. Through their experience, they received focused leadership training and were granted freedom to lead activities and guide other members. Speaking about the crew lead experience, this member said:

That allowed me to grow—especially throughout the entire year and dealing with different crews, with different personalities—I feel like I developed a lot of leadership skills in this year. I feel like that’s something that you can carry on to anything you go into for yourself.

A second member described how the climate change issues became "real" when they were able to see firsthand the application of what they were learning to the service they were providing:

It’s a very unique experience to be in someone’s house, see how they live, and see how energy prices and heat and cold is affecting their day-to-day life. Obviously, you learn about it in the classrooms ... like heat island, and all the technical terms. But you never see it, so when you’re going house to house, going to these appointments and hearing the client ... it applies the knowledge that I have about environmentalism and [I’m] able to put a direct face to issues and anecdotal examples to the theoretical knowledge that I have.

Community Outcomes

MHYC’s Energy & Water Conservation program improves community outcomes through increasing household energy and water efficiency in the Denver metro area. Amid several severe droughts in recent years in Colorado, installation of fixtures such as low-flow showerheads and water-efficient toilets serve to decrease the water usage of households in Denver.

At a more specific level, the Energy & Water Conservation program affects the lives of low-income communities served by lowering their energy and water bills. For the income-qualified households the program serves, installation of efficient technology and resulting lowered utility



²² ZipRecruiter [Environmental Educator Salary in Denver, CO](#); ZipRecruiter [Park Ranger Salary in Denver, CO](#).

bills lessens the financial burden imposed by increased demand for energy and water amid the global and local temperature rise. Furthermore, members and project staff alike added a lens of equity, noting that low-income communities are often at increased risk to experience the effects of climate change while simultaneously less likely to have access to the technology and resources needed to withstand effects of a warmer, drier climate. One project staff shared estimates of community savings and described the individual impact services can provide:

Average household savings has been anywhere between \$150 to about \$250 over the past few years. It kind of has varied depending on rate of installs and what materials we're using. But those are real-world savings for individuals that may be paycheck-to-paycheck. And then beyond that there's this sort of trickle effect of connection to other resources. So we've been able to provide somewhere in the range of I think 26 to 35 referrals to bigger ticket items, which can include insulation, window sealing, and things like that, which again could hopefully help people longer term financially.

More broadly, members of the Energy & Water Conservation program—often those on the Promotoras project—disseminate resources to residents of Denver. Resources shared by members may include utility assistance program information, energy- and water-efficient behavioral techniques, and general information relevant to contextualize the effects of climate change in the Denver community. As described below by a member, this focus on providing resources to the community aims to increase awareness of climate change and climate solutions to create a more informed and resilient population:

Even the folks that we can't necessarily serve because the program is income-restricted. Just when we're out tabling and we meet folks who don't necessarily qualify but aren't wealthy enough to be able to buy a toilet—toilets are kind of expensive! We're able to find ways to have this conversation so that they can even look for more resources on their own and what is climate change and how does it affect Denver specifically. A lot of folks know what climate change is, but they don't connect it to what they're experiencing here. So they think, "Oh, it's not affecting me." So that they aren't as passionate or informed about it as they could be. But then when you're like, "Oh, you and your child's asthma is related to the air quality, which is resulting from climate change." Or the water usage in Denver is related to water usage throughout Colorado and other places, is also a super important tool. But it's often something people overlook. They know about these things, but they don't connect them, because no one has ever helped them connect those thoughts.

Barriers to Meeting Intended Outcomes

The most pressing barriers to the program from the perspective of staff and members were the restrictions imposed by the member stipend and AmeriCorps member requirements. Both of these factors hamper the ability of MHYC to recruit members from the income-qualified communities they serve, thus making their commitments to equitable programming and recruitment challenging.

While members acknowledged their service is not employment, the stipend reportedly seems to be a deciding factor for individuals interested in the Energy & Water Conservation program. In a city environment facing increased costs and a minimum wage of \$18.29 an hour, which significantly outpaces the \$13–\$14 an hour stipend, individuals interested in the program and current members face significant trade-offs despite the training and service component that AmeriCorps-funded positions provide. Especially for individuals who are income qualified and likely incentivized to pursue immediate financial well-being, the stipend acts as a prohibitive factor to attracting members that originate from the communities served by this program.

Additionally, members explained that AmeriCorps requirement for members to be a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or lawful permanent resident is an additional barrier to recruiting members from the communities served. In the Denver metro area, members report a large proportion of lawful yet not permanent immigrants who could be eligible and interested in service with the Energy & Water Conservation program. In addition to providing more reflection of the communities served through their membership makeup, the inclusion of immigrant communities could serve to voice needs and priorities of a community not often included in local climate discussions, despite their increased risk for experiencing harmful effects of local and global climate change.

Related to achieving a meaningful presence in their local community as a service provider and hub for climate resources, project staff and members both mentioned the challenges of short-term, 1-3 year contracts or grants. Aside from the difficulties of the 2-year timeline with respect to the consistent effort directed toward grant applications and reporting requirements, programs that focus on energy efficiency and community resilience through embedding members in the community suffer from the fast-paced nature of the grant requirements and reporting. As described by project staff below, Energy & Water Conservation programming focused on authentically building awareness and climate resilience in the community may benefit from longer-term grant agreements:

Time is the biggest thing, I'll say. I've been working tirelessly the entire year and it's just impossible. Also, underserved communities are exhausted with trying to get new people [involved in the community efforts].. They're just like, "Oh another one, okay. How long are you going to be around for?" ... So the more turnover and the shorter grants are ... exhausting everyone involved. So yes, longer terms...

Facilitators to Meeting Intended Outcomes

Project staff noted community partners and the supportive services provided to members by MHYC as two instrumental facilitators in helping MHYC achieve its outcomes. In describing the relationship with the community partners, project staff explained:

I really appreciate the community partnerships that we've been able to build. They all seem to buy into understanding our model and we present it up front. We don't present ourselves as a subcontractor, so to speak, that's going to be doing home efficiency work. We tell the whole story of here's who is going to be doing the work—the corps members, the services, and here's what we hope that they're going to get out of this program by virtue of you supporting us in terms of, like, getting into homes or doing multifamily projects and things like that. On a smaller level, we have been able to incorporate community partners to come in, help us when it comes to actually building out, like, career pathways for corps members.

MHYC also has a Supportive Services Team that provides an array of services that help make the program accessible to the members. Some of the services include assistance with transportation (many MHYC members do not have driver's licenses); providing mental health resources; leading the diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative where actions are being taken to increase both members' and staff's sense of belonging; and offering career readiness training.

Closing

The mission of MHYC is to encourage youth to make a difference in themselves and their community through meaningful service opportunities and educational experiences. Specifically, the Energy & Water Conservation

program encourages youth ages 18–24 to achieve this mission and address the greater public concern of climate change through:

1. Installing and retrofitting energy- and water-efficient household technology at no cost to low-income households,
2. Spreading climate awareness and resources to strengthen community resilience, and
3. Developing the skills and readiness required for young adults to pursue a career in the green jobs sector.

Through the 2-day site visit and analysis of member, project staff and director, partner, and community interview responses, it is apparent that the program is dedicated to achieving its mission of increasing access to climate-friendly household technology, developing community connections, and promoting career readiness. Aside from the valuable knowledge gained through household retrofits and engagement with Denver residents, the program's Career Pathway Certificates training initiative contributes to a member experience that values the interests and career pursuits of each individual. This commitment to flexibility supports the individual members with their current needs and future interests and is seemingly reflected in the members' responses to elements of program effectiveness and their continued interest in serving communities beyond their official term.

Aside from their ability to perform no-cost installation services for the income-qualified communities they serve, members impact communities at greater risk of the effects of climate change through long-term utility savings, providing resources and education about climate change in Denver, and authentically engaging with residents to gather their feedback on climate issues and solutions. When thinking about moving toward communities that are more resilient to climate change, these services are vital to ensure that all communities are involved in climate solutions. Moving forward, the Energy & Water Conservation program aims to strengthen the services they provide by continuing their dedication to equitable member recruitment through their presence within the Denver metro community as a trusted source for access to climate information and resources.

GRID Alternatives SolarCorps Case Study

Introduction

GRID Alternatives SolarCorps was selected as one of the five projects to include as a case study for the AmeriCorps Climate Change Evaluation Bundle study given its organization's focus on renewable energy. The mission of GRID Alternatives is "to build community-powered solutions to advance economic and environmental justice through renewable energy."

The nonprofit organization pursues this mission through no-cost construction and installation of solar photovoltaic, or PV, technologies, commonly known as solar panels. GRID Alternatives provides their no-cost installation to low-income communities throughout California, Colorado, the Mid-Atlantic states, and Tribal communities. GRID Alternatives serves communities from their eight affiliate offices spread throughout the regions listed above. Program staff shared the reach and impact that GRID Alternatives has had since it first began in 2001 during the California energy crisis:

As an organization, we've installed 20,937 systems. And collectively we're saving families over \$705 million during the lifetimes of the systems. And we're preventing close to 2 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions. So, really, this demonstrates our commitment to the triple bottom line of people, planet, employment.

Across the organization, GRID Alternatives provides services to their communities through the efforts of full-time staff, volunteers, and their AmeriCorps-funded program, SolarCorps. GRID Alternatives SolarCorps currently has a state grant and, as such, members serve in one of the eight regional affiliates. Over the years, they have been a national grantee and a VISTA sponsor.

To learn more about GRID Alternatives and more specifically SolarCorps, researchers visited the GRID Alternatives affiliate North Valley office in Sacramento, CA. During this 2-day site visit in January 2023, researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with:

- 2 program directors,
- 2 program staff,
- 1 staff member from an organization partnered with GRID Alternatives,
- 2 community residents who received services from GRID Alternatives, and
- 5 current members participating in the SolarCorps fellowship.

Researchers also observed SolarCorps training and delivery of solar services and had informal conversations with members during those observations. Specifically, researchers observed SolarCorps leading a hands-on stud finder training for approximately 15 GRID training program participants. Researchers also accompanied SolarCorps staff to observe 2 members and 5–7 program staff begin the first day of solar installation for a community health center approximately 35 minutes away from the North Valley office. During this period of observation, SolarCorps members assisted program staff in placing the solar panels in the correct placement on top of a flat roof.

Description of Program and Context

GRID Alternatives is the nation's largest nonprofit installer of clean energy technology and, as such, pursues many initiatives to make renewable energy more accessible to communities with economic and environmental justice inequities. The following are some of the activities provided by the organization as a whole:

- No-cost solar installation for low-income households,
- Hands-on solar workforce training,
- Technical assistance (TA) and installation for multifamily affordable housing,
- Low-income solar policy advocacy, and
- Connecting low-income communities with electric vehicle programs.

SolarCorps aims to recruit and retain 35 fellows across the 8 affiliate offices to assist GRID Alternatives staff (approximately 450 across the organization) with the no-cost solar installation services, solar workforce training, and community outreach.

These services directly mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing the consumption of resources such as natural gas that produce emissions harmful to the local and global environment. Furthermore, incorporating SolarCorps fellows in the services that a renewable energy organization provides serves to extend valuable training and experience to members from communities served in a field with growing employee demand and a growing role in climate solutions. It is important to note that the specifics of SolarCorps fellow experiences may vary according to the affiliate office with which they serve; for this case study, information pertains to the GRID Alternatives North Valley office.

In the state of California, GRID Alternatives is largely able to perform no-cost solar installation through the funding of the state's Disadvantaged Communities – Single-Family Solar Homes (DAC-SASH) program. This program provides qualified homeowners with no-cost solar installation systems through "administrators" such



as GRID Alternatives. To qualify for DAC-SASH and, by extension, GRID Alternatives services (with some exceptions), homeowners must live in one of the top 25 percent most disadvantaged communities statewide. This is calculated through the [CalEnviroScreen](#), a billing customer of Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison, or San Diego Gas & Electric. The homeowners must also meet income qualifications as denoted by annual state-administered energy assistance program guidelines.

Services Performed

The following section describes the services provided by SolarCorps fellows (referred to as members from this point forward). Members are integrated alongside teams of GRID Alternatives program staff to assist with no-cost solar installation service, solar workforce training, and community outreach. Occasionally, members serve alongside members from the other affiliate offices.

In some GRID Alternatives offices, including the North Valley office, members conduct rotations in the three service areas, each of which is described in detail below (i.e., No-Cost Solar Installation, Workforce and Volunteerism, and Community Outreach). This approach allows members to have exposure to various focus areas in the solar industry and develop technical skills in valuable topics to better inform their future career exploration and knowledge of solar overall. At the North Valley office, members typically spend 3–4 months in each service area.

No-Cost Solar Installation

Members who assist with no-cost solar installation for low-income households within the North Valley service area spend time working throughout the various stages of GRID Alternatives solar installation. These are known as the Construction Teams within the organization. Construction members help to complete all aspects of the solar installation process to include:

- Initial assessment of approved income-qualified client households to determine the roof's eligibility to receive solar installation,
- Solar system design to conceptualize the panel placement/angle of each household,
- Applying and obtaining the necessary permits to install solar panels,
- Installation of solar panel systems on the rooves of households, and
- Obtaining final approval of the solar construction from government officials and interconnection to the applicable utility system.

From the time of homeowner application to receiving no-cost solar installation to the final interconnection to the homeowner's utility provider, GRID Alternatives typically aims for completion in 6 months. This expectation can be variable given the time required to prepare application materials, conduct site visits, design solar panel layouts, obtain approval from city and county governments, install the solar system, pass inspection from city and county governments, and connect to various utility providers.

In addition to those steps, requirements and regulations may vary according to the local government policies and their local capacity to process all the planning documents, permits, and inspections required to install residential solar systems. When GRID Alternatives provides services to nonprofit clients that benefit low-income families, affordable housing providers, environmental justice partners, and underserved communities (e.g., local food banks, community health centers, multifamily housing complexes), this timeline can extend to multiple years.

Workforce and Volunteerism

To support GRID Alternatives' goal of providing hands-on solar installation training to community residents, members serving on the Workforce and Volunteerism Team assist program staff in recruiting, training, and managing prospective trainees and volunteers. Workforce members assist with GRID Alternatives' Installation Basics Training (IBT) program—a 200-hour introductory course to acquire the skills to pursue employment in solar 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.

Members supporting this team operate like teaching assistants. Members assist workforce development program staff in teaching the curriculum of GRID Alternatives workforce programs such as the IBT. For example, researchers observed two SolarCorps members leading an IBT session (approximately 10–15 trainees) in a hands-on training to locate studs using a stud finder.

In addition to their recruitment and training support, SolarCorps workforce members also assist trainees in locating employment following the IBT program. Through GRID Alternatives' partnerships with organizations interested in hiring entry-level employees with dependable solar skills, SolarCorps members provide information to IBT participants about upcoming job opportunities and facilitate connections with partner organizations. SolarCorps members also share information about the SolarCorps fellowship, a frequent pipeline for IBT participants (see the Recruitment and Selection section for more details).

Community Outreach

Members serving on the Community Outreach Team educate low-income families on the benefits of household solar systems and available resources in their community to pursue solar installation and increase household energy efficiency. SolarCorps outreach members spread awareness of GRID Alternatives' no-cost solar installation, determine if homeowners are eligible for GRID Alternatives' programs, communicate with families throughout the solar installation process, and help eligible families locate and apply for energy assistance programs.

Community outreach fellows often approach the community in settings that have an existing draw to residents, such as farmers' markets. In the words of one program staff, “We have a lot of outreach fellows who are just kind of out in the community doing tabling events, talking to community members. Letting them know about different programs that we might have that they might qualify for.” A community beneficiary of GRID Alternatives' no-cost solar installation discussed the significance of GRID Alternatives' approach to outreach:

I know that solar companies have a bad rep because they're very pushy. Especially the private solar companies, they're very pushy. And since GRID Alternatives is a nonprofit, they must reach out and provide a message that they're a nonprofit. They're not here to take your money. They're here to give you solar if you qualify for it. If you qualify for it, then it will pretty much be a free solar system that can help you out. Help your family, help reduce the bills, and help reduce climate change. ... I feel like it's very hard to go into a market where people already have a very negative view of you already. I would say that's the hardest part and it's the most important part that GRID must do or the SolarCorps [must do].

Role of Partners and Community Involvement

This section describes the role of partners in working with GRID Alternatives and broader community involvement.

Role of Partners

Across the more than 100 partners that GRID Alternatives maintains, SolarCorps partnerships vary widely in the purpose and frequency of collaboration. Partner organizations are often used for additional funding sources (e.g., financing for nonprofits), providing solar installation resources (e.g., solar design software), and offering training opportunities for members (e.g., SolarCorps training days).

Employer partnerships serve as an important avenue for SolarCorps members' future employment. For national, regional, and local solar employer partners that are seeking to hire trained and skilled members, they have access to GRID Alternatives' online resume bank. Solar installers in California metro areas are currently paid \$25–\$30 an hour.²³

Partnerships focused on providing materials or funding to GRID Alternatives and, by extension, SolarCorps member activities ultimately serve to mutually advance the missions and priorities of partner organizations and GRID Alternatives alike. For example, a partner that provides cost-free licenses for their solar design software to GRID Alternatives allows SolarCorps members to learn design skills in software that employers use. In addition to the increased use of their design software, this partner advances their mission to expand solar in an equitable approach through the work of GRID Alternatives and SolarCorps.

A partner that provides financing to nonprofits so they can transition to solar systems explained the impact of their relationship with GRID Alternatives and SolarCorps:

GRID has a great reputation; they do all different sizes of projects. ... The goal is to help the nonprofit save money and go solar. They just do an excellent job of doing that and their mission is aligned with our mission. ... They come into a project; we know they're going to do a great job on the install. ... They're going to work with us, say, if the numbers are a little bit too high and we need them to adjust the numbers to make economic sense for the nonprofit to do so, so they can save some money. Then they're willing to adjust their numbers to make it make sense for us and to make it make sense for the nonprofit.

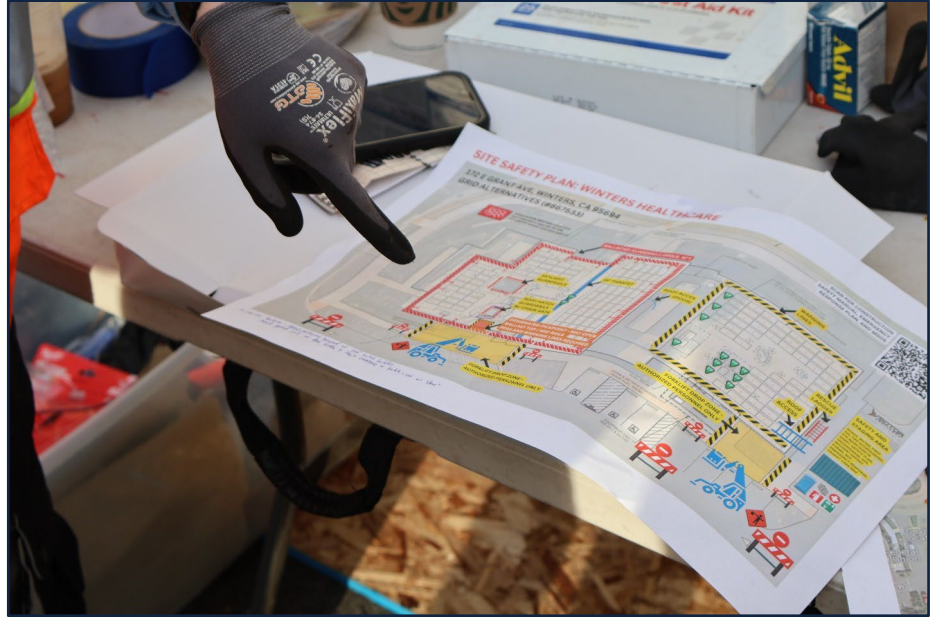
Community Involvement

A common phrase to describe GRID Alternatives' mission—"People, Planet, Employment"—was consistently mentioned by program staff and members. At the forefront of this phrase and often in staff and member responses was "people" or "community." GRID Alternatives and SolarCorps prioritize the involvement of their communities in several ways.

For the direct services that SolarCorps supports, communities participate in the no-cost installation process, training programs, and outreach efforts. Program staff shared, "I think from recruitment to implementation, everything we do is really community-based."

²³ GRID Alternatives [Open Positions](#), retrieved August 28, 2024; Indeed [Solar installer salary in California](#), retrieved August 28, 2024.

Members who serve on the Community Outreach and Solar Installation Teams are embedded within their communities, often communicating with residents in their spaces (e.g., flea markets, farmers' markets, households). Community Outreach members help to spread information about renewable energy resources and GRID Alternatives services and to assist low-income families throughout the lifecycle of their solar installation. Through these members' efforts, community residents are adequately informed of the solar process, technology, continued resources, and maintenance. Similarly, solar installation members involve community members by informing them of the solar system installation details and engaging in educational discussions surrounding renewable resources.



One SolarCorps member explained the impact of the interactions with community residents:

And what I love about this too is—not only does it feel like we’re making a difference—but it also brings awareness too. Because there have been times where we did an install and people will come up and say “Hey, what are you all doing? Oh, I would be interested; can I get the number? What company are you with?” “Oh, we’re with GRID.” “How does that work?” It’s bringing more into those disadvantaged communities where people are getting interested. [They say,] “Oh I didn’t even know this place even existed.” I remember someone was coming to me and [name] and was like, “Oh that’s cool, women on the roof, wow.” That was cool, that was a nice moment.

In connection with the solar training programs that GRID Alternatives provides (e.g., IBT) and SolarCorps recruitment efforts, the residents of the communities GRID Alternatives serve are involved through participation in the IBT program and serving as SolarCorps members. GRID Alternatives staff use several pipelines to target the recruitment and selection of community residents and, as a result, members of the community are involved through service (see Recruitment and Selection section for more details).

Program staff described how IBT outreach connects with communities:

That’s where we do the deepest community outreach, if you will. That’s the initial step into the clean energy industry with participants from the most local of communities with the highest barriers to employment. And then once they get on that track, they come through that program. And if it’s something they really take to, and show a passion for, those are the ones that usually get into our AmeriCorps fellowship.

Speaking to the value of having the community involved in the program and serving as AmeriCorps members, program staff shared:

I think that when they [community] see folks that look like them, that they feel represented by, they are much more likely to engage with us. ... And they [community] will be able to connect with folks who look like them who have similar life experiences.

According to program staff, this involvement of the community through SolarCorps service returns dividends to the well-being of communities:

The emphasis of the AmeriCorps program is its direct service work. I think with workforce development, specifically, how to learn how to better serve the community through working directly with them in the classroom. And same with the Outreach and Construction fellows. They're all doing that direct service work within their respective communities. We also have an emphasis on recruiting from the communities that we serve as well. Not from the outside—we're intentional about that. And a lot of fellows reflect on that just being a meaningful part of the experience and they're going back and serving in their community.

National Service Members

The section describes the member recruitment and selection processes, members' reasons for joining the program, and member demographics. Also included are perceptions about the stipend and training received.

Recruitment and Selection

GRID Alternatives' recruitment goal for an 11-month cycle is typically 35 members using the funds granted through AmeriCorps. As available, GRID Alternatives also funds additional SolarCorps fellows without the use of AmeriCorps dollars. In preparation for the current cycle of members, GRID Alternatives received approximately 500 applicants. Successful SolarCorps recruitment comes from two main sources: 1) Referrals from SolarCorps alumni and solar installation clients and 2) IBT program participants aware of the fellowship who go on to apply to join SolarCorps. While these sources often lead to the majority of SolarCorps members, GRID Alternatives also uses online job postings and job boards such as Service Year to maintain a well-rounded recruitment approach and program awareness.

To illustrate these efforts, of the five members who participated in a focus group, three decided to apply to SolarCorps following their experience in the IBT program while the other two members discovered the program through online postings.

Through GRID Alternatives' reputation of performing valuable, no-cost services for the community in a field with increased occupational demand, SolarCorps can successfully recruit through word-of-mouth referrals and programs that train residents in the community. Through these intentional pipelines, the program draws residents from the communities they serve to the SolarCorps program, which is in line with their mission to equitably incorporate economic and environmental justice communities into the broader transition to renewable energy.

In addition to strong pipelines to recruit members from the communities GRID serves, program staff are also intentionally focused on equity during the SolarCorps selection process. When reviewing applications to the SolarCorps program, staff purposely encourage female, non-White, and low-income representation across SolarCorps membership. This attention can largely be attributed to GRID Alternatives' goal to provide access to the renewables industry for underserved communities that may not otherwise be included in traditional pathways to construction and renewable energy occupations.

Description of Member Characteristics

When asked about the typical characteristics of a SolarCorps member, program staff responded that the general demographic can be characterized as members who are not typical of the solar industry. GRID Alternatives SolarCorps has a high representation of female, non-White, and residents of environmental justice communities within the SolarCorps program and the broader organization. The general underlying characteristic of many SolarCorps members, according to program staff, is the likelihood that members are often undergoing a major transition in life such as a career change or entry into the workforce following education.

Why Members Join

When the five members participating in the focus group were asked about their reasons for joining SolarCorps, one member said GRID Alternatives aligned with their values. This member explained, *"I was looking for work with something that was a bit more aligned with my values, as opposed to just part-time work. And I was reading more about the company and just resonated with many [of their] values."* One member was looking for a job, and for the three members who had taken part in the IBT program, becoming a SolarCorps fellow was the next step to getting experience in the solar energy field. One such member shared:

I think that I went and tried to apply to other solar companies. I just wanted to be in the solar field. And everyone was getting hired at GRID; I just put my application in because I wanted to work in the solar field. This was the one place that did pick me because they weren't expecting 6 months to a year's worth of already professional experience work. You have to know what you're doing when you go there, rather than here or there training you for up to 11 months. So, when you go out into the field you'd be like, "I have a whole year's worth of experience now." So, you have a better chance to get one of those professional installation jobs with an actual [for] profit company.

Stipend

Generally, members participating in the focus group felt that the stipend (\$1,600/month before taxes) was not sufficient to meet the cost-of-living needs in Sacramento. Members appreciated the support provided by program staff in applying for CalFresh, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP), benefits. Despite the stipend and additional supports such as SNAP, inflated costs pose difficulties to members during their service terms. One member shared:

If I am being honest, it would help if there was more ... because it's very expensive. ... It [the stipend] gets taxed and it would help if it's more, because it is a sacrifice ... we are able to apply for [Electronic Benefits Transfer, or EBT, for SNAP]. That helps. And there are also other discount programs that they do give ... with inflation it's expensive regardless. And with EBT that can only go so far.

GRID Alternatives staff also noted recruitment challenges in California's major cities, given the size of the stipend and the cost of living.

A continual challenge we find is we're in California—especially Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco—where the cost of living is so high that the living allowance is prohibitive for a lot of folks. They can't live off of that, so that's a barrier.

Since most focus group members were residents in the community before their service, they explained they had other supports (e.g., family, partners) that could assist them with basic needs not met by the stipend.

These members went on to explain that the valuable skills and experience provided through SolarCorps and the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award outweighed the stipend. One member shared:

To me, the education grant at the very end is going to help me tremendously [to] get into a better electrician's program than I was planning on doing. I was going to do the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] 5-year apprenticeship but that's going to take 5 years to get through the whole program. And if I use that grant, it's going to pay for half of my schooling, and then it'll take me about 2 years instead of 5 years to get to where I want to be at. So, the actual program is going to help me in the very long run get my career going.

Training

GRID Alternatives provides many opportunities to members for informal and formal training. Members begin their service receiving AmeriCorps-required training and an introduction to GRID Alternatives, often during the Pre-Service Orientation organized by GRID Alternatives staff. Following the Pre-Service Orientation held virtually for all members across the GRID Alternatives affiliate offices, members undergo a second week of virtual training focused on an introduction to solar topics.

During their service term, members engage in hands-on training provided by GRID Alternatives staff who are responsible for organizational activities with which members assist (i.e., no-cost solar installation, solar workforce training programs, and community outreach). During a visit to the GRID Alternatives North Valley office, program staff discussed the approach to training members currently in the Solar Installation rotation of their term experience and briefly reviewed the training materials available to members of the Solar Installation Team. During this rotation members receive training in four areas: solar installation, operations and management, project management, and solar design.



At the beginning of each rotation, members complete self-paced trainings under the supervision of program staff who have full-time positions on that rotation's team. Materials include videos, presentations, and explanatory documents to orient each member to the skills and information required to immerse themselves in the rotation activities. Members can discuss challenging content with program staff, conduct hands-on training such as wire size identification, and complete quizzes on training content to gauge their comfort with the materials.

Following each member's completion of the "classroom" training for each rotation, members are increasingly incorporated into the service operations of program staff. For example, members of the Solar Installation Team accompany program staff on visits to examine the suitability of homeowner roofs and collect the data necessary to design solar layouts for each house (e.g., roof pitch). Members have a detailed site visit checklist to document and explain each step of the activity for members to reference throughout their rotation. According to members and program staff alike, this structure is necessary to reinforce member skills and accommodate the change in activities associated with rotations without compromising the quality of service.

When asked about the quality of training provided, members were pleased with the approach and adequacy in preparing them for their service activities and obtaining future career skills. One member explained:

The training was pretty good and very hands-on, especially when it comes to the roof or even IBT. But to actually get on the installations and see the whole situation get brought together, I like it. I can do stuff I didn't think [of]. I come from working in call centers and jobs like that and I never thought I could do this. So now I can go on a roof and install solar and water and combine box by myself. ... Yeah, I'll say A-plus training for sure.

To assist members in pursuing their interests, GRID Alternatives provides each member with \$600 to enroll in courses or certification programs that align with the topics or career fields in which they are interested. Throughout their service terms, all SolarCorps members also attend virtual "SolarCorps Days" once a month to facilitate personal and professional development across the cohort. Aside from the members across the eight affiliate offices being able to use this organized time each month to connect, members receive training from experts in a variety of topic areas such as environmental justice, professional development, and other optional opportunities. Examples of these training opportunities include:

- Historical policy in environmental justice & barriers to implementation
- Restorative practices implementation
- Correlation between health status and environmental setting
- Informational interviews and professional correspondence
- Employer panel and resume sessions
- How to make the average person more environmentally minded

Outcomes

This section includes information about performance measurement and evaluation, including any challenges. Program outcomes, both member and community, are described as well as a discussion of the facilitators and barriers to meeting the intended outcomes.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation

When explaining GRID Alternatives' relationship to AmeriCorps performance measures, program staff focused on difficulties associated with the narrow measurement selection and scope applicable to the many services that SolarCorps provides. Program staff found the performance measurement language to be restrictive for the allowable outcomes.

For example, one of the performance measures, EN1 (Energy), outlines an output of providing retrofits to at least 1,550 housing units or structures. According to program staff, this output is straightforward, however, the associated outcome they were required to select is not entirely representative of the impact that SolarCorps provides in the area of their no-cost installations. The associated outcome with this performance measure is the number of housing units/structures with reduced energy or reduced energy costs. While the number of housing units is a notable outcome, program staff felt that the ability to define their outcome as an estimate of cost savings provided would be a more representative outcome, but they are not able to include estimates of cost-savings over time as an outcome without violating AmeriCorps requirements. Program staff explained:

Yes, it's easy to do our target output of 1,550 housing units or structures. But then it was like the outcome can't be cost savings because that's like an estimate. But we can't in the

moment say the impact because the impact happens over time. So, it's not a false outcome but it doesn't feel like an accurate illustration of the impact. ... The system we install today is going to save money over the next 20 years, but you can't count the projected 20 years of greenhouse gas reductions or the 20 years of financial savings.

Program staff also explained the conflicting interests of balancing AmeriCorps' requirement to only conduct predetermined activities over the 3-year grant period with the evolving practices and priorities in the renewable energy space. As an organization centered around technology with constantly changing techniques, products, and forms of implementation (e.g., electric vehicles [EVs]), programs in the renewable energy space need to be flexible to account for evolving practices and priorities. Especially as the priorities and attainable climate solutions of local governments and community residents change, requirements to conduct only specified service activities can pose a barrier to programs such as SolarCorps with a mission to be responsive to the needs of local communities and low-income and diverse communities. One program staff went on to explain the challenge, adding context to how this issue affects the SolarCorps membership:

Funding is very restrictive, especially with this industry changing so quickly. This is a 3-year grant where what they're doing can't change over the course of 3 years. So now we're moving into EV, and I know how attractive that would be to individuals, but we can't offer slots in there, because we'd have to wait for another round.

Member Outcomes

As mentioned, the SolarCorps program has a strong emphasis on the personal and professional development of each member while simultaneously providing meaningful and equitable climate solutions to low-income and often historically underserved populations. This section describes member outcomes in the areas of civic engagement, technical skills, and career preparation.

Civic Engagement

Program staff shared that service with SolarCorps illustrates to members the impact of providing accessible services to their communities, especially when engaging with populations that may not otherwise have equitable access to renewable household energy. Program staff and members both shared that feedback from community residents who receive workforce training and no-cost solar installation often mentions the impact of seeing people who look like them (referencing gender/race) in the solar field as reassuring of the services SolarCorps and GRID Alternatives provides and encouraging them to view solar as an attainable career field.

Further supporting this sentiment, *GRID Alternatives SolarCorps Impact Report for the 2022–2023 Cohort* stated that 85.7 percent of surveyed members felt “they were provided opportunities for meaningful service that matched what they signed up for.” One program staff also described the impact on member civic engagement as it relates to interest in continuing to address community-facing issues following their formal service, explaining:

The first thing that came to mind was an interview that I did with one of the fellows, where he was like, “SolarCorps showed me that service can be a profession. Service doesn't have to be volunteering on Saturday morning. It can be a career in serving communities as a viable option.” I think in that way, showing folks the value of community engagement, and just the value of community, period. I feel like this is a whole other tangent, but the U.S. is slowly becoming more and more isolated, and community is not as valued as it once was. Just

giving folks the opportunity to realize that there's an opportunity to have a career in this and that it's real and tangible ... and valuable in its own way.

Technical Skills and Career Preparation

In addition to SolarCorps' and GRID Alternatives' commitment to providing clean energy to local low-income families and training and job support placement for qualifying individuals, SolarCorps prioritizes the personal and professional development of the members. The program displays this priority through their many formal training opportunities, individual training incentive (\$600), unique program structures (e.g., rotations), and daily interaction/instruction from program staff with solar expertise.

In combination with these tangible supports to advance the personal and professional development of members, program staff and members both frequently mentioned the significance of GRID Alternatives' commitment to equitable solar programming, inclusive of the SolarCorps fellowship. Whether members were recruited through their participation in the IBT program, referrals from GRID Alternatives staff or community residents, or online sources, a common sentiment was the value of an accessible program such as SolarCorps in providing a necessary year of experience to obtain the skills needed for entry-level employment or further education. One member described this phenomenon and SolarCorps' impact on their technical skills and career pursuits, explaining:

I think for me it's made me a bit more driven and goal oriented. It's a really cool program that I never knew existed. I think the amount of support that there is here—it would take a lot for somebody to not use the networks that are in place here. I feel like there's a lot to be learned. Anybody that's here that is staff is more than willing to help in any way they can. I think all of that has been such a positive influence, that I've just barely gotten a start in renewables, but I can already tell that it's something I have a passion for—for things around environmental justice and such. But this gives me a bit more power where I felt like I didn't exactly have before. And also learning new skills along the way. I was never really big into construction before. And now I feel like just the training that I've gotten from here has already transformed my skill set.

Furthermore, while SolarCorps aims to encourage members to consider green jobs in their future employment planning, the program authentically incentivizes members to pursue the careers in which they are most interested. Aside from the \$600 provided to each member to complete trainings and obtain certifications of their choice, program staff equip members with the knowledge needed to obtain employment in any field through trainings on professional correspondence, mock interviews, resume reviews, employer panels, and partnerships centered around member employment opportunities with employers that use the skills developed through SolarCorps service. Several members described the impact this program approach has on their confidence and capability to navigate the career field, with one member sharing:

Yeah, at the end, if any of us ever found this is not for us, the stipend at the end for the education, that really helps. Another thing is also getting help dealing with the tools, which helps too. So that helps, like with the other \$600, yeah, we could be able to use it for tools and also furthering education. They want us to educate more of ourselves, have more of a background of other things too. It's not only giving people a second chance, but also exploring "Hey what are you also interested in?" And making sure we get that personal development time, like, "What are you interested in? What do you see yourself doing?" and helping us. That's wonderful, I love that!



Another member noted:

Freedom. I mean one thing I like is I don't feel like I must do solar, even though I like it. It's like, once your 11 months is done, you can do whatever you want. That gives me that peace ... I can learn whatever I want. I don't have to use that for only solar, I can do other things.

Community Outcomes

SolarCorps improves community outcomes by lowering the energy costs of low-income families, decreasing usage of energy sources that emit harmful pollutants, and training community residents to help them pursue employment with higher pay in solar fields.

Concerning the latter service, SolarCorps provides meaningful training to residents of the communities they serve with a particular focus on assisting populations that may otherwise have barriers to accessing solar training resources (women and nonbinary trainees; justice-involved trainees; Black, Indigenous, and people of color, or BIPOC, trainees; trainees with disabilities; youth trainees; LGBTQIA+ trainees; and veteran/active military trainees). SolarCorps members assist program staff in providing hands-on supportive training to participants to increase the skill base of community residents and, as the training progresses, SolarCorps members serve vital roles in the process of job placement support for trainees who complete their programs.

Additionally, because SolarCorps members are often residents of the communities they serve, participation in the program further upskills local, diverse communities to implement climate solutions in the form of renewable energy systems. Following their service, SolarCorps members are more equipped to both pursue

employment/education and exhibit the ability for residents of their communities to pursue opportunities in the climate solutions and trades space, as one program staff describes:

Getting more folks out and having jobs in solar, in the industry, and a more diverse workforce itself is hugely beneficial to the renewable energy industry. A lot more new ideas, better culture neither I or [program staff] had construction or solar-related roles before we were at GRID. So having that exposure to the culture in construction can be difficult for people of color, for women in construction, and I think that making it more diverse will just make it more popular in general. Which then directly contributes to combating climate change if we're able to make solar a more widespread phenomenon and helping people understand the importance of it as well. That helps—every little bit helps.

Directly related to the climate impact facing communities served by SolarCorps, members and program staff alike provide no-cost solar installation to low-income households. This service provides access to low-income communities to participate in the climate solution and energy cost savings provided by solar, when otherwise, low-income households would often face barriers to obtaining solar through a private organization.

To demonstrate the numerical impact of these services, the *GRID Alternatives SolarCorps Impact Report for the 2022–2023 Cohort* indicated 336 trainees served by SolarCorps members, 1,686 households received solar from SolarCorps members, and across the 8 affiliate offices created \$26,891,697 in energy savings that resulted in 67,120.39 tons of carbon emissions reduced. To illustrate the impact of these services from a family perspective, one community resident explained:

I would say the solar has helped immensely for helping us cut down our costs, so that we can buy the food we need. It relieves my parents' stress about the bills, because my dad did stress a lot about the [Pacific Gas & Electric] bill. But now that he sees we're only paying \$80–90 that's not too bad. You know, I could save this cash for when we really needed it, for like an emergency fund.

Barriers to Meeting Intended Outcomes

The most pressing barrier from the perspective of both staff and members was the stipend. While SolarCorps aims to recruit members from the communities they serve, the stipend amount can be a barrier to service, especially in urban service areas with high costs of living. Despite the specialized training and increased employability that service with SolarCorps provides, individuals interested in the program and current members face trade-offs when pursuing AmeriCorps-funded positions. One program staff explained:

Money is still a barrier for our fellows, unfortunately, with housing and food insecurity. But as for our AmeriCorps State and National [fellows], at least they can apply for CalFresh and we can refer them to other services that they might be eligible for and that helps. I confirm with them [potential members] three times that they know the pay. It is also necessary to ensure they can live on that pay from our program. I know it's a great opportunity but sometimes they must look out for themselves, and if it's not the right time right now that's perfectly fine. I can refer them to maybe something that would be easier for them to do.

Facilitators to Meeting Intended Outcomes

The program's approach to authentically supporting members and GRID Alternatives' organizational mission and culture, which emphasizes equity and inclusivity, facilitates meeting outcomes. Beyond the meaningful service of providing solar technology and energy cost savings to low-income households, training, and job support for residents of their community—and spreading renewable energy information to communities at

large—members are encouraged by SolarCorps staff and GRID Alternatives staff to pursue their personal and professional interests while serving.

SolarCorps members were quick to emphasize the impact that supportive program staff had on their confidence and capability to pursue opportunities of interest to them and, often, in service of their community. One member shared the impact of both serving their community and making a difference with climate change:

I could not imagine how I would be able to provide for my community the way that this company does. It gives you a purpose in a way. Whereas some jobs don't have any purpose at all ... with this, you're able to give back to the community as well as save the environment.

Closing

GRID Alternatives has an unwavering focus on what program staff refer to as the "triple bottom line of people, planet, and employment." Impact occurs in these three areas through enacting the mission, which is "to build community-powered solutions to advance economic and environmental justice through renewable energy." To achieve this mission, SolarCorps members support GRID Alternatives through the following efforts:

- No-cost solar installation for low-income households,
- Hands-on solar workforce training, and
- Conducting outreach to low-income communities.

Through the 2-day site visit and analysis of member, program staff (which is inclusive of the director), partner, and community interview responses as well as observations of training and service delivery, it is apparent that the program is dedicated to achieving its mission of increasing access to renewable technology, developing community connections, and equipping members and community residents with the skills needed for employment in the solar industry.

Notably, program staff and members were quick to describe the uniqueness of GRID Alternatives' authentic dedication to equity for community beneficiaries, SolarCorps members, and program staff. With concrete standards to achieve equitable recruitment, knowledge performance indicators to ensure solar training programs include populations historically excluded from solar and construction, and community agreements among GRID Alternatives and SolarCorps to achieve a safe workplace, GRID Alternatives seeks to implement equity wherever possible. Program staff noted:

This needs to be a safe place to make mistakes but also has to be a place where we acknowledge and understand your privilege and power, including positional power. It's the idea that we cocreate our experiences. Using gender fluid, open and expansive, and accessible language. During onboarding, preservice orientation, laying these out and framing this is how we are at GRID. This is how we're different. ... I just want to add that not only that this is the way we do the work, but that this is the work, if you will. The equity work is just as much the actual implementation of clean energy—the implementation of equitable practices is also the work. And not separate.

SolarCorps members acquire valuable skills and experience, expand their personal and professional development, and serve their communities with invaluable energy savings and reduced emissions. Illustrated by the estimated 30 percent of GRID Alternatives staff who were previously SolarCorps fellows, the program provides a meaningful entryway into renewable energy and demonstrates the impact of equitable climate solutions for low-income, diverse communities.

Kupu’s Conservation Leadership Development Program Case Study

Introduction

Kupu's Conservation Leadership Development Program, which started in Hawai'i and recently expanded into the U.S.-affiliated Pacific, was selected as one of the five programs to include as a case study for the AmeriCorps Climate Change Evaluation Bundle study given its focus on environmental stewardship.

During a 2-day site visit in January 2024 to Kupu, a researcher conducted individual interviews with:

- 2 program directors, and
- 2 program staff.

Two focus groups were held, one with three current members and the other with three alumni who are now Kupu staff. A researcher was also able to tour two of the partner host sites and informally converse with members.

Documents such as grant applications, progress reports, tracking data, and training materials were also collected and reviewed. These documents helped to better understand the activities and status of each program's work and provided a basis for corroboration with stakeholder perspectives gleaned through the interviews and focus groups.

Description of Program and Context

Kupu, a nonprofit in Honolulu, HI, was established in 2007 by the chief executive officer (CEO), chief operating officer (COO), and one of its board members with a mission to empower youth to serve their communities through character-building, service-learning, and environmental stewardship opportunities that encourage *pono* (integrity) with *ke Akua* (God), self, and others. Two of the three founders were former AmeriCorps National service members. Kupu promotes sustainable practices, environmental education, and community engagement through hands-on experiences.

Partnering with more than 200 organizations since its establishment, Kupu operates numerous programs, two of which are funded by AmeriCorps:

1. Conservation Leadership Development
2. Hawai'i Youth Conservation Corps Summer Program

Previously, Kupu was also an AmeriCorps VISTA sponsor.

The focus of this case study is on their nationally-funded Conservation Leadership Development Program (CLDP). Recognizing challenges facing youth who want to enter conservation fields, entry-level experiences are provided to AmeriCorps members to prepare them for future careers. The program lengths are generally 6 and 11 months. Members may serve for up to two terms.

The program addresses the AmeriCorps focus area of Environmental Stewardship. In early 2024, Kupu was in its 3-year grant, and has a goal of having 235 AmeriCorps members who will remove invasive species, establish native vegetation, and remediate streams and trails at approximately 100 service sites. These service sites consist of federal, state/territory, and community-based nonprofit conservation agencies that manage parks and public lands in Hawai'i and in the U.S. Pacific Islands of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).

The climate change problems plaguing the region served by Kupu are well-known and documented in its logic model:

1. The area has unique and fragile native ecosystems and ecological services that are exceptionally vulnerable to decline and degradation results from invasive species, climate change, and natural disasters.
2. Invasive species are one of the most pervasive threats in the U.S. Pacific.
3. Excessive trail usage and a backlog of trail maintenance threaten user safety and damage sensitive natural environments.
4. The U.S. Pacific is susceptible to climate change impacts such as catastrophic weather events and wildfires.
5. General public information about environmental issues is limited.

Program staff and members shared several personal examples of how climate change has impacted them and their communities. One member explained:

How does climate change not impact my life? It's everywhere. On a personal note, I come from a family of farmers, so we've all seen the impact of just all of it. Whether it's new insects coming to eat our farms or just temperature change impacting the growth of our plants. We hear all these stories from our parents and grandparents and aunties and uncles about how things used to be.

Program staff shared:

I was fortunate to grow up in a family homeland that was passed down And having grown up there and watching the sea level rise over time, it was obvious. We had the King Tides [exceptionally high tides] come through; you see all of the stuff that's in the ocean in our yard. And so eventually that home is going to get passed down to me. And even though it's been the family home for generations, I believe it's going to be my generation and myself to have to decide on whether we sell it and move upland versus staying there, and the emotional toll ... and then what is the timing of it. If sea level rise impacts too quickly, is the value of the home going to drop? ... I think those are real things that people in Hawai'i are dealing with because of that.

Both of those examples also point to the economic impact climate change is having in the U.S. Pacific. It is frequently the poorest communities that are getting hit the worst by climate change, but as staff pointed out, "They are not the culprits of the climate [problems] or the polluters, but they are the ones that see the biggest effects."

Another program staff further explained the problem:

The Pacific Islands are smaller than they are here, so the sea level rise there is even more of an impact. And then that salt water table is getting into a lot of those ag[riculture] plots ... as you try to be more self-sufficient, and you try to farm your land and you try to do that in accordance with the correct practices. But then the sea level is coming up and infiltrating what you're trying to do to make you less dependent, which would maybe decrease some pollution by, you know, shipping.

In collaboration with Kupu CLDP's network of approximately 100 partners, which are located in Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam, and Saipan and Rota (within CNMI), members are placed in host sites where they are trained to address one or more of the five problems identified in Kupu's logic model and mentored to be the next generation of leaders in conservation. The initiatives and member duties vary depending on the host site at which the member is placed.

Initiatives include invasive species removal, native habitat restoration and protection, watershed management, marine conservation, lab work, research, environmental education, and outreach and leading volunteer groups. Members are exposed to a broad array of professional opportunities within several environmental fields: ornithology, botany, natural and aquatic, resource management, biology, marine biology, and Hawaiian cultural studies. By working side-by-side with conservation professionals, members gain insights into the conservation field and how to give back to the community.

Services Performed

The services members provide are varied and tailored to the conservation mission and needs of the host sites. The following is a sample of members' experiences:

- *My team focuses on aquatic invasive species here in Hawai'i so that can range from a lot of things. But we're looking at the four vectors of introduction—which are ballast waters, biofouling, marine debris, and aquarium release—and doing what we can to respond to those. We are also doing a lot of outreach to inform people, especially when it comes to things that are within their control.*
- *I worked with the state parks so I was an assistant to the park interpretive technician. And that basically entailed hiking, talking to visitors and community members, sharing about the geologic features of Diamond Head, sharing about native and invasive plants and also the story of Diamond Head and how it ties to cultural Mauna Loa [in Native Hawaiian culture, eruptions from the five volcanoes that form the Island of Hawai'i are spiritually significant manifestations of the land goddess Pele that is believed to reside in Mauna Loa] ... We also did a lot of hands-on work. So we had native plant gardens that we would help restore and maintain as well as frequent invasive species removal because it's 70 percent invasive species.*
- *My most recent term was with the environmental education program. That host site is within Kupu and that was a really great experience. So we were able to partner with different schools across this island. And so my role as environmental education leader was really just to bridge gaps between the schools and our various partners here on the island ... I also was able to connect these kids to different environmental education opportunities that were happening anywhere on the island. ... It's very important and it allows them [school children] to have a better idea of different career pathways where you can stay in Hawai'i. You can leave also but you can also come back and have these amazing jobs.*

Role of Partners and Community Involvement

This section describes the role of partners in working with Kupu and broader community involvement.

Partner Overview

Kupu CLDP has approximately 100 partners focused on conservation initiatives and outreach. Partners are located on almost every island in Hawai'i as well as islands in the larger U.S. Pacific and include large federal and state agencies as well as small, community-based nonprofits. Kupu's largest partners are the U.S. National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Hawai'i's Department of Land and Natural Resources. Program

staff recognize the need for federal partnerships, but said it is important to have a balance that includes community-led organizations. Staff said, "It is amazing to have those federal partnerships and they also have the funds to help with our services. But we still want to get to those local organizations who know their backyards and know what the community needs. We just want to support that and with a young adult from that same community."

Kupu partners serve as host sites for Kupu national service members and provide members with the needed training to carry out their service. Host sites are recruited and then paired with members. The type of service performed and its connection to climate change impact is dependent on each host site. Program staff explained:

The services that they [partners] are providing within those host sites can range widely from removing invasive species, planting native species so we can reduce runoff into our oceans, increasing the tree canopy here in Hawai'i and the respective areas that they're working. They could be doing research with certain host sites. We've had members working in our bays on the island where they're working with researchers to study the impact of climate change on our reefs. Nursery work too, to propagate the native species. The members are



trying to help the host site partners reach their land management goals by building more resiliency within each area.

Community Involvement

Kupu works closely with community-led host sites, primarily small nonprofits focused on conservation work. The majority of the host sites Kupu collaborates with are community-led, and Kupu's role is to provide support to the leadership of these nonprofits. While national parks and other federal partners have their ways of gathering community support, Kupu mainly engages with smaller organizations that may not necessarily seek large-scale partnerships. These nonprofits often operate with limited resources, but Kupu aims to find ways to collaborate and enhance the collective impact.

At the center of Kupu's work with community partners is the focus on needs. Although staff recognize they have specific deliverables for their funders, they are continually considering what the community has expressed is needed as it relates to conservation. Listening to the communities is an important aspect of relationship building. Kupu's commitment to listening to community needs while maintaining strong relationships underscores their dedication to conservation and sustainability in Hawai'i.

The communities in these partner host sites are often involved through residents of the community serving on the boards of partner organizations. These residents have input into the strategic direction and activities of the host sites and, subsequently, the members' experiences. Program staff shared:

We no longer own the land over there, but the nonprofit is managing ... the way the nonprofit decided to govern themselves, is that the board is made up of my family members. And so it's often the elders in my family who are leading the board, who are directing that organization. Those people are the community members, they've been in the community for eight generations and they influence what things our members are going to get when they're placed there. Stories like that can be replicated over and over through a lot of our partners.

In summary, when describing the value of the partners, program staff explained, "Kupu wouldn't be where it is today without our partners. ... They provide the opportunity to be in the land or in the ocean and they provide that skill set [training]." Likewise, the partners also appreciate Kupu's role, frequently sharing with Kupu staff that their organizations would not exist had it not been for Kupu.

National Service Members

This section describes the member recruitment and selection processes, members' reasons for joining the program, and member demographics. Also included are perceptions about the stipend and training received.

Recruitment and Selection

Kupu staff includes a recruiter who is a CLDP alumni. Recruitment occurs through multiple methods, including social media, posting on job and university boards and their website, tabling at events, and outreach to classrooms. Because the 6- and 11-month CLDP positions operate continuously, recruitment is an ongoing process.

According to program staff, the most effective recruitment method is word-of-mouth. Program staff said, "It's who you know, the network here in Hawai'i is very small, every island, even the territories. When we look at our database, we see that word-of-mouth has a higher percentage of how people are hearing about the programs."

When I was in my senior year [of college], I saw a Kupu ad in my College of Natural Sciences newsletter ... that sparked my interest. It was the conservation work being offered.

AmeriCorps member

A member confirmed the effectiveness of this approach:

The person who brought me into the program was my good friend who was already working at that host site and he was also a Kupu member. ... He was, like, "This is a great opportunity for you to reconnect and come back." ... I think through that one bridge of a community person that I did know, it got me [involved]. I feel like I helped bring more people, so it was that one bridge connected through the community and through that we have brought more people."

For recruitment outside of Hawai'i, Kupu works with the University of Guam, and in American Samoa, Kupu works with the program coordinator for recruitment. Program staff explained, "A Kupu program coordinator is shared with the University of Guam. We work directly with the University of Guam and its staff to help with recruitment. Our coordinator is a shared coordinator between the University of Guam and Kupu so we split the work. We all focus on that same conservation field."

Kupu prioritizes recruiting local applicants because these members are familiar with the culture and it is a way to develop community capacity. With more than 50 percent of applications from individuals not in Hawai'i or the U.S. Pacific, it is a "culture shock for the participants." Program staff added, "One thing that we've learned and we always strive for is to get local applicants—either raised here or been here, grew up here, or been here for a long time—into these positions and offering them those opportunities." The reason Kupu staff feel it is so important to recruit locally goes back to Kupu's mission of empowering youth to serve their communities through addressing environmental issues and environmental stewardship.

Although Kupu could "easily recruit" from the mainland, Kupu program staff said they want to be able to provide Hawai'i and U.S. Pacific Island youth with career opportunities in the conservation sector. Program staff explained:

We want to be able to provide these opportunities for our people here in Hawai'i. The cost of living in Hawai'i is getting out of hand There are high-level paying jobs here in Hawai'i in these [conservation] sectors. And the sector is growing by 7 percent every year. But the problem is that those high-level paid positions are often going to people who are not from here. So what Kupu gets to do is provide hands-on training and opportunities for our local people to get jobs like that. And so if everything happens in the ideal way, we can take somebody about to drop out of high school and end up in a high-paying career where they can sustain their family here in Hawai'i. So I think those are—maybe not the definition of equity—but the action that we put behind trying to make things equitable for other people here.

The challenge Kupu faces with recruiting locally is the members may not have the skills for the specific need or program that the host site is seeking. Therefore, as part of its larger organization strategy, Kupu has several other AmeriCorps programs and programs funded by other sources that help prepare youth so they have the necessary skills for becoming a CLDP member (e.g., Hawai'i Youth Conservation Summer Program, Hawai'i Youth Conservation Community Program).

Program staff explained how the multiple Kupu programs build upon one another to provide access to CLDP and to equip youth with the skills to attain a career in conservation:

One of the Kupu programs works with young adults who are dropping out of high school. Early on in the history of Kupu, our COO and our CEO—two of the three founders of the

organization—recognized that a lot of young adults who are falling by the wayside of the [Hawai'i Department of Education], weren't getting the education they needed. And if we couldn't solve something like that, then they wouldn't be able to access an AmeriCorps program. They wouldn't be able to access a lot of services. And so for that reason, they opened up what we call the community program. And so what the organization tried to do, AmeriCorps can be for everyone but recognize that we also may have to step down to lift someone up to the level of what AmeriCorps program can offer ... [equity is defined as] access to services that they likely would not have had access to before.

Another program staff added:

And we're trying to—not only in our AmeriCorps program but Kupu as a whole—be at almost every kind of major point in a young adult's or in a child's growth. So hopefully through [Kupu's] education department, where we're showing them opportunities in the middle school ... and then you also have opportunity during the summer as high school. "Oh, you just graduated from high school?"—this is another entry point. So really trying to communicate and make aware that you have this opportunity should you want it and it's available to you. There's no barrier ... there's some red tape that AmeriCorps comes with but we'll walk you through that and we'll get you into the program, which we believe will provide huge growth.

Why Members Join

Of the three alumni and three current members participating in the focus groups, four were from Hawai'i, either having been born and raised in the state or having lived there before becoming an AmeriCorps member. Across all six members, the underlying reason for joining Kupu was because of the conservation focus, desire to pursue a conservation career, and the need to get entry-level experience. The following responses from three members illustrate these sentiments.

- *When Kupu did their presentation in my college ... what they promoted and shared about the program was being invited in nature, getting to know your community, working with your community, and learning about all these really special places. ... So that is what lured me, as I went through orientation, then I learned more about, "Oh this is about AmeriCorps, this is about serving and helping our community." ... [I]t really impacted the trajectory of my life to be honest. ... That experience was one of many that really helped me to hone in on my passion. ... Every time that I came back to Kupu it just became stronger and stronger, my connection to the community and this place became stronger and stronger, so I am super grateful for that.*
- *When I joined Kupu it was because they had those same values [that I do] and they wanted to incorporate themselves into this unique conservation work. And I was specifically interested in marine conservation because that's what I decided I really want to focus on for the rest of my career. So, looking into their programs and seeing these cool opportunities with [partner] and the urchin hatchery team, I knew it was a good organization to get me where I needed to go.*

The third member had a positive experience with another AmeriCorps program and wanted to continue a second term:

My previous AmeriCorps fellowship was more like civic engagement; doing climate planning, doing electrification. I really did enjoy that but I've always just been drawn to conservation. Whenever I have time, volunteering at the aquarium or the random side jobs I've picked up, have all been super involved in conservation ... I didn't really know about other AmeriCorps conservation options other than Kupu. Just in my search I knew that was a goal to move to Hawai'i and do conservation work on the islands because it's such a unique environment out here.

Member Characteristics

CLDP is open to individuals age 17 or older who have a high school diploma. The majority of the members are in their early 20s. Kupu targets recruitment locally and in the 2023–24 program year about half of the 692 applications received were Hawai'i-based. The common characteristic across all CLDP members is their passion for conservation and making a difference in climate change.

Stipend

CLDP member benefits in Hawai'i include a stipend of up to \$1,280 biweekly, Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of \$6,895 for members completing a full-time term, health care benefits, and childcare assistance. Kupu staff also support members with signing up for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, or SNAP, benefits. Given the high cost of living in Hawai'i and the U.S. Pacific Islands, members said the stipend was insufficient to meet their needs but added there had been an increase this year. The stipend amount poses an issue preventing those who may like to join. One member shared, "Our median house costs over a million dollars, that's crazy ... I think it [Kupu CLDP] needs to be accessible to people of the community to do these programs." Another member added, "A lot of people will stop at even applying when they see the living allowances. But we're like, 'No it's more than that—it's the experience, it's the relationship, it's the networking.' "

Members unanimously agreed that the networking and experience gained in the conservation field outweighed the financial compensation. One member said, "At the time when I was a Kupu member, I had two other jobs ... My Kupu work felt so important to me and I was so passionate about it. I got to have this opportunity to build bridges and work with the next generation."

A second member added:

The experience outweighed the paycheck. But I would not have been able to do the program [if I weren't living with family]. So there's generational living where we're paying very, very minimal rent right now. ... Unfortunately, I do not feel the stipend is livable in Hawai'i without a lot of other variables that make it so you can do it. Do I feel like the experience is 100 percent worth it? Yes, my trajectory has completely changed.

Although not common, when housing is provided, the stipend is more manageable. One member explained:

I got super lucky last year and housing was provided, which is a rarity I understand, but that was amazing. It was really the only reason I was able to come out here, because my previous internship on the mainland was making pennies. So having that bump it made it seem like so much money. You realize that very quickly—that, you know, unless you're careful with it, it's really not going to go far in Hawai'i.

For members who do not have family to live with or if housing is not provided, finding affordable housing is a challenge. One member said, "The trickiest part, I think—especially coming from the mainland—is finding housing ... even just moving from Maui to O'ahu is a big struggle, because affordable housing is so rare these days."

Training

This section describes the specific AmeriCorps training that is provided by Kupu and the training that members can individually opt to receive based on career goals.

Corps Training

Kupu provides a 1-day orientation and training on AmeriCorps-required information for all members at the start of each term. Kupu members also receive a number of other topical and skill trainings, such as CPR and first aid training, resume development, Hawaiian culture and protocols, and soft skills (e.g., how to have difficult conversations, interviewing). During a member's 11-month term there are also 2 service days where they get a chance to visit other sites on their island and connect with other Kupu members and staff. Toward the end of their terms a "next steps" workshop is led by the program coordinators, which provides members an opportunity to consider what they want to do after Kupu, how they want to use their education award, and networking with federal and state partners as well as alumni.

Specific to the Hawaiian culture training, program staff shared:

We strive to have Hawaiian cultural practices as a part of the program A lot of members, especially those who move here, are interested and they want to learn. ... Every site, especially our nonprofits, they have their own protocols. And a lot of times, even members—if they're placed at a site that typically doesn't practice protocol—the member will take it upon themselves to learn the protocol because they want to make sure that they are in the right standing and that they should be doing the work that they're doing and being there.

The technical training is provided by the partners who are host sites. The philosophy is that the host sites are the experts in conservation and AmeriCorps members can spend their terms learning from those experts in the field. For example, the host sites provide training in identifying native species, how to use heavy equipment, fire training, GIS software, and developing classroom lesson plans. Through their service with partner sites, members have opportunities to receive certifications in areas such as chainsaws and Wilderness First Aid. The following example shared by program staff illustrates the broad array of training a member may receive depending on their host site:

There are certain certifications that members need. If they are utilizing or riding in a helicopter, they have to take [helicopter operations] aviation training or training to use certain chemicals or herbicides or ATV/UTV [all-terrain vehicles and utility terrain vehicles] operation. So depending on the type of site and the equipment that they are using, then they do provide certifications to the members. Any time that a site cannot fund that training for that member through their organization, then they'll reach out to us.

Members expressed appreciation for the training opportunities, whether they were formal or informal. One member discussed the various certifications they received and commented, "I can put that on my resume ... people look for it when you have it on your resume. It's just nice to get those certifications on there. So I really appreciate the training opportunities that they provide." A second member explained, "There were a lot of opportunities to jump in and learn as you go, which is the phrase *ma ka hana ka ike* [learn by doing]."

Individual-Specific Training

Kupu CLDP provides a professional development reimbursement program to the members. These resources may be used by members for individual development needs, such as attending a conference or a specific class or training that will advance their growth as it relates to their service position and career goals. Program staff shared:



I have noticed that in the past year or so a lot of our members are taking more advantage of this professional development training opportunity we have where if they find something and they bring it to us ... the opportunity to see if we can cover the cost for that training. Some of it is traveling to the continent and taking part in a conference. One went for climate change. It could be a class that they want to attend. They are telling us what they want to do.

One member shared the value of being able to have the funds to attend a statewide conservation conference:

Being aware of climate change, just as someone who has seen it every day and gone to college for environmental science, it's kind of at the forefront of my mind constantly. But being able to participate in things like the Hawai'i Conservation Conference was magnificent. It was such a wonderful opportunity to go hear people talk about a huge range of different

programs that are across the islands and across the nation on ways to mitigate climate change as well.

Outcomes

This section includes information about performance measurement and evaluation, including any challenges. Program outcomes, both member and community, are described as well as a discussion of the facilitators and barriers to meeting the intended outcomes.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation

With a primary focus on environmental stewardship and interventions, including invasive species removal and trail remediation, Kupu selected as its two outputs acres of parks or public land treated (EN4) and miles of trail treated (EN5) and the one required outcome as acres of public land improved (EN4.1). Program staff said all of their partners and members are contributing to helping with climate change as measured by one of these two selected outputs. However, the challenge in not meeting those metric results when they are unable to fill all their positions.

Program staff explained:

I know that 100 percent we're tied to all the work that we are doing to affect climate change. ... We're tracking the acreage cleared, which ties in with invasive removal, plants and animals;

riparian buffer; coastal restoration; and also native planting. So we are doing that with all our partners; everyone is different. Their type of work in the field is different ... conservation is a broad word in itself But when we don't fill our positions, then that work that could've been done by that body cannot be counted. So that's why recruiting is so important, filling positions is so important, having these added benefits for members is important Part of the reason we don't fill our positions is because the cost of living here is so expensive.

To collect output data, members complete tracking forms that are input into Salesforce. The site managers review the data and Kupu staff are charged with an overall review every 2 weeks where they conduct data quality checks. To measure program-specific performance, the members and host sites complete midterm and end-of-term surveys. The member surveys measure the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and changes in behaviors. The host site surveys focus on the contributions of the member and their accomplishments as they relate to the host site's goals. To measure impact on the economy, Kupu leadership compiles the number of hours of member service and produces a metric that equates the monetary value of their service that is contributed to the economy. Being able to assess the long-term impact of CLDP on the members was an area for which Kupu staff wished they had systematic data and they noted the challenges with collecting data from alumni.

As a national grantee, Kupu is required to have a rigorous evaluation. To meet that expectation, Kupu is part of a consortium of AmeriCorps National grantees that has contracted with an external evaluator to conduct a study in which data are being aggregated from multiple conservation corps nationwide and using a quasi-experimental post-hoc comparison group design. The external evaluation is part of a broader effort to develop and implement standard measures for conservation corps in The Corps Network's Public Lands Service Coalition.

Challenges with conducting an impact study were described in Kupu's application and are two-fold. First, the purposeful selection of service sites often makes it difficult to include comparison control sites in the evaluation design. Second, service activities occur in diverse habitats under dynamic conditions based on the individualized priorities and strategies of partner agencies, which complicates standardization and comparison.

Member Outcomes

This section describes member outcomes in the areas of civic engagement, technical skills, and career preparation.

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is embedded within CLDP both as a part of the service members are performing—Kupu Service Days—and a week-long service program. Because of the opportunities afforded to members during their service and valuing community betterment and addressing social issues, members agreed they planned to continue with civic engagement activities.

One member shared:

I think the most that I was civically engaged was when working with students and bridging that gap between government and school Even though I was bringing a lot of awareness to the students, I feel like I was teaching myself also how to be engaged in our community ... it was a whole new world of how to be engaged as a citizen here in Hawai'i. Not just how to have your voice be heard but also how to find that resource, how to find knowledge. Learning

that you really have to break out of your day-to-day norm to find information and resources to make educated decisions.

A second member shared an experience they had during one of the service days and how that impacted their decision to continue volunteering:

I've also gotten to build rock walls, the Native Hawaiian way, where you don't use any cement. You learn how to stack the rocks in a specific way that makes them super sturdy. So just being able to keep finding those different ways to volunteer and learn about Hawai'i has been really great and something that I'll definitely continue doing.

A third member discussed why they were volunteering more now than they had in the past:

Surrounding yourself with other AmeriCorps members, I mean—we're not in it for the money—is inspiring because all these other people are also interested in helping the community and that's how you find other volunteer opportunities. I've volunteered more in the past 2 years than I think I have most of my life, just because people you know also know of other opportunities. They're always looking for more people. So it's been really great to just meet new people who are also interested in outreach and civic engagement.

Technical Skills and Career Preparation

Individuals who become CLDP AmeriCorps members are fueled with a passion to improve communities as it relates to climate change solutions and, more specifically, in the area of conservation. Kupu enables the members to turn their passion into a career. A major focus of Kupu is for their programs to be part of a career pathway and therefore significant emphasis is placed on ensuring members have experiences that prepare them for attaining careers in conservation. For context, salaries for entry to mid-level careers in conservation and natural resources in Hawaii can range from an average \$41,518 – \$53,335 annually. The salary is dependent upon the position's specific focus in conservation.²⁴

Members valued the technical skills gained through certifications, field experiences, developing their leadership and soft skills, and networking. They were excited about the opportunities to “get a foot in the door” in the conservation sector through their Kupu CLDP member term and attributed Kupu with giving them a competitive advantage because of the relationships they were able to develop with conservation experts and potential employers.

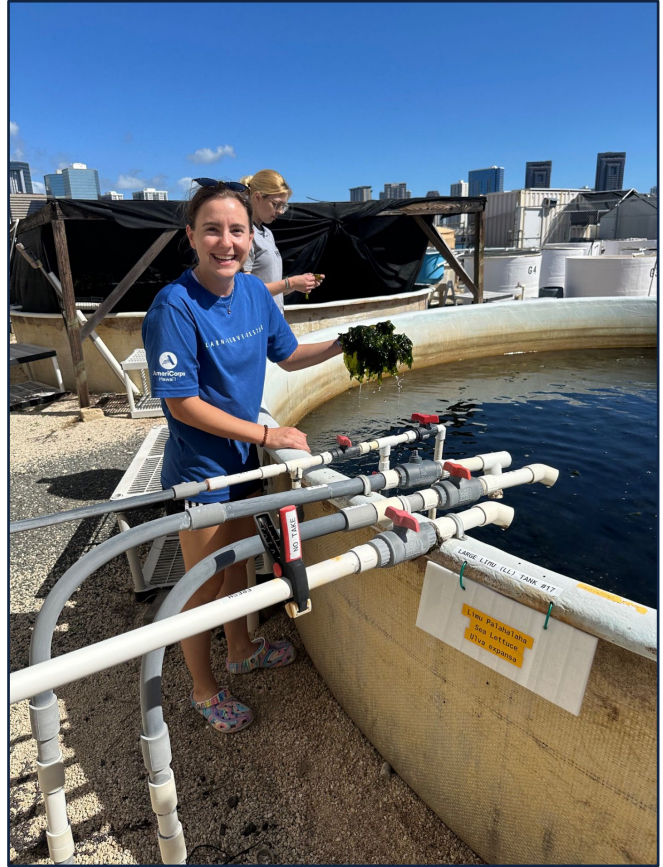
One member described the importance of technical training and how it advances their career goals:

Some of the technical training I got last year, like the ATV/UTV [all-terrain vehicle and utility task vehicle] certification, was great. I was able to physically handle endangered species, which is wonderful. Just using this equipment is so important for career growth. So being able to say, "Yeah I work with this specific laboratory set and this is what we did working in aquaculture." If I wanted a career in aquaculture it's definitely a lot easier now that I've got the experience. It's tricky to gain that experience because entry-level does not mean entry-level anymore. You already have to have 3–5 years' worth of experience, so I definitely think it's been really helpful to do that.

²⁴ ZipRecruiter [Natural Resources salary in Hawaii](#), retrieved September 2, 2024; ZipRecruiter [Conservation salary in Hawaii](#), retrieved September 2, 2024.

Discussing the importance of the experiences and networking with the host sites, program staff explained that not only are members well positioned for conservation careers but the program also develops equitable opportunities for individuals in the communities. As one staff said:

When you get that local person who maybe has only gone to high school, and they don't have the college degree that someone else does, but they've been serving at that host site ... and then they can get hired, and they can move up and keep growing. I think that is a really big one [of how our program addresses equity]. ... Often times it's not necessarily the person with the degree or with all the skills on paper. It's the person who knows the place and knows the plants and knows the land and the area. In Hawai'i it's about who you know. On top of that, if you have a connection to a place, the chance of you getting a position is higher than someone with all the bells and whistles. A lot of our local kids may not have the college degree that they're looking for, but they have a passion to give back to help restore land Most sites and partners want to invest in that, because they see them for the long haul.



All of the interviewed members described examples of how their experiences with CLDP have impacted their career pathways in conservation and expressed the desire to continue their careers in Hawai'i. One member described how their experience in Kupu was integral in their career pathway and their desire to help others learn about the opportunities to become involved in conservation:

My journey started in my freshman year of college. ... From my first experience with Kupu, I learned that it's not just nature [that I love]. I love the people who love this work. I love surrounding myself with like-minded people. So that kept on going throughout my Kupu journey. And my love for the environment became a love for people and the community here. Especially the like-minded community, the folks in nonprofits that are doing 'āina [care for the land] work in all the many ways that you can do that. And then working with students, that was another pivot of working with the next generation. ... I love making connections and finding ways to provide those "a-ha" moments.

Community Outcomes

Kupu members are placed in communities throughout Hawai'i and the U.S. Pacific Islands. Members cited examples of how the communities have been impacted by the services they provide at host sites. Impacts include invasive species removal, native habitat restoration, and outreach and education. Following are specific examples shared by the members:

- *We focus on making the reefs better and making sure the invasive algae isn't really a problem. So the corals and fish and all of the other important parts of those biospheres have the chance to grow, which also helps out the surrounding communities who need to fish. ... What we're doing is really helping the environment so these people can continue to have their livelihoods and hopefully they're less impacted than they would be. And even with limu algae. ... But now there's so much invasive algae that the natives [algae] that are important to Hawaiian culture aren't there anymore. So by clearing up this room for these native species to go back, we're also trying to help maintain that part of the culture, because there are less people who understand different algae species and that kind of thing now than there used to be.*
- *I worked in visitor services for [U.S.] Fish & Wildlife and had mostly elementary school groups ... we talked about our endangered bird species in the wetland that I worked. It was really great to connect with the community and explain why what we do is so important, why climate change is so important, and we have to take it seriously.*

As soon as COVID allowed it, we pretty much opened up to everybody—whether it was schools or Boeing [airplane maker] came, or other corporate places. We just wanted to be a space where people knew whether you worked in an office or at a school or anywhere that you could come and learn how to malama 'āina [care for the land] and hopefully take that into your own community and do that as well.

Barriers to Meeting Intended Outcomes

Restrictions associated with AmeriCorps funding are the primary barriers to meeting outcomes according to program staff. Three of those four restrictions relate to the members:

1. Members must be U.S. citizens,
2. Background checks, and
3. Stipends.

The other restriction concerns partners.

Hawai'i and the U.S. Pacific Islands have a large population from Micronesia and although they can work, pay taxes, and serve in the military, they cannot be in an AmeriCorps program unless they are citizens, nationals, or lawful permanent residents. Program staff said, "That is one of the struggling populations here in Hawai'i, Guam, and Saipan and unfortunately we can't recruit for that."

Obtaining background checks and doing member onboarding has been a challenge both on Maui, following the 2023 fires, as well as in other sites such as American Samoa, program staff explained:

With the isolation of some of our sites, like American Samoa, they don't have a field location, so the amount of time to do a background check in American Samoa could take months. It's been a huge issue. ... There's one site on Maui that everyone has to go to that site, and they're only open for a fraction of the day. So when we try to onboard over there it's a challenge.

The third member-related barrier and the primary one according to program staff is the stipend. With such a high cost of living, potential members are choosing other options. Program staff said:

The living wage here in Hawai'i is getting out of control. People ... are making really easy decisions. It's not to join our program because they can get more money somewhere else

and live a more comfortable life here. So we have to really be creative in how we communicate the value of the program We used to be kind of the big fish, but now there are a lot of other programs that are offering similar experiences.

A fourth AmeriCorps restriction that poses a barrier to Kupu is the definition of who can be a partner. Program staff said many nonprofits would like to be partners and could provide a valuable member experience, but because they only operate with volunteers, they are not able to be partners.

Facilitators to Meeting Intended Outcomes

Program staff were asked about the aspects of CLDP that were either most effective or helped to facilitate progress toward its intended outcomes. Kupu staff said that creating a sense of community among the members is important as well as offering opportunities to grow and learn together. Activities Kupu offers to achieve those aims include in-person orientation, Kupu Days, and week-long service programs. Kupu Days occur twice on Fridays during a member's year-long term where members gather for training and team building. The week-long service programs bring the members from across the islands together in a camplike setting. Kupu staff explained the purpose behind these in-person activities:

During the program year we want to be able to add all these extra benefits for them, so that they know that it's worth their time. And that they feel valued during the program, because anybody can do the work It's giving these members the opportunity to expand their growth so that they're not just coming through the program When they leave us they have a solid tool belt with them, because you can take that anywhere you go.

Program staff expressed that the partners who serve as the host sites are critical for the program's success. Speaking about the array of partners, one program staff said:

A facilitator is our network of partners. It's still amazing to see all that they [members] could choose from. You could do ocean work, you could do lab work, you could do nursery work, ... you could do aqua culture. ... I think we've also grown to a point where one of the facilitators is that work often comes to us at this point versus us going to them. As far as the conservation world, the sustainability world, Kupu is not a small name anymore, here in Hawai'i at least. So we're often called upon for a lot of that work. And so the work comes probably at a rate that's faster than what we can handle at times.

Also highlighted by program staff was the ability for Kupu to connect the members with career opportunities and the emphasis on the interconnection between the Hawaiian culture and the service. Two program staff shared:

- *The most effective thing is that we're able to connect our members with people who know what the jobs are and who've been in these roles. They're learning from experts and often local experts from Hawai'i or the areas that they're from. I think that's the strength of our program by far. ... But at the end of the day, it's the connections they make with the people who are doing the work. And I think the people who are doing the work; they're connected to the land. In Hawai'i the culture and the land are one thing. It's not really separated. And so a member experience in working in the land is, I want to say, a little different than a member experience maybe on the continent. ... here it's embedded ... from our orientations, we really ... from the start to the end, we have a [hō'ike] or end-of-term celebration.*
- *We emphasize that the culture and the service you're doing are intertwined. And the person that is really going to bring you into that is that partner or that host site, because they'll tell you about the*

history of the land, and then the cultural stories that are connected to that land We call them great stories from the members, that theme of ... just being a part of something bigger is prevalent, I think, in a lot of those stories. Not only did I plant hundreds of trees, I now know why that tree is significant to the land and the people. I think that's why a lot of people from the continent come to Hawai'i. Even some of our local kids who might step away, they get reintroduced ... they find a part of their family history or their family culture and they get to reconnect with.

Closing

Kupu CLDP directly impacts climate change through the services members provide in their host site placements, but as importantly—or perhaps more so—the program develops a career pathway in conservation for the members. In line with Kupu's mission, exposing members to these career pathways simultaneously empowers youth to serve their communities through character-building, service-learning, and environmental stewardship opportunities.

While the importance of these opportunities for individuals interested in conservation cannot be understated, the impact of Kupu CLDP's program similarly extends to the well-being of community-based organizations and their local environments. Through the services of members, organizations across the islands of Hawai'i, U.S. Pacific Islands of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands have increased capacity to address the most pressing conservation needs of local environments and their surrounding residents. This approach is particularly important for the focused community nonprofit organizations that often operate with limited resources. Through the provision of a CLDP member, these partners have the opportunity to pursue conservation activities of value to their landscape that may otherwise not have been feasible.

In addition to these local environments receiving the care they need, CDLP members obtain valuable real-world experience and skills in conservation from a local perspective. Throughout their service terms, members experience the importance of conservation informed by local needs and community residents, cultivating an expansive network of individuals invested in the betterment of their environments. Members and program staff alike explained the benefit of service with CLDP in creating a more resilient environment through dedicated conservation efforts and a skilled workforce. One program staff summarized:

To keep it simple, what I see Kupu doing is developing ... the awareness of conservation as a career and also that conservation has many, many levels. You can be in the lab, you can be in the office, you can be working with drones, you can be out in the field, boots on the ground. So I think the way that Kupu is addressing climate change is by diversifying the economy by providing awareness and opportunities for folks to do something different here in Hawai'i Kupu's partnerships with not just conservation, but the University of Hawai'i, and the government. We're really tapped in and trying to figure out what's the next move. How is Hawai'i being impacted by climate change and how can we be a part of the solution, rather than sit back and see what everyone else does. ... And if it's not us directly, then how can we support our partners to do that? That makes me feel really great about being with Kupu and providing these AmeriCorps opportunities to the next generation.

Appendix C. Instrumentation

AMERICORPS PROJECT DIRECTOR SURVEY

Grantee/Sponsor Project Director Survey Consent

Participation

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. This survey is part of a study being conducted by ICF on behalf of AmeriCorps and [project name] to better understand how their projects/projects are working. More specifically, we are interested in your project’s activities and effect on the community you serve. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

Risks

We do not anticipate any risks in participating in this survey. Participation in this survey is voluntary. You can skip any question or stop answering questions at any time.

Your responses to the survey will be kept confidential. Your answers will not affect your current or future work with AmeriCorps. A report summarizing feedback across different organizations and AmeriCorps members will be shared with AmeriCorps. The information that we use from this survey will not be identified with any one individual. Only ICF staff and the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation will have access to the de-identified survey data.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the survey, you may contact study representative Dr. Kimberly Good. For questions regarding your rights related to this evaluation, you can contact ICF’s Institutional Review Board at IRB@icf.com.

If you agree to participate in the survey, please acknowledge below by selecting, “I agree to participate.”

- I agree to participate.
- I do not agree to participate. *[If selected, will use skip logic take respondent to the end of the survey.]*²⁵

Background

1. What is your current role in your organization?
 - Project assistant
 - Project manager
 - Director
 - Other (please specify): _____

2. How long have you been with this organization?
 - Less than 1 year

²⁵ Within survey question text, brackets indicate how the online survey reacts to respondent choices, links, and partner or organization identifiers added for respondents.

- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–15 years
- 16+ years

3. How long have you been with this organization in your current role?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–15 years
- 16+ years

4. How many national service members does your project oversee? _____

National Service Member Training

5. How many hours of training do national service members receive?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1–4 hours
- 5–8 hours
- 9–16 hours
- 17+ hours

6. What is the content of the training? (Select all that apply.)

- Environmental sustainability (e.g., water conservation, reducing energy consumption)
- Renewable energy (e.g., wind or solar power)
- Technical skills (e.g., using new technology or tools)
- Communication skills (e.g., verbal communication, active listening)
- Problem solving skills (e.g., identifying a problem, exploring alternative solutions)
- Teamwork skills (e.g., team building, conflict resolution)
- Career preparation
- Other (please specify): _____

Services and Activities

7. In general, what types of services does your organization provide? (Select all that apply.)
- Education (e.g., tutoring, literacy, education for children and youth)
 - Health (e.g., nutrition, access to care, prevention, awareness, mental health)
 - Services to veterans, members of the armed forces, or their families
 - Environment (e.g., education on environmental issues, land conservation, energy conservation, ecosystem development/maintenance)
 - Disaster services (e.g., disaster education, preparation, mitigation, response)
 - Economic opportunity (e.g., housing services, employment counseling, job training, financial literacy, financial assistance)
 - Other services (please specify): _____
8. Who does your organization serve? Please select the populations that your organization serves. (Select all that apply.)
- Formerly Incarcerated
 - Homeless
 - Immigrant (documented and undocumented)
 - Individuals with disabilities
 - Low income
 - Non-English speaking or limited English proficiency
 - Older adults
 - Racially/ethnically diverse
 - Refugee
 - Substance dependent
 - Veterans
 - Other: _____
9. What types of services do you provide that are **designed to impact climate change**? Please select all of the services that your organization provides and indicate how long you have been providing the service (e.g., 2 years, 6 months).

Service	Length of Time (in months)
<input type="checkbox"/> Education or training (e.g., public outreach and education on environmental issues)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Disaster response (e.g., clearing storm debris, distributing supplies)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Community resilience (e.g., efforts to strengthen communities, communication, services)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Energy efficiency (e.g., installing energy-efficient equipment in homes)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental stewardship/conservation (e.g., erosion control, invasive species removal)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mitigation activities (e.g., wildfire, flood)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other services (please specify): _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> None	
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	

10. For services connected to climate change that were selected in item 9, please describe (in greater detail) the **activities** that are being implemented to address climate change?

Partnerships

11. Does your organization partner with other organizations to provide activities or services for this project?

- Yes
- No

[If yes is selected, go to item 12. If no is selected, go to item 21.]

12. Please specify the number of organizations that your organization works with to provide activities or services for this project: _____

If you worked with more than one partner, please think about one partnership that was successful and another partnership that was challenging when responding to the following questions. You will have the opportunity to answer each question twice to provide information about each partnership.

[Questions 13-20 will be shown twice so the grantee/sponsor can provide information about two organizations; they will have the option to skip the second series of questions if they have only one partner example.]

13. Partner organization name: _____

14. What types of activities or services does your partner organization provide for this project? (Select all that apply.)

- Recruiting national service members or volunteers
- Curriculum design for training
- Identifying knowledge and skills for job requirements
- Training national service members or volunteers to develop required skills
- Providing facilities or equipment for training activities
- Providing equipment or software to support project success
- Coordinating project activities
- Supporting national service members or volunteers while on the job
- Other (please specify): _____

15. Prior to the current project, how often did your organization work with your partner organization?

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Always
- Don't know

16. Overall, how satisfied are you with the relationship with your partner?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

17. How would you classify your organization's relationship with your partner organization?

- We have a true partnership; we share strategies, resources, and information and jointly make decisions about the project.
- We coordinate with the organization and make some of our decisions together about the project but the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

- We cooperate with the organization to implement the project; we consider this organization when making decisions, but do not make decisions together.
- We have limited communication; the organization does not influence our decisions and we do not influence their decisions about the project.

18. How would you describe your relationship with this partner organization?

- Challenging
- Successful

19. Please elaborate on the description that you gave to the relationship with your partner. Why was the relationship challenging or successful? _____

20. The partnership between my organization and our partners will continue beyond the life of the grant period. (Using the selections below, please rate how strongly you agree with this statement.)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Project Outcomes

The items in this section are designed to measure **your perceptions** of the effectiveness of [project name].

21. Please indicate the level to which you think the project is effective at addressing the following **in the community**. If you do not have enough information to respond to the item, please select “Don’t know.”

Prompt	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Don’t Know
Increase the use of renewable energy sources					
Improve energy efficiency					
Prepare for extreme weather and climate					
Prepare for, respond to, or recover from natural disasters					

Prompt	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Don't Know
Preserve public lands and/or waterways					
Protect and/or restore biodiversity					
Help the community become more resilient to a changing climate					
Increase community engagement in climate change activities					
Increase self-sufficiency among community members					
Focus on the needs of vulnerable populations (economic, health, housing, transportation, social)					
Increase community members' awareness of resources to meet their basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, medical)					
Increase community members' knowledge about climate change					
Increase community members' positive attitudes toward activities that mitigate climate change					
Increase community members' behaviors around climate change					
Recruit diverse project participants					
Support local workforce development needs					
Increase skills development toward future employment					
Increase skills development toward green jobs					

22. Please indicate the level to which you think the project is effective at addressing the following for **national service members**. If you do not have enough information to respond to the item, please select "Don't know."

Prompt	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Don't Know
Attitudes and behavior toward civic engagement					

Prompt	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Don't Know
Future career goals					
Future education goals					
Job skills development					
Skills development toward green jobs					
Knowledge of the impacts of climate change					
Activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions					
Behavior to become more resilient to a changing climate					
Behavior to prepare for extreme weather and climate					
Behavior to become more resilient to extreme events					

23. In your opinion, what is **contributing** to achieving the desired outcomes in your community?

24. What are the **barriers** to achieving the intended outcomes in your community? -----

25. What recommendations do you have for other organizations that are planning to implement a similar project? -----

26. Do you have any other comments?

AMERICORPS COMMUNITY PARTNER SURVEY

Partner Organization Survey Consent

Participation

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. This survey is part of a study being conducted by ICF to help AmeriCorps and [project name] better understand how their projects are working. More specifically, we are interested in your organization's activities, partnership with [project name], and effect on the community you serve. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

Risks

We do not anticipate any risks in participating in this survey. Participation in this survey is voluntary. You can skip any question or stop answering questions at any time.

Your responses to the survey will be kept confidential. Your answers will not affect your current or future work with [project name] or AmeriCorps. A report summarizing feedback across different organizations and AmeriCorps members will be shared with AmeriCorps. The information that we use from this survey will not be identified with any one individual. Only ICF staff and the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation will have access to the de-identified survey data.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the survey, you may contact study representative Dr. Kimberly Good or Institutional Review Board representative [name].

If you agree to participate in the survey, please acknowledge below by selecting, "I agree to participate."

- I agree to participate.
- I do not agree to participate. *[If selected, will use skip logic take respondent to the end of the survey.]*

[Note: ICF will ask the grantee/sponsor to select 1–2 key partners to complete this survey.]

Background

1. What is your current role at your organization?
 - Organizational leadership (e.g., executive director, president, CEO)
 - Office or project director
 - Office or program staff
 - Administrative staff (e.g., finance, development, human resources)
 - Volunteer
 - Other (please specify): _____

2. How long have you been with this organization?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–15 years
- 16+ years

3. How long have you been with this organization in your current role?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–15 years
- 16+ years

4. What is your organization’s sector? (Select all that apply.)

- Private, for-profit business
- Public / government / Tribal organization, office, or agency
- Nonprofit organization
- Religious or other spiritual organization
- School (K–12)
- College or university
- Other: _____

5. In general, what types of services does your organization provide? (Select all that apply.)

- Education (e.g., tutoring, literacy, education for children and youth)
- Health (e.g., nutrition, access to care, prevention, awareness, mental health)
- Services to veterans, members of the armed forces, or their families
- Environment (e.g., education on environmental issues, land conservation, energy conservation, ecosystem development/maintenance)
- Disaster services (e.g., disaster education, preparation, mitigation, response)
- Economic opportunity (e.g., housing services, employment counseling, job training, financial literacy, financial assistance)
- Other services (please specify): _____

6. Who does your organization serve? Please select the populations that your organization serves. (Select all that apply.)

- Formerly Incarcerated
- Homeless
- Immigrant (documented and undocumented)
- Individuals with disabilities
- Low-income
- Non-English speaking or limited English proficiency
- Older adults
- Racially/ethnically diverse
- Refugee
- Substance dependent
- Veterans
- Other: _____

7. What types of services does your organization provide that are **designed to impact climate change**? Please select all of the services that your organization provides and indicate how long you have been providing the service (e.g., 2 years, 6 months).

Service	Length of Time
<input type="checkbox"/> Education or training (e.g., public outreach and education on environmental issues)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Disaster response (e.g., clearing storm debris, distributing supplies)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Community resilience (e.g., efforts to strengthen communities, communication, services)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Energy efficiency (e.g., installing energy efficient equipment in homes)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental stewardship/conservation (e.g., erosion control, invasive species removal)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mitigation activities (e.g., wildfire, flood)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other services (please specify): _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> None	
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	

8. For services connected to climate change that were selected in item 7, please describe (in greater detail) the **activities** that are being implemented to address climate change?

Partner Services

9. What types of activities or services does your organization provide for **this project**? (Select all that apply.)

- Recruiting national service members or volunteers
- Curriculum design for training
- Identifying knowledge and skills for job requirements
- Training national service members or volunteers to develop required skills
- Providing facilities or equipment for training activities
- Providing equipment or software to support project success
- Coordinating project activities
- Supporting national service members or volunteers while on the job
- Other (please specify): _____

10. Prior to the current project, how often did your organization work with **[grantee organization name]**?

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Always
- Don't know

11. Overall, how satisfied are you with the relationship with **[grantee organization name]**?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

12. How would you classify your organization's relationship with **[grantee organization name]**?

- We have a true partnership; we share strategies, resources, and information and jointly make decisions about the project.
- We coordinate with the organization and make some of our decisions together about the project but the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.
- We cooperate with the organization to implement the project; we consider this organization when making decisions but do not make decisions together.
- We have limited communication; the organization does not influence our decisions and we do not influence their decisions about the project.

13. Please rate how strongly you agree with this statement: The partnership between my organization and [grantee organization name] will continue beyond the life of the grant period.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Project Outcomes

The items in this section are designed to measure **your perceptions** of the effectiveness of [project name].

14. Please indicate the level to which you think the project is effective at addressing the following in **the community**. If you do not have enough information to respond to the item, please select “Don’t know.”

Prompt	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Don’t Know
Increase the use of renewable energy sources					
Improve energy efficiency					
Prepare for extreme weather and climate					
Prepare for, respond to, or recover from natural disasters					
Preserve public lands and/or waterways					
Protect and/or restore biodiversity					
Helps the community become more resilient to a changing climate					
Increase community engagement in climate change activities					

Prompt	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Don't Know
Increase self-sufficiency among community members					
Focus on the needs of vulnerable populations (economic, health, housing, transportation, social)					
Increase community members' awareness of resources to meet their basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, medical)					
Increase community members' knowledge about climate change					
Increase community members' positive attitudes toward activities that mitigate climate change					
Increase community members' behaviors around climate change					
Recruit diverse project participants					
Support local workforce development needs					
Increase skills development toward future employment					
Increase skills development toward green jobs					

15. In your opinion, what is **contributing** to achieving the desired outcomes in your community?

16. What are the **barriers** to achieving the intended outcomes in your community?

17. What recommendations do you have for other organizations who are planning to implement a similar project?

18. Do you have any other comments?

AMERICORPS MEMBER SURVEY PROTOCOL

AmeriCorps Member Survey Consent

Participation

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. This survey is part of a study being conducted by ICF to help AmeriCorps and [project name] better understand how their projects are working. More specifically, we are interested in your project’s activities and effect on the community you serve. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

As a small token of appreciation, ICF will raffle off 10 \$25 gift cards to respondents from the 15 projects in the study who opt to participate in the raffle. To opt into the raffle, you will need to provide your email address, however it will be disconnected from the rest of your survey data. More information about participating in the raffle is available at the end of the survey.

Risks

We do not anticipate any risks in participating in this survey. Participation in this survey is voluntary. You can skip any question or stop answering questions at any time.

Your responses to the survey will be kept confidential. Your answers will not affect your current or future work with AmeriCorps. A report summarizing feedback across different organizations and AmeriCorps members will be shared with AmeriCorps and with grantees/sponsors. The information that we use from this survey will not be identified with any one individual. Only ICF staff and the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation will have access to the de-identified survey data.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the survey, you may contact study representative Dr. Kimberly Good or Institutional Review Board representative [name].

If you agree to participate in the survey, please acknowledge below by selecting, “I agree to participate.”

- I agree to participate.
- I do not agree to participate. *[If selected, will use skip logic take respondent to the end of the survey.]*

Background

1. This is a list of reasons people have for giving their time and efforts to others. Please indicate how important each of the following reasons are for you personally to volunteer.

Prompt	Not important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	Don't know
It provides an opportunity to use your knowledge, skills, and experience.					
It is something that will help your own neighborhood or community.					

Prompt	Not important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	Don't know
It is a way to make a difference for a cause or issue that is important to you OR in which you are interested.					
It is a way to meet people or gather with people.					
Because you feel a personal responsibility to help others when they need it.					
It makes your own life more satisfying.					
It lets you learn things through direct, hands-on experience.					
It helps you to explore possible career options.					

Source: These items are adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps' Civic Engagement Volunteer Experience Survey and the Volunteer Motivation Scale.

Current Role and Services Provided

2. How long have you been with [grantee/sponsor name] as a national service member?
 - Less than six months
 - Six months – less than 1 year
 - 1–5 years
 - 6–10 years
 - 11–15 years
 - 16+ years

3. About how many hours per week do you serve as a member?
 - Less than 5 hours
 - 5–10 hours
 - 11–20 hours
 - 21–30 hours
 - More than 30 hours

4. What types of services do you provide that are **designed to impact climate change**? Please select all of the services that your organization provides and indicate how long you have been providing the service.

Prompt	Length of Time (in months)
<input type="checkbox"/> Education or training (e.g., public outreach and education on environmental issues)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Disaster response (e.g., clearing storm debris, distributing supplies)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Community resilience (e.g., efforts to strengthen communities, communication, services)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Energy efficiency (e.g., installing energy-efficient equipment in homes)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental stewardship/conservation (e.g., erosion control, invasive species removal)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mitigation activities (e.g., wildfire, flood)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other services (please specify): _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> None	
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	

5. For services connected to climate change that were selected in item 4, please describe (in greater detail) the **activities** that are being implemented to address climate change?

6. Why did you choose to serve in [project name]? _____

7. How would you describe the community that you are serving?

- City
- Suburb
- Town
- Rural area

8. Are you a member of the specific geographic community that you are serving?

- Yes
- No

Training

9. In general, how many hours of training have you received to prepare you to serve as a member?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1–4 hours

- 5–8 hours
- 9–16 hours
- 17+ hours

10. What was the content of the training? (Select all that apply.)

- Environmental sustainability (e.g., water conservation, reducing energy consumption)
- Renewable energy (e.g., wind or solar power)
- Technical skills (e.g., using new technology or tools)
- Communication skills (e.g., verbal communication, active listening)
- Problem solving skills (e.g., identifying a problem, exploring alternative solutions)
- Teamwork skills (e.g., team building, conflict resolution)
- Career preparation
- Other (please specify): _____

11. How helpful was the training for your role as a national service member in this project?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not at all helpful

Project Outcomes

12. In the last 6 months, how often, if at all, have you engaged in the following climate change activities and actions. Please indicate the level to which you have participated on a scale from “Never” engaged to “Frequently” engaged.

Prompt	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Became involved with an environmental group or political party (e.g., volunteer, summer job, etc.).				
Participated in an educational event (e.g., workshop) related to the environment.				
Participated in a community event that focused on environmental awareness.				
Participated in nature conservation efforts (e.g., planting trees, restoration of waterways).				

Prompt	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Spent time working with a group/organization that deals with the connection of the environment to other societal issues such as justice or poverty.				

Source: These items are adapted from the *Environmental Action Scale*.

13. Listed below are actions that one could take in the future to help reduce climate change. Please use the rating scale below to indicate how likely you would be to take the action.

Prompt	Definitely won't	Probably won't	Probably will	Definitely will
Vote on issues related to climate change.				
Organize an educational event (e.g., workshop) related to climate change issues.				
Use social media to raise awareness about climate change issues.				
Personally write to or call a politician/ government official about climate change issues.				
Organize a petition for an environmental cause.				
Organize a community event to fight climate change.				
Organize a community event to promote environmental justice.				

Source: These items are adapted from the *Environmental Action Scale*.

14. The following items pertain to the impact of the project on your future education and career goals. Please indicate the extent to which participation in the project affected the following.

Prompt	Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	A great deal
Participation in this project enhanced my general employment skills (e.g., communication, problem solving, teamwork).				
Participation in this project increased my ability to use new technology/tools.				
Participation in this project improved my ability to work with people from different racial, ethnic, social, or educational backgrounds.				
Participation in this project impacted the career/occupation I will pursue in the future.				
Participation in this project influenced the degree/major I will pursue.				

15. Do you have any interest in obtaining a job related to climate change?

- Yes
- No *[If no, go to item 17.]*

16. If yes, please rate your willingness to pursue a career in the following job categories?

Prompt	Definitely won't	Probably won't	Probably will	Definitely will
Agriculture and natural resource conservation				
Clean transportation and fuels				
Disaster services				
Education, compliance, and awareness				
Energy efficient product manufacturing, distribution, construction, installation, or maintenance				
Natural and sustainable product manufacturing				
Pollution prevention or environmental cleanup				
Other (explain below)				

If other was selected in item 16, please specify:

17. The items in this section are designed to measure **your perceptions** of the effectiveness of **[project name]**. Please indicate the level at which you think the project is effective at addressing the following **in the community**. (If you do not have enough information to respond to the item, please select "Don't know.")

Prompt	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Don't Know
Increase the use of renewable energy sources					
Improve energy efficiency					
Prepare for extreme weather and climate					
Prepare for, respond to, or recover from natural disasters					
Preserve public lands and/or waterways					
Protect and/or restore biodiversity					

Prompt	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Don't Know
Help the community become more resilient to a changing climate					
Increase community engagement in climate change activities					
Increase self-sufficiency among community members					
Focus on the needs of vulnerable populations (economic, health, housing, transportation, social)					
Increase community members' awareness of resources to meet their basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, medical)					
Increase community members' knowledge about climate change					
Increase community members' positive attitudes toward activities that mitigate climate change					
Increase community members' behaviors around climate change					
Recruit diverse project participants					
Support local workforce development needs					
Increase skills development toward future employment					
Increase skills development toward green jobs					

Demographics

18. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18–29
- 30–39
- 40–49
- 50–59
- 60–69
- 70–79

- 80+

19. How do you describe your gender? (Select all that apply.)

- Male (including transgender men)
- Female (including transgender women)
- Nonbinary/nonconforming
- Prefer to self-describe as _____
- Prefer not to say

20. Which one of these groups would you say best represents your race?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Multi-racial or multi-ethnic (2+ races/ethnicities)
- Other (please specify): _____
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

21. Are you of Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

22. What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?

- Never attended school or only kindergarten
- Elementary school
- Some high school
- High school graduate or equivalent
- Some college or technical school *[If selected, go to item 23]*
- College graduate *[If selected, go to item 23]*

- Some graduate school *[If selected, go to item 23]*
- Completed graduate school *[If selected, go to item 23]*
- Prefer not to say

23. What was your major area of study?

24. Did you grow up in an area that is similar to the community that you are serving?

- Yes *[If yes, go to item 26.]*
- No

25. How would you describe the community where you grew up?

- City
- Suburb
- Town
- Rural area

26. Do you have any other comments? -----

Thank you for your responses. There is a raffle for a \$25 Amazon gift card for survey respondents. Ten (10) winners from the 15 projects participating in the study will be selected. To enter into the raffle, please select the following link. Your raffle information will be disconnected from your survey responses.

[\[Link to raffle entry\]](#)

AmeriCorps Member Survey Raffle Entry

Please select the project you belong to.

- CA - GRID Alternatives SolarCorps
- CO - Youth Corps for Colorado
- CO - Colorado Climate Corps
- D.C. - The Corps Network's Opportunity Youth Service Initiative
- HI - Conservation Leadership Development Program
- HI - Department of Land and Natural Resources - OCCL
- HI - Office of Climate Change, Sustainability, and Resiliency
- MN - Climate Impact Corps

- MN – Minnesota GreenCorps
- MO – Safety Service Corps, Partnership for Youth
- NC – AmeriCorps Project Conserve
- VA – Virginia Service and Conservation Corps
- WA – Washington Conservation Corps
- WA – Washington Service Corps
- WA – Vets Work Environment

Please enter your email address: _____

GRANTEE/SPONSOR ORGANIZATION – PROJECT DIRECTOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW (60 minutes)

Grantee/Sponsor Project Director Interview Consent

Participation

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in today’s interview. This interview is part of a study being conducted by ICF for AmeriCorps. The reason for the study is to help AmeriCorps and [project name] better understand how their projects are working. More specifically, we are interested in your project’s activities and effect on the community you serve. We have prepared a number of discussion questions, but please feel free to offer any additional thoughts you have about your experience. The interview will take up to 60 minutes.

Risks

We do not anticipate any risks in being a part of this interview. Participation in today’s discussion is completely up to you. You can decide you don’t want to answer any question we ask, and you can stop participating in the discussion at any time. You can also decide not to participate at all and leave the interview at any point.

Anything you share with ICF will be kept confidential. By speaking with us, you will not affect your current or future relationship with AmeriCorps. A report summarizing feedback across different organizations and AmeriCorps members will be shared with AmeriCorps. Only ICF staff will see the data collected from this interview, and the information that we use from our discussions will not be identified with any one individual. However, since we are only talking to a small number of grantee staff at each organization, there is a chance that AmeriCorps personnel will be able to guess which individual shared certain information.

Do you have any questions about this study or this interview?

Before we begin, we would also like to check that you are 18 years or older and get your permission to participate in today’s discussion. If you do not want to participate, you may leave at this time.

Consent Statement

1. You are 18 years or older.
2. You understand being a part of this study is completely up to you and that you can stop being a part of the discussion at any time, with no penalty or risk.
3. You understand that only ICF staff will see your answers to these questions.
4. You understand that your name will not be included in any reports or presentations of the results and that what you share with us today will be treated as confidential.
5. You understand the possible risks and benefits of being a part of this study.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the interview, you may contact study representative Dr. Kimberly Good, or Institutional Review Board representative [insert name].

Background

1. Let’s begin with some brief introductions. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

- a. What is your title and role at [organization name]?²⁶
 - b. How long have you been in this position?
 - c. What are your specific responsibilities?
2. Can you tell me a little about [organization name]? What types of services and activities does your organization provide?
 3. Were you required to provide matching funds to receive AmeriCorps funding for the [project name]? If yes, to what extent were the required matching funds easily secured? Explain.

Project Operations and Context

I'd like to ask you a few questions about your project, [project name], and the community that you serve.

4. What are the mission and goals of [project name]?
 - a. What are project priorities?
 - b. In what ways has climate change affected your community and its members?
 - *[As needed, probe for economic, health, housing, transportation, and social impacts]*
 - c. Can you discuss some of the services and activities that address climate change issues in your community?
 - d. How are you measuring project impacts?
 - *[Use the probes below based on the specific project]*
 - Capacity Building
Number of organizations that received capacity building services/increased their effectiveness, efficiency, and/or project scale/reach
 - Disaster Services
Number of individuals served; number of individuals reporting increased disaster readiness; number of structures protected or restored/returned to regular use after a disaster
 - Environmental Stewardship
Number of individuals receiving education or training in environmental stewardship

²⁶ In interviews, bracketed text indicates program or partner information specific to interviewee such as program name and probe or interview instructions for the interviewer.

and/or environmentally-conscious practices/with increased knowledge of environmental stewardship and/or environmentally-conscious practices; number reporting a change in behavior or the intent to change behavior to better protect the environment; number of acres of public parks or other public and Tribal lands that are treated/improved; number of miles of public trails or waterways that are treated and/or constructed/improved and/or put into use

○ Energy Efficiency

Number of housing units or public structures weatherized or retrofitted to improve energy efficiency/with reduced energy consumption or reduced energy costs. GRID specific – the number of housing units of low-income households and public structures retrofitted to improve energy efficiency.]

- i. What are some challenges that you've encountered with the AmeriCorps performance measures? This includes outputs and outcomes.
- ii. Are there any challenges related to the AmeriCorps evaluation requirements? Describe the challenges.

5. How does your project define equity?

- a. Does the project have goals around equity and inclusion? *If yes, please tell us about them and how they are measured.*
- b. Can you describe the strategies that your project uses to increase equity?

6. What are the characteristics of the communities and individuals served through the project?

- a. Can you speak to the role of the community in this project?
 - i. How were community members notified about the project?
 - ii. How are community members involved in project activities? Are they actively involved in project activities? What role do they have in the project?
 - iii. Were the community members involved in project planning? *If yes, please tell us about the process.*
 - iv. Are you able to recruit members from within the community? What are successful recruitment strategies? What are the challenges with recruitment from the community?

7. Thinking about how this project was structured and implemented, is the project operating as intended? If not, in what ways is it different than intended? Why were those changes made?
 - a. What types of outreach and strategies do you use for recruitment of national service members?
 - b. What are the most effective outreach and recruitment strategies you have used? What are the least effective outreach and recruitment strategies?

8. What aspects of the project do you think are most effective? What do you think could be improved in how the project was structured and implemented?
 - a. What practices have been most effective for engaging vulnerable and/or diverse communities? Is there anything that you would do differently to increase community engagement?
 - b. What practices have been most effective for increasing equity? What gaps still need to be addressed?

9. What barriers has the project faced while trying to meet intended outcomes?

10. What facilitators have assisted the project in meeting intended outcomes?

11. Considering the goal of addressing climate change, what successful strategies or innovations did your project implement that could be transferable to other communities or organizations wanting to implement this type of project?

Partnerships

[Questions #13-15 to be asked for each of the partners identified for the partner interviews.]

12. What are the number and types of partners that your organization is working with on [project name]?
 - a. Do you have any partnerships that focus on resilience building for at-risk populations within your community? (Examples may include racial minority groups, populations with limited English proficiency, disabled populations, and any other identified populations within your community.)

13. Can you please tell me how you started working with [partner organization name]? How long have you been working with them?
 - a. How has [organization name] maintained a relationship with [partner organization name] during that time?
 - b. How often do you engage with your partners?

- i. How often do you work with your partners on joint activities?
14. How would you describe the relationship between the organizations?
- *[Probe: How do AmeriCorps members engage with your partners?]*
15. How is your organization working with **[partner organization name]** to build community resilience?

Project Outcomes

16. In what ways does your project improve member outcomes?
- *[Probe for increased civic engagement*
 - *Probe for increased knowledge of the impacts and solutions to climate change, positive attitudes toward activities that mitigate climate change, and behaviors around climate change*
 - *Probe for an increase in functional and technical job skills, interest/willingness to pursue a career in a green job]*
17. From your perspective, in what ways has **[project name]** helped the community address climate change?
- *[Probe on the following and follow up with how*
 - *Energy efficiency/renewable energy sources*
 - *Disaster response*
 - *Reduced occurrence/severity of wildfires*
 - *Environmental conservation*
 - *Improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around climate change*
 - *Built community capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change]*
18. In what ways has your project increased equity in the community?
- *[Probes include increased education, engagement, self-sufficiency, and partnerships]*

Project Sustainability

- From your perspective, how likely is it that you will be able to sustain the project after the grant-funding period?

- *[Probe: Which components will you be able to sustain?]*

20. Do you have any additional feedback or insights you would like to share with us regarding the project?

GRANTEE/SPONSOR ORGANIZATION – PROJECT STAFF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW (60 minutes)

Grantee Staff Interview Consent

Participation

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in today’s interview. This interview is part of a study being conducted by ICF for AmeriCorps. The reason for the study is to help AmeriCorps and [project name] better understand how their projects are working. More specifically, we are interested in your project’s activities and effect on the community you serve. We have prepared a number of discussion questions, but please feel free to offer any additional thoughts you have about your experience. The interview will take up to 60 minutes.

Risks

We do not anticipate any risks in being a part of this interview. Participation in today’s discussion is completely up to you. You can decide you don’t want to answer any question we ask you, and you can stop participating in the discussion at any time. You can also decide not to participate at all and leave the interview at any point.

Anything you share with ICF will be kept confidential. By speaking with us, you will not affect your current or future relationship with AmeriCorps. A report summarizing feedback across different organizations and AmeriCorps members will be shared with AmeriCorps. Only ICF staff will see the data collected from this interview, and the information that we use from our discussions will not be identified with any one individual. However, since we are only talking to a small number of grantee staff at each organization, there is a chance that AmeriCorps personnel will be able to guess which individual shared certain information.

Do you have any questions about this study or this interview?

Before we begin, we would also like to check that you are 18 years or older and get your permission to participate in today’s discussion. If you do not want to participate, you may leave at this time.

Consent Statement

1. You are 18 years or older.
2. You understand being a part of this study is completely up to you and that you can stop being a part of the discussion at any time, with no penalty or risk.
3. You understand that only ICF staff will see your answers to these questions.
4. You understand that your name will not be included in any reports or presentations of the results and that what you share with us today will be treated as confidential.
5. You understand the possible risks and benefits of being a part of this study.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the interview, you may contact study representative Dr. Kimberly Good, or Institutional Review Board representative [insert name].

Background

1. Let's begin with some brief introductions. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. What is your title and role at [organization name]?
 - b. How long have you been in this position?
 - c. What are your specific responsibilities?

Project Operations and Context

2. How have you been involved with [project name]?
 - a. In what ways has climate change affected your community and members of the community?
 - *[As needed, probe for economic, health, housing, transportation, and social impacts]*
 - b. Can you discuss some of the services and activities that address climate change?
 - c. Can you discuss how the project attempts to increase equity in terms of climate change outcomes?
 - d. Do you work with the national service members? How are the members recruited? What types of outreach and strategies do you use for recruitment of national service members? What are the most effective outreach and recruitment strategies you have used? What are the least effective outreach and recruitment strategies?
 - e. Can you tell us about their activities and your interactions with the members?
 - *[Probe for information about the characteristics of the national service members]*
 - f. Do you work with members of the community? How are they involved in the project?
 - *[Probe for information about the characteristics of the community and its members; probe for community members' role in project activities]*
 - g. What practices have you found to be most effective at engaging vulnerable and/or diverse communities?
 - h. Are you able to recruit members from within the community? What are successful recruitment strategies? What are the challenges with recruitment from the community? }
3. What aspects of the project do you think are most effective? What do you think could be improved in how the project was structured and implemented?
4. How are outcomes related to climate change measured?
 - *[Use the probes below based on the specific project]*

- Capacity Building
Number of organizations that received capacity building services/increased their effectiveness, efficiency, and/or project scale/reach
 - Disaster Services
Number of individuals served; number of individuals reporting increased disaster readiness; number of structures protected or restored/returned to regular use after a disaster
 - Environmental Stewardship
Number of individuals receiving education or training in environmental stewardship and/or environmentally-conscious practices/with increased knowledge of environmental stewardship and/or environmentally-conscious practices; number reporting a change in behavior or the intent to change behavior to better protect the environment; number of acres of public parks or other public and Tribal lands that are treated/improved; number of miles of public trails or waterways that are treated and/or constructed/improved and/or put into use
 - Energy Efficiency
Number of housing units or public structures weatherized or retrofitted to improve energy efficiency/with reduced energy consumption or reduced energy costs. GRID specific – the number of housing units of low-income households and public structures retrofitted to improve energy efficiency.]
 - a. What are some challenges that you've encountered with the AmeriCorps performance measures? This includes outputs and outcomes.
 - b. Are there any challenges related to the AmeriCorps evaluation requirements? Describe the challenges.
5. From your perspective, what challenges did your organization encounter in meeting intended outcomes?
6. What were the most successful strategies that you observed to meet intended outcomes?
7. Considering the goal of addressing climate change, what successful strategies or innovations did your project implement that could be transferable to other communities or organizations wanting to implement this type of project?

Working with National Service Members

8. Does [organization name] offer members any additional training? If so, what types of training?
 - *[Probe for member skill development toward green jobs and willingness to pursue a career in conservation and environmental education fields]*
9. What have you found to be best practices for engaging members? What are the challenges?
 - a. Do you have any specific practices to effectively support members from diverse backgrounds?
 - *[Probe for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) commitments, affinity groups, identity-specific outreach events, and so forth]*

Working with Partner Organizations

10. Does [organization name] work with community partners? If so, can you please share what type of collaboration you have had with these partners in your work on [project name]?
 - a. How often do you engage with your partners?
11. How often do you work with these partners on joint activities?
 - a. How has [organization name] built and maintained these partnerships?
 - b. Do you think your work with partners helps build community resilience? If so, how?

Project Outcomes

12. From your perspective, in what ways has [project name] helped the community address climate change?
 - *[Probe on the following and follow up with how*
 - *Energy efficiency/renewable energy sources*
 - *Disaster response*
 - *Reduced occurrence/severity of wildfires*
 - *Environmental conservation*
 - *Improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around climate change*
 - *Built community capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change]*
13. In what ways has your project increased equity in the community?

- *[Probes include increased education, engagement, self-sufficiency, and partnerships]*

14. In what ways has [project name] improved member outcomes?

- *[Probe for increased civic engagement]*
- *Probe for members' increase in functional and technical job skills, interest/willingness to pursue a career in a green job*
- *Probe for previous members' job attainment and careers in green jobs after their service]*

15. Do you have any additional feedback or insights you would like to share with us regarding the project?

PARTNER ORGANIZATION IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW (60 minutes)

Partner Organization Consent Statement

Participation

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in today's interview. This interview is part of a study being conducted by ICF for AmeriCorps. The reason for the study is to help AmeriCorps and [project name] better understand how their projects are working. More specifically, we are interested in your organization's activities, partnership with [project name], and effect on the community you serve. We have prepared a number of discussion questions, but please feel free to offer any additional thoughts you have about your experience. The interview will take about 60 minutes.

Risks

We do not anticipate any risks in being a part of this interview. Participation in today's discussion is completely up to you. You can decide you don't want to answer any question we ask you, and you can stop participating in the discussion at any time. You can also decide not to participate at all and leave the interview at any point.

Anything you share with ICF will be kept confidential. By speaking with us, you will not affect your current or future relationship with [project name] or AmeriCorps. A report summarizing feedback across different organizations and AmeriCorps members will be shared with AmeriCorps. Only ICF staff will see the data collected from this interview, and the information that we use from our discussions will not be identified with any one individual.

Do you have any questions about this study or this interview?

Before we begin, we would also like to check that you are 18 years or older and get your permission to participate in today's discussion. If you do not want to participate, you may leave at this time.

Consent Statement

1. You are 18 years or older.
2. You understand being a part of this study is completely up to you and that you can stop being a part of the discussion at any time, with no penalty or risk.
3. You understand that only ICF staff will see your answers to these questions.
4. You understand that your name will not be included in any reports or presentations of the results and that what you share with us today will be treated as confidential.
5. You understand the possible risks and benefits of being a part of this study.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the interview, you may contact study representative Dr. Kimberly Good, or Institutional Review Board representative [insert name].

Background

1. Let's begin with some brief introductions. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - *[Probe: What is your title and role at (partner organization name)?]*
 - *[Probe: How long have you been in this position?]*
 - *[Probe: What are your specific responsibilities?]*
2. Can you tell me a little about [partner organization name]? What types of services and activities does your organization provide?

Partnership and Project Operations

3. Can you please tell me how you started working with [organization name]? How long have you been working with them?
 - How has [partner organization name] maintained a relationship with [organization name] during that time?
4. How would you describe the relationship between the organizations?
5. What role does your organization play with [project name]? How have you been involved with planning/implementation of [project name]?
 - How does working with [project name] support your organization's mission and goals?
 - What are the benefits and challenges for [partner organization name] of working with [organization name] on an AmeriCorps project?
 - What have been your experiences in working with AmeriCorps national service members? What has worked well? What has been challenging?
 - What kind of activities do members engage in with [partner organization name]?
6. How is your organization building community resilience?
 - In what ways has climate change affected your community and its members?
 - *[Probe for economic, health, housing, transportation, and social impacts]*
 - How does your organization connect its work with climate change?
 - Can you discuss some of the services and activities that address climate change?
7. Can you discuss how the project attempts to increase equity in terms of climate change outcomes?

8. Do you work with members of the community? How are they involved in the project?
 - *[Probe to identify if they were involved in planning and implementation]*
 - a. What practices have you found to be most effective for engaging vulnerable and/or diverse communities?
9. What aspects of the project do you think are most effective? What do you think could be improved in how the project was structured and implemented?

Project Outcomes

10. From your perspective, in what ways has **[project name]** helped the community address climate change?
 - *[Probe on the following and follow up with how]*
 - *Energy efficiency/renewable energy sources*
 - *Disaster response*
 - *Environmental conservation*
 - *Improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around climate change*
 - *Built community capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change]*
11. From your perspective, how likely is it that you will be able to sustain the project after the grant-funding period?
 - Which components will you be able to sustain?
12. Do you have any additional feedback or insights you would like to share with us regarding **[project name]** or working with **[organization name]**?

AMERICORPS MEMBER FOCUS GROUP (90 minutes)

AmeriCorps Member Focus Group Consent

Participation

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in today's focus group. This focus group is part of a study being conducted by ICF for AmeriCorps. The reason for the study is to help AmeriCorps and [project name] better understand how their projects are working. More specifically, we are interested in your project's activities and effect on the community you serve. We have prepared a number of discussion questions, but please feel free to offer any additional thoughts you have about your experience. The focus group will take up to 90 minutes.

Risks

We do not anticipate any risks in being a part of this focus group. Participation in today's discussion is completely up to you. You can decide you don't want to answer any question we ask you, and you can stop participating in the discussion at any time. You can also decide not to participate at all and leave the focus group at any point.

Anything you share with ICF will be kept confidential. By speaking with us, you will not affect your current or future relationship with [project name]. A report summarizing feedback across different organizations and AmeriCorps Members will be shared with AmeriCorps. Only ICF staff will see the data collected from this focus group, and the information that we use from our discussions will not be identified with any one individual. However, since we are only talking to a small number of members at each organization, there is a chance that AmeriCorps or [project name] personnel will be able to guess which individual shared certain information.

We also request that you do not discuss what is disclosed in this focus group once the discussion ends.

Do you have any questions about this study or this focus group?

Before we begin, we would also like to check that you are 18 years or older and get your permission to participate in today's discussion. If you do not want to participate, you may leave at this time.

Consent Statement

1. You are 18 years or older.
2. You understand being a part of this study is completely up to you and that you can stop being a part of the discussion at any time, with no penalty or risk.
3. You understand that only ICF staff will see your answers to these questions.
4. You understand that your name will not be included in any reports or presentations of the results and that what you share with us today will be treated as confidential.
5. You understand the possible risks and benefits of being a part of this study.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the focus group, you may contact study representative Dr. Kimberly Good, or Institutional Review Board representative [insert name].

Let's begin with some brief introductions. Please tell us your name and a little bit about yourself.

Background

1. Why did you become a national service member? How did you become aware of the project?
 - *[Probe: What recruitment strategies led to you becoming a member? What encouraged you to sign up to be a member with this project? What was it about (project name) that interested you?]*
 - *[Probe: If you have graduated from college, what motivated you to participate in the project?]*
2. To what extent were you engaged in community activities prior to your service?
3. Why did you choose to serve in [project name]?
4. Are you a member of the community that you are serving?

Project Context and Activities

5. How does climate change impact your life? In what ways has climate change affected your community and members of the community?
 - *[If needed, probe for economic, health, housing, transportation, and social impacts]*
6. What is your understanding of the mission and goals of [project name]? In your own words, what is the project designed to accomplish?
 - *Probe: What activities and services are intended to address climate change?*
7. Can you discuss how the project attempts to increase equity in terms of climate change outcomes?
8. How have you been involved with [project name]?
 - What is your role? What services did you provide? What activities did you engage in during your service?
9. Do you work with members of the community? How are they involved in the project?
 - *[Probe for information about the characteristics of the community and its members; probe for community members' role in project activities]*

Training and Supports

10. Overall, how prepared were you for your position as a national service member?
 - Now please think about your specific job tasks—for example, conducting community outreach, retrofitting a building, coordinating disaster responses services, forest fuels reduction, and/or

native species management. How prepared did you feel to perform these tasks?

11. After the training, how knowledgeable were you about the impacts of and solutions to climate change?
12. Were you provided a living allowance and/or stipend for participating in the project? If yes, were these monetary supports sufficient to meet your living needs? Why or why not?

Project Outcomes

13. In what ways has [project name] affected you personally?
 - *[Probe for increased civic engagement]*
 - *[Probe for increased knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around climate change]*
 - *[Probe for an increase in functional and technical job skills, interest/willingness to pursue a career in a green job]*
14. Following your experience in the project, would you be interested in pursuing additional opportunities to positively engage with your community?
 - *[Examples may include volunteer work, contributions to charitable organizations within your community, participation in discussions concerning social/environmental responsibility, and so forth.]*
15. Do you have any interest in obtaining a job related to climate change?
 - *[If yes, probe to find out what area (e.g., energy, conservation, disaster relief, wildfire mitigation)]*
 - *[If yes, probe to find out if they will have need to pursue more schooling and in what field of study]*
16. Can you tell me about how your experience has affected your preparedness for a career within the climate change field? Have you developed necessary skills for a career within climate change?
 - *[If not, has your experience within the project increased your awareness of pathways to obtain necessary skills for a career within climate change?]*
17. From your perspective, in what ways has [project name] helped the community address climate change?
 - *[Probe on the following and follow up with how]*
 - *Energy efficiency/renewable energy sources*
 - *Disaster response*

- *Reduced occurrence/severity of wildfires*
- *Environmental conservation*
- *Improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around climate change*
- *Built community capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change]*

Final Thoughts

18. Do you have any suggestions to improve [project name]?
 - *[Probe for training/onboarding deficiencies, member-level challenges, etc.]*
19. Do you have any additional feedback or insights you would like to share with us regarding your experiences in the project or working with [organization name]?

COMMUNITY MEMBER FOCUS GROUP (60 minutes)

Community Member Focus Group Consent

Participation

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in today's focus group. This focus group is part of a study being conducted by ICF for AmeriCorps. The reason for the study is to help AmeriCorps and [project name] better understand how their projects are working. More specifically, we are interested in your project's activities and effect on the community you serve. We have prepared a number of discussion questions, but please feel free to offer any additional thoughts you have about your experience. The focus group will take up to 60 minutes.

Risks

We do not anticipate any risks in being a part of this focus group. Participation in today's discussion is completely up to you. You can decide you don't want to answer any question we ask you, and you can stop participating in the discussion at any time. You can also decide not to participate at all and leave the focus group at any point.

Anything you share with ICF will be kept confidential. By speaking with us, you will not affect your current or future relationship with [project name]. A report summarizing feedback across different organizations and AmeriCorps Members will be shared with AmeriCorps. Only ICF staff will see the data collected from this focus group, and the information that we use from our discussions will not be identified with any one individual. However, since we are only talking to a small number of members at each organization, there is a chance that AmeriCorps or [project name] personnel will be able to guess which individual shared certain information.

We also request that you do not discuss what is disclosed in this focus group once the discussion ends.

Do you have any questions about this study or this focus group?

Before we begin, we would also like to check that you are 18 years or older and get your permission to participate in today's discussion. If you do not want to participate, you may leave at this time.

Consent Statement

1. You are 18 years or older.
2. You understand being a part of this study is completely up to you and that you can stop being a part of the discussion at any time, with no penalty or risk.
3. You understand that only ICF staff will see your answers to these questions.
4. You understand that your name will not be included in any reports or presentations of the results and that what you share with us today will be treated as confidential.
5. You understand the possible risks and benefits of being a part of this study.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the focus group, you may contact study representative Dr. Kimberly Good, or Institutional Review Board representative [insert name].

Let's begin with some brief introductions. Please tell us your name and a little bit about yourself.

- *[Participants introduce themselves]*

Community Context

1. Can you tell us about your community? What is it like?
 - *[Probe for history, infrastructure, community leaders]*
2. How long have you lived in the community? Has it changed in the past 5 years? If so, how?

Perceptions of Climate Change

3. What do you know about climate change?
 - *[Probe for causes of climate change, their beliefs about climate change]*
4. How does climate change impact your life?
 - *[If needed, probe for economic, health, housing, transportation, and social impacts]*
5. How have you been involved with **[project name]**?
 - a. Did you provide feedback on the project? Did you contribute to the development, content, or activities of the project?
 - b. Before today were you aware that this site partners with AmeriCorps?
 - c. What has been your involvement or interaction with AmeriCorps national service members?
6. Did you receive any training or education related to climate change? If so, what was the training about and how helpful was it?

Project Outcomes

7. In what ways has **[project name]** affected you personally?
 - *[Probe on the following and follow up with how]*
 - *Energy efficiency/renewable energy sources*
 - *Disaster response*
 - *Reduced occurrence/severity of wildfires*
 - *Environmental conservation*

- *Improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around climate change*
- *Built community capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change]*

8. Do you have any suggestions to improve [project name]?

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 projects and civic life in America.

About ICF

ICF (NASDAQ:ICFI) is a global consulting and digital services company with over 7,000 full- and part-time employees, but we are not your typical consultants. At ICF, business analysts and policy specialists work together with digital strategists, data scientists and creatives. We combine unmatched industry expertise with cutting-edge engagement capabilities to help organizations solve their most complex challenges. Since 1969, public and private sector clients have worked with ICF to navigate change and shape the future. Learn more at [icf.com](https://www.icf.com).

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