



## EVALUATION OVERVIEW

# An Evaluation of AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund Grant Programs

April 2024



BUNDLED EVALUATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

## Background

In a polarized, post-pandemic America, volunteers have been described as playing a key role in reestablishing trust and human interaction—critical activities for strengthening American civil society (Hager & Brudney, 2021). According to the most recent federal data, 23.2 percent of Americans, or 60.7 million people, formally volunteered (i.e., volunteered with an organization) between September 2020 and 2021, serving an estimated 4.1 billion hours with an economic value of \$122.9 billion (AmeriCorps, 2023). In addition, nearly 51 percent of Americans, or 124.7 million people, informally volunteered by helping others (e.g., by exchanging favors with their neighbors) during that same period (AmeriCorps, 2023). These data show that service to others continues to be a priority for millions of Americans and organizations need to be ready to engage those who want to give back (AmeriCorps, 2021).

AmeriCorps,<sup>1</sup> 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. As an independent federal agency, AmeriCorps plays a vital role in supporting the American culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility, and is the nation's largest grantmaker in support of many forms of service and volunteering. AmeriCorps engages more than 5 million Americans in service through its AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps Seniors, and Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) programs.

The VGF program invests in volunteer management practices that increase both volunteer recruitment and retention through grants to state service commissions and nonprofit organizations. To learn more about how VGF grants have been implemented and the outcomes of those grants in improving volunteer recruitment and retention, the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation contracted with ICF to conduct an evaluation of the VGF grant program based on the work of participating grantees awarded in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. This contract also included delivering evaluation capacity building sessions to participating grantees.

## What Did the Evaluation of VGF Grant Programs Do?

The evaluation assessed how FY 2020 VGF grantees implemented their grants to develop and/or support community-based entities to recruit, manage, and support volunteers within their states as well as the outcomes of VGF grantees' efforts. In FY2020, 14 state service commissions were awarded VGF grants. State service commissions, the state partners of AmeriCorps, are charged with administering AmeriCorps State, VGF, and related programs to address critical community needs and engage citizens in service (America's Service Commissions, 2023). These governor-appointed public agencies or private nonprofit organizations serve at the state level to regrant federal national service funds; support other community service agencies; and work to support local communities. In total, nine of the 14 VGF grantees participated in the evaluation, as shown in exhibit 1.

**EXHIBIT 1.—FY2020 VGF grantees**

State	Commission	Federal Funding Amount	Evaluation Participant
Florida	Volunteer Florida	\$658,401	✓
Illinois	Serve Illinois Commission	\$378,522	
Iowa	Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (Volunteer Iowa)	\$331,976	✓
Kansas	Kansas Volunteer Commission	\$172,176	
Maine	Maine Commission for Community Service	\$132,958	
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Service Alliance	\$352,173	✓
Michigan	Michigan Community Service Commission	\$740,937	
Minnesota	Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service (ServeMN) with partner Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA)	\$266,000	✓
Nevada	Nevada Volunteers	\$216,810	✓
New Hampshire	Volunteer NH	\$360,109	✓

<sup>1</sup> AmeriCorps is the operating name of the Corporation for National and Community Service, or CNCS.

State	Commission	Federal Funding Amount	Evaluation Participant
New Jersey	New Jersey Commission on National Community Service (NJ Commission)	\$250,860	✓
North Carolina	North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism & Community Service (VolunteerNC)	\$270,875	✓
Utah	Utah Commission on Service & Volunteerism (UServeUtah)	\$185,000	✓
Wisconsin	Wisconsin National and Community Service Board	\$235,917	

Note. Although 12 commissions initially agreed to participate in the evaluation, nine followed through in conducting one or both of the major data collection activities (i.e., site visits and/or the program beneficiary survey) and are therefore considered evaluation participants in this table. ServeMN is the fiscal agent of the VGF grant and responsible for grant compliance, though subgranted all aspects of VGF grant implementation to MAVA. ServeMN and MAVA consider themselves as grant partners. Given MAVA's role in grant implementation, MAVA is therefore referenced as a VGF grantee along with the other state service commissions grantees throughout this overview.

The evaluation team used a mixed-method case study design—with each VGF grantee considered a case—to fully depict implementation and outcomes for each grantee. An in-depth cross-case analysis was also conducted to understand cross-cutting trends in VGF grant implementation and outcomes among the grantees. One important contextual note is that many evaluation activities occurred in 2021 and 2022—at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on all aspects of American life—interrupting in-person participation across social sectors—which greatly impacted volunteerism. Findings should be interpreted accordingly.

## Outcomes of the Bundled Evaluation

Participating program beneficiaries reported strategies they used and/or learned through their participation in VGF-supported training and capacity building activities, which centered on improving volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention. VGF grantee outcomes were centered around increased reach and recognition and improved services for beneficiaries, and beneficiary outcomes aligned with key focus areas of improved engagement, recruitment, retention, and increased organizational and/or individual staff capacity.

## Contact Information

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## References

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### About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](https://www.americorps.gov).

### About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](https://www.americorps.gov/office-of-research-and-evaluation) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

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