



EVIDENCE SNAPSHOT

Colorado Climate Corps Case Study



BUNDLED EVALUATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

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.¹ 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

¹ 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 ([Green Jobs: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)): (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.

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 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.²

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 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 - \$44,652
(ZipRecruiter, 2024)³

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

² ZipRecruiter [Entry Level Construction Worker Salary in Denver, CO](#).

³ ZipRecruiter [Environmental Educator Salary in Denver, CO](#); ZipRecruiter [Park Ranger Salary in Denver, CO](#).

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 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.

Acknowledgements

The ICF evaluation team would like to acknowledge the many members of the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) and the participating AmeriCorps-supported organizations, as well as the AmeriCorps members and VISTAs and community partners who are contributing 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 programs 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.

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.

This report was commissioned by AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation under Contract #GS00Q14OADU209 and Order #95332A20F0075. Information in this report is in the public domain.

Suggested Citation

Rakes, E., & Good, K. (2024). Evidence snapshot: Colorado Climate Corps case study. In K. Good, E. Rakes, R. O'Conner, B. Holbrook, H. Shepard-Moore, A. MacDonald, K. Fitzgerald, & M. Sarawana, *An evaluation of AmeriCorps-supported programs tackling climate change* (Appendix B). ICF.

Photo Credit

AmeriCorps Photos

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). For additional information about ICF, please contact:

ICF

1902 Reston Metro Plaza, Reston, VA 20190


Phone: 703-934-3603 or 1-800-532-4783

Fax: 703-934-3740 Email: info@icf.com



 [linkedin.com/company/icf-international](https://www.linkedin.com/company/icf-international)

 [facebook.com/ThisIsICF](https://www.facebook.com/ThisIsICF)

 [#thisisicf](https://www.instagram.com/thisisicf)