

## Program Experiences in the Environmental Stewardship, Climate Change, and Disaster Services Areas

### Background Information:

Working in the areas of environmental stewardship, climate change, or disaster services presents unique opportunities and challenges when seeking to make a community impact. In early 2023, the Office of the Research and Evaluation (ORE) sought to gain a better understanding of AmeriCorps funded programs that focus on these areas. ORE interviewed AmeriCorps program partners and experts in the field to gain insight about their experiences, learn more about how they engage members, their successes and challenges with recruitment, the employment pathways they see for members, and any issues they face in measurement of their work in this space. These individuals, which included program directors and evaluators, participated in a one-hour, recorded interviews.

Below are some the key takeaways from those voices from the field.

### Key Takeaways:

#### Member Engagement

AmeriCorps ORE asked experts in the field about the kind of work or activities AmeriCorps members engage in with their organization, and if they receive any specialized skills or certifications. Program experts reported that Members engage in activities ranging from tree mapping to assisting the Department of Energy with weatherization programs. They also reported that most Members have an interest in exploring an array of skills and trainings, regardless of whether it is their core area of interest.



"And that was interesting because the training interests, it was like the lowest response was 75% wanting training in a particular area. They want everything right. They wanted to learn about all of it... Members of this year have the opportunity to earn their Building Performance Institute Building Analyst certification. It's a national certification that essentially says if you have this certification, you know how to go into the field or go to someone's house, do a whole home energy audit, and take all the necessary measurements, collect the data, and put the data into a system in order to model it."

- Dylan Kelly, Ampact

"The building analyst certification... would give them the ability to ... be an energy auditor and we've had assurance from our partners that with that certification, they should all be completely hireable at the end of their term if that's the route they would like to go."

- Sharon Delcambre, ServeMinnesota



## Member Recruitment

AmeriCorps ORE asked experts in the field about the strategies they use to recruit members, including why they believe members sign up to serve with their organization. Program experts reported that they believe members sign up because they are personally motivated to engage in climate or disaster-related work, but that some member positions are easier to recruit for than others. Organizations have been creative in their approach to recruiting members, but also find it challenging to recruit given the current amount of the AmeriCorps stipend.



“You know, people can kind of picture themselves planting trees, but if you talk to them about engaging in energy audits, a lot of people don’t even know what that is. We’ve found a little bit more success if we’re able to go out [into the public], rather than think about recruitment through the lens of just Facebook posts ... and give a little bit more presentation to talk about pathways.”

- Dylan Kelly, Ampact



“With this new position that’s starting in January we really wanted to put an emphasis on climate justice...and really start from that point of building equity from the beginning. ... We knew site-based recruitment really had to be part of that... We want members to, you know, as often as possible ... come from the communities that they’re serving because they have some built-in sense of place, connection, relationships, all of that.”

- Dylan Kelly, Ampact



“I think a large part of our members sign up because they’ve either been impacted by disaster, or they have some kind of personal touch point to that and they’re curious about what that long term recovery landscape looks like. And then I’d say more generally, the type of member that we attract are just like disrupters. They see they may not necessarily know the details of why the disaster recovery landscape in this country is as big of a mess as it is, but they see that there’s something wrong here and there’s an opportunity for them to be involved or engaged in a real, tangible way.”

- Mike Sullivan, SBP



“So, the majority of our applicants are relocating generally to the communities in which we serve or come from a background where they may have additional financial support that would allow them to be successful in our program. We’ve done some things to counter that, so we’ve raised the stipend, ... we have begun offering a relocation reimbursement..., we also offer a returning member housing stipend, so for members who either have participated in our program, come from Peace Corps, come from another national service...receive an additional \$175 per month. So, we’ve looked at different ways outside of what traditional AmeriCorps programs offer to incentivize or provide.”

- Mike Sullivan, SBP



"The additional thing that we've done to incentivize members is we've started a referral program. ... that allows us to pay out \$150 for every successful member referral... that means that whoever they referred has to apply, interview, be accepted, be offered, and then actually physically start within the program and if that happens then members can receive an additional \$150 like incentive or bonus... then for every 3 referrals members gain or leverage for the program, we've also partnered with American Airlines, given that we're disaster response [which] requires a lot of travel and with their corporate social responsibility stuff, it kind of just lined up. They've donated us a ton of airline miles and so we've been able to leverage those for operational business needs and then the excess donations we're able to offer as an incentive to AmeriCorps members for referrals. For every 3 referrals...they receive...\$150 per referral and then after the third referral they received 30,000 American airline miles."

- Mike Sullivan, SBP

## Member Career Pathways

ORE asked experts in the field about the kind of work or education members pursue after completing their service, including other potential workforce pathways that could emerge. Program experts reported that Members have a desire to pursue climate related careers, and that their time serving with AmeriCorps is an opportunity to better understand the landscape of this work and explore potential career pathways. However, some climate-related jobs require advanced degrees, which can be a limiting factor for immediate employment after the service term.



"Members want to do something about climate. I think that is the number one thing... from an initial survey with [of] ... about 28 members... we asked them a lot about their desires and around work and what we have was 86% of them are intent on engaging in some kind of climate work, right, as a career. And we found that...they don't necessarily even know where in climate work, they just know it's climate work."

- Dylan Kelly, Ampact



"Part of the reason that we're focusing on some of these systems thinking skills is because that is essential to a lot of environmental work. And being able to draw those connections between something like water conservation and agriculture and community, forestry and energy is what allows you in the interview for potential job to be able to communicate well about how environmental and social systems operate."

- Dylan Kelly, Ampact



"I do know in forestry the Master's degree is a common requirement for a lot of jobs, which is a barrier for us for employment at times, but which we can't at this time provide them a Master's degree, but ... we give them a lot of good experience."

- Sharon Delcambre, ServeMinnesota



“I think there's a segment of people who are motivated by that environmental stewardship, that climate change messaging and there are some folks who are more interested in it from a policy perspective and how can we influence you know change in that way and then I think what we're seeing more and more of ... folks that are out there that are like what can I get out of this and... how can this be an opportunity to launch me into a career path that I'm interested in, and... how can I make this sacrifice right now for this ten months ... and see if this is something that I really want to get into.”

- Mike Sullivan, SBP



“We're starting to see like pathways into policy, we're starting to see pathways into industry beyond just like swinging hammers and knocking on doors and doing response work. And I think our members are starting to understand that this is a pretty cool and broad field and there's a lot of different ways that we can drive impact.”

- Mike Sullivan, SBP



“AmeriCorps more and more seems to be an opportunity for like job development, career development and I think that's like the direction programs are headed or have recognized or long understood to be the direction of the program.... Reflecting on how do we like more broadly support members? Financially, with education and with opportunities for like certificates or you know development codifying that they gain as a participant in these programs is going to be huge.”

- Mike Sullivan, SBP

## Green Jobs

AmeriCorps ORE asked the leading experts interviewed about the term “green jobs”, and what they believe are the distinguishing aspects of these jobs compared to non-green jobs. Their response highlighted that the definition of a green job is broad and does not necessarily reflect a specific type of job, but rather an approach to the work.



“A green job is not a type of job. It's how you do the job ... that it is taking that lens of sustainability that says in any decision or action, there are environmental consequences, there are social consequences, there are economic consequences, and there are cultural consequences.”

- Dylan Kelly, Ampact

## Measurement

When asked about the successes and challenges of measuring and reporting on outputs and outcomes of their programs, experts in the field reported that measuring the impact of climate related work is a major challenge given the complex nature of the issues.



“What do you define as the acres that have been treated versus the acres that have been improved, especially if that's like say the only area where planting is happening?...Those trees are providing benefits for probably the entire neighborhood around it, but it's really hard to quantify where those benefits start and where they end, whereas in like a public land, we'll say the National Forest ..., they can actually just drop a ... GIS pin or a GPS pin and then measure the space that they were working in and call it that.”

- Dylan Kelly, Ampact

“We're really good at getting to outputs. We can count our outputs really well. The link between outputs and outcomes in these systems is really hard to make.”

- Dylan Kelly, Ampact








“We're going to see changes from year to year. I mean climate change has change in the name...Change is the constant thing of climate work and so having a consistent performance measure that's not changing, I think is just going to be something challenging across all climate work. Just like by definition, it's also like solving climate change, it's a really complex thing to do ....it's like we have this really specific reading intervention that we can say that students who engage in this X times per week like it's going to have this very measurable rate of success on their ability to read, but it's really hard for me to say that if you can plant this many trees, you're going to be able to noticeably solve climate change because climate change is so complex, there's so many interrelated factors.”

- Sharon Delcambre, ServeMinnesota

## Summary:

The conversations with experts working in environmental stewardship, climate change, and/or disasters provided insights on member engagement, recruitment, and career pathways, as well as broader issues like “green jobs” and measuring climate-related interventions. These insights from experts in the field suggest that engaging in climate related work is a major pull for recruiting and engaging members, and many members view AmeriCorps as an opportunity to explore potential career pathways in this field. That said, recruiting members requires some level of creativity and effort on the part of organizational leaders, especially for member positions that do not necessarily fit the traditional image of a climate-related job, when stipends are low, and organizations want to recruit from within the communities they serve. Experts in the field see “green jobs” career pathways for members as being quite broad, with opportunities ranging from highly technical jobs to those more oriented in policy or community building.

These “voices from the field” offer situational awareness of the opportunities and challenges facing organizations working in the areas of environmental stewardship, climate change, and disasters. It also serves as a supplement to other evidence-building efforts at AmeriCorps in this space, including:

 <b>Life Cycle Evaluation Climate Change Bundle</b>	 <b>Return on Investment Studies</b>
<p>A descriptive evaluation study—the first ever for AmeriCorps—that synthesizes information about climate change approaches and models across funding streams. It will provide insights on a range of program activities related to education and training, disaster response, conservation, wildfire mitigation, and energy efficiency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check out the <a href="#">materials and resources</a> for the Life Cycle Evaluation Climate Change Bundle</li> </ul>	<p>AmeriCorps commissioned the following ROI studies to measure program performance and build an evidence base for future resource allocation decisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Green City Force</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Habitat for Humanity</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Montana Conservation Corps</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Nevada Conservation Corps</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">SBP</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Washington Conservation Corps</a></li> </ul>
 <b>AmeriCorps State and National Grantee Impact Evaluations</b>	 <b>AmeriCorps NCCC Impact Studies</b>
<p>An AmeriCorps evidence brief that highlights the impact of AmeriCorps-funded environmental stewardship programs and interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check out the <a href="#">Effective AmeriCorps-Funded Environmental Stewardship Programs</a> brief</li> </ul>	<p>A webinar highlights AmeriCorps’ longitudinal evaluation of its NCCC program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View the <a href="#">AmeriCorps NCCC Impact Studies</a> webinar</li> </ul>
 <b>AmeriCorps ORE Research Grantees</b>	
<p>AmeriCorps’ ORE provides research grants to researchers, scholars, and dissertators at higher education institutions to advance the field’s understanding of civic engagement, volunteering, and national service, and civil society more broadly. A few of the <a href="#">ORE Research Grantees</a> that have specifically studied climate and the environment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Puerto Rico</li> <li>• University of Nevada, Reno</li> <li>• University of Houston and Texas Southern University</li> <li>• SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry</li> </ul>	

AmeriCorps ORE is grateful to the program leaders and field experts who offered their time and knowledge to help us better understand their work and experiences and hope that we can take these lessons to continue supporting AmeriCorps' strategic goals related to climate change and civic engagement.



**Dylan Kelly**

Director of Climate Programs  
Ampact

Ampact is a nonprofit organization which delivers evidence-based programs in Education, Environment, and Healthy Futures. Powered by AmeriCorps members to help solve most pressing issues.



**Sharon Delcambre, PhD**

Improvement and Impact Evaluator  
ServeMinnesota

ServeMinnesota is a catalyst for positive social impact in education, economic opportunity, housing stability, climate mitigation, and more. Working with AmeriCorps and community partners to address critical needs in Minnesota.



**Mike Sullivan**

National Director of AmeriCorps  
SBP

SBP provides resilience training in ten communities per year and engages in recovery efforts across the country to make vulnerable residents resilient to potential disaster and rebuild for those who have survived disaster.

**About the Office of Research and Evaluation**

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

**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](#).**