

Corporation for National and Community Service

2017 State of the Evidence

Annual Report

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Corporation for National and Community Service 2017 State of the Evidence Annual Report

Introduction

The Corporation for National and Community Service is the federal agency for volunteering, service, and civic engagement. The agency engages millions of Americans in citizen service through its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Volunteer Generation Fund programs, and leads the nation's volunteering and service efforts. For more information, visit NationalService.gov.

CNCS Mission: To improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

Corporation for National and Community Service

These programs both create national service and volunteering opportunities for millions of Americans and support nonprofit and faith-based organizations nationwide. The CNCS [Office of Research and Evaluation \(ORE\)](#)¹ has built a portfolio of evidence around the agency's mission and its programs. This State of the Evidence report synthesizes results² from research and evaluation activities conducted between fiscal years 2015 and 2016. Specifically, findings from research studies conducted by university-based scholars, program evaluations conducted by independent third parties, agency performance metrics, and analyses of nationally representative statistics are summarized. In addition, the report includes key metrics (see Appendix A) that reflect the agency's use of evidence in its budget, management, and policy decisions during the same time period.

¹ To learn more about the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) and related resources visit <https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange/research-evaluation>. If you have questions about this report or other research related questions, contact ORE at evaluation@cns.gov.

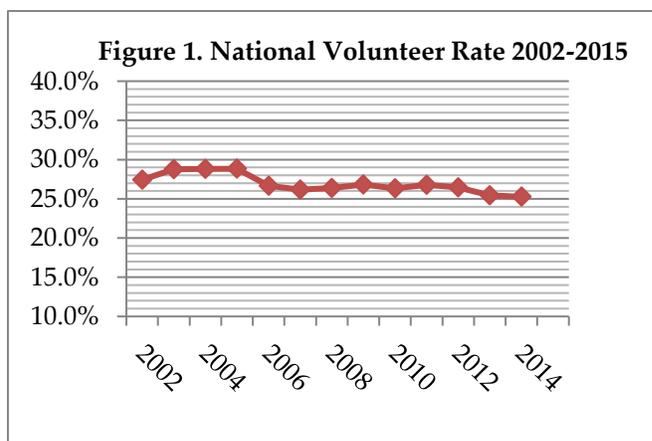
² Information available as of June 30, 2017 is included in this report. The report includes studies funded with FY15-FY17 appropriations. The one exception is the CNCS Volunteering and Employment study which was conducted by Office of Research and Evaluation staff in FY13.

CNCS-sponsored research has established national trend data on volunteering and its economic benefits

National Volunteering and Civic Engagement Statistics

The Serve America Act of 2009 tasked the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) with facilitating “the establishment of a Civic Health Assessment....”³ Among the recommendations made for accomplishing this task, the Act highlighted the consideration of the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. CNCS has funded the fielding of two CPS supplements: the Volunteering Supplement and the Civic Engagement Supplement.⁴ The data from these two supplements are made public and are used by CNCS primarily in the creation of the annual [Volunteering and Civic Life in America](#) report.

Trends in volunteering at a national level have been consistent (Figure 1). Important partners like the Congressionally-chartered National Conference on Citizenship as well as our Governor-appointed State Commissions rely on these data to track the civic health of states and local communities and inform decisions about which issues to tackle through volunteering.



The Serve America Act also recommended partnering with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to help determine how best to develop the Civic Health Assessment. In 2010, CNCS commissioned NAS to convene a panel of experts for the purposes of studying and defining concepts pertinent to assessing civic health, reviewing existing methodologies and data sources for measuring indicators of civic health, and ultimately providing recommendations for how to best design the Civic Health Assessment, including redesigning the CNCS-funded CPS supplements. The result was a report released in 2014 entitled, *Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion: Measuring Dimensions of Social Capital to Inform Policy*,⁵ hereafter referred to as the NAS Report.

³ Text of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, H.R. 1388:

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/hr1388/text>

⁴ Current Population Survey (CPS) Technical Documentation:

<http://www.census.gov/cps/methodology/techdocs.html>

⁵ Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion: Measuring Dimensions of Social Capital to Inform Policy (the NAS Report): <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/18831/civic-engagement-and-social-cohesion-measuring-dimensions-of-social-capital>

Principal among the recommendations of the NAS Report was to combine the two supplements into one, recognizing the high costs of supporting multiple surveys and the increased constraints on federal agency budgets in recent years. The report also takes into account the most up-to-date research and proliferation of pertinent data sources, recommending further that a combined supplement be designed with the understanding that it will only speak to certain indicators and sub-indicators of civic health rather than assess the concept in its entirety.

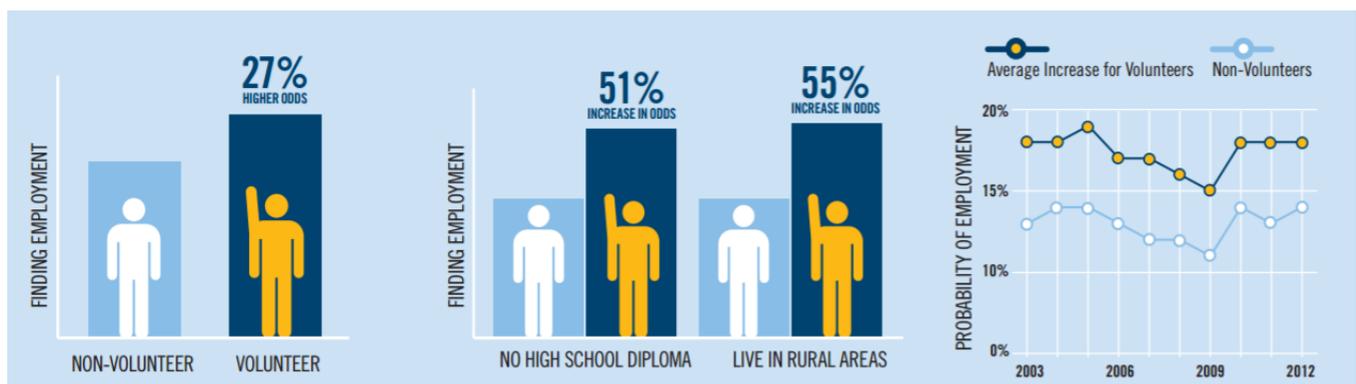
In FY16, CNCS worked with the U.S. Census Bureau to redesign these surveys into a single instrument with the goal of improving the country’s ability to accurately measure the nation’s civic behavior. To achieve this goal, CNCS and the Census Bureau conducted a literature review, psychometric analyses, and cognitive testing as part of the redesign efforts. CNCS and the Census Bureau expect to administer the new survey supplement in September of 2017.

The CNCS Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) also decided to sponsor a research grant program for scholars and dissertators at institutions of higher education to further explore the ideas underlying civic health. In addition, a community-based project designed to explore the various ways in which citizens define civic health at a local level was piloted and a report summarizing findings will be available in October of 2017.

Employment, Volunteering and Service

A 2013 CNCS ORE analysis of the relationship between **volunteering and employment** found that volunteers have 27 percent higher odds of finding a job after being out of work than non-volunteers (Figure 2). Volunteers without a high school diploma as well as those living in rural areas experience even greater economic benefits. Volunteers without a high school diploma have 51 percent higher odds of finding employment after being out of work than non-volunteers. Volunteers living in rural areas have 55 percent higher odds of finding employment after being out of work than non-volunteers.

Figure 2. Volunteering and Employment



More recently, CNCS-supported scholars have found positive links between serving in AmeriCorps and employment opportunities. A team of scholars at Tufts University conducted a resume-based experiment to test whether a record of national service (AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA) on an applicant’s resume has a significantly positive impact on the prospect of getting a job. The study defined a “positive impact” as getting an offer for a job interview (Table 1). The researchers found that college graduates with AmeriCorps experience on a resume had a positive and significant effect on the likelihood of getting an interview offer: 24 percent of college graduates who were national service alumni received an interview offer, compared to 17 percent of college graduates without a service record.

Table 1. For Applicants with 4-year College Degrees

		Outcome of Submitted Application	
		No interview offered	Interview offers
Service Resume	No service	83.5%	16.5%
	Service	76.0%	24.0%
Total		80.2%	19.8%

The difference between “service” and “no service” resumes’ interview offer rates is statically significant, at p. < .05 level, using Gamma ordinal coefficient, which is 0.23.

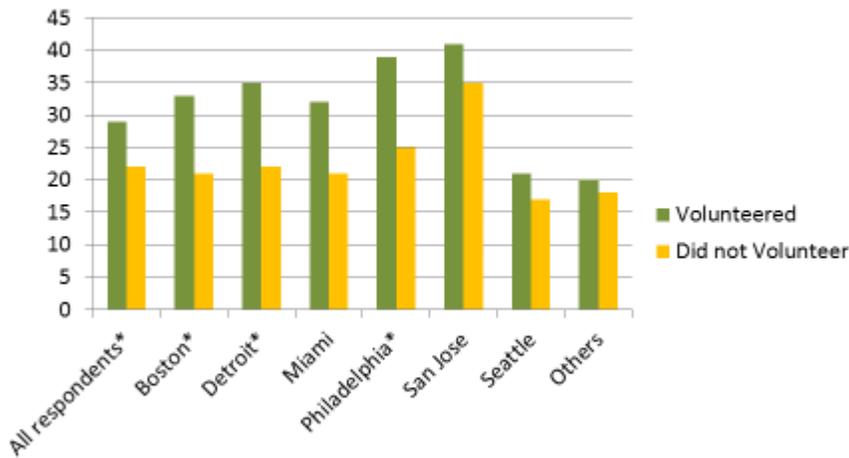
The Tufts research team is conducting additional research over the summer of 2017 to take a closer look at the preferences of organizations in hiring decisions. Hiring managers will be interviewed for their insights on how candidates with AmeriCorps experience are perceived.

In addition, a CNCS-sponsored research team at Arizona State University is exploring both individual employment pathways of AmeriCorps members and job creation within organizations that host AmeriCorps programs. Preliminary findings from a pilot project in Arizona found that 82.7 percent of organizations surveyed hired at least one AmeriCorps member since 2012. Among organizations that hired members, 57.8 percent hired members from their own sites. Of the positions, 64.3 percent were full-time and over half of the positions were newly created. The study has expanded to five other states and organizations. Alumni and former supervisors will be surveyed and interviewed during the summer of 2017.

Another CNCS-sponsored study at George Mason University is conducting a study of college-educated immigrants across six cities and analyzing associations between civic engagement, social network and economic success. This study includes follow-up interviews

with 4000 immigrant respondents. Preliminary analysis demonstrates that there are different volunteering rates across cities. In addition, economic success for immigrants was higher among individuals who volunteered (Figure 5). Building professional networks is a key factor facilitating civic involvement and both formal and informal professional networks appear to be a critical link between civic engagement and economic success.

Figure 5: Volunteering¹⁾ and Economic Success²⁾ by City



1) For a neighborhood, business or community group. 2) Earning at least \$50K, using higher education on current job and working in a professional or managerial occupation.

CNCS programs impact communities

Research shows that civic engagement promotes the quality of life in a community (Ehrlich, 2000; Sampson 2001). Communities with strong citizen participation enjoy positive economic, social and health outcomes.⁶ Communities with strong civic infrastructure, robust networks amongst its residents, and between its residents and community partners (e.g. nonprofits, businesses, local government, universities) can come together to resolve challenges and become more sustainable and vibrant places to live (Berger 2009). Indeed, recent economic research shows that living in good neighborhoods contributes to upward mobility later in life (Chetty and Hendren 2015).⁷ Research supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation at Virginia Commonwealth University’s Center on Society and Health shows that opportunities to lead a long and healthy life can vary dramatically by neighborhood.⁸

⁶ For benefits of social capital see Putnam 2000, 2002; for political engagement and democratic governance see Tavits 2006; for bridge to employment see Granovetter, 1983; for public safety see Sampson 2001, and for health of a community see Ziersch, et al., 2005.

⁷ http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/images/nbhds_paper.pdf

⁸ <http://www.societyhealth.vcu.edu/work/the-projects/mapping-life-expectancy.html>

Improved Civic Health

One CNCS research grantee has generated the most compelling evidence to date of the agency's contributions to the nation's civic health. A team of researchers at the University of Texas at Austin developed two new county-level measures; one for civic engagement and one for subjective well-being. Statistical models were used to analyze these datasets to test whether or not national service programs strengthen the overall health of communities across the United States. This team of researchers found that the presence of AmeriCorps programs (i.e. AmeriCorps State and National and VISTA) from 2005–2010 is significantly associated with levels of subjective well-being. More specifically, the AmeriCorps programming within a community buffers those communities so that citizens report fewer negative aspects of subjective well-being such as disengagement or negative relationships. The study also found that the presence of a VISTA member predicts engagement at the county level. The research team expects to release a white paper on these findings in July of 2017.

Increased Organizational Capacity

In one of the agency's most rigorous assessments of its impact on strengthening organizational capacity,⁹ a [quasi-experimental design study](#) found promising evidence of improved organizational capacities among Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grantees¹⁰. SIF grantees experienced greater increases in capacity for 1) conducting rigorous evaluations of their programs; 2) using evaluation findings to improve programs; and 3) using evaluation findings to demonstrate and communicate effectiveness of programs funded by the organization. SIF grantees attributed many organizational changes to their participation in the SIF program and the technical assistance they received from CNCS.

In addition, initial findings from twelve in-depth case analyses show that VISTA members build the capacity of organizations to serve communities, even within their first year of service. For example, VISTA members develop systems for increasing organizational efficiency, engage in outreach and partnership development to expand the organization's

⁹ See also a 2012 study of the AmeriCorps Volunteer Infrastructure Program that found positive impacts on organizational capacity, <https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange/AmeriCorps-VIP>.

¹⁰The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) was a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service that received funding from 2010 to 2016. Using public and private resources to find and grow community-based nonprofits with evidence of results, SIF intermediaries received funding to award subgrants that focus on overcoming challenges in economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development. Although CNCS made its last SIF intermediary awards in fiscal year 2016, SIF intermediaries will continue to administer their subgrant programs until their federal funding is exhausted.

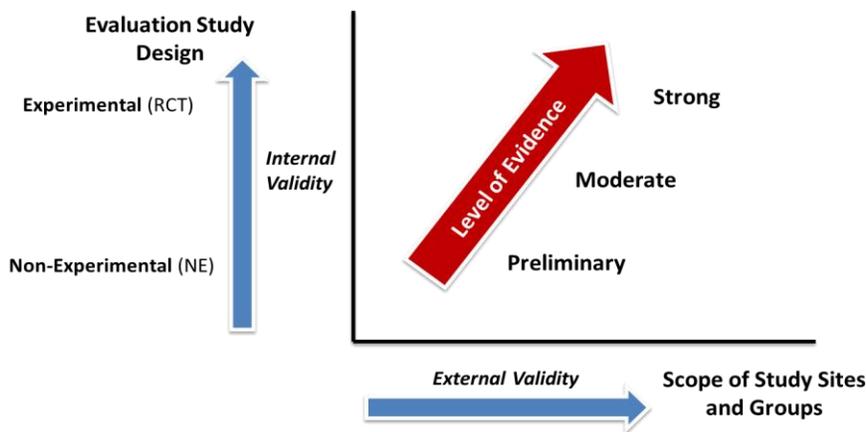
reach, and generate resources such as funding, volunteers, and in-kind donations. Final analyses will be completed in September 2017.

Effective Programs

CNCS also invests in high-capacity organizations committed to evidence-based programs and practices. In 2015 and 2016, CNCS funded 67 grants across 50 unique organizations that demonstrated rigorous evidence of program effectiveness. These partner organizations also help CNCS generate studies that establish causal impact and/or are generalizable to more diverse geographies and populations. This contributes to the strength of evidence and allows grantees to move higher along the “*evidence continuum*”.¹¹

Figure 3 shows the tiered-evidence framework that CNCS has been using to categorize the strength of evidence among its grantees and supported interventions. The three main levels of evidence are preliminary, moderate, and strong with the strength of evidence increasing through studies with positive findings using designs which establish that program impact is, in fact, attributable to the intervention (typically using quasi-experimental and experimental study designs), and/or studies that demonstrate program effectiveness and also establish that positive results of the intervention are generalizable across different target groups or different geographies, or both (diverse and expansive scope of study sites and groups). In technical terms, strength of evidence increases when studies are designed to address threats to internal validity (in order to establish causal impact) and external validity (in order to demonstrate generalizability of results).

Figure 3. Investing in an Evidence Framework



¹¹ The evidence continuum demonstrates how the infusion of progressively rigorous evaluation and measurement into every phase of a program’s lifecycle builds a cumulative evidence base for a program. <https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation/evidence-continuum>.

Funded Programs with Promising Evidence of Effectiveness

Training and Employing Workers

- Increased employment and earnings ([Saint Paul Neighborhood Network](#), [Mayors Fund Work Advance](#), [REDF Social Enterprises](#))
- Increased financial literacy and stability ([SaveUSA](#), [LISC](#), [Family Rewards](#))
- Increased access to college and careers ([College Possible](#), [Blue Engine NY](#), [Edna McConnell Clark Foundation SEED](#), [Citizen Schools](#), [Jobs for the Future National Fund for Workforce Solutions](#), [Latin American Youth Center Promotor Pathway Program](#), [Venture Philanthropy Partners Urban Alliance](#))

Building Infrastructure

- Increased affordable housing stock ([Habitat for Humanity](#))

Educating our Children

- Improved school-readiness ([Reading Corps Pre-K](#), [Jumpstart](#), [HippyCorps](#))
- Improved reading and math achievement ([Reading Corps K-3](#), [Reading Partners](#), [Teach for America](#), [BELL Summer Program](#), [Mile High United Way Jefferson Foundation](#))
- Improved school attendance and behavior ([City Year](#), [Communities in Schools](#), [WINGS for kids](#), [Playworks](#), [AARP Experience Corps](#), [Notre Dame Mission Volunteers Program](#))

Improving our Health

- Improved health behaviors ([AIDS United](#), [U.S. Soccer Foundation Soccer for Success \(SfS\) program](#)), [Up2Us Coach Across America](#), [Birth and Beyond](#).

(unlinked reports are still being processed)

In the past few years, CNCS has engaged third-party research and evaluation experts to conduct evidence reviews for grant applicants and evaluations conducted or sponsored by agency grantees. A body of evidence emerging from impact evaluations suggests that CNCS programs produce measurable results at a reasonable cost to taxpayers by investing in community-based organizations that offer residents evidence-based and evidence-informed programs. In return for their investments, taxpayers and partner institutions benefit from cost-effective solutions to train and employ the nation's workers, to support families and communities impacted by disasters and help them rebuild their lives, to educate the country's children, and to improve health outcomes. (See the recent [National Service Synthesis](#), [Social Innovation Fund Meta-Analysis](#), and [Evidence Exchange](#) to access full research reports). Examples of funded programs with promising evidence of effectiveness are listed in the adjacent text box.

The agency's increased focus on evaluation and evidence has produced lessons learned and surfaced important considerations with regard to quality and strength of evidence. For example, evidence of effectiveness for a program can come from one study or report or from multiple studies conducted over time that form a body of evidence for that program. Consistently positive evidence of impact from multiple studies over time increases confidence in program results and demonstrates stronger evidence of

effectiveness. In addition, the study design and the extent to which it is well-implemented affect the quality (reliability and validity) and strength of evidence produced. The choice of evaluation design is typically based on the research question(s) that the study seeks to answer (e.g. confirmatory and/or exploratory) as well as other technical, contextual, and logistical factors including the resources available and allocated to the study. It is also important to carefully examine findings from evaluations because most studies answer multiple questions and it is not uncommon for an impact study, for example, to demonstrate mixed (positive, null, negative) results. CNCS has drawn on lessons learned and insights generated from its efforts to date in order to refine our approach to evidence assessment, to develop a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes promising and effective programs, and to identify interventions with the strongest evidence that are poised and perhaps ready to be considered for scale up.

Effective CNCS programs increase the return on taxpayer investment¹² as the examples on the following page illustrate.

¹² The concept of ROI analysis is straightforward: calculate the ratio between what the program costs and the benefits that accrue, and see how they compare. Conducting such a study can be complex. On the cost side, a program may have a fixed level of funding. But accounting for costs that do not show up in an account ledger—like in-kind contributions, expenses covered by a parent organization, externalities, or opportunity costs lost, is challenging. On the benefits side, some gains are readily measurable, but difficult to measure or monetize intangibles may accrue over decades.

Conducting a detailed ROI study accounting for the full range of costs and benefits is a labor-intensive endeavor that places substantial demands on programs and participants. ROI literature provides extensive and creative approaches to calculating and monetizing both costs and benefits including the “ingredients approach” which identifies all resources, or ingredients (e.g., personnel, facilities, materials, and equipment), in an intervention with a cost estimate for each (McEwan, 2012).

Return on Investment for Individual CNCS-Funded Organizations

- Independent return on investment (ROI) analyses conducted on a series of nine sectoral employment training programs funded within the economic opportunity portfolio of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) conservatively estimated an average of \$2.02 return to the federal and state government for every dollar invested by federal government and match funders over a ten-year period in this public-private partnership model.
- **Reading Partners** (AmeriCorps and SIF) demonstrated a \$980 cost-saving per student compared to schools operating other similar reading programs (\$710 per student cost borne by school for Reading Partners, compared to average of \$1690 per student for other similar programs).
- **AIDS United** (SIF and AmeriCorps). The AIDS United Access to Care initiative expanded access to high-quality, life-extending care to over 5,000 people living with HIV, exceeded national viral suppression rates by 27 percent and saved up to \$8.83 in future HIV-related medical care for every \$1 spent. This innovative model puts client health first and moves communities closer to achieving the goals and progress indicators in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (2020).
- **Birth and Beyond** (AmeriCorps) – Findings from the Birth and Beyond Home Visitation program study show that the children of the parents served were 41% less likely to have a substantiated referral to child protection services and were 18% less likely to be referred to CPS at all. Moreover, four independent audits show that “Birth and Beyond” has essentially eliminated child abuse in the homes served.
- Tobacco Cessation Counseling Intervention in Primary Care (*Office of Research and Evaluation and AmeriCorps State and National*) – Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S. and related illnesses account for nearly 170 billion in medical care costs and an additional 156 billion in lost productivity. In Ohio, less than 10% of adults who smoke receive counseling and pharmacotherapy to help them quit due largely to provider time constraints. With the AmeriCorps tobacco cessation coaching program, AmeriCorps members have coached 846 smokers over the past two years, and the quit rates are 72% at 3 months and 39% at 6 months. A CNCS research grantee, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine is currently studying this model.

CNCS programs impact those who serve

Through AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, CNCS directly engages 324,000 Americans in intensive service each year at more than 50,000 locations across the country, from large cities to small towns and rural areas. These dedicated Americans serve in tough conditions to meet local needs, all while recruiting millions of other volunteers to serve alongside them and multiply their impact.¹³ In return for their service, they enjoy various economic, social and health benefits.

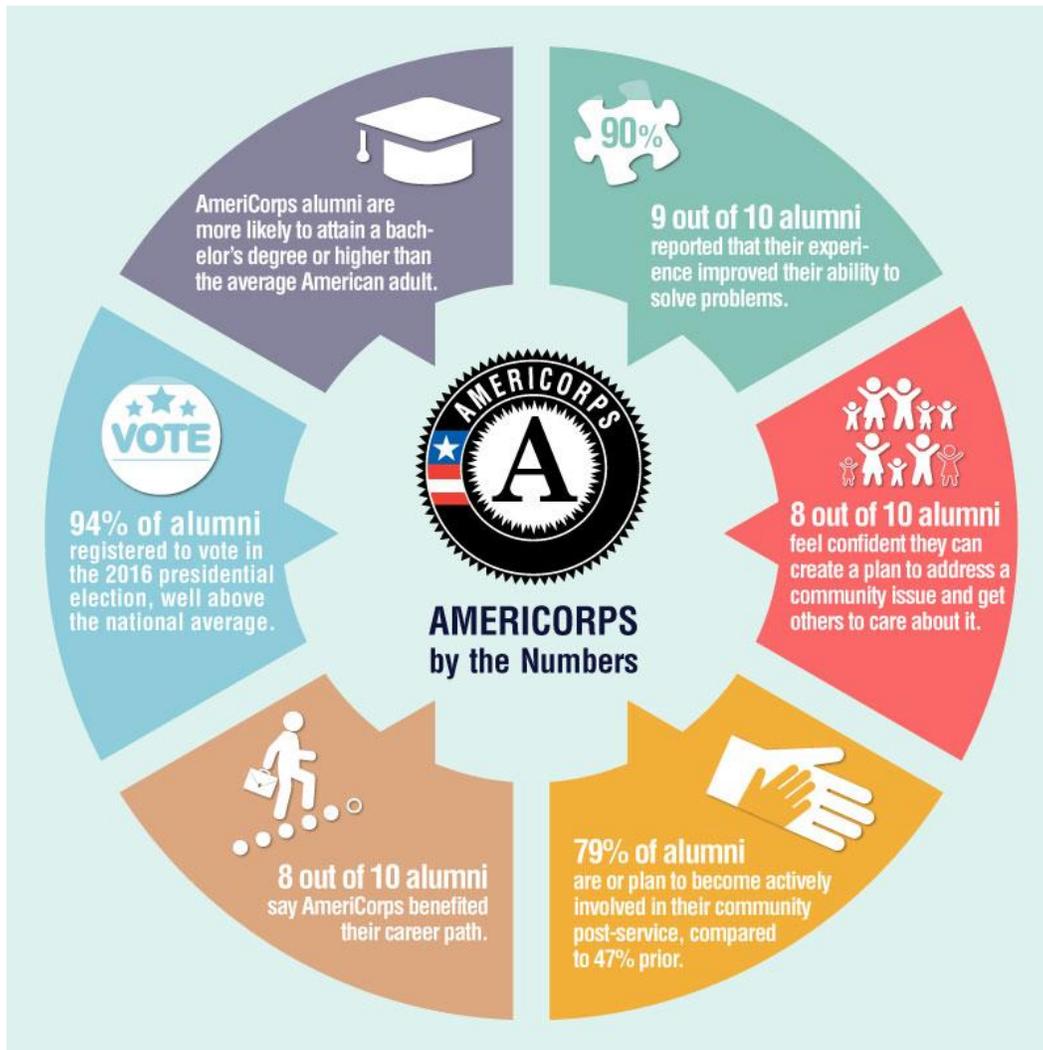
AmeriCorps

According to recent member exit survey data, 70 percent of AmeriCorps members are 24 years of age or younger. These young adults are in “emerging adulthood” when optimism is high and they are open to opportunities for transforming their lives (Arnett 2006). During this period, exposure to new ideas and experiences can enhance young adults’ abilities to work successfully in diverse groups and they may have their first consequential exposure to preparing, planning, executing, and assessing an endeavor (Allport, 1954; Brown and Hewstone, 2005; Heath, 1999; Martin and Vaughn, 2007). These young adults report gaining critical educational, employment, and civic benefits through service. A recent survey of nearly 4,000 AmeriCorps alumni from the 2005, 2010, and 2013 cohorts found positive results (Figure 4¹⁴). Questions were based on the AmeriCorps member exit survey and focused on long-term civic participation, career pathways, education outcomes, and skill acquisition of AmeriCorps alumni. AmeriCorps is a personally and professionally defining experience. For example, eight out of ten alumni say AmeriCorps benefited their career path and 79 percent are, or plan to become, actively involved in their community after service, compared to 47 percent prior to service.

¹³ https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/CNCS_FY2016_AFR.pdf

¹⁴ AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Study - <https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange/AmeriCorps-Alumni-Outcomes>

Figure 4. AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes



As with the G.I. Bill, AmeriCorps members earn education awards following their civilian national service term to help them advance their educational attainment. From the beginning of their use in 1995, through FY16, nearly 580,000 AmeriCorps alumni have used these awards to put over \$2 billion towards higher education.¹⁵

Recent analyses conducted by the [Hamilton Project](#) concluded the work-life earnings of a typical bachelor's degree graduate is \$1.19 million, twice that of a typical high school graduate. Similarly, estimates of work-life earnings reported by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) illustrate that each successively higher education level is associated with an increase in

¹⁵ Segal Award dataset - <https://data.nationalservice.gov/National-Service/Segal-AmeriCorps-Education-Award-Payments-by-State/dz6i-y5ak>

earnings. As the survey findings reported here indicate, participating in AmeriCorps and other national service programs, increases educational opportunities and the likelihood for getting an interview offer by employers (Table 1). Employment translates into increased individual earnings and important tax revenue for the country.

Education awards can also be used to pay off student loan debt. Given that recent reports indicate the average Class of 2016 graduate has \$37,172 in student loan debt and the student loan delinquency rate is 11 percent, this is an important benefit to both members and taxpayers.

Senior Corps

Research shows positive cognitive, physical, and psychosocial health benefits are associated with active life styles and volunteering among older adults. Remaining active later in life is also associated with reduced incidence of disability, increased generativity, and prolonged life expectancy (Gruenewald, et al., 2015). Alternatively, studies on loneliness and social isolation (Cacioppo, et al., 2011) of older adults demonstrate that fewer social interactions can accelerate cognitive decline (Carlson, et al., 2009), and isolated individuals are twice as likely to die prematurely as those with more robust social interactions (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Thus, finding opportunities for older adults to remain active and socially connected can positively impact their health (Hong & Morrow-Howell, 2010).

Older adults serving as Senior Corps volunteers also experience health benefits compared to similar seniors who don't volunteer. A 2013-2014 CNCS-sponsored study of a representative sample of 8,000 Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions was drawn from 30,860 respondents and compared to a matched sample of volunteers and non-volunteers from the [Health and Retirement Study \(HRS\)](#). Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions were 88% female with a mean age of 72, 40% were African American, and 12% were Latino. The study used descriptive and propensity score matching analyses to answer the research questions. Relative to the matched sample, Senior Companions reported a 16 percent prevalence of poor/fair health compared to a 49 percent prevalence of poor/fair health among HRS non-volunteers ($p < .0001$). In comparison to the matched sample, Foster Grandparents reported a 40 percent prevalence of excellent/very good health and a 43 percent prevalence of

Senior Corps volunteers support aging in place which can translate into healthcare savings for both Medicare and private insurance companies (see [Measuring the Cost Savings to Aging in Place; States Seek to Keep Seniors Out of Nursing Homes](#)).

An [economic impact survey](#) of elder Maine residents receiving regular visits by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension's Senior Companion Program has concluded that the program saved at least \$4.6 million in 2011 by supporting elders choosing to remain in their own homes.

good health compared to a 22 percent prevalence of excellent/very good health and a 32 percent prevalence of good health for the matched HRS non-volunteers ($p < .0001$)

In 2015, Senior Corps began a longitudinal study of both its Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) and Senior Companion Program (SCP) volunteers and the caregivers of its Senior Companion Program clients. The volunteer study examined the health and psycho-social effects of serving as a Foster Grandparent or Senior Companion. The study measures a sample of 987 senior national service volunteers at initial entry into FGP/SCP and at one and two year follow-up points. Recent findings from the first follow-up demonstrate positive effects on volunteers' self-rated health, loneliness, social connectedness, and symptoms of depression and anxiety within one year after starting service.

Findings from caregivers served in the Senior Companion Program are also positive. Approximately 50–60 percent of those with critical need reported that Senior Companion services helped them 'a lot' or 'a great deal' to become more involved in social and entertainment activities, manage requests or demands from family and friends, organize time to pay bills or do paperwork, and enjoy time with their friends or relatives.¹⁶ Additionally, within one year following the start of respite support, approximately 40 percent of caregivers reported improvement in their health and functional limitations. This indicates that having a Senior Companion can result in an improvement in overall perceived health.

Final survey data and analysis is expected in October 2018.

Almost half (46 percent) of new volunteers measured at the baseline reported improvement in health and well-being at the one year follow-up. Additionally, 63 percent of volunteers who reported that they 'often' felt alone at the baseline, reported decreases in feelings of isolation at the one year follow-up. Over two-thirds (70 percent) of those who reported five or more symptoms of depression at baseline and stayed in the program, reported fewer symptoms at follow-up. This also held true for 63 percent of volunteers who reported three or four symptoms at baseline. These positive effects do not appear to be due to healthier individuals staying in the program.

¹⁶ These findings are from a working paper, *Health Effects of Volunteering as a Foster Grandparent or Senior Companion* May 2017, by researchers from JBS International, Inc., Annie Georges, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate Wenson Fung, Ph.D., Research Associate Jenée Smith, B.A., Research Assistant Jenny Liang, B.A., Research Assistant Donald Pratt, Ph.D., Research Associate Carmen Sum, M.B.A., Senior Research Associate Claudia Birmingham, M.A., Research Associate Susan Gabbard, Ph.D., Vice President.

Civic engagement and service within specific populations

CNCS programs seek to engage specific populations in service because of the belief that national service may have a particularly transformative effect. The evidence supporting this theory is still emerging. Studies designed to examine how veterans, opportunity youth, and immigrant populations may benefit from participating in national service programs are described briefly.

Veterans. CNCS has recruited more than 27,000 veterans to serve as AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members across 200 American communities. Veteran members help other veterans and military families access benefits and services; obtain job training and conduct job searches; find safe and affordable housing; and mentor and tutor children of service members.¹⁷ Service is innate to military personnel and veterans. The 2015 Veterans Civic Health Index report¹⁸ indicates that veterans tend to volunteer more hours annually than nonveterans and are more likely than nonveterans to be regular volunteers. Young veterans, or veterans aged 20–49, are reported to have the highest rate of volunteering among all Americans.¹⁸ Several CNCS programs involving veterans and military families are currently proposing evaluation studies. For a complete list of programs and studies, see the CNCS research brief [National/Community Service and Veterans and Military Families: Programs, Evidence, and Possibilities](#).

Opportunity Youth (OY). CNCS is sponsoring a study that examines if opportunity youth¹⁹ engaged as AmeriCorps members improve, relative to a comparison group of similar OY not participating in AmeriCorps programs, on measures of educational attainment, employment attainment, and community engagement. For some young adults, participating in national service programs can be an even more critical catalyst for becoming a successful citizen. There are 272 opportunity youth engaged as AmeriCorps members participating in the study (there are 320 comparison youth). At baseline, the majority of OY in both the treatment and comparison groups report being non-white (72.5 percent), non-Hispanic (82.9 percent), male (60.5 percent), and receiving some form of government assistance (52.4 percent). Most participants are not limited due to physical, mental, or emotional problems (89.4 percent), are not the parent or primary caregiver of a child (74.2 percent), and do not have a criminal history (67.7 percent).

¹⁷ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/focus-areas/veterans-and-military-families>

¹⁸ <https://gotyour6.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Veterans-Civic-Health-Index-2015.pdf>

¹⁹ From the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014: Opportunity youth, or disconnected youth, are “individuals between the ages of 14 and 24 who are low income and either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, unemployed, or not enrolled in or at risk of dropping out of an educational institution.”

Early results from sites that have completed pre/post-test survey activities indicate that in several programs, particularly those emphasizing educational attainment, more OY AmeriCorps members report achieving a high-school diploma/GED or enrolling in an educational program (e.g. technical program, vocational training, or community college) than at baseline. At several sites, more members report full-time employment, and completing critical job search activities (e.g. resume writing) than at baseline. Many youth report engaging in civic activities, such as volunteering or donating money to a cause they support, more frequently.

Importantly, the results from pre-/post-tests indicate that many youth are reassessing their level of preparation and planning for the future: self-reported measures of employment and educational skills and preparation have fallen since pre-test. Rather than indicating that the programs are causing harm to members, it seems to indicate (almost across the board) that members may be realizing the extent of their preparation and skills gaps, though they remain confident in their abilities to overcome these gaps. Final results are expected in the spring of 2018.

Latino populations. A CNCS-sponsored research team based at California State University San Marcos is conducting a study that seeks to understand the effectiveness of a culturally appropriate civic engagement curriculum (*Cultivando Liderazgo, Nurturing Leadership*). The eight-week civics course was designed to be multi-generational so that entire families could learn about civic engagement together. While the curriculum had been used in the community for several years, specific outcomes for participants had never been formally assessed. Participants include individuals as well as families. A total of 300 participants, 75 percent of whom are immigrants, have completed the course and the baseline survey. Participants are asked questions about their civic knowledge and participation after completing the course and again three months later. Oral histories and photo-elicitation interviews are also conducted to learn more about how participants experience community involvement and are civically engaged. Preliminary analyses are expected in the fall of 2017.

Conclusion

Integrating quality evidence into budget, management, and policy decisions has allowed the agency to test promising programs and practices to see if they are effective and capable of replication. During the past 3 fiscal years CNCS programs made significant investments in research, evaluation and evidence. Indicators of this investment include preference points for evidence in grant award decisions, resources allocated to building the evaluation capacity of grantees, and evaluation requirements for grantees (See Appendix A for additional indicators). CNCS also invested in making data and evidence publicly available so that taxpayers have access to findings. This report reflects this commitment to transparency. Building, sharing, and using evidence has helped CNCS achieve better results and create greater returns for American citizens.

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Appendix A

Indicators of the Agency's Investment in Evidence

This appendix highlights a few key internal indicators of CNCS's investments in research, evaluation and evidence. CNCS shares information with external organizations that monitor other indicators that highlight the agency's use of research, evidence and evaluation in grant making and program improvement such as Results for America.²⁰ CNCS programs and grantees are at different points in building evidence and integrating evaluation in their work.

Availability of Evaluation Resources, Reports, and Data

- ORE expanded [evaluation resources](#) for grantees to strengthen grantees' evidence-building efforts and their capacity. The importance of providing these resources to CNCS's partner organizations is confirmed by national studies conducted on the nonprofit sector (see [Innovation Network's State of Evaluation Project](#) and [2016 State of Evaluation Report](#)).
- The *Evidence Exchange*, an electronic repository for reports, was launched in September 2015. Since it launched, a total of 79 research reports have been made available to the public (eight in FY15; 43 in FY16; and 28 in FY17 thus far).
- *CNCS Open Data* platform was launched in November 2016. Since it launched, three datasets have been released to the public with 460 charts/graphs and 55 maps produced by the agency.

Allocating Points for Providing Evidence or Strong Evaluation Plans in the Grant Application Process

- *AmeriCorps State and National*: Applicants are awarded points for providing evidence from prior studies and evaluations that demonstrate the proposed intervention will lead to outcomes identified in the theory of change. Points allocated to evidence in grant applications:
 - FY15: 25 points of 100 (17 points include Theory of Change and Logic Model and 8 points include Evidence Base).
 - FY16: 27 points of 100 (15 points include Theory of Change and Logic Model and 12 points include Evidence Base).
 - FY17: 31 points of 100 (19 points include Theory of Change and Logic Model and 12 points include Evidence Base).

²⁰ See Results for America (<http://results4america.org/tool/index/>)

- *Social Innovation Fund: Percentage allocated to the evaluation portion for grant applications:*
 - FY12 to FY16: 30 percent of 100.
- *Senior Corps:*
 - FY17: Used evidence more as a threshold for eligibility for Senior Corps Augmentation Grants.

Dollars Invested through Grants for Research, Evidence, and Evaluation

- *Office of Research and Evaluation:*
 - FY15, National Service and Civic Engagement Grant Competition, \$923,100.00 dollars.
 - FY16, National Service and Civic Engagement Grant Competition Continuation and Supplemental, Total: \$1,436,003.00 dollars (Continuation: \$1,061,003.00; Supplemental: \$375,000.00).
 - FY17, AmeriCorps State and National Evidence-Based Planning Grants: \$489,978.00 dollars [funded by ORE and co-managed with ASN].
- *AmeriCorps State and National:*
 - FY16 and FY17: Commission Investment Fund grants, focuses on performance measurement and evaluation capacity building. Priority Area 3 focuses on evaluation capacity building.
 - FY16: 38 Commissions included Priority Area 3 in their CIF grants and have an allocation of \$4,382,187 dollars.
 - FY17: 38 Commissions included Priority Area 3 in their CIF grants and have an allocation of \$5,391,705.
- *Senior Corps:*
 - In total in FY17, Senior Corps plans to spend \$3.14 million²¹ (representing 1.6 percent of Senior Corps' \$202.11 million budget in FY17) in evaluation and evidence building activities.
 - These evaluation and evidence building activities include: new evidence-based programming augmentation grants²²; program evaluation of JumpStart; reviews of grantee evaluation plans and reports; longitudinal survey of volunteers who participate in Senior Corps programs that examines health and well-being outcomes over time; researching the implementation of programming models;

²¹ This figure does not include any grantees already doing evidence-based programming that did not apply for an augmentation grant. This figure is not available at this time.

²² In FY 17, Senior Corps augmentation grants allocated \$1,200,000 dollars (RSVP: \$500,000, Foster Grand Parent, \$400,000 and Senior Companion P: \$300,000). For augmentation funding, Senior Corps grantees seek funding through the administrative renewal process and are encouraged to implement new or expanded volunteer service activities in support of an evidence-based program.

and, conducting focus group with senior Corps program directors to inform policy development.

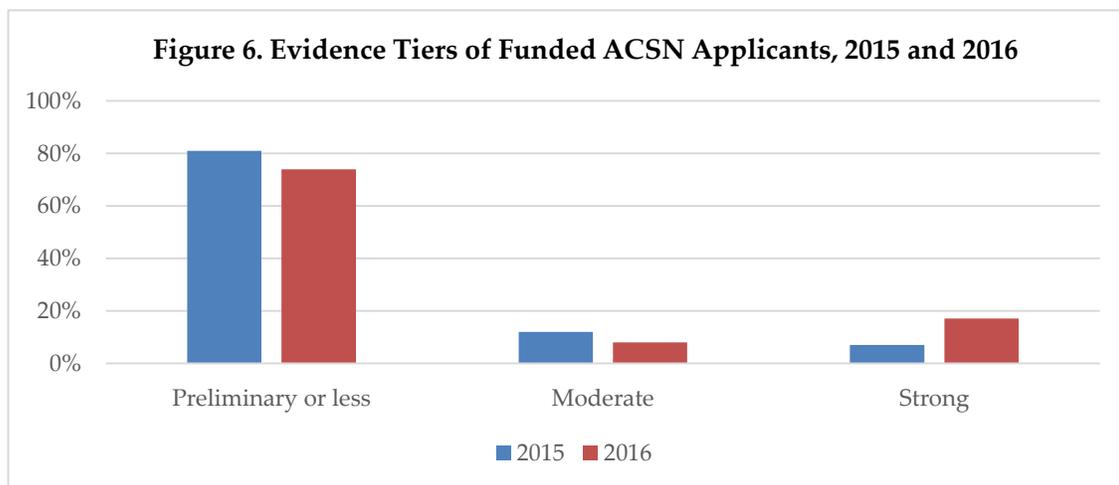
Dollars Invested for Evaluation Capacity Building for Grantees

- *AmeriCorps State and National:*
 - FY16, AmeriCorps State and National Opportunity Youth Evaluation Bundling, \$482,566.79.
 - This program is both an evaluation study and a capacity building project. Technical assistance and coaching is provided to grantees as they design and implement an evaluation.
 - FY17, Evaluation Capacity Building and AmeriCorps State and National Opportunity Youth Evaluation Bundling, \$1,000,797.70 (Evaluation Capacity Building: \$535,164.02; and Bundling: \$ 465,633.68).
- *Social Innovation Fund:*
 - FY16, SIF Evaluation Review and Monitoring Project, \$408,643.

Funding Rigorous Evidence

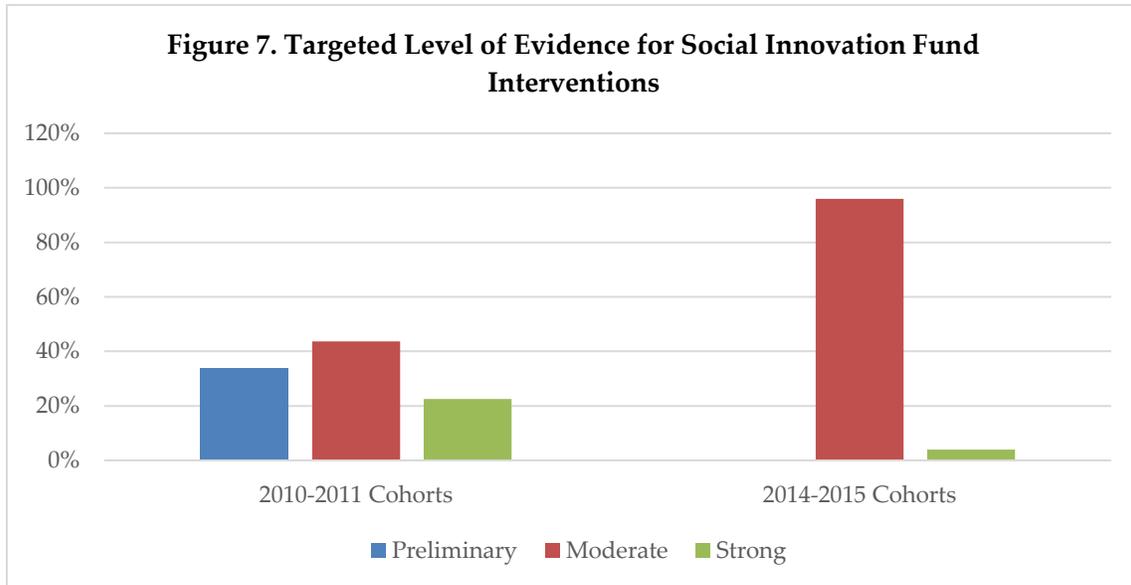
Rigorous evidence is generally defined as positive findings obtained from research studies that use an experimental or quasi-experimental design. These designs allow for scientifically credible cause-effect attributions between program activities and results.

- *AmeriCorps State and National:*
 - The percentage of funded AmeriCorps State and National applicants with rigorous evidence increased from 19 percent in 2015, to 26 percent in 2016, with a noticeable increase in the most rigorous evidence tier from 7 percent to 17 percent (Figure 6).

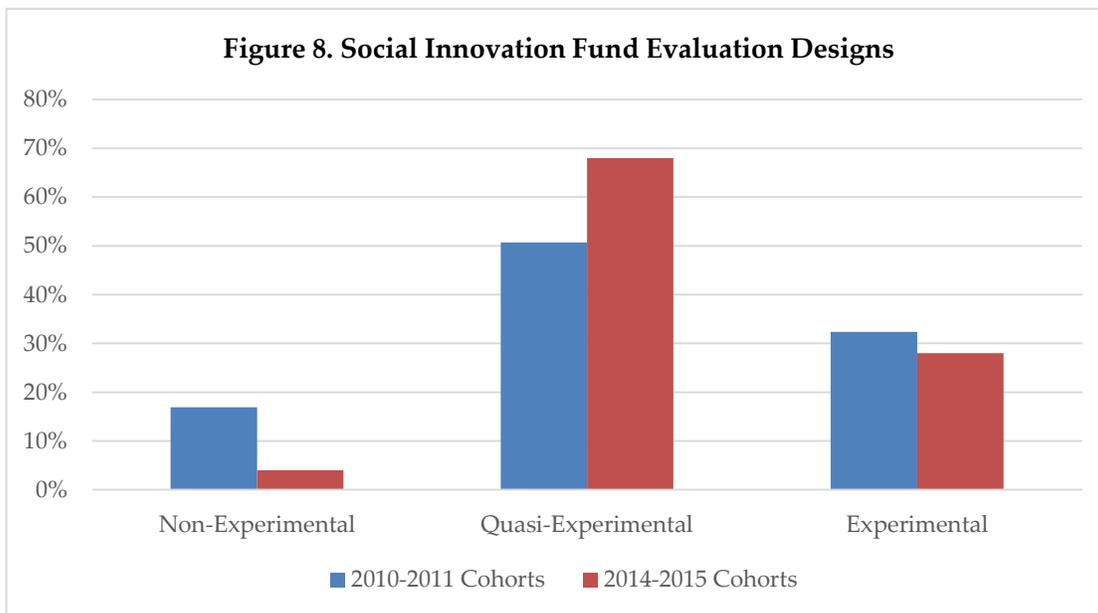


- *Social Innovation Fund:*

- The percentage of SIF grantee evaluations targeting moderate or strong levels of evidence increased from 67 percent in the 2010 and 2011 cohorts to 100 percent in the 2014 and 2015 cohorts (Figure 7).



- Rigorous evaluations for Social Innovation Fund interventions have increased. In the 2010- 2011 cohorts, 82 percent of program evaluations were using experimental or quasi-experimental designs and in the 2014-2015 cohorts, 96 percent were using rigorous evaluation designs (Figure 8).



- VISTA
 - FY16: VISTA Qualitative Analysis, \$90,000.
 - This study measures the concurrence of service activities between VISTA project applications, VISTA member position descriptions, and VISTA project reports. The report will be finalized fall of 2017.



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