

file AmeriCorps

TO: Karen Tramontano

FROM: John Gomperts
Corporation for National Service

DATE December 4, 1998

RE: Increasing Public Awareness of AmeriCorps

Following our recent meeting and in response to your specific request, we have outlined a 6 - 9 month plan for ways in which the President and other White House principals and Administration surrogates can increase the public's understanding of AmeriCorps. Indeed, our aim should be to make AmeriCorps a household word, one in which the great majority of people take pride.

Of course, we are delighted by the interest the White House is showing in helping us promote AmeriCorps and national service, and we want to work with you to craft ideas that meet our objectives and fit into your broader plans to use the time and resources of the White House. As you suggested, we have organized our thinking around the themes and objectives that we expect to be pursuing in the coming weeks and months. So first I describe our own focus and plans for the coming months. Second, I present the themes that the President and others can use in support of our efforts. Then, I lay out a timeline of possible events and activities that would help to amplify the themes and achieve the objectives.

* * *

OUR STRATEGY AND GOALS

Naturally, White House efforts will work best if they are part of our overall strategy. Much of our thinking is reflected in the materials and campaign we put together in preparation for the event celebrating the 100,000th AmeriCorps member. Although the White House celebration had to be postponed, we saw that benchmark as the beginning of a campaign that we always planned to continue. The key elements of that campaign are as follows:

Focus on the members. As I described in our meeting, too much attention has been focused on Washington political battles about AmeriCorps. We want to shift attention to AmeriCorps members and what they are doing. This refocusing extends from planning our own activities to framing our message to the outside world. From our ongoing conversations with the elite media, to pitches to local newspapers and television stations, to conversations with elected officials, presenting AmeriCorps members as new patriots is our most consistently successful



approach. This focus on the members is reflected in the positive press and editorial coverage we have already received, and it will be our continuing emphasis in our events and travel of our principals.

Growing AmeriCorps. As you know, in separate venues we are pressing hard for a significant increase in the size of AmeriCorps. While we have reached the 100,000 member mark in total AmeriCorps members, we want to get to the point where there are 100,000 AmeriCorps members *every* year by the end of the Administration. The visibility plan we are presenting should help to realize this specific policy objective.

Stepped-up recruiting campaign. We need idealistic, energetic, young Americans to join AmeriCorps. To fill AmeriCorps slots (and hopefully more slots soon) we will launch an aggressive recruiting campaign including a new PSA produced by MTV, a mailing to more than 300,000 college seniors, print ads featuring AmeriCorps members, and a number of AmeriCorps member-organized events and service projects on college campuses.

Continue to build bipartisan support. From the time when the President asked Senator Wofford to head the Corporation, our overriding objective has been to build bipartisan support for national service, especially AmeriCorps. That means courting Governors and Mayors as well as members of Congress. (This also means working hard to present AmeriCorps in a non-political fashion to the greatest extent possible, and recognizing that as we bring more positive attention to AmeriCorps, our detractors will escalate their efforts as well.)

Energize the field. Unfortunately, to date, the national service field has not been a strong voice supporting or defending national service. From our efforts with major non-profit partners, to Governor-appointed state commissions on national and community service, to AmeriCorps Alums, to key allies such as America's Promise and the Points of Light Foundation, strengthening the national service field continues to be one of our key strategic objectives.

KEY THEMES FOR WHITE HOUSE

AmeriCorps has come of age. No longer a small, "boutique" program, AmeriCorps recently passed its 100,000 member milestone -- a mark it took the Peace Corps more than 20 years to achieve. This year more than 40,000 AmeriCorps members will be recruited by programs all over the country, approximately 7,000 more than the Marines are recruiting. (N.B. A proposal to substantially increase the size of AmeriCorps would make the "coming of age" point even more pertinent.)

AmeriCorps solves problems. When it comes to improving childhood literacy, providing quality after-school programs, reducing violence in schools and neighborhoods, preventing drug abuse by teens, responding to natural disasters -- AmeriCorps is getting the job done. We will be able to release timely research and evaluation reports to support these claims of AmeriCorps' success.

AmeriCorps is creating America's future leaders and building communities. When the President declared "the era of big government is over," he also said that "the era of big challenges is not, and so we need an era of big citizenship." Like many others, the President was looking to individual citizens and to our civic institutions to take on-- or share-- some of the responsibilities that had previously been the province of government. AmeriCorps does just that, through partnerships with more than a thousand national, state, and local non-profit, educational, religious and civic organizations. Like their counterparts in the Peace Corps and the military, AmeriCorps members are serving their country. But in the case of AmeriCorps members, the new patriotism they demonstrate is in service on the homefront, in tackling some of the most urgent problems of our hard-pressed communities. AmeriCorps members serve with—and strengthen—the local non-profits that are on the frontlines of some of our most difficult problems.

AmeriCorps is a model of local control and reinventing government. The general perception remains that AmeriCorps is a top-down, Washington-run operation. Nothing could be further from the truth – most AmeriCorps grants are made and most AmeriCorps positions are allotted through governor-appointed, bipartisan state commissions. This structural point is the key to AmeriCorps' popularity and bipartisan support among governors. And an even more fundamental kind of devolution is in the fact that projects using AmeriCorps members are run by the local, state, and national non-profits who recruit, select, and support the members. The sooner people understand that AmeriCorps is a model of devolution to the states and the civic sector and of reinventing government, the sooner we will win the full public acceptance and enthusiasm we need.

TIMELINE OF SUGGESTED EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

December 1998

Service on December 21/22. We are told that the President and the First Lady are interested in performing service in connection with the holidays, most likely on December 21 or 22. In a separate memo, we have proposed sites that include AmeriCorps members that would be appropriate venues for this service. In addition, we suggest that this might be an opportunity to announce the following initiatives:

- ◆ AmeriCorps Promise Fellows grants (representing more than 550 new AmeriCorps members). AmeriCorps Promise Fellows is a joint initiative between AmeriCorps and America's Promise. The grant announcement, a total commitment of nearly \$10 million, is the realization of the idea the President announced in his speech at City Year's convention in Cleveland in June. It is tremendously appreciated by General Powell and the leaders of the state and local efforts around the country to achieve the goals for children and youth set at the Presidents' Summit for America's Future.

- ◆ President's Student Service Award. Modeled on the President's Physical Fitness Awards, this new award program will recognize (with a Presidential letter and a pin) students who have served at least 100 hours. This is a key goal of the Presidents' Summit which the President has repeatedly championed: that young people should be challenged and given opportunities themselves to serve, not just to be served.
- ◆ Martin Luther King Day grants. This year we have doubled the amount of mini-grants to support service on the King Holiday to \$500,000 with 100 communities receiving grants. These grants have played a key part in turning the holiday more and more into "a day on-- not a day off," a day of service throughout the country. Last year the President announced the grants in a radio address.

January 1999

Event marking AmeriCorps' 100,000 member milestone. The news for this event would be the President's request for increase in AmeriCorps' funding. We also propose using this as the opportune moment to release an independent report on AmeriCorps' accomplishments. This new research covers the last three years and provides very positive outcome data. The event might include swearing in new AmeriCorps members (representing the 100,000 who have served) to give the event strong regional media opportunities.

MLK Day (January 18th). In 1994, President Clinton signed legislation making the Martin Luther King holiday a day of service. Last year, the President and Mrs. Clinton celebrated this day by participating in two different service events in Washington, DC. This year, hundreds of service projects are taking place across the country. The President, other principals and surrogates should participate in high profile service projects on the Monday holiday. Alternatively, the actual day of Dr. King's birthday-- January 15, three days before the holiday, could be an occasion for the President to do something symbolic to make the call for service on the holiday itself.

State of the Union. While we realize the intense competition over the material to be included in the State of the Union, being in the speech is also one measure of the significance of an issue. Therefore, we strongly recommend that the President refer to the 100,000 member milestone in the speech and that he make his request for a significant funding increase for AmeriCorps as part of a more general call to citizen service. In addition, we suggest that Millard Fuller, President of Habitat for Humanity International, and one of the more than 500 AmeriCorps members who serve with Habitat be invited to sit in the box with the First Lady. Fuller is a big fan of the First Lady and vice versa—and of AmeriCorps—and his presence will help us to make the point about the partnership between AmeriCorps and faith organizations and major non-profits.

NGA Meeting. As noted above, the structure of AmeriCorps depends heavily on Governors. That is why many Governors, Democrats and Republicans alike, are enthusiastic

about AmeriCorps. This enthusiasm includes, notably, Govs. Carper and Leavitt, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the NGA. The President's talk to the NGA meeting is an excellent opportunity for the President to thank Governors for their leadership on this issue, and to ask them to join him in the general call to service to all Americans. (We have State Profiles on all that AmeriCorps and the other streams of national service do in each state. These State Profiles can be released at any time.)

February 1999

Launch the "Call to Service" recruitment drive and campus tour. In February AmeriCorps will launch a major new, member-led recruitment drive. All White House principals and key Administration surrogates can play a role in this campaign. We hope that the President will make a major "Call to Service" speech (probably on a college campus) promoting the broad ethic of service and asking students to serve their country through AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, or the military. Possible venues include, the University of Michigan (where President Kennedy first raised the idea of the Peace Corps), Notre Dame University (where the President gave his major address on national service during the 1992 campaign), a historically black college, or any other college with a strong ethic and history of service.

AmeriCorps Promise Fellows training. The President or a White House principal should address this gathering of some 500 AmeriCorps Promise Fellows, the new group of AmeriCorps members that is the result of the partnership between AmeriCorps and America's Promise. Colin Powell is expected to speak to this group on February 26. The White House participation can be timed to precede, coincide with, or follow Gen. Powell's appearance. The event will likely be in the Washington DC area.

March 1999

Event to emphasize AmeriCorps' partnership with the religious community. We would like to plan an event designed to call attention to this partnership; to emphasize the fact that more than 8,000 AmeriCorps members now serve with religious organizations, and to recognize the tremendous work that churches are doing to strengthen communities. Possible venues include: National Prayer Breakfast (may be in February) or a gathering of religious youth organizations.

Alternative Spring Break build with Habitat for Humanity. The President and White House principals and/or surrogates should participate in a build with AmeriCorps, Habitat and hundreds of college students as part of the Collegiate Challenge. This year we expect that more than 8,000 college students will participate in this event at 10 main sites between February 14 and April 10.

April 1999

AmeriCorps All-Stars. As part of our effort to focus more on AmeriCorps members, we propose to create a new recognition program called AmeriCorps All-Stars. We would select 25 exceptional AmeriCorps members from around the country who would come to Washington to be recognized during National Volunteer Week, perhaps on National Youth Service Day. The ceremony would be similar to the Teacher of the Year event, and it would afford the opportunity to focus on the extraordinary people who join AmeriCorps and their accomplishments as AmeriCorps members.

National Volunteer Week/National Youth Service Day/Earth Day. These annual events provide extremely good opportunities to reinforce the messages being promoted as part of the overall public awareness effort. The President, Vice President and other surrogates could serve alongside AmeriCorps members. This is also a perfect opportunity for surrogates to participate in the Call to Service tour. During National Volunteer Week AmeriCorps will be hosting a number of recruitment activities on college campuses. Participation by principals and cabinet members in these events would significantly increase the visibility of this effort.

May - June 1999

College Commencements. The Call to Service should be a consistent and leading theme in the commencement addresses of the President and other Administration officials. Once again, young people should be asked to give at least one year of their life to their country through service in AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps or the military.

AmeriCorps and America Reads event. Do an event, either at a tutoring site or as a press briefing, with Secretary Riley to release an independent study on the success of AmeriCorps' childhood literacy programs.

Annual City Year Conference. City Year, one of the most notable and successful sponsors of AmeriCorps members, holds an annual gathering of all City Year members, called CYZYGY. The President spoke at this conference last June in Cleveland. The First Lady spoke to the 1997 CYZYGY in Providence, Rhode Island. The 1999 conference will be held in Washington DC, probably at Howard University. This might be a very good setting for the Vice President to perform service or speak to the group— or for a return visit by the First Lady. (June 2-5)

National and Community Service Conference. We co-sponsor this annual conference with the Points of Light Foundation. This year the conference (which attracts more than 2000 participants) will be held in Las Vegas from June 6-10. A videotaped message from the President and/or the First Lady would be a way to reach this group of key partners and leaders in volunteering and service.

September 1999

5th year anniversary celebration. September marks the five year anniversary of the AmeriCorps launch. We expect major national, state, and local events marking this milestone. We recommend the President and all White House principals participate in one or more events to celebrate the accomplishments of the nearly 150,000 people (at that point) who have served their country and community through AmeriCorps. This celebration will be another occasion to bring attention to exemplary AmeriCorps members.

Anytime

Meetings with AmeriCorps members. Any White House principal or other Administration official can meet with AmeriCorps members in the course of their travels. These meetings are thrilling for the members, and are often powerful learning experiences. We encourage these types of encounters, and can arrange meetings, either at service sites or otherwise, in many locations around the country.

Rally the field. Through the course of the year we will have a number of instances in which significant participants in the national service field will be gathered in Washington and other places around the country. These gatherings of members of Governor-appointed state commissions, significant non-profit partners in the youth service and volunteer field, board members of grantee organizations, and philanthropic and private sector partners, are terrific opportunities to motivate the national service field.

* * *

Again, I want to emphasize how pleased we are by your interest in working with us to advance AmeriCorps and promote the cause of national service. At your urging, we have laid out an ambitious plan. I recognize that we are asking a great deal, but we hear the clock ticking and want to make the most of the time remaining. Naturally, the suggestions in this memo are a starting point for further discussions, and we can be flexible in shaping events and activities. In any case, we believe that this undertaking, whatever form it ultimately takes, will not only help us achieve our strategic objectives, but will also reflect extremely well on the President and his Administration.

Cc: Bruce Reed
Ann Lewis
Gene Sperling
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*file
Americorps*



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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 10, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT AMERICORPS CALL TO SERVICE EVENT

Richie Coliseum
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

2:34 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Ladies and gentlemen, when I was listening to Stephen and Leslie and Justin and Pepe talk, I was reminded of why I wanted to be President -- so that I could give young people like them the chance to make America a better place. (Applause.)

I want to thank all those who are here today who have supported our efforts. I thank Harris Wofford for his outstanding leadership of the Corporation of National Service. (Applause.) Deb Jospin and John Gomperts of AmeriCorps. I thank Governor Glendening and Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend for making Maryland America's leading state for citizen service. They have really done -- (applause.) I thank my good friend, Prince George's County Executive Wayne Curry; Senator Mike Miller, my longtime friend; and Mayor Jacobs, thank you for making us welcome. Carson Dailey, thank you for the work MTV did on those wonderful spots, the PSAs.

I would like to thank also the mother of the Lt.

Governor, my good friend, Ethel Kennedy, for being here today. (Applause.) And I thank Mark Gearan, our Peace Corps Director, and I'll say a little more about the Peace Corps in a minute and its relationship to AmeriCorps.

I'd like to thank one person who is not here today, but who was on the front lines of creating AmeriCorps, Senator Barbara Mikulski, your United States Senator from Maryland. I thank her. (Applause.) I want to thank the President of the University of Maryland, on my right; and the President of the Student Government of the University of Maryland, on my left -- (applause) -- for making me welcome. Avery and Dr. Mote, thank you. (Applause.)

You have already heard from Dr. Mote and others that six years ago I came here to celebrate the end of the Summer of Service, which was our dry run for this national service program. We wanted to work out the kinks and see whether we could make this idea go. There were three people who are here who were instrumental on that day; I would like to thank them: Georgia Sorensen, Marilyn Smith and my former White House staffer, whom I miss very much, Bill Galstone. Thank you all very much for what you have done. (Applause.)

And I thank the University of Maryland for the College Park Scholars, the Team Maryland Athletes -- (applause) -- the work-study students that are tutoring, and the others from the students and faculty who demonstrate the power of citizen service.

Let me say to all of you, when I ran for President in 1992 I wanted to get America working again and moving again, but I also wanted to bring America together again. It seemed to me that we had two great problems. One is that our economy was not functioning very well and we seemed to be getting weaker, but also that we seemed to be letting our divisions overcome what we have in common.

Martin Luther King once said that the old law of an eye for an eye sooner or later leaves everyone blind. I always believed that America's differences could be the source of our strength if we respected and we celebrated our differences, but we understood that, underneath it all, there was something that bound us together that was more important.

So, as I look back on the last six years, I think we can all take a great deal of pride in what our country has achieved together -- economically, the longest peacetime expansion in history; the lowest peacetime unemployment rate since 1957, 42 years ago -- (applause) -- welfare rolls cut nearly in half; the lowest crime rate in over a quarter-century. I think those are great things.

But I think we can also celebrate the evidence that we

are coming together -- over 90 percent of our children across all racial and ethnic lines immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time in history; the doors of college literally open to all with the HOPE scholarship, the lifetime learning tax credit, the more generous Pell grant, more affordable student loans, more work-study slots. Those things matter.

But maybe most of all, those of you here in Americorps, and those in citizen service -- whether in the Peace Corps, serving our country in the military, or serving in some other way -- embody the determination of America to draw closer together as we grow more diverse. And that, I think, is terribly important.

When you saw the four Americorps volunteers up here speaking, and each of you identifying with them in turn -- if they worked in your project or you knew them -- you know they were a picture of America, of the changing face of America, and the best of America that never changes.

If you look around the world today, at many of the challenges that I face as your President and that the United States faces -- the sad trip that the First Lady and I recently took to Jordan for the funeral of our friend, the King of Jordan, who survived decades of assassination attempts -- literally decades of assassination attempts, probably 50 in all -- to stand as a symbol of peace among people in a very tough neighborhood, who use religion as a reason to find their differences more important than their common humanity. All over the world today you see that. If the United States wants to lead the world toward peace and freedom and prosperity in a new century in a new millennium, it is actually quite an advantage for us to have within our borders people from all races, all religions, all ethnic groups, all cultural backgrounds doing all kinds of different things.

But we cannot do good around the world unless we are good at home. And, therefore, we have to find this magical balance, being honest about our differences of opinion on matters from the serious to the mundane -- and I'll leave it to you to decide whether it was serious or mundane when the President asked me take sides in the basketball game. (Laughter.) You've got a great team here, though, I'll tell you that, I've watched it. (Applause.) We have to find a way to do that, to say, this is what I believe, this is where I stand, this is what I'm for -- and also to say how lucky we are to stand on the verge of a new millennium in a totally global society, where people are being brought closer together than ever before, and we are finding ways to relish, to celebrate, to honor our differences in a way to bring us closer together, instead of driving us apart.

AmeriCorps is the living, breathing symbol of the answer to that. Where we do not ask people to check their differences at the door, but we do ask them to reaffirm our

common humanity. We do not ask for a handout, but we do ask for a hand up for everyone who needs it, and we say we are going forward together. That is what you represent. That is my fondest hope for America. And I thank you for your service. (Applause.)

You know, all during the 20th century, the tradition of citizen service grew stronger in America. In the great Depression I remember my parents telling me about the chance President Roosevelt gave able-bodied, unemployed people to work in the Civilian Conservation Corps -- the CCC. They cleared trails, they fought fires, they planted trees. They built whole state parks -- the Appalachian Trail, Skyline Drive in Virginia; parks in my home state that Hillary and I have stayed in, with rather interesting names like Petit Jean, and Devil's Den. I have in the back office of the White House an old CCC cap -- a cap that one of the volunteers wore in the '30s, that I found wedged in between a chimney and a wall, in a cabin in a state park in the mountains of north Arkansas. And I have kept it with me all these long years, to remember the unifying power of citizen service in one of the most difficult moments of the 20th century for the United States.

President Kennedy in the 1960s asked young people to serve in the Peace Corps -- to teach English, to provide health care, to bring running water and electricity to some of the most remote villages in Africa, Asia and South America. My brother-in-law served in the Peace Corps in Colombia. And the other night, he was getting together with some of the people who served there with him. When we were getting ready to come out here today, and Senator Wofford came in with Mark Gearan, the present Peace Corps Director, we were celebrating the fact that, if our new budget passes, we will have more people serving in the Peace Corps in the next two years than have ever served in any given year. We'll be back at an all-time high.

And we were lamenting the fact that we just had to withdraw our Peace Corps volunteers from Eritrea and Ethiopia, two countries that I have felt particularly close to in the last couple of years, because of the trouble the two countries are having -- the threat to go to war. And the Peace Corps volunteers, going all the way back for decades, have volunteered to try to come in and solve the conflict and deal with the disputed area of land. I don't know if they will accept it, but think of that. All these years later, people that were there years and years and years ago remember what it was like -- not to give a handout, but to give a hand up, and to ask people to understand that their differences are not as important as what they have in common.

So I thank our Peace Corps volunteers, I thank Mark Gearan, and I thank all of you in AmeriCorps, because you are in the rich tradition of America's citizen service, from the CCC to the Peace Corps to AmeriCorps.

Now, six summers after I first came here, AmeriCorps is thriving. There now have been over 100,000 people serve in AmeriCorps in just four years of the full-time program. Everywhere I go around the country I see you -- I see you in all kinds of different contexts. I was in San Jose right before the election and there were a lot of -- the Peace Corps volunteers had just come to start their mission, and so I saw them standing on the street as I pulled into the hotel. And I asked them all to come see me and we took a little picture -- and they were from everywhere.

And then when I went home to Arkansas after the terrible tornadoes a couple of weeks ago, in both the communities I visited there were AmeriCorps volunteers there and there were people there who, believe me, would never have come to Arkansas in their lives if they hadn't been in AmeriCorps. (Laughter.) I know it was good for the people they were helping and I think it was pretty good for them.

This has been an astonishing encounter for tens of thousands of people. Now, all of you know what it's like -- I love talking to people who have been in AmeriCorps because I always hear two things -- number one, they're proud of what they did to help people -- teaching a child to read, or immunizing a child, or having a playground that's safe in an area that used to be dominated by gangs, or cleaning up some polluted site, or doing something to preserve the environment. I love that.

The second thing I always hear is, "I like the people with whom I serve;" "I met people I never would have met;" "I got to know people I never would have gotten to know;" "we were all so different and, yet, when we worked together, we grew together, and it made my life different and better." That is what AmeriCorps needs to do -- and that is what America needs to do.

America needs to think of itself as sort of a giant AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps at home, getting things done together. Getting things done together. (Applause.) If our budget passes this fall, we can boost the number of AmeriCorps volunteers by one quarter, to 50,000 members. In our new budget we want to keep expanding AmeriCorps every year so that by the year 2003, and there forward, every year 100,000 young people will be serving in AmeriCorps. (Applause.)

But I want to challenge the young people of this country -- and the not so young who are willing to do it -- to sign up for AmeriCorps, to see for yourselves what you can do to solve America's problems and reap America's promise. I want to challenge high school students, as well. Maryland has done a wonderful job as the Governor and the Lt. Governor said, being the only state in the country to actually require community service as a part of a public education. In our balanced budget we propose to allow high schoolers for the very first time to join AmeriCorps by serving part-time during the school year and

full-time in the summers.

And I want to challenge, again, the young people beyond this room, to dedicate a year or two of your lives to a cause larger than yourselves. It may be your best chance to change the lives of others for the better, and to enrich your own life in the process.

Today, so many young people have the time and freedom and energy they will never have in the future, to tackle the kind of challenge Americorps represents -- to pack a bag at a moment's notice, to fight a forest fire, or move into our most remote

towns or Native American reservations to teach children, or work with churches in some of our toughest neighborhoods. At the end of your service, as all of you know, Americorps will provide help to pay for college or pay off student loans. So I ask you all to help me reach others -- to take advantage of this opportunity, to use this moment to prove that this generation of young people, far from being a generation of cynics and slackers, is instead a generation of doers and patriots. (Applause.)

Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend quoted something her father said. I would like to close with a quotation from Senator Robert Kennedy, in a speech he gave to college students in South Africa when I was a young man. It resonated around the world, and every person my age, which was then your age now -- every young person I knew, without regard to their party or their opinions or anything else, was riveted by the notion that a United States Senator could go to South Africa and talk to the young people about building a different future, a long time before, for the first time in over 300 years, all South Africans had a chance to choose their future.

This is what he said: "Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

That is still true today. For those in AmeriCorps, I thank you for sending forth those ripples of hope. I thank you for bringing out the best in yourselves and others.

For those who could still yet serve, I ask you to join the rest of your fellow citizens in building that bridge to the 21st century that all can walk across, arm-in-arm, to the best days of America.

Thank you and God bless you. (Applause.)

file AmeriCorps

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

December 30, 1998

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Tramontano
Podesta

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

CC John D. Podesta
FROM Karen A. Tramontano

Outlined below is the strategic plan we developed at your request to provide greater visibility for AmeriCorps. The plan is based on three communications principles: 1. Regional coverage will better enable AmeriCorps to achieve its legislative goals; 2. AmeriCorps' stories about volunteers and communities are best told by alumni--AmeriCorps' untapped resource; and 3. A communications plan that builds up to AmeriCorps' 5th Anniversary in September 1999.

To implement these principles we recommend beginning with low-key service events (e.g. your DC Kitchen service event), expanding to monthly themes utilizing alumni and culminating in a 5th year anniversary celebration. In this way, the public will witness your days of service, learn about AmeriCorps through a public relations campaign around its monthly themes and celebrate AmeriCorps' 5th year anniversary. We hope this plan will reinforce three key messages: AmeriCorps is about service by young people to communities; AmeriCorps strengthens communities; and AmeriCorps expands educational opportunities for young people.

January: A Day of Service

Subject to your approval, we will recommend some low-key service activities for you to consider performing during the Martin Luther King holiday. We will ask members of your Cabinet to perform service during the holiday, too. These service events will be similar to your day at D.C. Kitchen in December. We want these events to provide a transition to your State of the Union.

For the State of the Union we are reviewing several stories of young AmeriCorps volunteers and the service they are performing for a possible mention in your address. If you chose to mention one of the stories, the First Lady may wish to include the featured AmeriCorps volunteer in her box. We hope the above-mentioned references will result in both national and regional coverage for AmeriCorps.

February: A Call to Service

AmeriCorps will launch its public service announcement campaign which has been produced by MTV. For February we will recommend that you swear-in the 1999 AmeriCorps volunteers. These members will mark the 100,000 volunteers who have served in AmeriCorps. At the event, we plan to screen the new AmeriCorps PSA and release an independent study of AmeriCorps' accomplishments.

March: Spring Break with AmeriCorps

During March many AmeriCorps members participate in a number of high-profile alternative spring break projects with Habitat for Humanity, Boys and Girls Clubs and other organizations. We will work with AmeriCorps to bring additional visibility to these events by asking Cabinet members and other surrogates to join AmeriCorps volunteers on these projects. AmeriCorps will also be launching its college recruitment campaign in March. For Cabinet members who are not engaged in service events, we will be asking them to participate in AmeriCorps college recruitment days at their alma maters.

April: National Youth Service Day

To highlight National Volunteers Week (April 18 -24) AmeriCorps will bring together alumni and current members on the same day in a wide-range of service projects on various college campuses. We will work with AmeriCorps on these college campus events by using Cabinet members and other surrogates to increase visibility and improve the regional coverage of these events.

May: City Year Conference

The annual City Year-AmeriCorps conference will be held in Washington, DC. There will be more than 1,000 AmeriCorps volunteers available. We are planning a service event with members of your administration and AmeriCorps volunteers to highlight a major community service project for DC. This may also present another opportunity for you to perform service in DC.

June: Commencement Season

We have several recommendations for the commencement season. First, if you approve, we will recommend at least one college for you to address that has focused on service in general and on AmeriCorps in particular. Second, we will recommend that Cabinet members who give commencement addresses include references to AmeriCorps volunteers and service to communities in their addresses. Finally, we have suggested that AmeriCorps ask their alumni to present the President's Student Service Award at their high school and/or college alma maters.

July: AmeriCorps graduation

Several states and cities host AmeriCorps closing ceremonies to mark the end of the year of service. Many of these ceremonies feature Governors and Mayors as keynote speakers. We will work with AmeriCorps through Intergovernmental Affairs and our Regional press operation to increase the profile of these events.

August: Back to School

More than 20,000 AmeriCorps members are participating in America Reads. We are planning an America Reads event possibility with Secretary Riley to show AmeriCorps' education focus. AmeriCorps is also planning to release an independent study of AmeriCorps' success in increasing childhood literacy.

September: Anniversary Celebration

We are in the early planning stages for this event but we would like to focus the event around a "blitz-build" service project. We would include partners from the corporate and non-profit worlds as well as celebrities. AmeriCorps anticipates that MTV and VH-1 will be the media partners for the event. We have asked AmeriCorps to begin discussions with their state chapters to create simultaneous state anniversary events for possible satellite downlinks.

Between now and the anniversary I will facilitate bi-weekly conference calls to ensure that we are staying on track with both message events and the overall plan.

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Changing lives, changing America

AmeriCorps: Five Years of Getting Things Done

October 1999

File
AmeriCorps

*Changing
lives,
changing
America*



AmeriCorps: Five Years of Getting Things Done

7/1/99

To: Shirley Segawa

FAX 202-436-6244

**An Evaluation of
AmeriCorps
Summary**

ACQUIRE INTERNATIONAL

An Evaluation of AmeriCorps

Summary

*This report is a summary of program benefits based on a
recent national study of the AmeriCorps Programs*

Submitted to:

**The Corporation for National and
Community Service**

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March 24, 1999

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INTRODUCTION

AmeriCorps programs carry out a wide range of community service activities through multiple sponsoring organizations. Aguirre International's evaluation employed a variety of methods and approaches to gather and assess information about AmeriCorps programs. This is a 3-year study which included various layers and components aimed at providing an understanding of the overall field while providing in-depth assessment of specific aspects of how programs function. The study was conducted to evaluate the start-up process of participating programs and thus, evaluation is limited in scope. Findings on members and community benefits, however, should be understood to have longer-term impacts. As fledgling programs refine their infrastructure, improve management, and leverage of community resources, future benefits provided should be more substantial. The approach combined quantitative and qualitative data to describe what AmeriCorps programs looked like and what services they were providing. The overall evaluation consisted of 3 parts:

1. Survey of program accomplishments (reported elsewhere). This consisted of a very broad-based assessment focusing on "what got done." The intent here was to obtain information from the entire universe of AmeriCorps members.
2. A multi-tiered approach which assessed a random sample of 60 sites with interviews and life skills inventory (LSI) of participating members. This involved regular site visits and interviews with staff and members. Members reported on their skills in 5 areas (see the next section) before beginning service and then after the completion of service. A control group of demographically similar non-Members was also surveyed. It was the comparison between the member group and the control group that enriched the results of this study. This tier of the study was scientifically valid and allows us to make generalizable statements about AmeriCorps.
3. Case studies for 8 sites for purposive assessments focusing on specific information about what worked, what didn't and why. It also examined ways in which AmeriCorps programs worked collaboratively with others in this commitment. The case studies were designed to add depth, insights to survey interviews, and provide lessons learned. They drew information on the impact of AmeriCorps, documented outcome results regarding communities and service beneficiaries, and provided evidence and indicators needed to assess overall impact.

The field researchers used by Aguirre International were all experienced evaluators with diverse backgrounds, experience and a range of knowledge of environmental studies, social science, language and literacy, organizational structures and operations. Some evaluators had direct experience working in and with community based organizations, and therefore clearly understood the challenges organizations and individuals faced in designing and implementing their programs.

This report summarizes benefits of the AmeriCorps programs that we found during the evaluation.

CHAPTER I. MEMBER IMPACT

The first chapter in this summary of Aguirre International's evaluation of the AmeriCorps Programs focuses on the effect community service experience had on individual AmeriCorps members. We looked at AmeriCorps members' life skills, civic responsibility, and education to see if service in AmeriCorps made a difference.

A. THE IMPACT OF AMERICORPS SERVICE ON MEMBERS' LIFE SKILLS

AmeriCorps members were asked to assess their skills in 5 functional areas:

- Communication skills,
- Interpersonal skills,
- Analytical problem-solving,
- Understanding organizational systems, and
- Information technology.

According to many experts, these are the skills our society needs to compete in a global economy and to overcome the social, economic, and environmental problems we face across the country. The skills are not specific to any given curriculum but are linked to the framework outlined by the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Necessary Skills (SCANS).

THE FINDINGS

Participation in AmeriCorps results in substantial gains in life skills.

- **The survey showed that participation in AmeriCorps results in substantial gains in life skills for more than three-quarters of the members.** Even those members who reported their life skills had not improved overall were able to identify gains in at least one area of skills development or to cite a specific vocational skill that they had acquired.

The gain in life skills are broad-based.

- **Members reported statistically significant gains in all areas of life skills, indicating that the AmeriCorps service learning experience provides a balanced, across-the-board opportunity for gaining and sharpening skills.**
 - ▶ 59% of members reported gains in the area of communications,
 - ▶ 72% reported gains in interpersonal skills,
 - ▶ 61% in analytical problem-solving,
 - ▶ 65% in understanding how organizations work, and
 - ▶ 39% in using information technology.

Detailed assessments by respondents of the specific skills they gained suggest that some of these gains resulted from learning how to utilize these skills in an organizational

environment. For example, a number of members reported they had learned "public speaking skills" or "getting along with people" different from themselves.

Acquiring these life skills will help AmeriCorps Members in the long term.

- **AmeriCorps members who acquire these skills are likely to be more successful in managing change in their personal and family lives, to adapt to challenges in the workplace, and to be disposed to work collaboratively with others in their communities.** AmeriCorps offers members opportunities to extend and enhance a "core" set of basic skills. Interestingly, low-skill members who had dropped out of high school benefitted more than other low-skill members who do graduate from high school. This finding may yield important insights on how to develop appropriate, alternative career pathways for young adults and others who may not have been able to fit into the "standard" sequence of high school, college, and career.

Benefits occur for all AmeriCorps Members, including those with the least developed skills upon program entry.

- **Gains are most dramatic among those entering with the least developed skills, but are not limited to this group.** Almost all (about 90%) of the members who considered their initial skills to be deficient achieved substantial or dramatic gains in every area except for the use of information technology.
- **Members who achieved the greatest gains were those who were oriented towards self-directed learning and who were relatively well-prepared to engage in experiential learning.** One-fifth of the members entered AmeriCorps with a high level of skills overall and remained that way. Nevertheless, the average member's prior work experience was often in jobs requiring less teamwork than the collaborative environment of their service experience. This teamwork experience is likely to contribute greatly to their developing more agility and flexibility in the "high performance" workplace of the 21st century.

AmeriCorps Members did better than the control groups.

- **As part of this evaluation, Members took part of a one-year study in which they showed gains in life skills that were significantly greater than those of the control group.** As a result of their AmeriCorps participation, at least three-quarters of the members (76%) displayed substantial gain in general skills that would enable a person to make effective use of their school, life, family, employment and service experience to pursue their careers, collaborate with others at work and in the community to achieve common goals, to overcome the challenges they face as individuals and as responsible family members, and to participate as informed and engaged citizens.

All ethnic groups share in the reported gain in skills.

- **Hispanic/Latino members who entered with low skills reported the greatest gains in skills, followed by Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Whites.** More generally, participation in AmeriCorps appears to provide minority AmeriCorps members who have had limited employment experience and, in many cases, less than satisfactory school experience, extraordinary opportunities to develop new skills and to enhance existing ones. All groups gained skills in working with diverse customers and co-workers.

AmeriCorps service can help members obtain jobs.

- **AmeriCorps members who used computers and other types of technology in their service work, often stated that these were important opportunities to develop job skills.** This occurred even though AmeriCorps was not designed to help members secure entry-level employment, unlike employment training or welfare-to-work programs.

AmeriCorps members benefit from their service regardless of education or experience.

- **AmeriCorps seems best-suited to providing opportunities for concerned and motivated individuals who have had some work experience in a structured setting fulfilling specific responsibilities.** The AmeriCorps experience seems to work well, however, even for individuals who have not done well in a formal educational setting. For them, AmeriCorps' service-learning experience provides a jump-start for career mobility and an alternative pathway for fulfilling their personal goals and realizing their full potential. Success in AmeriCorps can renew aspirations, self-confidence, and optimism. One member referred to "the fact that now I know how I can best use my talents. I've found my niche."

AmeriCorps service helps members enhance life skills they already have.

- **AmeriCorps members entered service with more confidence in their communication and interpersonal skills than in the areas of organizational understanding and analytical problem-solving, yet they achieved gains in all of these areas.** This suggests that the AmeriCorps experience not only enables members to enhance skills that they already had, but also provides a way for members to discover practical use in skills that they previously didn't have. Opportunities for members to expand their repertoires of skills are extremely important because the central challenge in responding to the demands of a high performance society is to develop versatility and to deploy skills acquired in one context in new situations.

AmeriCorps service instills in members a commitment to the ethic of service.

- **Almost all of the members surveyed, both those with high and lower levels of skills, indicated that their service in AmeriCorps had instilled in them a sense of commitment to the ethic of service.** One member responded that the most valuable aspect was "Challenging myself and teaching others." Another mentioned, "I was able to help children from urban settings, give them a sense of hope. It gave me one too." This commitment to

service is likely to influence members' career choices and to contribute to their future success in education and employment.

AmeriCorps promotes understanding among members of different ethnic groups.

- Many respondents cited the value of gaining a better understanding of the diversity of America, getting to know and work with people different from themselves, and becoming acquainted with community problems about which they had previously been unaware. Typical responses included: "I had the great opportunity to work with and learn about cultures different from mine — inner city and other city." "Meeting many new people, working with people from all types of backgrounds." "Meeting and getting close to people I would otherwise never have met." Not only are these experiences important in and of themselves, but they are also likely to be the foundation for future flexibility and versatility in teamwork, for communicating and negotiating in different social and workplace contexts, and for developing and exercising leadership skills.

What do members think is AmeriCorps' greatest strength?

- In one way or another, most AmeriCorps members pointed to the experiences of working collaboratively with others to address immediate and visible community problems as AmeriCorps' greatest strength. The life skills survey suggests that AmeriCorps greatest strength lies in providing alternative ways to develop high performance skills among participants whose educational experiences and employment history have failed to provide them with adequate opportunities for development of these skills is AmeriCorps's greatest strength.

B. THE IMPACT OF AMERICORPS SERVICE ON CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Civic responsibility is the hallmark of AmeriCorps and forms the backbone of the service work that members perform. As stressed in AmeriCorps programs, civic responsibility includes becoming aware of local, state and national issues, becoming involved in community issues and working collaboratively to mitigate community problems and address community needs. It also includes a desire to continue community service work.

THE FINDINGS

Members' interest in performing community service increases during their AmeriCorps service.

- At the end of their terms, nearly all (99%) of AmeriCorps members reported plans to continue some form of community service in the future, even though only 56% of them reported involvement prior to serving. Members at one site agreed that they had a sense of civic responsibility before AmeriCorps, but that their involvement in AmeriCorps has definitely increased their level of civic responsibility. They shared stories of how working

with clients make them more aware of the community needs and the efforts required to strengthen communities.

AmeriCorps service motivates many members to choose public service and community-oriented careers.

- **Interest in community service careers was high among members.** In fact, members were more likely to say they would be involved with community service agencies in a career rather than volunteer capacity. One member who planned to attend law school noted that although his desire to become a lawyer hadn't changed, as a result of his experience in AmeriCorps, he had decided to practice public service law or become an advocate for community-based organizations. Another member, a college chemistry major, expressed concern about teaching as a profession because of low pay. Working with children during his AmeriCorps service, however, convinced him that teaching would be worth the sacrifice. A third member wrote: "I gained experience in the field I wanted to be in (environmental science)."

AmeriCorps service increases members' awareness of civic affairs.

- **Both supervisors and members reported an increase in an awareness of community issues, often a precursor to a sustained commitment to community service.** In one program where members tutored immigrant adults in literacy and English, the members reported being better able to understand policy debates on welfare and immigration. Another program comprised of inner-city members held a meeting each morning to discuss an item of local interest from the newspaper, helping to educate members about community issues. Members in yet another program said they had registered to vote in the past but that what they had learned from AmeriCorps would make them more likely to exercise that vote in the future. In a final example, inner-city members involved in a water conservation project reported becoming conscious of the effect of a whole community wasting water and, as a result, became personally more conscious of their own water usage.

Members of different educational backgrounds differ in their perspectives on community service.

- **At the end of their service year, less educated members were more likely to have applied for positions in community service agencies.** However, they were more tentative in terms of committing themselves to future volunteer or community service activities. Prior to their service, less educated members tended to have less experience with community service. Unlike their more educated colleagues, they often cited the stipend, vocational training and educational opportunities as primary reasons for joining AmeriCorps.

The AmeriCorps stipend is key in enabling low-income members to perform community service.

- **Members drawn from low-income families needed the stipend to be able to perform community service.** Many were energized by this experience and began to see themselves as contributors to their communities. A member, for example, was so excited about her efforts

to involve residents in public safety issues in her inner-city community that she noted she would continue involvement in the community after completing her AmeriCorps service. Other members commented that service "opened their eyes to the problems and resources in the community."

AmeriCorps enhances members' leadership skills.

- **Members report attending and speaking up at council meetings and serving on committees.** Participating in grassroots organizations gave them a better sense of how needs are identified, programs planned and implemented, and activities assessed. In some cases members participated in activities that lay outside of the immediate scope of their project: making presentations, training others and creating awareness of key issues. In doing so, they increased their own capacity and learned to be part of the public debate and the political process.

Projects with clearly visible results reinforce members' sense of civic responsibility.

- **Members reported feeling most effective when involved in activities with clearly visible results, such as cleaning up a stream, feeding the homeless, and building or rehabilitating a house.** They also reported a high sense of accomplishment when a sustained one-on-one connection could be established with an individual, such as during tutoring children or assisting an elderly person, where they could see the results of their service. One site supervisor said, "It does a lot for them...the sense of responsibility and the value of making the kids feel safe - something they [member from the inner-city] didn't have for themselves." In cases where service was more diffuse, such as in drop-in assistance centers, members came away with having done something worthwhile, but their sense of having made a difference was not as strong.

C. THE IMPACT OF AMERICORPS SERVICE ON EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

One of the goals of AmeriCorps is to help members increase their educational attainment and/or enhance their educational opportunities. AmeriCorps offered various educational opportunities for members through training and learning opportunities related to service, professional and career development, and providing an educational award to be used by each member to further his or her education or to pay back student loans.

Methodology: Site visit reports, interviews with supervisors, and case study accounts were used to determine changes in educational attainment and opportunity. In addition, members were surveyed about their current attempts to increase their knowledge, skills and education as well as their plans for the future, through the life skills inventories and in follow-up phone calls to a sub sample. Special attention was paid to the following areas of education:

- Vocational Technical Skills
- Basic Skills Development

- Career Awareness
- Transition to Higher Education

The FINDINGS

AmeriCorps increases educational attainment and opportunity.

- AmeriCorps increased both educational opportunity and attainment for the majority of its members. For example, 85% of members planned to use their educational awards to further their education or to pay off student loans. Four out of ten members were enrolled in educational programs while completing their AmeriCorps service. In addition, many members received certificates in newly mastered skills such as carpentry or child development. Members with lower initial academic skills showed some gains but they were lower than their more educated counterparts.
- **Overall, AmeriCorps members exceed the national average in terms of educational attainment in all age groups.** Members represented the spectrum of educational attainment, from those without high school diplomas to members with advanced degrees. Two-thirds of members had attended at least some college or other form of higher education beyond high school. An additional quarter of the members had graduated from high school. The remaining almost one-tenth of members had not completed high school or earned a GED. This group tended to be concentrated in urban programs and demonstrated the greatest need for improvement in basic academic skills.

Members of different educational backgrounds have different needs.

- **Members' needs differed significantly for different subgroups.** Those who entered AmeriCorps with a solid foundation in education looked for opportunities to increase their life skills and acquire specific service related skills. Members who were academically under prepared needed to improve their basic skills and gain diplomas or GEDs while they did their service work. This group also needed help in overcoming the multiple barriers that typically prevent at-risk-youth and adults from making the transition to higher education.

Members benefit from the variety of educational opportunities offered by AmeriCorps.

- AmeriCorps allowed members to gain experience with career opportunities, teamwork, real-world challenges, and opportunities to work with diverse people — all of which contributed to increasing AmeriCorps members career awareness. Several members reported wanting to go into fields related to their AmeriCorps work such as teaching, social work or working with youth. Follow-up interviews showed that these plans were often realized. A few learned from AmeriCorps that they were not suited to service-oriented careers. The educational award served as both an incentive and a clear opportunity to further education and skills. For example, a member used her experience working with the Yupik and Tlingit tribal groups as background for pursuing a career in international relations. After AmeriCorps, she used her educational award to study graduate international relations in Russia.

AmeriCorps members with weak academic skills benefit from their AmeriCorps service.

- **Many members received certificates from AmeriCorps for newly mastered skills and some completed their GEDs, while others in this group had difficulties overcoming the barriers that had prevented them from previous academic success.** Members who received certificates felt proud of their accomplishments and felt the certification would be useful. One member said, "this certificate will look great on my resume." Another commented that her certificate in aiding victims of domestic violence was "good because you now have something in hand that proves you know what you are doing."
- **Many of these members learned of new career opportunities through AmeriCorps.** One member, after discovering she was an excellent public speaker and trainer, expressed a desire to study education rather than return to farm work. Another member who completed service involving young children while studying for her Child Development Associates degree commented that she had "waited all her life" for an opportunity to work with children and to attend school herself.

The educational award increases educational opportunities for members.

- **The majority of members (85%) had concrete plans to use the award.** Five out of six members who planned to further their education said the educational award was necessary to attain their goals. This is a very positive result from AmeriCorps service.

CHAPTER II: COMMUNITY IMPACT

AmeriCorps programs were designed to have an impact on the communities served by the members. Aguirre International's assessment of AmeriCorps looked at these impacts on communities and found that, in general, they were substantial and positive. The following sections discuss these impacts on beneficiaries, sponsors, communities, and work accomplished.

Aguirre International looked in-depth at eight specific sites.

A. THE IMPACT OF AMERICORPS ON SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

AmeriCorps funds allowed programs and their service partners to expand, improve, restore, or add new service. Funds also assisted new organizations to begin providing valuable community services. The institution building that resulted from organizations' involvement in AmeriCorps has had a profound and potentially long-term impact on America's communities. Sponsoring organizations developed new community consortia and deepened links with other community organizations as they created new solutions to community problems.

THE FINDINGS

AmeriCorps Helps Local Organizations Do More of What They Do Best

- AmeriCorps programs helped sponsoring organizations expand and improve their services, and create new ones.
- The challenge of implementing new community service programs resulted in institutional change.
- AmeriCorps brought increased service capacity of existing community service organizations.
- Sponsoring organizations that previously were not broadly service-oriented incorporated direct service into their operations or extended services to new groups in their community.
- Coalitions of community organizations joined together to create AmeriCorps programs.
- Several national direct grantees expanded geographically by replicating their successful programs in new areas.
- Other national directs increased capacity to serve more beneficiaries at existing sites.
- Most program expansions focused on increasing the numbers of direct beneficiaries at existing service locales rather than expanding service programs to new locations.
- Small, underfunded community organizations blossomed with the additional resources from AmeriCorps, allowing them to improve the quality of their organizations and their services as well as to deepen the array of services provided.
- AmeriCorps members eased burdens on staff, resulting in delivery of better quality services.
- Sponsoring organizations were able to take on long-delayed tasks and projects.
- The presence of AmeriCorps members facilitated better use of existing staff and allowed them to tackle more complex issues.
- Sponsoring organizations are now working with new service populations and trying out new types of services.
- AmeriCorps members serve as links between agencies and were often recognized for the new energy and perspectives they brought.
- AmeriCorps helps organizations provide more hands-on service.
- Colleges, universities, and other organizations not previously involved in community services are serving as sponsors.

AmeriCorps Increases Program Quality and Professionalism

- The principles of high quality service that are fundamental to AmeriCorps obliged many service providers to change how they viewed their programs, provided services, and structured their administrative functions.
- Sponsors made changes in program design or implementation to meet AmeriCorps requirements.
- Writing clear objectives helped programs deliver more focused services with a higher chance of being able to measure the effects of the service.
- Sponsors learned to change their measures of service from inputs such as numbers of volunteers or of hours of service provided, to outputs, such as the numbers of children immunized.

- Formulating better objectives helped sponsoring organizations deliver more effective services and increased their ability to measure the effects of their services.
- With concrete results from their efforts, administrators came to believe in the effectiveness of the AmeriCorps model.
- By the end of the second year, all believed that their AmeriCorps efforts would yield a long-term impact.

AmeriCorps Encourages Collaboration between Funded Programs and Other Organizations

- In many cases, partnerships between sponsors of AmeriCorps and cooperating institutions emerged to streamline service delivery within their communities.
- Partners found new ways to centralize costly operations while decentralizing program design and implementation.

AmeriCorps Has Positively Impacted America's Volunteer Service Sector

- AmeriCorps has served as a catalyst for change in how community organizations operate and deliver services.
- Perhaps most importantly, it has helped community organizations provide services in an efficient manner that encouraged accountability.

B. THE IMPACT OF AMERICORPS ON BUILDING COMMUNITIES

AmeriCorps programs provided new ways for community organizations to work together in addressing the needs of their communities. Because of the flexibility of program guidelines, concerned groups in communities could work with AmeriCorps to design programs and seek support that would address their particular community concerns and, in some cases, build new partnering relationships.

AmeriCorps program activities were seen as providing direct benefits to communities but, at the same time, fostering a sense that people in communities could work together to address community needs. Program staff, collaborating organizations, the families living in neighborhoods where community service projects were underway all noted how community service programs helped to bring people together and provided new opportunities for concerned citizens, AmeriCorps members and community members alike, to show they cared.

THE FINDINGS

AmeriCorps Serves Our Nation's Neediest Communities

- Residents are predominantly low-income,
- Communities themselves often lack resources and infrastructure, and
- Community representatives gave AmeriCorps projects high ratings on community strengthening.

- 82 percent of community representatives rated programs as having an "outstanding" or "very good" impact on their communities.

AmeriCorps Is Highly Effective

Reasons:

- The full-time commitment of members,
- Extensive member training,
- Flexibility of the programs,
- Community focus,
- Long-term commitment to fixing community problems, and
- Achieving a great deal of community acceptance and collaboration.

AmeriCorps Improves Lives of the People it Serves, their Families, Friends and Neighbors

Members . . .

- noticeably improved their ability to manage their lives and family relationships, and
- found the education stipend was an incentive to return to school to further their formal education.

Parents . . .

- who were trained to tutor and teach their own children felt competent working with their children, teachers and schools,
- gained confidence in the educational process, and
- became involved in their local schools and communities.

Families . . .

- benefitted from improved health thanks to prenatal care and infant immunizations, as well as screening for contagious diseases such as tuberculosis,
- were provided a better education for children, and
- saw strengthening of inter-generational links, bringing youth in touch with seniors and children.

One Native American tribe used an AmeriCorps grant to fund assisted-living services for the elderly. The members were tribal youth who helped elders with tasks requiring physical strength. The program strengthened the tribal community by reinforcing the cultural norms of youth helping elders, aiding the elders, and providing jobs for reservation youth on a reservation with a 60 percent youth unemployment rate.

Neighbors . . .

- who were in crisis received assistance,
- who were out of work got help to improve their job search and educational skills,
- enjoyed safer communities with reduced crime, and
- saw improvements such as community gardens, cleanups, and removal of environmental hazards and pollutants.

AmeriCorps Strengthens Communities by:

- helping direct beneficiaries in all the ways mentioned above, and in turn, positively affecting many others as indirect beneficiaries.

AmeriCorps Improves Community Infrastructure by:

- building or renovating community centers, park buildings and structures, playgrounds, low-income housing stock, roads, trails, and community gardens, and
- removing nuisances that prevented community members from enjoying public spaces, by replacing graffiti with murals, destroying condemned and dangerous structures, and closing down drug houses.

AmeriCorps Strengthens Networks of Local Organizations and Institutions by:

- making them more effective and efficient,
- stimulating them to develop new services for their communities,
- obliging them to upgrade their service standards,
- strengthening their links with schools, other community organizations, and businesses,
- encouraging referral networks,
- bringing together organizations that do not usually work together, and
- removing interagency bottlenecks to the delivery of services.

AmeriCorps Brings Resources to Communities by:

- raising funds above and beyond the AmeriCorps grants and recruiting, training, and supervising 329,987 volunteers who greatly expanded the work of AmeriCorps members,
- providing small but vital infusions of Federal dollars (up to a maximum of 85 percent of AmeriCorps program funding) to America's neediest communities,
- requiring every AmeriCorps program to find matching funds,
- writing proposals for community groups,
- organizing the staff of community groups,
- participating in community fund-raisers, such as walk-a-thons and charity events, such as holiday baskets for the needy,
- having funded service commitments topped off by members' service contributed on their own time, and
- bringing members' skills in nursing, architecture and other professions to their communities.

AmeriCorps Empowers Community Residents by:

- involving local residents in improving their own neighborhoods and towns,
- recruiting, through AmeriCorps members, unskilled or troubled youth, who serve as role models for other community members,
- returning high-risk members to their communities with more skills and preparation to look for jobs,
- making community members informed and more likely to take action to keep their communities safe and wholesome. "AmeriCorps provided a spark to show community members that someone cared, that something could be done, and that community members could make things happen in their own neighborhoods."

AmeriCorps Promotes Diversity

- Because AmeriCorps programs aimed for and achieved diversity, they have learned to weather racial, cultural and generational tensions.
- Successful programs strengthened their communities by increasing the number of community members that now have experience at making diversity work.

C. THE IMPACT OF AMERICORPS ON BENEFICIARIES

In the 1995-96 program year, there was an in-depth evaluation of the impact of AmeriCorps on its beneficiaries. The evaluation made clear the variety of services AmeriCorps provides and the uniqueness of each program design. These AmeriCorps programs had developed innovative services to tackle difficult social problems, mainly in low-income, often distressed areas. Almost all of the services enjoyed a high level of customer satisfaction. In seven of eight programs studied in depth, the services that made up the bulk of the program's accomplishments were rated as having had either a moderate or a substantial impact on beneficiaries.

How was the evaluation conducted?

Evidence of impact was obtained from many different kinds of sources. Direct reports were obtained through interviews, surveys, and focus groups conducted with beneficiaries (or, in the case of children, their parents), program staff, members, and the staffs of partner organizations. Records of performance (e.g., school grades, standardized test scores, school attendance, immunization rates, crime rates) were carefully examined. In some cases, special measures of performance (e.g., a reading test) were part of the evaluation. Finally, considerable use was made of evaluator's direct observations contained in reports made immediately after site visits to a sample of programs.

How was program impact rated?

Based on all the available information, evaluators studied representative service activities at each program. As part of this study, they rated each activity as having substantial, moderate, or little/no beneficiary impacts. This rating was based on a documented evidence of the positive impacts of each program's service activities on beneficiaries. For example, if five children in an AmeriCorps program received tutoring in reading but none of them demonstrated a measurable improvement in their reading skills, no positive impact was credited to the program.

How was evidence for program impact assessed?

Some impacts and evidence were weighted more than other evidence in assessing whether service activities had greater or lesser impact. Objective and quantitative data had more weight than evidence that could not be objectively verified. For example, for programs providing prenatal instruction, increased use of health services weighed more than mothers' self-reports of liking the service or feeling that the service helped them. When the evidence was subjective (e.g., anecdotal evidence from program staff), it was given greater weight if there was concurrence from several observers, such as program staff and site supervisor and student parents. Evaluators also rated service impacts higher when they had more than one concurring impact measure, and evidence of outcomes was weighted more than evidence of process.

What was the rating system employed?

Programs were given one of the three ratings: substantial beneficiary impacts, moderate beneficiary impacts, and low beneficiary impacts. A program was given an overall rating of "substantial beneficiary impacts" when most of its major service activities showed substantial measurable beneficiary impacts. Programs were rated as having "moderate beneficiary impacts" when their major service activities and most of their individual placements were rated as moderate. Programs were rated as having "low beneficiary impacts" when the majority of their service activities had little measurable beneficiary impact beyond customer satisfaction.

THE FINDINGS

Over 9 million people benefited from AmeriCorps services.

- **The most immediately affected beneficiaries of AmeriCorps services were the individuals who personally received services from AmeriCorps members.** In the year of the evaluation, AmeriCorps programs personally provided services to 5.5 million individuals. An additional 3.7 million individuals benefited as members of neighborhoods and communities that were improved in some way, such as feeling safer because a crack house was torn down and replaced with a new family home or because their families could enjoy a new park, playground, or community garden.

Beneficiaries received a wide variety of services.

- Some 1.9 million students were tutored, mentored, enrolled in after-school programs or received other services while 75,000 young children received care, instruction, or immunization. In addition, 70,000 families were helped and 25,000 parents trained. The remaining 3.3 million individuals that personally received services benefitted received a variety of education, other human needs, public safety, or benefitted from environment restoration efforts or disaster relief activities.

Certain types of programs have more beneficiary impacts than others.

- **Programs with high levels of beneficiary impacts shared certain characteristics.** First, they had relatively focused service models. One of them deliberately pared down its range of service activities after the first year in order to increase its beneficiary impacts. These programs also placed a higher priority on making a positive impact on beneficiaries than on members. This meant devoting a major portion of their resources to training members and working collaboratively with service sites. Finally, these programs put more effort into evaluation by developing performance measures, identifying sources of information, collecting data, and organizing surveys and focus groups.

Numerous programs showed exemplary results.

- **GED tutorials** — Another program that showed substantial beneficiary impacts was based in a rural area of widely scattered, small communities in the Western United States. AmeriCorps members on a college campus tutored adults in literacy and basic skills to help them obtain a high school diploma or a GED. The AmeriCorps members took the program on the road, tutoring adults who were receiving Aid for Families with Dependent Children at a social services agency and adult inmates at nearby prison. Among 1,147 tutored, an impressive 420 went on to receive a high school diploma or GED. Another 650 made some progress towards these goals. There was very little beneficiary attrition. Beneficiaries reported reduced dependence on public assistance and better success in obtaining employment. Staff in county welfare-to-work programs and at the prison rated the program very effective.
- **Distribution of household water conservation devices** — One especially beneficial program carried out the distribution of household water conservation devices to 40,000 people. The AmeriCorps members were mostly urban Hispanics and African-Americans resident in the community where the program was based. Members distributed water-saving toilets and shower heads, performed water use audits, inspected distribution pipes for leaks, and educated residents about water conservation. Almost 15,000 old toilets were crushed to be incorporated into paving material and thus kept out of city landfills. In addition to promoting water conservation and serving area residents, the program aimed to provide training and employment opportunities for at-risk youth. Beneficiaries reported that they were experiencing lowered electric bills. The water district that participated in this AmeriCorps program estimated savings to be 165 million gallons. Since the host community is in an area that is a natural desert, water conservation is vital to the region's economy and

welfare. In a sense, all water district customers, several million people, benefited in some way from this program.

- **Educational services to inner-city schoolchildren** — In one of these programs, AmeriCorps members provided a variety of educational services primarily to inner-city schoolchildren, most of whom were either African-American or Hispanic. Members assisted teachers in classrooms, provided after-school tutoring twice a week, helped students with homework at a community center, and accompanied them on trips to spring vacation camps. Although impact on student performance could not be documented by improvement in grades, students liked having an AmeriCorps member in class and teachers reported that members' work with individuals or small groups of students improved their preparation, concentration, and focus. After-school tutoring with small groups of students had a positive impact on the students' concentration and homework completion. The after-school program had a moderate impact on students' behavior and a substantial impact on their self-esteem. At two spring vacation camps planned and conducted by the members, they led the children in sports, games, arts and crafts, and field trips. Both camps had a substantial impact on students' self-esteem.

In addition to its core service activities, this program also had its members improving the neighborhood environment, such as building a playground at one of the after-school centers. The new playground had a substantial impact by giving children an alternative to an old playground that exposed them to danger. Members cleaned buildings for use by senior citizens, people with AIDS, and people recovering from substance abuse, and they prepared garden sites for use by senior gardeners.

- **A multi-targeted program:** Another program with moderate impact offered an ambitious service plan over a wide geographic area. In its first year, 80 members were placed in 60 service sites; in the second year, 50 members were placed in 35 sites. Services were initially offered in all four of AmeriCorps' priority areas, and then reduced to education and other human needs services. For example, over 1000 students in grades K-12 were provided tutoring and in-class support at a school hosting some of these AmeriCorps members. Parents participating in a focus group praised these services as outstanding, stating that they had made a substantial difference in students' behavior and in their attitudes towards schoolwork. Some 2,500 school children were mentored by AmeriCorps members or were offered conflict resolution training. School records for six of a sample of ten elementary students assisted in these ways showed improvements in their grades. Other AmeriCorps members in this program conducted outreach efforts to the elderly (including assistance with Medicaid and FEMA applications, transportation, food), life skills training to people with mental retardation, housing rehabilitation, distribution of food and clothing to homeless people, and living assistance to persons with HIV/AIDS.

D. WHAT AMERICORPS PROGRAMS HAVE ACCOMPLISHED

AmeriCorps programs provided direct services in four issue areas: education, environment, public safety, and other human needs.

THE FINDINGS

Education

Education was one of the most successful service areas. AmeriCorps members working in these programs helped children in impoverished urban and rural communities succeed in school. They taught in classrooms, established new learning programs in and out of school, and prepared preschoolers for the demands of school.

The AmeriCorps members helped at-risk children succeed in school by assisting them and their families to develop their sense of civic and community responsibility and to become more stable, more self-sufficient, and more involved in the community.

Specific accomplishments included:

- Teaching children in Head Start, kindergarten, and grades 1-12,
- Tutoring students in grades 1-12,
- Mentoring and counseling students,
- Providing in-class enrichment, such as speakers, presentations ,
- Providing out-of-class enrichment, such as field trips,
- Organizing and conducting service learning and community education activities,
- Developing curriculum materials,
- Assembling book collections and maintaining libraries,
- Recruiting and training peer (student) tutors,
- Working parents and families on parenting skills,
- Teaching adults for GED or basic skills development,
- Counseling for job development or placement,
- Conducting home visits for follow-up of educational activities, and
- Providing child care.

Environment

Environmental programs restored wild lands, abated hazards, and assisted in disaster prevention. Members also assisted in emergencies such as floods, fires, and other unanticipated natural disasters.

- The AmeriCorps members improved neighborhoods, parks, and recreation facilities by converting vacant lots, renovating buildings, repairing public facilities, and conducting

recycling and conservation programs, resulting in a heightened sense of community ownership.

- Neighborhood environment was another popular service area. Programs involved in urban and rural neighborhood environment activities conducted needs assessment, planned, monitored, provided public education, and made general improvements of neighborhood communities. These activities included several large-scale clean up or maintenance projects, safety and health seminars about environmental hazards, and the distribution of materials or resources to decrease homeowners' utility expenses.
- One Native-American program focused on building community gardens and restoring the use of traditional agricultural practices. Members consulted with elders in the communities to learn about traditional agriculture practices and techniques. They produced curriculum materials for local schoolchildren on the subject of gardening and good environmental practices. Teachers commented that students improved their awareness of their cultural heritage. The gardens created by members displayed the application of good techniques such as the biological control of pests. Much of the produce was donated to community members in need. Residents were able to harvest traditional corn for their dances for the first time in over forty years, helping to revive an important tradition.
- Programs focusing on the natural environment undertook complex and physically demanding environmental enhancement activities involving conservation, habitat restoration, or parkland improvement.
- In one exemplary project, members worked on tasks such as wetland reclamation, trash clean up with other environmental programs, the restoration and building of new facilities in state forests. They conducted baseline data collection and documentation of stream conditions. Members also gave demonstrations at schools to teach school children the effect that humans have on their environment.

Public Safety

Public safety programs performed a variety of activities aimed at reducing crime and improving community life.

- AmeriCorps members started neighborhood safety programs, mobilized neighbors, and improved community/police relations, resulting in safer communities.
- They established better working relationships and improved communication between diverse groups (e.g., between members of different gangs, or between tribal groups).
- They conducted neighborhood watches and violence prevention patrols, and provided escorts for children and elders.
- Members worked to prevent violence and drug abuse in families and communities and provided direct assistance to victims of crime as well as referring them to needed services.

- Members also used mediation techniques to help prevent violence in schools, resulting in decreased incidents of violence and negative behavior.
- One successful project was focused on helping victims of domestic abuse by providing both direct client services and community education. Members based at crisis intervention centers provided victims and their children with counseling and referrals and information on steps to take for self-protection. Members serving at the prosecutor's offices acted as advocates for victims going through the court process against their abusers. Members based in civil courts provided guidance through the legal maze and information to aid victims in making the best decisions regarding their situations.

Other Human Needs

Other human needs programs focused on public health and services to targeted individuals and communities. These programs provided immunizations and pre-natal services, assistance in accessing social services and, for low-income and homeless people with immediate needs, help in finding shelter, food, and clothing.

- AmeriCorps members made independent living easier for disabled, elderly, or hospitalized individuals and helped build low-income housing units.
- The AmeriCorps members provided immunizations and emergency medical services, offered medical referrals for diagnosis, screening, and prenatal care, as well as health training and educational materials. They provided child care and transportation to clients who needed that support to obtain medical care.
- In one urban-based program, members counseled individuals on job development and job placement, assisted pregnant women to obtain prenatal care and other services, served as advocates for low-income families and the elderly for obtaining access to health care services, assisted counselors with clients needing physical or mental assistance, and distributed clothes and food to low-income families and homeless people.

All in all, with respect to getting things done, members accomplished a substantial amount of service in each of the four service areas. Three factors emerged as keys to program success: good service models tailored to the needs of communities, effective supervision of AmeriCorps members, and solid management. The focus on "Getting Things Done" served AmeriCorps well.

CONCLUSION

The AmeriCorps Program was implemented very quickly and grew very fast. Early on, programs struggled with implementation issues. Over time, Aguirre International saw programs become more effective as managers tightened service objectives, implemented better monitoring systems, adjusted placement and supervision structures, added partners, and improved management practices. Service delivery improved and the amount of accomplishments reported increased. The quality of technical assistance provided improved as well.

Despite the varied start-up challenges, AmeriCorps programs displayed significant impact on the lives of AmeriCorps members and service beneficiaries. AmeriCorps members' involvement in community service not only heightened their life skills, civic responsibility, and education, but promoted social awareness and community understanding to an extent that would not have happened without AmeriCorps.

AmeriCorps programs provide substantial direct services in four issue areas: education, environment, public safety, and other human needs, but more importantly, it furnished communities with services that were essential and valuable. These services had measurable positive impacts on service beneficiaries. In addition, AmeriCorps programs expanded the capacity of community organizations and strengthened the communities involved.