

Exploring Demographics, Motivation, Interpersonal and Group Cohesion Factors in Retaining Members through their Term of Service: A National Study of AmeriCorps NCCC

FINAL REPORT

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Value of solution.*



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December 29, 2023

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Executive Summary

The Corporation for National and Community Service (dba AmeriCorps) is the federal agency connecting individuals and organizations through service and volunteering to tackle the nation's most pressing challenges. AmeriCorps engages and provides opportunities for more than five million individuals to serve their communities and address local needs through its core programs – AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps NCCC, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps Seniors. The service that members and volunteers provide through the core programs is embodied in AmeriCorps' mission statement: *To improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering*. Operating under the AmeriCorps umbrella and mission is the AmeriCorps NCCC program, with its own, related, mission statement: *To strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct, team-based national and community service*.

AmeriCorps retained JBS International (JBS) to design a mixed-methods longitudinal evaluation consisting of three studies: (1) measure the impact of service on leadership skills among members; (2) define and gauge how AmeriCorps NCCC strengthens the communities in which its members serve; and (3) evaluate the factors affecting retention of members.

This report discusses the findings on factors that affect the retention of members. Retaining members through their year of service is an important in order to achieve AmeriCorps' desired impact on those who serve, the beneficiaries and the communities. Retaining members maximizes the program's cost effectiveness and enhances sustainability. A high attrition rate yields a higher than anticipated cost per member, as has occurred in recent years. It is important to understand the evidence on member retention to inform AmeriCorps' efforts to achieve its desired impacts on beneficiaries and communities, enhances cost effectiveness of the program and its sustainability. With these concerns in mind, AmeriCorps sought to design this longitudinal study of its AmeriCorps NCCC program to understand how to maximize member retention at various stages of service.

Objectives

This study of member retention accomplishes the following objectives:

1. Describe the characteristics of members who do not complete their term of service (early exit members).
2. Describe motivation for service and reasons for leaving service.
3. Identify factors that contribute to member retention through the end of the service term.
4. Discuss the lessons learned and best practices that can inform how best to maximize member retention.

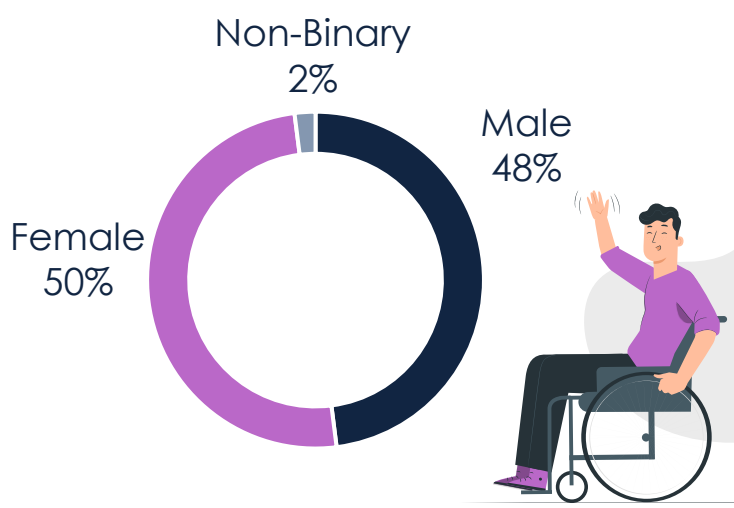
Methods

The study of member retention draws from the national longitudinal quasi-experimental design (QED) evaluation of AmeriCorps NCCC. The QED identified comparable individuals drawn from the pool of candidates who applied to serve and were accepted, but did not do so, and the treatment group consists of individuals who served and completed their term of service with AmeriCorps NCCC. The sample of early exit members includes members who began service but did not complete their terms of service. The survey administration timeline is the same for members, early exit members and comparison participants. All participants completed the same questionnaire at three time points. In addition, early exit members completed a short survey at

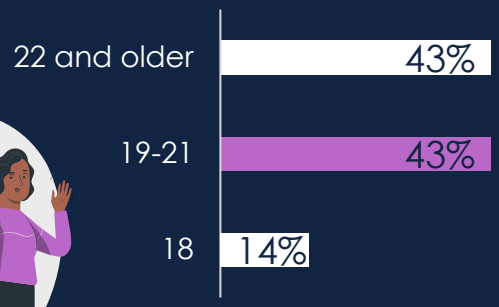
the time of their exit to measure their reasons for leaving as well as their perception of the service experience and how this experience may have contributed to their decision to leave. Of the 1,252 incoming members, 344 exited without completing their term of service. This represents an attrition rate of 27 percent. We conducted semi-structured interviews with a random sample of 48 early exit members. Two researchers conducted the interviews via video conference calls or telephone conference calls between November 2020 and June 2022. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Average age of early exit members is 21. More than one-third are from low SES households. More than half identified as White; less than a quarter identified as Hispanic or Latino; less one fifth identified as Black or African American.

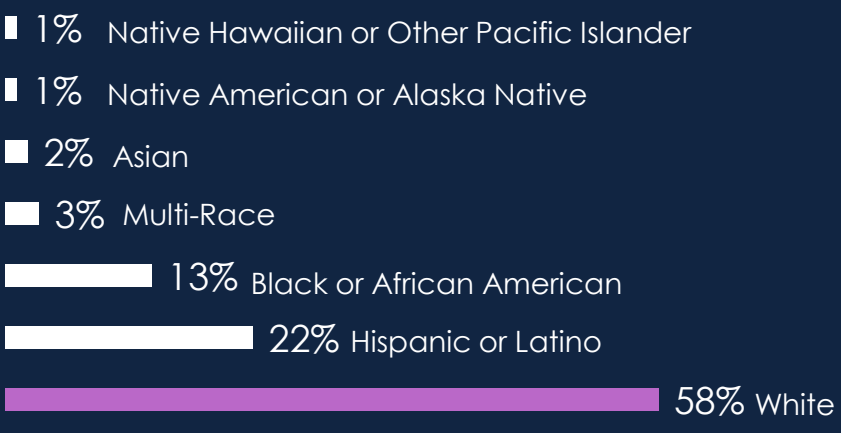
Gender



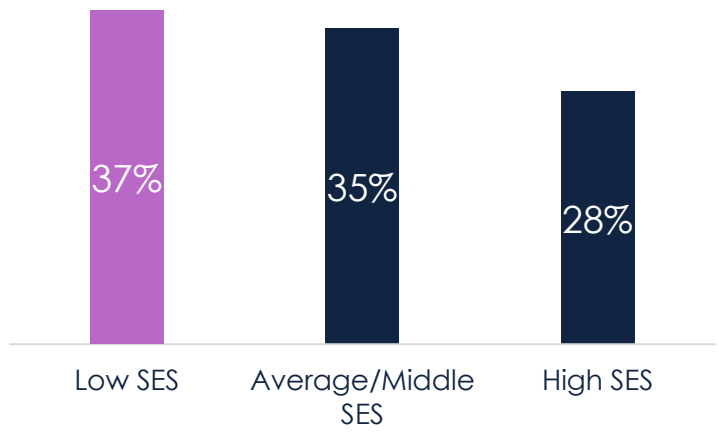
Age



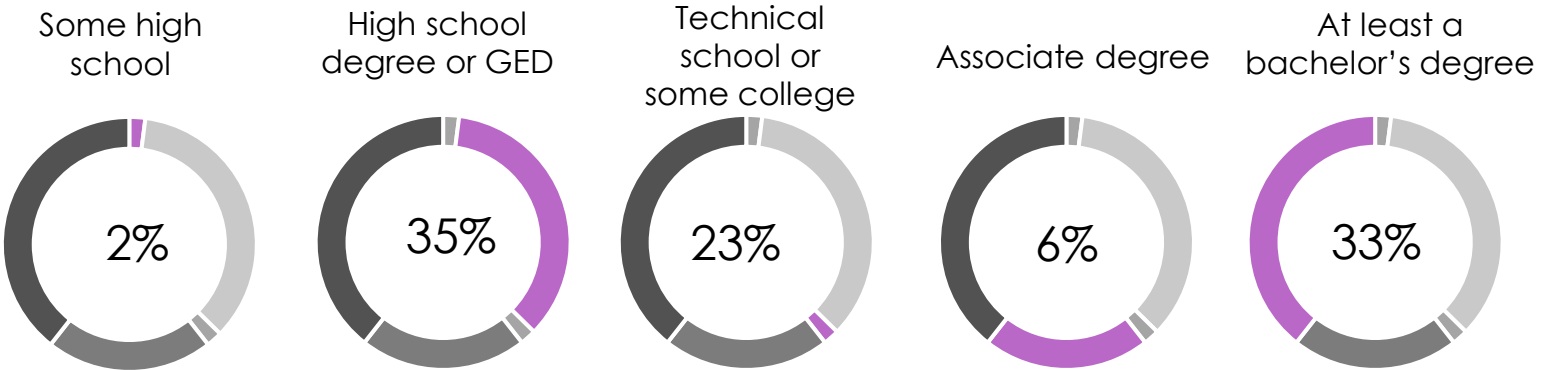
Race & Ethnicity



Socio-Economic Status



Most early exit members have either a high school diploma or GED, technical school, or some college.



Early exit from national service varies. The lowest exit rate is among members with a college degree irrespective of their age, SES, or race and ethnicity.

Age

Members aged 19 through 21 have the highest exit rate compared to members aged 18 or members aged 22 and over.

Educational Attainment

Members who do not have a high school diploma have the highest exit rate.

Socio-Economic Status

Members who have a lower SES have a higher exit rate than those with average or high SES.

Race & Ethnicity

Members who identify as Black or African-American have the highest exit rate.

Early exit members are motivated to seek career and leadership development opportunities and they are altruistic.



Develop

» 77% of early exit members are motivated to find a direction for their career; 73% are motivated by the opportunity to gain professional skills.

Do Good

» 85% of early exit members are motivated because they want to make a difference and serve their country.

Explore

» 87% of early exit members are motivated by the opportunity to travel the country; 75% are interested in meeting new people.

Earn

» 50% of early exit members are motivated to earn money for college tuition; 31% are motivated because they need a job.

Unrealized expectations can result in ending service.

Program structure, outside obligations, project assignments, and interpersonal team dynamics plays an important role in retaining members



"Improving the process by which campus leadership hears and responds to concerns from members, not just team leaders, would really increase that level of trust."

Leadership & Program Structure

Outside Obligations

"I needed to help my family pay the bills, I was not earning enough money with NCCC."

"I didn't feel like the work I was doing was beneficial to people. They were struggling to find things to do."

Project Assignments

Team Dynamics

"Some members engaged in bickering and negativity that dragged down the team."

» Felt disconnected and disillusioned with the program's structure.

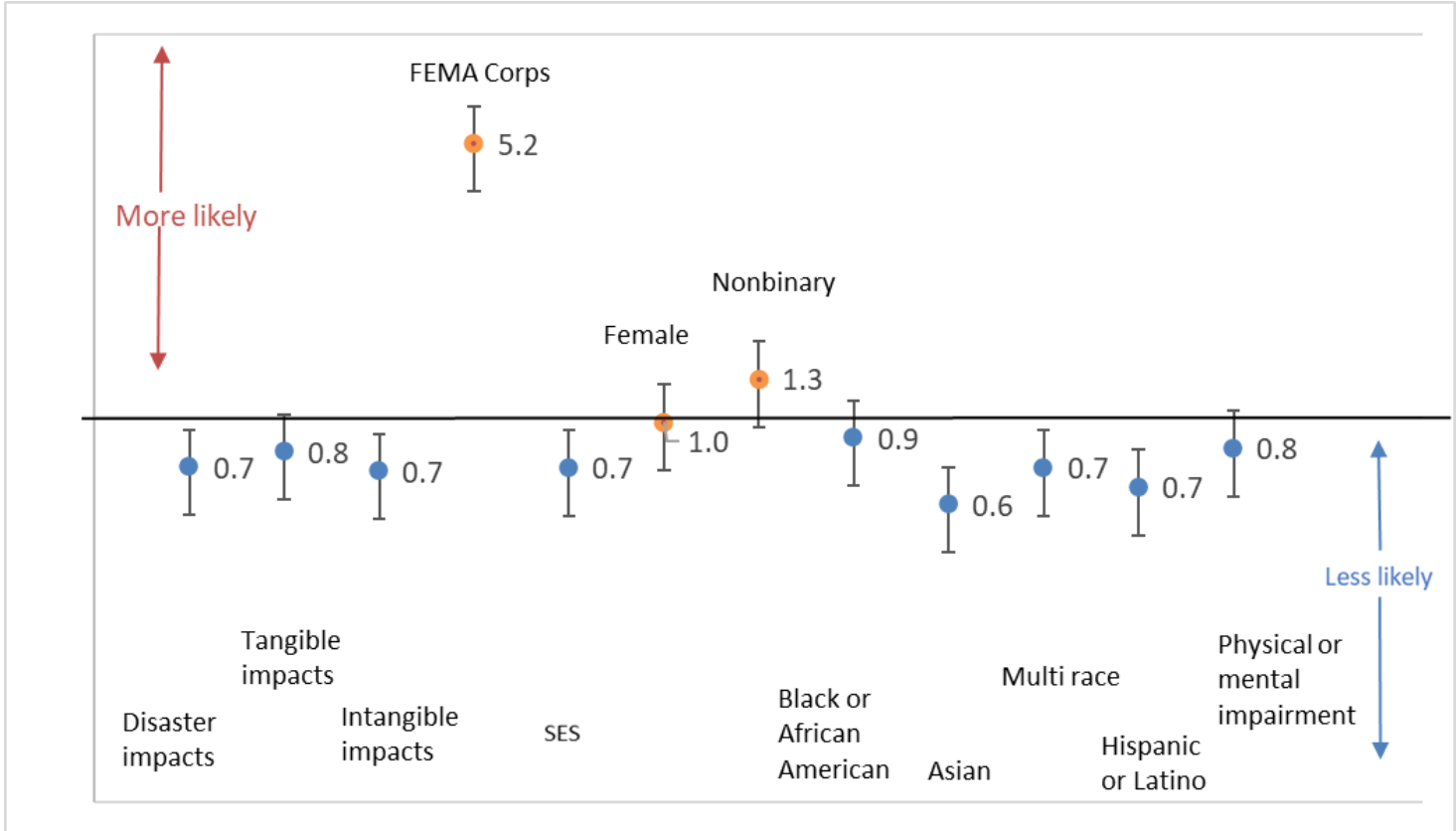
» Secured a job, going back to school, need to care for a family member

» Dissatisfied with project assignments

» Interpersonal conflicts with the team

Members with project assignments that align with their interests and motivations are less likely to end their service early.

- » Members assigned to projects where they perceive they are making a difference are less likely to exit early, especially members who identified as Black or African American who also have the higher risk of ending their service early.
- » FEMA Corps members are significantly more likely to exit early compared to Traditional Corps members. This may be due to FEMA Corps members' feeling they are less connected to the community they serve than Traditional Corps members, and more often feeling their assignments are meaningless busy-work.



Maximize member retention

- » Expose members to a range of assignments that align with interest, connection to the community being served as well as personal leadership and career development.
- » Ensure quality sponsors with sustainable workloads and clear expectations of training.
- » Strengthen communication connection between members and program leadership.



Background

The Corporation for National and Community Service (dba AmeriCorps) is the federal agency connecting individuals and organizations through service and volunteering to tackle the nation's most pressing challenges. AmeriCorps engages and provides opportunities for more than five million individuals to serve their communities and address local needs through its core programs – AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps NCCC, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps Seniors. The service that members and volunteers provide through the core programs is embodied in AmeriCorps' mission statement: *To improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering*. Operating under the AmeriCorps umbrella and mission is the AmeriCorps NCCC program, with its own, related, mission statement: *To strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct, team-based national and community service*. The Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE), as the principal office for research activity within AmeriCorps, relies on multiple sources of scientific inquiry to provide credible and reliable evidence to support the agency's mission and help drive the agency's business decisions to allocate resources strategically and grow effective national service programs. AmeriCorps NCCC and ORE embarked on a collaboration to evaluate how service with AmeriCorps NCCC promotes leadership skills among its members and how service projects strengthen the communities in which members serve. This national evaluation is closely linked to AmeriCorps' strategic plan, which the agency developed in accordance with the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (FEBP) of 2018, Pub. L. 115-435. The strategic plan provides the agency a roadmap for generating credible, relevant, and actionable information for strategic learning and decision-making to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of AmeriCorps and its programs.

In September 2018, AmeriCorps retained JBS International (JBS) to design a mixed-methods longitudinal evaluation consisting of three studies to (1) measure the impact of service on leadership skills among members; (2) define and gauge how AmeriCorps NCCC strengthens the communities in which its members serve; and (3) evaluate the factors affecting member retention. In January 2020, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approved the data collection (OMB Control Number 3045-0189) for the three studies.

This report discusses the findings on factors affecting retention of members¹. *Retention* refers specifically to the continuance of members in a service program or activity; *attrition* refers to the loss of members from service. The literature on volunteer management has long sought to measure volunteer retention (and attrition) rates and to understand the determinants of retention. Low retention rates may result in the need for ongoing investment in recruiting and retraining other volunteers; attrition may even indicate a failing or an unsustainable program (Beirne & Lambin, 2013). Member retention through their year of service is an important factor for AmeriCorps to achieve its desired impacts on those who serve, beneficiaries, and communities. High member retention maximizes the program's cost effectiveness and enhances sustainability. A high attrition rate yields a higher than anticipated cost per member. It is important to understand the evidence on member retention to inform AmeriCorps' efforts to achieve its

¹ Georges, A., Smith, S.J., Hussain, B., Shannon, R., Sum, C., Tait, E., LaTaillade, J., Alvarado, A., & Krauss, J. (2023). *Leadership through Service: AmeriCorps NCCC's Impact on Members*. San Mateo, CA: JBS International, Inc; Georges, A., Shannon, R., Sum, C., Smith, S.J., Tait, E., LaTaillade, J., McHugh, C., & Mackey, C. (2023). *Evidence of AmeriCorps NCCC' Impact on Strengthening Communities*. San Mateo, CA: JBS International, Inc.

desired impacts on beneficiaries and communities, enhances cost effectiveness of the program and its sustainability. In recent years, rising attrition rates (low retention rates) among members have resulted in higher than anticipated costs per member. With these concerns in mind, AmeriCorps sought to design a longitudinal study of its AmeriCorps NCCC program to understand how to maximize member retention.

At the time of the study's implementation, AmeriCorps NCCC maintained two programs: Traditional Corps and FEMA Corps. In the Traditional Corps program, AmeriCorps members perform service projects in one or more focus areas, such as helping communities develop emergency plans and respond to emergencies such as flood, hurricanes, and public health emergencies such as COVID-19, constructing and rehabilitating low-income housing, performing environmental clean-up, coordinating volunteers, and addressing other local needs. FEMA Corps is a partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), where members gain professional skills in emergency management while serving with FEMA on disaster response and recovery efforts. Administrative records show almost 23 percent of Traditional Corps members and 27 percent of FEMA Corps members leave before completing their service term.

This study of member retention accomplishes the following objectives:

1. Describe the characteristics of members who do not complete their term of service (early exit members).
2. Describe motivation for service and reasons for leaving service.
3. Identify factors that contribute to member retention through the end of the service term.
4. Discuss the lessons learned and best practices that can inform how best to maximize member retention.

Organization of the report

This report is organized into 5 chapters. Chapter 1 summarizes the literature on factors affecting member retention in national service. The key themes that emerge as effective mechanisms to maximize retention include the importance of social networks, efforts to enhance satisfaction, and efforts to minimize stress and burnout. The discussion identifies the evidence gap in the literature to which the current study on member retention contributes. Chapter 2 describes the research design which includes the analysis approach, and data sources. Chapter 3 discusses the findings on the first two objectives; this includes a description of early exit member characteristics, members' motivations to serve, and their reasons for ending their service. Chapter 4 discusses the findings on the third objective on the factors that contribute to member retention. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and discusses the lessons learned and best practices to maximize national service members' retention. Throughout the discussion, the analysis compares differences between Traditional Corps and FEMA Corps early exit members.

Chapter 1 Prior studies on retention of young adults in national service

Mechanisms for the retention of young adults in national service vary, but across the literature, key themes emerged regarding the importance of social networks; efforts to enhance satisfaction; and efforts to minimize stress and burnout as effective mechanisms to maximize retention. The evidence from studies of AmeriCorps members shows younger members more frequently

terminate their service prior to completion than older members; members with lower levels of education (GED, less than a high school education, or technical school) were more likely to leave their term of service for a non-compelling reason as were African American and American Indian/Alaskan members (AmeriCorps VISTA (n.d.); DMA Corporation, 2003).

Social motivations are one reason for both an attraction to serve and desire to complete the service term. The influence of family and friends can induce individuals to volunteer (Rehberg, 2005), though the study of AmeriCorps members by Jastrzab et al. (2004) found that family and friends were not major reasons that individuals chose to join AmeriCorps. Some studies demonstrated the importance of social networks within organizations for the retention of volunteers (Hidalgo, 2009; Rice & Fallon, 2011). Volunteering in groups may positively impact retention due to social acceptance, friendship, and other peer effects (Cnaan & Amroffell, 1994; Gidron, 1983; Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009 cited in McBride & Lee, 2012). The social relationships that volunteers develop with each other and paid staff (or group integration) is found to be a significant predictor of intent to remain among volunteers (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002). While relationships within the organization are important, and good relationships with staff and other volunteers can positively affect volunteer retention (Hidalgo, 2009), some studies found that coworker relationships have a relatively weak influence on volunteer intention to remain (Walker, 2016; Vecina, Chacón, Marzana, and Marta, 2013). These mixed findings suggest the need for further research to better understand the role that the social aspects of service and volunteering play in retention.

Other studies point to the importance of satisfaction for retention. Volunteer happiness is negatively associated with the intention to leave, and volunteers who find intrinsic rewards in their service experiences are more likely to stay (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016; Al Mutawa, 2015; Lammers, 1991). A study conducted by Yiu, Au, and Tang (2001) found that, of numerous factors examined, satisfaction with the volunteer assignment was the most salient predictor of longer duration of service. Volunteers tend to experience satisfaction when they are given interesting activities and some autonomy (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016). Volunteers who receive ongoing training and support – thus fulfilling their motivations to acquire new skills and knowledge – also express greater satisfaction with their assignments and greater likelihood to remain in service (Wooten, 2017). Those volunteers who are fully engaged tend to find that assignment more intrinsically enjoyable and are more likely to remain in the organization (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016). In their study, Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley (2002) found that volunteers need to feel effective and competent in their tasks, and these feelings can significantly impact retention.

Burnout and stress contribute to attrition. Burnout is defined as an emotional depletion, a sense of a lack of personal accomplishment, and cynicism and callousness toward one's assignment (Yiu, Au, & Tang, 2001). Volunteers experiencing burnout tend to have shorter duration of service and lower commitment to their service (ibid.). A study by Jansen (2010) found that greater use of negative coping mechanisms, higher levels of stress, decreased levels of empathy, and poorer general mental health were significant predictors of increased volunteer burnout. These findings may have implications for early warning signs of AmeriCorps member dropout. In a survey of AmeriCorps participants who left the program, Aguirre International (n.d.) found that personal need reasons (including family issues, financial difficulties, illness, childcare problems, and pregnancy) were frequently cited by former members.

Research on Retention of College Students. A few seminal resources revealed similarity of

factors affecting retention of young adults attending residential colleges and retention of young adults in residential service programs like AmeriCorps NCCC. In their book on college student retention, Braxton and colleagues (2013) identify the importance of social integration on student retention and find empirical evidence demonstrating that commitment of college institutions to student welfare, institutional integrity, and psychosocial engagement play a significant role in social integration. Student perceptions that faculty at their institutions hold a genuine interest in students positively influence students' views on the commitment of their colleges to student welfare and to institutional integrity (Braxton et al., 2013). In a survey of the literature, Tinto (2006) points to several key findings on student retention. For example, for under-represented students, where it was once argued that, to promote retention, students should be encouraged to break away from past communities, the research shows that it is beneficial to maintain connections to past communities, families, and churches (Tinto, 2006). Student engagement also appears to be a driving factor of retention, though Tinto (2006) also points to gaps in the literature on best practices for encouraging student engagement. This finding may be critical to retention efforts for residential youth service programs and relates to the previously discussed desire of younger adult volunteers to feel engaged in meaningful and satisfying assignments when serving.

In a review of research on college persistence indicators, Bowles, Therriault and Krivoshey (2014) noted that the reasons for college student attrition are varied and include a blending of personal, academic, and background characteristics as well as the transition from a highly structured educational experience in high school to a wider range of settings at college. For example, life experiences can have an important effect on persistence, and indicators of life experience on college persistence include availability and access to financial assistance; first-generation college student; single-parent student; working while attending school; and support. Institutional factors related to the higher education institution also play a role in persistence, and indicators include metrics under the dimensions of quality of classroom instruction and institutional resources.

Research on Retention of Military Personnel. AmeriCorps NCCC's residential service program combines aspects of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the United States military. The common foundation to the military is that training and deployment to service occur in a setting that is away from the members' homes and communities, and it is different from their previous experience; furthermore, the service experience occurs in a close-quartered and structured environment that is unlike any prior experience members may have previously encountered. This unique structure might be relevant in understanding variations and fluctuations in AmeriCorps members' retention.

An understanding of factors affecting retention of college students is informative for addressing retention of young adults in national service. Specifically, factors shown to be important are:

Social integration as well as maintenance of social ties with communities, families, and churches, particularly for under-represented students;

Institutional commitment to student welfare and engagement; and

Differential needs of students with different personal, academic, and background characteristics.

Factors associated with military retention parallel those identified in the volunteer literature. For example, misalignment between expectations of military service, such as length and type of deployment, and the reality of actual experience could negatively affect retention (Helmus et al., 2018; NATO RTO, 2007). One report described how a change in requirements for service to increase the pool of recruits could potentially enroll members who are less prepared for military service and, as a result, retention of these members could be lower compared to other recruits (NATO RTO, 2007). During their term of service, military members tended to leave service due to dissatisfaction with circumstances in the military and the attractiveness of alternatives in the private sector (NATO RTO, 2007). This finding is similar to the research findings among AmeriCorps NCCC members (Aguirre International, n.d.). The research on female Air Force officers, specifically, found three salient categories affecting retention: family and personal factors (such as children, pregnancy, spouses, and dating); career (career path flexibility, ability to cross-train, and civilian opportunities); and broader Air Force and military factors (including benefits, deployments, and force reduction).

The key factors that have emerged as important contributors for recruitment, motivation, satisfaction, and retention in the military provide lessons about the retention of AmeriCorps members. For example, the research on the military suggests consideration be given to understanding how retention might be related to type of service projects, duties performed in projects, and length and duration of projects.

Chapter 2 Research Design

This report describes the characteristics of members who do not complete their term of service, their motivation for wanting to serve, reasons for leaving, and the factors that contribute to the likelihood of leaving service early. The objectives are:

1. Describe the characteristics of members who do not complete their term of service (early exit members).
2. Describe motivation for service and reasons for leaving service.
3. Identify factors that contribute to member retention through the end of the service term.
4. Discuss the lessons learned and best practices that can inform how best to maximize member retention.

This study draws from the national longitudinal quasi-experimental design (QED) evaluation of AmeriCorps NCCC. The QED identified comparable individuals from a comparison group drawn from the pool of candidates who applied to serve and were accepted but did not enroll. The treatment group consists of individuals who served and completed their term of service with NCCC. The sample of early exit members includes members who began service but did not complete their terms of service. The survey administration timeline is the same for members, early exit members and comparison participants. All participants completed the same questionnaire at three time points. In addition, early exit members completed a survey at the time of their exit to measure their reasons for leaving as well as their perception about the service experience and how this experience may have contributed to their decision to leave.

Participants

The service year for AmeriCorps NCCC is divided into three cycles; the Fall cycle begins in October, the Winter cycle begins in February, and the Summer cycle begins in July. Incoming members from February 2020 through March 2021 enrolled in the study. The data collection began with the February 2020 Winter cycle. Enrollment into the study occurred as members reported to their campus for training to begin their service.

AmeriCorps members who began service but departed before completing their service term are identified as early exit members. The sample for the retention study is drawn from a survey administered to 1,252 AmeriCorps members as they began their service term. During the term of service, as members ended their service early and did not complete the program, the member is then identified as an early exit member. Table 2.1 shows the sample for the retention study. Of the 1,252 incoming members, 344 exited without completing their term of service. This represents an attrition rate of 27 percent. The attrition rate for FEMA Corps was 32 percent, and the attrition rate for the Traditional Corps was 26 percent.

Table 2.1: Sample of Traditional Corps and FEMA Corps early exit members

	Incoming AmeriCorps Members at Baseline	Sample of Early exit members	Attrition Rate
Overall	1,252	344	27%
Traditional Corps	1,020	270	26%
FEMA Corps	232	74	32%

The first survey was administered immediately prior to the start of service to each of 10 AmeriCorps NCCC classes that began service between February 2020 and March 2021. The members who exited early before completing their service term were administered a survey at the time of their exit to measure their reasons for leaving as well as their perception about the service experience and how this experience may have contributed to their decision to leave. The early exit members were also contacted to complete the second survey, which was administered from October 2020 to March 2022. This is the same timeline that these participants would have completed their term of service (10 months for Traditional Corps, 12 months for FEMA Corps)². The administration of the second survey began three to four weeks prior to members' completion of their service term. The early exit members were again contacted to complete the third survey, which was administered from October 2021 to April 2023, 12 months post service. Concurrent with each survey administration with members, participants in the comparison groups completed the same survey as members.

Table 2.2 shows the number of early exit members for each wave of survey administration. Of the 344 early exit members, 170 responded to the early exit survey at the time of their exit from the program, a response rate of 49 percent; 219 of the 344 participants completed the second survey, a response of 64 percent; and 148 responded to the third survey, a response rate of 68

² FEMA Corps has since adjusted their term of service to 10-months.

percent.

Table 2.2: Survey response rate among early exit members

		Total Contacted	Respondents	Response Rate
Early exit survey^a				
	Overall	344	170	49%
	FEMA Corps	74	29	39%
Second survey^a				
	Overall	344	219	64%
	FEMA Corps	74	51	69%
Third survey				
	Overall	219	148	68%
	FEMA Corps	51	34	67%
Semi-Structured Interviews				
	Overall	51	48	94%
	FEMA Corps	10	10	100%

^aThe early exit survey was administered at the time the member was exiting the program. Overall, 344 members exited early, all of whom were contacted about the early exit survey. Of the 344 early exit members, 170 completed the early exit survey. For the second survey all 344 early exit members were contacted, of which 219 completed the second survey.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with a random sample of up to five early exit members from each of the ten classes whose members enrolled in the study. Of the 51 early exit members contacted, 48 completed the interview, resulting in a response rate of 94 percent. A total of 10 FEMA Corps early exit members and 38 Traditional Corps early exit members participated in the interviews. Two researchers conducted the interviews via video conference calls or telephone conference calls between November 2020 and June 2022. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Non-Response Bias Analysis

Non-response bias can occur when individuals who chose not to take part in the study or who dropped out of the study before completion, are systematically different from those who participated fully. Between the baseline survey and first follow-up survey, a non-response bias analysis showed none to minimal bias. The non-response bias analysis determined that there were no significant systematic differences in characteristics between early exit participants who responded to the first follow-up survey and early exit participants who did not respond.

Appendix A provides a full list of the variables and a full description of the non-response analysis.

Chapter 3 Demographic background, motivation, service experience, and reasons for leaving

This chapter addresses the first two objectives: describe the characteristics of members who do not complete their term of service (early exit members); and describe their motivation for service and reasons for leaving service. This chapter is organized into seven sections:

- Demographic characteristics,
- How members first heard about AmeriCorps NCCC,
- Motivations for serving,
- Understanding of the service experience,
- Perception of the service experience,
- Reasons for leaving service early, and
- Differences between Traditional Corps and FEMA Corps.

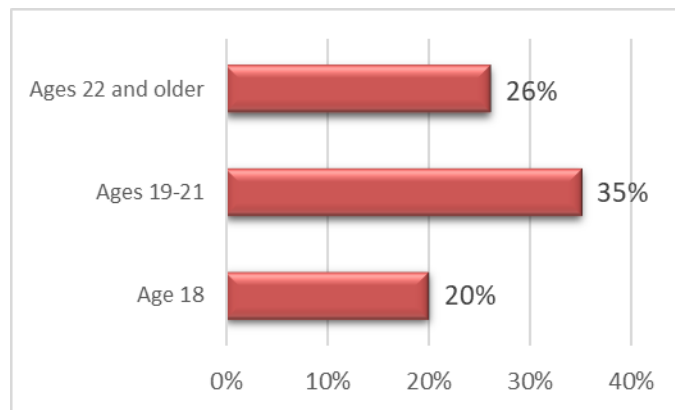
Demographic Characteristics

Members in the 19-21 age bracket and members who identify as male have a higher attrition rate.

Age and gender

The average age of an early exit member was 21, with about 43 percent of early exit members in the 19-21 bracket and the 22 and older bracket. Figure 3.1 shows the attrition rate within each age group. The highest attrition rate, 35 percent, was among participants in the 19-21 bracket, compared to an attrition rate of 26 percent among those in the 22 or older bracket and an attrition rate of 20 percent among participants aged 18.

Figure 3.1 Attrition rate by age group



Of the 344 early exit participants, 171 identified as female (50%), 166 identified as male (48%), and 7 identified as non-binary (2%). Gender was not notable when examining the attrition rate, with males having a slightly higher rate (28%) compared to females (27%) and non-binary members (26%).

Race and Ethnicity

There are differences by race and ethnic distribution among members who would eventually exit early and among those who would eventually complete their service. Members who identified as Black or African American and those who identified as White are over-represented among early

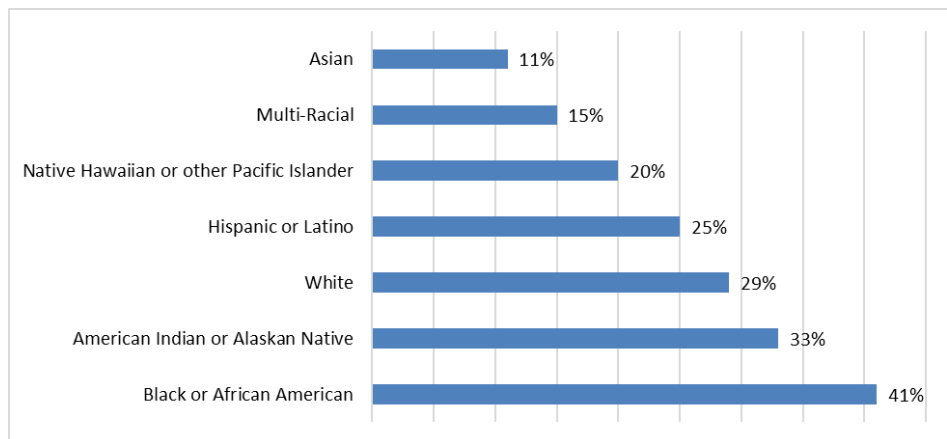
exit members compared to those who completed their service (Table 3.1). Among early exit members more than half (58%) identified as White compared to 55 percent among those who completed service; 13 percent of early exit members considered themselves Black or African American compared to 7 percent among members who completed service. Members who identified as Hispanic or Latino, Asian and multi-race are under-represented among early exit members (Table 3.1). Less than one-quarter (22%) of early exit members identified as Hispanic or Latino compared to 26 percent among members who completed service; 3 percent of early exit members identified themselves as multi-racial compared to 6 percent among members who completed service; and 2 percent of early exit members identified as Asian compared to 4 percent among members who completed service. One percent of early exit members identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. Members who identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaskan Native are under-represented but make up a smaller proportion of members.

Table 3.1 Comparison of the Race/ethnicity distribution among early exit members and members who completed service

Race and Ethnicity	Early Exit	Completed Service	All Incoming members
White	58%	55%	55%
Hispanic or Latino	22%	26%	26%
Black or African American	13%	7%	9%
Multi-Race	3%	6%	5%
Asian	2%	4%	4%
Native American or Alaska Native	1%	1%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	1%	0.4%

Figure 3.2 shows the attrition rates within each race and ethnic group. Members identifying as White have a 29 percent rate of early exit. Black or African American members have the highest attrition rate at 41 percent. Among Hispanic or Latino members, the attrition rate is 25 percent.

Figure 3.2 Attrition rate within each race and ethnic group



Education

The attrition rate by education is highest among members with no high school diploma, followed by members with a graduate degree, and members with a technical apprenticeship certificate. This pattern, however, is more consistent among members who identified as White, or Hispanic and Latino. Table 3.2 shows the majority (87%) of early exits have either a high school diploma/GED, some college, or a bachelor's degree. Members who have a bachelor's degree are under-represented among early exits, 31 percent of early exit members have a bachelor's degree compared to 36 percent among members who completed service. Members with some college, an associate degree or who do not have a high school diploma are over-represented among early exits compared to members who completed service (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Distribution of highest level of education completed among graduating AmeriCorps members and early exit members

Level of Education	Early Exit	Completed Term of Service	All Incoming AmeriCorps members
Some high school, I do not have a diploma	2%	1%	1%
High school diploma or GED	35%	35%	38%
Technical school / Apprenticeship certificate	2%	2%	2%
Some college	21%	20%	21%
Associate degree	6%	5%	5%
Bachelor's degree	31%	36%	32%
Graduate degree	2%	1%	1%

Sample size is 907 for AmeriCorps members that completed the term of service and 344 for early exit members.

There is variation at the intersection of education and the participant's race/ethnicity. For efficiency, since 93 percent of early exit participants identify as White (58%), Hispanic or Latino (22%), or Black or African American (13%), the discussion and chart focus on these three groups. Table 3.3 illustrates the attrition rate within each race and ethnic group by education level. Overall, the level of education completed by members is an important indicator of remaining in service. Within each group, the lowest attrition rate is among members with a college degree. Among members who identified as White and Hispanic or Latino, there is a high attrition rate for those on either side of the education spectrum (some high school, or graduate degree). By contrast, there is a high attrition rate among members who identified as Black or African American with a high school, technical school, and some college education.

Table 3.3 Comparison of attrition rate within each race/ethnic group, by education

Level of Education	White	Hispanic or Latino	Black or African American
Some high school, I do not have a diploma	38%	100%	-
High school diploma or GED	26%	27%	43%
Technical school / Apprenticeship certificate	25%	-	75%
Some college	36%	22%	43%
Associate degree	34%	37%	33%
Bachelor's degree	25%	19%	22%
Graduate degree	38%	50%	-

Note: “-“ indicates no members with that level of education exited early. There were four members in the sample in the “Technical school / Apprenticeship certificate” education category and were Hispanic or Latino, none of them exited early. There were no African American members with some high school as their highest level of education. There was one African American member with a graduate degree that did not exit early.

There is an inverse association between education and early exit among members who identified as Black or African American. The attrition rate among members who identified as Black or African American and completed technical school was 75 percent. The attrition rate among members who identified as Black or African American with either a high school diploma or GED or some college was 43 percent. Among those with a bachelor’s degree the attrition rate was 22 percent.

Among members who identified as Hispanic or Latino and who had a high school diploma or GED, the attrition rate was 27 percent, and among those with an associate degree, the attrition rate was 37 percent. Whereas the attrition rate was lower at 19 percent among those with a bachelor’s degree.

The attrition rate was 26 percent among members who identified as White (non-Hispanic) and who had a high school diploma or GED. The attrition rate was 36 percent among those with some college, and 38 percent among those with a graduate degree. Among members who identified as White and with a college degree, the attrition rate was 25 percent.

Household Structure

The survey included several questions on family background such as household structure, which asked participants to indicate the highest level of education completed by the parent or guardian they lived with most of the time and whether the parent or guardian, at the time they completed the survey, was currently working. These questions form a proxy of the members’ socioeconomic status.

The pattern in the distribution of members’ household structure between both groups is the same in that most early exit members and members who completed service are from two-parent or one-parent households. When comparing the two groups, members in two-parent households are under-represented among the early exit group compared to members who completed service; whereas members in one-parent household are over-represented in the early exit group compared to members who completed service. More than half (51%) of early exit members lived in a two-parent/guardian household compared to 59 percent among members who completed service; and

30 percent of early exit members lived in a single-parent household compared to 24 percent among members who completed service. Members in one-parent and one-guardian households, and single-guardian (no parent) households are over-represented in the early exit group. About 3 percent of early exit members lived in a household with one-parent/one-guardian household or in a single-guardian household; the distribution among members who completed service in the same type of households is 1 percent and 2 percent respectively (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Comparison of household structure among early exit members and members who completed service

Household Structure	Early Exit	Completed Service
Two parents	51%	59%
One parent	30%	24%
One parent and one guardian	3%	1%
Single guardian (no parent in household)	3%	2%
No parent	3%	3%
Two other family figures	1%	1%
Do not wish to answer	9%	10%

Sample size is 865 for AmeriCorps members that completed the term of service and 319 for early exit members

Note: Parent is defined as: biological parent, adoptive parent, or stepparent. Guardian is defined as: foster parent, partner of relative, grandparent, other relative, or other guardian.

Differences are demonstrated in the education level of the parent/guardian between early exit members and members who completed their service. Table 3.5 shows this distribution for each group. About 36 percent within each group have a parent or guardian with a master’s degree or Ph.D. At lower levels of education, the difference between the two groups is mixed. More than a quarter of early exit members have a parent/guardian with a bachelor’s degree or associate degree (27%), and more than a quarter have a parent with a high school diploma or occupational training (28%). By contrast, less than one quarter of members who completed service have a parent/guardian with a high school diploma or occupational training (20%), and more than one third (38%) of members have a parent or guardian with a bachelor’s degree or associate degree.

Table 3.5 Comparison of parent/guardian education among early exit members and members who completed service

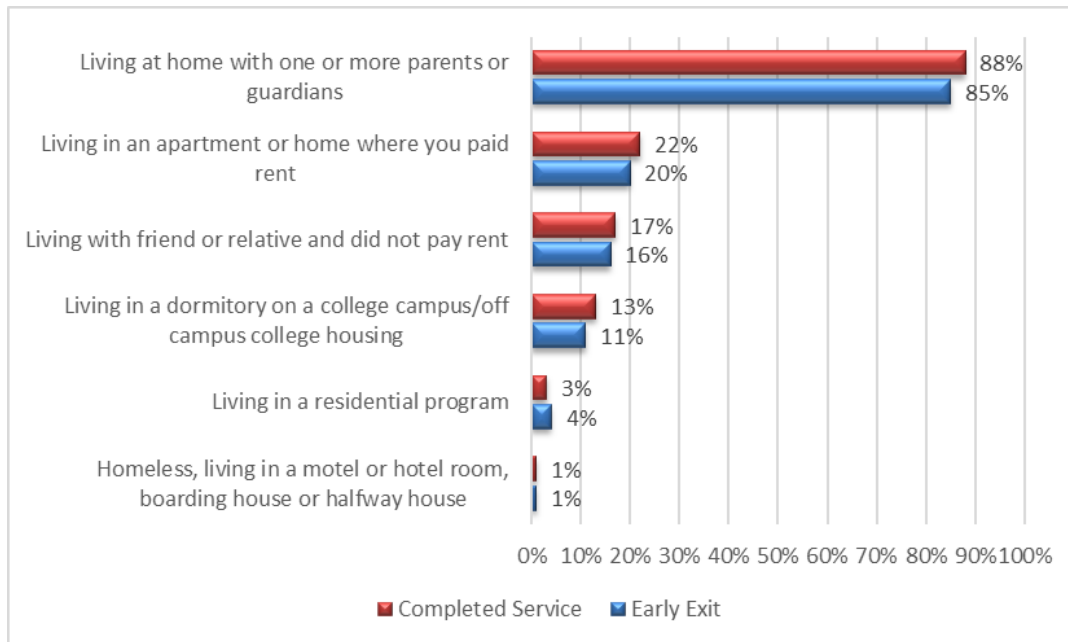
Level of Education	Early Exit	Completed Service
Master’s degree or PhD	36%	36%
High school diploma or occupational training	28%	20%
Bachelor’s degree or Associate degree	27%	38%
Unsure of parent’s education	5%	3%
Does not have a high school diploma	4%	3%

Sample size is 757 for AmeriCorps members that completed the term of service and 280 for early exit members.

Living arrangement

In Figure 3.3, most early exit members (85%) lived at home at some point in the six months prior to service. One-fifth of early exit members lived in an apartment or home while paying rent (20%) prior to the start of their service. There was a similar distribution for members who completed their service.

Figure 3.3 Living arrangements prior to service



Members' socio-economic status

The socio-economic status (SES) construct is derived from an analysis that used household structure, parent employment status, and parent education. Based on the analysis, we calculated the SES score, which is then transformed to a scale from 1 to 3, where a score of '1' indicates low socio-economic status, a score of '2' indicates middle socio-economic status, and a score of '3' indicates high socio-economic status. The factors that contribute to a lower SES score are no parent or guardian in the household is employed, no parent or guardian has at least a college degree, or the member lives in a single parent household or no parent household. The factors that contribute to a higher SES score are all parents/guardians in the household are employed, all parents/guardians have a college degree, or the member comes from a two biological parent household. Appendix B provides a full list of the variables used to measure SES.

Table 3.6 shows the SES categorical scale for the early exits, and for members who completed service. There is an inverse relationship between SES and early exit. Among early exit members, 37 percent have a low SES score compared to 30 percent for those who remained in the program. Similarly, a lower proportion of early exit members had a high SES score (28%) compared to those who completed service (32%). Members in the lower SES ended their service early at a higher rate compared to those with an average SES or high SES. The attrition rate among members in the lower SES was 33 percent, compared to 25 percent for members with an average SES and 23 percent for members with a high SES.

Table 3.6 Distribution of early exit members Socio-Economic Status

SES Score	Early Exit Members	AmeriCorps members
1 – Low SES	37%	30%
2 – Average/Middle SES	35%	38%
3 – High SES	28%	32%

Members' education and employment activity prior to service

The pattern in education activity was similar for early exit members and those who completed their service in that most members in both groups were not in school/taking a break from school in the months prior to service (Table 3.7). However, members who were not in school prior to service are over-represented among the early exit group; and members who were attending college or high school prior to service are under-represented in the early exit group. In the six months prior to service, 51 percent of early exit members and 44 percent of members who completed service were not in school/taking a break from school in the months prior to service. More than one-third of incoming AmeriCorps members have a bachelor's degree³. It is not surprising that a common activity in the six months prior to service is that incoming members are attending college or high school or taking a break from school (see Table 3.7).

As shown in Table 3.7 in the months prior to service, early exit members worked in the private sector (25%) and service industry (31%). This distribution differs among members who completed their service, with 31 percent working in the private sector and 27 percent working in the service industry. There is a much smaller percentage of early exit members who reported they were working at a non-profit (13%), government sector (12%), their own small business (6%), or their own non-profit (2%). The distribution is similar among AmeriCorps members who completed their service. AmeriCorps members who completed their service had worked in the non-profit sector (14%), government sector (12%), their own small business (5%) and at a non-profit they created (1%). Both groups had about a quarter of their cohorts who had been unemployed and looking for work prior to service.

³ Georges, A., Smith, S.J., & Fung, W. (2021). Profile of AmeriCorps NCCC Members at the Start of Service. San Mateo, CA: JBS International, Inc.

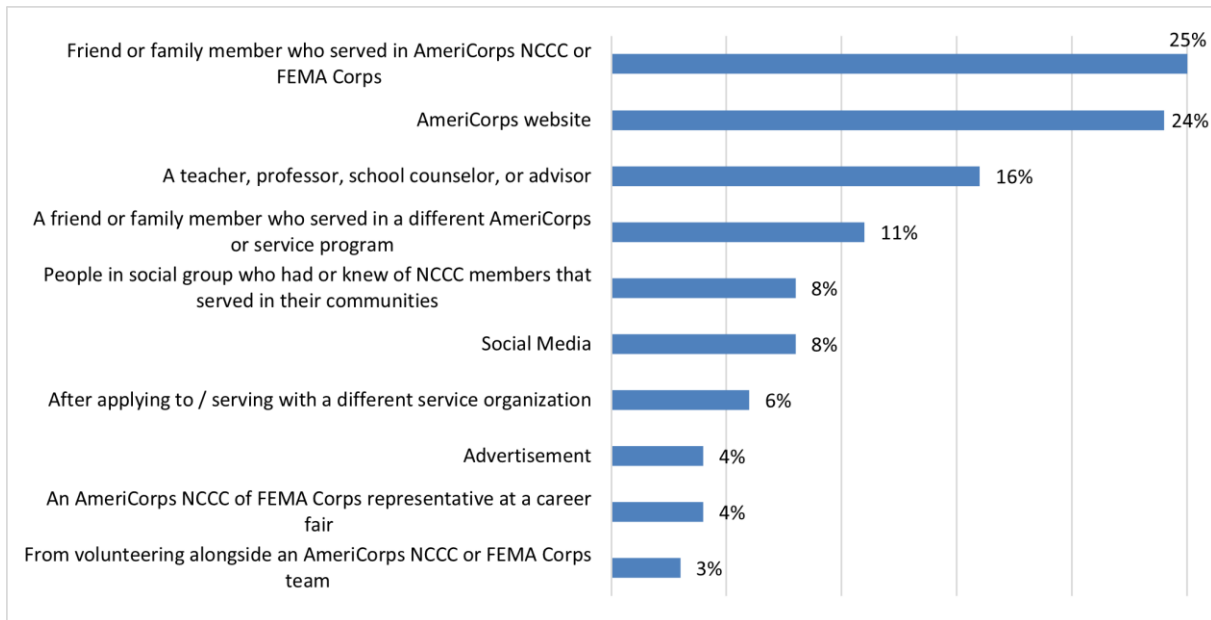
Table 3.7 Education and employment activity in the six months prior to service

Education and Employment Activity	Early Exit	Completed Service
Education Activity		
Not in school/taking a break from school	51%	44%
Attending college	32%	37%
Attending high school	12%	20%
Attending a vocational / technical training program	6%	3%
Attending graduate school	3%	2%
Type of Employment Activity		
Working in food preparation and service-related occupations	31%	27%
Not working / unemployed, and actively looking for work	26%	25%
Working in the private sector	25%	31%
Working in the nonprofit or social service sector	13%	14%
Working in the public/government sector	12%	12%
Working in your own small business	6%	5%
Working in another national service experience	4%	5%
Working at a non-profit or social entrepreneurship venture that I created	2%	1%
Other	17%	18%

Sources where members first hear about AmeriCorps NCCC

Family or friends are the most common sources from which members first hear about AmeriCorps NCCC (Figure 3.4); this includes a friend or family member who had previously served in an AmeriCorps program (25%) and family or friends who served in a different AmeriCorps program (11%). Other frequent sources are the AmeriCorps website (24%), teachers or advisors (16%), people in social group who had or knew of members (8%), and social media (8%).

Figure 3.4 Early exit members first heard about AmeriCorps NCCC from a friend or family or the AmeriCorps website



Sample size is 334.

More than half of early exit members (59%) and AmeriCorps members who completed their term of service (57%) heard about AmeriCorps NCCC from only one source. About 13 percent of early exit members heard from two sources, and 6 percent heard from three sources. Of the members who heard from two sources, the most common combination of sources, at 11 percent, was family or friends who served in AmeriCorps or FEMA Corps, and family or friends who served in a different AmeriCorps or service program. Another common combination of sources was friends or family members who served in AmeriCorps or FEMA Corps combined with the AmeriCorps website. Hearing from a teacher or advisor, combined with the AmeriCorps website was also a common combination.

Motivation to serve

The issues that motivate individuals to serve help determine the types of experiences and the support and training needed to keep them engaged through the end of their term of service. Consistent with prior studies, there is not just a single reason for wanting to serve, individuals are motivated to serve for more than one reason. Among members serving with AmeriCorps NCCC, they are both altruistic, and they desire to achieve or accomplish a milestone. Drawing on the literature of motivation for volunteering, the survey included 24 statements that members rated on a scale of “Not Relevant” to “Very Relevant.” The survey included an open-ended option where members could describe their motivation in their own words. We coded the open-ended responses to determine overlap and redundancy with the initial statements. Table 3.8 lists the ten reasons with the highest proportion of early exit members reported as important in their decision to serve. Compared to members who completed their term of service, a higher percentage of early exit members were motivated because they wanted to travel/leave their town (87% vs. 85% for members), find direction to take career (77% vs. 73% for members), make new friends (75%

vs. 77% for members), gain leadership skills (74% vs 72% for members), network with professionals (58% vs. 52% for members), and earn money for college tuition (50% vs. 46% for members).

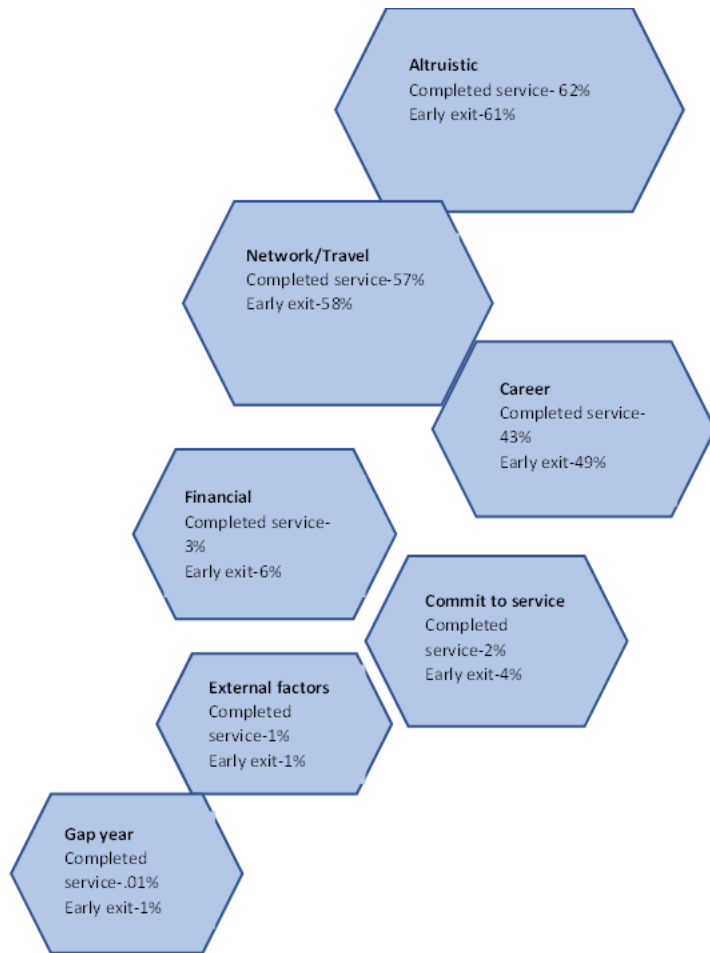
Table 3.8 Reasons which the highest proportion of early exit members reported as important in their motivation to serve

Motivation	Early Exit	Completed Service
Desire to Achieve or Accomplish a Milestone		
I want to travel the country/I want to leave the town that I am living in right now	87%	85%
NCCC will give me a sense of purpose	78%	78%
To try something new to find what direction I want to take in my career	77%	73%
I want to meet new people/make friends	75%	77%
To gain leadership skills	74%	72%
To gain professional skills/carpentry or construction skills/build resume	73%	73%
I want to network with professionals in my field of interest	58%	52%
I want to earn money for future college tuition	50%	46%
Desire to Make a Difference/Altruism		
I want to make a difference/serve my country	85%	87%
I want to reduce social or economic inequality	77%	82%

Sample size is 898 for AmeriCorps members and 341 for early exit members.

Both groups are altruistic in their motivation for service, albeit members who complete their service are on average more inclined to be motivated to serve for altruistic reasons. Slightly more than three fourths (77%) of early exit members and 82 percent of members wanted to serve to reduce social or economic inequality. About 85 percent of early exit members and 87 percent of members wanted to make a difference and serve their country.

Figure 3.5 Classification of motivation to serve among early exit members



We analyzed the pattern of responses of members’ motivation to serve using a principal component analysis (PCA) technique, which allows for a meaningful interpretation of the data by reducing the number of items to a few linear combinations of the data. Each linear combination corresponds to a principal component. Appendix C describes the PCA analysis and provides a complete list of the original survey items. The first seven principal components explained 53 percent of the variance. Based on the results from the PCA, we determined there are seven types of motivation to serve among early exit members. We then used factor analysis, a data reduction method, to interpret the seven types of motivation, as shown in Figure 3.5⁴.

There are three primary types of motivators. Similar to members that completed their service, the statements members frequently chose as ‘very

important’ or ‘quite important’ in their decision show they are altruistic, seek opportunities to explore by traveling and making new friends, and career opportunities. The early exit members differ from members in that a higher proportion of them had financial reasons for applying to serve, a higher proportion of them were motivated to for the opportunity to travel, career opportunities, taking a gap year, and seeking experience to serve in another program.

Understanding of the service experience

The extent to which early exit members do not understand the service experience may also contribute to a decision to exit early. The survey administered to participants prior to the start of service included several statements to gauge members’ perception of what the service experience would be like. The statements describe an aspect of the service experience, and participants could rate whether their service experience matched that description.

For the most part, AmeriCorps members and early exit members anticipated the experience in similar ways prior to the start of their service (Table 3.9). About 91 percent of members from both groups understood that a uniform must be worn when on duty. About the same proportion

⁴ One statement ‘I want to take a break while enrolled in college’ did not fit unto any of the six factor loadings, suggesting that none of the members dropped out of college to serve with AmeriCorps NCCC.

in both groups understood they would serve on projects away from the dormitory of their campus and have to be around their team most of the time and could travel all over the United States during their service.

The widest difference between early exit members and members who completed the service term is that a higher proportion of members who completed service understood that they would not be able to take on a part-time job or take night classes. Additionally, a higher proportion of early exit members thought there would be a process to guide how, what, and when things needed to be done, as well as thought they would have complete privacy when they were not on duty.

Table 3.9 Percent of members responding 'Yes, this is true'

Expectations of the service experience	Early Exit	Completed Service
I always must conform to uniform standards when on duty	91%	91%
I serve on projects that are away from the dormitory of my campus and must live, eat, and work with my team all the time around the clock	75%	76%
I will travel all over the United States and meet a lot of people	62%	66%
I will have a formal structure and processes to guide me on how, what and when things need to be done	68%	63%
I cannot take a part-time job or take night classes	54%	64%
I am part of a team of 8-10 other members who share my values	54%	51%
I do my service projects between 9am and 5pm, and I have free time at night and on weekends to do the things I want to do	36%	34%
I live in a dormitory that feels like being in the military	23%	20%
I get to work in an office doing administrative duties	15%	12%
I have complete privacy when I am not on duty	10%	5%
I believe that there are times the rules can be bent	5%	6%
I can take time off anytime I want	3%	3%
I can choose what type of work or projects I will be doing	3%	2%
I participate in physical training only when I want	2%	2%

Sample Size is 888 for members that completed service, 334 for the early exit members.

Differences Between Traditional Corps and FEMA Corps Early Exit Members

Of the 1,252 incoming AmeriCorps members we enrolled in the study, 19 percent served with FEMA Corps (Table 2.1). Of the 344 early exit members, 270 (78%) served with Traditional Corps, and 74 (22%) with FEMA Corps. The attrition rate for FEMA Corps was 32 percent, and the attrition rate for Traditional Corps was 26 percent. Comparison of the two groups showed these differences in age, gender, education, and employment activity.

- FEMA Corps early exit members were older than Traditional Corps early exit members; 57 percent of FEMA Corps early exit members are in the 22 and older bracket, versus 39 percent for Traditional Corps.
- A higher percentage of FEMA Corps tend to be male; 57 percent of FEMA Corps members early exit members identified as male, and 46 percent did so in Traditional Corps.
- FEMA Corps had a higher proportion of early exit members who identify as Black or African American (21%) compared to Traditional Corps (11%).

- A higher percentage of FEMA Corps early exit members completed some college, an Associate degree or a bachelor's degree (65% for FEMA Corps and 54% for Traditional Corps).
- A higher percentage of FEMA Corps early exit members worked in the public or government sector; 18 percent compared to 10 percent for Traditional Corps.
- FEMA Corps early exit members were motivated to join AmeriCorps NCCC for the opportunity to network with professionals in their field (70%) more so than Traditional Corps early exit members (54%). FEMA Corps members were less motivated by the opportunity to make friends (66%) compared to Traditional Corps (78%).
- A higher percentage of FEMA Corps early exit members believed they would have complete privacy when they were not on duty; 19 percent compared to 8 percent for Traditional Corps.

Reasons for Leaving Service Early

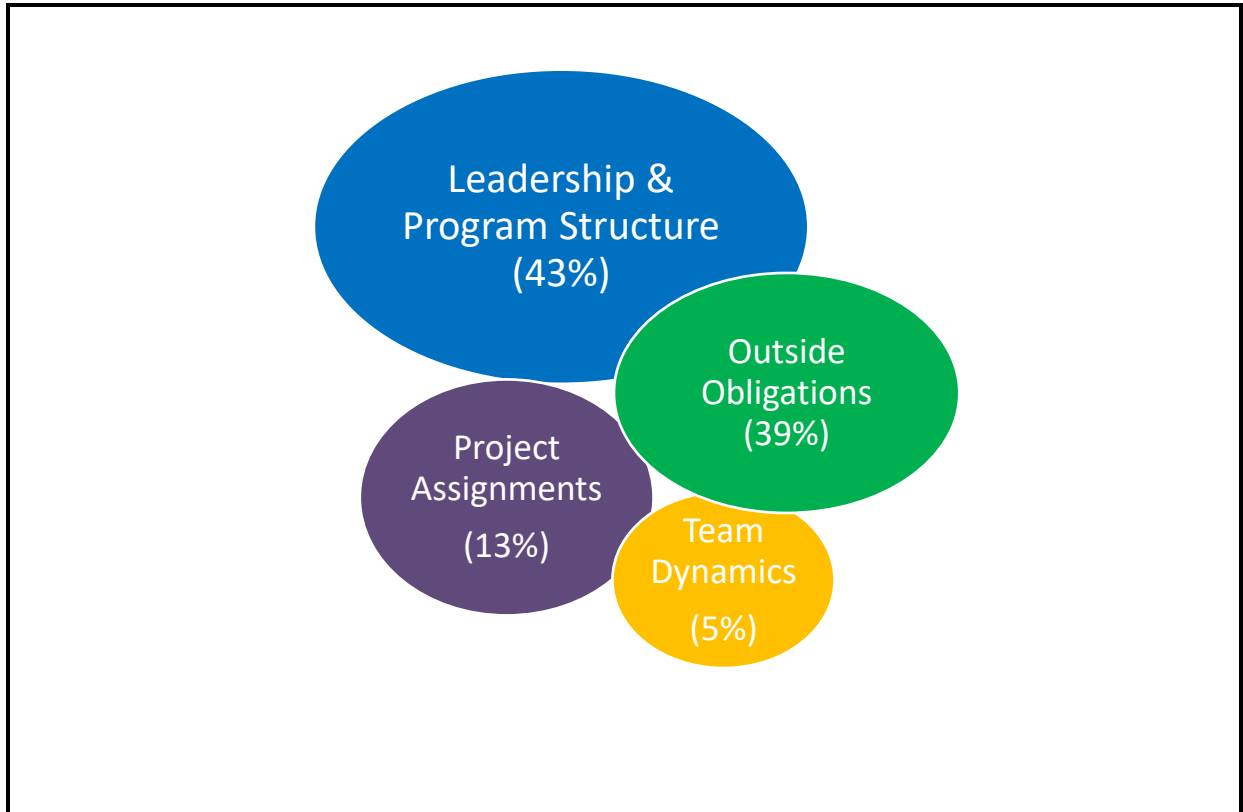
An understanding of the reasons members leave before completing their service term can inform discussion on how best to maximize retention. Upon exiting, through a survey, we asked participants about their reasons for ending service early. For 26 survey items members could answer “Yes” or “No” whether each reason applied to their situation for ending their service. The survey provided space for members to write personal statements about their reasons and service experience. In addition, we randomly sampled five early exit members from each of the ten classes to participate in an interview about their service experience. Of the 51 members we contacted, 48 completed an interview.

Prior studies show that reasons for ending service are complex and multi-faceted. This suggests the mechanisms for retaining members at risk of not completing their term of service will vary and will not be unidimensional. As discussed in Chapter 1, prior studies show that the intersectionality of the social network aspects, project assignments, and personal characteristics plays an important role in retaining members through their term of service. Our analysis reiterates what the previous literature has shown, that while each member has their own multifaceted set of reasons for leaving, there are common characteristics among early exit members that can yield insights on the multiple angles to support retention among those at risk of ending their service early.

There are both voluntary and involuntary reasons for an early exit. Ten percent of the early exit members in the sample were involuntary; the program dismissed these members. Yet, members do not have a singular reason for leaving, even if it is involuntary. Of the 256 early exit members who answered the early exit survey, 87 percent cited multiple reasons for leaving. A combination of principal component analysis (PCA) and cluster analysis was utilized to group members based on the similarity of the pattern of their responses. Principal component analysis allows for a meaningful interpretation of all the data by reducing the list of 26 items to a few linear combinations of the data. Each linear combination corresponds to a principal component. A cluster analysis performed on the principal component scores showed four groups of members who shared similar reasons for leaving (Figure 3.6). Appendix D describes the clustering technique used and provides a list of which survey items fall into each cluster. The largest group, 43 percent of members, reflects members whose reasons relate to the program's leadership and who found the program's structure challenging. The second group (39%) includes members

whose reasons were related to outside obligations such as leaving the program for a job or to go to school. The third group (13%) includes members who were dissatisfied with their project assignments. The fourth group (5%) includes members who found it challenging to overcome interpersonal issues with team members.

Figure 3.6 Groups of reasons why members left service



Group 1: Leadership and program structure. The largest group includes 43 percent of members who felt disconnected from the leadership and disillusioned with the program’s structure. The members in this group reported not feeling valued and feeling disrespected by the people in the program, not getting along with their supervisor or leadership, and feeling the program was too strict and structured. More than one-third of early exit members reported that they did not feel valued by the people in the program (39%), and some felt disrespected by people in the program (36%). This survey item was open to interpretation and could include interactions with peers, team leaders, or program staff. More than a quarter of early exit members reported they did not get along with their supervisor or leadership (28%). Some members felt challenged with the overall structure of the program. A quarter of early exit members in this group felt that the program was too strict (25%).

Table 3.10 Group 1 Reasons for leaving related to leadership and program structure

Reason for not Completing the Term of Service	Percentage that said ‘yes’		
	All early exit	Traditional Corps	FEMA Corps
Leadership and program structure			
I did not feel valued by the people in the program	39%	38%	43%
I felt disrespected by the people in the program	36%	37%	32%
I did not get along with my supervisor or leadership	28%	27%	34%
NCCC has too much structure / too strict	25%	27%	20%

Members provided examples that, for them, would improve accountability and transparency, and minimize communication gaps between the program’s leadership and members. After giving some examples, one member who exited the program early shared his reasons, stating *“They need to be more consistent with it [application of rules]. I think it sort of helps to, like, you know present these things – my hope is would be that they’d say, ‘Oh wow. We didn’t even know that. Maybe we should start looking into this.’”*

Some interviewees noted that AmeriCorps should not be treated as a military-esque organization, as the deference to the chain of command hinders open communication and relation of issues. When speaking about the structure of AmeriCorps, one early exit member stated, *“I understand why they would want to have that, but the result is that members don’t feel that they are heard by campus staff. And especially when there are emergency situations going on, members do not have recourse.”* An interview with an early exit member underscores that the program’s structure can strip them of their autonomy and individuality, leading them to feel undervalued. *“I personally value my independence a lot and I feel like that was taken away in the program.”* The member shared, *“seems like they don’t really care about individual members, as much as I feel like they should be like trying to work with you to help you want to stay in the program.”*

Interviews and open-ended survey responses showed potential interpersonal conflicts with the program. They felt their feedback and issues were inadequately addressed. One member shared, *“Campus staff really believes in the program, and that’s awesome, but the result is that they don’t listen when people have concerns. Improving the process by which campus leadership hears and responds to concerns from members, not just team leaders, would really increase that level of trust.”*

Some early exit members noted the lack of access to directly engage with unit leaders, even when discussing critical matters. One early exit member recalled, *“when I would try and give feedback, it never really felt like I was being heard by my unit leader...and my team leader already had enough on her plate. I really didn’t feel like she was being supported in any way or not in a great way.”*

Some early exit members felt the team check-ins did not provide an opportunity to discuss critical matters. One early exit member recalled, *“when he would do team check-ins, which is the only other time we were really able to talk to the unit leader, it felt like...he’d ask the entire team how do you feel about your team leader with the team leader sitting right there...that’s not how you’re gonna get real responses.”*

As a residential program, housing is one of the program structures that seems to factor into some members' decision to end their term of service early. An example of this is the housing accommodation. Nearly a fifth of members reported their reason for leaving was because of the housing situation (18%). For example, one early exit member highlighted the frustrations with the communal grocery shopping and cooking arrangements enforced by his team leader, saying *"I spoke to my team leader multiple times if it was possible we were allowed our own individual amount to decide what we could eat. If I wanted to eat only chocolate, that was my prerogative....I would've rather liked having my own little groceries stocked in my room."* Other responses centered on the perceived inadequacies of the money available to purchase quality food; one member suggested that AmeriCorps *"increase the food budget to accommodate the amount of calories burned doing so many hours of physical labor"* and an interviewee noted, *"I'm barely surviving. My diet is not being met here. I'm eating unhealthy things."* Other members described grappling with a lack of privacy, even for bathing, with one member sharing, *"Both the men's and women's showers were at a public gym so there were many nights that we would go to try to take a shower and those from the public games could walk into our showers and there was no way to lock the door to make it more private."* In an open-ended survey response, a member shared, *"I never had any personal time or privacy during or after work hours."* Other members generally felt that their housing conditions were inadequate; in a survey response one member said, *"The housing was extremely bad at times,"* and another stated, *"Housing was horrible."*

Concerns about member protection and issues related to diversity and inclusion as did additional themes about the program structure emerged from the qualitative data. At least five early exit members expressed concerns about safety within the program, particularly regarding working and living conditions, inadequate policy response, physical strain, and situations regarding harassment and misconduct from fellow members. One early exit member recalled a situation in which a fellow member exhibited inappropriate behavior stating, *"There was this kid...causing problems, sexually-wise. He was making unwelcomed comments and touching girls...And he eventually got his three strikes and left. And then I remember in my second year I came in, and I'm looking at faces and I was like, 'Wait is that the kid that was in my class doing all of that stuff?'"* This example underscores the vulnerability some members feel when it appears that the organization did not adequately protect them with swift, effective, and consistent action.

Four early exit members who filled in open-ended responses to the survey expressed similar concerns, calling out a need to update AmeriCorps' policies regarding sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination, with one respondent suggesting that AmeriCorps *"make it easier for members to make complaints and to be separated from individuals around whom they do not feel safe. In addition, investigations into allegations of discrimination, harassment and assault need to take top priority."* A review of the qualitative data shows that 144 early exit members made statements related to inadequate policy responses and bureaucratic measures that could erode the trust and confidence in the program's commitment to wellbeing. Outside of these explicit complaints regarding discrimination and harassment, members noted that the physical demands of their service, such as excessive mandatory physical training, posed a risk to members' health and morale, potentially leading to both injuries and dissatisfaction. Members also drew attention to inadequate accommodation for and training to support members with physical or mental disabilities or mental health challenges, underscoring the need for a more

protective and supportive environment within AmeriCorps.

Members described frustrations with efforts made to integrate greater diversity and inclusion into the program. For many respondents, there was a perceived lack of intentionality around accommodating individuals of diverse backgrounds into the program. Some members felt that AmeriCorps' efforts to build diverse teams was not well executed or well thought out. One member stated, *"You guys speak a good game about being diverse and wanting your program opened up to different cultures and people with different economic means. I feel it wasn't a good plan implemented; basically, the push for diversity was a little more surface."* Another shared in a survey response, *"Diversity must be intentional and using an algorithm to randomly put people of different races or ages together does not embody intentionality."* When offering recommendations on how to act on this desire for diverse participants, one survey respondent suggested that AmeriCorps could *"allow more access to local houses of worship."* Some members noted a desire for greater diversity in their teams, in part to ensure that individuals did not feel like a token individual representing a particular demographic group. Some members described tensions within their teams related to diverse viewpoints and backgrounds. One member shared, *"Some members' right-wing views made other CMs uncomfortable around them. This made us feel that we had to avoid talking about certain topics or sharing personal information."* Others felt that AmeriCorps' trainings on issues related to diversity were outdated and insufficient; one member said, *"The diversity workshop was a complete joke. It did not mention the words race or racism one time over a span of three hours."*

Some members who identified as politically conservative felt that AmeriCorps was politicizing issues unnecessarily given their emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Mirroring an early exit member's comment back to him in an interview, the interviewer stated, *"What I'm hearing is that you didn't feel that your perspective as more conservative was as represented and as welcomed."* A member shared their recommendation that AmeriCorps *"drop the Critical Race Theory courses and replace it with a more sensible Diversity training. Emphasize zero tolerance for ridiculing others for political beliefs. Emphasize that AmeriCorps does not have a political standing and does not favor members for their beliefs."* Similarly, a member stated, *"They call it diversity training, but it's not. They're teaching us critical race theory,"* and another noted, *"One of the instructors were trying to tell us about Black people being oppressed and how we should address that. And I was like, 'I don't think this should be political.' I don't think you need to be telling me what we need to believe."*

Although not detailed here with qualitative data, 19 percent of early exit members reported mental, emotional, and physical limitations prevented them from participating in the program.

Table 3.11 Personal limitations affect members’ reasons for leaving

Reason for not Completing the Term of Service	Percentage that said ‘yes’		
	All early exit	Traditional Corps	FEMA Corps
Personal limitations			
I have a mental or emotional condition that limits my ability to do some activities	15%	17%	9%
I have a condition that substantially limits my ability to do some physical activities	4%	6%	2%

Early exit members described a sense of inadequate mental healthcare and support during their AmeriCorps service experiences. Members noted difficulties in accessing therapists and mental health care providers due to cost, availability, and mental barriers. One member said, *“People with mental health issues struggle a lot. My friends talked about how they had member benefits and Teledoc and Telehealth can only really do so much because we only get a certain amount of sessions. Somebody who really needs support – two sessions with a therapist isn’t really gonna be beneficial for 10 months. And having little Wi-Fi or cell service can interfere with your access to telehealth.”* Another member shared, *“I had the option to see a therapist online through my phone...but it was on me if I wanted to get better or not and start seeing a therapist. I got into my head too much that I just couldn’t start seeing the therapist.”* For members actively struggling with their mental health and – for many living on their own for the first time – practicing healthy behaviors was challenging without active support. For those who did not receive the services and treatment they needed, mental health was frequently a reason for exiting the program.

Fourteen respondents described the effect of COVID-19 on the decision to leave. This included members who did not feel safe due to COVID and those for whom COVID led to dissatisfaction with the program. While the virus may have directly prompted the departure of members in some circumstances, the management of service projects and inconsistencies in addressing the COVID-19 concerns of members appears to have added to dissatisfaction among the members who exited the program early.

Group 2: Outside Obligations. The second largest group of members, comprising 39 percent of early exit members, reported securing a job or going back to school as reasons for leaving. Nearly half of the early exit members reported they found a job or had to leave because they would be starting work (45%), and 25 percent reported having decided to return to school. Family obligations also played a role in the decision to leave for some members, as 19 percent needed to care for a family member or close friend.

Table 3.12 Group 2 Reasons for leaving related to outside obligations

Reason for not Completing the Term of Service	Percentage that said ‘yes’		
	All early exit	Traditional Corps	FEMA Corps
Outside obligations			
I found a job / I will start working	45%	43%	55%
I was not earning enough money / I needed to earn more money to help pay bills	38%	36%	46%
I am going to go back to school	25%	24%	29%
I need to care for a family member or close friend	19%	21%	11%

Members were able to expand on their reasons for leaving using their own words in both interviews and in a write-in answer option in the survey. One member in an interview explained, *“Another one of my members who was on my team also ended up leaving early. She left early because she felt like she didn’t need it anymore. She had a good job offer.”* Another member stated, *“I think that most people that I’ve met through the program left for the same reason as I did. Where they got a job earlier.”*

Financial reasons are not a primary driver of attrition, but rather a secondary reason that was cited across four groups of members. However, financial reasons are most intertwined with members who indicated they were leaving due to work, and school. Overall, 38 percent of all early exit members indicated they felt like they were not earning enough money. However, among members who are in Group 2 (Outside Obligations), close to half (48%) indicated they were not earning enough money.

For some early exit members, financial stressors such as debt or family-related financial responsibilities were the driver for leaving. For some members, these financial challenges were exacerbated during the shift to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic; a survey respondent noted, *“The stipend was not livable for low-resource individuals when you gave us remote work and did not provide housing or wifi,”* and another shared, *“My decision to leave AmeriCorps was strongly tied to the service projects due to COVID. The stipend was not enough to cover full housing expenses.”*

Group 3: Project Assignments.

The third group of members, comprising 13 percent of early exit members, exited due to dissatisfaction with their project assignments. The members in this group reported not having the assignments they thought they would be doing, lack of fulfillment with their assignments, and their own perception that they were not making a difference with their assigned projects.

Table 3.13 Group 3 reasons for leaving related to project assignments

Reason for not Completing the Term of Service	Percentage that said ‘yes’		
	All early exit	Traditional Corps	FEMA Corps
Project assignments			
I was not getting to do the type of work I thought I would be doing	33%	33%	34%
The work I was assigned was not fulfilling	27%	26%	30%
I was not making a difference in people's lives with the projects I was assigned	18%	17%	23%

One-third of early exit members were not doing the type of work they thought they would be doing, and, similarly, they did not find the work they were doing fulfilling (27%). A smaller proportion of early exit members stated they felt they were not making a difference in the communities they were assigned to (18%).

These findings are supported by the interviews, in which early exit members described frustrations with their service assignments. These frustrations were either related to the type of assignments (e.g., assignments that felt boring, menial, or not impactful) or to programmatic structure. One member noted the sense of separation between her day-to-day tasks and overall impact, stating, *“What we were doing was making the gates for a farm and that was all we were doing all day for the entirety of our stay. It was something to maybe be a learning opportunity for kids maybe 10 years down the line, which is great; it was just very distant from something that would provide really anything in the moment or near future so I didn’t feel very connected to it.”* Another shared, *“I didn’t feel like the work I was doing was beneficial to people. They were struggling to find things to do.”*

Group 4: Team Dynamics. The fourth group of members (5%) exited due to interpersonal conflicts with their team. The members in this group reported not getting along with or not feeling part of the team, felt disconnected from the program and unable to make friends with the people on their team, or were dismissed by the program.

Table 3.14 Group 4 Reasons for leaving related to interpersonal team dynamics

Reason for not Completing the Term of Service	Percentage that said ‘yes’		
	All early exit	Traditional Corps	FEMA Corps
Team Dynamics			
I did not get along with the other members on my team	18%	19%	18%
I did not feel part of the team	18%	19%	18%
People in the program did not try to get to know me	13%	13%	14%
I was not making friends with the other people on my team	11%	10%	14%
I was dismissed by the program	10%	8%	16%

Some members described a sense that they did not fit in or belong with their teams. Some members described a lack of cohesion within their teams that contributed to their decision to leave early. Members live and work with the same team, and some members struggled to find space to take a break or get away from individuals with whom they were frustrated.

In some cases, members described direct conflict within their teams. A survey respondent provided a detailed description of the conflicts on their team, sharing, *“As time went on and residual issues and hurt emotions were left unresolved, the team conflicts grew in frequency and ferocity. Sometimes the emotional implications of this constant fighting were brought up in order to resolve them. However, the problematic attitudes and actions rarely, if ever, changed... Only two members managed to stay in the program.”*

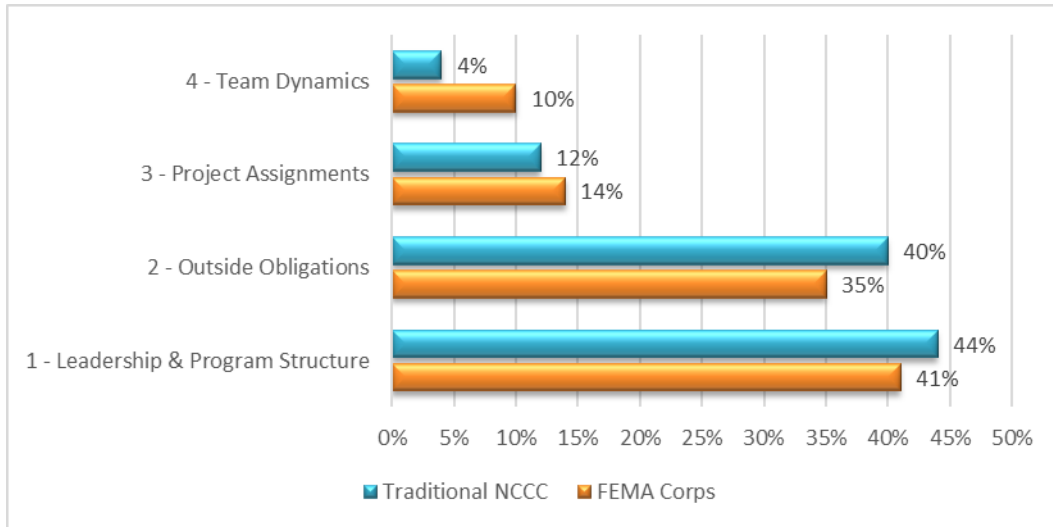
Some members noted that the efforts AmeriCorps made to facilitate healthy team dynamics, such as conflict resolution training and supportive team leaders, were not sufficient to address these issues. One member shared the sentiment that training on conflict resolution *“only go so far when you live, work, travel, socialize, eat, share a van, and share a debit card with seven random people.”*

Some early exit members reported experiencing conflict with their fellow teammates, such as not getting along with other members (18%) and not feeling a part of the team they were in (18%).

Differences in Reasons for Leaving Between Traditional NCCC and FEMA Corps Early Exit Members

Figure 3.7 shows the distribution of members in each group by program type. Both FEMA Corps and Traditional Corps the largest group pertains to members experiencing challenges with leadership and the program structure. This is followed by outside obligations, project assignments and then team dynamics, respectively. Compared to Traditional Corps, a higher proportion of early exit FEMA Corps members felt challenged with their service assignments (14%) and with getting along with their team members (10%)

Figure 3.7 Distribution of reasons for leaving by program type



One FEMA Corps member shared in an interview, *“The team leaders were either bossy and arrogant, or they were just straight up neglectful. There were mental health issues by different members that were just straight up ignored by team leaders.”* Similar to members in Traditional NCCC, FEMA Corps members expressed concern with the management of service projects specifically in the context of COVID-19. Five FEMA Corps members expressed dissatisfaction with how the service assignments were formed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. One FEMA Corps member stated,

“If AmeriCorps, at least gave some more thought into what assignments could have been, other than sitting in a hotel room, I would have stayed. I think FEMA, in particular, they were doing a lot of things during the pandemic last year, there were a lot of ways that I feel like we could have helped out that would have been so much more meaningful than sitting on a hotel bed on a computer for the whole work day. So I feel like if I had better superiors that actually tried to understand me, as well as more meaningful assignments then I would have stayed, for sure.”

This is reiterated in the individual survey items as:

- A higher proportion of FEMA Corps members stated that they felt the work they were doing was not making a difference in the communities at 23 percent (17% for Traditional Corps).
- A higher proportion of FEMA Corps members found the work to be unfulfilling at 30 percent (26% for Traditional Corps).
- A higher proportion of FEMA Corps members found that they were not making friends on their team at 14 percent (10% for Traditional Corps).

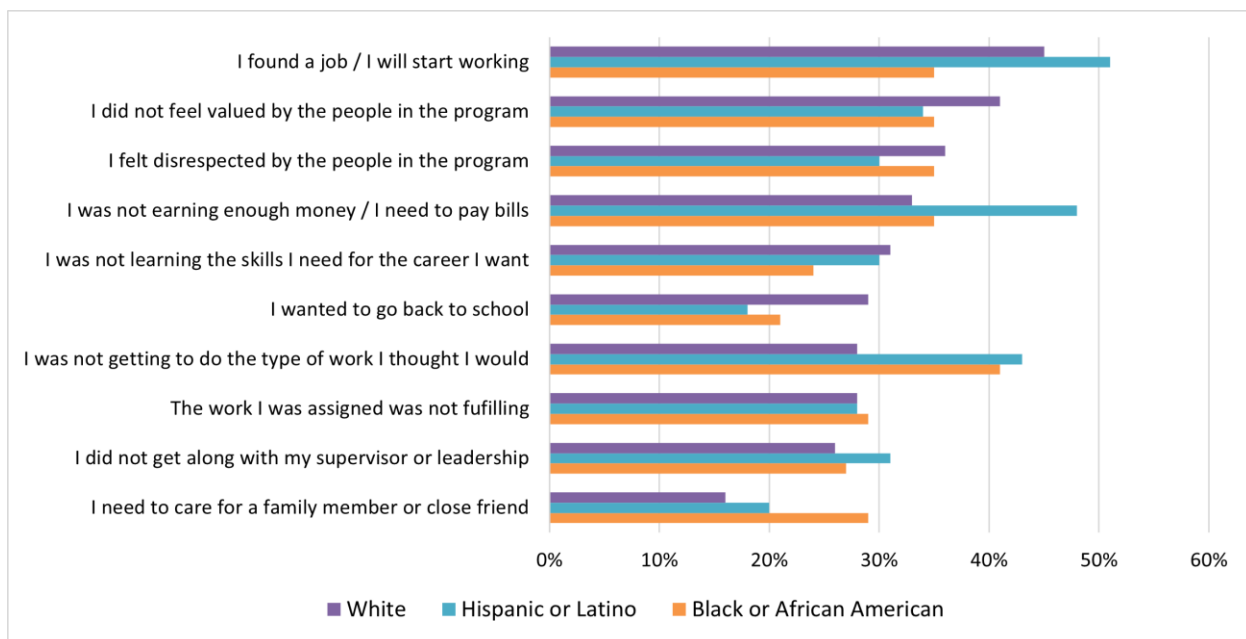
Reasons for leaving early examined by race and ethnicity

We examined reasons for early exit by race and ethnicity. We focused on White, Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American for efficiency since these three groups comprise more than 90 percent of incoming AmeriCorps members. In Figure 3.8, among members who

identified as White and Hispanic or Latino, their most frequently cited reason was “I found a job/ I will start working” (45% of Whites said ‘yes’) and (51% of Hispanic or Latino said ‘yes’). Finding a job was less frequently cited among members who identified as Black or African American participants with 35 percent of this group’s early exits answering ‘yes.’

Among Black or African American members, their most frequently cited reason for early exit was, “I was not getting to do the type of work I thought I would be doing,” at 41%; this proportion was higher at 43 percent among members who identified as Hispanic and Latino. By contrast, among members who identified as White, 28 percent responded that this statement was true for them.

Figure 3.8 Reason for leaving service early by race & ethnicity



Not earning money and needing more money to pay bills was a top concern among Hispanic or Latino (48%), Black or African American (35%) and White (33%).

Another common reason for early exit among White members was their sense of not feeling valued by the people in the program, with 41 percent selecting this reason. This reason was also cited by 34 percent of members who identified as Hispanic or Latino and by 35 percent of Black or African American members as their reason for early exit.

Nearly one-third of Black or African American members indicated that family reasons was their reason for exiting the program early, as 29 percent stated they had to care for a family member or close friend. This is a higher proportion compared to both Hispanic or Latino (20%) and White members (16%).

The opportunity to return to school was more frequently cited among White members, with 29 percent indicating that going back to school was a reason for exiting the program early,

compared to 21 percent of Black or African American and 18 percent of Hispanic or Latino members.

Chapter 4 Service project characteristics and member retention

This chapter addresses the third objective to identify factors that contribute to member retention through the end of the service term. The research questions that guided this analysis are: How do the characteristics of service projects (e.g., duration, perceived team accomplishment and opportunities to engage with the community) affect member retention? How does the association between service project characteristics and retention differ for Traditional Corps and FEMA Corps? The results are from a multi-level logistic regression model that accounts for the clustering of members within region and focuses on the association between service projects and the likelihood of remaining in service, controlling for member characteristics.

Of the 344 early exit members, we obtained assigned service projects for 278; of the 1,011 members who completed service, we obtained assigned service projects for 887. When examining members who left early, we found that 46 percent of early exit members left during their first project or before their second project, 34 percent of early exit members left during their second project or before their third project, 15 percent of early exit members completed two service projects but left before completing a third, and 5 percent of early exit members completed three service projects before exiting.

Table 4.1 shows the distribution of early exit members by region. The North Central region had the highest proportion of members who ended up leaving early at 35 percent, followed by Southern at 26 percent, Pacific at 20 percent and Southwest at 19 percent.

Table 4.1 Distribution by region

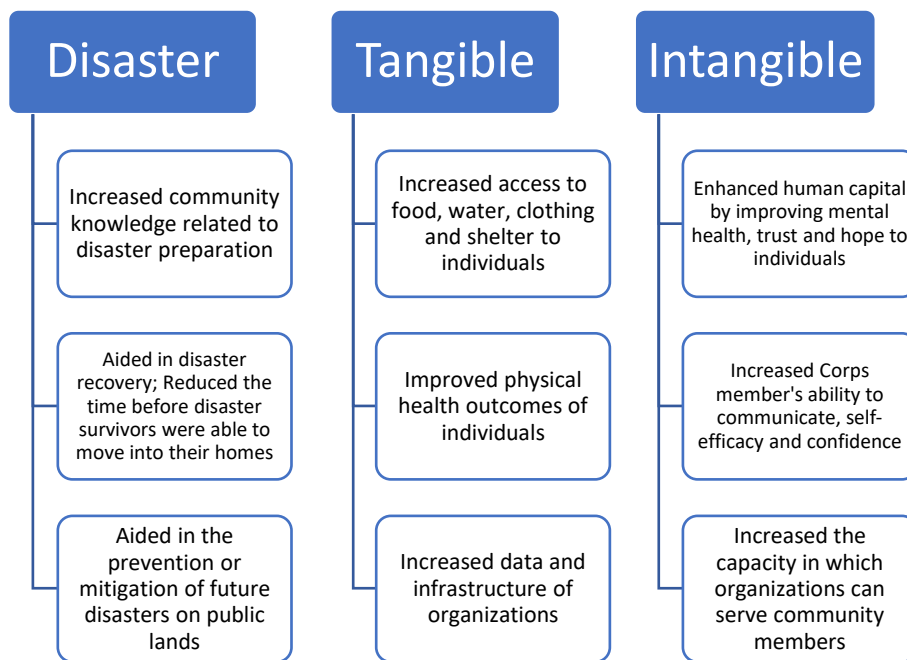
Region	Early Exit
North Central	35%
Pacific	20%
Southern	26%
Southwest	19%

The measures on the characteristics of the service projects are from the AmeriCorps NCCC Service Projects Database (SPD), which contains information on more than 6,700 service projects completed between 2012 and 2022. The SPD is the primary source of information describing the activities of the service projects as well as the impact on the individuals, organizations, and communities. The variables in the SPD are issue areas, project accomplishments, project characteristics, disaster type (when applicable), type of sponsor, and sponsor and site locations. Each project has narrative texts that reflect the team’s perceptions of the project’s impact and what the team gained from the assignment. These codes identify the primary types of impacts the team reported for the project. The coding framework distinguishes the unit where the impact occurred (i.e., Individual, organization, community) and the tangible and intangible impacts. Tangible impacts capture outcomes that are clear to observers, such as providing food and clothing to survivors of a disaster. Intangible impacts capture outcomes that are not concrete or clear to observers, such as providing emotional support to survivors after a

crisis or listening to people in the community who are struggling with addiction. Each member is linked to each of the projects they were assigned during their service. For the analysis, the data on service projects are limited to those projects for members in the sample. For the analysis, we focus on three impact groupings within the SPD. Figure 4.1 provides illustrative examples of disaster, tangible and intangible impacts coded from the narrative text:

1. Disaster Impacts – These projects focus on the prevention, mitigation, and preparedness of disaster. This includes service projects focused on disaster recovery and disaster response. Service projects that had a focus area of COVID-19 are included in this group.
2. Tangible Impacts–These projects have impacts that are observable and measurable; this category excludes disaster related projects.
3. Intangible Impacts–These projects have impacts that may be too subjective to accurately measure, and the impacts may not be able to be physically seen or felt. This type of project excludes disaster related projects.

Figure 4.1 Examples of the coded projects’ impacts as described by teams assigned to the projects



We created a sum composite variable for each of the three service groupings (disaster, tangible and intangible) in Figure 4.1. These are our main explanatory variables in the model that examines the effect of service projects on members’ likelihood of remaining in service.

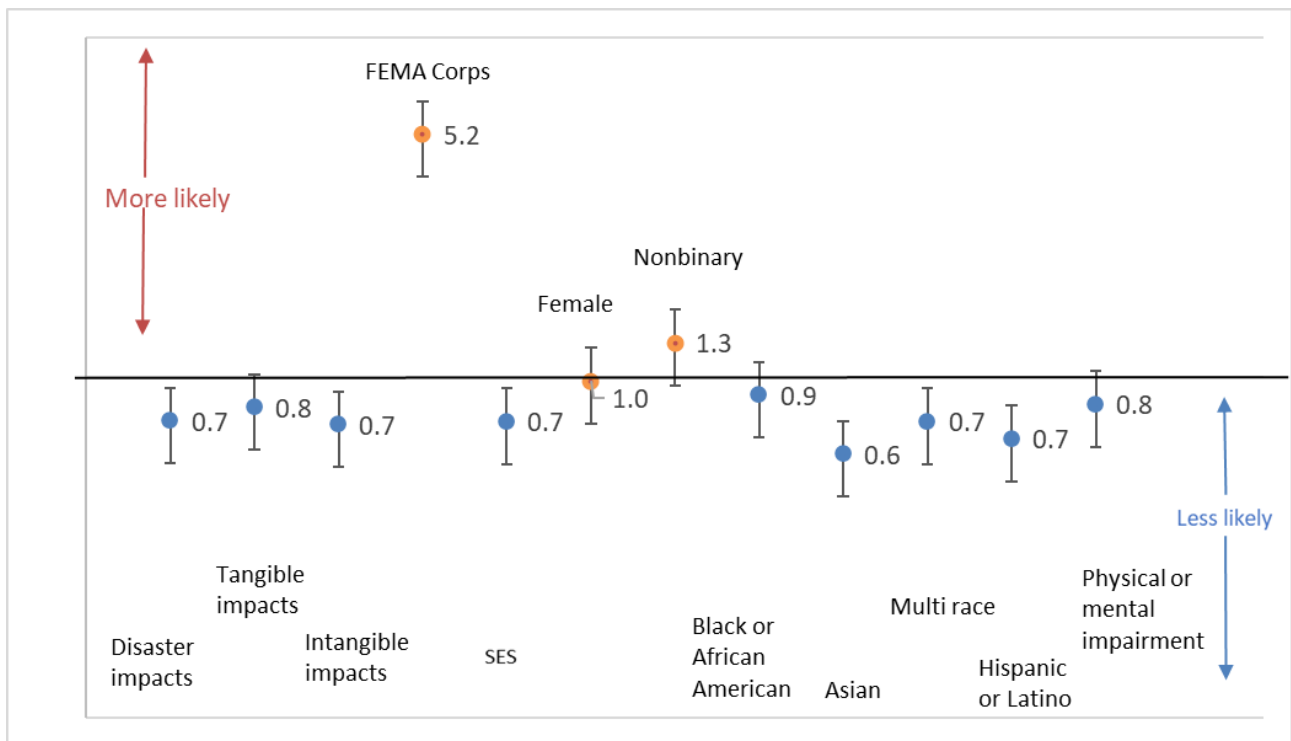
The regression model controlled for socioeconomic status scores (scaled with z score), race and ethnicity (e.g., White, Black or African American, Asian, Hispanic or Latino), gender, and physical or mental impairment. We analyzed three different models that introduce different sets of covariates. Model 1 includes service project coded impacts, member characteristics, and whether the member served with FEMA Corps. Model 2 includes service project coded impacts

and member characteristics. Model 3 includes only member characteristics. Appendix C provides the full results from the model.

Models 1 and 2 indicate that projects with disaster impacts (disaster recovery, mitigation, prevention, or preparedness) reduce members' likelihood of early exit; similarly, projects with tangible or intangible impacts reduce members' likelihood of early exit. The analysis showed that these associations are statistically significant within the limits of confidence.

All else being equal, FEMA Corps members have significantly higher likelihood of early exit compared to members in Traditional Corps. These findings were supported by the 95% confidence limits of the analysis (Figure 4.2). One possible explanation for the differential probability of exit between Traditional Corps and FEMA Corps (even though FEMA Corps focuses primarily on disaster projects) may be due to closer connections that Traditional Corps teams have to the community they served, where FEMA Corps teams frequently engage in office and logistics assignments that do not engage directly with the communities being served.

Figure 4.2 Service projects and the likelihood of early exit (Model 1 controls for service projects coded impacts, FEMA Corps and member characteristics)

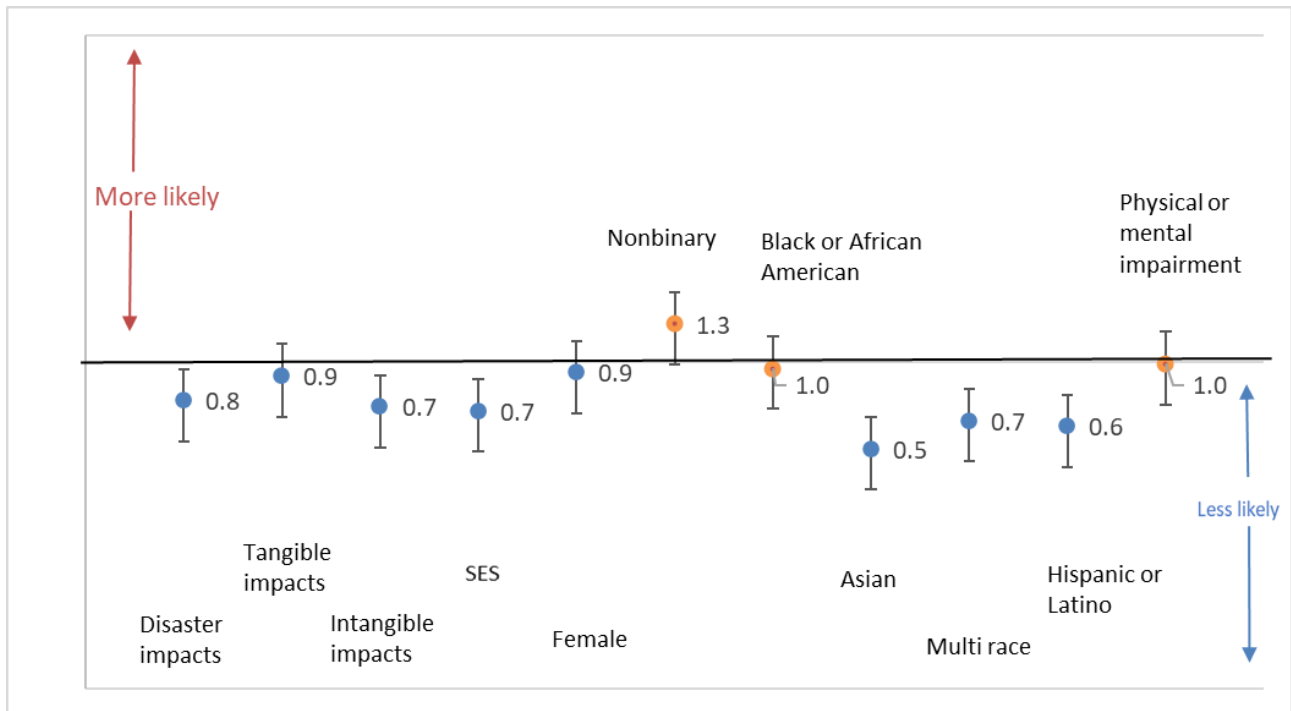


The significance of member characteristics decreases once the model accounts for project impacts. This suggests that matching project assignments to align with members' interest and motivations may reduce the likelihood of early exit.

There is a significant negative association between socioeconomic status and the likelihood of early exit. Participants with high SES scores have a significantly higher likelihood of remaining in service compared to participants with lower SES scores. This pattern is consistent across all models.

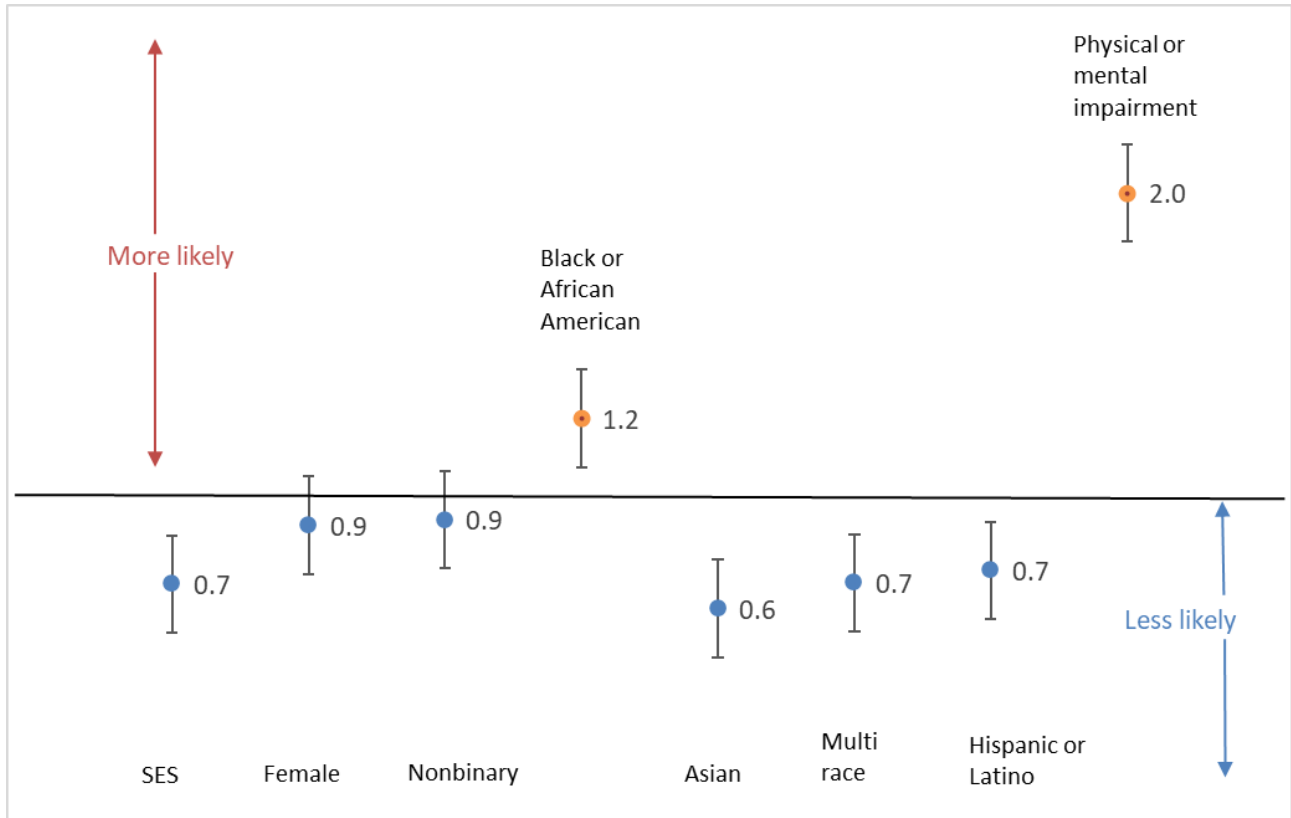
The significance of member characteristics in explaining likelihood of early exit increases when the impact of service projects are excluded from the model (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3 Service projects and the likelihood of early exit (Model 2 controls for service projects coded impacts, and member characteristics, does not control for FEMA Corps)



Members who identify as Black or African American have a higher likelihood of early exit compared to participants who identify as White (Figure 4.4). However, the odds of early exit for members who identify as Black or African American decreased when project experience is accounted in the model (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.4 Service projects and the likelihood of early exit (Model 3 controls only for member characteristics)



One potential reason may have to do with the intersection of FEMA Corps service projects and the racial and ethnic distribution of FEMA Corps members. The likelihood of early exit seemed to be driven primarily by the differences in the impacts of members’ service project assignments between the two programs, as well as the higher proportion of Black or African American members who are assigned to FEMA Corps. Members who identify as Black or African American make up a larger proportion of FEMA Corps members at 15 percent than the 9 percent of Black or African American members who enrolled in Traditional Corps. Of that 15 percent, 43 percent of Black or African American FEMA Corps members will leave without completing the term of service. Members who identified as Black or African American cited leaving because of not getting the assignments they thought they would do (i.e., dissatisfaction with project assignments).

As shown in Table 4.2, FEMA Corps members feel less of a connection to the community than Traditional Corps members. Nearly half (48%) of FEMA Corps members who identify as Black or African American agreed that they developed an understanding of the strengths of communities compared to 63 percent of Black or African American members in Traditional Corps, 62 percent of members who identify as White in FEMA Corps, and 73 percent of members who identified as White in Traditional Corps.

Table 4.2 Differences between FEMA Corps and Traditional NCCC

	Black or African American FEMA Corps	White FEMA Corps	Black or African American Traditional NCCC	White Traditional NCCC
I developed an understanding of the strengths of communities	48%	62%	63%	73%
I felt personally accepted in the communities in which I worked and served	43%	58%	59%	70%
I spent a lot of time doing meaningless "make work" tasks	52%	53%	41%	46%

FEMA Corps members less often reported feeling accepted in the communities they serve than Traditional Corps members, as only 43 percent agreed that they felt personally accepted in the communities in which they served, compared to 59 percent of Black or African American Traditional Corps members, 58 percent of White FEMA Corps members, and 70 percent of White Traditional Corps members.

FEMA Corps members were more likely to agree that they spent a lot of time doing meaningless “make work” tasks, with half of both Black or African American (52%) and White FEMA Corps members agreeing (53%). This compared to 41 percent of Black or African American Traditional Corps members and 46 percent of White Traditional Corps members.

Chapter 5 Summary of Findings

This report draws data from the longitudinal mixed-methods national evaluation of AmeriCorps NCCC to examine member retention through the end of their service term. In addition to survey responses, we coded emerging themes from interviews with a sample of early exit members. There is minimal to no effect of non-response bias. These are indicators of the validity and robustness of the data itself.

AmeriCorps members who ended their term of service early were, on average, 21-years-old, living at home with their families prior to service, and had completed some college. They were motivated by a desire to travel while serving their country to make a lasting positive impact. The highest percentage of early exit is among Black or African American members (41%) and those in the 19-21 age bracket (35%).

In terms of educational attainment, the highest attrition rates are among members who have not completed high school (50%) while the lowest attrition rates are among those with a college degree (23%). This statement holds when examining the intersection of education and member's race/ethnicity, as the lowest attrition rate for members who identify as White, Hispanic or Latino or Black or African American are all for members who have a college degree. There is a high attrition rate among members who identify as White and Hispanic or Latino and did not graduate high school. By contrast, there is a high attrition rate among members who identify as Black or African American with a high school education, technical school, and some college. Though African American members as a group had higher attrition rates, early exit appeared more common among those with fewer years of education, indicating that educational attainment is an important factor in determining retention.

Our analysis corroborates the literature on retention in that it is a complex and multifaceted issue. Members who left service early felt disconnected from leadership and were dissatisfied with the program's structure. Interviews and open-ended survey responses revealed that members often had conflicts with their unit leaders and campus staff.

For some early exit members, outside obligations enticed them to leave the program early. Lack of satisfaction with service assignments seemed relevant in the early exit decision, with members stating they were not getting the assignments they thought they would be doing and that they did not feel fulfilled by their assignments. Project assignments seemed salient for FEMA Corps members, especially the members who identified as Black or African American.

Leaving the program to go back to school was a more common reason among members who identify as White compared to members who identify as Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino. Among both Black or African American members and Hispanic or Latino members, the most common reason was they were not getting the assignments they thought they would be doing, which was particularly important among FEMA Corps members. Also, a higher proportion of members who identified as Black or African American said they exited early because they needed to care for a family member or friend.

Service project assignments have a significant association with member retention, with projects that focused on disaster recovery, mitigation, prevention, or preparedness reducing the likelihood

of early exit, especially for members who identified as Black or African American. Similarly, projects with tangible or intangible impacts reduce the likelihood of early exit. FEMA Corps members have significantly higher likelihood of early exit compared to members in Traditional Corps independent of member characteristics, which is associated with FEMA Corps members' perception that they were not making a difference to the communities they served. This suggests that AmeriCorps NCCC should help members better understand and externally document how each project assignment supports and strengthens communities. Additionally, the odds of early exit for members who identify as Black or African American decreased when project experience was taken into account. This may be attributed to the higher proportion of Black or African American members assigned to FEMA Corps, and primarily driven by the difference in service assignments between Traditional Corps and FEMA Corps.

Chapter 6 Recommendations and Lessons Learned to Maximize Member Retention

Expose members to a wide range of service projects to ensure personal development and increase perceived impact. The literature on retention states that satisfaction with the volunteer assignment is a vital predictor of longer duration of service. Volunteers tend to experience satisfaction when they are given activities that support and relate to their interest in making a difference while at the same time supporting self-development and career development, as well as having some autonomy (Alfes, Shantz, & Bailey, 2016). Our analysis corroborates this sentiment and shows that the types of service project assignments significantly affect the likelihood of remaining in service. Participation in a wide range of projects increases the number of development opportunities for members. Matching member interests and skillsets to their service projects assignments would alleviate some of the disconnect members feel between themselves and the work they are doing.

Ensure quality sponsorship with durable workloads. Members perform better when they have enough tasks and view the assignment as meaningful. AmeriCorps NCCC may need to ensure sponsor organizations have the amount of tasks needed to sustain a team for the duration of an assignment. In the cases where there are not enough tasks, members advocated for more flexibility in pulling teams from projects that were completed sooner than anticipated. The sponsor organization can make or break members' experience. Clear communication and training from sponsors are vital in promoting the development of skills. To ensure satisfaction for both sponsors and members, there should be transparency in the expectations of the depth of training a sponsor can provide, as well as the teams can be expected to provide.

Ensure team leaders have an accurate understanding of the position and provide them with additional support. The team leader has a crucial role and can have a large influence over their team dynamic and, as such, members' overall experience. Team leaders are intermediaries between members and staff, and they deal with team conflict, enforce disciplinary actions, and provide support to their team. A sentiment shared through survey and interview responses was that team leaders need more internal support, more training, and more oversight to ensure they are treating teammates equitably.

To combat the pressure that may come with a team leader position, team leaders may require in-depth training of the roles and responsibilities of the position. One significant source of stress for

team leaders is the burden of their administrative duties. A team leader recommended “*having two Team Leads to spread out the workload,*” or perhaps a formal assistant team leader position. When team leaders are too overburdened by administrative duties, they cannot lead effectively or build positive relationships with their teammates.

AmeriCorps needs to provide clear processes to team leads so they understand how to engage the organization to handle issues beyond their responsibilities, such as with mental health and sexual harassment. Team leaders have the responsibility of effectively handling team conflict as well as navigating the personal issues arising in their team. This can be extremely challenging and could result in team leaders feeling “*intense pressure to fulfill roles beyond their means of experience and training,*” as one member stated. Team leaders may require more in-depth training in conflict resolution was a recommendation from members. However certain conflicts may require internal organizational support. Members described a lack of oversight of team leaders. Individual conversations between members and unit leaders could help alleviate issues of unfair treatment from team leaders. In addition, a standardized set of disciplinary actions may be utilized to ensure fair action across all members.

Strengthen the connection between members and leadership by increasing communication.

A good relationship with staff and other volunteers can positively affect volunteer retention (Hidalgo, 2009), and this can be seen in our analysis as well. One way to alleviate a disconnect between members and leadership is to improve the direct communication channel between leadership and members. Some early exit members noted the lack of access to directly engage with unit leaders, even when discussing critical matters. Members want to feel seen, heard, validated, and supported by AmeriCorps staff and leadership. Additionally, members want to know that the organization will protect them especially when they are feeling vulnerable or isolated. Members expressed concerns, calling to a need to update AmeriCorps’ policies regarding sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination.

Appendix A: Survey Non-Response Bias Analysis

The purpose of the non-response analysis is to identify the potential for bias and, if any bias is present, describe its direction and magnitude. A non-response bias analysis determines whether the non-response is random or there are systematic differences in characteristics between respondents and non-respondents. The non-response bias analysis examines whether, at baseline, respondents differed systematically from the target population. We used the relative non-response bias formula as defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The relative non-response bias is:

$$B(\bar{Y}_r) = \bar{Y}_r - \bar{Y}_t = \left(\frac{n_{nr}}{n}\right) (\bar{Y}_r - \bar{Y}_{nr})$$

where:

\bar{Y}_t = the mean based on all sample cases;

\bar{Y}_r = the mean based only on respondent cases;

\bar{Y}_{nr} = the mean based only on nonrespondent cases;

n = the number of cases in the sample; and

n_{nr} = the number of nonrespondent cases.

We used available administrative data provided by AmeriCorps NCCC which contained observed characteristics on all participants whether they responded to the survey or not. Additionally, we used variables that were included in the baseline survey as all participants included in the first follow-up analysis were respondents in the baseline survey.

Respondents and non-respondents can have similar demographic distributions, yet significant bias may still exist. On the other hand, differences between respondents and non-respondents on a few demographic characteristics may suggest that non-respondents are not “missing at random,” and there may be similar differences on key survey variables. In each instance, we compared differences between respondents and non-respondents to assess the presence or absence of response bias and calculated the size and direction of the bias by applying the OMB formula.

The administrative data contained age, any prior employment at the time of their application to serve with NCCC, number of previous jobs reported on their AmeriCorps NCCC application, if the participant was an immediate family member of active duty, National Guard or Veteran, and their application assessment score. Variables used from the baseline survey included: gender, whether the participant had an associate degree or higher (college degree or graduate degree), if at least one of the participant’s parents had at least a college degree, whether the participant identified as a Non-Hispanic White, whether the participant identified as Hispanic or Latino, whether the participant lived in a single parent or no parent household, and if the participant indicated they worked in the six months prior to their service. Using these defined variables, the relative non-response bias calculations are based on the formula defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). JBS calculated non-response for all respondents combined (Table B1). Bias was low for all variables, indicating that there were only small differences between respondents and non-respondents.

Non-Response Bias in the Full Sample. We assessed the differences in response patterns for all respondents. Table A1 shows the relative bias for each variable. Overall, the relative bias is

considered low as no variable has a relative bias greater than 10 percent. The two variables with the largest relative bias are ‘Hispanic or Latino’ and ‘Single or no parent household,’ both with nine percent relative bias. This indicates that early exit participants who identified as Hispanic or Latino, or early exit participants who came from a household with a single parent or no parent, were more likely to be respondents for the retention study.

Table A1. Non-Response Bias—All Respondents

Variable	Mean - all	Mean - respondents	Mean non-respondents	Total respondents	Total non-respondents	Difference in means	Relative Bias
Female	0.50	0.51	0.47	263	81	0.04	0.02
Age	21	21	21	263	81	0.34	0.00
Prior employment	0.87	0.86	0.90	263	81	-0.04	-0.01
Number of jobs	2.51	2.60	2.25	226	73	-0.35	0.03
Prior volunteer experience	0.76	0.78	0.69	263	81	0.09	0.03
Veteran status	0.19	0.19	0.19	261	81	0.01	0.01
NCCC application assessment score	65.28	65.26	65.35	245	78	-0.09	0.00
College degree	0.38	0.39	0.33	263	81	0.06	0.04
Parent college degree	0.67	0.64	0.74	201	65	-0.10	-0.04
Non-Hispanic White	0.59	0.56	0.70	258	81	-0.15	-0.06
Hispanic or Latino	0.23	0.25	0.16	262	81	0.09	0.09
Single or no parent household	0.36	0.40	0.24	247	72	0.16	0.09
Working participant	0.58	0.58	0.58	263	81	0.00	0.00

To examine the effects of each variable on non-response when all other variables tested were held constant, we ran a logistic regression model (Table A2). Early exit participants who had prior volunteer experience were significantly more likely to participate in the retention study by responding to the early exit short survey. No other variables exhibited statistically significant differences.

Table A2. Likelihood of Non-Response Based on Participant Characteristics—All Respondents

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Female	-0.0507	0.1341	0.1428	1	0.7055	0.904
Age	-0.7828	0.8167	0.9185	1	0.3379	0.457
Prior employment	0.2786	0.2238	1.5496	1	0.2132	1.746
Prior volunteer experience	-0.3646	0.1594	5.2333	1	0.0222	0.482
Veteran status	-0.0517	0.1703	0.0921	1	0.7615	0.902
NCCC application assessment score	-0.0258	0.0941	0.0749	1	0.7844	0.975
College graduate	-0.0246	0.1839	0.0179	1	0.8936	0.952
Parent college graduate	0.132	0.1686	0.6127	1	0.4338	1.302
Non-Hispanic White	0.2942	0.1937	2.3072	1	0.1288	1.801
Hispanic or Latino	-0.0645	0.2287	0.0795	1	0.778	0.879

Appendix B: Socioeconomic Status

We constructed a socioeconomic status (SES) indicator variable based on multiple baseline survey questions. SES can be defined broadly as one’s access to financial, social, cultural, and human capital resources. Traditionally a student’s SES has included, as components, parental educational attainment, parental occupational status, and household or family income, with appropriate adjustment for household or family composition (Cowen, 2012). The history of SES measurement and the identification of possible explanatory correlates show that SES is defined as a broad construct, ideally measured with several diverse indicators. In the construction of the SES variable, we follow the guidelines set by a panel of experts convened for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The panel concluded that the components of a core student SES measure were the “big 3” variables (family income, parental educational attainment, and parental occupational status). Table B1 shows the original baseline survey questions that we used to construct the SES variable.

Table B1: Baseline Survey Questions Used for SES

Variable	Question	Response Options
BQ29	If you live in more than one household, answer about the parent or guardians you live with most of the time. Please choose one parent to begin. What is this parent's or guardian's relationship to you?	Biological Mother Biological Father Adoptive Mother Adoptive Father Stepmother Stepfather Foster Mother Foster Father Female Partner of your Parent or Guardian Male Partner of you Parent of Guardian Grandmother Grandfather Other Female Relative Other Male Relative Other Female Guardian Other Male Guardian No Parent
BQ30	What is the highest level of education completed by the parent/guardian?	Less than high school completion Completed a high school diploma, GED, or alternative high school credential Completed a certificate or diploma from a school that provides occupational training Completed an Associate's degree Completed a Bachelor's degree Completed a Master's degree Completed a Ph.D., or other high level professional degree Don't know
BQ31	Does this parent/guardian currently hold a job for pay?	Yes No Don't know

Table B1 continued

Variable	Question	Response Options
BQ33	Do you have another parent or guardian in the same household?	Yes No
BQ34	What is this parent's or guardian's relationship to you?	Biological Mother Biological Father Adoptive Mother Adoptive Father Stepmother Stepfather Foster Mother Foster Father Female Partner of your Parent or Guardian Male Partner of you Parent of Guardian Grandmother Grandfather Other Female Relative Other Male Relative Other Female Guardian Other Male Guardian No Parent
BQ35	What is the highest level of education completed by the parent/guardian?	Less than high school completion Completed a high school diploma, GED, or alternative high school credential Completed a certificate or diploma from a school that provides occupational training Completed an Associate's degree Completed a Bachelor's degree Completed a Master's degree Completed a Ph.D., or other high level professional degree Don't know
BQ36	Does this parent/guardian currently hold a job for pay?	Yes No Don't know

Based on the questions in Table B1, we created three variables that aggregate parent employment, parent education and family structure. Table B2 lists these variables.

Table B2: Aggregated Parent Characteristics

Variable	Indicator	Assignment Options
Parent_employed	Is at least one parent/guardian in the household employed?	0 = no one in the household is employed 1 = one parent/guardian is employed but not all 2 = all parents/guardians in the household are employed (this includes single parent houses) . = Participant does not know/no answer
Parent_degree	Does at least one parent/guardian in the household have a college degree or higher?	0 = No parent in the household has a college degree or higher 1 = Yes, at least one parent/guardian has a college degree or higher but not all 2 = all parents/guardians in the household have a college degree or higher (this includes single parent houses) . = Participant does not know/no answer
Parent_structure	How many parent/guardians in the household?	0 = Participant said no parent in household 1 = There are no biological parent/adoptive parent in the household, but there are either 1 or 2 guardians ((step parent, foster parent, grandmother, family friend) 2 = Single parent household: There is one biological parent/adopted parent 3 = New partner household: There is one biological parent/adopted parent and one other guardian that is not a biological parent or adoptive parent 4 = Nuclear family: There are two biological parents or adoptive parents in household . = Participant did not want to answer

A composite score was then created using the three variables (parent_employed, parent_degree, and parent_structure). Per the panel, there are reporting and interpretation advantages and disadvantages for treating SES as a single measured variable, as several single measured variables, or as a composite of several measured variables. The advantages of a composite variable over the use of single variables outweigh the disadvantages. The composite variable was constructed using principal component analysis. SES is treated as a latent variable with reflective indicators. A rationale for treating SES as a latent variable with reflective indicators is that its components correlate. Treating SES as a latent variable with reflective indicators implies that changing SES would result in a change in income, parental education, and parental occupational status, which seems implausible. The use of PCA resulted in a single SES composite variable for everyone in the study. We then scaled the composite variable to be in a range of one to three: 1 – low SES, 2 – medium SES, 3 – high SES.

Appendix C: Composite Measure of Motivation for Service

We use Principal Component Analysis (PCA), a data reduction technique which allows for a meaningful interpretation of the data by reducing the number of items to a few linear combinations of the data. Each linear combination corresponds to a principal component. We performed the PCA on the 24 items included in the baseline and first follow-up using the prior communality estimates (Eigenvalue = 1.00). We use the principal axis method and varimax rotation to identify the parsimonious items. The PCA revealed six principal components with an eigenvalue greater than 1.1. Combined, these six principal components account for a total variation of 49 percent.

Table C1: Eigenvalues and the proportion of variation are explained by the principal components

Principal component	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion of variation explained	Cumulative proportion explained
1	4.21891	2.273433	0.1758	0.1758
2	1.945478	0.304668	0.0811	0.2568
3	1.64081	0.221295	0.0684	0.3252
4	1.419515	0.032737	0.0591	0.3844
5	1.386778	0.239931	0.0578	0.4421
6	1.146847	0.079736	0.0478	0.4899
7	1.067111	0.031229	0.0445	0.5344
8	1.035882	0.027715	0.0432	0.5776
9	1.008168	0.095707	0.042	0.6196
10	0.91246	0.097894	0.038	0.6576
11	0.814566	0.03218	0.0339	0.6915
12	0.782386	0.009828	0.0326	0.7241
13	0.772558	0.032036	0.0322	0.7563
14	0.740522	0.051992	0.0309	0.7872
15	0.68853	0.024502	0.0287	0.8159
16	0.664027	0.09771	0.0277	0.8435
17	0.566317	0.020784	0.0236	0.8671
18	0.545533	0.03074	0.0227	0.8898
19	0.514793	0.024603	0.0214	0.9113
20	0.490189	0.029727	0.0204	0.9317
21	0.460463	0.029451	0.0192	0.9509
22	0.431012	0.042796	0.018	0.9689
23	0.388216	0.029287	0.0162	0.985
24	0.35893		0.015	1
Total	24			

We then used factor analysis, a data reduction method, to interpret the six types of motivation. An item loads into a factor if the loading was 0.40 or greater for that item and less than 0.40 for

the other factor. We set the number of factors to six based on the PCA results. Using this criterion there are six groups of motivations to serve, defined as: 1) professional and career development 2) altruistic, 3) financial, 4) commitment to service, 5) finance undergraduate education, 6) finance graduate education. Table C2 shows the original survey items.

Table C2. Original Survey Item List

Factor
Altruistic
I want to make a difference/serve my country
I want to reduce social or economic inequality
NCCC will give me a sense of purpose
Network / Travel
I want to meet new people / make friends
I want to travel the country / I want to leave the town that I am living in right now
Professional and Career Development
To try something new to find what direction I want to take in my career
To gain leadership skills
To gain professional skills / carpentry or construction skills / build resume
I want the opportunity to network with professionals in my field of interest
Financial
I want to earn money/I needed to get a job
NCCC was my only employment option
There are not enough jobs where I live
I wanted to have stable housing and other benefits
I want to earn money to pay off student loans
Commitment to Service
I want to gain experience to serve in other AmeriCorps programs
I want to gain experience to join the Peace Corps
I want to gain experience to join the military
External Factors
I have a friend or family member who was applying or participating
My parents/guardians wanted me to join NCCC
An AmeriCorps organization or one like it helped you or a loved one in the past
Gap year
I want to take a break before college
I want to take a break between college/grad school

Appendix D: Reasons for Leaving Cluster Analysis

To analyze early exit members reasons for leaving a combination of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and clustering technique was utilized (Ding, 2004). Research shows that when

the number of features is high, clustering results may suffer due to high level of dimensionality (Aggarwal et al. 2001). To navigate this, methods of dimensions reductions can be applied before any clustering methods as it helps to reduce the unnecessary noise of the data and achieve better clustering results (Ben-Hur and Guyon, 2003).

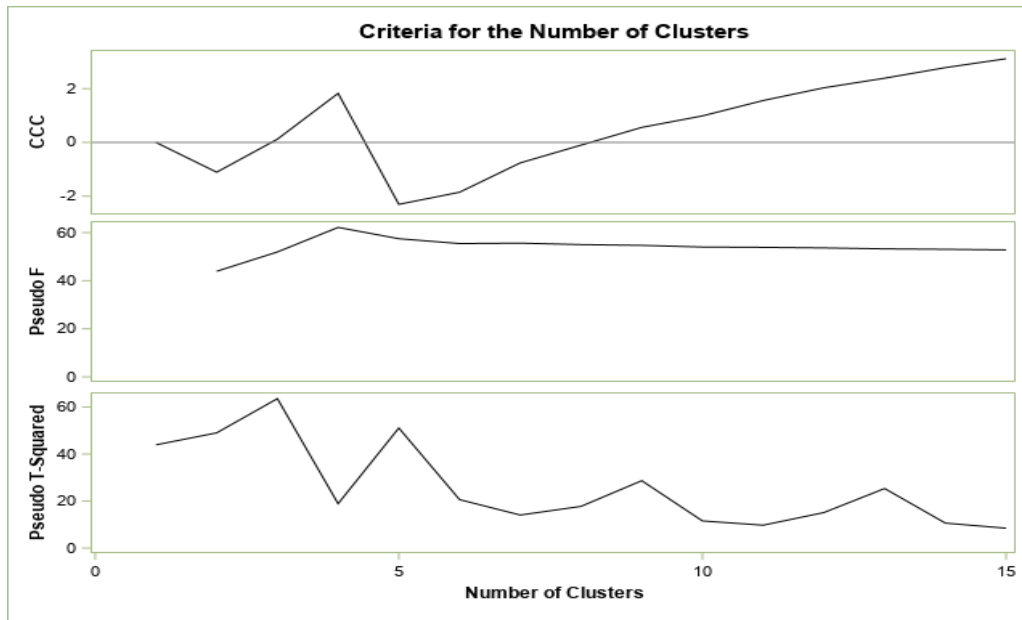
We performed the PCA on the 26 survey items included in the early exit survey using the prior communality estimates (Eigenvalue = 1.00). We use the principal axis method and varimax rotation to identify the parsimonious components. The PCA revealed nine of the survey items with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Therefore, nine components are retained for the rotation pattern. Combined, these nine components account for a total variation of 62.0 percent (Table D1).

Table D1: Eigenvalues and the proportion of variation are explained by the principal components

Principal component	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion of variation explained	Cumulative proportion explained
1	4.640552	2.23093	0.1785	0.1785
2	2.409623	0.63338	0.0927	0.2712
3	1.776245	0.23077	0.0683	0.3395
4	1.545477	0.23344	0.0594	0.3989
5	1.312039	0.06607	0.0505	0.4494
6	1.245972	0.05045	0.0479	0.4973
7	1.195521	0.0757	0.046	0.5433
8	1.119817	0.11719	0.0431	0.5864
9	1.002625	0.03024	0.0386	0.6249
10	0.972387	0.0273	0.0374	0.6623
11	0.945091	0.05477	0.0363	0.6987
12	0.890316	0.10582	0.0342	0.7329
13	0.784494	0.01556	0.0302	0.7631
14	0.768933	0.07071	0.0296	0.7927
15	0.69822	0.02345	0.0269	0.8195
16	0.674767	0.08033	0.026	0.8455
17	0.594438	0.01343	0.0229	0.8683
18	0.581009	0.07423	0.0223	0.8907
19	0.506779	0.0638	0.0195	0.9102
20	0.442977	0.01331	0.017	0.9272
21	0.429663	0.03891	0.0165	0.9437
22	0.39075	0.04986	0.015	0.9588
23	0.340894	0.01957	0.0131	0.9719
24	0.321327	0.10138	0.0124	0.9842
25	0.219946	0.02981	0.0085	0.9927
26	0.190138		0.0073	1
Total	26			

Rather than performing a cluster analysis on the individual survey items, a cluster analysis is then conducted using the factor components as calculated from the PCA. An optimal number of clusters was determined after reviewing three criterion: the cubic clustering criterion (CCC), pseudo-F, and t-squared statistic. Figure D1 shows the criteria for the numbers of clusters. The CCC, pseudo-F, and t-squared statistics indicate four clusters as the optimum amount.

Figure D1. Criteria for the number of clusters



In setting the number of clusters to four, each early exit participant is assigned into one of the four clusters based on the complete linkage clustering technique. Complete linkage clustering calculates the distance between clusters based on maximum distance of possible pairs, and it tends to make highly compact clusters (Adams, 2021). We then examined each cluster to determine the commonalities in reasons for leaving. Based on the most frequently cited reasons in each cluster, we defined each cluster as 1) Leadership & Program Structure in which 43 percent of the early example was assigned; 2) Outside Obligations in which 39 percent were assigned; 3) Project Assignments in which 13 percent were assigned; and 4) Team Dynamics in which 5 percent were assigned. Table D2 shows the original survey item and the corresponding cluster.

Table D2. Original Survey Item List and Corresponding Cluster

Cluster
Leadership & Program Structure
I felt disrespected by the people in the program
I did not feel values by the people in the program
NCCC has too much structure / is too strict
I did not get along with my supervisor or leadership
Outside Obligations
I wanted to go back to school
I found a job / I will start working
Project Assignments
I was not learning the skills I need for the career I want
I was not gaining any leadership skills
I was not making a difference in people’s lives with the projects I was assigned
The work I was assigned was not fulfilling
I was not getting to do the type of work I thought I would be doing
Team Dynamics
People in the program did not try to get to know me
I did not get along with the other members on my team
I was not making friends with the other people on my team
I did not feel part of the team

Appendix E: Multilevel Model

To analyze the impacts of service project characteristics on AmeriCorps members’ likelihood of attrition, we utilized a multilevel mixed linear model. Multilevel models (MLMs) have been developed to properly account for the hierarchical (correlated) nesting of data (Bell, 2013).

Research has shown that ignoring a level of nesting in data can impact estimated variances and the available power to detect effects of covariate (Donner & Klar, 2000; Julian, 2001; Moerbeek, 2004; Murray, 1998; Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002), can seriously inflate Type I error rates (Wampold & Serlin, 2000), and can lead to substantive errors in interpreting the results of statistical significance tests (Goldstein, 2003; Nich & Carroll, 1997).

Multilevel models can be conceptualized as regression models occurring at different levels. In this case, we are modeling the leadership development of AmeriCorps members (at level-1) and exploring the influence of characteristics associated with service projects assignments (at level-2). Additionally, a third level is added by accounting for the clustering of teams within regions (level-3).

There are several advantages of fitting multilevel linear models to hierarchically structured data (Raudenbush, 1993). First, both continuous and categorical variables can be specified to have random effects. Variability can be partitioned at each level, which becomes an important process when accounting for dependency due to clustering effects. In addition, independent variables or

covariates can be included in the model at different levels. For example, predictors pertaining to the participant (e.g., age, gender) as well as information regarding the region in which participants are nested can be included in the model at each level (Suzuki, 1999).

Table E1: Multilevel Analysis Results – Model 1

Indicator	B	SE	P-value	Odds ratio	95% Confidence Interval – Upper limit	95% Confidence Interval – Lower limit
SES	-0.371	0.105	0.0004	0.690	0.562	0.847
Female (Ref=Male)	-0.123	0.200	0.539	0.884	0.597	1.309
Nonbinary (Ref=Male)	-0.104	0.665	0.876	0.901	0.244	3.325
Black or African American (Ref = White)	0.211	0.369	0.568	0.211	0.598	2.548
Native American Alaska Native (Ref = White)	1.282	1.434	0.372	1.282	0.216	60.179
Asian (Ref=White)	-0.494	0.634	0.437	-0.494	0.176	2.121
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Ref= White)	-5.600	15.392	0.716	-5.600	<0.001	>999.999
Multi-Race (Ref= White)	-0.364	0.443	0.411	-0.364	0.292	1.657
Hispanic or Latino (Ref= White)	-0.308	0.240	0.200	-0.308	0.459	1.177
Physical or Mental impairment (Ref = No)	0.681	0.603	0.259	0.681	0.605	6.454

Table E1 shows the MLM results for Model 1 including the odds ratio estimates and the 95% confidence intervals. Model 1 includes participant level characteristics and demographics. The interpretation of the odds ratio depends on whether the predictor is categorical or continuous. Odds ratios that are greater than 1 indicate that the event is more likely to occur as the predictor increases for continuous variables. Odds ratios that are less than 1 indicate that the event is less likely to occur as the predictor increases. For categorical predictors, the odds ratio compares the odds of the event occurring at different levels of the predictor. Odds ratios that are greater than 1 indicate that the event is more likely to happen at event 1 (i.e. if a participant is female compared to the reference of male). Odds ratios that are less than 1 indicate that the event is less likely at event 1.

According to the odds ratio table for Model 1, it seems that members' socioeconomic status is linked to their likelihood of becoming early exit members. The 95% confidence limits indicate that those with higher SES scores tend to remain in the NCCC program for a longer duration than those with lower SES scores. This pattern continues consistently across all three models. In Model 2 (Table E2) we accounted for the total number of assigned disaster projects, which include service projects focused on disaster recovery and response, as well as projects that specifically addressed COVID. We also factored in tangible impact projects, which have observable and measurable impacts, and intangible impact projects, which have impacts that are more subjective and may not be physically visible or felt.

Table E2: Multilevel Analysis Results – Model 2

Indicator	B	SE	P-value	Odds ratio	95% Confidence Interval – Upper limit	95% Confidence Interval – Lower limit
SES	-0.347	0.131	0.008	0.707	0.547	0.914
Female (Ref=Male)	-0.076	0.245	0.756	0.927	0.573	1.498
Nonbinary (Ref=Male)	0.267	0.742	0.719	1.306	0.304	5.609
Black or African American (Ref = White)	-0.045	0.445	0.920	0.956	0.399	2.289
Native American Alaska Native (Ref = White)	4.341	1.994	0.030	76.786	1.531	>999.999
Asian (Ref=White)	-0.613	0.742	0.409	0.541	0.126	2.324
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Ref= White)	-4.135	15.230	0.786	0.016	<0.001	>999.999
Multi Race (Ref= White)	-0.416	0.535	0.438	0.660	0.231	1.888
Hispanic or Latino (Ref= White)	-0.456	0.287	0.113	0.634	0.360	1.114
Physical or Mental impairment (Ref = No)	-0.012	0.717	0.987	0.988	0.242	4.040
All Disaster project	-0.276	0.083	0.001	0.759	0.645	0.893
All Tangible projects	-0.098	0.089	0.272	0.907	0.761	1.080
All Intangible projects	-0.317	0.047	<.0001	0.728	0.664	0.798

Our findings revealed that female and nonbinary members are less likely to leave the program early compared to their male counterparts. However, we also discovered that nonbinary members have a higher likelihood of leaving the program early than males when their project experience is taken into account. In terms of race and ethnicity, our analysis demonstrated that Black or African American and Native American Alaska Native members have a higher probability of becoming early leavers than White members. Moreover, the odds for Native American Alaska Native members remain higher than those for White members across all three models, regardless of their project experience. However, the odds for Black or African American members decrease when project experience is added to the model. The remaining race and ethnicity groups were found to have lower odds of exiting the program early compared to White members.

Based on our research, it appears that the specific characteristics of a project can have a major impact on whether or not its members decide to remain in the program. We found that when we factored in these characteristics in our analysis, the odds of most individual factors decreased, which suggests that there is a strong link between project characteristics and members' desire to remain in the program. SPD provided valuable information on project issue areas and characteristics, which we utilized in our analysis by grouping three projects within the SPD.

We can see that individuals who took part in disaster and intangible projects have a higher probability of remaining in the program. The statistical analysis revealed that these associations were significant within the limits of confidence. This trend was observed in both traditional Corps members and others. To explore this further, we included FEMA Corps as a predictor in Model 3 (Table E3). The results showed that members in FEMA Corps are more likely to exit.

Table E3: Multilevel Analysis Results – Model 3

Indicator	B	SE	P-value	Odds ratio	95% Confidence Interval – Upper limit	95% Confidence Interval – Lower limit
SES	-0.298	0.133	0.025	0.742	0.572	0.963
Female (Ref=Male)	-0.024	0.250	0.923	0.976	0.598	1.595
Nonbinary (Ref=Male)	0.235	0.763	0.759	1.264	0.283	5.653
Black or African American (Ref = White)	-0.118	0.452	0.794	0.888	0.366	2.156
Native American Alaska Native (Ref = White)	4.523	1.817	0.013	92.136	2.603	>999.999
Asian (Ref=White)	-0.519	0.744	0.486	0.595	0.138	2.565
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Ref= White)	-4.445	15.111	0.769	0.012	<0.001	>999.999
Multi Race (Ref= White)	-0.298	0.534	0.577	0.742	0.260	2.118
Hispanic or Latino (Ref= White)	-0.417	0.294	0.157	0.659	0.370	1.174
Physical or Mental impairment (Ref = No)	-0.182	0.736	0.805	0.834	0.196	3.538
All Disaster project	-0.294	0.085	0.001	0.745	0.631	0.881
All Tangible projects	-0.205	0.096	0.032	0.815	0.675	0.983
All Intangible projects	-0.318	0.048	<.0001	0.727	0.662	0.799
FEMA (Ref=Traditional Corps)	1.646	0.506	0.001	5.185	1.920	14.003

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