

ICF Transcription -
Creating Successful Volunteering
and National Service Opportunities Webinar

JENELLE: Hello! I'm Jenelle Azore from ICF

International. And before we begin there are a few housekeeping items to cover. This webinar will be recorded and posted online at AmeriCorps' Impact Webinars page. If you have any questions or experience technical difficulties please let us know by using the Chat box feature and directing your message to the AmeriCorps Research Evaluation.

Please be advised that all lines have been muted to avoid background noise and to allow for greater engagement. You can submit questions on the presentation at any time to the Chat feature below. Select Everyone when submitting your questions. We will read your questions for you during the Q&A session following the presentation. Closed captions are available. To activate please select the Live Transcript icon on the Zoom menu and select Show Subtitles.

That takes care of our housekeeping items. The webinar will start now. Here to welcome us is Dr.

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Mary Hyde, Director of AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation.

MARY: Thank you, Jenelle. Hello and welcome. I want to thank all of you for joining us today. We are thrilled to see there is such interest in this topic. Today's topic takes us to the very core of AmeriCorps' mission. Volunteers and national service members are the fuel and fire for our collective success. Given their central role in multiplying local efforts to improve community conditions, we are excited to share some new research on best practices.

The research is relevant to anyone seeking to effectively recruit and retain volunteers. AmeriCorps as an agency, built on Senior Corps and VISTA's rich history of volunteering practice and research, in the decades following the creation of AmeriCorps a robust set of practices and body of knowledge has been established. AmeriCorps partners play a central role in managing local volunteers.

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And initiatives like the Volunteer Generation Fund help support the use of best practices in the field. AmeriCorps also has a long track record of sponsoring research on volunteering including the Nationally Representative Civic Engagement and Volunteering Survey, longitudinal alumni surveys, an annual member exit survey, and more locally focused research which the Office of Research and Evaluation sponsors through its research grant program.

The research that Dr. Hager and Dr. Hudson-Flege will share today builds on this foundation and we fully anticipate its translation into practice by the field. Next we will hear from our two speakers. First, we will hear from Dr. Mark Hager, Associate Professor in the School of Community Resources and Development at Arizona State University. Mark Hager is Associate Professor of Nonprofit Leadership and Management at Arizona State University. He is a return Peace Corps volunteer, having served in Sierra Leone after college.

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In 2003, while at the Urban Institute in Washington DC and with support from AmeriCorps, Mark was Principal Investigator for the Volunteer Management Capacity Study. That study provided a baseline understanding of management practices for supportive volunteers across the country. In 2017, AmeriCorps funded a follow up study dubbed the Volunteer Management Capacity II and that's what Mark will share today. He's been in Phoenix with Arizona State for fourteen years. However, his wife has taken a job in Houston. So, this summer he will move his family there and look for a new way to contribute to the nonprofit sector.

Our second speaker, Dr. Matthew Hudson-Flege is a Research Assistant Professor at Clemson University and the Program Director of Furman College Advising Corps, an AmeriCorps program. Matthew served in AmeriCorps after high school and also served in the Peace Corps in Jamaica after college. He has over a decade of experience founding, leading, and researching AmeriCorps programs.

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We will finish the presentation portion with brief reflections from Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi, the Deputy Director for AmeriCorps State and National. And finally, for the last 25 or 30 minutes, we will open it up for Q&A. As Jenelle said, if you think of any questions, comments, or useful resources during the presentations feel free to add it to the chat and share with everyone. I will now pass this on to Professor Mark Hager to provide some introductory remarks and his findings.

MARK: Well, thank you, Mary. Let me do my clicks here. Let's see. So, there's a presentation and there we go. Alright, everybody should see my title slide here: Slouching Toward Volunteer Management Capacity. Thank you, Mary. And it's neat to be able to go first. I get to spend about 20 minutes chatting with you all off the bat here to kick things off. That gives me just enough time to give some flavor of some work that actually took several years to complete, offer some high level observations of what we got out of that work, and end with several encouragements.

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I should say that, unlike Matthew's work that we'll hear from here in just a little bit, my work is not specific to AmeriCorps or AmeriCorps volunteers. It's more generally about what we call volunteer management capacity. It's more broadly about how organizations of all kinds are engaging citizens to work in their communities in a great variety of ways. Although, I've always had at least one eye on national service. Mary mentioned that I spent time as a Peace Corps volunteer in Sierra Leone, I'm still active in that. But, more recently my 18 year old daughter has applied for an AmeriCorps slot. So, my family is sort of on pins and needles waiting to find out if our daughter is going to be able to get one of those spaces. So, we talk about it a lot, studied it a lot, and so we have that top of mind right now.

Let me jump in with a little bit of context here about how I sort of think about volunteering. And I'm not going to say anything that's strange to the people on the call, but I think the world as a whole needs a little bit of a reorientation about how volunteering sits with organizations writ large. I

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think there is some sense that nonprofits or other organizations that might engage volunteers are kind of like businesses in that the businesses or the nonprofits hold all the cards. They make the decision about who they're going to hire and we're lucky to get a job.

And even on the business side, we can see right now that that's not always the case or is changing right now with what's being called the Great Resignation. Where you see that employees hold more of the cards. Right now we're sort of challenging this convention that the businesses always hold the cards, the employers always hold the cards, and we're seeing people saying I don't want that job anymore. I don't want to do what I've been doing. I'm going to go do something else.

Well, it's always been that way for volunteers. It is a social situation where volunteers are the ones that hold all of the cards. I think we don't always see it that way and probably should. It's the volunteers, it's the individual citizen who gets to decide how

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they're going to spend their time. And volunteering, except for a fairly small slice of the American population, isn't the top option. The top option is going to be more like Netflix. Hoing up in your house, maybe talking to neighbors occasionally, but binging on Netflix is a lot more popular than actually engaging our communities.

That said, some folks do want to volunteer in community organizations, but it's a buyer's market. The volunteers are the ones that hold all the cards and if they don't find themselves in a good situation they can just walk away and go find something else to do. So, it's the nonprofit or it's the congregation that is in the place of holding up their hand, putting their best face forward so they can attract the volunteers that are going to work best within their organizations.

So, that goes to what we call building a quality volunteer program. Noting that the quality of the volunteer program and the quality of the engagement that we have with volunteers is what determines how

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the volunteers are going to see their experience. That's that social contract. A volunteer can walk away at any particular point unless they find that they have a good experience and the organization is going to value their time.

That's where we enter into a sort of a whole arena of volunteer administration and you are all familiar with this. Volunteer management, volunteer administration, volunteer resource managers. This is real work and it's real administration within organizations of all kinds where if we're going to work effectively with volunteers we need to do the legwork to define the volunteer roles, to figure out how to bring them in, do the work of recruiting and screening volunteers, make sure people are appropriately on-boarded and trained to do their work, to supervise and communicate with volunteers throughout their work with organizations, to assess their work, to recognize them so they feel good about their work and their connection to the organization so they keep on coming back.

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When we don't do this work sufficiently individual volunteers can simply walk away. So, what do we know about volunteer management capacity? We only know what we study. And you can go back almost 20 years when the federal government started asking this question, what do we know about volunteer management capacity? And it came on the heels of President Bush, the younger one, his 2002 State of the Union address that he gave just a couple months after the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington DC and outside of Pittsburgh.

And in that State of the Union address President Bush encouraged all Americans to go spend what would amount to two years of their life volunteering in the community, not all at once, but, you know, a little bit at a time, regularly go out and connect more to community. The field sort of had two pretty different responses to that. One was hey, wow, the president is encouraging people to go out and volunteer more, that's awesome. We don't get to hear that too much from the president. But, the second one, though, is a little bit skeptical. The field kind of pushed back

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and said, you know, we have a hard time effectively managing the volunteers we already have, let alone if we had an army of new volunteers that came roaring to our doors.

So, the federal government heard that and they started asking questions about well, what is capacity? What could we do to encourage more capacity? So, the federal government, a White House office called the USA Freedom Corps, that was established by that President Bush, reached out to AmeriCorps. They had a different name at the time and said hey, you know, can you help us get up to speed on volunteer management capacity? And AmeriCorps said yeah, we can put money towards some research on that. Let's see if we can find some more money and sure enough the UPS Foundation stepped up and they went looking for a partner in this.

That ended up being the Urban Institute, a think tank in Washington DC that just does this kind of work, that ended up being me because I was there at the time, and that ended up being the Volunteer

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Management Capacity Study, the briefing reports that were published in late 2003 and in 2004. There's a link there. I'll share these slides a little bit later to the public briefing report that came out in 2003, 2004. But, it was, you know, it got a fair amount of air play. It made a fair amount of impact at the time.

The thing is that's almost two decade ago. People still will refer to it, but when they refer to it, like me, in class, I'll say, 'This is getting older. What has changed?' We know some things have changed. So, several years ago we approached AmeriCorps to revisit this study. So, 2018, we laid a lot of groundwork. 2019, we collected data for the second round of the Volunteer Management Capacity Study.

Can I get to the chat right now? I will press go. There's a link to the public report that I just put in the chat. It's also linked there in the slides. A report that we released last spring. I keep saying we, this is Jeffrey Brudney, who is co-principal investigator on this study, a good friend of mine. We

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were finishing up that briefing report that I just linked to and I'm speaking from a little bit today, last spring. Jeff wasn't feeling very well when we were finalizing this.

It dragged him down a little bit, had an infection, went into the hospital. His wife brought him his laptop so he could keep working from the hospital, but he dragged down a little bit more and sad to say never made it out of the hospital. Last Easter Jeff Brudney died, which is lousy for the field. He was the preeminent scholar of volunteer management, volunteer administration in the world, but also a good friend of mine. So, it's sort of a little bit in memoriam to be able to speak about Volunteer Management Capacity II knowing that Jeff Brudney had such a large hand in this particular study.

So, points of context. What did we learn from this study? Well, here's something that seems to have changed since we first did our first round of Volunteer Management Capacity Study almost two years ago. So, this looks at the growth, and we heard about

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this going on and this documents it a little bit more, the growth of interest in what we call episodic volunteering. Short-term assignments or periodic assignments rather than the long-term, regular super volunteers that we had more of back in the old days.

It's good to be able to engage volunteers in short-term assignments if that's where they're at, but they're inevitably shallower. People spend less time working in organizations. So, I don't know that it's a good development, but it's the context of where we're at right now. You see that 41.7% at the bottom of this slide, those are short-term volunteers that are in face-to-face assignments. And I'm going to guess, if we did this now in the throes of the pandemic, we would find that episodic assignments have probably now eclipsed those long-term assignments. That's important context for the hard work of volunteer administration.

Here's another point of context, something also we noted back in 2003 in the initial round of the Volunteer Management Capacity Study, and that's that

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professional volunteer resource managers are a distinct minority. Meaning that the people that are doing volunteer resource management in organizations aren't professionals. The professionals are down here in this slice, 23.8% of people that are working with volunteers in organizations. These are staff volunteer managers who are devoting at least half-time to volunteer administration.

Now look over to the right, the 41.4%, those are still staff volunteer managers, but they're spending less than half-time. It's something that Jeff Brudney and I have said for many years is unless you're doing something half-time that's not how you think about your job professionally. You know, if you say, ah, I'm a program manager. Oh, but, I also spend a little time doing volunteer management because nobody else in my organization is tasked with that particular job. If you're doing most of your job as program manager that's how you think about yourself, that's where you get your training, that's where you join a professional association.

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So, unless you do get up to half-time, become a professional volunteer resource manager, you don't get the training and the professional development and the individual identity towards professional administration. I think that's a problem for the field of volunteer administration.

Perhaps as a consequence we are short on volunteer management capacity in many nonprofit organizations or volunteer settings across the country. Most nonprofits have a problem recruiting volunteers. Now in the black here those organizations say they don't have a problem either recruiting enough volunteers, or recruiting volunteers during the work day, or volunteers with right skills or expertise, but when you look in the green you see a third, a quarter of organizations saying it's a big problem, and lots in the middle to bring us up to a majority of organizations who say at least they have some problem with recruiting volunteers. We think this is due to a lack of capacity to manage volunteers, to recruit, and later on to retain because volunteers know

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they're getting a good experience in that organization.

We focus to a large extent on practices. That's become a mainstay of the Volunteer Management Capacity project. We ask about adoption of particular practices. What about practices related to recruitment and placement? Well, not too bad. The green are those organizations that have adopted a particular practice to a large degree and you got over half of organizations, shoot, going on almost 2/3rds of organizations saying they match volunteers to appropriate tasks or jobs. Yay. Pretty good. But, only half that say they are always screening to identify suitable, screening for appropriateness of volunteers, and many fewer that have written policies and job descriptions, and more than 1 in 5 that don't have written policies and job descriptions at all. So, some capacity here, but work to do.

What about supporting volunteers themselves? We asked five questions that had to do with support of volunteers. And yay, up on top regular supervision of

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volunteers. I suppose it's good on one hand that half of our nonprofit organizations say they've adopted to a large degree this practice of regularly supervising volunteers, but that leads another half that don't do this. And the other practices are listed here:

liability coverage, regularly recognizing volunteers, training volunteers and staff are adopted to a much lower degree.

You look at training for paid staff at the very bottom and it's that staff that does the work with volunteers, you only have about 17% of organizations say that they've adopted that to a large degree, and nearly half that say we don't do that at all. So, support practices not so great, work to do.

Communication practices are somewhat better, maybe because this is easier for people to do. This involves both communicating with volunteers about the work that they need to do or have been doing. Or communicating with other stakeholders, it could be the general public, it could be the board of directors, it could be funders. And here we see,

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actually, lots of green where most organizations are saying that they've adopted these practices to a large degree. But, still too much black and enough of that middle category to give us pause about how well nonprofit organizations are communicating both internally and externally regarding their volunteer work.

The fourth group of practices that we investigated has to do with assessment. Knowing what your volunteers are doing, how many there are, whether they're having an impact, and what it's value is for the organization, and here we're losing ground compared to where we were in 2003. We have not half, but a third of organizations, anyway, that say we don't do these things at all. And less than that, or around a third, again, that say they've adopted these to a large degree. Which ones are those?

Well, they're the larger organizations. They're the ones that work with volunteers more. So, there are certainly some very good, well established organizations that work with volunteers and have very

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good management practices. But, too many organizations in the rank and file that are handling a lot of our civic engagement that are not giving volunteers good experiences, and there's turnover, and there's happiness, and people are just going to go watch Netflix rather than keep working with our community organizations.

So, summing up. Volunteerism is that primary way that people engage their communities. People need engagement, organizations need engagers. So, both on the supply side and on the demand side volunteerism provides this great opportunity for connecting to communities. The thing is people walk away if they don't feel like they're getting a good experience. This is real work and organizations have to invest in management capacity if they expect volunteers to keep returning to do that work.

This is a tall order. This is hard work for our volunteer administrators especially if they're not professionals, this is something that they're just thrown into or that they are doing on the side. We

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have increasing short-term shallow assignments. And during the pandemic we have a need to handle virtual engagements which have increased quite a lot and are not going to go away. What we see in this study, and it's not changing anytime soon, is too few organizations investing in people and practices that lead to those happy, productive, committed volunteers that are going to stick around.

Lots of shortcomings. 1 in 5 organizations have no written policies or position descriptions. Half do no training of staff to work with volunteers. 1 in 3 collect little to no information on what their volunteers bring to operations. So, there is substantial potential for increasing management capacity.

How do we do that? Let me give you three quick ideas on what we can do in our organizations to increase our volunteer management capacity. First, we have to recognize that our volunteer administrators usually aren't the ones holding the purse strings. They're not the ones that control resources. They're usually

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just not in a position to do that, but what we can do is advocate internally for resources.

That little circle at the bottom of our slide, those two arrows, that's the key argument here. Too often boards, top management teams they don't understand the value of volunteers or the work that goes into creating good experiences for volunteers. They say ah, volunteers are free. We don't need to put any money into this, but that's not true. The benefits you get from volunteers are the results of the investments that you do in volunteer administration. And those investments then return more benefits. It's a positive feedback loop, and unless you're in that positive loop, you're just going to provide poor experiences for your volunteers. So, we must convince our boards, our top management teams, the people that control resources that these returns from volunteers only come from investments and the capacity to work with volunteers.

The second has to do with people. Let's get more professional volunteer resource managers in place.

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That means this has to be more than half-time if there's only one person working in these organizations. Sometimes there's a bunch of people, but unless it's half-time, people aren't going to see this as a professional job that then they seek development for. There's a certifying body, the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration has about 1,000 certified volunteer administrators in the United States and Canada. Let's get more of those and let's get our organizations to hire people who are trained, developed professional volunteer administrators.

Can we plug AmeriCorps members in here? Sure, we can. That was a conversation back in 2003 when we were doing the initial work. And AmeriCorps members do this work and I know there have been at least some movements in that particular direction. Great. But, let's make sure that they get serious training in order to slot into these particular spots. My 18 year old daughter is smart and talented and beautiful, and if she gets a slot as an AmeriCorps member she'll do a great job, but boy is she not at all ready to go in

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and lead volunteers in an organization of any size. Everybody needs serious training in order to do this work well.

That's people. The third piece are those management practices. You got to build a volunteer program if you haven't or shore up what you have. You've got to adopt the practices that make sense for your particular situation. It's not an accidental thing and it's treated as accidental management too often. We have to be strategic in how we build approaches to recruitment, to placement, to support, to communication with volunteers, and assessment of their work.

The formula that Jeff Brudney created is simple. He defined volunteer management capacity, which became the namesake for this 20 years of work that we've done, has two pieces. It's the people that you invest in to do volunteer administration in your organizations and it's the practices we adopt in order to properly manage them. If we do these two things well people will come, and be happy, and work

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and work productively, and stay in our organizations. If we don't they will simply walk away, find a better volunteer assignment to do, or go binge some Netflix. Don't let that happen. Thank you.

I am Mark Hager. You can get me at Mark.Hager@asu.edu. I'll be happy to field questions, but first we want to hear what Matthew has to say about his work on AmeriCorps volunteers.

MATTHEW: Alright, good afternoon, everyone. And Mark, thanks so much for that great presentation. My name is Matthew Hudson-Flege. I'm a Research Assistant Professor at Clemson University. My full-time day job is running Furman College Advising Corps, which is a small AmeriCorps program serving high school students throughout the State of South Carolina. This afternoon I'm going to be talking to you about my research over the last few years trying to better understand AmeriCorps members - who they are, why they're motivated to serve, and how we can better recruit and support them.

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So, what is the challenge that I'm trying to address in my research? Every year there are more than 75,000 Americans serving in AmeriCorps helping our their communities in various capacities. Well, we know that this group of AmeriCorps members is very diverse in a lot of ways, but particularly in terms of their age, their education level, and why they're serving in AmeriCorps. So, the question is how can AmeriCorps program leadership and others better understand these diverse groups of member, recruit them, and support them throughout their AmeriCorps service?

So, in order to tackle this question we looked at data from a few different sources. First, I analyzed quantitative data from two large surveys that are nationally representative of AmeriCorps members. The AmeriCorps Longitudinal Study was an effort that tracked AmeriCorps members over an eight year period from 2000 to 2008. And then the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Survey looked at a few different cohorts of AmeriCorps members who served in the late 2000 oughts through early teens, so a bit more recent data there.

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Both of those studies, I'll note, were funded by AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation, and they're available on what they call the Evidence Exchange which has these two studies as well as numerous others. So, a great resource if you're interested in studies and other information about AmeriCorps. In addition to the quantitative work, I also interviewed several AmeriCorps alumni from around the country to kind of get a little deeper understanding. So, I'm going to present some kind of key findings from this research.

And I'll also note that my research for this particular project is focused on young adult members around the age of 18 to 25. So, certainly know and appreciate that there are AmeriCorps members of all ages making valuable contributions. I think I saw several introductions in the chat from folks from RSVP or other AmeriCorps seniors programs. So, certainly not to take away from those programs in any way, but it's something I learned very quickly when I delved into the world of research is you have to kind

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of narrow your audience. So, this particular research is focused on that young adult demographic.

So, the first thing that I really encountered when doing this work was trying to identify how we can sort of group to better understand AmeriCorps members based on their age, their education, and their motivation to serve. What I found was four sort of distinct profiles of AmeriCorps members and I've named them as followed: public servants, gappers, wanderers, and young idealists, oh my. So, who are these people and why do they join AmeriCorps?

First, we'll talk about public servants. Public servants are recent college graduates, they're going to be in that 22 to 24 age range and they have a very high level of public service motivation. Meaning in college they were active as volunteers or in different advocacy efforts and they have an interest in civic engagement. They're really joining AmeriCorps to serve as a springboard towards a career in the nonprofit sector, the public sector, or the general helping sectors.

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They're looking at AmeriCorps as a way to gain experience, maybe get their foot in the door at a nonprofit organization, or to really prepare and build their resume for graduate school in these related areas. Public servants in the datasets that I've looked at represent about 1/3rd of young adult AmeriCorps members, so a pretty sizable group. What does this look like in real life? I'll point out Andrea Rosado, who is an AmeriCorps member I worked with in my past work.

She was a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, was a pre-med student, but was very active in service and volunteerism throughout college. She wanted to do AmeriCorps to gain more hands-on experience with underserved communities and she also wanted to take some time to be intentional about applying to medical school. She ended up serving a year with Vincentian Volunteers of Cincinnati, which is a small residential AmeriCorps program in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she was able to work in a charitable pharmacy really gaining experience working one on one with

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patients, before she ultimately went on to medical school.

The next group I'll talk about are who I call the gappers. Gappers like the public servants or recent college grads, in that 22 to 24 age range, they, though, have a more low to moderate level of public service motivation. So, not quite as active in volunteerism, don't necessarily have a set interest in going into the nonprofit, public, or helping sectors for their career. They're joining AmeriCorps to discover new career pathways, maybe they got to the end of college and decided hey, this major really wasn't for me.

Or they do have a good sense of where their career will take them, but they're looking for somewhat of a break between college and really launching full fledge into their career. Like the public servants, gappers represent about 1/3rd of all AmeriCorps members. As an example, I'll cite Ariel Cochrane-Brown. So, Ariel, when she was a senior at UNC Chapel-Hill she had been majoring in PR and

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marketing. And she had a little bit of an identity crisis senior year and decided hey, I'm not a PR girl after all, this isn't really the field that I want to go into. What am I going to do now that I'm about to graduate?

An older sorority sister of Ariel's was serving as an AmeriCorps member with College Advising Corps at the time, told Ariel about the program, and she thought hey, this looks like a chance to do something meaningful for a year. I'll have a job so my mom won't be mad at me and it'll give me time to sort of assess where I'm at and where I want to go with my career.

The next group that I'll talk about are wanderers. So, wanderers are high school graduates who may have a year or two of college or work experience. So, we're thinking like 19 to 21 year olds. But, they haven't really quite found their right fit either academically or with work. They don't know sort of what their career direction is going to look like. Like the gappers, they have a lower or more moderate

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level of public service motivation, and they're really joining AmeriCorps to find a sense of direction for their career and purpose in their lives.

Wanderers represent about 17% of young adult AmeriCorps members. So, a much smaller group than the two previous groups. I'll note most likely because of the issue of having a bachelor's degree. While some AmeriCorps programs are open to high school graduates, other AmeriCorps programs like College Advising Corps, many AmeriCorps VISTA positions are only open to folks who have a bachelor's degree. So, that's somewhat limiting the pool of non-college graduates. Excuse me.

As an example of a wanderer I'll talk about Alex Harvey. Alex had grown up in sort of rural Arkansas. He spent two years at the University of Arkansas studying business, but he just really was not, his heart wasn't in it, he didn't really feel like he fit in as a college student, didn't know where he was going, and he was also very interested in living life

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in the big city, but he didn't know quite how to get there from where he was. So, what Alex did was literally Google 'what to do when you don't want to move back in with your parents.'

When he did this AmeriCorps came up and he researched it for opportunities. He ended up serving a year with SBP, which is an organization in New Orleans that works with housing for families who have been a victim of a natural disaster. One thing I'll note too about wanderers is that wanderers as a group are more racially, gender, and economically diverse than AmeriCorps members as a whole.

The final group I'll talk about are young idealists. So, young idealist are recent high school grads, 18 to 19, with a very high level of public service motivation. They're joining AmeriCorps because they really want to make an impact in the real world or in their community right here and now. Almost identical in size to the wanderers, they make up about 17% of AmeriCorps members in this young adult age range.

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As an example, I'll actually tell my own AmeriCorps story. So, believe it or not under that helmet and massive head of hair that's me at 19 back in 2002, when I actually heeded that very call that Mark talked about from President George W. Bush in the wake of 9/11. Like many Americans at the time, I had a real sense of patriotism and a desire to serve, but my interests were much more in community service.

So, I found out about AmeriCorps N triple C, which is a team-based, very hands-on AmeriCorps program. So, I spent a year with a team of fellow young adults doing, you know, really great community work right after I graduated high school before eventually going on to college.

Like the wanderers, young idealists are also a bit more diverse racially, in terms of gender, and economically than AmeriCorps members as a whole. So, that being said, if you're an AmeriCorps leader and you are interested in having a core of AmeriCorps members who are representative of the communities you

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serve, young idealists and wanderers might be particular groups of interest to you.

So, in just a minute I'm going to ask our sort of facilitators to open up an audience poll, but before I do that I just want to put this in context. So, this grouping of AmeriCorps members into these four profiles it's not meant to be like a diagnostic tool to say okay, you're this category or that category. Rather as we're thinking about AmeriCorps members as large groups, how can we organize our thoughts on who they are and why they're serving?

That being said, you know, when I speak to current AmeriCorps members or AmeriCorps alumni about these profiles very often they'll tell me, 'Oh yes, that profile or these two profiles really do speak to me in terms of who I was and why I joined AmeriCorps.' So, I'm guessing that on this webinar, out of our 250 or so participants, there's probably a handful of you who served in AmeriCorps yourself.

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So, we're going to launch a poll question and for those of you have served in AmeriCorps I'd like to know which of these profiles sort of best describes, and I know a couple might, but just pick one that best describes with you or if you thought no, none of these really describe me at all you can just say none of these. And we'll leave the results up to see what we find.

Alright, I am not able to see the poll results. I don't know if we can share those. Okay, great.

Alright, so, yes, I was correct, quite a few of AmeriCorps alumni on the call, welcome. So, it looks like we had the largest group being public servants, followed by, it was 44 of you. 11 gappers, 8 wanderers, and 7 young idealists. Oh yes, Mark, I'll definitely talk to her and see what profile she fits.

So, alright, I was curious to do this, and this sort of bears out anecdotally, but what I found is that within the AmeriCorps world many people who are running AmeriCorps programs or working in different capacities who themselves were AmeriCorps members,

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the large majority of them were in that public servant category, and that's not surprising given the fact that, you know, you're still working in this AmeriCorps world. But, I wanted to just pause and poll the group, because I think it's really important to kind of keep in mind the proverb that we see from where we stand.

So, for those of us who work in the AmeriCorps arena who were members it's a great asset because we can relate to our members in a certain way since we ourselves went through AmeriCorps, but it's really important to stop and consider that, you know, our motivations for serving might be very different from the motivations of some of our members. So, we always want to honor that difference and take that into account when we approach them.

Alright, so, after developing these profiles, when I was doing interviews with AmeriCorps members, who kind of resonated with these different groups, I wanted to dive down into questions that could help us as AmeriCorps program leaders better recruit and

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serve these diverse groups. So, one of the questions I ask is, 'Why did you join AmeriCorps?' And I did see some different responses based on the profiles.

So, wanderers often times they strictly needed a job. They were looking for a job and that's how they found this position. They also talked often about needing an opportunity for a new direction. Gappers also talked about, you know, approaching college graduation and needing a job. Many of them, though, were interested in the nonprofit sector, but because they hadn't like majored in social work or done a lot of volunteering in college, they saw AmeriCorps as a way to sort of get their foot in the door in the nonprofit world.

Public servants often talked about preparation for graduate school and also an opportunity to refine their broader interests within the public service realm. So, they knew they wanted to be in nonprofit or a helping profession, but they didn't know exactly what that would look like and AmeriCorps might provide that opportunity to really drill that down.

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Finally, young idealists really talked about wanting to make a hands-on impact right away and not just wanting to kind of continue in school. The one thing I'll say about all these groups is that they all were looking for an opportunity to do meaningful work. So, even though I mentioned that wanderers and gappers maybe had a lower level of public service motivation, they all had an interest in doing meaningful work that would impact their community and all saw AmeriCorps as a way to do that.

Some interesting food for thought, though that came up within my discussions about this question. One, is that many AmeriCorps members I've spoken with actually didn't know they were joining an AmeriCorps program until very late in the interview process or even until their first day on the job. So, while if you're joining a program like AmeriCorps N triple C where it's very, AmeriCorps is in the name, many folks who served for state and national programs they're not like looking for AmeriCorps positions, they're just looking for a job and finding it, and

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only did they later on realize oh, this AmeriCorps,
what is that?

Another thing I found is that for those who were familiar with AmeriCorps or had heard of it, many folks have a very narrow impression of what AmeriCorps is based on their own personal experience knowing someone who served. So, for example, if they had a roommate or friend or sibling who served in AmeriCorps N triple C or AmeriCorps VISTA, that's all that they know about AmeriCorps. There's definitely a lack of an understanding and appreciation for the broad range of opportunities that are available for AmeriCorps service among college and high school seniors.

So, another question that I asked is, you know, looking back at yourself before you joined AmeriCorps, what type of a recruiting message would have resonated with you at that time? Wanderers talked about emphasizing technical and job skills that you can learn in AmeriCorps as well as the education award and the healthcare benefits. Again,

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they were often just kind of looking for a job with benefits at the time.

Gappers really emphasized the career opportunities that can come about through AmeriCorps service as well as, again, the education award and health benefits. Public servants focused on the career and personal growth opportunities that are available as well as the education award, as many public servants are planning to go on to graduate school. Finally, the young idealists talked about messages related to real hands-on and impactful opportunities as well as how AmeriCorps can support their broader career growth.

Something that I heard a lot from people across all profiles, though, was really a desire to hear authentic stories from quote unquote "people like me." So, they want to hear stories about people who were in their shoes or were in a similar situation who served in AmeriCorps. And they often had kind of an aversion to overly polished marketing campaigns. Even when I asked the question, what kind of

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recruiting message would be effective? They kind of bristled at that and said well, it shouldn't be about like recruiting message, it should just be about telling the story about people like me who did it and then I'll see if it's for me.

So, once you have someone onboard, I'm definitely interested in within these different profiles how can we best support AmeriCorps members? So, I asked them what types of training and other member support opportunities were helpful for you? And what sort of training, you know, wasn't there or could have been expanded upon? Here, interestingly, I did not really see a clear differentiation between answers based on what profile folks were in.

Across the board folks talked about, you know, new hard skills such as construction or different technology being really helpful for them later in their careers. They talked about sort of on the job training that was provided from more experienced AmeriCorps members who maybe started before them as being particularly effective. And they also talked

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about how many of the program staff had an open door policy and were very supportive, and that was something that really stuck out as helpful member support efforts.

Things that they pointed out as gaps or being needed were better direction on how to use the AmeriCorps Education Award, sessions on how to really prepare for life after AmeriCorps, and throughout the year a little more attention to their professional growth and development as they're going through this AmeriCorps experience.

So, how can you take these different profiles of AmeriCorps members and apply this knowledge to your work working with AmeriCorps members? Lots of different directions that you could take it, but I wanted to share a couple ways that I have used this in my job managing a chapter of College Advising Corps.

So, first when it comes to recruiting. When I'm interviewing a perspective member or talking to

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someone at a career fair often I'll ask them questions about, you know, who they are, what their interests are to really try to say okay, am I talking to a public servant here, am I talking to a gapper here? And that knowledge is really going to help me pick out which of the program highlights, both in terms of the work and the benefits and where you can go after a year of College Advising Corps, it's really going to help me tailor what I'm going to share with that perspective member that I think they'll be most excited about.

Also, I know many AmeriCorps members or AmeriCorps programs will try to match an applicant or perspective member with a current member or alumni so they have someone they can ask questions to. And when I'm doing that I'm definitely trying to think in terms of these profiles, and if I have a perspective member that I really see as a public servant I want to match them with one of my current members or alumni who was in that similar situation because I think they might have a little bit more in common to share.

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And then in terms of member support, what I really drew from doing these interviews is that the type of support that's needed is very individualized. It really depends on the person. So, something we've done with College Advising Corps at Furman is put in place personalized professional development coaching. So, we actually have a professional development consultant who we brought in on a limited basis to work one on one with our members throughout the year to help them not only be as effective as possible as AmeriCorps members, but really work with them from day one to identify how they can grow in this year and where this year of service will help them in their long-term education and career trajectory.

So, finally, I'd like to leave you with a resource. My colleague and I, Janna Pennington, this past fall we released a book called *Joining AmeriCorps* which is really informed by this research and my work with AmeriCorps. It's a book that's geared towards perspective AmeriCorps members to help them identify if they should serve in AmeriCorps, how to find

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different AmeriCorps positions and apply, and then when they do join AmeriCorps how to make the most of the experience.

It's also a resource for AmeriCorps programs, of state service commissions and others who would like to have a helpful recruiting tool that they can give to perspective members. And then for using, with their AmeriCorps members themselves, we actually have many hands-on worksheet activities about how to make the most of the AmeriCorps year and how to prepare for life after AmeriCorps. And these activities can be used by program staff in a sort of facilitated setting with your members. So, if you think this would be helpful this book is available at JoiningAmericorps.com, which is our website, or at Amazon.

So, thank you very much and I look forward to a spirited question and answer session. My contact information is here. Please don't hesitate to get with me. And at this point I will pass it back to Mary.

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MARY: Thank you, Matt. Thank you, Mark. Yes, the chat is firing up with tons of questions. But, before we get to everyone's questions in the Q&A segment I would like to have Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi, the Deputy Director of AmeriCorps State and National, offer some remarks and reflections on what has been shared with us here today. Jennifer?

JENNIFER: Thank you, Mary. So, I would love to thank Dr. Hager, Dr. Hudson-Flege, Dr. Mary Hyde, all of my colleagues in our office of Research and Evaluation who put research and evaluation front and center at our agency every day. I also would like to acknowledge and honor the late Dr. Jeff Brudney for his work and contribution to this space. And I want to thank everybody who joined. I see a lot of familiar names, a lot of familiar organizations, some new ones. We're so glad that you have joined us this afternoon.

I do want to say a special hello to Debbie Cox-Roush who has been a lifelong volunteer in many different

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ways, was a colleague with us here at the agency, and is now continuing to do wonderful work with Samaritan's Feet. And Dr. Hager, our fingers are crossed for your daughter.

I've been asked to give some reflections. I love research and evaluation. I especially love research that can be consumed and immediately put into action, which is what both of these two research studies are. I love the groupings of public servant, gappers, wanderers, young idealists. I think it puts a frame around what program operators have known in their bones about when they're recruiting and when they're running programs, but it provides a crispness and a precision to allow people to be better recruiters.

The takeaways. I was struck by the fact that the storyteller tradition is alive and well and very meaningful. That recruitment engages people the best with one on one experiences being shared. And I also think another takeaway is it highlights our collective work that we have together to end AmeriCorps being the best kept secret in this

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country. We all need to think about ways in which we can continue to respect the A and lift it up alongside and in partnership with all of the amazing organizations that partner with AmeriCorps.

And it provides a great through line, this research to the research of Dr. Hager. AmeriCorps will be creating a position that oversees the agency's volunteer grant making work. The linking of our days of service grant making, which comprises the 9/11 grants, the Martin Luther King Day of Service grants, as well as our Volunteer Generation Fund, and all of those grant programs both cover episodic volunteering as well as long-term volunteering, it's an important step for our agency in a more thoughtful and strategic approach. And with the benefit of the American Rescue Funds, we will, for the first time, be able to open up the Volunteer Generation Fund to all nonprofits and organizations.

I think in reading the report from Dr. Hager, one of the things that struck me is it may be a great place for our agency to start as we focus in in a different

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way on grant making related to the volunteer management sector and it's contained in the end of his report, which is three things that have not changed much so far this century and then three things that have changed quite a bit. It's a great frame for us to potentially support, strengthen, or challenge the volunteer management sector by investing in changing what hasn't changed or strengthening the new aspects. So, thank you, Mary.

MARY: Thank you, Jennifer. I think we're going to hand this over to Melissa to start diving into some of the questions. And Jennifer, really appreciate your reflections.

MELISSA: Hello, good afternoon. I'm Melissa Gouge. I'm an Analyst in the Office of Research and Evaluation. And I'm going to be facilitating what looks like is going to be quite a lively question and answer session. I see a number of questions have already been added to the chat and I've been keeping track of those. And as you continue to ask questions, keep dropping those in the chat. You're also welcome to

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provide comments, reflections, and resources as well,
and we'll be able to pass those along and share them.

And the very first question we have is from one
panelist to another. Dr. Hager has a question for Dr.
Flege. You have the floor Dr. Hager.

MARK: Well, thank you. I love to throw curveballs when I
can. So, Matt, I'm going to introduce the world to my
18 year old daughter, who I mentioned earlier has
applied for AmeriCorps. Why don't you chat with her a
few minutes? Give her a couple of questions and
diagnostics. And then let us know where you would
place her among those categories. So, I'll have Zoey
sit down, you've already heard her dad describe her
as smart and talented, but what else do you need to
know, Matt, in order to put her into a category?

ZOEY: Yeah. I'm Dr. Hager's daughter. I guess I'm here
for the questions.

MATT: Hey Zoey, I'm Matt. It's nice to meet you. So,
what AmeriCorps program did you apply for?

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ZOOEY: I applied for N triple C.

MATT: Alright, I'm an AmeriCorps N triple C alum myself.

I did it right out of high school. So, I had a great experience. So, tell me like what kind of things you've been into as a high school student?

ZOOEY: Well, when I was in high school I did a lot of robotics, I was pretty active on the team there. Unfortunately it shutdown due to our head moderator leaving. So, over time I moved over towards more theater, behind the scenes sort of stuff. So, I've always enjoyed more technical kind of working with my hands.

MATT: Gotcha, great. And, so, you're looking to join AmeriCorps N triple C right now. Do you have an interest in going to college after a year of AmeriCorps or are you not really sure about continuing your education?

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ZOOEY: Well, I was actually, prior to the pandemic, I was thinking about doing college directly after high school. That was the plan, really, but then of course all of 2020 through 2022 happened, and unfortunately kind of threw my plans off. So, I was looking for something else to try out and kind of get a better handle on what I might enjoy, what kind of things, once I do go to college, I'd be interested in maybe majoring in. And this seemed like a good way to get more experience in the world, you know?

MATT: Awesome, great. Well, Zoey, it was great meeting you. If I had to put you in one of my AmeriCorps member categories I'd probably say you're leaning towards a wanderer. So, you mentioned wanting to join AmeriCorps to help find some direction in terms of what you might be interested majoring in, what other types of interests that you have. And I'll say AmeriCorps N triple C is the perfect program for you because instead of having one job for the whole year, you'll have probably four or five different projects. You'll get to work with young adults from all over the country, some of whom have already been to

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college. So, I wish you the best in your application and I hope that you're able to make an impact in that year and it helps set you off on an exciting next phase of your journey.

ZOOEY: Alright, thank you. It was nice meeting you.

MATT: You too.

MARK: Holy cow, Matt! I wouldn't have guessed you were going to go that route, wanderer, huh? I was going to say he's going to put her over in some category, who knows? But, you know, I think that's exactly right. The way you described your categories, the way I know my own daughter, having talked with her for more than two minutes, yeah, I think wanderer is right where I would put her as well. So, your instrument is validated.

MATT: Alright, appreciate it.

MELISSA: That was fantastic. Thank you so much, both of you. Now, Matthew, if you have a curveball you'd like

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to throw back just throw that in the chat too, happy to facilitate that. [laughs] And we'll move on to the next question. We've got an audience question. Matt, does your subset include alumni from all of AmeriCorps' programs? And if so, do you find the motivations to be similar between all of the programs you looked at?

MATTHEW: Yeah. So, the dataset does have AmeriCorps members from VISTA, N triple C, and state and national programs, so, a pretty good representation. I have not done an analysis to see whether those profiles stacked up differently across those, but that's definitely one on my list of sort of follow-up questions to pursue.

MELISSA: Perhaps a follow-up study is in order.

MATTHEW: Absolutely.

MELISSA: And the next question we have is for Dr. Hager. Do you have additional research planned knowing that the pandemic has significantly impacted

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how people volunteer? Do you have additional thoughts that are related to your three recommendations about how to build broad support among senior nonprofit leaders for investing in volunteer engagement?

MARK: I dropped a link into the chat after Melissa asked that question. There was a follow-up project unrelated to the VMC 2 project that I was talking about today, but was a supplement that AmeriCorps exclusively funded. A separate project entirely that looked at technology use by volunteer administrators. And as the timing work out, during the pandemic when technology use ended up being really important to know about and to use in engaging volunteers in more remote environments.

So, that's actually gotten a lot more play because it's a sexier topic than the VMC 2 project that I talked about today. So, there's a link there to my partner, which is the Council for Certification and Volunteer Administration, that's housing the release of both the public report, and a recent podcast, and two or three practice oriented articles related to

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engagement with volunteers remotely, and use of technology during the pandemic.

But, Melissa's question was broader than that too. She's pointed sort of my first recommendation which is that we need to get to the people holding the purse strings and advocate internally for more resources in order to build both the people and the practices in organizations to achieve volunteer management capacity. And she sort of caught me. I mean, VMC 2, the survey really isn't about that. It's about the practices and the people, and less about this question about internal advocacy.

I just know that's an issue. It's something that we started talking a little bit in VMC 1 and then the field has just talked about it, right. I've got my fingers a little on the pulse, maybe a little off the pulse, and occasionally on the pulse of what the field of volunteer administration is talking about. And this comes up constantly. How do we get more resources? How do we get people to understand the need to invest more in volunteer management capacity?

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Have I researched how we do that? No. I just know it's a thing, it's a thing that has to happen in order for us to get the people and the policies in place to be able to have effective management of volunteers. What I will say though, Melissa, is given that the field is talking about it, it shows up in textbooks. For example, there's a textbook that certification body uses to train people towards the test in volunteer administration and there's an early chapter in there that's only about how do we advocate internally to show our boards and our colleagues and our executive director the volunteers are important and they need to invest in volunteer administration.

So, it's my point number one, although it's not something I've studied specifically. People talk about it and there are many places to get guidance on that issue.

MELISSA: Yeah, thank you. While we've got you, you alluded a bit to your pandemic research and dropped the report into the chat so folks can read up on

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that. Would you mind just giving us a little bit more of a taste of the pandemic research that you've done and maybe just some of the highlights of your findings?

MARK: Right on. This is great. So, you got to go back a couple of years. And Melissa writes me. She says, 'Hey, we have more money than we can spend. So, you're a grantee. Why don't you propose something?' She didn't just write me, she wrote everybody, she wrote all the grantees, I'm sure Matthew got this email as well. 'Hey, do you have something else as a supplemental project?' And I'm like ah, a prospect for more research money, that's awesome. I didn't have an idea.

I went to bed that night and while I was sleeping my brain worked on this. This never happens to me, I've heard of this happening to other people before. When I woke up the next morning the project was full blown in my head. The dream said you call this Technology Evolution in Volunteer Administration. So, it's pound TEVA. And what I'm doing is for the first time

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talking to individual volunteer administrators. I don't do that. I'm an organizations guy. Like VMC 2, it's about studying organizations, not really studying individual people, but in this case it's studying individual volunteer administrators.

We got the Council for Certification and Volunteer Administration aboard. They have about - I mentioned about 1,000 CBAs in the United States and Canada. We surveyed all of them about CBA technology use. We followed up with them, many of those in focus groups so that we could hear stories about how they were thinking about their technology use in the pandemic. So, both with really great survey data and some thick stories in the focus groups. There's a public report at the link I dropped into the chat. And now reporting out at *Engage*, which is a field publication for volunteer administration, another at *Nonprofit Quarterly* about equity and access issues related to social media and the pandemic, and another forthcoming in *Nonprofit World* about an issue of volunteer administrators not controlling their own

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social media and how that's a problem with actually engaging their public.

So, lots of interesting threads coming out of a project that became suddenly relevant. When I proposed it to Melissa and her crew there wasn't a pandemic. Like, ah, that's sort of interesting. Boom, a pandemic comes along. Everybody goes remote and technology becomes really relevant. And so as I said in the chat, I'm actually more actually about the TEVA work than what we get from VMC 2. VMC 2 is awesome. VMC 2 is awesome, right, except we collected all the data in 2019 and everything changed in 2020.

So, we call it sort of a benchmark for where we were pre-pandemic, but really all the big questions now are about the pandemic and TEVA helps us to speak to that a little bit.

MELISSA: Yep, absolutely. So much, thank you. We're excited about all of your work and really excited as you keep your finger on the pulse of how things are

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changing too and excited to see what happens in the future as well.

MARK: Awesome, yeah.

MELISSA: Yeah, so Matt, coming back to you. How many individuals were surveyed as part of your study?

MATTHEW: Yeah. So, the AmeriCorps Longitudinal Study, and I'll just point out too, I was analyzing data from bigger surveys that AmeriCorps had done. But, the AmeriCorps Longitudinal Study tracked 4,000 individuals. 2,000 of them were AmeriCorps members, 2,000 were people who applied for AmeriCorps, expressed an interest but didn't ultimately serve. The Alumni Outcome Study, I want to say that was around 3,000 AmeriCorps alumni. So, pretty large datasets representing AmeriCorps members from multiple programs and all across the country.

MELISSA: Absolutely. Thank you. So quite a robust sample. So now this question may be for folks across the panel to provide some ideas or just discussion

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points on how do we find and recruit AmeriCorps members? What do we as an organization?

MATTHEW: So, I can share kind of a couple more thoughts. And I saw one question in the chat as well about like what spaces should I be in to find these different profiles? So, you know, one thing I would say is that, as I mentioned, a lot of AmeriCorps members they're not saying I want to join AmeriCorps, which program do I do? They're saying I'm looking for a job. So, making sure that our AmeriCorps positions are on Indeed, are on all the main job boards, Handshake, that college grads are using. We want to make sure our AmeriCorps positions are seen by general job seekers who don't necessarily know they're interested in AmeriCorps, so that's one thing.

Another thing I would say is that knowing that, you know, not everyone who joins AmeriCorps was like really hot on community service in high school or college, it's important that we're going to groups outside of like volunteer clubs or people who we

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think are really going to be interested in volunteerism, but looking at more general groups. So, when I'm recruiting AmeriCorps members and I go to colleges, and I'm based at a university so I have a lot of student access, initially I would just go to the main service organization, other places where I thought really service oriented students would be, or students in majors for the helping professions.

However, in doing this research I've started to broaden that. So, I'll go and speak to fraternities and sororities, or I'll go speak to sports clubs because just because a student hasn't already been highly engaged in service doesn't mean that a service year with AmeriCorps might not be appealing to them. So I think it's important to get outside of those just sort of predisposed service oriented young people.

The final thing I'll say is that I think a lot of AmeriCorps recruiting is focused at the college level, but many AmeriCorps members either have not finished college or have never been to college,

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particularly those young idealists and wanderers. So, thinking about how you can be in touch with school counselors at the high school level and career development facilitators and recruiting in high schools is something that can pay dividends both for, you know, current graduating seniors, but also if you've planted the seed with them as a high school student about AmeriCorps it might be something they revisit later down the line.

MELISSA: Yeah, thank you. I think you would find that one of our Research and Evaluation managers, Dr. Robles, she might even say, I know that her kids were introduced during middle school, and as she says frequently, still wear the t-shirt. So, maybe it's never too early to learn about AmeriCorps.

MATTHEW: Absolutely.

MELISSA: Would you say that there might be - Thank you so much for addressing these particular spaces where you might look. Do you think that there could be

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additional specific spaces where, people in these different categories, we might look for them as well?

MATTHEW: Again, I think making sure we're hitting the high schools for those younger groups. I think that like people that are the kind of gappers and wanderers, those are people who probably going to find it on, just again, doing that general job search board. So, making sure that you're there. And then I would like any of Mark's thoughts on this too, but, you know, I think there's the question of social media marketing and a lot of AmeriCorps programs do place ads on things like Facebook, Instagram. What are our opportunities now with TikTok being the predominant platform for AmeriCorps aged young adults? I think that, you know, figuring out how best to use the social media platforms is important as well.

MELISSA: Yeah, thanks, Matt. And just as you were saying that, Star placed in the chat looking for positions on Indeed, LinkedIn, job boards, so that social media interface I think will continue to be

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important as well. So, we've got another question here. Post-pandemic, looking at Generation Z, if you will, what are your thoughts on the pipeline for AmeriCorps and perhaps volunteers more broadly also? Increasingly be younger, perhaps not college graduates, or even enrolled in college?

MARK: Matt, what do you think?

MATTHEW: Yeah, so, college enrollment is definitely down as a result of the pandemic. I think at the same time it's tempered, though, by a lot of people kind of sticking around home. So, I think that can lead to more recruiting for sort of place based programs, but I don't think it's representing a spike in like, you know, programs that you travel to.

I think the bigger question too will be now that, hopefully, there's a sort of return to normalcy on the horizon, is that college enrollment decline just a short dip and it's going back to the way it was? Or is it going to be a bigger trend where more and more

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high school students are thinking nah, there's other options beyond going right to college for me?

JENNIFER: I just wanted to put in a plug for non-traditional participants. Out of school youth, people that are underemployed, they could be young, they could be all different ages, those participants bring a wealth of life experiences. Some of them have packed in more experiences in their short lives than many of us have had in possibly my older person longer life and bring an incredible frame, and also there is something extremely powerful about people from the community serving their own community and flipping the script as being people that may have received services, they are now providing services.

Also, those members, in recruiting them and involving them and engaging them in AmeriCorps, also creates a legacy effect that affects future generations of members and of people engaging in the community in perhaps more productive ways.

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MATTHEW: Jennifer, I'm glad you made that point and just to follow on that. So, within, you know, the research that I've done, definitely in that sort of wanderer and young idealist category, you do see a lot more people who are representative of the communities AmeriCorps is serving. And I think, as you said, Jennifer, it's extremely important and it carries a great benefit to the work that they can do, the contributions they can make to the communities they're serving in with the knowledge that they have, and the contribution they make to the broader AmeriCorps team based on their experiences. So, great point.

And certainly as, again, as I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, my research for this particular project really focused on that young adult age range, but, you know, so many AmeriCorps members are at different life stages and play an incredibly important role in the national service landscape.

MELISSA: Yes, absolutely. Thank you for bringing that up. I got a little bit of context behind the next

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question, so just bear with me for a moment. We've got Scott Peterson in the chat and he's a CEO at Global Youth Justice working with over 1,800 youth led and volunteer driven youth teams, student, peer court and peer jury youth in trouble for misdemeanors. In order to try to avoid court, lawyers, and instead work with their peers in these roles.

And then the Youth Justice gives them one to fifty hours - I'm getting there. I'm having to go through the chat to find all of this. Be patient with me. It's going to take me a second to find this one. Sorry about that, everybody. Scott, we may have to get back to your question. If you don't mind adding it back into the chat, that way I can track it down.

And in the meantime - Okay, here you are. But, the office is episodic as they volunteer for a year, as crime doesn't end. Is there anything, any type of research or data on this type of service that you know of? And Scott, if you want to drop a question in

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the chat again, I may not have gotten that super clearly.

And we've got about five more minutes or so in the chat. So, if there's a question you have not had an opportunity to ask yet or something, somehow we missed you, you're welcome to drop your question in the chat. In the meantime I'll ask Dr. Hager, as episodic volunteering grows or perhaps at a minimum stays stagnant, do you see an increasing role for national service to meet these more in-depth opportunities over the long-term? And if so, how do you think we can help nonprofits see the leveraging of national service for their volunteer programs?

MARK: Yeah, I saw that question in the chat. I'm not sure that I have any good answers for it. I guess we can think about national service, domestic national service like AmeriCorps serving two different kinds of populations. And if we think about the members themselves then yeah, I mean, those are long-term assignments. I mean, you're going to define a long-term assignment being virtually full-time over the

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course of many months to a year to longer than that, that's long-term, and that's a great role for AmeriCorps, and a great service for the people that fill into those slots.

The thing is that's a small slice of America. There aren't - In the scheme of things there aren't that many AmeriCorps volunteers. So, yeah, they're serving those members, but the question is does that serve the greater slices? The greater slices are those other individual people that are out in the communities that we might engage. And for them I think we just have to engage them where they're at. And where they're at seems to be an interest in shorter term, shorter term episodic kinds of engagements.

And I think that AmeriCorps, the national service like every other person or body that's interested in facilitating civic engagement in the United States, has got to think about how do we sort of meet people where they're at? But, then also how do we encourage people towards longer, deeper kinds of civic

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engagement experiences? So, I think anything we can do is good, in that vein is good, it's just I don't think that's where America seems to be right now.

MELISSA: Yeah, across your whole body of work, Mark, have you looked into specifically volunteer recognition efforts and seeing what kind of value it may have in the management of volunteers?

MARK: Well, recognition is one of those management practices that we ask about. We ask about a dozen of them in VMC 2 because management practices ended up being the bread and butter of the Volunteer Management Capacity Study. Let me press a link into the chat. This exists somewhere else on the internet, but that's straight out of my Dropbox folder.

That's one of the AmeriCorps briefs that we did on the original study. And if you looked at figure 6 in that report you would see how various organizational characteristics including the extent to which recognition has been adopted as a management practice

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in a given organization, how does that influence your ability to retain volunteers over time?

It turns out it matters quite a bit, for those that don't want to look at the slide. There are things that harm retention, there are things that help it. There are three things that help it: recruiting, having volunteers recruit others one on one, that personal-social helps to retain volunteers over time. Believing and showing that volunteers bring benefits to your organization. So, you're very positive about the benefits that they bring, that's associated organizationally with retention of volunteers over time. And then there are several management practices.

Training and professional development for volunteers helps retain. Screening volunteers, matching them through assignments helps to retain. And to your question, having, adopting the practice of recognizing what volunteers bring to organizations helps to retain them over time. So, empirical support in some of the things that we've put out before. It

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really emphasizes the value of recognition in organizational outputs regarding volunteers.

MELISSA: Alright, thank you so much. So, we've ended our Q&A time here and just want to ask you if you each have any final comments, anything you want to mention, anything you want to emphasize, and we'll start with you Mark. Is there anything that you'd like to wrap up with, any final thoughts?

MARK: Oh, thank you. No, no big summative thoughts. You know, this point about the importance of volunteer management capacity, the fact that we're not as good at it as we need to be to really engage America's volunteers, and what we can do to do it better. It's not a new story. It's not something that just came up out of VMC 2. There are specific research things that came out of VMC 2 that people can certainly dig into in the report that we've posted into the chat or I can share otherwise.

But, this theme of the importance of volunteer management capacity has been around a long time. I

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just happen to be that guy that's really out beating the drum on it. And every chance I get, I want people to think about the importance of capacity for increasing our civic engagement going into the future.

What the future looks like is hard to know. I was lamenting a few minutes ago about how the pandemic suddenly rendered a lot of VMC 2 obsolete. You know, in a moment in time what this sector looked like in 2019, but I'd love to return to this again say in 2024, five years later when you've worked through a pandemic, how different is volunteer administration? What do we do differently now? What do we do in the pandemic that we're going to leave aside or that we're going double-down on going forward? So, there will be a VMC 3, maybe, in the future. I think it will tell us a lot of new things about what the sector looks like.

MELISSA: Yeah, thank you, Mark. And Matt, if you've got some final thoughts. And we do have another, if you don't mind perhaps wrapping your final thoughts

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alongside this final question about the idea of gap year and hearing maybe from other communities that may not be the best way to frame it. So, what are your thoughts on that as you wrap up your presentation?

MATT: Yeah, absolutely, and a great question from Lisa.

So, I think definitely the term gap year, at least for me, evokes a wealthy European college student on holiday in South America or something, and that's sort of I think the perception that's tied with gap year. So, I think most AmeriCorps programs and AmeriCorps related organizations typically use the term service year or year of service. But, I think the key is communicating AmeriCorps so that it's clear it's an opportunity for people from all walks of life and it's something that's economically feasible where you will learn, have a living stipend, and money for college. It's not something that you need to be wealthy to do is extremely important.

I guess I would say and kind of my wrap up would be that just for those of you who work with AmeriCorps

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members just understanding, appreciating the diverse walks of life that our members come from. And just always keeping in mind how we can use a knowledge of who our members are and why they're motivated to serve to better recruit them and better support them in their year of service and beyond. And thanks to AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation for supporting this work.

MELISSA: Yeah, thank you so much for those final thoughts. And Mary, if you would like to hop in with some final thoughts right before we close this out.

MARY: I'm just very grateful that Matt and Mark decided to share their research with us. I'm thankful for everyone who spent the last hour and a half learning with us. And I want to just highlight a point that Jennifer made in her reflections and that is I think some of the beauty of this particular body of research is that it really does talk about research based practices and it feels a lot more feasible and practical than perhaps the conversations that often

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are about entire evidence based interventions that feel intimidating.

So, I feel like this opens the tent for evidence based practice in wonderful ways that are completely relevant and appropriate for our agency. So, thank you.

MELISSA: Thank you so much, Mary. And we are wrapping right on time. I just want to thank Dr. Hager, Dr. Hudson-Flege, and Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi for your presentation, your thoughts, and to our entire audience today for just a fantastic discussion. I also want to Larissa Crewalk and Jenelle Azore from ICF Next International and their whole host of colleagues who help make all this happen with technical support and lots of coordination.

We're going to send out a post-webinar survey. Please let us know your thoughts on the webinar. Let us know your ideas for future webinars. If you have questions that went unanswered, you're welcome to reach out to us at evaluation@cns.gov. We can forward any of those

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questions to anybody else that might have an answer
to them. And we want to just thank you so much and
hope you have a wonderful rest of your day and a
lovely weekend.

MARK: Thank you all.

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