



What are the goals of the program?

According to recent estimates there are more than 6.7 million youth between ages of 16 and 24 who are low-income and either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, unemployed, or not enrolled in or at risk of dropping out of an educational institution. AmeriCorps has recently begun recruiting these “opportunity youth” (OY) as members and engaging them in national service projects designed to improve local education, public safety, health, and the environment. These OY programs provide services for local communities, and aim to advance the education, employment, and civic engagement of the youth who participate.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: AmeriCorps State and National

Focus Population: Opportunity Youth

Focus Areas: Youth Development and Economic Opportunity

Communities Served: Austin, TX; Flagstaff, AZ; Tucson, AZ; Davenport, IA; Baltimore, MD; Batavia, NY; Miami, FL; Brooklyn, NY; Hartford, CT; New Orleans, LA; Eugene, OR; Madison, WI; Philadelphia, PA; Portage, WI; North Charleston, SC; Richmond, VT; Grand Junction, CO; and Independence, WI

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of the AmeriCorps Opportunity Youth Program ran from 2014-2018. The evaluation bundled 19 small AmeriCorps programs (receiving less than \$500,000/year) into a single quasi-experimental evaluation using a propensity-score matched comparison group. The study assessed whether OY who participated in AmeriCorps showed greater improvements in education, employment, and civic engagement outcomes than comparison youth. Surveys were administered to youth at three time points-- the start, end, and six months after their service with AmeriCorps. The final matched sample consisted of 124 treatment youth and 90 comparison youth from 15 sites-- with program sample sizes ranging from two to 40 youth. Additional exploratory analyses examined changes in outcomes for a sample of 216 treatment youth within all 19 sites.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Propensity-Score Matched Quasi-Experimental Impact Evaluation

Study Population: Opportunity Youth (16-24)

Independent Evaluator: JBS International

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Strong

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

What did we learn from the evaluation?

The CNCS office of research and evaluation engaged JBS International as an independent evaluator to conduct an impact evaluation of the AmeriCorps opportunity youth program. Key findings indicated that:

- AmeriCorps OY showed **improvements from pre-test to follow-up in high school completion, course completion, percentage currently employed, hourly wages, and longest employment.**
- AmeriCorps OY were not more likely to show improvements in key outcomes than comparison youth.
- Youth with a prior criminal history were **less likely to face charges or be on probation or parole** at follow-up if they had participated in AmeriCorps.
- Youth who had been employed at some point in the six months before the evaluation were **more likely to be currently employed** at follow-up if they had participated in AmeriCorps.
- Youth who had participated in AmeriCorps were **more likely to have recently completed a course** than comparison youth, especially if they were not high school graduates at pre-test.

Evaluation Report Brief

AmeriCorps Opportunity Youth Evaluation Bundling Project

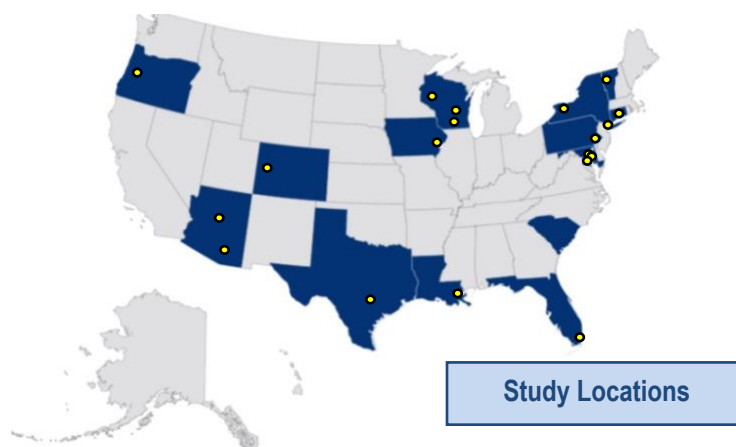


Notes on the evaluation

Evaluation findings do provide promising evidence of AmeriCorps' effectiveness with specific populations of youth, however overall main effects of program participation were not found in the current evaluation. Challenges with study recruitment and retention (especially among comparison youth and program dropouts) suggest the need for larger sample sizes (ideally 20 treatment and 20 comparison youth per site) and intensified retention efforts to detect smaller effect sizes in future studies.



Vermont Youth Conservation Corps members participating in an environmental conservation project.



19 programs in 16 states participated in the evaluation.

How are the AmeriCorps OY programs using the evaluation experience and findings?

AmeriCorps programs in the bundled evaluation received technical assistance (TA) both to support their implementation of the evaluation and to promote the sustainability of evaluation at their site. Evaluation sustainability TA was geared to help the participating programs to identify and pursue their evaluation goals. TA included support and training around developing and maintaining data collection systems, improving recruitment and retention for OY, identifying external resources to support evaluation, and developing and implementing future impact studies. At the study's conclusion, several programs commented on how much they had learned about evaluation and their desire to conduct future evaluations internally.

Additionally, within CNCS, these findings have been used as an example of a promising new methodology to help small grantees participate in an impact evaluation and may be used with future AmeriCorps grantees. The findings themselves also suggest the importance of continuing to provide AmeriCorps services to the most at-risk populations including those with a prior criminal history and those without a high school diploma.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by JBS International. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the AmeriCorps grantees who participated in the evaluation. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.