



RESEARCH BRIEF – ROI PROJECT

Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps

AmeriCorps.gov

Program Description

Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps (ALCC) is an environmental service program dedicated to promoting field research and direct conservation service. ALCC supports communities and the environment through offices in Acoma Pueblo, Navajo Nation, Zuni Pueblo, Hopi-Kykotsmovi, Isleta Pueblo, Land Grant Communities, Wind River, WY, and Albuquerque, NM. ALCC crews preserve historic sites, conduct trail maintenance and construction, apply fuel mitigation techniques, and restore habitats. ALCC's trained monitoring and assessment teams capture critical data on forest and rangeland health. Cultural heritage preservation is a core purpose of ALCC's work, and its full range of activities incorporate indigenous knowledge and practices. That aspect of ALCC programming reinforces the cultural heritage of not only ALCC members, but also the local communities where they work. ALCC engaged 126 AmeriCorps State and National members in this work during the period studied.

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. Learn more at AmeriCorps.gov.

Return on Investment Analysis

To better understand the impact of the program in relation to costs, AmeriCorps commissioned a return on investment (ROI) analysis by ICF, an independent research firm. ROI analyses of national service programs estimate the monetary value of benefits that a program generates per dollar invested.

The ROI analysis of total benefits per funder dollar estimated ALCC's ROI to be between \$0.02 and \$12.00, depending on a) how long AmeriCorps members experience increased earnings as a result of the program and b) whether low, average, or high estimates of ecosystem benefits to society are used. The return on each dollar of federal spending for the program is between \$0.00 and \$15.32.

Overview of Benefits and Costs

To calculate the ROI, the program benefits were identified, quantified, and compared to the program's costs. Benefits of ALCC include:

- **Benefits to various stakeholders of ecosystem services, reduced wildfire damage, other environmental benefits, and trail access.** ALCC uses AmeriCorps members to perform fuel reduction treatments¹ on at-risk sites to reduce severity of wildfires, remove invasive species to increase benefits to society from ecosystems, and build and maintain trails that provide health and recreational benefits. The societal benefits of ALCC can be attributed to three key functions of the organization: wildfire mitigation, habitat improvements, and maintenance of trail systems.
- **Additional earnings by AmeriCorps members.** Serving in AmeriCorps leads to increased wages and reduced unemployment post-national service through skill acquisition, as well as increased educational attainment post-service.
- **Living allowances, stipends, and education awards.** AmeriCorps members receive living allowances and stipends during their national service and receive Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards after successful completion.
- **Increased tax revenue for government.** Federal, state, and local governments receive more income tax revenue from increased AmeriCorps member earnings post-service, as well as additional sales tax revenue related to those earnings. Federal and state governments also realize tax revenue from the taxable living allowances, stipends, and education awards provided to AmeriCorps members.
- **Reduced lifetime spending on corrections, public assistance, and social insurance.** Because of the increase in secondary and postsecondary educational attainment for AmeriCorps members, federal and state governments spends less on these items.

A growing body of evidence links connectedness to cultural heritage to physical and mental health, sense of belonging, and community engagement. These benefits from ALCC's preservation of cultural knowledge, protection of cultural sites, and strengthening of cultural connectedness within communities could not be quantified for this study based on the available data and research findings. However, those impacts should not be overlooked and may be captured in the future, as additional data and research findings become available.

Program costs for ALCC totaled \$5,556,646 and were funded by AmeriCorps, other federal government sources, state and local government, Tribal governments, and private funders.

¹ ALCC's fuel reduction treatments include mechanical thinning where potential fuel for wildfires is removed to increase ecosystems' resilience to wildfires.

ROI Results

The table below shows the ROI results. Each row represents a different ROI calculation depending on which benefits are considered (all benefits or only benefits to the federal government) and which funding is considered (federal funding only or all funding). The ROI estimates are presented as dollars returned for every \$1.00 of investment. The analysis used three different scenarios to estimate benefits under different assumptions. Specifically, the study assumed that increased earnings attributable to the programs last for one year (short-term scenario), 15 years (medium-term), or 30 years (long-term). The analysis also used low, average, and high estimates of ecosystem benefits to society based on the literature.

ROI Calculation	ROI Scenario		
	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
Total Benefits per Federal Dollar*			
With low ecosystem benefits	\$0.00	\$2.34	\$4.95
With average ecosystem benefits	\$0.15	\$3.98	\$7.12
With high ecosystem benefits	\$0.71	\$10.25	\$15.32
Total Benefits per Funder Dollar*			
With low ecosystem benefits	\$0.02	\$1.58	\$3.20
With average ecosystem benefits	\$0.15	\$2.98	\$5.04
With high ecosystem benefits	\$0.63	\$8.30	\$12.00
Federal Government Benefits per Federal Dollar	-\$0.03	\$0.48	\$1.19

* These ROI estimates are provided based on low, average, and high estimates of ecosystem benefits to society.

The program produces strong returns for the medium- and long-term scenarios when benefits to AmeriCorps members, program participants, and state/local governments are included. This is indicated by the results of the *total benefits per federal dollar* and the *total benefits per funder dollar* ROI calculations for these two scenarios. Under the short-term scenario, which only includes one year of benefits, ROI's for *total benefits per federal dollar* and *total benefits per funder dollar* are all under one. All medium- and long-term scenarios, except for the *federal government benefits per federal dollar*, show positive returns at all ecosystem benefit levels.

The *federal government benefits per federal dollar* calculations estimate losses for the short- and medium-term scenarios and a small positive return in the long-term scenario. As a program that is intended primarily to generate benefits to society, rather than benefits to the federal government, these results are consistent with the design of ALCC. In addition, existing data and literature do not establish causal relationships between program activities such as wildfire reduction and federal expenditures. Following some wildfires, federal (and private) disaster recovery funds are spent to aid in recovery efforts. ALCC's efforts on wildfire reduction treatments could result in the mitigation of those severe wildfires and lead to subsequent saving of those funds. However, the current literature lacks the linkages to establish causality between treated acres and the saving of federal (and private) funds. This suggests that there may be additional savings as a result of ALCC's activities that are not quantified in this methodology. Including federal disaster recovery expenditure savings, resulting from a reduction in wildfires, would lead to a higher ROI for the federal government than this analysis estimates.

The magnitude of the positive ROI estimates is driven by the following factors:

- **Reduction in wildfire-related costs.** Societal benefits from reduced severity of wildfires accrue but diminish over time as vegetation regrows and generates more potential fuel.
- **Increased benefits from ecosystems from reduced invasive species.** Societal benefits accrue but diminish over time as invasive species return.
- **Benefits from trail maintenance and creation.** Societal benefits from access and use of trails accrue over time but diminish as trails naturally deteriorate.
- **Educational attainment outcomes of AmeriCorps members.** After serving in the AmeriCorps program, AmeriCorps members receive an education award, which is used by a portion of members to help pay for postsecondary degrees post-service. The additional educational attainment resulting from the use of the education award generates additional earnings for AmeriCorps members.
- **Employment outcomes of AmeriCorps members.** Past studies establish that AmeriCorps members experience increased employment and increased earnings post-service.

About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

For more information, please contact evaluation@americorps.gov.

About this Brief

The report summarized in this research brief was commissioned by AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation under Contract # GS00Q14OADU209 and Order # 95332A20F0068. Information in this report is in the public domain. Please, direct communications related to this report to Lily Zandniapour at lzandniapour@americorps.gov and Emily McDonald at emcdonald@americorps.gov. Cite the report as follows: Voigt, G., Borgida, J., Clark, D., Miller, B., Modicamore, D., Pershing, J., Thompson, P., & Calamari, M. (2024). *Return on Investment Study: Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps*. ICF.

Produced and published at US taxpayer expense.