



# Results Driven Service: The 2023 State of the Evidence on AmeriCorps' Impact

September 28, 2023

Office of Research and Evaluation



# Virtual Meeting Tips & Best Practices

## Rules of Engagement



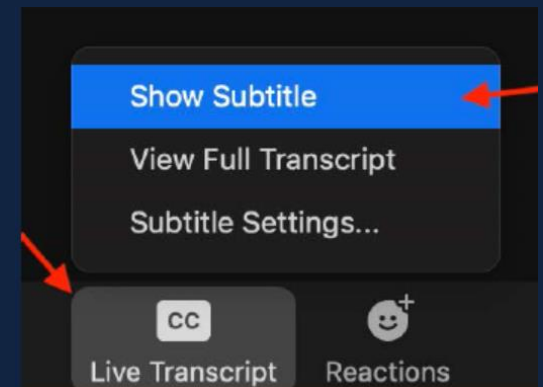
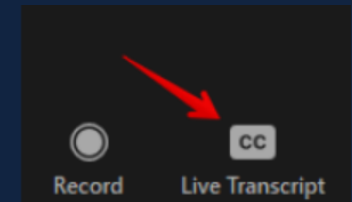
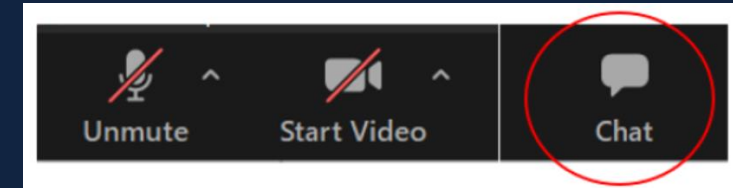
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# Welcome

Katy Hussey-Sloniker, MBA, MSW

Learning Officer, Office of Research and Evaluation



# The AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation

The mission



# Celebrating the AmeriCorps Evidence Story

Michael Smith, CEO

AmeriCorps



# The State of the Evidence

Scott Richman, Ph.D.

Senior Researcher, Mathematica



# AmeriCorps 2023 State of the Evidence Report

**September 28, 2023**

Scott Richman, Mathematica





# Agenda

- **Overview of the AmeriCorps 2023 State of the Evidence Report**
- **Highlight key themes arising from the reviewed evidence on where AmeriCorps seeks to make an impact**
  - The individual, organization, local community, and societal levels
- **Hear reflections on how the agency builds evidence to support and enhance national service and civic engagement**



# AmeriCorps' evidence-building investments

- **AmeriCorps generates and uses actionable evidence to inform how it operates and improve upon its effectiveness**
- **AmeriCorps regularly invests in evidence building**
  - Provides funding and technical support to grantee organizations
  - Program offices and state commissions
- **AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE)**
  - Conducts its own research
  - Funds third-party evaluations
  - Funds research grants

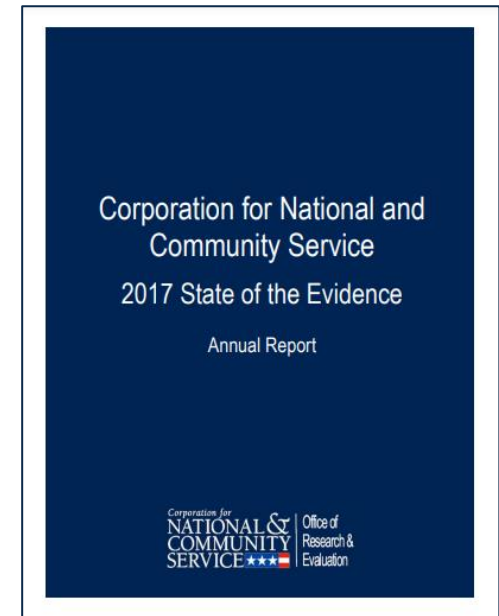


***Use evidence reviews and syntheses to identify themes***



# AmeriCorps 2017 State of the Evidence Report

- **AmeriCorps ORE conducted one of the agency's first large-scale evidence syntheses**
  - Discussed studies and evidence developed from October 2014 to June 2017
- **Highlighted key themes such as:**
  - Volunteerism and AmeriCorps service benefit individuals' economic opportunity
  - Older Americans who volunteer experience health improvements
  - AmeriCorps-funded interventions provide a return on taxpayer investments





# Overview of the AmeriCorps 2023 State of the Evidence Report

- **Purpose of the report**

- Synthesize AmeriCorps-conducted or -funded research and evaluations published since 2017
- Further the knowledge base on national service, volunteerism, and civic engagement

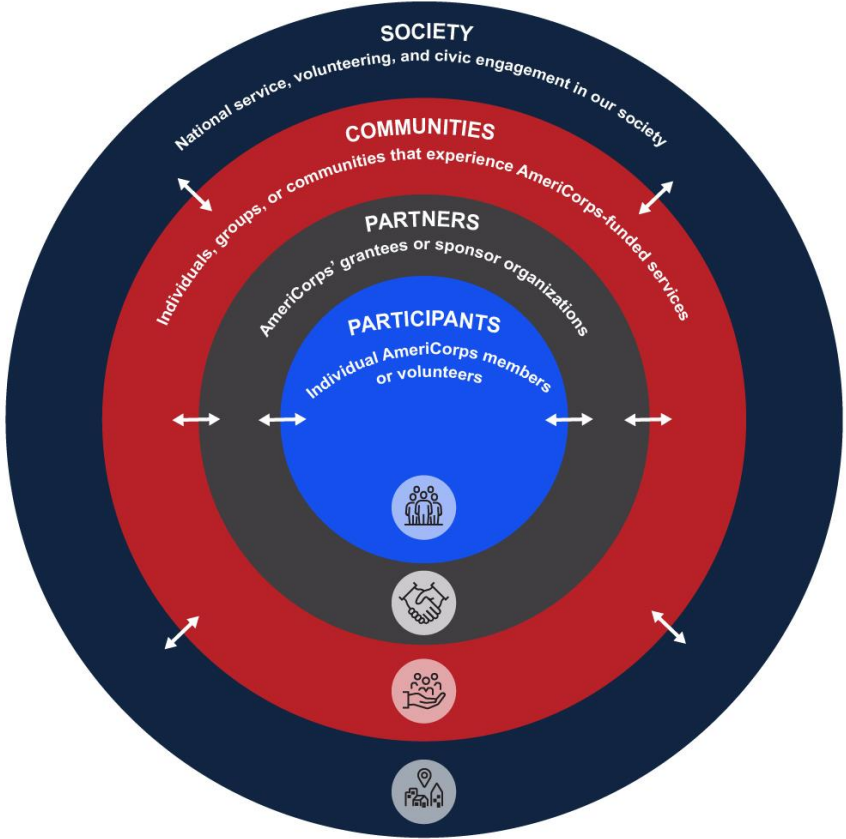
- **State of the Evidence Framework**

- Developed to guide the evidence review and synthesis of key themes
- Consists of four domains that represent where AmeriCorps seeks to make an impact in pursuit of its mission



# State of the Evidence Framework

What does AmeriCorps know about...



## • Participants

- The individuals who join AmeriCorps as members and volunteers to serve local communities through AmeriCorps programs

## • Partners

- AmeriCorps grantees and sponsoring organizations receiving AmeriCorps program funding to implement service projects

## Communities

The individuals, groups, and local areas that experience services from AmeriCorps-funded grantees or sponsors delivered by AmeriCorps members and volunteers

## Society

National service, volunteering, and civic engagement in the United States

AmeriCorps strives to make a lasting impact on its participants, partners, communities served, and the civic health of society, as it fosters the powerful synergies between these interconnected domains.



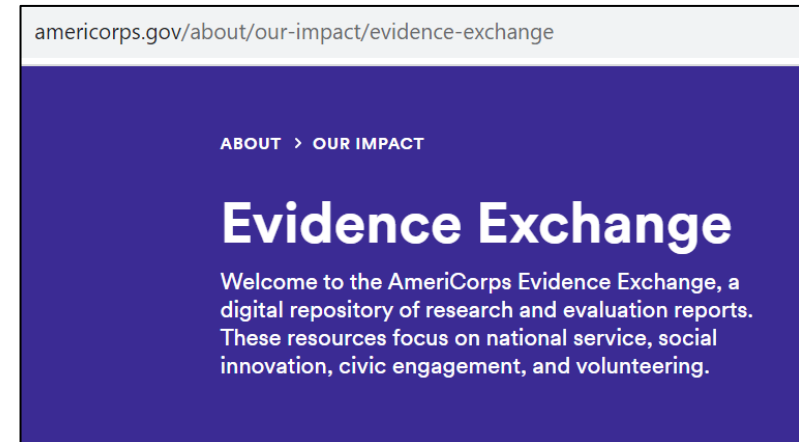
# Scope of the review

- **Studies published between July 2017 and December 2022 conducted by:**
  - AmeriCorps program grantees
  - AmeriCorps ORE
  - AmeriCorps ORE research grantees
  - AmeriCorps ORE-commissioned contractors
- **Eligible studies needed to meet at least one criteria:**
  - AmeriCorps participants as the focus of the research
  - AmeriCorps participants involved in delivering services that AmeriCorps partners provided to communities
  - National service, volunteerism, or civic engagement as the focus of the research



# Review process

- **Compiled studies from:**
  - AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange
  - AmeriCorps ORE research grantee profiles
  - AmeriCorps ORE
- **A total of 116 studies reviewed**
- **Applied a structured review process to extract key information on each study's:**
  - Substantive focus; AmeriCorps focus and topic areas
  - Intervention components and focal populations
  - Research design
  - Key outcomes of interest and main findings

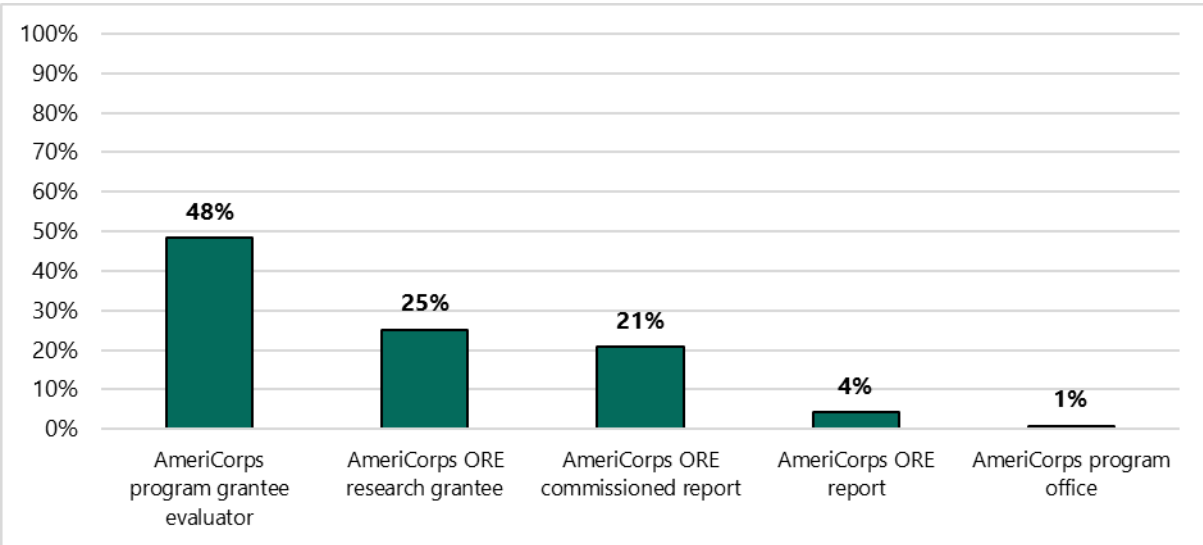




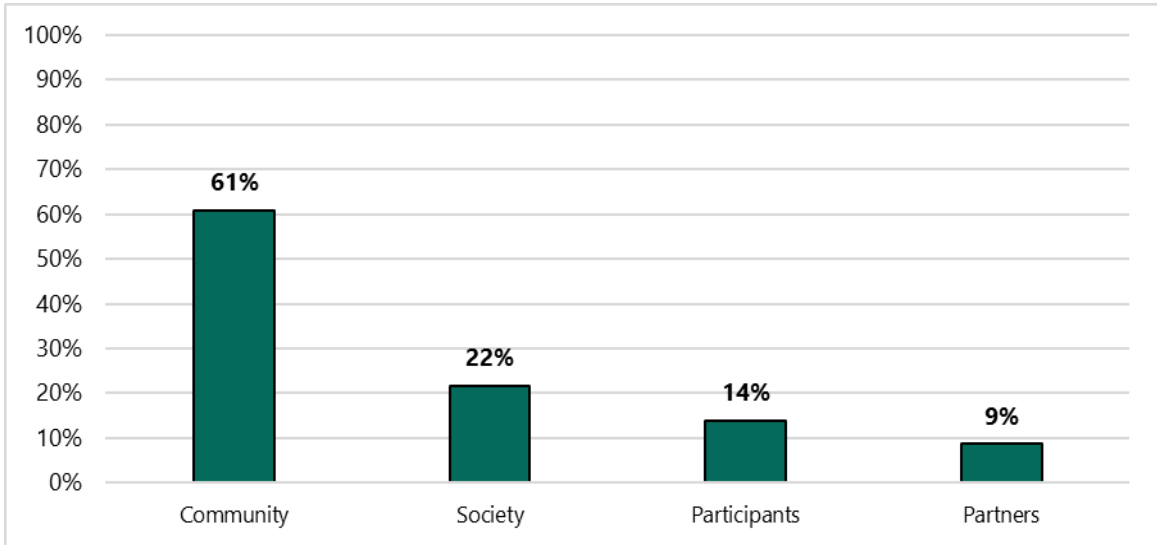
# Characteristics of the reviewed studies

- **Studies most commonly:**
  - Produced by AmeriCorps program grantee external evaluators
  - Focused on the community domain of the State of the Evidence framework

Percentage of studies by who conducted the research



Percentage of studies by State of the Evidence framework domain



\*studies could be categorized into more than one domain

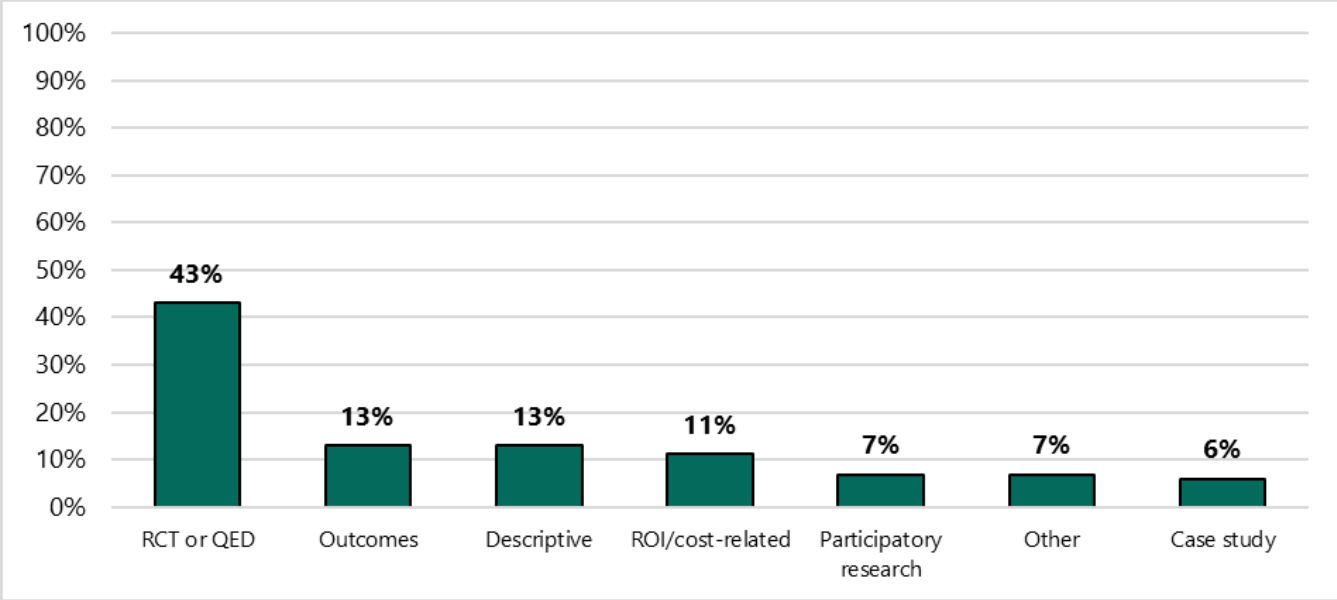




# Characteristics of the reviewed studies (continued)

- **Causal study designs used most often**
- **Broad range of other research approaches**

Percentage of studies by research design/approach



\*RCT = randomized controlled trial; QED = quasi-experimental design; ROI = return on investment



# Discussion of key findings

- **Themes organized around the four domains of the State of the Evidence framework**
  - We placed a relatively greater emphasis on impact studies for identifying themes
  - Discuss emerging findings from other study types that coalesce around each other or support other studies' impact findings
- **Intent is to capture the state of the evidence produced or supported by AmeriCorps between 2017 and 2022**
  - Not cumulative with other evidence produced before that timeframe
  - Evidence and knowledge building are ongoing process

# The State of the Evidence Findings Participant Level

Individual AmeriCorps Members and Volunteers





# State of the Evidence: Participants

- **AmeriCorps empowers AmeriCorps participants to help address the challenges local communities face**
  - Their experiences can help their professional, personal, and civic development
- **Research questions**
  - What are the characteristics of participants who serve with AmeriCorps?
  - What outcomes and impacts, if any, do AmeriCorps participants experience?
- **Key findings associated with 16 studies (14 percent of 116 studies) with a focus on AmeriCorps participants**



# Characteristics of AmeriCorps members

- **Possess the cultural competency to work with communities of people who differ from themselves**
  - AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey data on nearly 360,000+ AmeriCorps members
  - Members enjoy exploring differences with (over 88 percent) and respect the values of (over 94 percent) people from different cultures and backgrounds
- **Enter their service terms with unique backgrounds and motivations to serve**
  - Member profiles using AmeriCorps Longitudinal Study data

**Young Idealists**  
Recent high school graduates with high public service motivation

**Wanderers**  
High school graduates who possibly have some college with low public service motivation

**Gappers**  
Recent college graduates with low public service motivation

**Public Servants**  
Recent college graduates with high public service motivation

Dermanjian and Johnson (2022); Hudson-Flege (2018)



# Benefits to AmeriCorps members: employment and education outcomes

- **Mixed evidence of impact from four QED or RCT studies**
- **AmeriCorps members *were more likely* than comparison groups to:**
  - Work in the nonprofit, public, or government sectors
  - Show increases in basic work skills
- **AmeriCorps members and comparison groups were *similar* on:**
  - High school completion, courses completed, current employment, hourly wages, and length of employment
  - Receiving a call back for a job interview
  - Views on employment success and educational success



# Benefits to AmeriCorps members: civic engagement

- **Mixed evidence of impact from three QED studies**
- **AmeriCorps members *scored higher* than comparison groups on:**
  - Views on the importance of being active in the community; feasibility of working with neighbors to meet local needs
  - Expressing political views and participating in volunteer activities
- **AmeriCorps members and comparison groups were *similar* on:**
  - Views on community-based activism
  - Sense of community, social trust, and self-efficacy to solve community issues



# Benefits to AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers

- **AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers experienced significantly greater improvements in their physical and psychological well-being than a comparison group**
  - Longitudinal Study of AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Programs  *Improvements in self-perceived health among those who completed their service*
  - Systematic Review of AmeriCorps Seniors Impacts  *Improvements in physical health, overall functioning, life satisfaction, mental health, and social connectedness*

Frazier et al. (2019); Georges et al. (2018)



# Experience and Reflection: The State of the Evidence for Participant Level

Sonali Nijhawan, MSW

Director, AmeriCorps State and National



# The State of the Evidence Findings Partner Level

AmeriCorps grantee and sponsor organizations





# State of the Evidence: Partners

- **AmeriCorps strives to support and empower nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations to address critical issues in their local areas**
  - Help partners increase their reach
  - Enhance infrastructure and foster community partnerships
- **Research question**
  - In what ways has AmeriCorps helped build the capacity of grantees and sponsor organizations to achieve their missions and better serve their communities?
- **Key findings associated with ten studies (nine percent of 116 studies) with a focus on AmeriCorps partners**



# Partnering with AmeriCorps helped organizations meet their project goals

- **Compared to similar sites that did not host AmeriCorps members, AmeriCorps partners:**
  - Built 13 percent more homes per year
  - Completed 30 to 42 percent more trail or habitat management tasks (for example, planned trail and fuel management work)
- **AmeriCorps NCCC sponsoring organizations from 2016 to 2019 indicated that their AmeriCorps NCCC service team:**
  - Supported the organization’s mission (96 percent)
  - Helped enhance services to the communities (92 percent)



Hamdan and Robles (2022); McCreary et al. (2020); Viola et al. (2018)



# Indications of partner capacity increases but more evidence is needed

- **Evidence of impact from a QED study**
  - AmeriCorps VISTA sponsor organizations had 71 percent more volunteers two years later than did a comparison group of non-AmeriCorps VISTA sponsor organizations
- **Evidence based on outcome and descriptive studies**
  - An AmeriCorps State and National volunteer infrastructure program helped improve community-based organizations' volunteer management practices
  - Approximately one-third of AmeriCorps NCCC projects implemented between 2012 and 2019 used capacity-building activities (such as supporting organization partnerships and coalition building)

# Experience and Reflection: The State of the Evidence at the Partner Level

Mike Sullivan

National Director, AmeriCorps Programming, SBP



# Shrinking the time between disaster and recovery!



**AmeriCorps**

SBP AmeriCorps members and staff welcoming home families in New Orleans, LA, Panama City, FL, San Juan, PR, and Lake Charles Louisiana in 2023.

# The State of the Evidence Findings Community Level

Individuals, Groups or Communities that  
Experience AmeriCorps-Funded Services







# State of the Evidence: Communities

- **AmeriCorps programs aim to strengthen local communities by addressing the local issues and challenges they face**
  - AmeriCorps-funded partners and their members and volunteers enter local areas to deliver interventions to communities and individuals within them
- **Research questions**
  - What outcomes or impacts do communities served AmeriCorps-funded partners and their members and volunteers experience?
  - What does the research say about investments in and scaling of effective interventions?
- **Key findings associated with 71 studies (61 percent of 116 studies) with a focus on communities served by AmeriCorps**



# Studies focused on AmeriCorps benefits to communities

- Fifty-one studies examined community impacts or outcomes from interventions delivered by AmeriCorps-funded partners and their members and volunteers**

Number of reviewed studies examining AmeriCorps outcomes and impacts in the community domain, by AmeriCorps focus area

Disaster services	Economic opportunity	Education	Environmental stewardship	Healthy futures	Veterans and military families
2	8	31	6	6	1

\*Numbers do not add to 51 because studies could be represented in more than one focus area



# AmeriCorps-funded interventions improve education outcomes

- **Reading and tutoring programs increase students' literacy outcomes**
  - Particularly for younger students (kindergarten to grade 6) and on specific literacy development components (such as letter sound fluency or whole word reading)
- **Peer coaching focused on college preparation improve high school students' outcomes**
  - Increasing school attendance and grade point averages
  - Completing a greater number of college admissions applications, scholarship applications, and financial aid applications
  - Enrolling in college

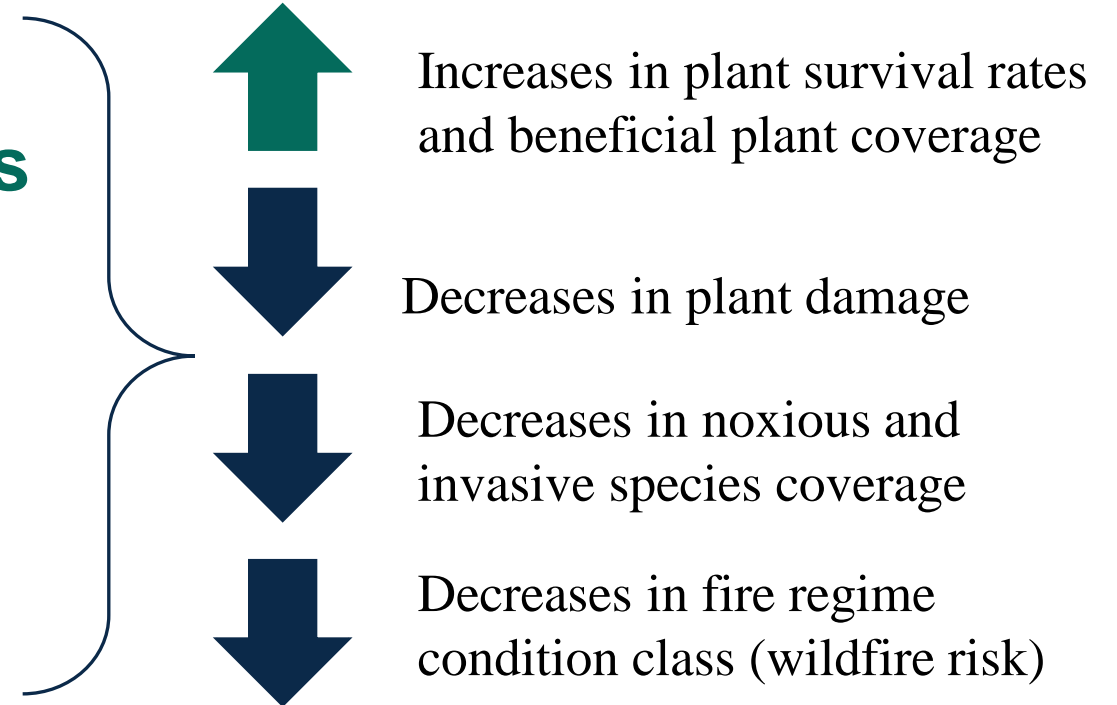
Bettinger et al. (2019); Caverly et al. (2019); Chapin Hall (2017); Edmonds (2019); Kowalski et al. (2018); Lambert (2019); Markovitz et al. (2018); Pepper et al. (2018); Richardson et al. (2018); Rolfhus et al. (2021); Spinney et al. (2019); Van Norman (2020)



# AmeriCorps-funded approaches are protecting at-risk environmental ecosystems

- **Five QED studies showed that AmeriCorps-funded approaches protect at-risk environmental ecosystems**

- Restoration methods
- Suppressing invasive plants
- Fuel reduction treatment activities





# Investing in community-based solutions generates greater value in return

- **Twelve return on investment (ROI) studies on AmeriCorps programs showed that:**
  - All 12 programs showed a positive return on invested dollars under the assumption that AmeriCorps members experience earning impacts for 15 or 30 years after finishing their service program
  - Each of the agency's six focus areas of interest has an AmeriCorps-funded program demonstrating a positive ROI



# Experience and Reflection: The State of the Evidence at the Community Level

Antonio Mendez

Deputy Director of Regional Programming,  
AmeriCorps NCCC



# The State of the Evidence Findings Society Level

National Service, Volunteering and Civic  
Engagement in our Society





# State of the Evidence: Society

- **AmeriCorps strives to make a lasting impact on the civic health of society and to be a thought leader in the field of volunteering and civic engagement**
  - Goal of supporting and conducting research and evaluations that advance the knowledge base and public understanding of volunteering and civic engagement
- **Research questions**
  - What are the societal rates of volunteerism, and civic engagement?
  - What new insights has AmeriCorps-funded research generated to advance the field's understanding of national service, volunteering, and civic engagement?
- **Key findings associated with 25 studies (22 percent of 116 studies) with a focus on society**





# Volunteerism in the U.S.

- **Current Population Survey (CPS) Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement- 2019 Data**
- **Volunteering rates have remained stable at 30 percent over the last 20 years**
- **Rates of volunteering higher for:**
  - Women (33 percent) compared to men (25 percent)
  - Individuals with a college degree or higher (44 percent) compared to those with less than a high school diploma (12 percent)
  - Individuals in households with an annual income of \$150,000 or more (44 percent) compared to those in households with an annual income of less than \$40,000 (20 percent)




# Participatory research can successfully study and address complex social problems

- **Participatory research**
  - Community members are actively involved in the research, using their community expertise to identify local issues and develop actionable solutions
- **Eight studies by ORE research grantees used participatory research approaches to address various community issues**
  - *Example:* Adult and youth co-researchers documented local environmental injustices and identified strategies for community members to implement
  - *Example:* Researchers worked with refugees to understand how to foster civic engagement and support community members to become drivers of change



# Volunteer-management practices

- **Volunteer management practices associated with positive organizational and volunteer outcomes include:**
    - Assigning tasks that align with volunteers' career goals
    - Using supportive messaging toward volunteers' work and their general well-being
    - Providing training and professional learning opportunities
    - Cultivating positive relationships
-  Increases in volunteer longevity and satisfaction

# Experience and Reflection: The AmeriCorps State of the Evidence at the Societal Level

David Medina

COO and Co-Founder, Results for America



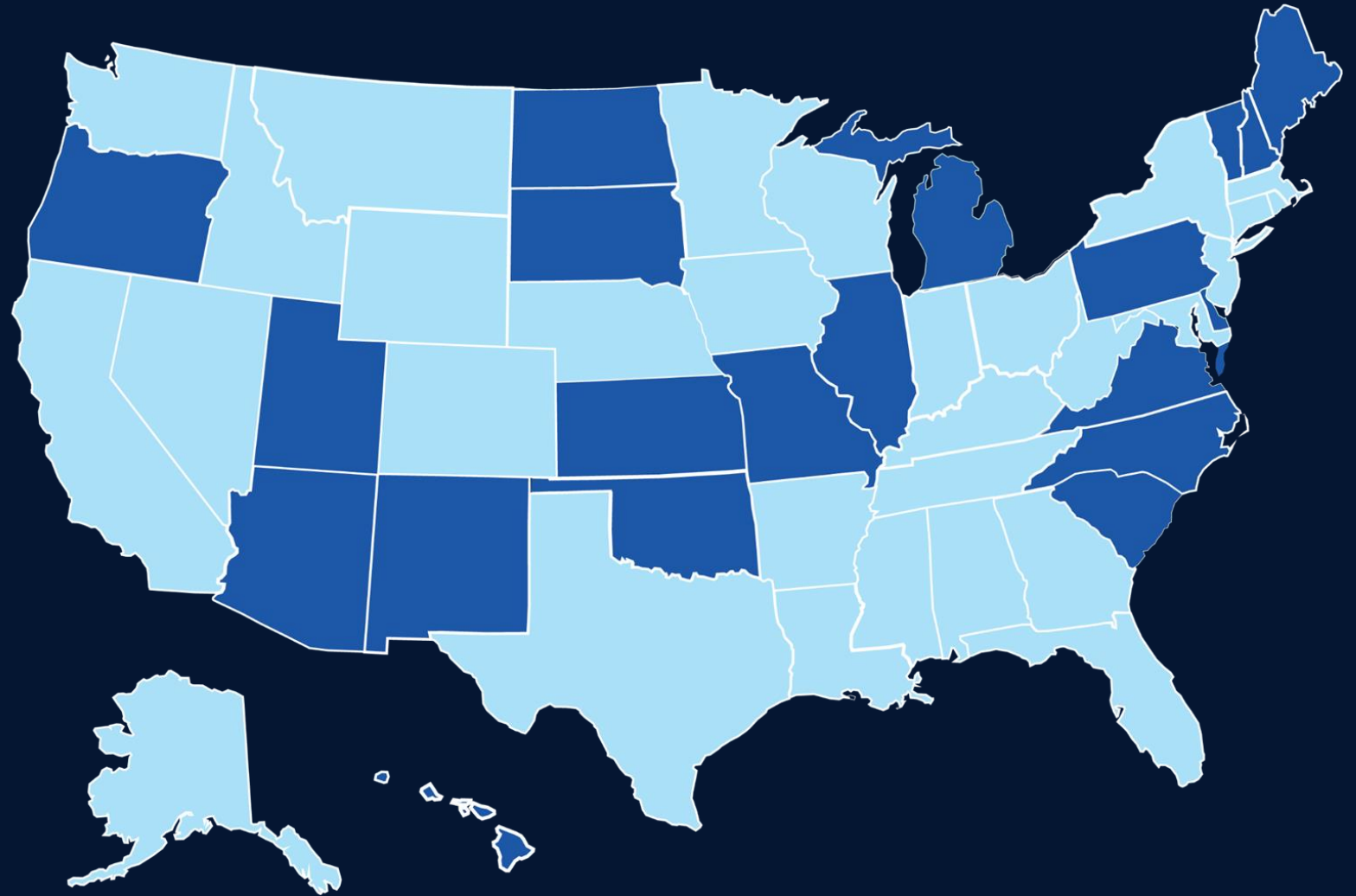
# 2023 Federal Standard of Excellence



**AmeriCorps**

# 30 State Service Commissions Defined/Prioritized Evidence in their AmeriCorps State/National Grant Applications in FY23

- AL
- AK
- AR
- CA
- CO
- CT
- FL
- GA
- ID
- IN
- IA
- KY
- LA
- MA
- MD
- MN
- MS
- MT
- NE
- NV
- NJ
- NY
- OH
- RI
- TN
- TX
- WA
- WV
- WI
- WY



# Thank You

Nichole Dunn

*Results for America's Vice President, Federal Policy*

[nichole@results4america.org](mailto:nichole@results4america.org)

Mary Hyde, Ph.D.

Director, Office of Research and Evaluation





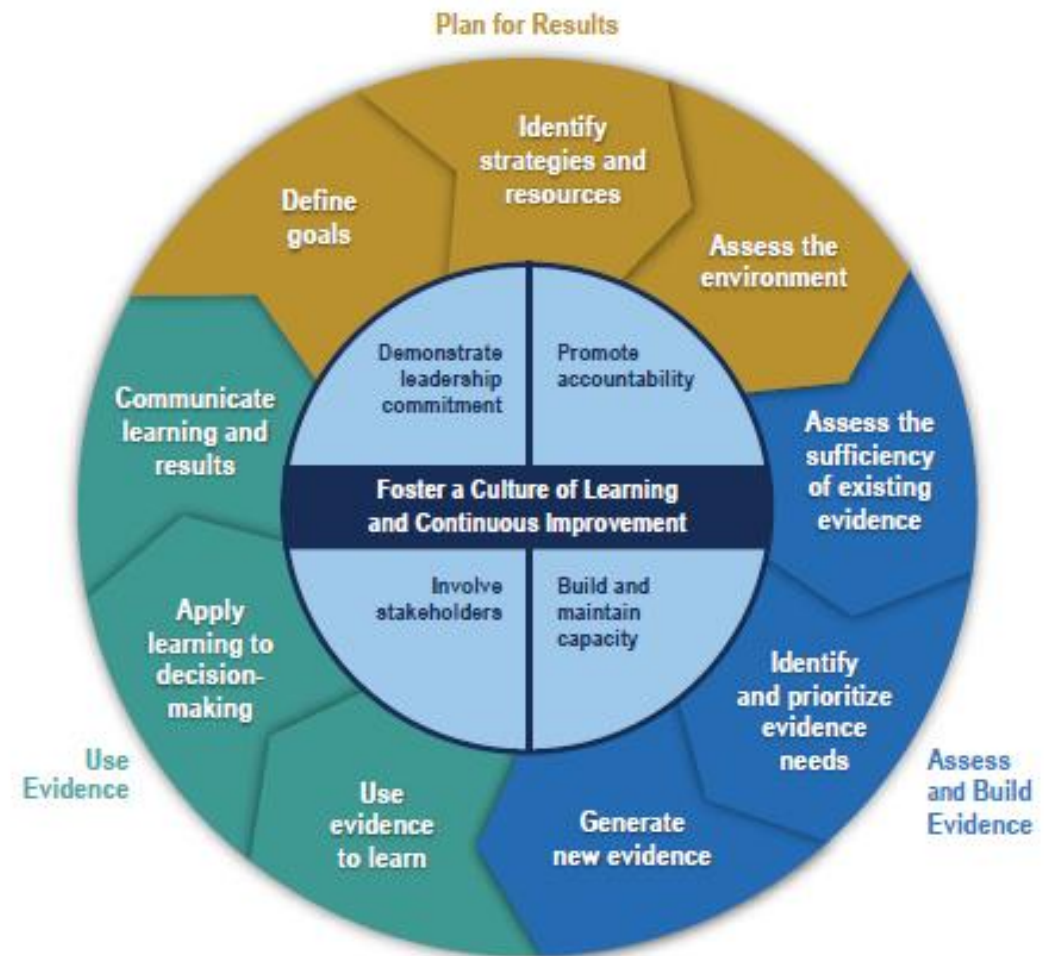
# 2023 State of the Evidence

Findings, Recommendations and the AmeriCorps Learning Agenda 2022-26

- Plan
- Assess and Build
- Use

Download the AmeriCorps Learning Agenda at:

<https://www.americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/AmeriCorps-Learning-Agenda-2022-2026.pdf>



Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-23-105460

# Thank you for attending today's webinar

Join us in our year long [Celebration of Service and Its Evidence Story](#).

Our next Webinar:

[Delivering on Diversity and Equity with Data](#) will be 10/31 from 10:30am-12pm EST

The recording and support materials for this webinar will be provided in the next two weeks on the [AmeriCorps Our Impact Webinar page](#)

To inquire about the work presented in this webinar, please reach out to [Evaluation@cns.gov](mailto:Evaluation@cns.gov)



The screenshot shows a banner for the "Evidence & Impact Webinar Series 2023-2024". On the left is the "30 YEARS of AmeriCorps" logo. The main title is "Celebrating Service and Its Evidence Story". Below that is a section titled "About the 2023-2024 Webinar Series" with a paragraph of text.

**30**  
YEARS of  
AmeriCorps

**Evidence & Impact  
Webinar Series**  
2023-2024

**Celebrating Service and Its Evidence Story**

**About the 2023-2024 Webinar Series**

The six-webinar series hosted by the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation will focus on evidence and impact with partners in the field, within the agency, and leaders in communities and the nation. Register, participate and celebrate AmeriCorps' 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of harnessing the transformative value of evidence use to strengthen community-based organization practices, members and volunteers, local impact, and public trust. This showcase year will highlight AmeriCorps' evidence journey and the evidence use movement sparked through the Evidence Act. Webinars will share how AmeriCorps not only supports research, evidence and evaluation capacity building that strengthens the local nonprofit missions to problem solve and tackle community inspired change, but also shows return in taxpayer dollars saved to local, state, and national budgets and sparks our nation's civic engagement.