

Can National Service Programs Improve Community Well-Being?

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The Issue: What We Know

- Do national service programs have an impact?
 - Evidence that AmeriCorps members help nonprofits on the *organizational* level through service provision
 - For example, serving children through food programs, rehabilitating public housing, and operating reading camps for children (U.S. GAO 1997).
 - Evidence that AmeriCorps members benefit *themselves* over the life course as a result of their service
 - Increased levels of civic engagement such as voting and volunteerism (Finlay, Flanagan, and Wray-Lake 2011).

The Issue: The Unanswered Question

- But do national service programs have an impact beyond the individual or the organization and also affect the *community*?
- 1993 legislation states:

“It is the purpose of this act to...renew the ethic of civic responsibility and the *spirit of community*...[provide] structured service opportunities with *visible benefits to the* participants and *community*...provide *tangible benefits to the communities* in which national service is performed,” (NACSTA 1993).
- Our research: do national service programs improve community well-being?

Research Design: How Can We Answer the Question?

- First, how do we define community?
- Community = *County*
- Justification:
 - Effect of a national service program may not be limited to a specific neighborhood
 - Individuals may travel across a zip code or city to receive services from an organization
 - Need level that is comparable across diverse communities, including urban/rural
 - Data availability

Research Design: How Can We Answer the Question?

- Second, how do we measure “national service”?
- Presence of AmeriCorps programs
 - Overall
 - AmeriCorps State
 - AmeriCorps National
 - AmeriCorps VISTA
 - AmeriCorps “Other” (Promise Fellows, Tribal, etc.)
- Auxiliary analyses considered: number of programs and number of members



Research Design: How Can We Answer the Question?

- Third, how do we define community well-being?
- Subjective Well-Being
 - Increasing interest
 - Example: Healthy People 2020, Gross Domestic Happiness
 - Typically measured via surveys

Research Design: How Can We Answer the Question?

- How do we measure subjective well-being?
- Data source: Twitter
 - Novel measure
 - Can capture multiple dimensions of subjective well-being
 - 1) Engagement; 2) Disengagement; 3) Positive Relations; 4) Negative Relations; 5) Positive Emotions; 6) Negative Emotions
 - Captures “ambient geospatial information” (Stefanidis, Crooks, and Radzikowski 2011)
- Example:
 - Disengagement Words/Total Words Tweeted



Research Design: How Can We Answer the Question?

Six Dimensions of Subjective Well-Being

- Today, we focus on two: engagement and disengagement

Engagement	Disengagement
Learning	Meh
Interesting	Tired
Alive	Bored
Alert	Blah
Involved	Sleepy
Creative	Exhausted

Research Design: How Can We Answer the Question?

- How do we connect these? (AmeriCorps with Subjective Well-Being)



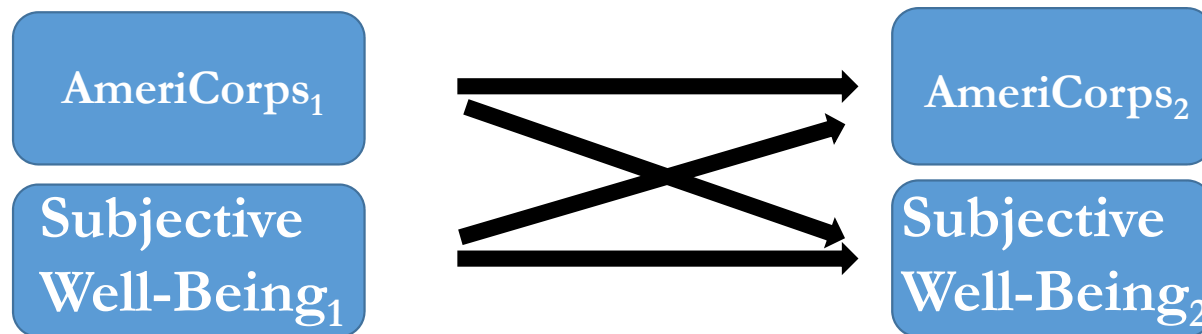
- Linear regression
 - Shows *association*
 - Allows for broad overview
 - Can perform several
- Results? Significant effects!

Research Design: How Can We Answer the Question?

- What could be wrong about these results?
 1. Counties with AmeriCorps programs may be *different* than those that do not receive such programs
 2. Counties with greater levels of subjective well-being can *better attract* AmeriCorps

Research Design: How Can We Answer the Question?

- Addressing these concerns:
 1. Control variables: income, racial/ethnic diversity, education level, rurality, age, state fixed effects.
 2. Add in a second wave of data: Wave 1: 2006-2009; Wave 2: 2010-2013
 - Intervention/Treatment
 - Consider reverse effects



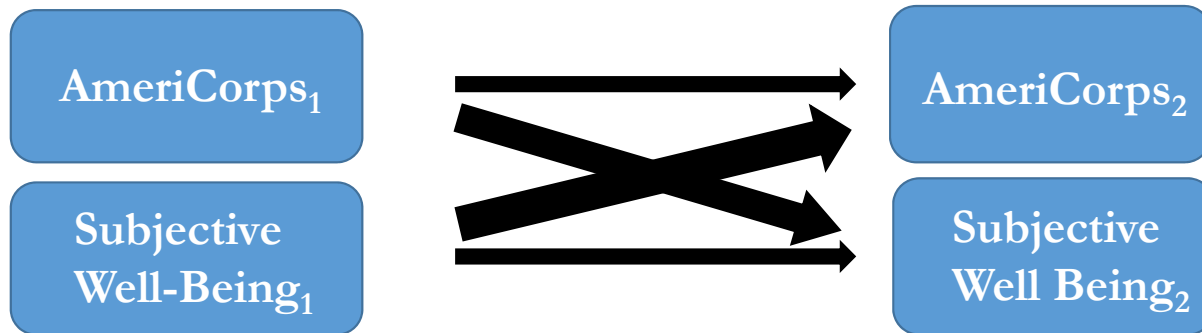
Results

	Engagement	Disengagement
Overall Programs	+	-
AmeriCorps National		-
AmeriCorps State		-
AmeriCorps VISTA	+	-
AmeriCorps Other		-

• Note: small effect sizes



Results



Takeaways

“It is the purpose of this act to...renew the ethic of civic responsibility and the *spirit of community*...[provide] structured service opportunities with *visible benefits to the* participants and *community*...provide *tangible benefits to the communities* in which national service is performed,” (NACSTA 1993).

- AmeriCorps programs help improve community subjective well-being
- Largely through the *buffering* against *negative* aspects
- AmeriCorps is fulfilling its stated goals, should be funded



Takeaways

- Differential effects across AmeriCorps programs. Why?
- Results hold up to various threats against inference
- The reverse effects suggests that when considering applications, pay particular attention to “quiet” or atypical communities

Next Steps

- Questions from you?
- Questions for you.

Audience Questions

1. If you have an AmeriCorps State/National and an AmeriCorps VISTA member, are there differences in how you use them?
2. How do your organizations utilize social media? Do you have AmeriCorps members increase engagement with social media as part of their service to your organization?
3. Do you think the observed effect is because of AmeriCorps members or because of the work nonprofits are already doing?
4. What is the benefit of receiving an AmeriCorps member?
5. If you were to lose your AmeriCorps program, how would your activities change?

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Top Words for Each Dimension

Positive Relations	Negative Relations
Friends	Hate
Together	Alone
Home	Jealous
Team	Blame
Kind	Lonely
Welcome	Rude

Engagement	Disengagement
Learning	Meh
Interesting	Tired
Alive	Bored
Alert	Blah
Involved	Sleepy
Creative	Exhausted

Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions
Great	Sorry
Happy	Sad
Awesome	Pissed
Amazing	Scared
Enjoy	Mad
Laughing	Horrible