



**AARP Foundation
Experience Corps
Implementation
Evaluation of
AmeriCorps-Funded
Sites**

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1. Introduction

In June 2015, the Experience Corps (EC) national office contracted Abt Associates to conduct an implementation evaluation that builds on current internal research and answers new research questions that have emerged as the EC program has evolved and matured. The overarching goal of this implementation evaluation is to better understand what implementation “on the ground” looks like for the two EC strategies – sustained tutoring (one-on-one or small group) and classroom literacy assistance – and the key internal and external factors that influence how each is implemented in AmeriCorps-funded sites. With a more in-depth understanding of how the program is implemented across sites, EC stakeholders can improve program delivery across the entire network.

The three major products of the implementation evaluation are: 1) a refined EC program model, 2) the development of a system to measure implementation fidelity, and 3) a qualitative assessment of implementation fidelity which enables EC national office to address targeted research questions. Results from this implementation evaluation are also being used to inform the EC impact study which has been funded by CNCS, with data collection beginning in the 2018-2019 school year.

The implementation evaluation was conducted in four phases:

- Phase 1: Further refinement of the EC program model
- Phase 2: Identification of research questions and development of a measurement plan to address those questions
- Phase 3: Utilization of the measurement plan and engagement in data collection activities
- Phase 4: Analysis of implementation data and reporting of findings

2. The Experience Corps (EC) Program Model

AARP and Abt worked to clearly identify essential program components in a program model. A clear articulation of a program’s program model is a critical step in assessing whether any program is implemented with fidelity. As expected, the implementation evaluation required the explicit identification of the following components: (1) the inputs and supports needed to ensure successful implementation (e.g., volunteer training, management infrastructure); (2) key program outputs (e.g., sustained one-on-one tutoring, sustained small group tutoring, engagement of students); and (3) the experiences and changes hypothesized to occur as a result of participation (e.g., volunteer skill development, improved student reading achievement). After identifying those essential elements of EC program delivery, the evaluation team possessed a comprehensive framework for assessing implementation—determining which components were delivered, how well they were implemented, and what challenges were faced by schools, teachers, tutors, and students participating in the program. Ultimately, measuring implementation fidelity will help EC program developers understand how implementation varies across sites and will guide program developers in refining any program elements that have not been implemented as intended. Figure 1 depicts the most recent Experience Corps program model.

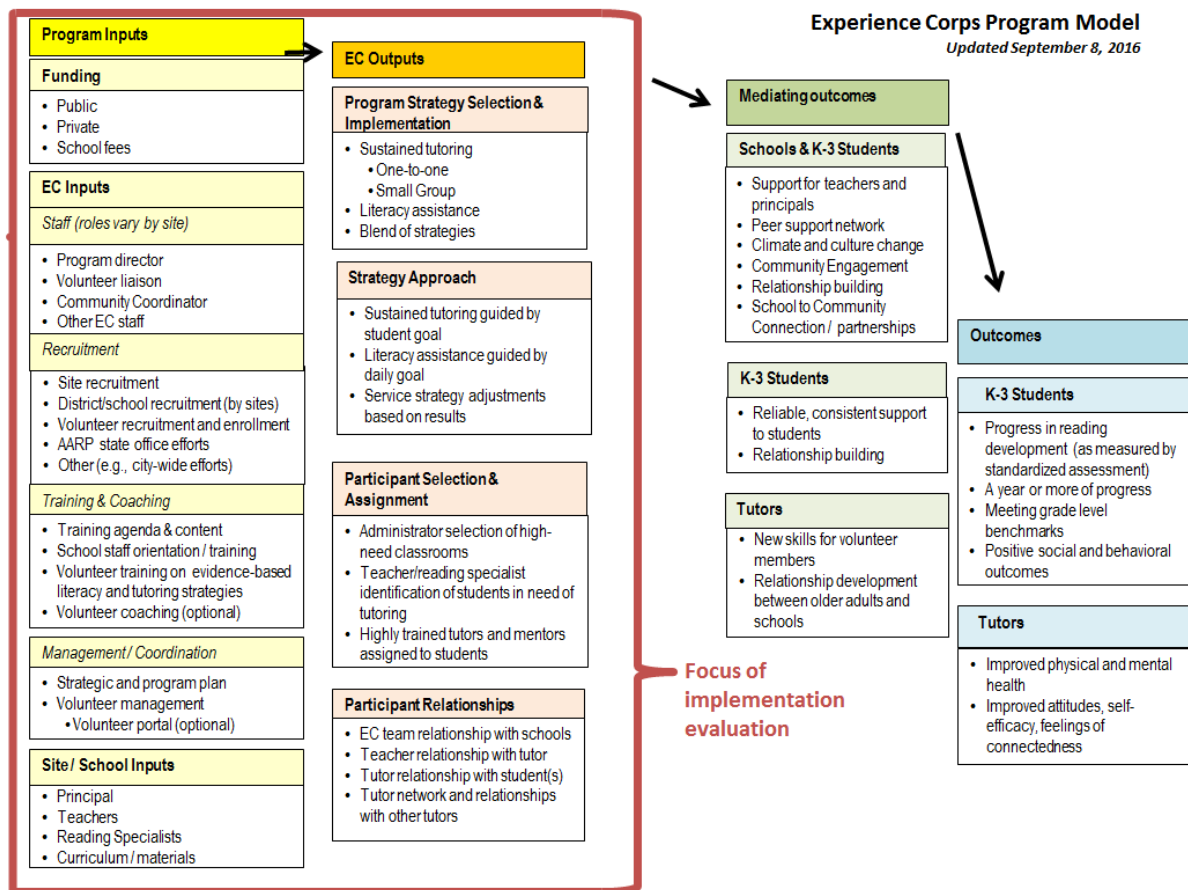


Figure 1. Experience Corps program model

3. Implementation Research Questions

At the onset of the implementation evaluation, EC national staff, in collaboration with the evaluation team, identified five primary research questions. These questions and the corresponding analysis and conclusions can be mapped to elements of the program model.

Research questions related to Experience Corps inputs and outputs (see first two columns in the EC program model):

- I. How are core program components currently implemented across the network (e.g., tutor training, coordination with classroom teachers, program model selection, EC leadership structure, tutor stipends, student assessment)? Is there strong implementation standardization/efficacy across the network? What program components have the most variability and the most consistency in implementation across sites?
- II. How are the two EC strategies – sustained tutoring in a one-on-one or small-group setting and classroom literacy assistance – being implemented?

Research questions exploring factors related to the implementation of the Experience Corps model:

- III. What other internal and external variables appear to most influence program results (i.e., degrees of implementation)?
- IV. What supports from AARP and the school/site itself are necessary for successful program implementation?

Research questions addressing program sites' readiness for rigorous evaluation of effectiveness:

- V. Which sites are most ready for impact evaluation and why?

4. Data Sources and Measurement Plan

The evaluation team examined these research questions by cross-referencing and analyzing multiple data sources. In the initial phases of the implementation evaluation, the evaluation team and EC national staff identified viable data sources necessary to capture multiple perspectives of EC implementation. These data sources included EC program data and documentation, program director phone interviews, site visits and on-site interviews of key staff and tutors, and online teacher and tutor surveys. The timeline of data collection, and the corresponding summary reports, is presented in Figure 2.

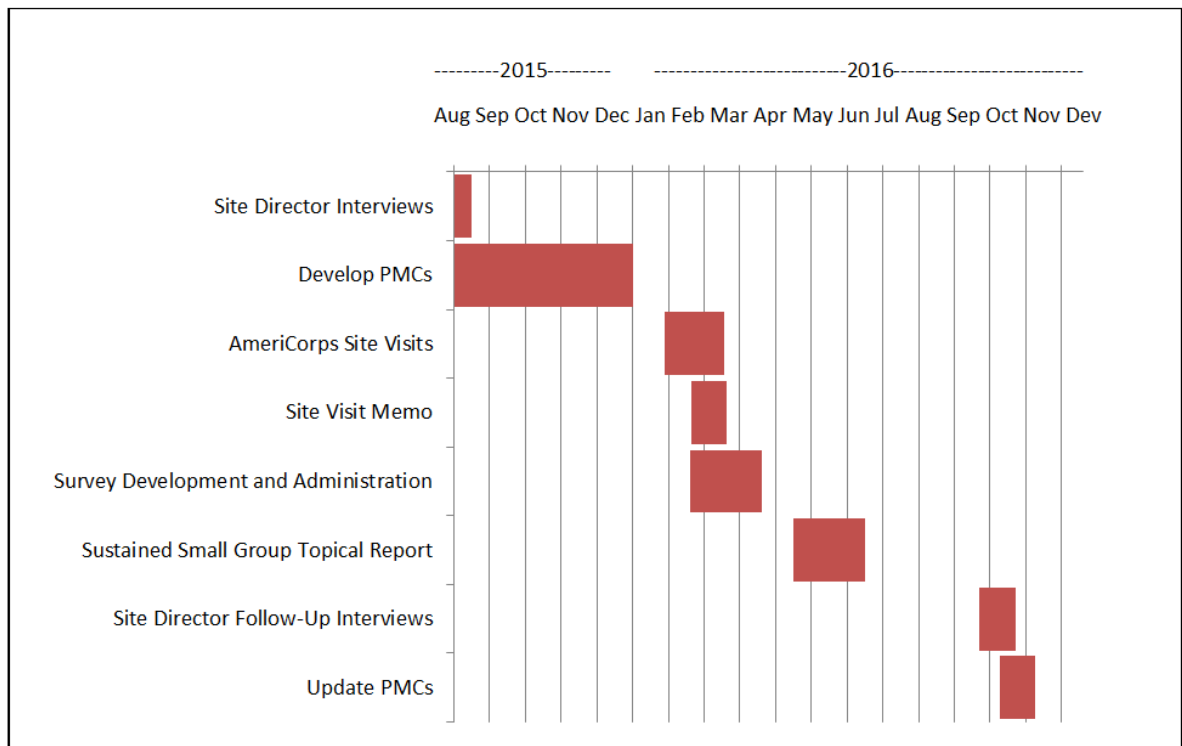


Figure 2: Timeline of Abt data collection and dissemination activities for EC AmeriCorps implementation evaluation

4.1 Who was involved

This implementation evaluation involved all eight AC sites who implemented EC in 2015-2016: Baltimore, Bay Area, Boston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, and Washington DC. Experience Corps New York City discontinued operations in 2016-2017, but information about program implementation in 2015-2016 is included in this report. Some data collection activities, described more below, took place at every site, while others took place in a selection of the eight sites. Table 1 shows an overview of the AC sites including which strategies were used where, how many districts, schools, and tutors were involved, and what grades were served by the EC program.

Table 1. Description of Implementation and Characteristics of AmeriCorps Sites in 2015-2016

	Year Program Started	EC Strategies			Districts	Schools	Tutors	Tutor Stipends	Grades Served
		Sustained Tutoring		Liter. Assist.					
		1-on-1	Small Grp						
Baltimore	1998		✓	✓	1	27	284	98%	Pre-K-3
Bay Area	1998	✓	✓	✓	3	22	169	14%	K-5
Boston	1998	✓	✓	✓	2	19	266	69%	Pre-K-3
Minneapolis/St. Paul	1995	✓	✓	✓	2	15	87	87%	K-3
New York*	1996	✓		✓	3	6	49	100%	K-3
Philadelphia	1996	✓	✓	✓	1	26	275	90%	K-3
Portland	1995	✓	✓	✓	7	9	45	66%	K-5
Washington DC	1999	✓	✓	✓	1	9	92	77%	Pre-K-4

*Experience Corps in New York City closed after the 2015-2016 school year

4.2 Program Director phone interviews

In the first phase of the evaluation, Abt staff reviewed annual EC program data and conducted a series of eight phone interviews in August 2015 with EC program staff from each AmeriCorps-funded site. The results of these interviews were provided in Program Model Case (PMC) summaries for each site, which describe tutoring strategies and delivery mechanisms, including recruitment, training, tutor coordination, strategy implementation, staffing, participant relationships, tutor assignments to classrooms, student assignment to tutors, and challenges faced. The PMCs provide a “snapshot” of programming across EC sites and have been periodically updated to reflect changes in program implementation within each site. Abt staff conducted a second round of Site Director interviews in October 2016 to confirm the accuracy of the PMCs and capture changes in programming in the 2016-2017 school year. The updated PMCs for all AmeriCorps sites (excluding New York) were submitted to AARP in November 2016.

4.3 Site visits

The Abt team conducted five site visits between January and March 2016 to gather more in-depth qualitative data about the EC model and its implementation in select sites. These site visits were conducted in Boston, Massachusetts; Oakland, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; and Portland, Oregon. These site visits enabled the Abt team to gather first-hand observations of EC program delivery and to determine whether elements included in the current program model were being implemented in participating schools. The site visits also provided opportunities to identify elements that should be included in the EC model but were not at the time. The Abt team summarized key takeaways from the site visits in the AmeriCorps memo which was presented to EC National in March 2016. Table 2 shows the distribution of data collection across AC sites from the site visits.

Table 2. Distribution of School Visits, Interviews, and Observations across AmeriCorps Sites

	Boston	Bay Area	Philadelphia	Baltimore	Portland	Total (across sites)
Site Interviews						
Program Director	1	1	1	1	1	5
Other EC Staff	1	1	3	2	1	8
Principal / Leader	2	3	1	2	2	10
Teacher	0	3	2	1	0	6
Tutor	0	1	2	2	5	10
Total Interviews (per site)	4	9	9	8	9	39
Site School Visits						
School Visits	2	3	2	2	2	11
Total School Visits (per site)	2	3	2	2	2	11
Site Observations						
Sustained One-on-One	1	1	5	0	4	11
Sustained Small Group	4	1	1	0	3	9
Literacy Assistance	1	0	1	6	0	8
Total Observations (per site)	6	2	7	6	7	28

4.4 On-site interviews

Each site visit included a number of data collection activities (Table 2). In order to get a range of perspectives and experiences related to key EC inputs like staff roles, recruitment, training, tutor management, and decisions around strategy and targeted student selection, the Abt team interviewed a number of different individuals depending on the structure of each site. Interviews typically included the following key EC stakeholders: 1) EC Program Directors, 2) Additional EC Staff Members, 3) School Principals, 4) K-3 Classroom Teachers, and 5) EC Tutors. In addition, Abt team members observed tutoring sessions at each program site. Direct observation provided substantial opportunity to understand EC strategy delivery and to assess the experience of students receiving assistance and/or tutoring. The Abt team used the same data collection tools and protocols across the AmeriCorps site visits.

4.5 Tutor and teacher surveys

The Abt team designed online EC tutor and teacher surveys in March 2016 to supplement the information collected during the five site visits. All EC tutors in the eight AmeriCorps sites

(Baltimore, Bay Area, Boston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, and Washington DC) whose contact information was accessible in the EC Salesforce database were emailed the survey and given the option to respond. Teachers from five AmeriCorps sites (Baltimore, Bay Area, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Portland, Washington DC) were randomly selected to participate in the survey. The surveys were sent to 1,009 tutors and 288 K-3 classroom teachers in AmeriCorps-affiliated sites on April 4, 2016, and the survey remained open until April 25, 2016. By the time the survey closed, the Abt team received 526 EC tutor responses and 61 teacher responses. The Abt team analyzed responses across and between sites, as well as for certain tutor/teacher subgroups (e.g. tutors who implement sustained small groups, tutors with prior teaching experience). Preliminary findings were presented in the Experience Corps Sustained Small Group Topical Report published in July 2016. The Abt team published the final Experience Corps Survey Results Memo in November 2016.

5. Evaluation Findings

Results from the implementation evaluation are presented here in conjunction with the associated research question. The evaluation team used the previously described data sources to evaluate each research question and identify differences in implementation across all eight sites. The team conducted site visits to only five sites; however, the sample of sites visited was designed to be representative of the full EC AC network. The first two research questions corresponded to program *inputs* (e.g. staffing) and *outputs* (e.g. strategy selection) as shown in the EC program model in Figure 1. Program *outcomes* were not a focus of this evaluation. The third and fourth research questions required the research team to identify internal and external factors that influence program implementation and best support tutors. Finally, the fifth research question addressed future impact evaluation plans and required the evaluation team to identify sites that are “ready” for the next impact phase in the larger Abt EC study.

5.1 Research Question 1: How are core program inputs (e.g., tutor training) currently implemented across EC AC sites?

One of the goals of this implementation evaluation was to examine the variation in inputs across sites and compare what is being done “on the ground” with what is outlined in the program model. According to the EC program model provided above in Figure 1, there are six key program inputs: funding, staffing, recruitment, training and coaching, management/coordination, and site/school support. These inputs, or resources invested in the program, have been identified as essential for delivering EC services. The following section will summarize key findings across EC AC sites and highlight unique ways that certain sites have adapted the EC model. Ultimately, AC sites appear to implement these inputs with varying levels of fidelity, and factors like program size, strategy type, and school leadership affect how these activities are carried out.

5.1.1 EC Input: Staffing

Depending on the size of the program, the staffing structure varies in size and scope. In Portland, which only serves nine schools across seven districts, the program coordinator/director serves as the primary contact for school staff and EC tutors. The Portland coordinator is involved in day-to-day tutor management activities (e.g., interacting with teachers, collecting timesheets, and discussing make-up hours), as well as general program support (e.g., tutor training, school recruitment). Larger sites may utilize a more complex staffing structure which may include a Branch Director, Program Director, Recruitment Coordinator, and several Team Leaders. EC Philadelphia, one of the largest branches in the EC network with 275 tutors serving 6,306 students in 26 schools, has 7.5 full-time EC staff members who each fulfill a unique role in program delivery. In several EC sites, EC leadership has recently increased the use of literacy coaches and other instructional personnel to train and support tutors in a more pedagogically-focused manner. Both Philadelphia and Boston demonstrate very promising approaches to integrating these staff into existing training and scheduling frameworks.

5.1.2 EC Input: Recruitment

Program staff use a variety of strategies to recruit and retain new tutors, including but not limited to mailings/email blasts, information sessions, and print or radio/TV advertisements. In addition to these efforts, current EC tutors act as a primary recruiting tool by spreading the word about EC to other

potential tutors. Consequently, recruitment “by another EC tutor” serves as the most frequently cited way (27%) for EC AC tutors to learn about EC and decide to enroll in the program (see Table 3). Other successful strategies include AARP state mailings (22%) and community newspaper/print advertisements (17%). Across EC sites, program staff are heavily involved in tutor recruitment. Larger sites may have a designated Recruitment Coordinator who is responsible for leading program recruitment efforts.

Table 3: Primary Recruitment Strategies Used across EC AmeriCorps Sites

Recruitment Strategy	Tutor Survey Respondents (%)
By another EC tutor	27.3
EC information session	11.3
AARP state mailings	22.0
Community newspaper/ print advertisement	17.4
Radio or TV advertisement	2.9
Social Media	0.80
Online volunteer database	6.7
Other (e.g., other advertisements, Internet searches, community fair, word of mouth)	24.2

Source: Tutor Survey Q4. *How were you recruited to be an EC tutor?* (n=524)

*Percentages sum to more than 100% because tutors were able to select more than one response

5.1.3 EC Input: Training

Pre-service and ongoing tutor training is delivered in a fairly consistent manner across all five sites. EC Portland provides 12 hours of training to all tutors and an additional half-day training to new tutors in the later summer / early fall. Tutors are expected to participate in an additional 10-12 hours of training throughout the year. In Boston, tutors receive extensive pre-service and ongoing training that aligns with the instructional practices and content area priorities of Boston Public Schools (BPS). Team leaders often observe tutors and provide feedback on a weekly basis. EC Bay Area currently offers tutors a three-session pre-service training, monthly meetings with the Site Coordinator, and feedback from observations conducted by the Site Coordinator. EC Bay Area recently hired a literacy trainer who is revamping training materials, activities, and opportunities for peer-tutoring observations. EC Philadelphia also augments initial tutor training with monthly meetings – almost half of which are facilitated by new literacy coaches and focus on instructional strategies. EC Baltimore follows a similar approach and plans to roll-out a new training model that organizes tutors into grade-level cohorts and trains these tutors together. Tutors in Baltimore have recently also had the opportunity to attend trainings delivered to Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) teachers, and EC staff have also provided trainings for BCPS teachers. This cross-collaboration between BCPS and EC Baltimore has helped the program align their tutor training with classroom instruction. Across most sites, we observed a very systematic use of literacy coaches as well as Site Coordinators and

Team Leaders with strong backgrounds in literacy instruction to provide tutors with necessary pedagogical training and support.

5.1.4 EC Input: Management and Coordination

Team Leaders, veteran EC tutors who supervise other EC tutors and facilitate meetings, often provide on-the-ground leadership and management. In EC Baltimore, for example, EC tutors interact most frequently with teachers and onsite Team Leaders. The same was true in EC Philadelphia, where tutors most frequently interact with Team Leaders, literacy coaches, classroom teachers, and other tutors. Tutors look to the Team Leader for logistical support (e.g., keeping track of hours worked, stipend checks, etc.) as well as instructional mentoring. In EC Bay Area, Site Coordinators fulfill similar responsibilities to what was expected of Team Leaders. Site coordinators in EC Bay Area interact with tutors on a regular basis and are available to provide increased support, especially to new tutors. This intensive ongoing tutor management and support is a key feature of EC Bay Area, and EC leadership in this site hold tutor management at the forefront of their site-specific program model.

Across sites, EC staff also use detailed documentation of tutoring sessions (e.g., session length, content) and tutor hours to monitor and manage programming. EC Boston, Bay Area, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Portland all require tutors to log hours of tutoring per day and per week, as well as number and length of literacy assistance sessions, and tutoring sessions with specific students. During site visits, EC staff from all five sites indicated they use the paper-format tracking logs to document assistance and tutoring time. Across the EC network, sites have started transitioning to electronic monitoring systems like the FIS and New Volunteer Portal (NVP) in the 2016-2017 school year. The Abt evaluation team was able to observe the implementation of this new process in the two schools visited during the site visits to EC Philadelphia. Each Team Leader made a Kindle e-reader available to each tutor throughout the day to enter hours into a Kindle-compatible app. Despite the fact that EC program staff across the network are concerned that older tutors may have varying abilities and comfort levels in using technology, EC Philadelphia has made the process more accessible to this population. By using Team Leaders as facilitators of both the equipment and the process, EC Philadelphia has successfully made the transition from paper and computerized session logging.

5.1.5 EC Input: Site / School Contribution and Involvement

Across the five visited sites, school staff (e.g., teachers, principals, literacy specialists) play varying roles in supporting EC implementation. Schools allocate money for EC services in different ways, pulling from specialized pools of money (e.g., Title I) or from the general school budget. For instance, principals in Baltimore noted that Title I funds can be used to fund the program, and this was an important funding source for EC services. In Portland, however, schools are not required to pay for EC services. Principals across sites have been highly supportive of the EC program in their schools regardless of the monetary investment required by schools. However, the level of principal involvement in the day-to-day EC activities varies from school to school and is dictated by the priorities and experience level of the principal in that particular school. Through the site visits, the evaluation team identified extensive principal involvement in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and the Bay Area. The team also observed authentic connections between tutor, teacher, and school resources in Boston and among tutors and EC Team Leaders in Philadelphia.

Teachers also provide varying levels of guidance and instructional materials to EC tutors. According to tutor survey results, tutors most frequently turn to teachers for guidance when they have questions

(see Table 4). The specific level of teacher involvement varies widely across sites. In some sites, tutors work closely with classroom teachers and incorporate classroom-based resources into their tutoring sessions. In EC Baltimore, which primarily operates under the literacy assistance strategy, tutors work closely with teachers within the same classrooms. Consistent with the literacy assistance strategy, tutors in EC Baltimore serve as a general resource for the classroom and its teachers. In other sites, tutors bring materials from home or look to the Team Leader for resources. In Portland, tutors are given an “EC toolkit” (i.e., bags with books, games, and other instructional materials) and are free to use classroom materials, but tutors are fairly autonomous and rarely consult with the classroom teacher when using classroom materials

Table 4: EC or School Staff Members Providing Instructional Support

EC or School Staff Member	Percentage of Tutor Survey Respondents (%)
EC Program Director	2.7
EC literacy coach	4.6
School principal	0.0
School literacy coordinator	3.8
School teacher	38.7
Other EC tutor	3.4
Don't know	1.2
EC team leader	25.8
Other EC program staff (e.g., site coordinator, site liaison)	16.6
Other (Please specify)	3.2

Source: Tutor survey item: *If you have a tutoring or academic content question, who would you ask for guidance from first?* (n=524)

5.1.6 Student Selection and Assessment

Classroom teachers are often responsible for selecting students to receive Experience Corps tutoring. Especially in sites that focus more heavily on literacy assistance (e.g., Baltimore), the delivery of tutoring and additional classroom assistance is largely driven by teachers. In these cases, tutoring assistance can be either focused on a single concept (e.g. fluency, phonemic awareness) or on a more long-term goal to improve reading skills (e.g. reading at grade level). In one site, Bay Area, students are selected to receive Experience Corps tutoring either by a classroom teacher, principal, or by a literacy coach who works with struggling readers schoolwide. EC Bay Area staff set clear expectations with school personnel about selecting Tier 2 students (in a RTI framework) and referring students with more intensive academic needs to other specialized programs.

Regardless of the primary intervention strategy, students selected to receive sustained Experience Corps tutoring generally have a similar profile: they are struggling readers at least one year behind

grade level. Teachers, literacy coaches/specialists, and other EC or school staff frequently utilize student assessment data to identify eligible students. Student performance on standardized assessments like the DIBELS, AIMSweb, DRA, and the Fountas and Pinnell heavily influences student selection across AmeriCorps sites. In the literacy assistance strategy, students are often grouped into ability levels within classrooms and provided the appropriate level of assistance for their needs. Assessment data less consistently influences student selection in classrooms implementing literacy assistance only.

5.1.7 Use of Stipends

Across AmeriCorps sites, the majority of tutors (65%) receive a stipend, but over one third (36%) of tutors receive no source of funding. Within sites, stipends may either be provided to all tutors or given to a select group of tutors. For example, Boston provides stipends for 69% of all tutors regardless of funding, while Bay Area only provides stipends to AC-funded tutors. Some sites (e.g., Philadelphia, Baltimore) provide stipends to all tutors regardless of tutoring hours completed, but stipend amounts differ based on tutors' time commitment to the program. In EC Baltimore, tutors must serve a minimum of 10 hours per week, but quarter-time and reduced-half-time options are also available. AC tutors on minimum time schedules (10 hours/week) receive a stipend of \$150 per month, and stipends rise to \$225 per month for a quarter time commitment and \$300 per month for a reduced half-time commitment.

There is some disagreement among interviewees as to whether using stipends increases recruitment or retention rates. In particular, some EC staff expressed that the use of stipends increased the professionalism and the credibility of the program. While future research should investigate whether the use of stipends can lead to increased recruitment and retention, interviews with EC staff and tutors provided more in-depth information about the importance of stipends for certain tutors. For tutors in several communities, the stipend represents a consistent source of income that may be used to cover basic living expenses.

5.1.8 Consistency of Program Inputs

At AC sites, the inputs underlying the EC model were implemented in line with EC standards when applicable. Many of the EC standards, however, are intentionally broad since maintaining program flexibility and adapting to local school needs is a hallmark of the EC model. For instance, EC standards require a minimum of 25 hours of annual training for new volunteers and 20 hours of annual training for returning volunteers. The annual training requirements can involve a mix of pre-service and in-service training, and there is evidence that each EC site offers a different mix of these trainings. This local flexibility was coupled with a deliberate effort on the part of site leadership to maintain fidelity to EC standards; all but three AC sites exceed annual training standards. Moreover, the flexibility afforded to EC sites allowed for local innovations such as linking EC training to district curricula (Boston), hiring professional literacy trainers to modify the training curriculum (Bay Area), enlisting literacy coaches (Philadelphia), and organizing training into grade-level cohorts (Baltimore).

While we observed the most variability among inputs in training, staffing arrangements also varied substantially depending upon the size of the EC site. As expected, larger EC sites (e.g., Philadelphia) had greater division of responsibilities while smaller EC sites (e.g., Portland) required a smaller number of staff that fulfilled multiple concurrent roles. Despite the differences in staffing arrangements, we observed a great deal of similarities in the leadership structures across sites. All EC

sites had central office coordination with site-level leadership (fulfilled by site coordinators, Team Leaders [typically senior tutors], or even project directors in some cases). Moreover, tutors consistently kept session logs of sustained tutoring activities, though the content of those session logs differed across sites. Classroom teachers were generally a consistent source of support and coordination as well.

A key remaining challenge for the evaluation is to specify measures of implementation fidelity that provide guidance on how to further define the EC model while not hindering local innovation. Many of the EC standards pertaining to program inputs are very broad (e.g., training requirements of 25+ hours per year for new tutors), focused on general site management (e.g., consistent branding for site recruitment activities), or are simply not existent (e.g., staffing requirements). It is clear that the implementation fidelity metrics must be developed in a manner that is consistent with EC standards; however, the current EC standards should not be the sole source of our fidelity rubric.

5.2 Research Question 2: How are the two EC strategies, sustained tutoring and classroom literacy assistance, implemented across EC AC sites across the network?

Across the network of AmeriCorps-funded sites, tutors deliver a combination of EC strategies. The two EC strategies include 1) sustained tutoring in a one-on-one or small-group setting and 2) classroom literacy assistance. Four of the five visited EC sites deliver both strategies and delivery approaches (one-on-one and small group), and in many instances these strategies are used in combination with one another depending on the site, school, and population of students. Figure 3 displays a map of all eight AmeriCorps-funded sites and EC strategies currently delivered by each program. EC National has recently advised sites to increasingly implement sustained small group tutoring in order to serve more students, but the five visited AC sites are in varying stages of making this transition. One-on-one tutoring remains the most common mode of EC service delivery across AC sites, except in EC Baltimore where a blended form of literacy assistance is the predominant approach.

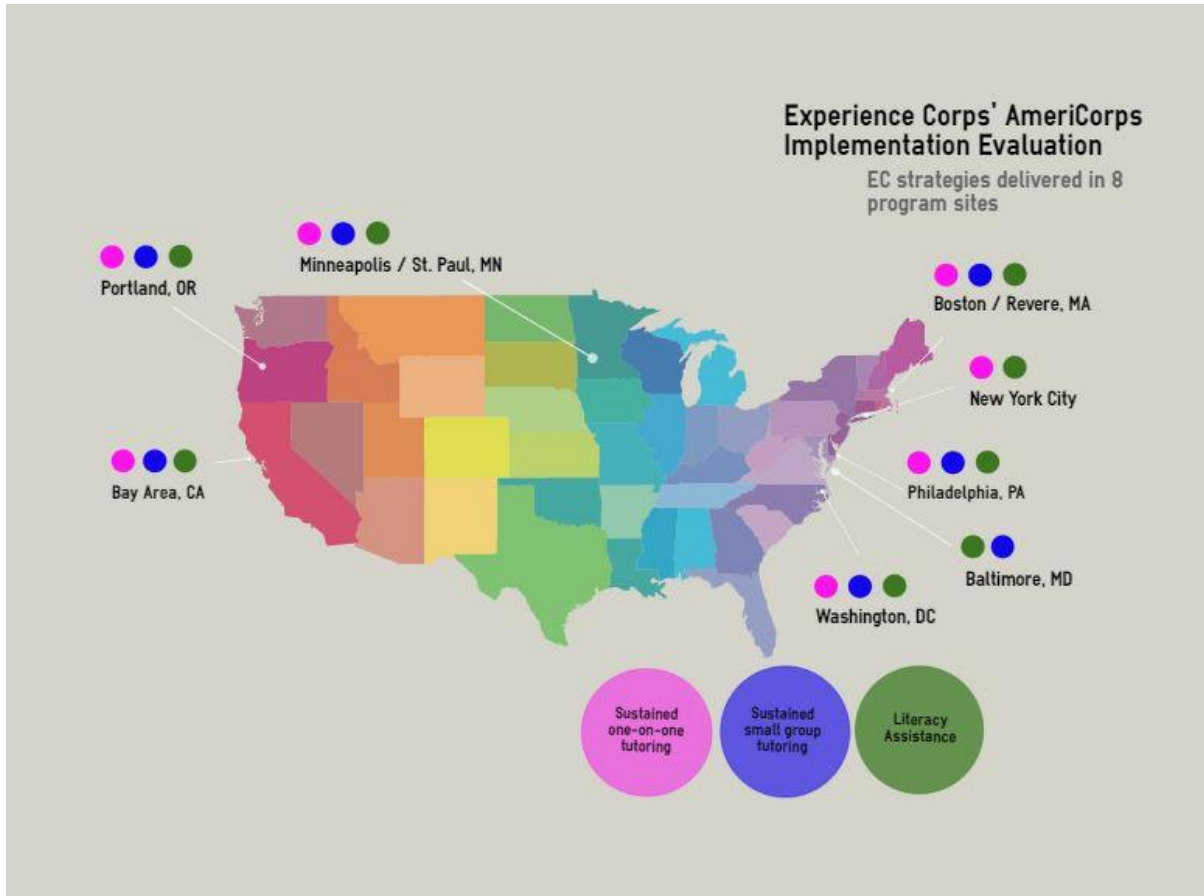


Figure 3. Experience Corps strategies delivered across AmeriCorps-funded sites

The five visited AC sites have also implemented each strategy to varying levels of fidelity, often because of differences in tutor training, resources, and site leadership. EC National has produced guidelines for each strategy, but as will be discussed in the following section, each strategy is implemented in slightly different ways. The Abt evaluation team observed a substantial amount of variation in the delivery of specific components of each strategy across AmeriCorps sites, but also by tutors within sites. As expected, we found this to be true for the delivery of literacy assistance, a strategy that promotes tutor flexibility to provide assistance as needed for any particular lesson in any particular day. However, we also found this to be true when tutors implement sustained small group tutoring and even sustained one-on-one tutoring, a strategy that is more prescriptive at its core. Each strategy will be discussed individually as defined by AARP's EC National standards, and then compared with data collected in interviews, observations, and surveys.

5.2.1 Strategy Delivery

Sustained tutoring

Sustained one-on-one delivery

Sustained one-on-one tutoring is one of two delivery approaches for the EC-endorsed sustained tutoring strategy. As defined by AARP's EC standards, this strategy is delivered when an individual student meets with a tutor for two to five times per week with sessions lasting 20-40 minutes depending on age and need. The matched pair remains together for a sustained period with a target of

35 sessions throughout the school year. Students referred for one-on-one tutoring are below grade level in one or more of the foundational literacy skills or in overall reading ability. All students receiving tutoring should have attainment goals established by the classroom teacher or another relevant school staff or administrator (teacher, literacy specialist, liaison), and are tracked for progress through pre- and post-tutoring surveys.

One-on-one tutoring has historically been the most common EC strategy and is used in four of the five visited AC sites. The Abt team's observations of one-on-one tutoring generally matched the strategy as prescribed by EC National. EC Baltimore was the only AC site that did not use sustained one-on-one tutoring, but tutors worked individually with students while providing classroom-based literacy assistance. Across the other four visited AC sites, one-on-one sessions typically lasted for 30 minutes and occurred 2-3 times per week. Generally, tutors appeared to work with the same students across the entire year. Tutors typically worked with students in grades K-3, but the Abt team saw evidence of tutors working with students in grades 4-5 in one EC AC site. A number of AmeriCorps sites, including EC Boston, Baltimore, and Washington DC, have expanded into Pre-K. Although teachers were often responsible for identifying eligible students based on test scores or other factors, tutors were often responsible for determining the focus and content of one-on-one sessions with minimal guidance from the classroom teacher.

The Abt team observed one-on-one sessions both in the classroom and in separate spaces (e.g., hallway, library). Sessions taking place inside the classroom often occurred at a designated table or corner. The content of the observed tutoring sessions also varied widely depending on student needs and abilities. For example, in EC Boston, the Abt team observed a tutoring session that touched on more rudimentary literacy skills, incorporating elements of print awareness, reading fluency, phonetics, vocabulary, and comprehension. In this session, the tutor worked individually with one 2nd Grade student at a desk outside of the classroom. The teacher provided the tutor with specific activities to use with the student (a story writing worksheet and flashcards with words to read). The Abt team observed another tutoring session in EC Bay area that focused more exclusively on reading comprehension and advanced vocabulary. During this session, the tutor prompted the student to read one page at a time and then pause, after which the tutor facilitated a discussion about the vocabulary words they encountered and then asked reading comprehension questions. Some of the vocabulary words included, "precious," "mumble," and "plump." The tutor added to the student's cultural knowledge as well, explaining how to cook a "fried" and "poached" egg (both referenced in the story).

Tutors also used a variety of materials in the observed sessions. While traditional printed books were the primary teaching tool, the Abt team also observed multiple instances in which tutors used iPads, worksheets, flashcards, "EC toolkits" (i.e., bags with books, games, and other instructional materials), and other classroom materials. For instance, in EC Portland, the Abt team observed tutors using an assortment of materials and resources. Unlike other sites, tutors in Portland did not use any commercial, published curricula since the Common Core guides the instructional focus of Portland-area schools. During our observations, one Portland tutor used a bingo game from the classroom, and another tutor from the same school pulled materials from her EC bag. Tutors in other schools and sites may integrate more "high-tech" resources into their tutoring sessions. In EC Philadelphia, tutors are encouraged to use iPads or other technological teaching tools to deliver tutoring. We observed several tutors using iPads across the two schools involved in the site visit. EC leadership indicated that they used program funds to purchase a series of inexpensive literacy-based apps for each iPad. As

technology continues to become a larger part of education, the use of iPads and other assistive devices may be an effective tool for engaging students across all EC sites.

Sustained small group delivery

This delivery approach of the sustained tutoring strategy is adopted when one tutor is matched with a group of up to 4 students. The group of students should meet with a tutor two to five times per week with sessions lasting 20–40 minutes depending on age and need. The group remains together for a sustained period throughout the school year, or throughout the course of the after-school program. Like one-on-one tutoring, students referred for group tutoring are below grade level in up to three of the same foundational literacy skills and should have specific attainment goals.

The five visited AC sites have taken different approaches to integrating sustained small group tutoring. Four of the five sites offered sustained small group tutoring, and in each of those sites, at least one sustained small group tutoring session was directly observed by the Abt team. Tutors generally worked in groups of 2–4 students, but there were instances where tutors worked with five students at a time. Across the eight observed sessions, the Abt team observed a direct relationship between behavior management and group size—as the size of the small group increased, the amount of time spent on behavior management also increased. Tutors also adapted their instruction to engage multiple students at once. Many tutors played literacy games or facilitated interactive activities with their students to keep every member of the group focused and engaged. In a few cases, the Abt team observed tutors working with a small group on materials that might have been more appropriate in a one-on-one tutoring session (e.g., completing a worksheet assigned by the teacher, guided reading). In these cases, the tutor usually relied on teacher-provided materials with the small group as the rest of the class completed the same task individually.

During the site visits and also in some survey responses, the Abt team heard concerns from some EC staff that tutors may have difficulty working with multiple students at the same time. Despite these reservations, the Abt team observed several tutors successfully facilitating a small group session. At one elementary school served by EC Philadelphia, the Abt team observed a tutor working with three first grade students on developing phonemic awareness. The tutor led the students in an activity focused on recognizing consonant sounds and building words with the letters “s,” “t,” “r,” “u,” “c,” and “k.” In this activity, the students created a series of words from laminated letter cards that became increasingly more difficult (e.g., “us” “cuts” “stuck” “trucks”). The activity was engaging and required involvement from each student in the group, and the tutor rarely had to provide behavioral support because each student was focused on completing the task.

Literacy assistance

As defined by AARP’s Experience Corps standards, literacy assistance tutoring is intended to reinforce literacy skills or concepts introduced in daily lessons. The teacher assigns the tutor to work with a small group, individual student, or an entire class while the teacher works with other students in the classroom. Literacy assistance is employed to meet a specific lesson-related goal, rather than individual student goals. Tracking individual student progress for classroom literacy assistance is not required. In new sites, tutors are expected to devote no more than 20% of their tutoring time to Literacy Assistance.

Literacy assistance is used in all five of the EC AC sites, but is implemented to varying frequencies. Programs typically provide literacy assistance on an as-needed basis or in conjunction with sustained

one-on-one or small group tutoring. In EC Baltimore, however, literacy assistance is the primary strategy. Consistent with the literacy assistance strategy, tutors in Baltimore serve as a general resource for the classroom and facilitate short lessons. In one observed classroom in Baltimore, the tutor sat behind students during a whole-class presentation and provided behavioral management support by ensuring that students were focused on the teacher. The Abt team also observed instances in Baltimore where the tutor facilitated small group sessions while the rest of the class did other activities, but since the groupings were not sustained throughout the year, this would qualify as literacy assistance.

In other sites, literacy assistance may be implemented less frequently and often in combination with the sustained tutoring strategy. In EC Boston, literacy assistance typically occurs in one of two ways: 1) before and/or after sustained one-on-one and small groups are complete, or 2) as a scheduled tutoring session. At the beginning of the literacy assistance session that the Abt team observed, the tutor initially sat with a small group of students at their clustered desks, helping a few of them with spelling and writing as the teacher led a compare and contrast activity with the whole class. The EC tutor circulated among five students who needed varying levels of support to complete the activity. Similar to what was observed in other sites, tutors in Boston supported students who needed help focusing or provided specific assistance with teacher-determined activities or assignments (including worksheets, whole-group reading, individual reading, etc.).

Literacy assistance is generally related to reading and writing instruction, but the Abt team observed multiple instances where EC tutors provided assistance in other subject areas. In EC Portland, literacy assistance is frequently related to literacy instruction, but may also involve other disciplines or activities. In passing, one tutor shared that she spent some time that day working with a student on fractions during math class. During one observation of a second grade classroom with two EC tutors, tutors worked at separate tables while three other adults (e.g., classroom teacher, foster grandmother, other paraprofessional) worked with small groups of students at other tables in an interdisciplinary center-based instructional period. Similarly, in EC Philadelphia, the Abt team observed an EC tutor providing classroom support during a math activity. The tutor worked with three students at a separate table in the classroom while the lead teacher explained a math activity projected onto the whiteboard. The tutor provided individualized support to this group for the duration of the activity, often repeating and clarifying the teacher's directions to promote students' understanding.

5.2.2 Setting

Tutoring sessions take place in different settings (e.g., hallway, classroom, designated room), often according to EC strategy type and limitations in the school layout. According to responses to the tutor survey shown below in Table 5, tutors most commonly delivered services within the classroom. The most common tutoring locations included a separate tutoring area within the classroom (35%), hallways outside the classroom (30%), and classrooms supporting teacher instruction (23%). In Boston, the Abt team observed one-on-one tutoring exclusively in a pull-out setting, often in a hallway or common area just outside the classroom. In Philadelphia, the observed one-on-one tutoring was delivered as pull-out in the hallway adjacent to the classroom as well as within the classroom – these approaches seemed to be dictated in large part by the available physical space. EC Portland provides yet another approach to one-on-one delivery. Abt staff observed four pull-out sustained one-on-one tutoring sessions in a single school delivered in a variety of settings (e.g., in the hallway just

outside the classroom, in a hallway outside a Physical Education class in progress, and in the school library).

Table 5: Location of Tutoring Sessions

Tutoring Session Location	EC AC Tutor Survey Respondents (%)
In the classroom at a separate tutoring area	34.8
In the classroom at student work areas	29.6
In the classroom supporting teacher instruction	22.8
In a different room outside of the classroom	16.5
In the hallway outside of the classroom	30.2
In a different area of the school (i.e. library, cafeteria)	12.5
Other	9.1

Source: Tutor survey item: *Where do your tutoring sessions usually take place?* (check all that apply) ($n=514$)

5.2.3 Materials and Use of Curriculum

Across AmeriCorps sites, tutors occasionally used commercial curricula in their tutoring sessions. Approximately 53% of surveyed tutors reported that they use a specific curriculum with students during each session, and the remaining 47% either reported that they did not use a curriculum or were unsure. In addition, over half of tutors (56%) reported using teacher provided materials, but information gathered from site visits suggests that a significant number of tutors use materials from home or from EC staff members. In EC Boston, tutors engaged students on a variety of skills using instructional materials provided by the teacher or freely available within the classroom or school library. In other sites, tutors may rely more heavily on Team Leaders and their own resourcefulness to find materials that match the needs of their students. One tutor in Philadelphia shared that after every day of tutoring, he goes home to select and print worksheets from the Internet to use during his next session. Team Leaders may also identify and distribute instructional materials for tutoring sessions. One Team Leader, also from Philadelphia, explained that she receives several requests for additional material that focus on blending, for example, since this is a fundamental literacy skill often addressed in EC tutoring sessions.

Table 6: Curriculum Use in EC AmeriCorps Tutoring Sessions

Curriculum Used in Tutoring Session	EC AC Tutor Survey Respondents (%)
Reading A-Z	15.0
Read Naturally	18.0
Opening the World of Learning	2.6
Teacher provided materials	56.5
Other curriculum	36.1
None	7.6
Don't Know	4.8

Source: Tutor survey item: *What curriculum do you use with your student(s)?* (check all that apply) ($n=501$)

5.3 Research Question 3: What other factors appear to most influence program implementation?

Results from the implementation evaluation suggest that three primary factors influence the degree to which programs implement the EC program model. These factors are: 1) Approaches to in-service tutor training and supports, 2) Tutor use of curriculum and other instructional materials, 3) Tutors' prior teaching experience and educational background.

5.3.1 In-service Tutor Support

In several EC sites, we note the increased use of literacy coaches and other instructional personnel to train and support tutors in a more pedagogically-focused manner. Both Philadelphia and Boston demonstrate very promising approaches to integrating these staff into existing training and scheduling frameworks. We see this as a very positive step in expanding tutor knowledge of and comfort with effective EC strategies to move struggling readers forward. Research suggests that creating an instructional match with a reader – that is, selecting texts that both reinforce background knowledge and previously mastered skills as well introduce new words and content – is an essential step in increasing reading achievement. Providing an instructional match is important, yet many would argue that it is one of the most difficult aspects of teaching. Despite observing several instances where tutors unknowingly created an instructional “mismatch” by selecting (or having students select) texts that were either too difficult or too easy, we see the increased use of literacy coaches as a very viable method in helping tutors master this skill.

5.3.2 Targeted Use of Curriculum and Instructional Materials

The evaluation team observed substantial variation across sites with regard to sources of instructional materials utilized by tutors. In some sites, tutors work closely with classroom teachers and accessed a range of classroom-based resources. These observations aligned with the EC model, which stipulates that tutors work with the curriculum materials used in the classroom so that their instruction is

relevant. In other sites, tutors brought materials from home or looked to the Team Leader for resources. In and of itself, variation in the way in which tutors acquire materials is not problematic as long as the instructional value of these materials remains high, appropriate to each learner, and relevant to the other literacy instruction they receive. At sites in which tutors lack access to teacher-endorsed materials and/or teachers are not supplying materials or using a curriculum, EC national's recent recommendation of *Reading A-Z* will provide tutors across the network with high quality materials. Use of classroom materials and/or curricula will continue to serve as the preferred option to best align literacy instruction.

5.3.3 Tutors' Prior Teaching Experience

Data collected from program director interviews and tutor surveys have revealed the benefits of recruiting and maintaining tutors who have had experience teaching prior to volunteering with Experience Corps. According to tutor survey responses, 34% of AC-supported tutors indicated that they have previous teaching experience. Survey results also indicate that tutors with extensive experience working with schools, as classroom teachers or in other roles, tend to feel most prepared to lead small group tutoring sessions – arguably the most challenging tutoring format, as it requires more adept behavior management and engagement skills. The EC network cannot expect to enlist only tutors with teaching backgrounds, but awareness of past tutor experiences in the timing and assignment of specific tutors may reduce discomfort and concerns with tutoring.

5.4 Research Question 4: What supports from AARP and the school/site itself are necessary for successful program implementation?

The evaluation team was able to utilize the varied data collection activities and subsequent analyses to identify key supports in implementation that are delivered at both a broad scale via EC national staff, and a more local scale via EC site staff. Results from the implementation evaluation suggest that tutors would benefit from additional training, increased access to a formalized curriculum or other intentional instructional materials, and support and encouragement in fostering frequent interactions with classroom teachers.

5.4.1 Additional Tutor Training

For several years, EC national staff have provided sites with well-developed training materials, scheduling and dosage expectations, and guidelines on how and why to deliver focused training. During site visits, many tutors emphasized the importance of training and had generally positive feedback about the quality of their training. Approximately 75% of tutors responding to the EC survey indicated that trainings both prepare them to work with students and support their tutoring activities during the year. When asked how tutors could be further supported, tutors indicated their desire for even more training, specifically in areas related to behavior management, supporting social and emotional learning, and delivering the five components of reading instruction.

5.4.2 Access to Curriculum

The EC national office has made strides to provide top-down supports by endorsing *Reading A-Z* and encouraging local sites to acquire *Reading A-Z* licenses as a resource for tutors. Based on data collected through site visits and the tutor survey, the evaluation team views the increased emphasis on using sponsored curriculum as a viable support in EC implementation.

During site visits, members of the evaluation team observed tutors exhibiting varying levels of success in establishing an instructional match with their students. Formal curricula, like *Reading A-Z* and *Read Naturally*, often take the guess work out of aligning reading material with children’s reading ability. The EC network has, at large, deliberately used curricula to guide tutoring sessions. In fact, a little over 50% of tutors report using a curriculum. Based on these observations and supporting evidence generated by survey respondents, the evaluation team concludes that providing a curriculum to tutors who do not currently use one may be helpful in maintaining a higher degree of fidelity to the EC program model.

5.4.3 Tutor and Teacher Interaction

A variety of data sources indicate that the majority of tutors and teachers have a strong relationship and that teacher-tutor pairs interact with a high degree of frequency. Seventy-two percent of tutors and 68% of teachers report “checking in” with one another at least once per week. In addition, 64% of tutors and 69% of teacher reported having a strong relationship with one another.

Data also indicate that a substantial portion of these interactions are used to communicate issues concerning tutoring delivery. Close to 70% of tutors reported being observed and receiving feedback, most often a few times per year. Relatedly, three-quarters of teachers reported feeling comfortable giving tutors feedback directly. The evaluation team sees this as an essential element in supporting EC implementation at the local level. Strong tutor-teacher relationships and regular check-ins help foster open communication. Tutor observations and feedback allow tutors to adapt their tutoring methods continually, not only during formal assessment periods.

5.5 Research Question 5: Which sites are most ready for impact evaluation and why?

Implementation is a necessary but insufficient piece of discovering the impact of a program or intervention. Arguably, implementation is the most important piece to enacting change. In order to be able to examine the effect of a program, it is critical that the program be implemented well and with fidelity. Low levels of implementation fidelity can lead to biased conclusions about the effectiveness of a given intervention in changing student skills. Such implementation requires key program supports and components are in place. Two EC AC sites, Boston and Bay Area, applied to be a part of the Social Innovation Fund EC evaluation and were accepted. As we know from site visits, interviews, and other collected information, those sites are currently implementing EC at reasonable levels of fidelity to be primed for an impact evaluation. Boston has an established relationship with the school district and individual schools within that system, as well as an existing data sharing agreement. There is an existing system of data collection, management, and analysis at the site, and staff have developed a plan to implement a specific combination of the two primary EC tutoring strategies in new classrooms. EC Bay Area also has significant experience with the program model and has established a strong reputation in the area. Though they do not have a data sharing agreement currently in place, the program is planning to hire a Program Coordinator who will be responsible for the majority of data management and analysis activities. In addition to Boston and Bay Area, we also saw other sites during our data collection process that showed potential to be excellent candidates for impact evaluation based on their level of implementation.

The degree to which a site supports tutors and maintains fidelity to the EC model are important factors in determining the readiness of a site to participate in an impact evaluation. Certain supports

such as a willingness to participate, the ability to provide district-level data and support outcome data collection, and sufficient buy-in from school staff are vital to the success of the program. Additionally, the implementation of EC needs to be consistent within each participating school across all sites. If eligibility criteria for participation are different, if assignment procedures are different, or if the delivery of EC differs between schools within a site varies substantially, our ability to detect site-level effects will be compromised.

6. Conclusion

Ultimately, findings from the implementation evaluation enable EC national staff, as well as program leadership across all AC-funded sites, to better understand what implementation on the ground looks like for the two EC strategies – sustained tutoring (i.e., delivered in one-on-one and small group formats), and classroom literacy assistance. We observed generally strong levels of implementation across sites. The vast majority of tutoring observed was within the EC Standards (e.g., 20-40 minute sessions for two-five times per week for sustained one-on-one and small-group tutoring). There were, however, some deviations in implementation (e.g., some sustained small-group tutoring sessions involved five students), but these deviations were determined to be largely driven by local needs and context. A key strength of the EC program is that it meets schools and teachers “where they’re at” to provide a range of tutoring strategies that address superintendent, principal, and/or teacher preferences. Local innovation, when employed deliberately and aligned with core components of the EC model, does not appear to be a weakness of the EC model but rather a strength of it.

There is evidence that the EC model is becoming more “professionalized,” with a greater reliance on literacy coaches and education professionals in the administration of training. We have also observed a growing emphasis among EC sites on engaging tutors with prior educational experience to take on additional tutoring responsibilities. Moreover, new recommendations encouraging tutors to use a standardized curriculum (*Reading A-Z*) when teachers’ materials and/or curricula do not provide sufficient guidance will provide EC staff and tutors with more clarity around the EC model. When EC finalizes these program components and the Abt team develops a fidelity rubric for each tutoring strategy, we expect that EC sites will soon arrive at a common understanding of the core implementation components that are necessary to successfully execute the EC model. Given these developments, coupled with an upcoming experimental study of the sustained small group strategy, there are numerous learning opportunities on the near horizon.