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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AmeriCorps Service Effects on Participant Civic Engagement

prepared by



10204 Amsterdam Road
Waynesboro, PA 17268
(717) 762-9865
www.veraworks.com

Project Director

Bea Boccalandro
bea@veraworks.com

prepared for

THE WASHINGTON
COMMISSION FOR NATIONAL
AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

PO Box 43113
Olympia, WA 98504-3113
(360) 902-0663
www.ofm.wa.gov/servewa

A study of pre- and post-survey data from 348 Washington AmeriCorps members (from both State and VISTA programs) and from a comparison group of 818 individuals suggests that AmeriCorps service boosts participant civic engagement.

Comparing Washington pre- and post-program data with national comparison group data indicates that Washington AmeriCorps appears to increase many, but not all, measures of civic engagement among participants. This study finds that Washington AmeriCorps service appears to strengthen the following in participants:

- Commitment to community service
- Community service self-efficacy
- Community-based activism
- Connection to community
- Knowledge of community problems
- Personal growth

Positive findings on AmeriCorps civic engagement outcomes are in line with research conducted in Washington, in the Northwest region, and nationally (Cohen, 1997; Jastrzab, 2004; Perry, 2004; Simon and Wang, 2002; Valente, 2004).





Pre- and post-survey data, however, also indicate that Washington AmeriCorps may not increase the following in participants:

- Engagement in the political process
- Importance given to service-oriented careers
- Importance given to neighborhood and civic obligations

Although some studies suggest that AmeriCorps increases participant importance given to neighborhood and civic obligations, these null outcomes are otherwise consistent with national research (Jastrzab, 2004; Perry, 2004).

Because of technical issues, findings regarding the effect of Washington AmeriCorps service on voting participation are inconclusive.

Washington AmeriCorps effectiveness at increasing civic engagement appears to be similar regardless of participant background. There were very few differences in civic engagement outcomes by participant age, gender, race, income level, amount of formal education, national service and community service background, childhood events related to service and civic involvement, reason for joining AmeriCorps, or type of service (VISTA or State)

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One Washington AmeriCorps participant may have summarized this study when she stated that AmeriCorps made her “a deeper kind of patriot than the average American.” Indeed, this analysis of pre- and post-program data finds that AmeriCorps service strengthens civic engagement, regardless of participant age, ethnicity, gender, and background. Although there are manifestations of civic engagement that Washington AmeriCorps service does not appear to increase, such as political involvement, this form of service does appear to boost overall civic engagement. Principally, the data indicate that Washington AmeriCorps service strengthens participant commitment to community service, community service self-efficacy, community-based activism, connection to community, knowledge of community problems, and personal growth. In the words of another participant, AmeriCorps appears to position participants to “definitely... get more involved” after their service.



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