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AMERICORPS
WASHINGTON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AmeriCorps Service as a Personal and Professional Boost

prepared by



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A survey conducted by VeraWorks, Inc., suggests that Washington AmeriCorps service profoundly influences participant professional and personal direction, aspirations and commitments. The survey was completed by 332 respondents, or approximately 40 percent of Washington state AmeriCorps participants of the 2006-2007 service year.

Survey respondents described AmeriCorps as an intense experience boasting rich relationships, compelling and intensely rewarding service work, and novel and challenging experiences. They found many program activities rewarding, from cleaning a park to being mentored by an admired community leader.

Of course, respondents also reported that the AmeriCorps experience had downsides. Chief among these were the financial hardship of living within the program's stipend, paper work and an exhausting schedule. Unfortunately, approximately three percent of respondents considered the overall experience sufficiently flawed so as to have little overall value to them.

For over 97 percent of respondents, however, the pleasures and challenges of the AmeriCorps experience came together as a positive and transformative experience. Participants reported that the AmeriCorps experience made them more skilled, confident, directed and service-oriented.

**"I am sure of where I am going now in life and where I want to end up.
I know how to get there so I will be motivated and doing my best."**

- **Skilled**

Over three quarters of respondents reported higher levels of workplace skills due to AmeriCorps. Respondents reported that their service developed universal workplace skills such as leadership, management, teamwork and communication; as well as selected specialized skills ranging from chain sawing to teaching.





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• **Confident**

Consistent with their rise in skill levels, over a third of respondents reported that they were more certain that they had the abilities, resources and skills to achieve success in school and work.

• **Directed**

Over a quarter of respondents expressed that the AmeriCorps experience gave them a greater sense of clarity about their future. For many, it renewed a sense of purpose and hope for what they wanted to accomplish.

• **Service-Oriented**

Although it was typically not reported as one of most dramatic effects of AmeriCorps service, survey data indicate that the year strengthened participant commitment to serving others in over three-quarters of respondents.

Before AmeriCorps I was...

and now I am...

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Bound in a mindset that the only job I could ever get is in fast food and that I would never move up | • Going to get my bachelors degree |
| • Not on the right track | • About to be in a good job with great references |
| • Without a plan as to where to go next in life | • Ready for the next step! I have set a plan in motion to get where I always imagined myself |
| • Just another college graduate with very little idea what to do with my life or my degree | • A more confident and skilled citizen with the tools to help create a successful future for myself and my community |
| • Ignorant about our community | • Aware of the many opportunities and resources |
| • Depressed and working a dead-end job | • Confident and excited for the future |
| • An observer of the city | • An active member |
| • Segregated | • Diverse in my thinking |
| • Trying to figure out what my main passion was in life | • Sure that my main passion is protecting the environment |
| • Crippled, both [by] my disability and by my mind set | • Accomplished, and on my way to a much better future than I had pre-disability |
| • Doing ok financially | • Broke |
| • Washing dishes | • Never washing dishes again (ever) |
| • Quiet, inexperienced, and skinnier | • Able to voice my opinion, aware of my community roles, and heavier than when I started |

"I am now seeing my future in a whole new light and I am proud of myself."



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The findings from this largely qualitative survey are consistent with quantitative studies completed in the last three years. Three studies commissioned by the Washington Commission for National and Community Service found that, as compared to a national comparison group, Washington AmeriCorps increases participant civic engagement and readiness for educational and employment success; and that AmeriCorps participants are more likely than other Washington workers to be employed in sectors focusing on the public good, such as government, healthcare, elementary and secondary education and nonprofit services.

The story this survey tells is an inspiring one: Participants come to AmeriCorps from all backgrounds and personal and professional highs and lows; they serve their communities with passion, do things they had never done before, develop deep relationships and encounter personal and professional challenges; and – except for a very small minority – emerge newly empowered to study, work, live and serve as their dreams demand.