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The Value of State Service Commissions

EVALUATION REPORT

January 2021

Commissioned
by:

**AMERICA'S
SERVICE
COMMISSIONS**



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Introduction

The purpose of this evaluation is to explore the value that state service commissions bring to their states and territories. The evaluation was conducted in partnership with America's Service Commissions (ASC), and five state service commissions. The participating commissions include OneStar Foundation (TX), Oregon Volunteers, ServeOhio, SerVermont, and UServeUtah.

The evaluators from Dialogues In Action designed a convergent mixed-method outcome evaluation to explore the effects that each of the participating commissions has had on three populations: 1) AmeriCorps program leaders, 2) nonprofit and volunteer service organization leaders, and 3) public officials. The evaluators identified findings for each commission and the findings in this report result from a metasynthesis of those findings.

About Dialogues In Action

Dialogues in Action LLC (DIA) is a consulting firm based in Portland, Oregon dedicated to rethinking the development of people through evaluation, strategy and leadership development. Since 2006, DIA has been providing expertise to social sector organizations throughout North America and beyond to help them deepen their impact. Our style is dialogical and developmental. Our approach is informed by a lens of equity. We believe in the power of an intentional conversation. We also believe in the potential for people, communities, and society to grow, evolve, and reach their fullest potential and we believe national service is a powerful strategy to help them get there.

About America's Service Commissions

America's Service Commissions (ASC) is the national association of the 52 governor-appointed state service commissions. Combined, state service commissions administer 80% of the nation's AmeriCorps State and National funding in addition to promoting national service and volunteering in their respective states. The mission of ASC is to lead and elevate the state service network.

Much more than AmeriCorps

While the evaluators anticipated seeing significant impact among the AmeriCorps programs that are one of the commissions' central areas of focus, the data reveal that the value commissions bring to their states extends well beyond AmeriCorps grant administration, training, and technical assistance. The data reveal that commissions are trusted entities within their states that are recognized by nonprofit and public sector leaders as critical to meeting their states' needs. The findings that follow illuminate how the five commissions participating in this evaluation provide "much more than AmeriCorps" to their states.



The mission of ASC is to lead and elevate the state service network.

State Commission Partners

The five state commissions that partnered with ASC to participate in this evaluation include:

OneStar Foundation (Texas)

The OneStar Foundation was established in 2003 with the purpose of “furthering volunteerism and community service in the State of Texas.” OneStar’s mission is to strengthen Texas communities by creating pathways for individuals and organizations to engage, connect, and accelerate their impact.

As the state service commission for Texas, OneStar administers \$18.8 million in federal funding per year to a portfolio of 32 AmeriCorps Texas programs, made up of nonprofits, state agencies, and P-16 educational institutions. OneStar also serves as a sponsor organization for AmeriCorps VISTA, placing AmeriCorps VISTA members with host site organizations throughout the state of Texas.



Oregon Volunteers

Oregon Volunteers, also known as the Commission for Voluntary Action & Service, was created in 1994 to provide Oregonians with a statewide entity to focus service and volunteer efforts, to enhance the ethic of service and voluntarism in the state and provide funds for state-based AmeriCorps programs. As a state commission, Oregon Volunteers’ role is to promote and elevate service, volunteerism and civic engagement in Oregon Communities.

The Commission’s work is supported and advised by a maximum 25-member board of Governor-appointed commissioners. Oregon Volunteers is housed in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) Office of Workforce Investments.



ServeOhio

ServeOhio is the Ohio’s Commission on Service and Volunteerism. It was created to empower local communities to mobilize AmeriCorps members and volunteer resources for the purpose of building a stronger Ohio. Through collaborations and partnerships with nonprofit, government, and community organizations across the state, ServeOhio increases the effective utilization of AmeriCorps members and community volunteers working to address the state’s frontline issues in education, health, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship.

ServeOhio administers Ohio AmeriCorps programs through formula and competitive funding to help solve the state’s most critical challenges. In Program Year 2019-2020, ServeOhio supported 26 AmeriCorps programs placing more than 900 AmeriCorps members to serve communities at 497 service sites across the state.



ServeOhio also works directly with volunteer program administrators at nonprofit, government, and community organizations to provide them with the tools and skills they need to strategically engage volunteers. ServeOhio helps community organizations build capacity to increase their volunteer recruitment efforts, enabling more volunteers to serve communities in need. ServeOhio administers the ServeOhio Awards, leads the Skills-Based Volunteerism Training Academy, and hosts the Ohio Conference on Service & Volunteerism.

ServeOhio is led by an 21-member commission with 15 members appointed by the governor.

SerVermont

SerVermont is Vermont's State Service Commission. SerVermont's mission is to support, promote and recognize volunteerism and community service in Vermont. SerVermont's activities include administering grants for Vermont's AmeriCorps State programs, monitoring AmeriCorps programs to ensure compliance with federal regulations, promoting inclusion within the programs, and working to expand opportunities to serve in Vermont. SerVermont also serves as a sponsor organization for AmeriCorps VISTA, placing AmeriCorps VISTA members with host site organizations in Vermont.

SerVermont is part of the Vermont Agency of Human Services, and national service is the means through which SerVermont works on the agency's mission to improve the health and well-being of Vermonters today and tomorrow, and to protect those among us who are unable to protect themselves.

UServeUtah

UServeUtah, the Utah Commission on Service and Volunteerism, was created by state statute in 1994 and is comprised of 20 members representing local government, community-based organizations, and statewide networks as well as 10 staff. Since its inception, UServeUtah has worked to inspire, equip, and mobilize individuals and organizations to take action to transform their communities.

UServeUtah accomplishes this through national service and community engagement. UServeUtah manages the Utah AmeriCorps State program portfolio comprised of 11 AmeriCorps programs that target underserved and at-risk populations in the areas of: Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Disaster Preparedness, Healthy Futures and Veterans and Military Families.

UServeUtah also seeks to establish a strong infrastructure to support community engagement in Utah and functions as a consultant and training resource to expand organizational capacity and increase volunteer utilization. UServeUtah also actively promotes civic participation and is committed to supporting quality community engagement opportunities.



Evaluation Methodology

This section describes the methods used to evaluate the impact of commissions. It describes the focus of the inquiry, research questions explored, sampling strategy, and the qualitative and quantitative methods used for data collection and analysis.

Focus of the Evaluation

This evaluation focused on gathering data to inform the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the value that state commissions bring to their states?

This primary focus of this evaluation is to capture and communicate findings from both quantitative and qualitative data about the value of state service commissions. The evaluators collaborated with commission staff to identify intended impacts for each commission. The evaluators determined common areas of impact to identify the following categories of intended impact on which to focus the evaluation. These impacts, along with other benefits commissions bring to their states, demonstrate the value of commissions.

Intended Impacts

1. AmeriCorps program leaders deliver efficient and effective service programs.
2. AmeriCorps program leaders deepen and expand their program's impact.
3. AmeriCorps program leaders create meaningful and productive member experiences.
4. Social sector leaders develop the capacity to effectively engage volunteers and national service members.
5. Public officials become champions for service and volunteerism.
6. AmeriCorps members develop habits of civic engagement.

Research Question 2: What are the key catalysts of commissions' impact?

The evaluation is also designed to discover the critical catalysts influencing the impact in AmeriCorps program leaders, nonprofit and volunteer service organization leaders, and public officials in each state. By describing the factors and features contributing to the commissions' potency, this evaluation provides insight into the kinds of strategies that give commissions a unique influence and effect. These insights not only inform the future of commissions' work but also lend insight into how state service commissions can maximize impact individually and collectively.

Definitions

AmeriCorps agency. The federal agency formerly known as the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that administers federal AmeriCorps funding to state commissions and AmeriCorps National programs.

AmeriCorps National.

AmeriCorps programs serving more than one state. AmeriCorps National funding is awarded and administered by the AmeriCorps agency.

AmeriCorps State.

AmeriCorps programs serving a single state. AmeriCorps State funding is awarded and administered by state service commissions.

AmeriCorps VISTA.

AmeriCorps members who are recruited by a sponsor organization and placed with local organizations to build their capacity to address issues related to poverty.

Social sector.

The collection of nongovernmental and governmental organizations working to address social issues and advance social progress.

Volunteer Service Organization

(VSO). An organization that engages volunteers in service to achieve all or part of their mission.

Evaluation Methods

To answer the primary research questions, the evaluators designed a convergent mixed-method outcome evaluation focused on the intended impacts.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the qualitative portion of the evaluation, the evaluators developed an in-depth interview protocol to gain data about the structural, qualitative changes resulting from commissions. Purposeful stratified sampling technique was used to select a representative sample from the following populations:

- **AmeriCorps program leaders** – Program directors and managers of AmeriCorps State programs that are funded by commissions and AmeriCorps National programs that are funded by CNCS and informally supported by commissions.
- **Nonprofit and volunteer service organization leaders** – Leadership from nonprofit and public sector organizations that partner with commissions. These organizations include the host sites for AmeriCorps members and VISTAs. In Texas and Vermont, the sample of leaders was delimited to the VISTA host site supervisors who supervise AmeriCorps VISTA members placed with their organizations.
- **Public officials** – Elected or appointed local, regional, and state officials who are involved with the commission in a variety of ways, including public policy, community events, and advocacy. The governor-appointed commissioners that serve on the boards for each state service commission are included in this population.

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the quantitative portion of the evaluation, we designed a questionnaire to collect data on changes that have occurred as a result of the commissions. The evaluators administered this instrument to a broader range of people from the same three populations: AmeriCorps program leaders, nonprofit/volunteer service organization leaders, and public officials. See Table 2 for sample sizes for the quantitative survey for each commission. The data were analyzed primarily using measures of central tendency, looking principally at the mean responses for each item. Due to the differences in sample sizes for the commissions, the evaluators determined a weighted mean based on the proportion of responses from each commission. The evaluators identified key insights, patterns, and gaps within the data and incorporated these discoveries into the related findings.

Table 1. Sample Sizes for Qualitative Interviews & Quantitative Survey

	AmeriCorps Program Leaders		Nonprofit/VSO Leaders		Public Officials		TOTAL	
	Interviews	Survey	Interviews	Survey	Interviews	Survey	Interviews	Survey
OneStar Foundation	15	30	7	23	0*	0*	22	53
OregonVolunteers	13	0*	4	0*	0*	0*	17	0*
ServeOhio	11	25	7	14	2	10	20	49
ServeVermont	8	11	8	69	0*	8	16	88
UServeUtah	8	8	9	80	5	17	22	105
TOTAL	55	82	35	186	8	35	98	303

* Commissions opted to exclude these groups from the interviews or survey either due to the timing or the scope of interest.

Limitations

The limitations that may have influenced the findings from this evaluation include the following:

The evaluation was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Early in the data collection stage, the country was wracked with the COVID-19 pandemic. Commission staff were required to focus their attention on the emerging challenges of leadership within their states to support and provide assistance and guidance to their grantees and partners, coordinate with state agencies to increase the efficacy of pandemic response, and provide leadership throughout their states. As such, both the timing of data collection, reach of participation, and the timeliness of reporting were affected. Several other limitations resulted from this including:

- **Limited sample sizes for quantitative data.** Part of the consequence of data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic was the limited responsiveness from people through the surveys. This limitation provides reason to exercise caution when interpreting and generalizing from the survey data.
- **Lack of representation from public officials.** The design of the study was to include more substantial representation of the perceptions of public officials. For a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the responsibility of officials to exercise leadership in response to the pandemic, the participation of public officials was limited. As a consequence, their voice is only limited in this report.

The evaluation scope did not include AmeriCorps members.

Each state that participated in the study has at least several hundred AmeriCorps members serving in the state through the AmeriCorps State programs that the commissions fund. Many of the commissions provide training directly to these members as well as supporting AmeriCorps State programs in providing a quality member experience. Therefore, AmeriCorps members represent a significant mode by which commissions impact their states. However, to keep the evaluation within scope, the decision was made to survey instead of interview the AmeriCorps members. This delimitation in the design results in the commissions' impact on AmeriCorps members coming solely from their responses to the quantitative survey and second-hand through interviews with leaders.

The participating commissions were not systematically selected.

The five commissions that participated in the study were not selected in a manner that ensures randomization or representation. Instead, all commissions were offered the opportunity to participate in the evaluation and the participating commissions opted in. While there is significant variety in the characteristics of the participating commissions, the fact that they opted in while others did not may indicate that these commissions are different from those that did not opt in. This may limit the representativeness and generalizability of the data and provides reason to be judicious when interpreting the data.

Findings About Commissions' Impact

This section provides a discussion of the most significant insights, or findings, discovered through the collective data from the five participating commissions. Each finding includes a description and interpretation of the data as well as examples of qualitative and quantitative data that led the evaluators to the finding. This first section of findings highlights insights about impact that prove the value of commissions' work in their states.

Part 1: Impact on AmeriCorps Programs and Leaders

Findings 1 through 3 are focused on commissions' role administering the AmeriCorps funding in their states. This includes providing training and technical assistance to AmeriCorps State grantees. Although not required, commissions provide training and technical assistance to AmeriCorps National grantees as well and their perspectives are also reflected in the findings.



1. Helping AmeriCorps programs navigate complexity

Key Insight: Commissions’ training and support help AmeriCorps program leaders understand complex requirements and make better decisions.

Throughout the interviews, AmeriCorps program leaders reported that one of the most significant areas of impact that commissions have had is helping them navigate complex national service requirements. Interviewees described these requirements as being ambiguous and changing frequently. The guidance for these requirements that comes from the AmeriCorps agency often produces confusion. Many of the requirements lack specificity and are subject to interpretation. Commissions’ in-depth knowledge of AmeriCorps requirements and their supportive approach help leaders develop a practical understanding of what they are required to do. This also helps them to understand the costs and benefits associated with possible options to implement the requirements.

1.1 Reducing risk

The training and technical assistance commissions provide is highly valued for helping programs

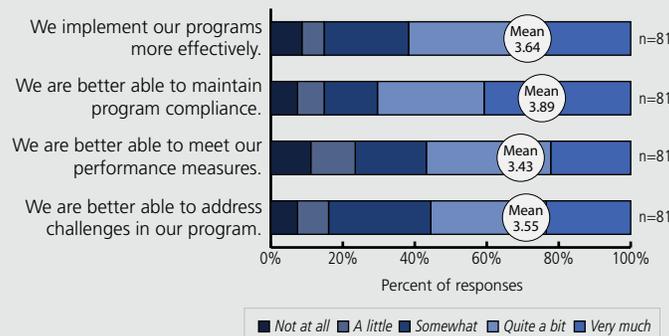
understand compliance and mitigate risk. The risks associated with noncompliance are a tremendous source of fear and stress for AmeriCorps program leaders. Leaders find comfort in commissions’ extensive knowledge of AmeriCorps requirements and willingness to advocate with the AmeriCorps agency on behalf of programs. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

There are a lot of gray areas with [the AmeriCorps agency], especially when it comes to things like [exiting members for compelling personal circumstances] and what is allowable and unallowable. There is no clear guidance from [the AmeriCorps agency] and sometimes it comes down to who the auditor is. That is always really frustrating. [The commission] helps us understand the risks. They are patient and supportive. They tell us, “Here are your risks if you do it this way.”

The survey data also show that programs are better able to maintain compliance and deliver effective service as a result of commissions. More than 61% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they are quite a bit or very much better able to implement their programs more effectively as a result of commissions. More than 70% report that they are quite a bit or very much better able to maintain program compliance. More than 55% of AmeriCorps programs leaders report that they are quite a bit or very much better able to meet their performance measures and address challenges in their programs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. AmeriCorps programs are better able to maintain compliance and deliver effective service as a result of commissions.

As a result of our state service commission...



1.2 Providing relevant resources

Commissions also have a deep understanding of the context in which programs operate, both internally in their organizations and externally in their community and state. The data reveal that this contextual knowledge gives commissions a unique ability to provide relevant support to leaders. Many commission staff also have direct program management experience that enables them to give practical guidance that is trusted by program leaders. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

Especially at the beginning when I was first starting in my role as AmeriCorps program director, I really benefitted from all of the guidance and the very clear concise explanations of the policies, procedures, and expectations. It is a really overwhelming role to step into because there is so much to remember and there is so much detail. I have always felt like that has been where the commission has been the most useful for my role is sifting through all of that and making sense of it and understanding what we need as a program to meet requirements and expectations.

1.3 Highlighting strengths and challenges

Commissions' monitoring processes are one of the key tools that AmeriCorps program leaders rely upon to ensure they maintain compliance and to help illuminate program successes and challenges. Leaders value how the monitoring process helps them gain deeper insight into their program's performance and develop a pathway to improve upon it. Monitoring reveals why something is or is not working well. It provides the insight that helps leaders make improvements broadly across their program and organization. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

We have monitoring events that occur on an annual basis. Those are really helpful as far as keeping us on track and making sure that we are keeping all the nuts and bolts of our program together. There are so many moving parts to any AmeriCorps program, especially as you are adding more and more people and sites and different components as you are moving throughout the community. When we are able to have those visits and be able to get feedback from our partners at the state about why something is happening, why we are doing well in an area or why we need to improve in another area, that is huge. And we do really appreciate that, and our staff takes that really seriously.

Significance

Gaining greater clarity about complex requirements and program performance has cascading effects for leaders and organizations. It is critical for leaders to thoroughly understand requirements so they can implement more effective practices. More effective practices help to strengthen the organization to promote sustainability and a more significant impact.

Practice Spotlight

OneStar Foundation's AmeriCorps Texas Grantee Resources

The **AmeriCorps Texas Grantee Resources page** on OneStar Foundation's website is a vital resource for AmeriCorps Texas programs and was noted as a helpful tool by AmeriCorps leaders in other states as well. The Grantee Resources page is a one-stop shop for all of the information AmeriCorps programs leaders need including communications, policies and procedures, detailed instructions for a required processes, checklists, document templates, communications materials, and much more. This resource enables AmeriCorps Texas grantees to easily access the information they need to operate high quality, compliant programs and helps them ask more informed questions of their program officer or grants officer.

2. Humanizing compliance to help AmeriCorps leaders and programs evolve

Key insight: Commissions' relational approach creates openness and trust that helps leaders move beyond compliance to achieve strategic goals.

One of the factors that drive commissions' effectiveness in helping AmeriCorps program leaders navigate the complexity of national service and advance their missions is the relational approach that commissions employ in their work with their AmeriCorps subgrantees. The strong relationships between commission staff and AmeriCorps program leaders create an environment where leaders feel comfortable asking questions and revealing challenges. They enable leaders to feel both accountable and encouraged, as though they are not alone in the challenges they face. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

I have a good personal rapport with our program officer. All of these requirements and last-minute requests can feel dehumanizing, burdensome, and unreasonable. It feels doable when we are true partners.

Another said,

[Our work with the commission is] really relationship based. It is not just a giant organization where you never know who to talk to, or what you are going to get. You know, we meet with them regularly, we know who they are. And there is a very strong relationship.

2.1 Developing confidence to improve program quality

While AmeriCorps program leaders all recognize the necessity of compliance, they also acknowledged that the regulations and how they are approached by the AmeriCorps agency are, in the words of one leader, "dehumanizing." The guidance feels abstract and disconnected from the realities of running a program.

Commissions bring a relational element to compliance that helps programs embrace it and strive to be better. When people have a supportive, trustworthy human connection, their fear is reduced, and they believe in their ability to do more. Reducing their fear helped their confidence to grow and enabled them make changes to improve their program. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

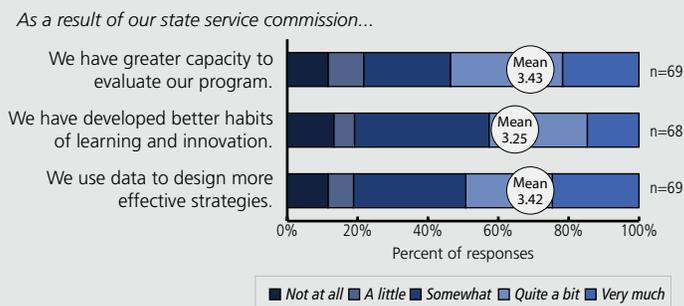
My contact with [the commission] has given me confidence because of the reliability of the information that they put out there. Once you have your compliance under control, I think having that solid foundation and confidence sets the stage for true leadership where you can expand on what you have and also share with others [in my organization].

2.2 Embracing continuous improvement

The data reveal that, for many AmeriCorps program leaders, their growing confidence coupled with the trust they have established with commissions helps them view the commissions' role as much more expansive than administering funding and ensuring compliance. They see commissions as partners in continuous improvement. Commissions help them recognize challenges and opportunities and adapt to changing circumstances. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

I am no longer thinking about our program as something static. If we do a good job at a certain time or reach a certain level as an organization, we are not going to be good to go forever. Instead, I think the Commission has been able to keep us thinking about how we are continuously improving

Figure 2. AmeriCorps program leaders are better able to learn from data to improve their program.



operations. They keep us informed about what the future holds, what the risks there are, where our funding is going to come from, what the challenges are within the community, or the people and places that we serve. I think that is something that I have definitely benefited from. All the trainings that the Commission has put on have helped the organization be nimble. They have allowed us to grow and have allowed us to increase the quality of experience for AmeriCorps members.

The survey data reveal that many AmeriCorps program leaders are better able to learn from data to improve their programs as a result of commissions. 53.6% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they have quite a bit or very much greater capacity to evaluate their programs. 42.7% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they have developed quite a bit or very much better habits of learning and innovation. 49.3% report that they use data to design more effective strategies (see Figure 2).

Significance

Commissions' relational approach helps leaders see that there is a person behind the request for compliance. It encourages them and makes them feel supported in their work. People are more likely to comply when they believe that they share something in common with the person making the request. They are also more likely to comply when they are reciprocating kindness that has been extended to them. These factors create a more positive environment with greater receptivity and responsiveness to requests and new requirements. A positive environment also promotes greater comfort, allowing people the liberty to ask questions and seek guidance when facing challenges. This enables leaders to prevent noncompliance and more proactively address challenges.

3. Building capacity for impact, innovation, and sustainability

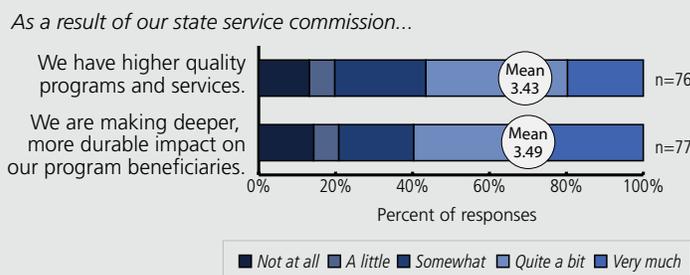
Key Insight: Commissions' support enables AmeriCorps programs to experiment, broaden the scope and scale of their work, and promotes long-term organizational health.

AmeriCorps program leaders place significant value on the resources and support that commissions provide to increase their aptitude and improve program quality. These resources help leaders improve policies and systems within their programs and projects that lead to overall quality improvements. Once these policies and systems are in place and leaders feel secure with their programs operations, they can focus on being more strategic and increasing their impact.

3.1 Promoting operational excellence

Leaders are becoming more confident in their program's ability to have a more significant effect on the community as a result of commissions' support. They are better able to recognize their programs' strengths and envision its success in meeting its goals. They feel confident that they can take on greater challenges to meet community needs. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

Figure 3. AmeriCorps programs are becoming more effective and impactful.



We have fallen into more of a groove now that we have all those procedures established. Now we can focus more on operational excellence. We can evolve to optimize service for the members so that they are feeling productive about what they are contributing to the program and they do not feel like they have any idle time.

The survey data also show that programs are becoming more effective and impactful. 56.6% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they have quite a bit or very much higher quality programs and services as a result of commissions and 59.7% report that they are making quite a bit or very much deeper, more durable impact on their program beneficiaries (see Figure 3).

3.2 Seeing the bigger picture

Commissions' unique vantage point gives them insight into what is happening across the state and country. The data reveal that commissions help to elevate programs' gaze above day-to-day operations and connect them to the bigger picture of service. Gaining a big-picture perspective allows leaders to make more strategic decisions and prioritize actions more effectively. For example, one leader said,

They give us access to training and best practices. We have become connected to other long-standing programs across the state, but there are also new programs that are coming up that we are able to connect to, which is really exciting for us. Being able to know the bigger picture of national service in Ohio, and the way that the Commission draws that together, is really critical. Being able to see that from a big picture model is really helpful. It makes us drop back and look at things from a slightly higher level to be able to get out of our day-to-day and helps us learn.

Another said,

The commission helps me to feel like change is being enacted and I am providing some sort of support to make that happen...The commission pushes that the goal is to serve [our state] and makes me feel connected to all the other agencies that are doing the same work.

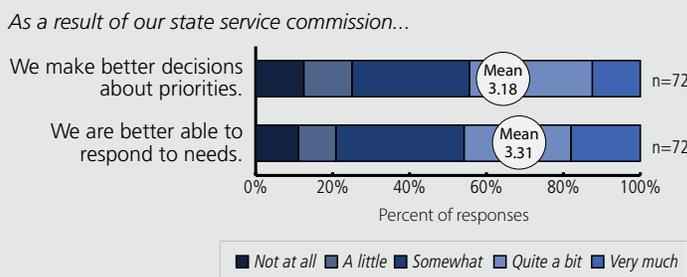
The survey data show that AmeriCorps program leaders are able to make more strategic decisions with commissions' support. 44.4% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they make quite a bit or very much better decisions about priorities. 45.8% report that they are quite a bit or very much better able to respond to needs (see Figure 4).

3.3 Illuminating trends

AmeriCorps program leaders value commissions' ability to identify trends in their states and nationally. Understanding these trends equips leaders to be better prepared to meet the needs their staff, their communities, and their program beneficiaries. Knowing about national service trends also allows leaders to plan for changes in the landscape of national service and AmeriCorps priorities. They can react proactively to ensure their programs are set up for success and sustainability. Being more proactive allows leaders the time to ensure they have the resources they need to effectively steward change in their organizations. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

Anticipating trends and changes has been really helpful because typically nonprofits keep our heads in the game of running the program or providing the service. It is hard to both do the micro and implementation and also keep tabs on all of the larger trends and be anticipating and understanding

Figure 4. AmeriCorps program leaders are able to make more strategic decisions.



what changes mean. That kind of thinking and interpretation has been a really helpful model for me as a leader.

Another said,

[Working with the commission] definitely makes you think strategically and practically about what it is going to take to maintain, to expand, or to right-size. It helps you see patterns of where you might need to go. Sometimes in the nonprofit world we tend to build the plane as we are flying it and I think this helps us to do better at being more proactive and creating better infrastructure to support what it is we are trying to do. I think this helps us be smarter for the long term to make better change.

3.4 Supporting sustainability

The interviews revealed that commissions' support is also contributing to the sustainability of programs. The policies, procedures, and practices that programs develop with commissions' training and support enable them to more efficiently and effectively use resources. Commissions also advocate for programs with the AmeriCorps agency when they make changes to program design or implementation and through the grant application process. Commissions' review of grant applications ensures that the applications are high quality. Commissions also support programs' long-term success by ensuring that their applications align

with the AmeriCorps agency priorities. Interviewees also emphasized the importance of commissions helping them navigate changes that require the AmeriCorps agency approval and the grant application process. One leader said,

[The commission has] advocated when we have budget modifications or changes in our programming. They have helped us in advocating when it has to go up to the national level. They do a review when we submit our grant before it goes to national and have given us good guidance that has been helpful.

The survey data also show that commissions are supporting the stability and sustainability of AmeriCorps programs. 53.3% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that their organizations are quite a bit or very much more stable and 59.7% report that their programs are more sustainable as a result of commissions (see Figure 5).

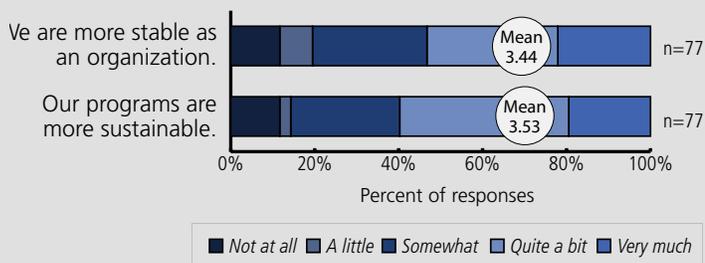
Significance

Strengthening the ability of leaders to be more strategic leverages the investment of resources, time, and energy. The work of commissions to sharpen the strategy of program leaders creates benefits that far outlast the intervention. When people can work "smarter, not harder," there is typically a release of energy in the work, draw of people to the work, and deepening of commitment for the work. People recognize that the work is having maximum effect, and that recognition is exciting and motivating.



Figure 5. AmeriCorps programs are more stable and sustainable.

As a result of our state service commission...



Findings About Commissions' Impact

This section provides a discussion of the most significant insights, or findings, discovered through the collective data from the five participating commissions. Each finding includes a description and interpretation of the data as well as examples of qualitative and quantitative data that led the evaluators to the finding. This first section of findings highlights insights about impact that prove the value of commissions' work in their states.



Part 2: Impact on the Social Sector and Communities

Findings 4 through 7 are focused on the impact of commissions on the social sector. The roles of commissions vary greatly from state to state. The findings that follow were resonant in the data despite differences in the commissions' functions.

4. Improving the state's ability to understand and meet community needs

Key insight: Commissions provide a critical link between community needs and the resources to address them.

The data reveal that people see commissions as connectors between on-the-ground community needs and state and federal government resources. They are viewed as the “good guys,” in the words of one interviewee, that are truly there to listen, and help people identify and access resources to assist. The link the commissions provide between needs and resources is seen as critical to helping communities achieve their goals. One public official said,

Especially where I am, the commission's projects I have worked with are critical to community successes. Without them, I would be fearful to see what the community would be like.

4.1 Deep local knowledge builds trust

Throughout the interviews, interviewees described commissions as having a unique understanding of the local context that few other state agencies have. They described commission staff and commissioners actively engaging in community and program events. AmeriCorps program leaders and nonprofit sector leaders welcomed the opportunity to host commission staff and commissioners. Leaders felt that these visits were intentional and thoughtful and enabled the commission to better understand the community and find the right match between needs and resources.

Rural communities, in particular, see commissions as their ally and partner to help them access much-needed resources. Throughout the interviews, commissions were celebrated by rural leaders as one of the few government agencies that truly understand them. They described commissions as, in the words of one interviewee, “paying attention” to rural communities and understanding their unique situations and needs. One AmeriCorps program leader in a rural community said,

The commission understands...When I am writing my grant and asking for funding, they know our cost will be higher because we are offering mileage reimbursement when our members have to drive 45 minutes to get to our office. They just get it. They know our host sites and understand the demographics of our area. They show us that they support our grant and our program, and they want us to be here. That makes a huge difference in this area.

4.2 Infusing energy and ideas into communities

In addition to the value of the financial resources the commission awards or connects people to, leaders also cited the value of the human resources that commissions bring to their states. The energy and new perspectives that AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps VISTAs bring to communities is tremendously valuable to enhance the capacity of communities and contribute to the vitality of communities. One nonprofit leader from a rural community said,

One of the things we know about AmeriCorps programs in [our state] is that people move here from another state to take on AmeriCorps positions and then they stay here. That is really important because a big thing in [rural communities] is that we do not have enough young people. We know now that AmeriCorps is a big piece of that. We bring all these young people in, they get hooked, and then they stay here.”

Commission staff and commissioners also bring resources to organizations and communities because of their breadth of experience and opportunity to interact with organizations across the state. This statewide perspective enables commission staff to share information about successful programs and practices that local leaders can adopt.

4.3 Building capacity for impact

Leaders also saw community organizations being able to do more and coming together to better serve their communities because of commissions. Organizations that partner with commissions and AmeriCorps programs such as AmeriCorps member host sites, and VISTA host sites in Vermont and Texas, described having greater capacity to serve the community and achieve their missions. Leaders recognized that their

organization’s ability to work more effectively catalyzed more effective work in the organizations they partner with as well. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

It makes a lot of [our host sites’] programs doable because they know they have AmeriCorps support. They wouldn’t have the financial means to hire five employees to run [children’s] camps. We have a public library that runs a bookmobile. They have an AmeriCorps member drive the bookmobile to local daycares and schools, providing early literacy to youth. And the director there has said that if they did not have an AmeriCorps member every year, the bookmobile could not run. We know that the kids in the area would not get this access to early literacy if an AmeriCorps member did not serve at the library.

The survey data show that AmeriCorps member host sites significantly increase their capacity as a result of commissions. 73.8% of AmeriCorps member host sites report increasing the capacity of their organizations quite a bit or very much and 74.4% report being quite a bit or very much better able to expand services as a result of having an AmeriCorps member placed with their organizations (see Figure 6).

The value of commissions serving as VISTA intermediaries stood out for building the capacity of organizations that were at a critical juncture where their organizational capacity limited their ability to address critical needs. The OneStar Foundation and SerVermont serve as VISTA intermediaries for their states supporting the recruitment, training, and placement of AmeriCorps VISTAs with social sector organizations. The data from SerVermont and the OneStar Foundation show that when commissions can use their expertise to place

VISTAs to build the capacity of organizations it has a tremendous effect on those organizations’ ability to advance their missions. The commissions’ expertise in AmeriCorps compliance also reduces the burden of compliance for small community organizations and makes adding this capacity viable. As one nonprofit leader said,

[The commission] is a great partner and we could not exist at the scale that we do without them. If part of our strategy is that we need X amount of people to run a program, and we can employ X amount of people, there would be a big gap. We could never reach that capacity without [VISTAs].

Another nonprofit leader said,

[Having a VISTA] has always made things feel possible. Having responsive and semi-flexible VISTA capacity that I can work with someone [at the commission] to adapt each year to make sure that it is the right project ensures that we keep growing and that when there’s new work to be done there is the possibility of expanding our capacity.

The survey data also show that VISTAs are substantially increasing the ability for organizations to deepen and expand their impact. More than 85% of VISTA host site supervisors report that they are quite a bit or very much making a deeper impact on their program beneficiaries as a result of commissions and more than 64% report that they are quite a bit or very much better able to respond to needs. More than 71% of VISTA host site supervisors also report that they are quite a bit or very much better prepared to expand the reach of their programs as a result of commissions (see Figure 7).

Figure 6. AmeriCorps member host sites significantly increase their capacity.

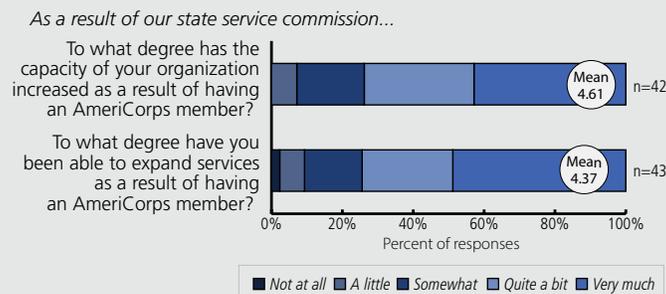
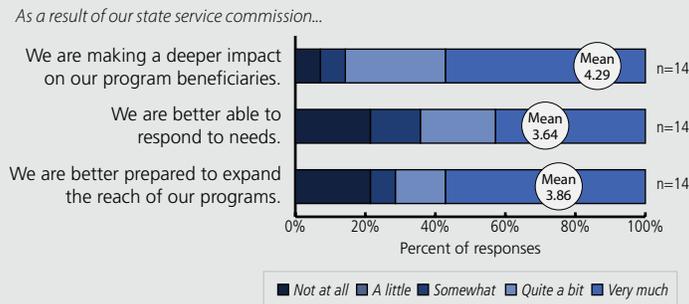


Figure 7. AmeriCorps VISTA host sites are increasing their capability to deepen and expand their impact.



Significance

The data reveal that commissions are trusted partners that play a vital role in helping communities access resources and, ultimately, realize their potential. The helping nature of the work that commissions do and the relationships that commissions build with community members and organizations, play a critical role in supporting ongoing collaboration within the community and with government. This promotes community-driven solutions and ownership within communities, which supports long-term change.

5. Developing the next generation of social sector leaders

Key insight: Commissions are supporting the development of AmeriCorps members into the next generation of leaders for the social sector.

AmeriCorps program leaders, nonprofit sector leaders, and public officials alike recognize the value of the training and experience that AmeriCorps members receive with the support from commissions. Commissions’ provide direct training to promote member development and support AmeriCorps programs in providing high quality member development opportunities and meaningful service experiences. The data reveals that this training and experience helps members develop into effective and empathetic social sector leaders. One leader said,

The untapped potential of AmeriCorps members is tremendous. They are so transformed by their experience. They go into something mission driven. They bring understanding of people and needs. They bring that experience to enrich whatever they do moving forward. When you add it all up, the resources leveraged to make a difference is enormous.

5.1 Building professional skills

Commissions provide a broad range of development opportunities for AmeriCorps members that are widely recognized for building critical professional skills for members during their service year and beyond. These trainings provide foundational skills for members’ service such as volunteer engagement and professionalism. Some provide members with an opportunity to develop or deepen their leadership capacity in a variety of areas. Other offer an opportunity for members to reflect on their service experience and chart a lifelong path for service. Many leaders regarded these trainings as valuable to the entire social sector. For example, one leader said,

[The training the commission provides] has been wonderful for my members...It would be good to take to my site supervisors as tools to develop AmeriCorps members. It would help them in their work too.

The survey data show that current AmeriCorps and VISTA members and AmeriCorps and VISTA alums are developing skills that enable them to be more effective social sector leaders as a result of commissions. Current members and alums report that they have a better understanding of community needs, are better able to involve others in serving their community and are more

effective champions for service. They also report that they are a better able to pursue their future goals and they are more motivated to use their life to make a positive difference in their community (see Figure 8).

5.2 Cultivating engaged citizens

One of the attributes that commissions help to develop in AmeriCorps members, VISTAs and other upcoming leaders is a deep commitment to civic engagement. Leaders recognize the value of cultivating a strong desire to be engaged in communities coupled with the skills to take action on behalf of communities as critical to organizations, communities and society. One public official said,

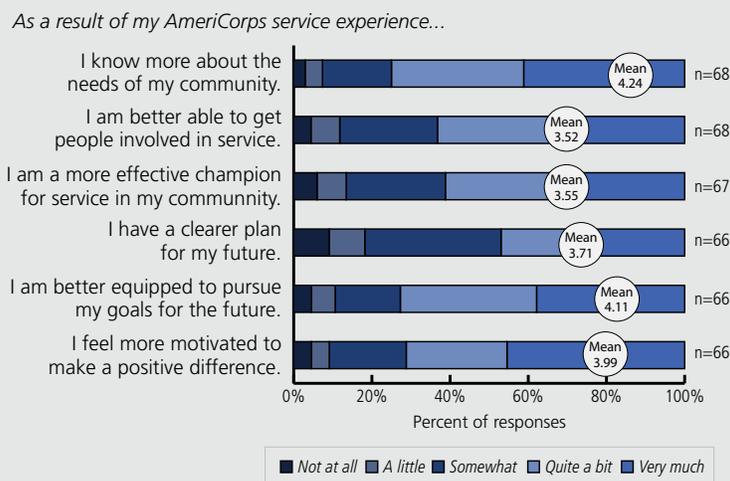
To meet AmeriCorps members and to hear about their experiences definitely changed my awareness and attitude about the importance of having those kinds of opportunities for the young people who are experiencing them, for the nonprofit sector, and for our state. Members' meaningful involvement and engagement with their communities in new ways helps them understand what is happening in their community in different ways than they are exposed to in their everyday lives. Having that kind of a sustained engagement over a long period of time makes a significant contribution to civil society.

The survey data also show that current AmeriCorps and VISTA members and alums are more engaged citizens. Members and alums report that they take greater responsibility for the welfare of their community, place greater value on service and volunteerism and are more actively engaged in their communities.

Significance

The social sector requires leaders with the experience, skills, and commitment to navigate the unique challenges that mission-driven organizations face. Leaders must be able to employ a range of skills to ensure the success and sustainability of organizations and meet the needs in the community. With standard turnover in the nonprofit sector averaging 19% and some reports claiming that as many as 45% of the nonprofit workforce is predicted to turn over in the next five years, it is critical for the sector to have a pool of capable candidates at the ready. The AmeriCorps member experience is a valuable training for these skills and ensures that members understand what it takes to do this challenging work. Commissions' work to help AmeriCorps program leaders create quality member training and experiences and their emphasis on developing the leadership capabilities of members will be valuable to ensure that the social sector and communities continue to thrive.

Figure 8. AmeriCorps and VISTA members and alums are developing skills to be more effective social sector leaders.



6. Enriching nonprofit culture and practices

Key Insight: The whole organization benefits from the ripple effect of commissions' training and support for AmeriCorps programs.

Organizations that sponsor AmeriCorps programs receive significant auxiliary benefits from their AmeriCorps program's work with commissions. The training and support that AmeriCorps program staff receive coupled with the grant management training and support that sponsor organization and host site staff receive, create stronger policies and practices for organizations. This professional support develops the skills of staff organization-wide and promotes the sustainability of the organization. One organization leader said,

They have helped grow a lot of programs that were sustainable, which means, in my experience, that they really focus on supporting us professionally.

6.1 Improving training organization-wide

One of the areas where organizations benefit the most is through improving training for all staff based on what the organization learns has worked for AmeriCorps. Training that commissions provide adds relevant content to sponsor organizations' training repertoire. One sponsor organization leader said,

We have changed our whole training program, not just for AmeriCorps, but for the rest of our team, to encompass some of the things that we were hearing from some of the AmeriCorps members. We are using a lot of the modeling and the systems we have developed to train AmeriCorps to train new staff. We have been able to cross-utilize lots of the tools that we have developed for some of our other programming. So as far as organizational outlook, it is very exciting,

Another said,

I would say one of the biggest benefits [of working with the commission] has been developing training for not just AmeriCorps members but for all of our staff. We are providing training in topics like different workplace cultures and cultural diversity. That has helped our discussions throughout our large agency. Our AmeriCorps directors have done training at our different partner sites also.

Practice Spotlight

Commission training to develop civically engaged leaders

Oregon Volunteers Life After AmeriCorps

provides training to members at the end of their term of service to help them prepare for the life path of their choosing. Oregon Volunteers brings in AmeriCorps alums and community leaders to present content in their areas of expertise. These connections help members build a network to support their future paths as well.

ServeOhio LeaderCorps gives at least one current AmeriCorps member from each AmeriCorps State Program the opportunity to participate in additional leadership training provided by ServeOhio. LeaderCorps members promote awareness of AmeriCorps across Ohio through effective outreach, regional collaboration and member engagement. They also learn to design and implement service projects to engage their community in service.

The **SerVermont National Service**

Conference is held each December to help AmeriCorps members connect and learn at a critical time in their service year. Members reflect on their first months of service, engage in training, and network with other members to help reignite their passion for their service as winter sets in and build skills to carry them through the rest of the service year and beyond.

The **UServeUtah Active Engagement**

Retreat uses the Stanford Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement curriculum to help AmeriCorps members and other up and coming leaders discover and reflect on their passions and purpose and explore pathways for civic engagement throughout their lives. In this two-day retreat, participants learn how to recognize assets in their communities, how to collaborate with community members to make an impact, and how to create a plan for a life of service and civic engagement that aligns with their personal interests and goals.

6.2 Improving management practices

Many management practices encouraged by commissions have been adopted broadly throughout sponsor organizations. Sponsor organizations have refined their human resources policies and practices based on those developed for AmeriCorps members. Many are also working with community partners more effectively by using the approaches developed to supervise AmeriCorps member placement sites. One leader said that the clarity of expectations for all staff in the organization has improved because of AmeriCorps:

We are making sure that we are really clear about what our direct service workers are accountable for and that they have clear directions about how to achieve that. You have to be more conscious of this when you get a new AmeriCorps member. Recognizing the importance of giving people all the information they need and communicating to people in an accessible way is something that has benefited our organization.

Another described building practices for more consistent partner engagement:

Our AmeriCorps program has opened our eyes to how different each of our placement sites are. In the past, we have been inconsistent in how we interact with them. Now, we develop and nurture these relationships with our partner organizations.

6.3 Thinking more strategically

Another important role that commissions play is to help leaders understand the broader context of their work. Commissions' statewide vantage point enables them to see work happening across the state and how it connects together. This enables the organizations commissions partner with to be able to put their work in perspective and identify the intersections with work occurring elsewhere locally, regionally, and nationally. One nonprofit sector leader said,

Anticipating trends and changes has been really helpful because typically nonprofits keep our heads in the game of running the program or providing the service. It's hard to both do the micro and implementation and also keep tabs on all of the larger trends and be anticipating and understanding what changes mean. That kind of thinking and interpretation has been a really helpful model for me as a leader.

6.4 Promoting organizational sustainability

The interviews revealed that commissions' support is also contributing to the sustainability of organizations. The policies, procedures, and practices that commissions help organizations to develop for AmeriCorps and volunteer programs also elevate quality throughout the organization, enabling the organization to more efficiently and effectively use its resources. One nonprofit leader said,

For a change, I am able to sit down and really focus on the mission. For a long time, I have just been in the automatic mechanical mode. And because of that, I have not had time to reflect, have not had time to really think through things. And I am a processor. [Having a VISTA through the commission has] helped me to be able to reflect and plan because really, my job is planning. It gives me more time to plan and to disseminate and delegate.

Significance

The benefits of partnership with commissions extend beyond the immediate program or personnel. The evidence of this study shows that there are multiple areas of application and integration from the investment of commissions. Not only do these benefits affect areas of organizational vitality beyond the immediacy of the AmeriCorps program, they appear to be durable and sustained as well. This means that the value of commissions' interaction with leaders of organizations and their programs extends significantly and meaningfully into the full organizational operations and trajectory.

7. Building bridges to strengthen collaboration

Key insight: Commissions bring people together to collaboratively meet community needs.

The data reveal that commissions play a critical role in connecting and convening people that promotes more effective collaboration and results in more effective action. Their role promoting and supporting service and volunteerism helps to create common ground that brings people together to better the community.

They are seen as bridge builders within communities as well as within their states bringing together groups that normally would not come together because of the opportunities they offer and the common vision of service they represent.

7.1 Bringing people together

Throughout the interviews, leaders expressed the value of the connections and partnerships that commissions help to create in communities. These connections help communities to more effectively address needs by ensuring that organizations are able to leverage their strengths and fill gaps through collaboration. One public official said,

Partnerships are key and I think the commission does that well. They work with not only nonprofit partners, but with community and corporate partners too. It takes a village; it takes everybody being engaged. For the commission to be well connected, to have their pulse on what is happening, and how they can be an instrument for bringing people together is critical.

The role that commissions play as a convener and connector was seen by many as a means to help reduce division and competition among organizations. By elevating quality work and modeling collaboration, they help to set an example for the social sector at large. One public official said,

I think one role the commission plays is trying to heal some of that competition between nonprofits. They are getting groups to work together and recognizing outstanding projects and work of the nonprofit sector through philanthropy and other things. Seeing how territorial some organizations can be, I think it is problematic. The commission's role is helping people problem solve so that everyone gets what they need to do the good work.

7.2 Convening builds community

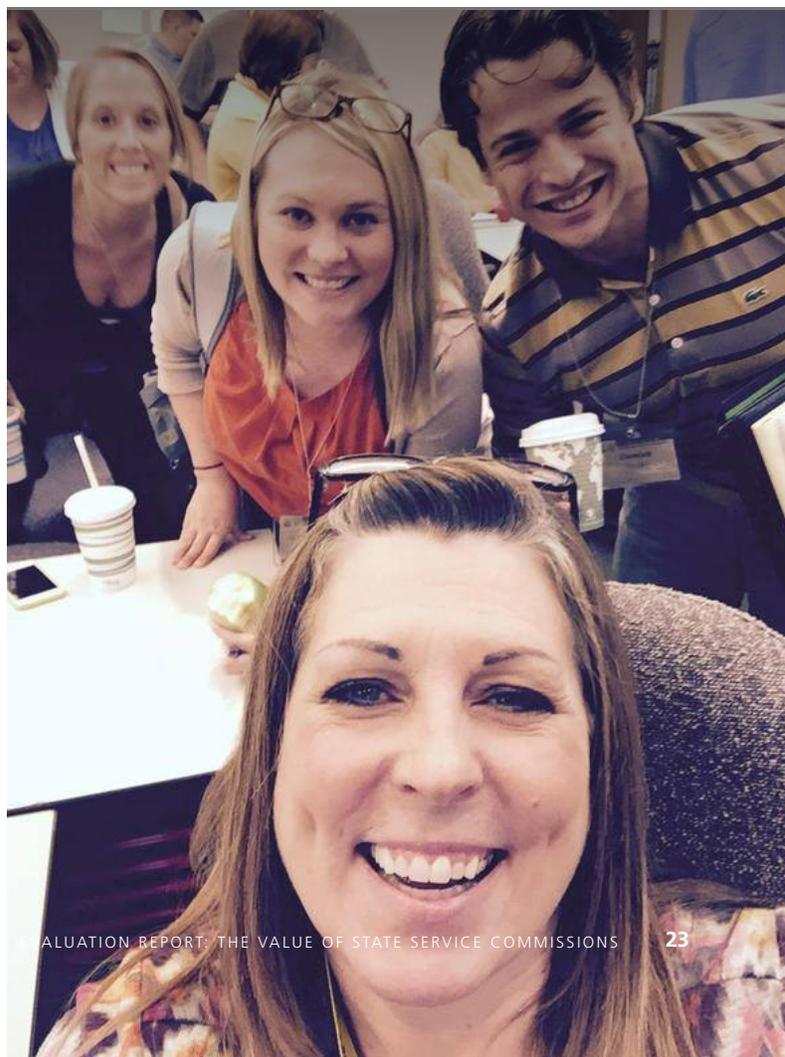
Commissions' role as a convener brings people together to build community and share resources. Leaders value commissions' regional and statewide conferences, training, meetings and planning sessions for connecting and exchanging information with their peers. This peer-to-peer learning enables leaders to have greater knowledge to lead with and carry back to improve their own organization. One volunteer engagement professional said,

The [conference] was really meaningful, and it is something that is not supplied anywhere else in our state, much less in my region. The conference is very valuable because there is not anything like it specific to volunteer administration and service. It is one of the only opportunities I have to connect with my peers around the state to learn from their experiences.

Bringing people together to plan for the future was also highly valued. Local leaders saw this as an opportunity to garner community support and input. As a well-respected state entity, commissions have the clout to engage people who typically would not be engaged and overcome barriers to collaboration.

Significance

The ability of commissions to leverage the work of leaders, organizations, and programs throughout the social sector provides inestimable value to communities. Their effort is multiplied. Their credibility, capacity, strategy, and network abilities are amplified. The multiplying and amplifying effects of commissions result in an enormous benefit for the advancement of the work of leaders and their organizations.



Findings About the Potential for Greater Impact

This second section of findings provides insights about areas where there is potential for greater impact or where gaps in impact have been identified. These findings are intended to improve the value of commissions' work.



8. Placing greater emphasis on elevating national service and volunteerism

Key insight: Leaders desire for commissions to play a greater role in elevating the value of national service and volunteerism in their states.

Throughout the interviews, raising awareness about national service and volunteerism was universally important to leaders. Interviewees recognized that commissions' place in state government, statewide reach, and vantage point to see across the sector give them a unique ability to communicate the value of national service and volunteerism in the state. Yet, they also recognized that these strengths have not been put to use to raise awareness of national service and volunteerism to the degree that many leaders had hoped.

8.1 Highlighting the impact of service and volunteerism

Leaders expressed how valuable it would be for them to have their commission raising awareness of the impact of national service and volunteerism and highlighting the myriad benefits to their state. Commissions have a unique position in the state to be able to do this because of their macro-level view of national service and volunteerism across the state. They also have connections to the state government that could support greater awareness statewide. AmeriCorps program leaders saw this as valuable to help them secure additional funding for recruitment. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

I think there is a lack of awareness in the community of what AmeriCorps can do. I think that is where state Commissions could have a better, stronger role. I am picturing that I do not have to spend a lot of time advertising, having these visionary conversations with people about what a member could do or what it means, or what it is like to have an AmeriCorps member. Instead, that they get it, they want one and that they are coming to us.

Many leaders saw raising awareness as especially critical in rural communities where there are high needs and limited capacity to support service and volunteerism. One public official said,

[The commission] should be an automatic go-to for people when they need to solve a problem. They should automatically think of AmeriCorps, volunteers, etc. People in this [rural] area, we are just not formally mobilized. It is all informal. It would be nice if it got to where that is the top thing people that comes to their minds when they get ready to work on a project.

8.2 Building awareness about commissions

Leaders also expressed that commissions themselves should be more widely known and receive the recognition they deserve. Leaders see how beneficial commissions are to their work and to the state and they believe that promoting greater awareness could ensure their commission's success and sustainability. One leader said, "The Commission is a really well-kept secret." Another leader expressed the need for greater awareness of the training and resources that commissions provide to volunteers. The leader said,

I promote both [the commission] and all of the programs involved with it, because there are still people out there that do not even understand what the commission is. I have always tried to raise awareness with those people that I have been in contact with. I have tried to help them realize that they can utilize volunteers. They think it is too difficult, but they can be trained on how to use volunteers. The commission can help them.

Significance

Stepping into the full potential of statewide influence for the advancement of national service and volunteerism is a role uniquely suited to commissions. The leaders who are partners with commissions have a vision for the possibility that could benefit the culture of service throughout their states in ways and to extents that have yet to be seen.

9. Striking a better balance between ensuring compliance and supporting impact and innovation

Key insight: Leaders are concerned that some commission requirements are unnecessary and undermine program quality and sustainability.

AmeriCorps program leaders, sponsor organization leaders, and some nonprofit sector leaders expressed that the AmeriCorps rules are burdensome and can limit their ability to adapt and sustain their programs. Many felt the staff time and capacity it takes to maintain compliance takes away from program quality and limits opportunities for improvement, innovation, and expansion. Some leaders looking for help from their commission to navigate these requirements and reduce compliance barriers can find them to be less flexible and creative than they would like. One leader said, “I have managed millions of dollars in federal grants before and this is by far the most difficult.”

9.1 Increasing risk

Programs are concerned that unnecessary and burdensome requirements create greater risk and undermine program quality. Leaders were not worried about new or changing requirements just because they caused extra work. They were worried about them because they want to run high-quality programs, so they want to make whatever changes they need to make well. Timing was of particular concern for this reason. Last-minute changes or requests put programs at greater risk of making a mistake or not implementing a change as effectively as possible. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

It is difficult when new things come out and need to be implemented right away. There can be damage from change that is not done well because we do not have the time to think it through to mitigate errors.

9.2 Compromising quality

While some leaders focus on the risk associated with the potential financial cost of noncompliance, others focus on the opportunity cost. They are concerned about the time they have to take away from other aspects of running a high-quality program to meet requirements. One leader said,

If all I did was administrative paperwork, I would have the time to sit down and make all these reports happen, but in many of our jobs we wear too many hats. We do not get to be that specialized. In addition to doing all this reporting, I have also got to deal with all the human element of my organization. I have to make sure that people’s needs are being taken care of. I have to go lead a training. I have to facilitate retreats. I have to talk to community stakeholders. I have to be in the community. I do not have the luxury of just specializing at my desk. I think that is something that some program officers are a little more cognizant of than others. But I think there is a definite gap in understanding of what is realistic for a program to be able to do and the amount of reporting that is increasingly required.

9.3 Undercutting common standards

To streamline and standardize compliance across their multi-state programs, national AmeriCorps program leaders seek greater clarity on what is required by commissions and what is required by the AmeriCorps agency. They value commissions’ guidance, and also need to understand what must be implemented more broadly across their programs throughout the nation. One national AmeriCorps leader said,

We need more clarity on what is required from the AmeriCorps agency versus [the commission]. There are many specific [commission] tasks that we do not do in any other states. I would like to know why. I do not want to put a form in front of members if we cannot explain why.

9.4 Impeding innovation and impact

Sponsor organizations, current AmeriCorps host sites, and potential host sites express concern that AmeriCorps is not sustainable because of the undue burden. Especially in rural communities, many organizations do not have the capacity to meet even the basic requirements to host a member much less operate an AmeriCorps program. This impedes programs’ ability to partner with new host sites and

have a more expansive impact in their community. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

It is difficult to find new host sites because they are worried about the rules. It undermines our ability to build capacity when we have to keep the same host sites year after year.

Leaders perceive some commissions to be stricter when it comes to compliance than other commissions. While they recognize this heavy focus on compliance provides assurance that their program fare well if audited, they also view some requirements as unnecessary. One leader said,

From what I have heard, it sounds like [our commission] is incredibly strict as far as commissions go. A slavish devotion to some of these rules impedes innovation and creativity. It does not help me create a work environment that allows us to have the kind of organization we want and the kind of impact we want to have.

A public official expressed the difficulty AmeriCorps programs faced to comply with additional requirements as they were trying to adapt to support members during the COVID-19 crisis. The public official said,

COVID-19 revealed how burdensome these requirements are. Programs are so burdened that they are not nimble enough to support members in an emergency. During this crisis, [programs] had to write a plan for what they are going to do with their members and submit it for approval. In times like these, there needs to be a system in place to empower local leadership to do what is best.

Significance

In an effort to retain the highest quality standards for programs in their states, it will be important for commissions to bear in mind the full extent of the time, energy, and stress involved in running a program that is in compliance. It will also be important for commissions to recognize that, especially in uncertain times, leaders need the flexibility to innovate and adapt their programs. Whenever possible, and however possible, flexibility should be offered to create an environment that is conducive to innovation, without compromising quality. Flexibility will promote program sustainability, increase impact, and enhance the experience of leadership. This will ensure encouragement instead of exasperation among the leaders.

10. Reducing barriers to equitable and inclusive service and volunteerism

Key insight: Leaders desire for commissions to be stronger advocates for policies and priorities that enable programs to serve those who can benefit most.

Leaders see a need for changes in national service and volunteerism requirements to better enable their programs to support individuals, organizations and communities most in need. They see commissions as their ally in this work and desire for commissions to be stronger advocates with the AmeriCorps agency and state agencies to promote policies and priorities that enable programs to be more equitable and inclusive. Addressing these systemic barriers will allow programs to more effectively engage and serve the state's most vulnerable citizens and communities.

The survey data also show that AmeriCorps program leaders struggle to make their programs equitable and inclusive. Among the lowest rated items on the survey were those pertaining to equity and inclusion. Nearly 20% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they are not at all better able to embed equity and inclusion in program design and delivery as a result of commissions and 35.8% report that they are only a little or somewhat better able. Similarly, 16.9% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they are not at all better able to adapt programming to fit the unique needs of underserved communities and 42.3% report that they are only a little or somewhat better able. More than 21% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they are not at all better equipped to co-create strategies with underserved communities and do not have more involvement from the diversity of their community as a result of commissions (see Figure 9 on next page).

10.1 Unlivable AmeriCorps living allowance

Not surprisingly, the low cost per member service year that AmeriCorps grantees receive and the consequent low member living allowance that they can provide was cited as a significant barrier to having a corps that

reflects the communities they serve. It also prevents AmeriCorps from being seen as a resource that can support state initiatives to promote equitable and inclusive service and volunteerism.

AmeriCorps program leaders described the difficulty of budgeting for adequate staff capacity to run a compliant, high-quality AmeriCorps program with offering a livable living allowance for members. Leaders recognize the tremendous benefits that AmeriCorps members receive as a part of their service through the education award, personal and professional development, and the experience they gain. However, leaders also acutely recognize that those benefits are inaccessible to those who could benefit most due to the low living allowance that most programs are able to offer. Several leaders described situations where members from the community they serve could not take advantage of the opportunity that an AmeriCorps position offers and, instead, took a low-wage job that paid more than the AmeriCorps living allowance so they could provide for their families. One nonprofit leader said, “You cannot fight poverty with poverty.”

10.2 Unrealistic AmeriCorps recruitment and retention requirements

Along with the challenges of the AmeriCorps member living allowance, AmeriCorps program leaders also struggle to create a diverse and inclusive corps while

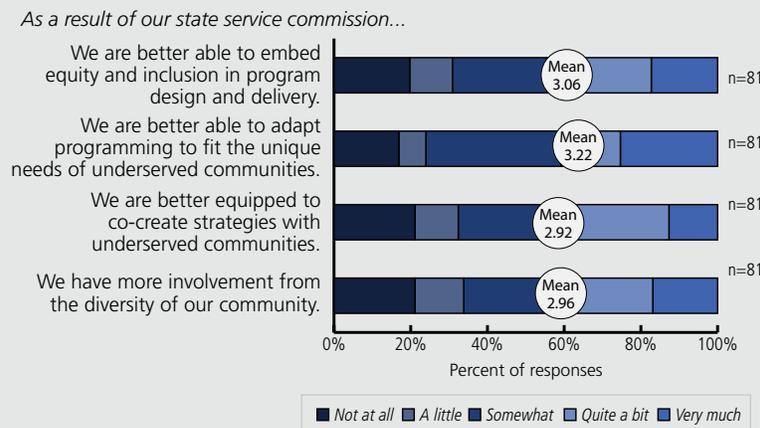
meeting stringent requirements for member recruitment and retention. Leaders described the difficulties they faced knowing that the best course of action to meet a community need and provide quality service was to have members from the communities they serve while also feeling pressure to recruit and retain a high percentage of members to ensure continued funding. Members from the communities they serve often did not have the resources and support system to be able to sustain the commitment that AmeriCorps requires. One nonprofit leader said,

We are always concerned about getting in trouble. We get punished if we lose a member or need to let a member go. We are recruiting members from the community and that is important to us, but many community members [have experienced trauma]. That can cause health issues and stability issues. We cannot control that, and we do not know what the right decision is.

10.3 Onerous match, fiscal, and administrative requirements

Many leaders expressed concern that the AmeriCorps match requirements, funding by reimbursement, and the cumbersome administrative requirements make it too burdensome for many organizations to manage. Leaders see the tremendous opportunity that AmeriCorps provides to organizations and members, yet they also recognize that many organizations are turned

Figure 9. AmeriCorps program leaders struggle to make their programs equitable and inclusive.



away by the upfront costs, workload, and risks. One nonprofit leader and public official said,

I sometimes do not promote AmeriCorps as much as I should because of the barrier of the match. It feels like a really big barrier for many organizations...I would love to have AmeriCorps and Senior Corps and I feel like we would provide great opportunities. But if you do not have a mode of entry, if you do not already have a great existing large AmeriCorps program nationally, the difference between my great idea of what I could do, and the funding reality is sometimes too large a gap for me to conquer.

Leaders spoke of the tremendous administrative burden that comes with AmeriCorps grant and program management. They described the need for simpler and more streamlined requirements to make AmeriCorps a viable option for most organizations, and particularly for those organizations serving the people and communities who could benefit the most. One leader said,

[My experience running an AmeriCorps program] has definitely made me realize just how much infrastructure you truly need to run a successful AmeriCorps program. Before this role I was running projects for the Department of State and the Department of Defense, and this is 10 times more detailed and more difficult to follow. It has made me understand and appreciate the need for thorough program management for the program to be successful and simpler to implement effectively.

Many leaders expressed concern that the actual and perceived difficulty and risk of running an AmeriCorps program might be its downfall. They also recognized that commissions are critical to closing the gap between what is required and what many organizations can feasibly manage. One leader said,

The concern I have is all of the federal requirements for compliance for the AmeriCorps program make the money almost not worth having. In terms of the grants, I think it is hard for some nonprofits to navigate all the rules and compliance requirements. I fear that could be the doom of the program. [The commission's] role is to try to help them navigate that so that the money is worth it.

Significance

For AmeriCorps to realize its full potential, programs must be accessible to the organizations, members, and beneficiaries that can realize the greatest benefit from service. For this to happen, it will be important for commissions to exert greater influence to shift priorities

and promote policy change to better align with state needs and better support inclusive and sustainable programs. If this can be achieved, it will unleash educational, economic, and experiential possibilities for individuals and communities that will have multiplicative effects for states.

11. Playing a more significant role in building the capacity of the social sector

Key Insight: Leaders see a role for commissions to help strengthen nonprofit capacity more broadly throughout their states.

The nonprofit sector has many capacity gaps that need to be filled in order for national service and volunteerism to serve the most critical needs in the state. Leaders see the potential for using commissions' capacity-building expertise as a resource to the nonprofit sector. This would result in organizations being able to take advantage of the opportunities AmeriCorps and volunteerism present to further build their capacity while benefiting individuals and communities throughout the state. It may also create a pipeline for future AmeriCorps programs.

11.1 Expanding impact throughout organizations

While there is evidence that commissions' support is having ripple effects throughout organizations that sponsor AmeriCorps programs, some AmeriCorps program leaders express concern that their commission's impact is limited to the program leaders that directly interact with the commission. Leaders recognize the benefit that their commission's support and guidance has brought to their program and would like that to be embraced more broadly throughout their organization. They could benefit from a greater focus on the organization beyond the AmeriCorps program to help bring them along and build internal support for the commission's recommendations and requirements. One said,

It is really just me that is benefitting from [the commission] and believing and becoming something different. That is not happening beyond me right now with my staff. And with my board I feel like there is a big gap.

Another said, “I am not in a position of power so I am not sure this will have any effect on the organization.”

The survey data show that even AmeriCorps programs that receive training and support from commissions need additional development opportunities to build the capacity of their teams. AmeriCorps program leaders rated survey items related to staff capability and capacity among the lowest on the survey. AmeriCorps program leaders report that their staff team is only moderately stronger and more capable as a result of commissions and their leadership capacity has only somewhat increased. 38.9% of leaders also report that they invest only a little or somewhat more in building the capacity of their team and 18% report that they do not invest more as a result of commissions. This indicates a need for increased investment to build the capacity of AmeriCorps program staff along with the rest of the social sector (see Figure 10).

11.2 Lack of capacity to host AmeriCorps members

Limited organizational capacity impedes the ability of AmeriCorps programs to partner with organizations in parts of their states that have the greatest need. Often, these organizations do not have the capacity to manage even the basic administrative requirements needed to host an AmeriCorps member. In some regions of the state, this has been a recurring issue for many years. A nonprofit leader from one of these regions said,

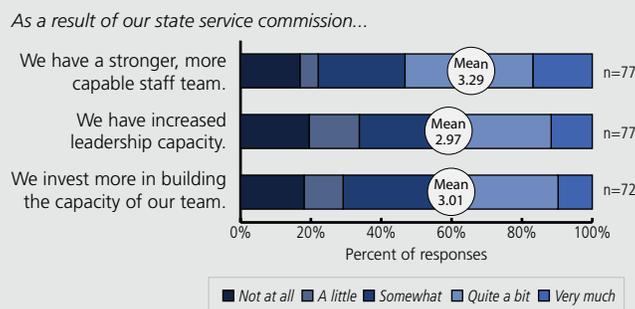
We just had another set of conversations and some meetings with other partners because this region has been underserved by AmeriCorps. This is not because of [our commission’s] outreach. It is because agencies in the region feel like they do not have the capacity. There were clearly folks who have interest and may have had a placement from an American program, but we have had very few hosted in the region regularly. This is a tremendous loss for a part of the state that really needs this support.

11.3 Limited data collection and management capacity

One of the most significant capacity gaps that leaders identified is the limited ability to collect and manage data. Given the importance of data collection and management to secure grants and report progress, additional support in this area would be a tremendous benefit to the sector. For example, one said,

There are some pieces of gathering information for [the commission] that are difficult when you have partners that you do not have any control over. We have a couple of partners that just do not track their data as well or they have more difficult data tracking systems. For example, one of our partners is the Board of Health. That is a huge city organization and they do not track every little thing like we do. It requires [a lot of work to help them track what we need]. Some do not even know how to create a database, especially if you are working with grassroots organizations.

Figure 10. AmeriCorps program leaders need more support to build the capacity of their teams.



11.4 Lack of volunteer management capacity and experience

Leaders value the training and support that commissions provide for volunteerism in their states. Yet many leaders also see a significant gap between the vision and capacity of leaders and the orientation and skills needed to effectively engage volunteers. Leaders entering volunteer service organizations and programs often have not received volunteer management training. More importantly, many do not have a clear vision for the meaningful role that volunteers can play for their organizations. One nonprofit sector leader said,

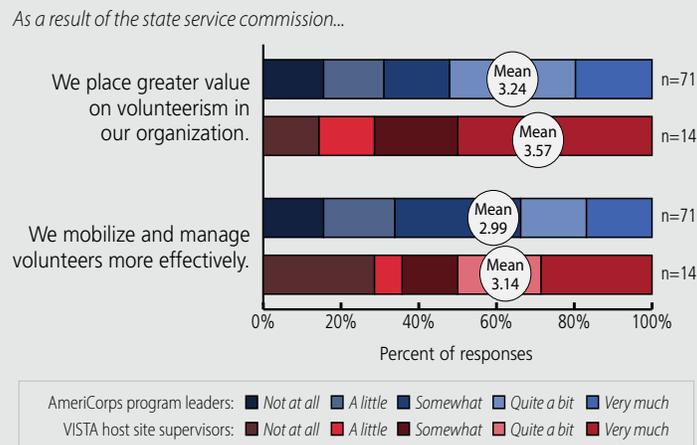
I definitely hope that in one year, let alone five years, that we have an even stronger, more robust sort of training suite to not only increase the capacity of individual nonprofit managers, but to increase the capacity of executive directors and CEOs to imagine how they could better utilize volunteers in their suite of paid and unpaid human resources. I think that again, like AmeriCorps programs, I think there are a lot of nonprofit executives think having a volunteer program is too much work. You put more into it than you get out of it. That misperception is something that I would like the commission to continue to chip away at.

Another said,

I am realizing that some assumptions I made about how we have a shared any value of the importance of volunteers, is not necessarily a shared or as broad as I thought it was. And I think what I see is when you have a shift in leadership, and that could be at pretty much any level, how quickly those values and priorities can evaporate or reshape or shift...as we see this baby boomer generation of executives retiring out of the system. I do not think people thought about how you perpetuate the values that group brought as a community to an organization and I do not know that that we have younger people who are brought up in that same culture of valuing volunteer opportunities or how important they are. I think people are making a lot of assumptions and they are not considering that you have to teach people that. Yet if you look at the good business schools, or good education programs, or public administration, it does not include volunteer components at all.

The survey data show that AmeriCorps program leaders and VISTA host site supervisors need additional support to effectively engage volunteers as well. While on average leaders report that their organizations place somewhat greater value on volunteerism as a result of commissions, 15.5% of AmeriCorps program leaders and 28.6% of VISTA host site supervisors report that they do not mobilize and manage volunteers more effectively (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. AmeriCorps program leaders and VISTA host site supervisors need additional support to effectively engage volunteers.



11.5 Building support networks for leaders

Leaders value commissions' training and other convenings as an opportunity for peer exchange and learning. These opportunities help to build community and provide a network of support that helps leaders address the challenges they face and provides a sense of camaraderie among likeminded leaders. Yet some leaders felt there was a dearth of these opportunities to connect and share with their peers in their regions or for their positions. They saw commissions as uniquely suited to help create these kinds of opportunities for peer networking and community-building. One nonprofit leader and public official said,

One of the things I keenly aware of as an executive director of a nonprofit, and as an elected government official. There are no support groups, there are no technical assistance groups, and there

is no place to go and talk to your peers about what is going on or to share your experiences. I learned really early on that you have to create that yourself. And that is hard to sustain just because of all of the pressures of other pressures related to elected public office or being a CEO. Maybe there is some way for the commission to support that for people in those positions, because it was really hard for me.

Significance

Leaders look to commissions as a resource and want to see the benefits of commission's training and support extended throughout their organizations and the social sector. Building the capacity of the social sector in key areas will help to support the success of these organizations, creating more capable partners for AmeriCorps programs, more positive volunteer and AmeriCorps member experiences, and stronger communities.



Findings About Approach

This section discusses the causes and catalysts of commissions' impact that were revealed through the data and the lessons that can be learned about what made these approaches effective.



Approaches that work

The section discusses the successful approaches that commissions have used to catalyze their impact.

12. Developing strong, supportive relationships

The data reveal that one of the most significant factors contributing to commissions' impact is the strong relationships commission staff have developed with grantees, partners, and community members. Throughout the interviews, leaders overwhelmingly described feeling supported by the commission. Community members felt that the commission cared about them in a way that few other state agencies did. Many AmeriCorps program leaders described their program officer as someone they trust and can confide in. They value the time that commission staff dedicate to building relationships as part of the monitoring process and see the commission as a model for their relationships with their host sites, partners, and AmeriCorps members. These strong relationships promote trust that enables commissions and programs to more proactively recognize and address issues. They also help to bring community members together to achieve their goals. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

To be very honest, I am not the best at compliance. It is not what I care about. We do it and we need to do it well, but that is not what inspires me or drives me or why I do this work. Having the staff members at [the commission] be kind means that it is no longer this thing that I try to put off as long as I can because it is not what excites me.

The survey data also reveal that AmeriCorps program leaders have strong relationships with commissions and that these relationships positively affect programs' compliance and quality. 76.8% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that they have a very good or excellent relationship with their commission and 75.9% report that they feel quite a bit or very comfortable approaching their commission for help if they face challenges. 87% of AmeriCorps program leaders report that this positively affects their ability to maintain compliance with AmeriCorps requirements and 83.3% report that this positively affects their ability to maintain program quality.

13. Customizing support to meet programs' needs

The interview data show that one of the most programs value the unique and deep knowledge commission staff bring to their work. This knowledge provides comfort to program leaders and helps them feel supported in their work. AmeriCorps and volunteer program leaders expressed feeling like the commissions support helps them to feel like they are not alone even though they are often the only person serving in their role within their organizations. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

This has really made me realize how critical the commission is to the program directors because [my organization's] leadership cannot provide support to me. They do not know my role. And maybe that is a weakness, but the truth is they do not know my role, and the only true support I feel like that I can get that is AmeriCorps-specific is from the commission.

14. Providing valuable training and resources

The value of the training and resources that commissions provide was evident throughout the data. Leaders described being better able to do their job because of the professional development and support that their commission provides. Leaders see commission's training as relevant and responsive to emerging needs. AmeriCorps program leaders recognized that commission staff appreciate the breadth of skills it takes to be an effective AmeriCorps program director and they provide training to help program directors broaden and enhance their skillsets. Many also valued that their commission collects and shares resources between programs to spread what works and reduce duplication of effort. Volunteer service organization leaders appreciated the deep understanding that commissions have of the nuances of volunteer engagement that is often missing in other professional development opportunities. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

I would say all those professional development experiences that [the commission] has provided have been some of the most impactful things they have done. And the peer network that I have been part of with the other AmeriCorps programs. That

has definitely expanded and informed me in terms of my process of becoming a leader within my organization. The exposure to all those resources is something that if I was trying to gain all by myself, I would have paid a lot more, you know, hundreds of thousands of dollars for those type of training activities over the course of 20 years. And not only me but the other staff that have been working with AmeriCorps member management and interfacing more prominently with the commission.

15. Strengthening support networks

Leaders deeply value the connections and camaraderie they have developed with their peers that have been promoted and supported by their commission. Commissions create an environment that promotes support and builds community despite the fact that programs are often competing for limited funding and resources. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

One of the things the Commission does really well is bringing our programs together. We meet once a month, but it is not just a staff meeting. In Vermont, our programs feel like a cohort. We feel like we come together to solve bigger problems. There is a lot of internal communication. I talk to the other program directors very regularly, and the commission is involved in that. They have helped us to work together instead of being competitive.

For AmeriCorps program leaders in Ohio and Texas, the regional and statewide program director networks that have formed in certain regions are one of the supports that they value most. These networks formed organically without involvement from the commission to help address common needs AmeriCorps programs faced in their region such as a need to bolster recruitment or plan for service days. Commissions have supported these efforts and, in some cases, provide funding to support their work.

16. Purposeful convening

Commissions' role as a convener brings people together to build community and share resources. Leaders spoke about a variety of commission convenings they valued for learning, connecting, and exchanging information with their peers. These convenings include statewide conferences, volunteer management training, AmeriCorps program directors' meetings that both provide information and support peer-to-peer learning that enables leaders to provide more effective training and support to their members and volunteers. One volunteer service organization leader said,

The [conference] was really meaningful, and it is something that is not supplied anywhere else in our state, much less in my region. The conference is very valuable because there is not anything like it specific to volunteer administration and service. It is one of the only opportunities I have to connect with my peers around the state to learn from their experiences.

Practice Spotlight

Regional AmeriCorps Networks

In Ohio and Texas, regional networks of AmeriCorps programs have emerged to provide a system of support for program leaders to address common challenges, and plan collaboratively. These include the Serve Austin Collaborative in Texas and the Greater Cincinnati AmeriCorps Network in Ohio. Both of these regional networks formed organically based on shared needs such as bolstering recruitment or sharing the workload for planning and implementing events such as city- or region-wide days of service. Since their formation, the regional networks have evolved to become more formalized with regular meetings and leadership. The Serve Austin collaborative became an independent nonprofit with 501(c)(3) designation allowing it to receive grants for the collaborative's work and hire a recruitment coordinator.

ServeOhio and OneStar Foundation have supported these networks in a variety of ways since their inception. ServeOhio staff have attended the Greater Cleveland AmeriCorps Network's meetings to provide clarification and support on relevant issues. OneStar Foundation has awarded grants to the Serve Austin Collaborative to plan and implement service days. The leaders of these regional networks value the commissions' support to strengthen their collaborative efforts.

Commissions' role in bringing people together to plan and develop programming was also highly valued. Local leaders saw this as an opportunity to garner community support and input. As a well-respected state entity,

commissions have the clout to engage people who typically would not be engaged and overcome barriers to collaboration. One nonprofit leader said,

[The commission] brought community members together that would never have come together otherwise around a common issue, our kids. Having them come to town and show their support made this work. Without that, thousands of kids today would not have been served.

17. Promoting stability and sustainability

The interviews revealed that commissions' support is also contributing to the stability and sustainability of organizations. The policies, procedures, and practices that commissions help programs develop elevate quality throughout the organization, enabling the organization to more efficiently and effectively use its resources. The support commissions provide in the AmeriCorps grant application process contributes to long-term success as well. Interviewees described the benefits of commissions helping them navigate changes that required the AmeriCorps agency approval and ensuring that their applications are strong through the grant review process. One leader said,

[The commission has] advocated when we have budget modifications or changes in our programming. They have helped us in advocating when it has to go up to the national level. They do a review when we submit our grant before it goes to national and have given us good guidance that has been helpful.

Commissions also play a unique role to stabilize states in times of crisis. Though some commissions focus more heavily on disaster services than others, they all provide crucial information and support to AmeriCorps programs and other social sector organizations during challenging times. The value of commissions was especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when commissions provided support for AmeriCorps leaders, members and VISTAs, volunteers, and community organizations. Some of the commissions were also able to collect and distribute funding to the nonprofit sector during COVID-19 to keep many organizations afloat that would not have been able to survive otherwise. One public official said,

Through this pandemic, I have really seen the value of [the commission] because nonprofits have been spinning out of control and struggling during the pandemic. To have a stabilized agency that can

take a lead on fundraising relief for nonprofits was essential. I think they gave out around \$150,000. It was money that just came in through some donors and they gave out some small little micro grants early on before the PPP or other money from the federal government was available to help nonprofits pay their rent or meet payroll that month. It was not a role that [the state nonprofit association] was in a position to play, so having [the commission] there to be a resource to those nonprofits with stabilized support and funding from general tax dollars, I think has been really critical.

Areas for improvement in approach

This section discusses challenges that have arisen related to commissions' strategies and the lessons that can be learned about what can be more effective.

18. Ensure consistency and continuity

Given the important role that commissions play and value that they bring to AmeriCorps programs and the social sector, it is not surprising that transition of staff at the commission level has proven to be very disruptive. Leaders spoke of the importance of staff consistency due to the complexity of AmeriCorps regulations and the uniqueness of programs. Ensuring there are systems in place at the commission to promote continuity was also seen as critical. Without these, programs are left without a clear path to get information and troubleshoot, which puts them at significant risk. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

Consistency at their level is really important. Keeping people there should be a focus. So much institutional knowledge is lost. They should be figuring out ways to maintain consistency as much as possible. Creating stability at the commission and having clear program roles will really help. More stability creates more opportunity to dialogue. That matters for the relationship.

19. Provide clarity and transparency

Commissions play a crucial role in interpreting guidance and requirements from the AmeriCorps agency and providing the training and technical assistance to help programs implement it. AmeriCorps program leaders expressed concern about the risk posed by

getting conflicting or inaccurate information from their commission. Some described information coming from their commission that did not seem to align with guidance provided by the AmeriCorps agency. Others described getting guidance from the commission and beginning to implement it only to change direction because they received later guidance that was quite the opposite.

AmeriCorps program leaders also emphasized the importance of understanding why policies or decisions were being made to help them better understand how to implement them more effectively. This was especially important for national direct AmeriCorps programs that receive guidance directly from the AmeriCorps agency and may also receive guidance from multiple commissions that can vary widely. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

There is often information that goes on behind the scenes that would be helpful for us to know, but unless we ask for it explicitly, it is not revealed. I think we need more open, transparent communication with more responsibility to the truth.

Professional corps programs also struggle to interpret regulations and would like greater support from commission to understand what is relevant to their unique circumstances.

20. Level the learning curve

AmeriCorps program leaders universally described the steep learning curve they faced when they started in their role. They appreciated all that their commission does to help build their understanding of AmeriCorps requirements and their role in implementing them, yet they also desire a better system of training and support for new program leaders to get up-to-speed quickly and systematically. Many described not being able to access a comprehensive “how to” manual or a list of steps to start the program year to help them plan more effectively. Some spoke about training for new program directors occurring long after they started in their role and sometimes happening piecemeal rather than as a holistic, well thought out curriculum. More attention to providing a comprehensive package of training, resources and support would benefit new program directors greatly. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

In my estimation, it took me 5-7 years to really get this job. Probably 2 full grant cycles. If I am ever going to leave my role, I need to think about how to ensure my program is strong and sustainable with that kind of learning curve for someone new. How

can you plan for that? And how can the commission help to ease that transition, so the learning curve is not so steep?

21. Promote peer-to-peer learning and collaboration

Leaders recognize that commissions have a unique vantage point that enables them to see what works and what does not across programs. They also value the network of support and expertise among their peers. Many leaders would like to see commissions promoting and supporting more formal and informal regional meetings to cultivate networks and share resources. One leader said,

We need time to be dedicated to creating a cohesive cohort of program directors and teambuilding. Quarterly opportunities for training and resource sharing would be great. Strengths mapping across the entire group of program directors and programs to see where we can capitalize.

22. Collect, codify and share best practices and exemplars

In addition to providing comprehensive training, resources, and support for new program leaders, leaders desire a central repository of resources that are collected, vetted by the commission, and shared among programs. Leaders described requesting examples from other programs to promote efficiency, but not knowing which resources were the ideal models they should be working from. They desire for the commission to provide model policies and document templates to reduce the administrative burden, avoid duplication, and more effectively and efficiently ensure compliance.

Similarly, leaders recognize that there is a significant amount of valuable training content that has been developed for AmeriCorps members and volunteers by the commissions and by their peers. Yet as training needs emerge in their programs, many leaders are struggling to create training from scratch because they do not know what is available. Establishing a library of vetted training content would benefit all programs. One AmeriCorps program leader said,

The commission should be a collector of best practices and share them to avoid duplication and ineffectiveness. It would be great if they asked us what is going on in our world, what is a struggle, and what they can do support us. They could be a hub for resources. They could collect innovations to spur ideas and create a learning community.

Recommendations

This section provides possible recommendations based on the data that can be explored to sustain and deepen the impact of commissions moving forward. These recommendations were developed by the evaluation team based on the data and informed by commission staff during a workshop at the 2020 AmeriCorps Symposium.



Shifts in Strategy

A. Shifting from conveners and connectors to movement builders

The data reveal that commissions can capitalize on their strength as conveners and connectors in their states to build a movement for national service and volunteerism. Movement building is a process for bringing people together around a common issue or interest. It involves building trust and cohesion among people and building capacity and leadership in the group to create social change. If commissions became movement builders, it could unleash tremendous potential and create a culture where service is part of who we are and what we do to solve our state's and country's most pressing challenges.

Strengths to build upon

- Effective conveners skilled at bringing people together to achieve a common goal
- Expertise building trusting relationships with and between leaders that will help to create a collaborative environment
- Expertise in training and capacity building

What else will it take?

- Bringing people together to co-create a common vision
- Supporting and inspiring or incentivizing people toward meaningful action
- Developing systems to sustain engagement and action over time
- Building buy-in from other funders and agencies
- Developing partnerships with other entities that can fill gaps and expand the reach of commissions
- Becoming bridge-builders to expand to a wider variety of partners and stakeholders (e.g., corporate partners, local government agencies, tribes, governor, and state agencies)
- Building internal people power to support the work
- Getting the attention of the governor and elected officials

Possible steps forward

- Bring commissions and key partners together to begin envisioning what might be possible

“What would be ideal is if the commission were a connector between national service throughout the state. Bringing together and having eyes on AmeriCorps members and alums, Senior Corps, VISTA and NCCC. They could create points of connection throughout the year that would make sure we do not lose sight of the larger national service community.”

- AmeriCorps program leader

B. Shifting from providing valuable training to becoming sector-wide capacity builders

The data reveal that commissions provide valuable training and technical assistance to AmeriCorps grantees, sponsor organizations and volunteer service organizations. Leaders see a greater role for commissions in building the capacity of the social sector more broadly, and particularly in rural and underserved communities. This shift would contribute to a stronger social sector and more organizations using service and volunteers to fulfill their missions and meet community needs.

Strengths to build upon

- Commissions have expertise in capacity building for AmeriCorps programs, sponsor organizations, and volunteer service organizations
- Commissions' vantage point enables them to see what is working across the state
- Strong relationships with leaders and organizations to help identify capacity needs

What else will it take?

- Expand or strengthen partnerships with nonprofit associations and other organizations serving nonprofit leaders and organizations
- Expand capacity-building to more community organizations, especially AmeriCorps host sites
- More commissions serving as VISTA intermediaries for their states
- Finding a niche to avoid duplication of effort
- VGF funding for all state commissions
- Partnerships with state nonprofit networks
- ASC advocating for state service commissions to expand resources in this area - things that could be provided to all commissions regardless of their size.
- Need for greater state funding
- Increasing staff capacity and capability
- Connecting with Points of Light
- More commissions becoming hubs for Service Enterprise
- Finding creative ways to help organizations feel supported

Possible steps forward

- Reach out to state nonprofit associations to explore possibilities
- Identify models among commission that are already doing this
- Connect with AmeriCorps member host sites and other organizations to build or strengthen relationships and discuss needs
- Identify and prioritize core competencies and gaps
- Provide training to AmeriCorps members to better prepare them to enter the social sector workforce

C. Shifting from creating a state service plan to employing service as a cohesive and collaborative strategy for statewide impact

The data reveal that commissions can play a larger role in developing statewide strategy and facilitating collaboration to solve states' toughest challenges. This would enable commissions to develop stronger and more strategic partnerships, fund innovative programs targeted at priority issues, and drive impact.

Strengths to build upon

- AmeriCorps program leaders and social sector leaders are eager to collaborate
- Commissions have strong connections to communities
- Commissions are adept at bringing people together

What else will it take?

- Program authority at the commission level
- Spending more time on proactive outreach, collaboration, and partnership building
- Breaking down philosophy and language barriers
- Dedicated funding for program evaluation to inform strategy
- Engaging stakeholders to identify strategic priorities
- Streamlined bureaucracy at the AmeriCorps agency to reduce administrative burden for commissions and programs

Possible steps forward

- Assess how current programs meet needs identified in state service plan
- Create opportunities to develop a shared vision for volunteerism and service

“Having commissions ready to support programs if the CORPS Act comes into play is important. Could commissions play a matchmaker role between organizations and community needs? We need them to facilitate strategic dialogue. Where are things headed? How do we stay ahead of needs and meet needs collectively and stay viable? We need to plan strategically as a group to do our best work.”

- AmeriCorps program leader

D. Shifting from being experts in compliance to becoming incubators for innovation

The data reveal that commissions can strengthen AmeriCorps programs and the nonprofit sector at large by investing in and supporting ongoing program development, experimentation, and expansion. This has the potential to create programs that are tied to local needs rather than national priorities; create more opportunities for people to serve in different issue areas; and expand opportunities for rural and grassroots programming.

Strengths to build upon

- Compliance is the prerequisite for innovation, and it is well-established with commissions and programs
- Programs are driven to get better and try new things

What else will it take?

- Greater advocacy role and skills to reduce barriers to innovation
- Take greater risks to realize rewards with formula funding
- Utilizing planning grants on a larger scale for current grantees to explore innovation and expansion as well as potential programs that can better explore the potential of AmeriCorps programming
- Be willing to take on more risk to support community led efforts
- Look to VGF as a model for supporting innovation
- Create funding sources
- Understanding that not everything can be evidence-based or data driven if we are trying to do something new
- Reduce administrative burden or reprioritize compliance requirements so AmeriCorps programs would be less intimidated to experiment
- Invest in commission staff time and explore how staffing roles, monitoring practices, and trainings be modified to help make this possible
- Explore partnership with "Office of Innovation" or nonprofit hub of innovation
- Build stronger cross sector engagement
- Expand the capacity of commissions to work with more innovative and small BIPOC led organizations

- Commission acts as intermediary for a short period to introduce national service and build partnership (similar to a VISTA intermediary but for AmeriCorps State and National members)
- Explore serving as a VISTA intermediary and place VISTAs to support needs assessment and innovative program development

Possible steps forward

- Examine ways to reduce administrative burden in your commission and for your programs
- Explore ways to use planning grants to support innovation in your formula grant process

“We need commissions to be trusted entities to distribute resources quickly. They need to be able to support innovative ideas and partnerships. It cannot take years. This is especially true for small nonprofits. It can mean everything to them.”

- Nonprofit leader

Shifts in Approach

E. Shift from monitoring to mentoring

To support continuous improvement and innovation, it will be important for commissions to adjust their approach from a primary focus on compliance to a primary focus on supporting leaders' and organizations' development. This shift will enable leaders to develop the skills required to run a high-quality, compliant program and also create a support system to promote ongoing experimentation and evolution.

Strengths to build upon

- Strong relationships with and among programs
- Valuable training and resources
- Commission staff have experience that they can apply

What else will it take?

- Cultivating stronger peer to peer networks
- Designing training to support professional growth and development
- Modeling effective management and leadership practices
- Advocating for the AmeriCorps agency to simplify and streamline requirements

Possible steps forward

- Develop a professional development plan with AmeriCorps program leaders and volunteer service organization leaders

F. Shift from managing complexity to pushing toward simplicity

AmeriCorps program leaders recognized commissions for their ability to help them navigate complexity. Yet to ensure the success, stability, and sustainability of these programs, it will behoove commissions and AmeriCorps programs to simplify and streamline requirements to the extent possible. Simplifying requirements will enable leaders to shift their focus from compliance to impact and innovation. It will also free commissions up to provide more support to AmeriCorps programs and the social sector at large.

Strengths to build upon

- Expertise in compliance
- Deep understanding of local context and uniqueness of programs

What else will it take?

- Advocating for the AmeriCorps agency to simplify and streamline requirements
- Gain a deeper understanding of what is in regulation and what is guidance to better determine and advise programs about what is necessary

Possible steps forward

- Review commission policies and procedures to determine what is necessary and simplify where possible
- Align policies and procedures whenever possible to maintain consistency between national and state requirements

G. Shift from duty to advocacy

The current focus of many commissions, understandably, is on their obligation to the AmeriCorps agency and the necessity of meeting the federal requirements. This

places the state commissions in posture of responding to the priorities and processes of the AmeriCorps agency. In turn, the AmeriCorps agency is understandably focused on fulfilling the statutes of congressional oversight. This influences the frames of mind for those leading the state commissions, orienting them toward obligation and duty of fulfilling requirements. If state commissions could also embrace the potential influence they have nationally, to speak and advocate for their states and the organizations of their states, there could be a potentially helpful and convincing voice from the states which might influence national policy, not simply respond to national policy.

Strengths to build upon

- Deep understanding of what leaders and organization need on the ground
- Knowledge of state dynamics and context
- Unique position of mediator between state and federal
- Relationships both within state and with the AmeriCorps agency

What else will it take?

- Identifying the most important areas in need of advocacy
- Generating shared messaging with other state commissions
- Investing some time, energy, and effort, along with ASC, to identify appropriate steps forward

Possible steps forward

- Conversations among state commission leaders
- Identification of critical areas in need of influence
- Creation of a pathway for influence

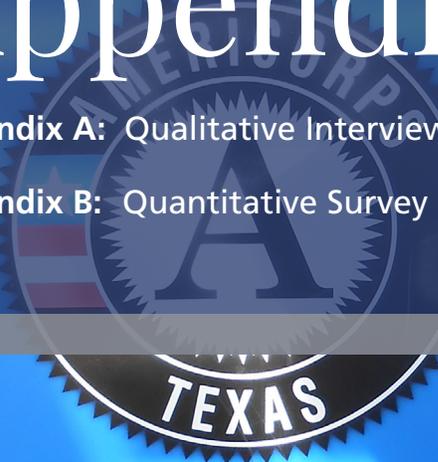




Appendices

Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Protocols

Appendix B: Quantitative Survey



What can AmeriCorps do for you?

OneStar Foundation administers AmeriCorps Texas, which pairs members with nonprofits, public agencies and faith-based and community organizations to help them tackle social challenges.

AmeriCorps Texas gives members the opportunity to strengthen Texas communities while being part of a national service movement. It is a great way to make a difference in people's lives—including your own.

AmeriCorps Texas is administered by
 **onestar**
foundation
texas center for social impact
www.onestarfoundation.org

Appendix A:

Qualitative Interview Protocols

AmeriCorps Program Leaders

Introductory:

Can you tell me a little bit about your organization and your role?

How long have you been working closely with the commission?

How would you describe your relationship with the commission?

What have been some of the most important things you've learned because of your relationship/partnership with the commission? ☒ How has this changed the way you think about your work? (How has this changed the way you think about compliance?) How has this changed your outlook on your program and organization's future?

In what ways has the commission helped you see your program/organization more clearly or understand your program/org better – its strengths and weaknesses, where you have capacity and where you are vulnerable, what's healthy and what's not healthy, etc.? ☒ How has that influenced how you think about where you are and what's next for your program/organization? In what ways has your outlook or mindset toward your program/organization been fundamentally influenced by your interaction with the commission?

What have you learned from the commission that has been most helpful to you in recruiting, retaining and developing AmeriCorps members? What has been most surprising to learn? What do you still wish you could know, or at least know better, about recruiting, retaining, developing members that would really help you? ☒ In what ways has this changed the way you envision members' role in the community now and in the future? In what ways has this changed the way you see your role in developing members?

What new skills and resources have you gained through your relationship with the commission that have helped you overcome challenges in your program and organization? What skills/actions have you tried out? (Or, what have you done differently in your program/org as a result of the commission?) How's that gone for you? What has been a struggle to apply? What skills and resources do you think you still need to develop? ☒ How has working on these things helped you be more strategic in your leadership of your program/org? In what ways do you still want to grow to become the kind of leader you want to be?

What new practices have you adopted from the commission to manage and use data in your program and organization? What parts of this have been easy? What parts have been difficult? ☒ How has this shaped the culture of learning and improvement for your program and organization? In what ways does your program and organization's culture still need to change for your program to grow into its full potential and learn the kinds of things it needs to learn and have the kind of impact you want to have in the community?

What have you been doing differently in member recruitment, management and training because of the commission? What should you be doing that you've been putting off? ☒ How has this made you a more effective advocate for members in your program and in the community? In what ways do you still need to grow in your ability to lead your members?

In what areas have you been feeling more confident because of the commission? In what ways has the commission made you sensitive to (and appropriately concerned about) your leadership, your program, or your members that you wouldn't have been otherwise? ☒ How has this made you more committed to the things that really matter for your team and your program?

Since interacting with the commission, what makes you feel more comfortable, maybe even excited, about evaluating and improving the impact of your program? What continues to be stressful or worrying to you about working on improving your impact? How has the commission affected your comfort level with really digging into the data on your impact and responding to what you see? ☒ What keeps you focused on your impact despite times when it feels bothersome or burdensome to you to do anything more than just manage your day-to-day operations? How has the commission made a difference in the kinds of impact you care about and are committed to achieving?

What excites you most about working with your members? What frustrates you? How have your feelings about working with your members changed since you've been partnering with the commission? ☒ How has your time with the commission connected you more deeply to the most meaningful parts of your work and even the meaning of your work? How has your work with the members and the commission made a difference in the kinds of things you care about in your work and life?

Nonprofit/VSO Leaders

Introductory:

Can you tell me a little bit about your organization and your role?

What kinds of commission programs/events/trainings have you been involved in?

How long have you been involved?

NOTE: Where it says "the commission" throughout this, substitute the specific ways they've been involved as appropriate.

What have been some of the most important things you've learned from participating in the commission's programs/events/trainings? → How has this changed the way you think about volunteers in your organization? How has this changed your outlook on your organization's future?

In what ways has your involvement with the commission helped you see your program/organization more clearly or understand your program/org better – its strengths and weaknesses, where you have capacity and where you are vulnerable, what's healthy and what's not healthy, etc.? → How has that influenced how you think about where you are and what's next for your program/organization? In what ways has

your outlook or mindset toward your program/organization been fundamentally influenced by your interaction with the commission?

What have you learned from the commission that has been most helpful to you in recruiting, retaining and developing volunteers? What has been most surprising to learn? What do you still wish you could know, or at least know better, about volunteer engagement that would really help you? → In what ways has this changed the way you envision volunteers' role in your organization and in the community now and in the future? In what ways has this changed the way you see your role in developing volunteers?

What new skills and resources have you gained through your involvement with the commission that have helped you overcome challenges in your program and organization? What skills/actions have you tried out? (Or, what have you done differently in your program/org as a result of the commission?) How's that gone for you? What has been a struggle to apply? What skills and resources do you think you still need to develop? → How has working on these things helped you be more strategic in your leadership of volunteers and in your program/org? In what ways do you still want to grow to become the kind of leader you want to be?

What new volunteer engagement practices have you adopted from the commission? What parts of this have been easy? What parts have been difficult? → How has this shaped the culture of your program and organization? In what ways does your program and organization's culture still need to change for your volunteer program to grow into its full potential and have the kind of impact you want to have in your organization and in the community?

What have you been doing differently in volunteer recruitment, management and training because of the commission? What should you be doing that you've been putting off? → How has this made you a more effective advocate for volunteers in your organization and in the community? In what ways do you still need to grow in your ability to advocate?

In what areas have you been feeling more confident because of your work with the commission? In what ways has the commission made you sensitive to (and appropriately concerned about) your leadership, your program, or your volunteers that you wouldn't have been otherwise? → How has this made you more committed to the things that really matter for your volunteers and your program/organization?

Since you've been involved with the commission, what makes you feel more comfortable tackling the challenges you face in your work? What continues to be stressful or worrying to you about the challenges you face? → How have you been able to embrace volunteerism as core to your organization's mission and community change despite those worries?

What excites you most about working with your volunteers? What frustrates you? How have your feelings about working with your volunteers changed since you've been involved with the commission? → How has your time with the commission connected you more deeply to the most meaningful parts of your work and even the meaning of your work? How has your work with the volunteers and the commission made a difference in the kinds of things you care about in your work and life?

Public Officials

Introductory Questions

- What connections do you have to national service and volunteerism?
- What commission events and activities have you been involved in?

NOTE: Some attribution to the commission is included in parentheses because it may not be appropriate given that many of these interviews are exploratory.

What do you think about the importance of national service and volunteerism in your community? (In what ways has the commission informed what you think about national service and/or volunteerism?) What information about national service and/or volunteerism do you wish you had access to? → **How has your vision for national service/volunteerism changed over the years? (How has the commission impacted the way you think about national service/volunteerism? If the commission hasn't impacted your thinking, how should it be?)**

What excites you most seeing volunteers or national service members at work in your community? What frustrates you? How have your feelings about volunteerism and national service changed over time (since you've been involved with the commission)? → **How has your time with national service/volunteerism (and the commission) connected you more deeply to the most meaningful parts of your work and even the meaning of your work? How has your work with the volunteers and national service members (and the commission) made a difference in the kinds of things you care about in your work and life?**

In what ways has your personal involvement with service and volunteerism (and the commission) helped you see your community more clearly or understand your community better – its strengths and weaknesses, where you have capacity and where you are vulnerable, what's healthy and what's not healthy, etc.? → **How has that influenced how you think about where you are and what's next for your community? In what ways has your outlook or mindset toward your community been fundamentally influenced by your experiences with national service and/or volunteerism (and the commission)?**

What has been troubling or alarming to you about your community that you think national service/volunteerism could help to address? In what ways has the commission affected what you feel about the needs in your community? → **How has feeling these things about aspects of your community been developing a commitment in you and others for making progress through national service/volunteerism?**

What have you been thinking about your own role in promoting national service/volunteerism? (What has changed in your perception of yourself and your role through your interaction with the commission?) → **How has that made a difference in what you envision for yourself and the influence you want to have for national service/volunteerism?**

What have you done to promote national service/volunteerism? What has seemed to be effective? What has not gone as well as you expected? (What have you done that you probably wouldn't have done without the influence of the commission?) → **How has that affected how you engage as a leader in the community more broadly?**

What kind of decisions or policies have you helped advance for national service/volunteerism? (How has the commission helped with these steps?) → **What kinds of skill and capacities have you been bringing to this work? How have those been developed in you? What skills and capacities would you still like to develop to advance national service and volunteerism in the way you want to?**

What have you not yet done that you want to do to move forward national service/volunteerism in your community? Why has moving on these things been challenging? → **What kinds of things would help support people in roles like yours to engage more fully in the cause of national service/volunteerism?**

What do you hope most for when you think about the potential impact of national service/volunteerism? What inspires you? → **How does this affect your heart for the future of your community?**

Appendix B:

Quantitative Survey Instrument

Example Survey from UServeUtah

The Value of State Service Commissions

Thank you for taking the time to provide us with your perspective on the impact of UServeUtah in your work and your community. Your responses will help us prove and improve the value of UServeUtah to the state. We appreciate your thoughtful responses to the questions that follow. The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete. The data from this survey will be joined with survey data from Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Vermont and from more than 100 in-depth interviews with leaders from these states to inform the work of state service commissions nationwide. The evaluators will share aggregated data with UServeUtah and America's Service Commissions. Your responses will be anonymous. If you have any questions about this survey or the larger evaluation project, please don't hesitate to reach out to the evaluators at info@dialoguesinaction.com.

About you and your organization

In what ways have you been involved with UServeUtah? (Please check all that apply.)

1. I am a staff member of an AmeriCorps State program.
2. I am a staff member of a national direct AmeriCorps program.
3. I work for an organization that sponsors an AmeriCorps State program.
4. My organization hosts an AmeriCorps member that we receive through an AmeriCorps State program.
5. I am a current AmeriCorps member.
6. I am an AmeriCorps alum.
7. I am a current AmeriCorps VISTA.
8. I am an AmeriCorps VISTA alum.
9. I am a UServeUtah commissioner.
10. I am a public official (elected or appointed).
11. I am a civil servant (public employee that's not elected or appointed).
12. I attended Volunteer Management Training hosted by UServeUtah.
13. I attended the Active Engagement Retreat hosted by UServeUtah.
14. I serve on the UServeUtah Youth Council.
15. Other _____
16. I have not previously been involved with UServeUtah.

Which of these categories describe your organization? (Please check all that apply.)

1. Nonprofit
2. Volunteer service organization
3. Volunteer center
4. State government
5. Regional government

6. Local government
7. Higher education institution
8. School district
9. Other _____
10. I am not affiliated with an organization.

What is your role in your organization? (Please select the option that most accurately represents your role.)

1. Executive director/CEO
2. Program director
3. Other director
4. Program staff
5. Fiscal staff
6. Other _____

How long have you been involved with UServeUtah?

1. I have not been involved with UServeUtah
2. Less than 1 year
3. 1-3 years
4. 4-6 years
5. 7-9 years
6. 10+ years

About how frequently do you interact with UServeUtah?

1. Never
2. Less than once a year
3. Once a year
4. A few times a year
5. Quarterly
6. Monthly
7. A few times a month
8. Weekly or more often

About how many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff does your organization have?

In your own words, how would you describe your race and ethnicity? (The evaluators will use this information to disaggregate the data to determine if there are patterns based on race or ethnicity.)

Impact on AmeriCorps Program Leaders and Organizations

For this section, please reflect on the experience you and your organization have had with UServeUtah as an AmeriCorps State grantee or AmeriCorps National direct partner. For each of the statements that follow, select a response based on the degree to which UServeUtah has affected you or your organization. If you have not interacted with UServeUtah in the way the statement describes, please select "Not at all."

Delivering effective service

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We implement our programs more effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to maintain program compliance.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to meet our performance measures.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to address challenges in our program.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to embed equity and inclusion in program design and delivery.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Strengthening organization

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We are more stable as an organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Our programs are more sustainable.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We have a stronger, more capable staff team.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We have increased leadership capacity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We have higher quality programs and services.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are making deeper, more durable impact on our program beneficiaries.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Strategic thinking and action

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We make better decisions about priorities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We invest more in building the capacity of our team.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to respond to needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

We are better prepared to expand the reach of our programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to adapt programming to fit the unique needs of underserved communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Engaging people and partners

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We mobilize and manage volunteers more effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We place greater value on volunteerism in our organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We collaborate more effectively with other organizations and agencies.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better equipped to co-create strategies with underserved communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We have more involvement from the diversity of our community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Learning and impact

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We have greater capacity to evaluate our programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We use data to design more effective strategies.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We have developed better habits of learning and innovation.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We have greater capacity to use data to prove our impact.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are have greater capacity to use data to improve our impact.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

In what areas could UServeUtah support you, your program, or your organization more effectively?

Impact on AmeriCorps Members and Community

For this section, please reflect on the experience you and your organization have had with UServeUtah as an AmeriCorps State grantee or AmeriCorps National direct partner. If you have not interacted with UServeUtah in the way the statement describes, please select "Not at all."

Members are impacted by their experiences.

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We develop programs that are more engaging for our members.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to create opportunities for members to make a difference.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We provide more enriching member development experiences.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to support members in achieving their career and education goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Members become capable, committed social sector leaders.

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We are better able to help members put their skills to use for the benefit of our communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to contribute to the professional growth of our members.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are more able to contribute to the personal growth of our members.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better at developing the leadership capacity of our members.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Members develop habits of civic engagement.

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We are better able to help our members engage in their community in meaningful ways.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to help our members identify a career path that includes service.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

We are more skilled at encouraging our members to be a voice for service and volunteerism in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better equipped to develop the capacity of our members to serve their community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Impact on AmeriCorps Host Site Capacity

For this section, please reflect on you and your organization's experience as an AmeriCorps member host site. For each of the statements that follow, select a response based on the degree to which UServeUtah has affected you or your organization. If you have not interacted with UServeUtah in the way the statement describes, please select "Not at all."

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
To what degree has the capacity of your organization increased as a result of having an AmeriCorps member?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
To what degree have you been able to expand services as a result of having an AmeriCorps member?	<input type="checkbox"/>				

What are the three most significant ways that having an AmeriCorps member has impacted your organization?

Impact on AmeriCorps members and alums

For this section of the survey, please reflect on your experience as an AmeriCorps member or VISTA.

How many terms of service have you completed as an AmeriCorps member?

1. Currently serving my first term
2. Completed 1 term
3. Completed 2 terms
4. Completed 3 terms
5. Completed more than 3 terms

What trainings and events have you participated in that have been provided by UServeUtah? (Please check all that apply.)

1. AmeriCorps Kickoff
2. AmeriCorps 25th Anniversary
3. Volunteer management training
4. Life After AmeriCorps
5. Active Engagement Retreat
6. Youth Council
7. Other _____

Did you serve in the same community you grew up in or consider home?

1. Yes
2. No

Did you stay in the community you served in after you completed your term of service?

1. Yes
2. No

Do you plan to stay in the community you serve in after you complete your term of service?

1. Yes
2. No

For each of the statements that follow, please select a response based on the degree to which your AmeriCorps experience has affected you. Then, please rate how much UServeUtah has contributed to the changes you experienced in the category overall.

Community connection

As a result of my AmeriCorps service experience...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I feel more connected to my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I know more about the needs of my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more effective at taking action to address the needs in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better equipped to get people involved in service to my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better able to bring forward the voices of the underrepresented in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I take more responsibility for the welfare of my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

How much has UServeUtah contributed to these changes in your connection to the community?

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Civic Engagement

As a result of my AmeriCorps service experience...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I place greater value on service and volunteerism in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

I am better able to involve others in service and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more active in serving the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more connected to others who are serving the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more committed to doing something about inequities in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am a better leader in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am a more effective champion for service in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

How much has UServeUtah contributed to these changes in your civic engagement?

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Life Pathways

As a result of my AmeriCorps service experience...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I have a clearer plan for my future.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better equipped to pursue my goals for the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I have a stronger network of support to help me achieve my goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
My goals for the future are more focused on service.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel more motivated to use my life to make a positive difference in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

How much has UServeUtah contributed to these changes in your life pathways?

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
	<input type="checkbox"/>				

What are the three most significant ways your AmeriCorps experience has impacted you?

In what areas could UServeUtah support you more effectively in your service or life after service?

Impact on Public Officials

For this section, please reflect on your experience with UServeUtah as a public official or commissioner. For each of the statements that follow, select a response based on the degree to which UServeUtah has affected you. If you have not interacted with UServeUtah in the way the statement describes, please select "Not at all."

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I know more about what is happening with national service and volunteerism in Utah communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I place greater value on national service and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am a stronger advocate for policies that support national service and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more committed to raising the visibility of national service and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better equipped to advance national service and volunteerism in my sphere of influence.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I volunteer more in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Impact on State Agencies and Civil Servants

For this section of the survey, please reflect on your involvement with UServeUtah as a civil servant. For each of the statements that follow, please select a response based on the degree to which UServeUtah has affected you or your agency. If you have not interacted with UServeUtah in the way the statement describes, please select "Not at all."

As a result of UServeUtah...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I better understand the role that AmeriCorps and volunteerism play in our state.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better equipped to advocate on behalf of AmeriCorps and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I give more consideration to the needs of AmeriCorps and volunteer programs when developing policies and procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more committed to making AmeriCorps and volunteerism more successful in the state.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

I am better able to coordinate with other state agencies to make AmeriCorps and volunteerism more successful in the state.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
My agency/department has more effective partnerships with AmeriCorps and volunteer programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

What are the most significant ways UServeUtah has impacted your ability to form mutually beneficial partnerships with AmeriCorps and volunteer programs?

What additional resources or support do you need to work more effectively with AmeriCorps and volunteer programs?

Impact of Volunteer Management Training

For this section, please reflect on your experience in Volunteer Management Training provided by UServeUtah. For each of the statements that follow, select a response based on the degree to which the Volunteer Management Training has affected you or your organization. If the Volunteer Management Training has not affected you or your organization in the way the statement describes, please select "Not at all."

Engaging volunteers

As a result of UServeUtah's Volunteer Management Training...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We mobilize and manage volunteers more effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We place greater value on volunteerism in our organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We better recognize the importance of effective volunteer management.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better equipped to create meaningful volunteer opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We more regularly recognize the contributions of our volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Strengthening organization

As a result of UServeUtah's Volunteer Management Training...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We are more stable as an organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Our programs are more sustainable.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

We have a stronger, more capable staff team.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We have increased leadership capacity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We have higher quality programs and services.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are making deeper, more durable impact on our program beneficiaries.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Strategic thinking and action

As a result of UServeUtah's Volunteer Management Training...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
We make better decisions about priorities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We invest more in building the volunteer management capacity of our team.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to respond to community needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better prepared to expand the reach of our programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
We are better able to adapt programming to fit the unique needs of underserved communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

What are the three most significant ways UServeUtah's Volunteer Management Training has impacted you or your organization?

In what areas could UServeUtah support you in your role as a volunteer manager more effectively?

Impact of the Active Engagement Retreat

For this section, please reflect on your experience participating in the Active Engagement Retreat. For each of the statements that follow, select a response based on the degree to which the Active Engagement Retreat hosted by UServeUtah has affected you. If you have not interacted with UServeUtah in the way the statement describes, please select "Not at all."

Civic Engagement

As a result of the Active Engagement Retreat...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I place greater value on service and volunteerism in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better able to involve others in service and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

I know more ways that I can serve the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more connected to others who are serving the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more committed to doing something about inequities in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am a better leader in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am a more effective champion for civic engagement in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Community connection

As a result of the Active Engagement Retreat...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I feel more connected to my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I know more about the needs of my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better able to recognize the assets in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more effective at taking action to address the needs of my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better able to collaborate with others to address the needs of my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel more responsible for the welfare of my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Life Pathways

As a result of the Active Engagement Retreat...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I have a clearer plan for my future.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
My goals for the future are more focused on service and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better equipped to pursue my goals for the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more confident that I can achieve my goals for the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I have a stronger network of support to help me achieve my goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel more motivated to use my life to make a positive difference in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

What are the three most significant ways the Active Engagement Retreat has impacted you?

In what areas could UServeUtah support you more effectively in being civically engaged moving forward?

Impact of the Youth Council

For this section, please reflect on your experience as a member of the Youth Council. For each of the statements that follow, select a response based on the degree to which your experience serving on the Youth Council has affected you. If you have not interacted with UServeUtah in the way the statement describes, please select "Not at all."

Civic Engagement

As a result of serving on the Youth Council...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I place greater value on service and volunteerism in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better able to involve others in service and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I know more ways that I can serve my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more connected to others who are serving the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more committed to doing something about inequities in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Leadership

As a result of serving on the Youth Council...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I better understand the policy process.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better able to influence policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better able to plan and implement service projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better able to amplify the voices of youth in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am a more effective advocate for my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am a better leader in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Life Pathways

As a result of serving on the Youth Council...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
I have a clearer plan for my future.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
My goals for the future are more focused on service and volunteerism.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am better equipped to pursue my goals for the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am more confident that I can achieve my goals for the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I have a stronger network of support to help me achieve my goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel more motivated to use my life to make a positive difference in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

What are the three most significant ways serving on the Youth Council has impacted you?

In what areas could UServeUtah support you more effectively as a youth leader?

Optional information about you and your AmeriCorps program

We are requesting the information below of AmeriCorps State programs to help us gain richer insights into the data. This information will enable us to identify factors that may affect the impact of the commission. It will also enable us to connect the data from this survey with the interview data we've collected. This information will be kept strictly confidential. No information that can identify you or your program will be shared with UServeUtah or with ASC. We will only share patterns from the data in aggregate. Thank you in advance for sharing with us!

About your relationship with UServeUtah

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent
Overall, how would rate the quality of your relationship with UServeUtah?	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	Very negatively	Moderately negatively	Slightly negatively	It has no effect	Slightly positively	Moderately positively	Very positively
How does the quality of your relationship with UServeUtah affect your ability to maintain compliance with	<input type="checkbox"/>						

AmeriCorps requirements?							
How does the quality of your relationship with UServeUtah affect your ability to maintain program quality?	<input type="checkbox"/>						

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very
How comfortable do you feel approaching UServeUtah staff for help if you face challenges?	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Is there anything else you'd like us to know about your relationship with UServeUtah?

Were you interviewed by one of the evaluators?

1. Yes
2. No

What is the name of your AmeriCorps program?(We are requesting this to help us make connections between survey responses, interview data, and other program information. Your program's name will not be shared.)

Overall Impact

In what ways has UServeUtah impacted you or your organization most significantly?

What can UServeUtah do in the future to bring greater value to you or your organization?

What has UServeUtah done that has brought the most value to your community, region, or state?

What can UServeUtah do in the future to bring greater value to your community, region, or state?