
Youth Corps:

Promising Strategies for Young People and Their Communities

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Introduction

Public concern about the life prospects of today's young people—especially youth who are “at-risk” due to educational or economic disadvantage— continues to escalate with news stories highlighting increasing rates of youth violence, unwed pregnancy, drug use, and dropout and unemployment rates. Meanwhile, Congress has reduced funding for programs targeting at-risk youth, arguing that “nothing works” and citing recent studies that have found that employment and training programs for youth demonstrate, at best, minimal impacts on participants. However, new research from a national evaluation of conservation and youth service corps indicates the corps are promising program models for youth programming. Corps programs lead to positive impacts on participants' employment and earnings, as well as on a variety of outcomes for minority groups, in particular young African-American men. At the same time, corpsmembers contribute important and valuable services to their communities.

This report is based primarily on a comprehensive national study of youth corps programs conducted by Abt Associates as part of a larger evaluation of community service programs for the Corporation for National Service and its predecessor organization, the Commission on National and Community Service. It focuses primarily on traditional youth corps, the precursor to the new AmeriCorps initiative. (While both traditional youth corps and AmeriCorps programs share many characteristics, in general, youth corps serve a more disadvantaged population and place somewhat more emphasis on participant development.)

The quantitative data presented in this report are based on the data provided to the national Evaluation Information System (EIS), which collected information on all programs funded by the Commission during

the 1993/94 grant cycle. During that same period, eight youth corps participated in more in-depth data collection for the programmatic and community impacts analysis. Four of those programs also participated in the participant impact and cost-benefit analysis.

Findings in this report are also informed by experience with youth corps involved in the Youth Apprenticeship Program, which Abt Associates assessed for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, as well as by numerous discussions with youth corps staff and participants and with the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps. (See page 28 for a list of the programs participating in the Abt Associates studies of youth corps.)

Youth corps are typically full-time programs that provide young people with a combination of work experience and education within the framework of community service. Currently, approximately 120 corps programs are in operation nationwide, enrolling 26,000 participants annually. Twenty-one states operate statewide programs; other corps are initiated and managed locally. Participants typically are educationally or economically disadvantaged young people between the ages of 18 and 25. Corpsmembers usually work in teams of 8 to 15 participants on service projects in their communities; many of the programs require participants to wear uniforms or at least t-shirts with the corps' logo. Most programs are non-residential, although a few, including several sites of the California Conservation Corps, provide participants with temporary lodging. Funding for the programs comes from a variety of sources including federal, state and local governments. Increasingly, however, programs are relying upon fee-for-service projects, in which sponsors pay some or all of the project costs, to support their activities.

Programs range in size from comparatively small corps serving twenty participants to programs with several hundred corpsmembers. Participation is typically full-time and intended to last between six and twelve months, although the typical participant stays in the program for about four or five months. Participants generally spend 80 percent of their time in community service; non-service time is allocated to education and other developmental activities. During their enrollment in the corps, participants are paid a stipend, generally equivalent to minimum wage or less. Those who complete the programs are often eligible for post-program educational stipends or small cash awards.

Context: A Brief History of the Youth Corps Movement

Youth corps in the United States began under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal in 1933. The first program, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), was designed primarily as a temporary work relief program during the Depression for unemployed men between the ages of 18 and 25. Participants lived in camps administered by the Army and did heavy construction work in crews managed by the Department of the Interior. Between 1933 and 1942, nearly three million men served in CCC. Participation peaked at 500,000 in the mid-1930s. Initiated as a jobs program for the unemployed, CCC changed the way that this country views national service and generated substantial accomplishments in conservation. Even today, former participants cite the positive effect of the CCC experience on their personal development.

Youth Corps History at a Glance

- 1933-1942:** President Roosevelt launches Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC); 3 million participate in the residential program.
- 1935-1943:** National Youth Administration created; 5 million enrolled.
- 1961-present:** Peace Corps initiated by President Kennedy, expands national service to the international community.
- 1964-present:** Economic Opportunity Act creates VISTA, the National Teachers Corps, and the Neighborhood Youth Corps.
- 1970-1984:** Youth Conservation Corps and Young Adult Conservation Corps renew opportunities for conservation-related service.
- 1976-present:** Numerous local and state corps program are created to address local needs.
- 1990-1993:** The National and Community Service Act of 1990 provides federal funding to local and state corps and creates the Commission on National and Community Service.
- 1993-present:** National and Community Service Act of 1993 merges VISTA and the Commission with the Corporation for National Service; President Clinton's AmeriCorps program is launched.

The National Youth Administration (NYA), created in 1935 and operated by the Works Progress Administration, continued the tradition of service by the unemployed. Between 1935 and 1943, five million men and women between the ages of 18 and 24 served in NYA. NYA differed

from CCC in several ways: it was non-residential (90 percent of the enrollees lived at home or at school); enrolled both men and women (about 50 percent of the participants were women); it was racially integrated; and it offered participants a wider range of work and service opportunities, such as work training programs, education classes, jobs in government agencies, and upgrading public facilities. With the beginning of World War II, both the CCC and NYA programs were discontinued as young men were drafted into the military and young women helped with the war effort at home and overseas.

Civilian national service did not appear again until 1961, when President Kennedy signed the Peace Corps Act. The program was comparatively small (6,000 participants annually), and the work was conducted in developing nations, instead of within the U.S. However, the creation of the Peace Corps served as a catalyst, and national service began to expand and evolve. In 1964, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), the National Teacher Corps, and the Neighborhood Youth Corps were all created under the Economic Opportunity Act.

During the 1970s, conservation-oriented youth programs modeled on the Civilian Conservation Corps enjoyed renewed interest as a solution to the problems of high youth unemployment and unmet needs for public lands conservation. In 1970, the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) was created as a residential, conservation-focused summer work and education program for 15- to 18-year-olds. At its height, YCC provided 32,000 young people with summer jobs. The Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) enrolled 25,000 16- to 23-year-olds in year-round service at its peak. Both programs were integrated into the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). Eventually, funding for those programs was eliminated as a result of departmental budget cuts between 1981 and 1984.

In 1976, Governor Jerry Brown of California, inspired by the old CCC, created the California Conservation Corps. This was the beginning of a "grassroots" movement of non-federal, local and state operated corps. The movement blossomed in the early eighties when programs such as the San Francisco Conservation Corps, the Washington (State) Service Corps, and the New York City Volunteer Corps were established. In 1985, the movement became more organized with the creation of the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC). NASCC provides a national venue for corps program staff to collaborate and exchange ideas for program improvement. By 1987, some 7,000 young men and women were participating in state and local corps.

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 allocated federal funds to state and local corps and brought the movement to the national agenda. It authorized creation of a bipartisan Commission on National and Community Service, and appropriated \$22.5 million for the youth corps programs in its initial funding under Subtitle C of the Act. The Commission was charged with the "...creation or expansion of year-round and summer youth corps." The Act provided youth corps with funding to support full-time, productive work with visible community benefits in a natural resource or human service setting. Participants were to receive a mix of work experience, basic and life skills, education, training, and support services.

The Act provided a more unified structure and national focus for funded programs than had previously existed. It encouraged funded programs to promote participation of unemployed youth, as well as to recruit applicants from diverse backgrounds. Age requirements limited the age of participants to 16 to 25 years for the year-round programs, and between 15 and 21 years of age for the summer programs. Appropriate in-service education and training were required, with assessment of the educational level of participants mandated at program entry. The education component was intended to help participants achieve a high school diploma or GED, as well as to provide skills training for employment. Post-service benefits were also encouraged, ranging from \$50 to \$100 per week of service.

With the passage of the National and Community Service Act of 1993, national funding continues to shape youth corps programs. That legislation includes the initiation of President Clinton's AmeriCorps program. Approximately half of the traditional youth corps programs receive AmeriCorps funding. Those corps are working to address AmeriCorps' emphasis on service provision while maintaining their longstanding commitment to participant development. The 1993 Act also merged the Commission for National and Community Service into the newly created Corporation for National Service, which also incorporates VISTA and other national service programs.

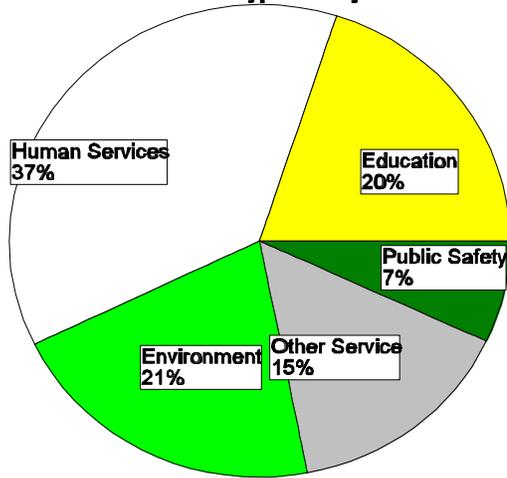
Serving Their Communities: Meeting Local Needs

Established as “grassroots” initiatives, youth corps are designed to address the specific needs of their local communities. Not surprisingly, there is considerable variation in the content of individual service projects. Human services, such as assistance to nursing home staff or helping to renovate low-income housing, is the most common focus for service projects. Education and environmental projects are also common.

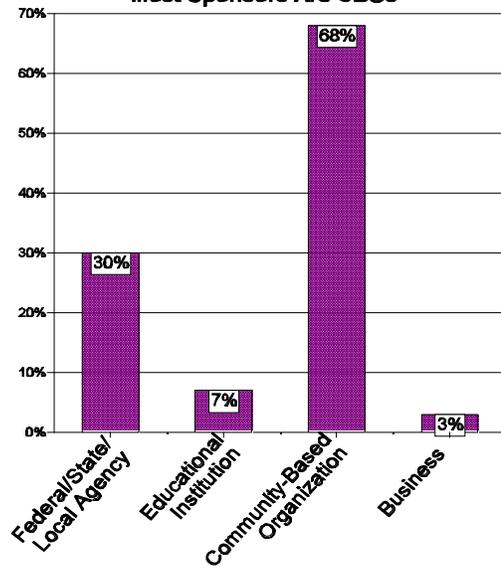
Projects are generally under the auspices of sponsoring, or host, agencies, which are usually not-for-profit organizations or community-based organizations (CBOs), or government agencies. Host agencies share in the responsibility for training and supervision of the corpsmembers. The agencies also frequently donate supplies and workspace for the project.

Service projects are generally short-term initiatives. Almost two-thirds of the projects last between two and twelve weeks; 41 percent last between two and four weeks.

Human Services Most Common Type of Project



Most Sponsors Are CBOs



Examples of Service Projects

- # In collaboration with a neighborhood school-based community center, a team of corpsmembers serve as teacher assistants, tutoring children (K-3) individually or in groups of 2-6, or reading to students. Each team member is assigned to a classroom with 20-25 children.
 - # Corpsmembers provide tutoring to 400 students enrolled in an after-school tutoring program operated by a community-based organization.
 - # At a local health care facility, corpsmembers prepare and mail materials for the volunteer services director, help maintain stocks in hospital supply rooms, escort patients to examinations, and assist with the provision of child care at an on-site facility (for employees). Corpsmembers provide services to 65-85 children, ranging in age from 2 months to 5 years.
 - # Corpsmembers assist in staging an Olympics-style athletic event for an estimated 400 physically challenged children. Corpsmembers help in the preparation for the event, time activities, and assist children in the track and field and swimming meets. They also clean up after the event.
 - # For a local conservation center, corpsmembers plant 400 trees along a highway as a soundbreak.
 - # For the corps program, participants begin the rehabilitation of a 5-story, 6000-square-foot building intended for use as housing for 14 future participants. Services provided includes demolition, excavation, masonry, window installation, rough-framing, installing structural steel, concrete finishing, site work, roofing, and siding.
 - # Following a devastating hurricane, corpsmembers remove debris and do exterior clean-up for approximately 20 duplexes in a public housing project.
 - # As part of a park improvement project operated by a local parks department, corpsmembers clear brush from a 10-foot wide trail. They also clear stairs on the trail, and reconstruct 25 4-foot wide × 10-inch deep stairs on a hillside that can now be traversed safely. For the same set of trails, corpsmembers also construct
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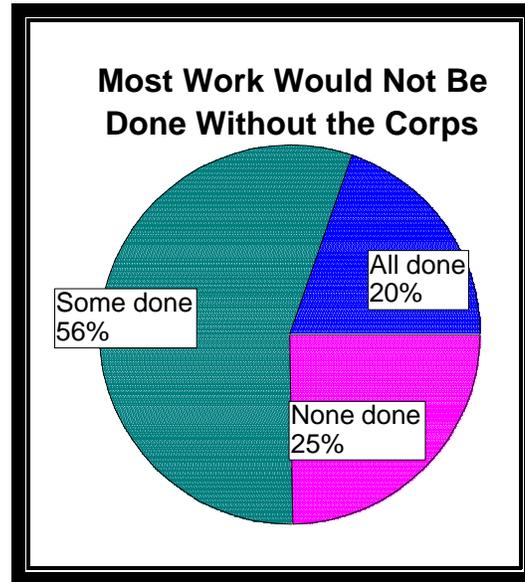
Providing Useful Service: Assessments of Sponsors and Beneficiaries

The average corpsmember in the eight intensive study sites contributed almost 600 hours of community service during his or her participation in the corps program. Staff from agencies sponsoring corpsmembers, as well as staff from service beneficiaries, were asked to assess the corps' accomplishments. We found that the corps provided net increases in the services available in their communities, in most cases accomplishing work that would not have been done otherwise. Where respondents report that only "some" of the work would have been accomplished

without the program, the sponsor typically had access to requisite supplies and materials but lacked some, or all, of the person power needed to complete the project. Although one in five sponsors indicate that the work would have been completed anyway, many of these sponsors indicated that alternatives to corps participation would have required more time or expense.

Project sponsors express a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of services provided by corpsmembers:

- ! Almost 80 percent of the sponsoring agencies rated the quality of corpsmember work as "good" or "excellent."
- ! The overall rating on a ten-point scale, where ten indicates the "highest quality" was 7.6; projects with a public safety or human needs focus received the highest ratings.
- ! Virtually all of the corps' sponsors (99.6 percent) said they would be willing to work with the corps again.



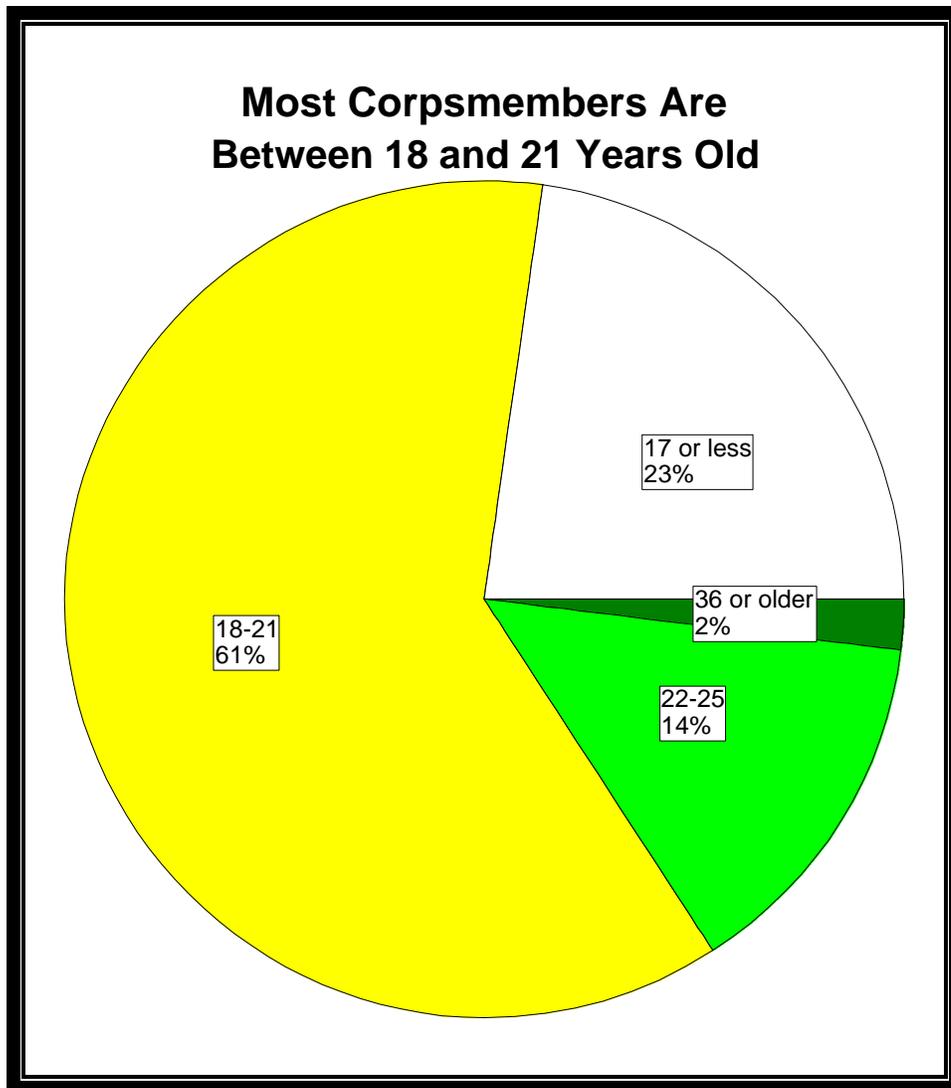
Beneficiaries of corpsmembers' services include elementary school students and other young people, disadvantaged populations, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and the community at large. In general, beneficiaries are satisfied with the services provided by the corpsmembers:

- ! Sixty-nine percent of the beneficiaries rate the quality of the work performed as "good," "very good," or "excellent."
- ! Nearly three-quarters of the beneficiaries indicate the quality of their lives had been improved by the services provided.

Sponsoring agencies were also asked to estimate what it would have cost them to hire comparable labor to provide these services. Using a supply price methodology to assess the value of services to the community, the estimated value averages over \$13 per service hour, or almost \$8,000 per participant. At the individual program level, the value per service hour ranges from \$8.64 to \$15.18. Projects requiring physical labor, such as construction or conservation projects, tend to have higher hourly values compared to more clerical or administrative activities.

Service Beneficiaries Are Satisfied with Work Quality	
Percent rating quality of work:	
Excellent	22%
Very good	30%
Good	17%
Some problems	16%
Poor	15%
Perceived effect of services on quality of beneficiaries' lives:	
Greatly increased	32%
Some increase	40%
No change	19%
Some decrease	5%
Greatly decreased	4%

Sponsors Give Programs High Ratings	
Percent rating overall program quality:	
Excellent	24%
Good	54%
Fair	22%
Poor	0%
Average rating on 10-point scale:	
Public safety	8.3
Human needs	8.0
Community improvements	7.9
Education	7.6
Environment	7.5
Education and human needs	7.0
Other	7.4
All projects combined	7.6
Agency would work with program again:	99.6%

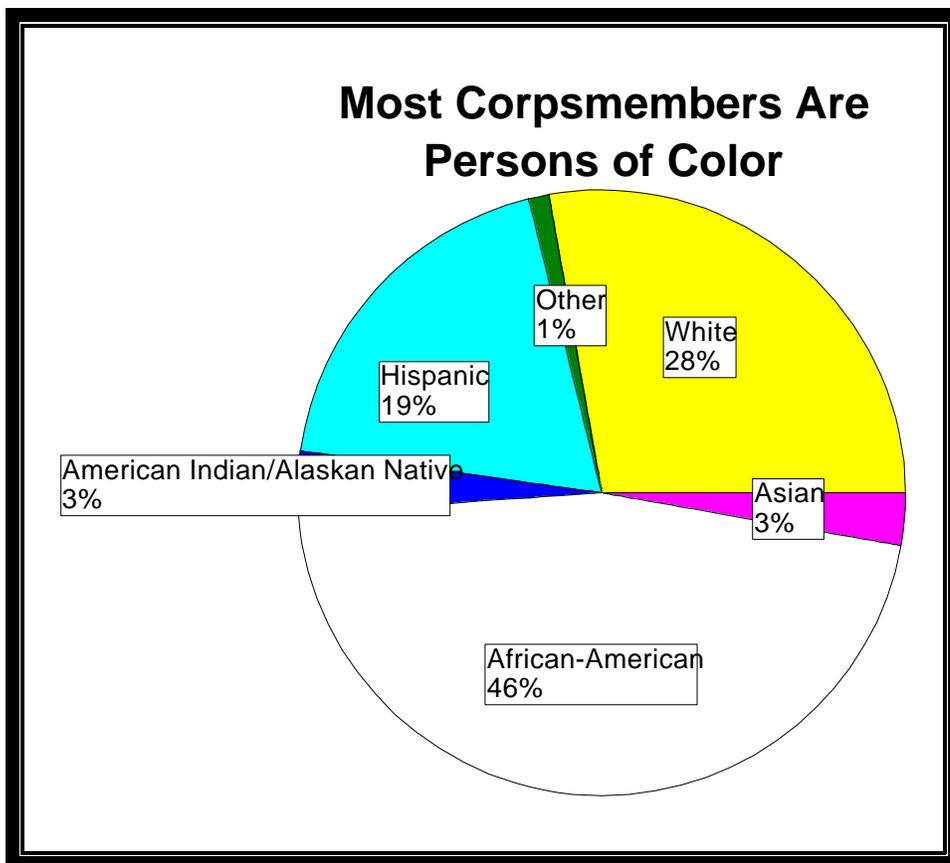


Who Joins Youth Corps and Why?

Corps participants are typically educationally or economically disadvantaged and between the ages of 17 and 26. In the year prior to their enrollment in the youth corps, only 12 percent of corpsmembers had participated in any community service. Most participants are persons of color: almost

half are African-American; only slightly more than a quarter are white. More than half (56 percent) were high school drop-outs when they joined the program, lacking a high school diploma or GED. Eighty percent did not work at all during the year prior to enrollment in the corps. Seventy percent reported a household income of \$15,000 or less in the previous year; almost half (45 percent) reported that their households were receiving some form of public assistance—AFDC, general relief, or food stamps.

Given the large share of disadvantaged participants, it is not surprising that the three most common reasons given for joining the corps were to get training, a GED, or a job. Only 12 percent reported that they joined to “help others” or to “do community service.”



Rating the Experience: Corpsmembers' View of the Program

Only about half of the corpsmembers complete the program, with completion rates ranging across programs from 30 to 59 percent. The corps programs' completion rate is consistent with other programs serving at-risk youth, such as Supported Work and Jobstart, and reflects typical behavior of many young adults, who migrate from one temporary job to another before finally settling into permanent employment. Programs differ in their definition of a successful completer, often including corpsmembers who leave to go on to better employment or full-time education as "successful completers" along with participants who remain for the duration of the program. When asked about the primary cause for leaving the program early, about a third of participants report that they left because they had a problem with the program—either they were dissatisfied with some aspect (stipend amount, location or difficulty of the service project), had a disagreement with staff, or were involuntarily terminated. Other dropouts gave reasons evenly divided between leaving for education or employment, and personal problems including pregnancy and medical reasons.

Program completion rates varied among participant subgroups. More women complete than men (53 percent versus 44 percent). Latinos (52 percent), Asian Americans (51 percent), and individuals who reported multiple ethnic backgrounds (70 percent) have higher than average completion rates. Native Americans and whites have considerably lower successful completion rates (37 percent and 42 percent, respectively.) Completion rates for African-Americans are consistent with the overall average: slightly more than half of black participants satisfactorily completed the program.

Participant age also appears to be correlated with program completion. Only 28 percent of corpsmembers aged 17 or younger complete the program, compared with half the participants between the ages of 21 and 25. Educational attainment prior to entry into the program also makes a difference. Participants who had already graduated from high school or had a GED when they enrolled in the program have completion rates a third higher than average (60 percent). On the other hand, successful completion does not appear to be related to the reasons participants gave for joining the programs. Only participants who said they joined to get a scholarship have comparatively high completion rates—64 percent. Only a third of the participants who joined the program because they wanted a job successfully complete the corps.

Program size is a factor in retention. In general, larger programs (50 or more participants) tended to have lower completion rates than their smaller counterparts. The comparative intimacy and personal nature of the smaller programs may promote corpsmember retention. Since enrollment targets are fairly low, smaller programs may also have the luxury of being more selective in screening and enrolling participants. Extended application processes may screen out individuals likely to drop out of the program. Several small programs have rigorous pre-enrollment “try-out” periods during which candidates unlikely to be successful drop out or are screened out.

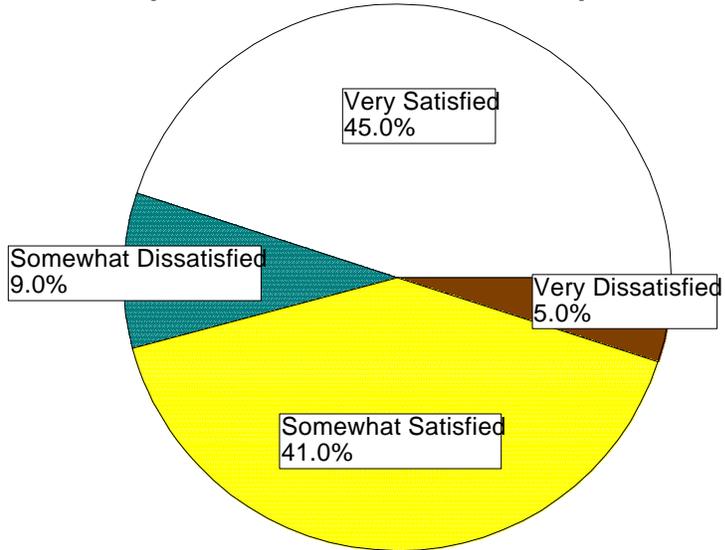
Participants reflected on their experience in the corps in followup interviews conducted approximately 15 months after their enrollment. At that point, all but a handful of corpsmembers had departed from the program. Overall, participants report that they were highly satisfied with their program experience: 86 percent reported they were satisfied with their experience in the corps, and almost half (45 percent) said they were “very satisfied.” Satisfaction with the overall program experience holds true even for participants who were involuntarily terminated from the program; of those individuals, 30 percent indicated they were “very satisfied” with their corps experience and 51 percent were “somewhat satisfied.”

In addition to reporting satisfaction with the program:

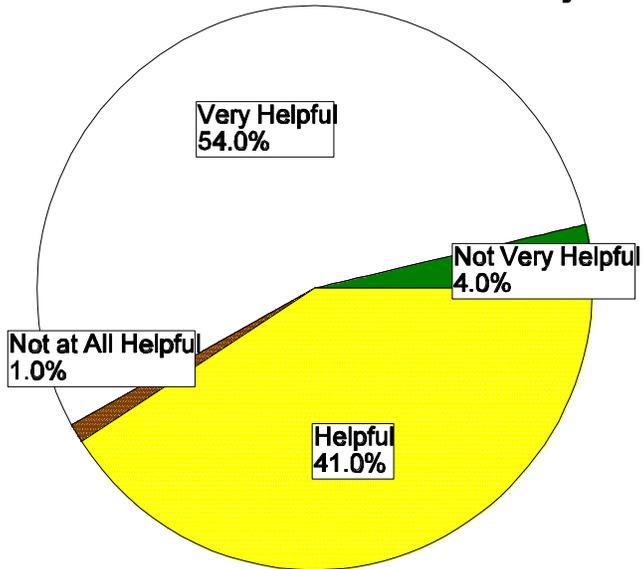
- ! Almost three-quarters (73 percent) of all participants said they learned a skill in the program that would benefit them in the future.
- ! Almost all (95 percent) perceived their services as “helpful” or “very helpful” to their community.
- ! Over 80 percent said they would enroll in the program if they had the opportunity to make the decision again.
- ! Almost two-thirds (64 percent) would recommend the program highly to a friend.

Corpsmember satisfaction may be related to the programs’ philosophy and operating rules. Corps programs maintain structured rules and guidelines to reinforce work skills and responsibility, while at the same time promoting corpsmembers’ personal development through respect and involvement in decisionmaking. Nearly 90 percent of corpsmembers viewed the programs as having reasonable expectations, and nearly three-quarters considered the rules and policies to be fair. Corpsmembers also rate program staff highly in terms of their respect for participants and willingness to listen. This is

Corpsmembers Satisfied with Experience



Value of Service to the Community



not to say that rules, regulations, and the strictness with which they are applied are consistent across programs. In general, smaller programs are more flexible in taking into consideration individual factors influencing particular behavior and in determining the extent of disciplinary response to infractions. Despite differences across programs, there is consistency within programs.

Youth corps also promote corpsmember social and personal development through teamwork and access to caring adults as role models and mentors. In particular, crew supervisors serve as boss, mentor, older sibling, advisor, disciplinarian and advocate for the participants on their team, frequently interacting with the corpsmembers after program hours. Ninety percent of participants reported they developed at least one very good personal relationship while in the corps. These relationships included those with fellow corpsmembers, crew leaders, or other adults on the program staff.

Benefiting Participants: Impacts on Corpsmembers

Youth corps provide participants with a variety of activities intended to improve their future education and employment prospects and to enhance their personal development. These activities include: work preparedness and skill training within the context of community service; remedial, vocational, and academic education (depending upon educational level and interests); and communication and interpersonal skill development. Abt's national evaluation of youth corps used random assignment of applicants to the program or to a control group that was excluded from the program to estimate the impact of these activities on participants. The analysis examined nine broad categories of program outcomes. See page 26 for a list of the outcome categories. (Unless otherwise noted, all impacts reported are statistically significant at the .10 level or better.)

The study found that the strongest impacts were on participants' employment and earnings, providing youth with employment opportunities that were not otherwise available. Counting jobs both in and out of the program, most corpsmembers reported being employed at some time during the follow-up period, in contrast to only about three quarters of their counterparts who were not enrolled in the program. Corpsmembers also worked more hours, averaging more than 2,000 hours over fifteen months, compared with less than 1,500 hours for nonparticipants. The employment experience afforded by the corps also appears to lead to successful post-program employment. Former corpsmembers who were

employed at follow-up had average wages of \$6.66 per hour, as compared with \$6.26 for the controls, although the difference between the wages of the two groups is not statistically significant.

In addition to employment-related impacts, the program had two other statistically significant impacts on the overall sample of participants. During the 15-month follow-up period:

- ! **Participants were less likely to be arrested.** Participation in the programs reduced arrest rates by nearly one-third (12 percent of the treatment group versus 17 percent of the controls).
- ! **Participants were less likely to earn a technical certificate or diploma.** Only 8 percent of all participants earned certificates or diplomas from technical schools, compared with 13 percent of the controls. Apparently, participation in the corps substitutes for enrollment in additional education, at least in the short term.

While, overall, significant impacts were identified for only the above outcomes, most other measures analyzed demonstrated positive, but not statistically significant, effects of participation in the corps. Collectively the findings suggest that the programs generate positive, if not robust, effects on participants.

These results are consistent across the four corps programs included in the participant impact analysis, despite considerable cross-program variation in location, focus, and target population. There also are no significant differences based on age of participants or high school completion status, nor are there any statistically significant differences in impacts associated with duration in the program, once adjustments are made for other participant characteristics.

However, there are considerable differences in impacts based on participant gender and ethnicity. The study examined impacts on corpsmembers grouped into six subgroups defined by those two characteristics. Findings are positive for African-American and Hispanic participants and for white women, with consistent impacts on employment-related outcomes as well as selected other measures. Of particular promise is the reduction of pregnancy rates among young unwed African-American women. The most dramatic impacts are on young African-American men. In addition to positive impacts on employment and earnings, compared with their counterparts in the control group, young black males also had increased social and personal responsibility and higher educational aspirations, and were more likely to vote.

The strong impacts on African-American men are especially striking given findings from previous studies indicating that few employment and training programs have any positive effects on disadvantaged persons of color, especially young men. Why do the corps have more impacts on black males? Most African-American men in the study live in inner-city areas with high levels of poverty. For many, their surroundings offer very limited positive alternatives to participation in the corps. In informal interviews, black men often commented that the corps provided them with opportunities and relationships not otherwise accessible or available to them. For many, the corps was a rare opportunity to develop a close friendship with a person of another race or someone who had substantially more education, or to have a relationship with a supportive and caring adult. Although corps strive to provide all participants with a wide array of opportunities and experiences, options outside of the corps appear to be much more limited for young black men. While this is a speculative conclusion, the lack of alternative opportunities is consistent with the dramatic impacts observed for young African-American men.

In contrast, the corps have quite different effects on young white men, who experience reductions in employment-related outcomes. What accounts for the impacts on white men? Much appears to be attributable to the difference in their more general employment and earnings experiences. During the follow-up period, white males in the control group had average earnings of over \$1,200, compared to an average of less than \$650 for all of the control group members combined. Apparently, outside of the corps, young white men have considerably more well-paying employment options than women or persons of color. For most participants, though, youth corps programs provide important sources of income and employment experience that would otherwise be unavailable to them. With the exception of white men, youth corps participants earned more than their counterparts over the course of the follow-up period.

Impacts on Young Men

African-American men:

- ▶ **Scored significantly higher on measures of personal and social responsibility.** Members of the treatment group had scores at follow-up that averaged nearly 8 percent above controls on the community involvement subscale, and over 6 percent above controls on the overall Personal and Social Responsibility scale.
- ▶ **Were more likely to have voted in the last election.** Participants were more than four times as likely to have voted than their counterparts in the control group (22 percent of participants had voted, compared with only 4 percent of controls).
- ▶ **Experienced more employment and had higher earnings.** Treatment group members were almost half again as likely as control group members to have worked for pay during the follow-up period (91 percent versus 62 percent), and both the total hours worked and average monthly earnings were over one and a half times as large in the treatment group compared with controls (participants worked over 1,810 total hours on average and had monthly earnings that averaged \$705). These impacts include work as corpsmembers.
- ▶ **Were more likely to have earned an associate's degree.** Nearly 4 percent of African-American men in the treatment group earned an associate's degree, while none of the control group earned the degree.
- ▶ **Had higher educational aspirations.** Almost two-thirds of the treatment group indicated they would like to graduate from college, compared to less than 40 percent in the control group.
- ▶ **Were less likely to report a good relationship with people at work besides their supervisor.** For those employed at time of follow-up, only 80 percent indicated they had very good or pretty good relationships with co-workers, compared with 95 percent of the controls. This may simply reflect higher standards for workplace relationships based on the supportive relationships participants encountered with their fellow corpsmembers.

Hispanic men:

- ▶ **Worked more total hours since program enrollment.** Participants worked nearly 900 hours more than their control group counterparts, who worked 1,450 hours.
- ▶ **Were more likely to receive a promotion at the current job.** Over a third of the participants received a promotion at the current job, as compared with 19 percent of the controls.

White males:

- ▶ **Were less likely to be employed at follow-up.** About two-thirds as many treatment group members as control group members were employed at follow-up (59 percent versus nearly 90 percent).
- ▶ **Had lower monthly earnings.** Participants' monthly earnings (including months with no earnings) averaged \$875 over the follow-up period, whereas the control group averaged \$1238. However, both groups of white males earned considerably more than their counterparts in other subgroups.
- ▶ **Had less perceived control over work outcomes.** Treatment group members had scores that were 8 percent below the scores of control group members, on a measure of the control of work outcomes.

Impacts on Young Women

African-American women:

- ▶ ***Were more likely to have worked for pay during the follow-up period.*** Almost 90 percent of the participants had worked since program enrollment, as compared with just over 60 percent of controls.
- ▶ ***Were more likely to have received an award at their current job.*** Of those currently working, nearly 35 percent of treatment group members had received an award at their job, as compared with only 9 percent of the controls.
- ▶ ***Who were unmarried were less likely to be pregnant at follow-up*** (6 percent of the treatment group versus 21 percent of controls).

Hispanic women:

- ▶ ***Were much more likely than control group members to have worked for pay since program enrollment*** (91 percent of the treatment group versus 53 percent of the controls).
- ▶ ***Were more likely to have higher educational aspirations.*** Nearly two-thirds indicated they would like to graduate from a 4-year college or attend graduate school, compared to 61 percent of controls.
- ▶ ***Were less likely to receive a raise at their current job*** (no treatment group members compared with 40 percent of controls). It should be noted, however, that at follow-up, participants may not have been in their post-corps job long enough to be eligible for a raise.

White women:

- ▶ ***Were more likely to have earned an associate's degree.*** Over a quarter of participants earned the degree, compared with no controls. At random assignment white women were more likely to already have a GED or high school diploma than individuals in other subgroups, so their attainment of an associate's degree during the follow-up period may have been more feasible.
 - ▶ ***Were more likely to expect to graduate from a 4-year college or attend graduate school*** (90 percent of treatment group members compared with less than 60 percent of controls).
 - ▶ ***Were much less likely to have consumed five or more alcoholic drinks in one sitting during the previous month*** (3 percent of treatment group members versus 32 percent of controls).
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Weighing Costs and Benefits

An important question for policymakers is whether the benefits generated by the programs are worth the costs of operating the programs. That is, are the programs worthwhile from the standpoint of society as a whole? To address this question, the monetary benefits and costs were analyzed and linked to the major groups in society that they affect. The analysis focused on the four programs subject to random assignment and included in the participant impact analysis. These programs were the largest, most established corps programs among the intensive study sites. They had weathered the transition associated with program startup and had achieved comparatively stable operations and effectively represent the steady-state functions of youth corps programs. Moreover, the random assignment design allowed net benefits to be estimated.

Not all program benefits and costs can be measured in monetary terms. The programs studied had multiple objectives and a broad range of potential effects, such as impacts on participants' sense of social and personal responsibility, which cannot be measured directly in dollar terms. The principal program benefits that can be monetized are the value of the services provided to the community and payments to participants; the principal costs are the operational costs of the program, including wages and benefits paid to participants and earnings given to participants.

A comparison of the major costs and benefits per average participant yields the following results for society as a whole:

**Youth Corps
Programs in the
Participant Impact Analysis**

Operating costs of youth corps	- \$9,540
Value of service to society	+ 7,824
Earnings gains to participants	<u>+ 2,313</u>
Net benefit to society	+ \$ 597

In purely monetary terms, the four established programs represent a valuable investment of public funds. On average, they produced nearly \$600 in benefits to society for every participant. (A more detailed accounting of costs and benefits, expressed per service hour, appears

on page 27.) We did not conduct a full analysis of the four newer, smaller corps programs included in other phases of the intensive analysis. Given their implementation status, we viewed it as premature to include these programs in the cost-benefit calculus. However, we did estimate the value of service and the operating costs of those programs, and, not surprisingly, found costs per participant to be significantly higher than for the larger programs.

A final comment on program costs is warranted. Corps are comparatively expensive and challenging to operate, with costs averaging almost \$10,000 per participant. Much of the costs are associated with the wide range of participant needs the programs seek to address, and the intensive, full-time nature of the corps. Despite the disadvantages (or “baggage,” as described by one staff member) many young people bring with them to the program, corps are effective in organizing participants on service projects that generate benefits to their community that come close to the costs of program operation.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the cost-benefit analysis is able to include only a limited set of fairly short-term benefits. Long-term benefits to participants and to society not measured in this analysis may be significant. Benefits to participants may continue to improve the quality of their lives in ways that extend beyond the scope of the study period. For example, the employment-related experience gained through the corps may alone be important enough to dramatically improve the lifelong employment prospects for participants. Given the extent of the benefits that were measured by the study and additional, unmeasured but reasonably expected additional benefits, youth corps are a worthwhile investment from the viewpoint of society.

Final Thoughts: Why Corps Work

Youth corps are rare among youth-serving programs in their ability to demonstrate significant and positive impacts on participants. What differentiates youth corps from other initiatives serving similar populations? The authors of this report identified several characteristics of youth corps that appear to be fundamental to the programs' success. While one or more of these characteristics often are present in other programs, all of them are integral to youth corps and evident in fully implemented programs. The essential features are:

- ! **Comprehensiveness of services.** A majority of participants in youth corps are significantly disadvantaged either economically or educationally. They often have multiple barriers that make them “difficult” to serve, such as a history of substance abuse, unwed pregnancy, or poor communication skills. To the extent feasible, corps attempt to serve the entire individual, not just selected needs. Through case management, participants are linked to a wide array of educational and supportive services while in the corps, and often after they leave the program. Many of these services, such as counseling and education, may be provided internally by the program; other needs are addressed by external providers. However, in contrast to many other youth-serving programs, corpsmembers are not simply referred to other social service agencies; the services are coordinated through the youth corps. Corps members are not expected to fend for themselves within the maze of social services. Externally provided services are integrated into the participants' corps experience.
 - ! **Supportive and dedicated program staff.** Youth corps staff—from Executive Director to team leaders—are carefully recruited and selected because of their commitment to improving the lives of young people. Staff are expected to incorporate principles of youth development in working with corpsmembers. As a result, one of the most consistent comments made by corpsmembers about program staff is that the “staff treats me with respect.” At the same time, program staff articulate high expectations for program participants. Rather than treating them as clients with deficits to be “filled,” they provide a more holistic approach that views participants as “young people with promise.” Although not all corpsmembers fulfill these expectations, the attitudes of
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program staff often help corpsmembers exceed their own self-perceptions.

- ! **Quality of the service projects.** With few exceptions, service projects are not simply “make-work” projects like many other summer or part-time jobs available to young people. Programs carefully screen potential host agencies and ensure that a high commitment to adequate supervision and opportunities for on-site learning are available. In addition, programs frequently use service learning or “reflection” to give corpsmembers structured time to think about the contributions of their service to the community. To the extent feasible, programs try to establish a direct link between service projects and actual service beneficiaries—direct service projects are given preference over more abstract activities where corpsmembers don’t have the opportunity to interact with beneficiaries. Often, corpsmembers are encouraged to propose ideas for possible service projects, then participate in planning those activities.
 - ! **Intensity of the service experience.** Participation in youth corps is typically full-time, lasting months and sometimes as much as a year; they are experiences that occupy a majority of participants’ available time. Generally, corpsmembers are required to actively participate 40 hours or more per week; travel to and from service sites can often add 10 hours or more to their regular work week. Much of the work is hard, physical labor; even the less physically rigorous projects are mentally or emotionally draining. At the same time, the day-to-day demands of the program tend to preclude participation in other, perhaps less positive, activities. As one corpsmember who had been active in a gang prior to the corps commented, “when I’m done here [at the service site], I don’t have the time or energy to hang with those guys.” The intensity of the service experience makes it more likely to have a permanent effect on the participants.
 - ! **Corpsmembers have access to an expanded social network.** For many participants, youth corps provide a rare opportunity to interact with peers from outside their immediate community. Some programs deliberately recruit corpsmembers from diverse educational, social and ethnic backgrounds and organize teams to maximize diversity. Because corpsmembers work in teams, they have extensive opportunities to develop close relationships with other team members and to overcome stereotypes and
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biases, while increasing their own self-confidence. It is not unusual for close friendships to develop among team members, providing strong networks of social support. These networks often take the place of relationships that dominated the participants' pre-corps lifestyle. They also reinforce commitment to the program—if a team member is absent, his or her work often falls to other team members to “make up.” As a result, there is considerable peer pressure from other team members to show up at the service site daily and on time.

In summary, youth corps are promising models for improving the life chances of young people, in particular disadvantaged youth. Well-implemented programs demonstrate a number of features that promote corpsmember development and improve employability. Employment-related impacts are evident for participants as a whole. Corps programs also lead to additional social or education benefits for specific subgroups, in particular African-American men. Corpsmembers produce important services that are valued by their community. Taken as a whole, program benefits outweigh program costs in large stable programs.

Categories of Participant Outcomes Analyzed

Civic, social and personal development

Current and planned involvement in community service

Current or planned involvement in other service (VISTA, the military)

Voting behavior

Education and training plans and achievements

Employment and earnings

Involvement with risk behavior

Educational aspirations and expectations

Work performance

Benefits and Costs per Service Hour

Type of Benefit or Cost	Benefit (+) or Cost (-) to:		
	Participants (Column 1)	Community (Column 2)	Society (Column 3)
<i>Monetary Benefits and Costs:</i>			
Operational costs of program (net of stipends, fringes, and post-program benefits)	0	-\$9.66	-\$9.66
Participant stipends, fringes, and post-service benefits	+\$6.76	-\$6.76	0
CNCS costs	0	-\$0.20	-\$0.20
Participant earnings while in program	-\$2.92	0	-\$2.92
Value of program output	0	+\$13.63	+\$13.63
Returns to additional education	+\$0.19	0	+\$0.19
Net monetary benefits:	+\$4.03	-\$2.99	+\$1.04
<i>Nonmonetary Benefits:</i>			
Impacts on participant civic, social, and personal development	0	0	0
Reduced risk behavior ^a	+	+	+
Strengthened collaborations and community networks and other indirect benefits to community	ne	ne	ne

^a Indicated by statistically significant reduction in the proportion of individuals ever arrested.

ne = not estimated

Data Sources

The authors of this report wish to acknowledge the contribution of the youth corps programs to this study. Much of the quantitative information used to describe the programs and their participants comes from the Evaluation Information System (EIS) established as part of the National Evaluation of Conservation and Youth Service Corps. The EIS collected descriptive information on all programs receiving funding from the Commission on National and Community Service during the 1993/94 grant cycle.

During the same period, eight youth corps participated in a more comprehensive data collection for programmatic and community impact analyses. Those programs are:

- ! Washington State Service Corps
- ! City Volunteer Corps, New York City
- ! Greater Miami Service Corps
- ! Santa Clara District, California Conservation Corps
- ! YouthBuild, Boston
- ! Civic Works, Baltimore
- ! New Jersey Youth Corps of Camden County
- ! Wisconsin Service Corps, Milwaukee

The first four of the programs listed above also participated in the cost-benefit analysis and the participant impact analysis which involved random assignment of program applicants.

The findings are also informed by the youth corps programs participating in the Youth Apprenticeship Program (YAP), sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In that demonstration program, youth corps partnered with local public housing authorities, unions and other organizations to provide pre-apprenticeship training to residents of public housing. The programs participating in Abt's assessment of YAP's implementation are:

- ! Washington State Service Corps
 - ! Civic Works, Baltimore
 - ! Philadelphia YouthBuild for Change
 - ! Los Angeles Conservation Corps
 - ! Milwaukee Community Service Corps
 - ! San Francisco Conservation Corps
 - ! Greater Atlanta Community Corps
 - ! Civilian Conservation Corps of Cleveland
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JoAnn Jastrzab is a Senior Associate at Abt Associates, with more than 20 years of experience studying education and employment programs. Her most recent work focuses on initiatives—both government and privately sponsored—designed to help young people transition into employment and careers. As Study Leader for the National Evaluation of Conservation and Youth Service Corps and director of the Assessment of the Youth Apprenticeship Program, she led much of the analysis presented in this report. Ms. Jastrzab manages Abt Associates' subcontract to the Brandeis University Center for Human Resources to evaluate the effects of community service on school-age children through the evaluation of the Learn and Serve Program. She is currently providing technical assistance to the Department of Labor's Youth Fair Chance programs and to youth initiatives operated by public housing authorities as part of the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Economic Lift Initiative.

Dr. John Blomquist is a Senior Economist at Abt Associates specializing in human capital development and workforce training, both domestically and abroad. He recently concluded a study of development options for economically depressed regions of Armenia for the World Bank. Dr. Blomquist conducted the participant impact analysis and contributed to the analysis of costs and benefits for the National Evaluation of the Conservation and Youth Service Corps, and served as chief analyst for the Abt-led evaluations of Serve-America and Higher Education Programs for the Corporation for National and Community Service. He is currently evaluating the impacts on K-12 participants of the Learn and Serve Program.

Julie Masker, a Senior Analyst at Abt Associates, has more than five years of experience with Abt studies focusing on youth training and educational programs. Ms. Masker's experience includes serving as a site liaison conducting in-depth site visits for the National Evaluation of the Conservation and Youth Service Corps, as well as conducting analysis of the community impacts data. Ms. Masker has managed data collection efforts on studies of the Summer Youth Corps Programs. On a related project for Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), UCEP Program and Participant Interviews, she managed a staff mail survey and on-site interviews with youth participating in four Urban Corps Expansion

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Dr. Lany Orr, Abt Associates' Chief Economist, was the Project Director for Abt's National Evaluation of Community Service Programs. In that role, he designed the quantitative analysis of youth corps impacts, benefits, and costs presented here, and served as adviser and reviewer of the youth corps study. Dr. Orr previously directed the National Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Study and served on the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Postsecondary Education and Training. He is currently a member of the editorial board of the journal *Evaluation and Program Planning* and directs the Lifelong Learning Demonstration for the U.S. Department of Labor.

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