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HOW TO ATTRACT YOUNG ADULTS TO AMERICORPS SERVICE

Rachel Goldstein

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HOW TO ATTRACT YOUNG ADULTS TO AMERICORPS SERVICE

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PIM 77

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA

August 14, 2019

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Abstract

AmeriCorps offers a variety of options for US citizens to serve their country in a non-military fashion while providing an opportunity for skill development, career exploration, community service, and self-growth. In exchange for service, AmeriCorps provides a minimal living allowance and an education award. Even with these benefits geared towards young adults, few young adults choose to enter AmeriCorps service upon the completion of their undergraduate studies. This research sought to understand motivations for and against service in an attempt to inform and improve AmeriCorps current recruitment practices. To understand how AmeriCorps can attract more young adults, a qualitative research study was conducted by employing online surveys with 73 AmeriCorps Members and 26 Non-Members; and interviews with two AmeriCorps employees. The findings revealed that the following factors influence recruitment: motivations for service, experiential poverty, preconceived notions of service, perspectives of compulsory service, challenges faced, and advertising/marketing. These findings informed recommendations on changes to the structure of AmeriCorps and improvements to current recruitment practices to help the organization increase its reach and influence the next generation of civically engaged citizens.

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Introduction

Participation in national and community service is a tradition in the United States (US). Acts of national service can be traced back to the origin of the country when civilians were called upon to fight for the independence of the nation (Frumkin & Jastrzab, 2010). Up until the middle of the 19th century, the only form of organized national service was the military. But by the early 20th century, other forms of national service were gaining in popularity. In the 1930s when the US was gripped by the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the New Deal, promoting economic recovery through public works (Boyte & Kari, 1996). One of the cornerstone projects of the New Deal was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) which employed nearly 3 million citizens on public conservation efforts between 1933 and 1942. National parks, highways, and infrastructure were created and repaired, and many of the effects of the depression began to be alleviated as a result of the efforts of the CCC. In addition to the services reaped by the public, individual CCC members received benefits for their service such as a monthly stipend, education, and job training (Boyte & Kari, 1996).

The success of the New Deal was largely attributed to three factors: highlighting important cultural ties between old traditions and new ways; building upon previously established networks; and pop culture reflecting themes of service through music and the arts (Boyte & Kari, 1996). AmeriCorps can attribute its success to these factors as well, particularly the first two. AmeriCorps was introduced in 1993 by President Bill Clinton with the intention of building on state and local efforts to address poverty (Waldman, 1995). It is a program that consists of three branches: Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA); AmeriCorps State & National; and the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC). All three branches work to alleviate poverty in America: VISTA through capacity building projects, State and National and

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NCCC through direct service. All three offer extensive benefits to those who serve. It is important to note that from its first days, AmeriCorps has featured these benefits as selling points for service: “Anyone seventeen or older could serve and receive a living allowance, health care and child care benefits, and an education award if they served full time for a year” (Sagawa, 2010, xxi). The demographics show that a majority of those who serve with AmeriCorps are young adults who are transitioning into careers and use their year of service for skill and resume building, networking, and exploration of potential career paths. The other large group of volunteers in national service are retirees who seek continued involvement in their communities, encore careers, personal fulfillment, and financial security (Belfield, 2014).

In 1974 the US Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting data on rates of volunteerism. Between 1974 and 1989 rates of volunteerism dropped from 23.6% to 20.4% among those surveyed but then increased by more than 32% from 1989 through 2005 when the report was compiled (CNCS, 2006, p. 1). These increased rates were due to elevated participation from three age groups: older teens (16-19); mid-life adults (45-64); and older adults (65+); and not the age group most often associated with AmeriCorps: young adults age 18-24. Since this report was compiled, rates of volunteerism in the United States have been on the rise. According to the most recent report on volunteerism produced by the United States Department of Labor, about 62.6 million people volunteered between September 2014 and September 2015 (Department of Labor, 2016, par. 1). Additionally, there was a direct correlation between one’s level of education and their participation in volunteer programs:

Individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to volunteer than were those with less education. Among persons age 25 and over, 38.8 percent of college graduates with a bachelor’s degree and higher volunteered, compared with 26.5 percent

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of persons with some college or an associate degree, 15.6 percent of high school graduates, and 8.1 percent of those with less than a high school diploma. The rate of volunteering declined for persons across all levels of educational attainment in 2015.

(Department of Labor, 2016, par. 7)

Annually, over 75,000 people serve through AmeriCorps (CNCS, 2018). This is a small fraction of the over 80 million US citizens who attained higher education degrees (bachelors, masters, professional, or doctorates) as of 2018 (US Census Bureau, 2018). With such extensive benefits geared towards young adults and the rich tradition of national service imbedded within the culture of the United States, it is surprising how few young adults in the United States choose to participate in AmeriCorps as a year of service following graduation. By gaining a better understanding of how current volunteers came to serve in AmeriCorps after graduating college as well as why other graduates chose not to serve, this capstone paper examined how AmeriCorps can make changes to attract more young adults to serve in their programs. The purpose of this study was to understand how AmeriCorps could increase the number of young adults who chose to serve within their programs.

Literature Review

The French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville exclaimed in his essay *Democracy in America* that Americans are quick to seek mutual assistance through the creation of associations to promote ideas and create needed change (Tocqueville, 1956). These observations from the 1830s remain true today. The idea of the American association is apparent through the independent yet interconnected web of non-profit organizations upon which the American public depends for instrumental services that are not sufficiently provided by our government.

AmeriCorps volunteers play an important role in the continued success of these nonprofits by

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filling positions that would otherwise go unfilled due to financial constraints faced by these organizations. They also provide an example of how service can lead to a stronger sense of citizenship and community engagement (Dionne et al., 2003).

Today, rates of philanthropy and volunteering in the United States are nearly twice those compared to citizens of other nations (Putnam, 2000). AmeriCorps is in its 26th year of operation and there is no shortage of studies on the impact that the program has had on the individuals who serve. The consensus is that volunteers benefit both professionally and psychologically from one year of AmeriCorps service. Some of these benefits include moral fulfillment, a sense of contributing to one's community, social bonds formed with community members and other volunteers, and lower rates of crime amongst those who serve (Belfield, 2014). Professional advancement tends to be one of the main attractions to service for young adults. Many believe that it will open doors career-wise, much the way that internships have historically done for those in the for-profit sector. Young adults are drawn to the skill building, on-site experience, and the education award which helps students pay off college debt (Belfield, 2014). It is worth exploring how well known these benefits are to AmeriCorps members prior to the start of their service and as such, if these benefits are major factors in the AmeriCorps recruitment strategy. Conversely, for those that do not serve, was AmeriCorps understood to be a viable option post-graduation? Are there benefits not currently offered that would attract more young adults to serve? Studies have been conducted on the impact a year of service has on those who serve, and yet there do not seem to be similar studies exploring the reasons some avoid service (CNCS, 2016; Dionne, 2003; Frumkin & Jastrzab, 2010; Sagawa, 2010). To understand how AmeriCorps can increase the rates of participation from recent college graduates, it is imperative to understand some of the deterrents to service. By addressing those deterrents, AmeriCorps can increase their numbers.

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It is also worth exploring whether economic hardships act as a deterrent to potential volunteers. As was noted in the article *Doing Well by Doing Good*, many of the people drawn to service are drawn to respected yet low-paying jobs, such as in the fields of education and nursing (Musick & Wilson, 2003). For young adults facing economic hardship and looming debt due to student loans, is AmeriCorps with its low living allowance a feasible option for all college graduates? According to *Forbes Magazine*, there are only four times when someone should accept an unpaid position: when the opportunity will give you real life experience, when the opportunity will give you legitimate exposure, when you are supporting a cause you believe in, or when the affiliation will be an impressive addition to your resume (Morin, 2017). The article makes claims regarding unpaid internships; however, the philosophy holds true with low-paid national service programs as well; these are all reasons that are given for choosing to participate in national service programs. Although this article hints at it, research is lacking when it comes to the comparison between perceived benefits of traditional internships and those provided by national service organizations such as AmeriCorps. If young adults are choosing to participate in internships for the benefits, why are they not participating in AmeriCorps at the same rates?

Accepting a low-pay volunteer position is a privilege that is not available to all. While this system may work for those with strong support systems and savings, it is a barrier for those who are starting from an economically disadvantaged position. AmeriCorps offers exposure to potential career paths while providing relevant work experience, incorporating new job skills, building networks, and compensating volunteers for their time (Tepper & Holt, 2014).

AmeriCorps should be available to all and not just those starting off from a position of economic privilege.

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In addition to the advertised benefits of AmeriCorps service, social pressures are another reason young people choose service. Those whose social networks are involved in service, volunteering, and fundraising are more likely to participate as well (Putnam, 2000). With the rise in participation in online social networks, I was curious to understand how and if these new social communities influence rates of national service and if the social pressures described by Putnam hold true through virtual communities.

Finally, there has been discussion on whether national service should be compulsory. Making national service compulsory would increase participation but at the same time it would deprive participants of their altruistic motivations to serve and ultimately lessens the psychological gains volunteers might receive from their service (Musick & Wilson, 2003). My research explored whether one's interest in AmeriCorps would change if national service was compulsory in the United States.

As the literature suggests, there are many reasons that young adults may or may not choose to serve with AmeriCorps. The impact that a year of service has on those who serve has been studied, but there is room to further explore the motivations behind service, or lack thereof, and how AmeriCorps can attract a broader base of participants. My research aims to gain a better understanding of these factors with the intention of providing recommendations to the Corporation for National and Community Service on how to improve their recruitment tactics to attract more young adults to choose national service with AmeriCorps following their undergraduate experience. By gaining a better understanding of how current volunteers came to serve in AmeriCorps after graduating college as well as why other graduates chose not to serve, I will address the question of how AmeriCorps can make changes to attract more young adults to their programs.

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Research Design and Methodology

Methodology Choice and Rational

To understand how AmeriCorps can do a better job attracting young adults to serve, I designed a qualitative research study. The qualitative methodology was chosen because it allows for personal narratives and experiences to be collected, providing depth and emotion to the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Understanding the experience of currently serving and past AmeriCorps members and what changes they would make to the AmeriCorps recruitment process proved instrumental in crafting recommendations that will hopefully lead to an increase in AmeriCorps participation. Similarly, understanding the reasons why many young adults chose not to serve with AmeriCorps also provided valuable feedback on how AmeriCorps could better incentivize potential volunteers.

Site and Participants' Description and Sampling

In my research design, I chose to focus on the experiences of currently serving volunteers as well as non-serving young adults who graduated from liberal arts colleges within the last five years. My intention was to focus on the experience of graduates of liberal arts school as they are more likely to have had a variety of options available to them upon graduation as opposed to graduates of highly specified institutions or technical colleges dedicated to putting students on a concrete career track. Due to the nature of my survey design, I was unable to ensure this qualification was met. To understand my participants background, a question was asked to ascertain the highest level of college completed by each participant; however, after reviewing the data, I determined that there was no reason to exclude the voices of those who did not obtain liberal arts degree.

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Two surveys were designed to collect data from specific populations: AmeriCorps Members (AMs), both current and past, and Non-Members (NMs). As an AmeriCorps member myself, I had access to an extensive network of Members and was able to advertise my survey using my AmeriCorps networks on Facebook. Seventy-three AmeriCorps Members and 26 Non-Members took part in the research. I used homogeneous purposive sampling (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) to gain insight from currently serving volunteers and past members. Snowball sampling (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), or chain referral sampling, was utilized to find and recruit participants who fell outside of my direct network. The non-member survey was designed with recent college graduates in mind; however, in reviewing my participants' demographic data, it became clear that most of my non-member participants graduated outside of the 10-year window I had aimed for.

In addition to the surveys, I intended to use expert sampling (Laerd, 2012) and interview five currently employed AmeriCorps staff to better understand what they seek in volunteers, what trends they have experienced with recruitment, and what gaps they feel are present in current recruitment efforts. Additionally, through the interviews, I intended to gather insight on what support they needed or felt was missing from CNCS. Staff members were identified through my network and their participation was requested through email. The survey was shared publicly prior to the scheduling of the interviews and due to the overwhelming response rate for both surveys, I decided to only interview two staff members.

Methods of Data Collection

The aim of my research was to explore how AmeriCorps could increase the number of young adults who choose to serve with AmeriCorps. Three methods of data collection were used:

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survey, interview, and observation. Open-ended surveys were used to collect qualitative data from young adults who chose to serve within the last ten years as well as from young adults who did not choose to serve. The survey method allowed for a large number of participants to contribute to my research and provided an option for anonymity for those participants. Each survey was divided into two sections: the first elicited general background information; the second sought to answer questions on the motivations for the path they pursued after college, their understanding of AmeriCorps at the time of graduation, and their opinions on the ways that AmeriCorps might increase its attraction to other young adults based in their individual experiences. Data collection took place in Waterbury, Vermont and two surveys were conducted online using Survey Monkey.

Survey. The online surveys were posted to my personal Facebook page seeking participation from the 1,111 people in my direct network and requesting that they share the surveys with their own social networks. The member survey was also posted in the AmeriCorps VISTA Leader Group on Facebook which is a social media group for current Leaders within the AmeriCorps community. Those Leaders were asked to share the survey with their members. This sampling method was chosen to reach the highest number of recent volunteers in the shortest amount of time. Participation exceeded my expectations. A total of 69 currently serving members and four previous members completed the AmeriCorps member survey ($n=73$). A total of 26 non-members completed the non-member survey. Of those 26, six indicated that they had served with other organized volunteer programs ($n=5$ Peace Corps, $n=1$ Fulbright). Survey participants represented 24 states.

Interviews. Current AmeriCorps staff in Vermont were invited for interviews to gain a better understanding of trends in recruitment methods and to establish thick descriptions of the

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volunteer and employment experience. Four interviews with current AmeriCorps employees took a guided interview approach, allowing my participants to openly share their stories and experiences and provide feedback as to how recruitment could be improved. Each interview was recorded with the consent of the participants, transcribed, and uploaded into Dedoose for coding and further analysis.

Observations. I also collected observational data (Rossman & Rallis, 2016) through my position as VISTA Leader. As an active participant in the recruitment process, I was able to observe trends in recruitment successes and failures, listen to the needs of potential volunteers, examine motivations for service, and reflect on interactions had at college recruitment fairs and during site visits with currently serving members.

Content Analysis. Finally, online content research was conducted to better understand AmeriCorps branding, marketing, advertising, and outreach. Recruitment efforts are largely placed in the hands of individual sites seeking volunteers. By increasing my understanding of the resources provided, I had a better understanding of the volunteer experience and recommendations.

Ethics of Research and Researchers' Positionality

I am a strong believer that AmeriCorps has a positive influence on young adults and the communities they serve and that more should be done to increase the participation of young adults in national service programs such as AmeriCorps. There was potential for bias in this research as I am both an alumna and a currently serving AmeriCorps volunteer. In designing the questions for my surveys and interviews, I was mindful to avoid any questions that seemed leading or influenced by my own opinions, such as avoiding my support for national service

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programs such as AmeriCorps. I conducted an extensive literature review so that my positionality could be based in the literature just as much as in my own experience. Further, my current role with AmeriCorps as VISTA Leader for 18 members in the state of Vermont presented a liability to my research. While I do not supervise these volunteers directly, I do conduct quarterly evaluations of their work. It was made clear to these volunteers that they would not receive any benefits or face repercussions as a result of their choice to participate or to abstain from my research. All participation was voluntary, and all had the option to participate anonymously. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to mask their identities.

A Human Subject Research (HSR) form was submitted for review prior to conducting research to protect participants. The HSR form outlined all precautions to be taken to ensure ethical conduct and treatment of participants during research. This included measures to guarantee the protection of individual privacy, participation by free will, and the provision of consent forms prior to the start of research. Data was collected and stored on a password protected computer that only I as the researcher had access to.

Data Management and Analysis

The online survey tool SurveyMonkey was used for data collection and for preliminary analysis. This online platform proved to be a useful starting place for data analysis, but the majority of my review was done using the software program Dedoose. Dedoose helped me to analyze my qualitative data, code it through inductive and deductive reasoning and explore patterns which lead to the establishment of themes. Trends observed in experiences and recommendations laid the groundwork for my findings.

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All data was securely stored on my password-protected computer. Any notes that were taken by hand were later entered and saved on the computer and then destroyed. Any identifying comments made during interviews or in the surveys by participants who wished to remain anonymous were redacted and pseudonyms were assigned to add an additional layer of protection to identities.

Credibility/Trustworthiness of Findings

This research sought to gain insight into the ways in which AmeriCorps could improve their recruitment efforts and increase the number of young adults who choose to serve after college. To maintain credibility of my findings, I triangulated my data sources, used the community of practice to validate my findings, and spent an extended period of time immersing myself in the world of AmeriCorps, also known as prolonged engagement (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Two different stakeholders – AmeriCorps Members (AMs) and Non-Members (NMs) - were surveyed and two AmeriCorps staff were interviewed, thus triangulating the data sources. Each provided insight into motivations for and against service. The survey participants were not experts in the field of recruitment but rather individuals reflecting on their experiences and providing insight as to how to improve current operations as they see it. Their recommendations do not speak for all programs nor offer a fix to every problem. An AmeriCorps staff member reviewed the study to ensure authenticity in the presentation of the findings. Bringing in this member of the community of practice helped to check the credibility of my findings. Lastly, by choosing to study a topic I was so closely involved with for the past year, I was able to obtain prolonged observational engagement with AmeriCorps, thus providing a firm understanding of

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operations to ground my work in. This research is understood to be a small study sampling a broader population and that point has been made clear throughout the findings.

Limitations and Delimitations of Study

I designed this research to focus on recent college graduates from liberal arts schools due to the nature of liberal arts education and the less restricted career paths that these students might face compared with their contemporaries in technical schools and institutions. I gathered data from 99 survey respondents (73 AmeriCorps Members and 26 Non-Members) as well as two interviewees. The study was restricted to those who are technologically fluent, have email accounts, and use Facebook. This method of data collection therefore excluded the voices of those that are not comfortable with technology and those who do not use social networking. It also allowed for a wider variety of age to be represented outside of the originally intended “recent college graduate” demographic.

It is important to recognize that the term AmeriCorps covers a wide variety of programs throughout the nation. Two volunteers working at the same organization might have completely different experiences based on the scope of their work and the prior experience they bring to the position. Additionally, many organizations will host volunteers for consecutive years, with the job description changing yearly. Accepting this variance, I determined it best to obtain narratives from as many locations and people as possible, and I see online social networks as a method to ensure this diversity of perspectives. In the end, 99 participants in 24 states took part in the two surveys offered.

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Findings

This research was conducted to understand how AmeriCorps can improve their recruitment efforts to attract young adults to service. Twenty-six non-members (NMs) and 73 AmeriCorps members (AMs) participated in online surveys to inform my research. These participants were located throughout the country, coming from 24 different states. Additionally, two AmeriCorps employees sat for interviews in Vermont. My Findings will be presented by highlighting the six themes that emerged from the data: Motivations for Service; Experiential Poverty; Preconceived Notions of Service; Perspectives on Compulsory Service; Challenges; and, Advertising/Marketing.

Motivations for Service

Motivations for service were largely influenced by the benefits of service as presented by family, friends, professors, advisors, and marketing materials, as well as personal values. They can be challenging to tease apart as they are often interconnected. For example, through professional skill development, a person develops as a more capable, well rounded individual, or; when intending to give back to their community, a person discovers a career in nonprofit work, or; in seeking a means to repay student loans a person acquires a year of on-the-job experience in a new field.

AmeriCorps Members were asked to indicate the amount of influence each of the following benefits had on their decision to serve. The benefits shown here summarize the rating categories of “some influence”, “strong influence”, and “highest influence”. In order of influence they were: Skill Development through Host Site (94%); Skill Development through AmeriCorps (86%); Professional Network (85%); Community (85%); Location (83%); Education Award

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(81%); Specific Host Site (80%); Professional Development Trainings (through AmeriCorps) (74%); Living Allowance (60%); Professional Development Funding (33%); Health Benefits (27%); Housing (22%); and the Fulfillment of Requirements (18%). These motivations are divided into five categories: professional, personal, social, educational, and gap year.

Professional. The professional category in the Motivations theme included skill development (through AmeriCorps and Host sites), professional development trainings (offered through AmeriCorps and Host Sites), the establishment of a professional network, and in the case of VISTA, individual professional development funds. Of all potential motivators for service, skill development had the highest influence on the decision to serve. AMs indicated that skill development through their host sites had some (22%, $n=16$), strong (38%, $n=28$), or high (34%, $n=25$) influence on their decision and NMs identified a desire to increase knowledge as the trait that would most likely compel them to serve (81%, $n=21$).

Similarly, skill development through AmeriCorps provided trainings had a strong influence on both AM and NM groups with 86% ($n=63$) of AmeriCorps members selecting it as a reason for service (some = 30% $n=22$, strong 41% $n=30$, high = 15% $n=11$) and 69% ($n=18$) of non-members indicating it as something they would wish to gain from a term of service. One staff member explained,

I found at the time, before I served, that almost every job I applied to had grant writing in the description. I had no successful or unsuccessful track record with grant writing and to get paid to grant write you kind of need experience grant writing, so how was I going to get that? (personal communication, 2019)

AmeriCorps was the answer for this employee. The program is valued by members for the access it provides to trainings and professional experiences that young adults might otherwise have a

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difficult time obtaining without the assistance of an organized program. It can be viewed as a transitional program; one that builds upon the trainings and experiences received in college. This supports the ideas presented by Belfield (2014) and Tepper & Holt (2014) which discuss this type of skill development and experience as an attraction to service.

Amongst the AmeriCorps Members who participated in the survey, professional networking held high value in attracting members to service with 40% ($n=29$) indicating a strong and 8% ($n=6$) indicating the highest influence. Both employees interviewed for this study corroborated this sentiment with expressions of gratitude to the AmeriCorps alumni network for assisting them in landing the jobs they hold today. One stated, “Every job that I’ve had somehow either came to me through my network from AmeriCorps or I got a leg up and an in through that AmeriCorps affiliation having served” (personal communication, 2019). The other staff member outlined a career influenced by and later focused on national service, having served with AmeriCorps for two consecutive terms at the beginning of her career, transitioning into a full-time paid position at her host site, joining a state commission and later running programs. The connections she formed with AmeriCorps early in her career influenced her interest in and ability to obtain work within the organization in the future. Young adults who value networking recognize AmeriCorps’ vast network of alumni as a connection to future careers. The professional motivations shared by survey participants and employees alike confirm what Tepper & Holt (2014) presented in their article *Unpaid Internships: Free Labor or Valuable Learning Experience*, that young adults are attracted to AmeriCorps for the skill development, career exposure, and networking.

Personal. The personal category includes location (community and specific host site/project), financial gains (living allowance), health benefits, housing, the fulfillment of

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requirements (school or job prerequisites), and personal fulfillment. Of the personal motivation category, community, location, and specific host sites were the top influencers. Of the AM survey participants, 85% ($n=62$) indicated that community influenced their decision to serve in some way (27%, $n=20$), a strong way (36%, $n=26$), or in the highest way (22%, $n=16$); 83% ($n=61$) indicated that location had some (12%, $n=9$), strong (38%, $n=28$), or a high (33%, $n=34$) influence on them; and 80% ($n=58$) indicated that the project at their specific host site had some (16%, $n=12$), strong (32%, $n=23$), or high (32%, $n=23$) influences on them.

AmeriCorps prides itself on its decentralized organization as this allows for specialized projects to emerge within communities, which in turn means that members can identify and serve at sites that directly align with their personal interests. This variety in host sites means that members are not always serving in their local or home communities. Many specifically name domestic travel and relocation as a benefit to service, a point which was not apparent in the literature review. To those entertaining the idea of moving to a new city or state, AmeriCorps can provide a safe way to test out a new location within a limited time frame, or, to make a change for an indefinite period. One currently employed AmeriCorps staff explained:

I served with a guy who grew up in a small town in Iowa, his family owned a business there and he knew he was going to take that business over some day, but he realized that he didn't want to spend his whole life in this tiny town in Iowa without going somewhere else - without meeting different people - and so he served a term as an AmeriCorps member, almost as a gap year in life. (personal communication, 2019)

AmeriCorps allowed him to go someplace he never would have been.

The AmeriCorps living allowance is a small, but guaranteed benefit of service. It varies based on project type and location - VISTA, State and National, NCCC - but one thing all three

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programs have in common is that the living allowance is low. The Corporation for National and Community Service is explicit in stating that “the living allowance is not a wage” (CNCS, 2012). Many AMs took the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the living allowance in the online survey, which will be further explored in the theme on Challenges and in Recommendations. However, for some, the living allowance coupled with other provided benefits was enough to sustain their service term and even was reflected upon with a positive air: “Coupled with full [food stamps] and Medicaid, AmeriCorps (VISTA) literally brought me out of poverty. I can finally start saving and not worry about being homeless.” Another AM explained their situation as: “I grew up in a lower income home and this was my first full-time job out of college, so this year was no different to me, financially speaking.” For those who were raised in higher income homes or who were of the opinion that they needed to start making money and saving right out of college, AmeriCorps was not as compelling as a full time, well-paying job would be. But as Musick & Wilson (2003) point out, for those drawn to respected but typically low paying work, such as nursing and teaching, AmeriCorps service is just another low paying but highly valued opportunity to provide for others.

A lesser influencer of service was the housing allowance with 71% ($n=52$) of AMs indicating that it had either no effect (41%, $n=30$) or was not applicable (30%, $n=22$) on their choice to serve. However, what must be noted is that site-provided housing and housing vouchers are not standard benefits, which likely accounts for the low percentage influence on their decision to serve. One participant lamented this point after having met members from other programs: “Many of the folks I met through Pre-Service Orientation got housing deals as part of their AmeriCorps service, and I was very resentful that I didn't get that opportunity.” Due to the

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decentralized nature of AmeriCorps programming and the ability of host sites to add their own incentives to service, members are often provided different benefits from one another.

Observational data through the recruitment process suggests that it is common for members to be attracted to positions in their hometown so that they may live with their families, thus alleviating the stress of finding affording housing on such a limited living allowance. The provision of a housing stipend or vouchers from host sites would make AmeriCorps more accessible to low-income young adults.

Another less influential motivator was health benefits. Almost half of the participants (47%, $n=34$) indicated that health benefits were not a factor in their decision to serve. This may be accounted for in the fact that participants serve at various points in their life (i.e. those under the age of 26 have the option of remaining on their parents' health plan). Additionally, AmeriCorps does not provide full health coverage. It is therefore understandable that health benefits are not a compelling draw to service.

AmeriCorps members also expressed less tangible personal benefits to service, such as the social bonds formed and the emotional fulfillment, they experience from serving in their host communities. One AM noted,

The main reason that I joined AmeriCorps was because I felt that it would allow me to understand what service/poverty was and could serve as a springboard for my career as it would allow me to gain skills I otherwise would not have been able to gain.

This blend of the personal and professional was a common refrain throughout the survey data.

Social Influences. Social influences played a role in whether young adults chose to serve with AmeriCorps. Robert Putnam (2000) discussed the effect one's social group has on their participation in activities. If your peer group is involved in a cause, you are more likely to

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become involved with that cause as well. Of the 26 NMs who participated in the survey, 50% ($n=13$) indicated that none of their friends were serving or had ever served with AmeriCorps and only 31% ($n=8$) indicated having one to two friends who had been involved. This affirms Putman's (2000) point that one's social group has influence on the activities one pursues. At the end of the survey for NMs I asked whether they would be interested in exploring AmeriCorps service positions now that they have taken the time to complete the survey. Surprisingly, 27% ($n=7$) indicated that yes, they were now more interested in service than they had been prior to taking the survey. This adds strength to the idea that mere exposure to AmeriCorps is an influencer in motivating others to serve.

In addition to the direct social ties which draw members to service is the broader appreciation for human connection at the community level. One staff member expressed appreciation for these connections as,

One thing that I think about a lot is real human connection. It's really hard to deliver some of the services AmeriCorps offers without being physically in a community doing something with and alongside other people, so there is this great community building and grass roots aspect to it, where you are not just online or digital, you actually have to interact with different people, difficult personalities, community members who are disenfranchised, gung-ho community members...there's a lot of interpersonal connection which I think is a benefit that, in a digital world, people don't get. We can't lose that because community is a diverse group of people who don't all love each other all the time and have conflict so if we are all just off in our own little camps, we'll just stay there unless we are forced to get out of that comfort zone which I think AmeriCorps does.
(personal communication, 2019)

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Educational. AmeriCorps offers educational motivators such as the education award, experiential learning, and the fulfillment of pre-requisites. The education award has historically been considered a strong draw to service by AmeriCorps employees. In the words of one employee,

My total student loans were only slightly more than the amount of the Education Award so [I realized that] I could do this for a year and just wipe that out at the end. Where else would you get paid \$12k a year (or let's call it \$18k adding in the Ed Award) and put a third of your income towards your student loans? (personal communication, 2019)

The education award ranked fifth as a motivator for service with 81% of AMs indicating the education award to be the highest influence (16%, $n=12$), a strong influence (38%, $n=28$), or to have some influence (27%, $n=20$) on their choice to serve. This percentage indicates that the education award is a strong motivator and confirms Belfield's (2014) statement that young adults are drawn to service for the education award. However, as student loan debt continues to rise and the education award remains stagnant, the attraction of this benefit diminishes.

AmeriCorps was also perceived as an option to gain hands-on experience through meaningful work, both as a gap year experience or as a compliment to traditional schooling. One current employee who attended college while serving in AmeriCorps highlighted the benefit of complimentary experiential learning while in service: "I do better hands on learning and so as I was doing my service, I was able to understand my actual academics better...it was applied learning" (personal communication, 2019). One AM stated, "I joined AmeriCorps because I was looking for a gap year opportunity that would give me real life and work experience. I also was looking for opportunities to pay off my student loans." The education award thus incentivizes

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young adults to participate in a year of service as a means of paying off student loans while gaining experience and exploring career options.

For the majority of AM participants, fulfilling school or employment requirements was not a pressing motivator; however, for a handful of participants (3%, $n=2$), this category was the most compelling reason to serve: “I chose AmeriCorps because I felt like it would be a good fit for my practicum experience during my schooling.” Similarly, another AM also cited prerequisites for their decision to serve:

To be eligible for [specific job], I needed to either be a veteran, have served with the Peace Corps, or have served as an AmeriCorps VISTA. I looked at the available projects and I saw one [that matched my skills and interests]. I've been a VISTA for two months now, and it feels good to be working toward a goal and working on bettering skills I already have.

As the statements from these two AMs confirm, people join AmeriCorps for a variety of reasons. Short-term practicum placements can be challenging to identify, and AmeriCorps provides a multitude of options for those who are searching. It is important for recruiters to understand the variance in motivations and market programs accordingly.

Gap Year. Gap years have traditionally been understood as the time some students take between high school and college; a period when young adults travel, volunteer, explore their interests and potential career paths, and gain confidence and maturity before enrolling in college. The term can also be applied to the time taken between college and a career, or furthering ones' education. Many AMs joined AmeriCorps with the intention of conducting a gap year:

I knew I eventually wanted to go to grad school, but I wasn't ready to make that time and financial commitment right out of college. I also wasn't sure of the exact path I wanted to take so I figured I'd work for a year to figure things out. AmeriCorps allowed me to have

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a meaningful gap year experience of working rather than just working a job to make money but that didn't mean anything to me.

Another AM commented that they were looking for a unique way to experience something new:

“I wasn't really ready to jump into a full-time position just yet. I wanted to work on something cool in a different part of the country for a while.” The professional development training and on-the-job trainings makes AmeriCorps a perfect fit for someone seeking a gap year and is comparable to a low-paid internship with its low monetary pay and high skill development.

AmeriCorps has done a good job making this option available to young adults, particularly with NCCC and VISTA.

Experiential Poverty

Young adults must believe that AmeriCorps has something to offer them if they are to pursue it as an option. Additionally, they must feel confident that the benefits of service outweigh the costs. Since the living allowance is minimal, the question arises: Is AmeriCorps a feasible option for all young adults coming out of college? Although members do sign up with the understanding that their service term will be financially challenging, AmeriCorps should not promote “experiential” poverty. One AM expressed it this way: “I feel like AmeriCorps is kind of exploitative of folks. It feels like part of the experience is to "try on" poverty-- to have experiential learning of what it is like to be in poverty while serving a community that is working to end poverty. I think the idea sounds great on paper but ends up being touristy of the poverty experience.”

Many of the NMs lamented that it was not a feasible option for them when compared to more traditional jobs that pay a living wage and provide the opportunity to save and plan for the

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future. Older NMs expressed concerns around being able to support a family: “Right now, I don't feel in a position to consider AmeriCorps because I support a family and couldn't take that large a salary cut. I don't know if it's realistic to try to recruit someone like myself.” Even AMs expressed concerns when it came to the logistics of supporting themselves and others in the future: “My parents are getting old, and while they can still support me in some ways I worry that I will not be able to support them when they need it - as I might be able to if I had gotten a job that payed me more.”

A number of AMs stated that they would not have been able to complete their service term had it not been for outside financial support. For some, that reliance fell to monetary savings while others relied on contributions from their parents, the ability to work a second job outside of their AmeriCorps hours, or operating on a minimal budget that at times required a choice between spending on essentials such as gas, car repairs, and bills or buying food. Many expressed that they would not have been able to do it without their parents, friends, or host site providing free housing or the ability to obtain food stamps. As one of the survey participants stated: “I was very lucky to have found a placement near my hometown and was able to live in my parents' house. I was heavily dependent on my family during that year. I do not know how I would have been able to do it without their support.” This is not a sustainable model for encouraging volunteerism amongst young adults.

Preconceived Notions of AmeriCorps

It became apparent that AmeriCorps Members and Non-Members alike had certain preconceived notions regarding AmeriCorps service. A common trope expressed by both groups

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was a comparison to the Peace Corps. There was also a lack of understanding on the availability of direct and indirect service projects.

Domestic Peace Corps. One participant, who did end up serving with AmeriCorps, expressed their complete lack of information on AmeriCorps when they stated, “I initially wanted to serve in the Peace Corps but was unsure of the 2+ year commitment. A friend suggested AmeriCorps, and to be honest, I thought it was a joke. I didn't even know AmeriCorps existed!” Statements such as this expose the need for better marketing and outreach from AmeriCorps.

Comparisons between AmeriCorps and Peace Corps were made numerous times throughout the data collection process in both surveys and interviews. AmeriCorps benefits from the public perception of a similarity with the Peace Corps and as such, common misconceptions about AmeriCorps serving as a domestic Peace Corps go unchallenged. The Peace Corps was established in the 1960s and has a positive connotation in the minds of many in the United States and abroad which explains why AmeriCorps would not want to distance themselves from this well-respected program (Frumkin & Jastrzab, 2010). The perception of similarities is in part related to poor branding. The Peace Corps has had a clearly defined mission and brand since its formation, whereas AmeriCorps upholds the loose mission of “Getting things done.” As one employee stated,

It is hard to understand all of the various streams of AmeriCorps. When you say Peace Corps, people know you are in another country for 2-years doing community development related projects. With AmeriCorps, it depends. Quarter time, half time, full time, one year, two years, residential programs, non-residential programs, serving in your

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own community, moving or relocating to serve...it's all over the place. (personal communication, 2019)

This incohesive brand directly correlates to the confusion and lack of understanding that young adults have concerning AmeriCorps.

Direct Service/Indirect Service. Not many participants understood the variety of service projects that AmeriCorps offers initially. As one AM explained,

I am currently serving my second AmeriCorps term. I have now done both direct and indirect service, but when I first heard about AmeriCorps, I had no idea there were so many opportunities available for direct service. I had only interacted with or heard of AmeriCorps volunteers working with non-profits on capacity building. It would have been awesome to learn about all the short-term direct service opportunities I could have taken advantage of during college instead of only after!

This example highlights the limited understanding of service that many young adults feel as they leave college and face the prospect of entering the workforce. Due to the predominance of direct service opportunities, many AMs and NMs admitted that they were unaware of the indirect service positions available. While NCCC and AmeriCorps State and National do indeed provide direct service opportunities, AmeriCorps VISTA is strictly focused on capacity building through indirect service. As one AM mentioned, "VISTA was particularly interesting to me because of the development work, which gave me an out from direct service while still being able to serve."

Perspectives on Compulsory Service

The United States does not mandate participation in national service from its citizens and still enjoys higher rates of volunteerism and philanthropy when compared with other nations

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(Putnam, 2000). As a means of understanding motivations for AmeriCorps service when compared with other branches of national service, both survey populations (AMs and NMs) were asked the hypothetical question of which organization they would enlist in if national service was to become compulsory in the United States.

Participants had mixed emotions when it came to the concept of compulsory service. One AM stated, "I think it would be great if everyone in the US was required to do a year of national service. I like the flexibility within the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps opportunities." This appreciation for national service reaffirms Tocqueville's (1856) observation that Americans are eager to participate in associations which strengthen the nation.

Others were strongly opposed to the idea of the United States implementing mandated service: "I'm still grappling with the legal issue of whether that would constitute slavery/forced labor or not. I find volunteer service to be extremely rewarding, but if it's mandatory I'd be less inclined to find it as rewarding." This statement reaffirms Musick & Wilson's (2003) argument that compulsory service would deprive participants of their altruistic motivations for service and in doing so would lessen the psychological gains obtained through unmandated giving.

Peace Corps was overwhelmingly favored amongst NM participants, with 62% ($n=16$) selecting it as their choice. Reasons included familiarity with the brand, a desire to travel, an interest in foreign cultures and language, and the idea of helping countries improve their conditions. As one participant summated, "It is the one that I am most familiar with in general and the one which several friends have served with (and had positive experiences) and does not entail combat-related skills." AmeriCorps was the runner up with 23% ($n=7$) of NMs selecting it.

Attraction to AmeriCorps service revolved around the idea of serving domestically to invest in the country, a fear of overseas travel, and an appreciation for the variety of programs

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offered: “It allows for the most flexibility in terms of choosing something I’m interested in. I also believe in domestic service over international service – especially for relatively un-skilled recent college graduates.” Only 4% ($n=1$) of the NM participants indicated a preference towards military service.

The AM participants stood by their choice in service with 90% ($n=66$) selecting AmeriCorps as their top choice. Reasons provided echoed the personal, professional, and educational reasons that they themselves had already chosen to serve with AmeriCorps. “AmeriCorps allows you to do a broad range of service that gives you a variety of experiences and skills while giving back to your community. I have moral objections to mandatory military service.” In the article *United We Serve*, Dionne et al. (2003) present the case that service can lead to increased feelings of community and civic engagement. This AM’s explanation of the benefits received by participating in AmeriCorps support this idea and allow for feelings of civic engagement while remaining true to ones’ morals (objection to military service). Peace Corps followed with 53% ($n=39$) indicating an interest in serving due to interests in foreign cultures, skill development, and general awareness of the brand: “If you had asked me this right out of undergrad I probably would have picked Peace Corps...because I hadn’t heard of any of the other programs;” and, “I would consider Peace Corps for language building skills and the opportunity to live abroad.” Like the NM population, only 4% ($n=3$) were interested in serving in the military.

The predominance of non-military service being selected should be flagged as researcher bias. My research took place entirely within my extended social network. I do not have many connections to people serving in the military whereas I have an abundance of connections to

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people serving in non-military related organizations. Had this question been posed to a different audience, it is likely that the data would look different.

Challenges

A surprising discovery was just how many members end up extending for additional terms of service. My research found that 40 of the 73 AMs indicate that they had served multiple terms. This speaks to the overall positive experience members have despite the challenges faced. This section will explore the challenges as identified by the survey participants and interviewees. Challenges that must be addressed if AmeriCorps wishes to attract more young people to service fall into the categories of financial hardships, emotional support, and the decentralized nature of AmeriCorps. Detailed recommendations for addressing each challenge will be discussed further in the Recommendations section.

Financial Hardship. The AmeriCorps living allowance varies by program and location, but on average, members earn less than the minimum wage as their stipend. AmeriCorps VISTA members' stipend ranges between \$12,000 and \$16,000 for their service year, with slightly higher living allowances provided to those serving in areas with a higher cost of living (New York, California, Washington, DC). Those serving through AmeriCorps State and National receive about \$13,000 a year, and those serving with NCCC earn \$13/day, or just under \$5000 for a full year of service. It is important to note that with NCCC, housing and transportation is provided. One AM who served in two programs noted, "I faced many economic challenges while serving in AmeriCorps State and National, but not while serving in AmeriCorps NCCC."

Members are encouraged to apply for food stamps, or SNAP benefits, but it is not guaranteed that they will qualify. To qualify, one must find themselves under a certain threshold.

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If they breach that threshold, they risk losing their benefits. Savings accounts, investments, or working a second job are all cited as reasons that members were rejected from the food stamp program. One AM described a challenge she faced as, “qualifying for SNAP benefits, but having them revoked because I receive free housing and work a second job on the weekends, pushing my income just barely above the allowable threshold for SNAP.” This often means that members must therefore rely on savings that they may have otherwise chosen not to utilize. As one participant stated, “Receiving SNAP benefits saved me, but I was definitely depleting my savings to serve my AmeriCorps year, and that was difficult and uncomfortable.”

The data showed that finding affordable housing was a common challenge encountered by AMs. And as the following member indicated, it was not just the low stipend that made finding housing difficult, it was the act of physically moving to a new location without a pre-established network and being expected to find housing on their own: “Finding housing was a nightmare with nearly no help or connections at all. I had to spend too much money on temp housing so I could look for permanent place.”

For those who rely on personal vehicles, affording gas and dealing with car trouble was a challenge. One participant shared: “I have a very long commute, so the miles have added up on my car, and gas is expensive.” Another stated, “Most sites expect you to have a working car and if something breaks most often you don't have the funds to pay for it.” Some members shared that they had to make a choice between buying groceries or paying for gas, both of which were necessities at the time, but the combined expense was too much.

Emotional Support. One AM described the trickle-down effect poverty has had on her social life and mentality: “It's stressful to be challenged economically. It causes worry and that emotion leads to social challenges. It is also depressing to linger at such a [low] economic level.”

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Members expressed facing social challenges either due to the low living allowance or from moving to a new area without a social structure already in place. It was specifically mentioned that the low living allowance had a negative effect on integrating into members' new location as many events, activities, and gatherings require money to attend that members do not have. Additionally, serving in rural areas added to social strains: "Socially, it has been difficult to find meaningful connections with others my age being in a local area but having a VISTA cohort has been helpful to make connections in the area."

Decentralization of AmeriCorps. The decentralized nature of AmeriCorps programming throughout the states creates a challenge that will be difficult if not impossible to overcome without a complete restructuring of the system. This would allow for streamlining of the application process and likely more direct communication with host sites: "In general, the application process is confusing with AmeriCorps because of the variety of programs, and the requirements of the host sites vs. AmeriCorps." As one staff member stated when describing AmeriCorps' potential contributions to recruitment, "When you have such a dispersed national program - they are focused in DC - I don't even know what they would do. It would be a one size fits none" (personal communication, 2019). This issue can be addressed if AmeriCorps decides to move in a more centralized direction.

Advertising and Marketing

AmeriCorps Advertising and Marketing efforts also presented challenges to prospective members. Members, non-members, and employees discussed their dissatisfaction with branding, technology, and advertising techniques. This section highlights how marketing and advertising could be improved upon to strengthen recruitment efforts.

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Branding. To determine how successful the AmeriCorps branding efforts are, AmeriCorps Members and Non-Members were asked to state one word that came to mind when thinking about the organizations. Of the 73 AM participants, 56% ($n=41$) used the word “Service.” Likewise, of the 26 NM participants, 54% ($n=14$) chose the word “Service.” This straightforward answer indicates that across the board, people generally understood the underlying reason for AmeriCorps. The exercise became more interesting when exploring the other words provided. For AmeriCorps Members, emotionally charged words such as idealist, helping, reflection, sacrifice, challenging, and joy were used. Other descriptive terms included fulfillment, poverty, capacity building, sustainability, commitment, and community were shared. Non-Members selected less emotionally driven words such as paid volunteering, domestic, short term, little pay, and Kennedy.

When asked what they knew about AmeriCorps prior to graduating college, nearly half of the NMs indicated that they knew nothing ($n=10$). There was some familiarity with the name AmeriCorps being associated with domestic national service but not a firm understanding of what that looked like or how they could be involved. One participant stated, “I didn’t know much about how it functioned but always thought about it as a last-resort option to get a job post college if I couldn’t find one that would pay me a regular salary.” A number of the AM participants (23%, $n=17$) heard about AmeriCorps as teenagers, but the vast majority of participants, 55% ($n=40$), were first made aware of AmeriCorps between the ages of 19-22 during or soon after their college years. The literature available on motivations for service does not touch on the prevalence, or lack thereof, of the AmeriCorps brand. It became apparent in the data that AmeriCorps does a poor job of marketing themselves on college campuses and in high

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schools. Branding and marketing matter, especially when trying to recruit in a competitive environment.

AmeriCorps only recently reached the threshold where their alumni are of an age to be in prominent positions within their organizations, in the government, and in the public eye. The name, logo, and positive association that organizations such as the Peace Corps have enjoyed due to their longevity has yet to materialized. As one AmeriCorps employee explained,

We are seeing AmeriCorps alum come up through the ranks, and talk to their kids and their coworkers and their communities about their service experience, so I think the more time goes on, the more people will know what it is, and there is a lot of affinity with that. (personal communication, 2019)

He continued: “I really think having AmeriCorps on a resume is only going to grow in strength as people come up through the ranks, you know, it was only a few years ago that the first AmeriCorps alum entered Congress (personal communication, 2019).

Technology. Members expressed dissatisfaction with AmeriCorps technology, specifically the website and the application portal. Make an opening here “The AmeriCorps side of things (portal) was horrible, and actually put a barrier up between me and [my host site]. I could see it resulting in a less committed recruit backing out of the process.” In the open-ended portion of the survey, seven AMs mentioned the portal as an outdated system that needs to be modernized. Compared to the Peace Corps website, AmeriCorps is outdated and hard to navigate: “The process definitely needs to be streamlined--it feels unprofessional, bureaucratic, and entirely impersonal. This is especially pertinent when comparing it to the sleek new Peace Corps application. I would say an overhaul of the front-end website is necessary.”

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Job postings and media advertisements accounted for low percentages of familiarizing people with the AmeriCorps program. Advertising through traditional job postings accounted for a relatively low portion of AMs 19% ($n=14$) becoming familiar with AmeriCorps however; observational data has proven that it is an important recruitment tool for placing members at sites. When asked how they discovered the site they ended up serving with, the majority of AMs indicated that they had found the position through the AmeriCorps website (42%, $n=31$). Only 15% ($n=11$) of AMs reported having first learned about AmeriCorps through media (traditional or new). This is likely due to the fact that there is a relatively low presence of advertisements in traditional and on social media.

Successful Advertising Techniques. Recruitment efforts have varied over the years but one method that remains consistently effective is the use of word of mouth. Of the AMs, 30% ($n=22$) first heard about AmeriCorps through a friend or family member. Another AM stated, “When my mentor told me about AmeriCorps, I knew I’d found a way to get my foot in the door with a career centered on addressing systemic barriers. I applied and am now serving a second term.” The power of relaying one’s own experience to others goes a long way in building trust and understanding around programs. One NM stated, “I had some familiarity with the different program options but didn’t know anyone who had ever done it so I didn’t have a clear firsthand view.” They ultimately chose not to join AmeriCorps because they did not have firsthand connections to reflect upon.

The AMs were asked what they would say to a friend considering serving with AmeriCorps based on their personal experiences. Most participants (93%, $n=62$) indicated that it was a great experience and that they would recommend AmeriCorps to a friend. The remaining 7% ($n=6$) indicated that it was worthwhile but that they would not recommend it. Most

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participants recommended service with the caveat that their recommendation would depend on the person they are speaking with. Many stressed the importance of doing research to fully understand what they are getting into and knowing that each site and program operate differently:

I would recommend that my friend really explore the project they will be working on and make sure that it is managed well and the organization has the resources to continue it after they are gone. Also, if my friend didn't have any kind of additional financial support, I would not recommend they serve.

One AM compared it to taking a vow of poverty for a year. Some brought up ethical concerns of poverty tourism and that it is not a feasible option unless one already has savings and a support network in place.

Another effective way of informing young adults about AmeriCorps is by utilizing college connections (advisors, professors, alumni) as was shown with 20% ($n= 15$) of AMs indicating that this was how they first became aware of the program. One AM discussed the importance of hearing about AmeriCorps through a respected professor:

A professor I really liked had a couple of events where a Peace Corps and AmeriCorps recruiters came to campus to talk about the benefits of the programs. I was already interested in the PC, but this was the first time AmeriCorps was presented to me and I thought it was really well done.

By being visible at college campuses through career fairs, participation in career services departments, or tabling, AmeriCorps can increase the chance of recruiting young adults to their programs.

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Recommendations

This section integrates the findings from both surveys and interviews and presents recommendations on how AmeriCorps can attract more young adults to service. It has been divided into five sections: Modernize Systems; Improve (and Expand) Benefits; Rebrand; Increase Visibility; and Develop New Marketing and Advertising Techniques.

Modernize Systems

If AmeriCorps is going to remain competitive, they must invest in their technology, specifically their websites and their application process, known as the AmeriCorps Portal. As it currently stands, the AmeriCorps website is found with hyperlink www.nationalservice.gov. This should be changed to www.AmeriCorps.gov for the sake of clarity in branding. National service is descriptive of the AmeriCorps program; however, the domain would be stronger with the actual program title. To someone unfamiliar with AmeriCorps, this misaligned domain name could be confusing and might cause them to look elsewhere for service programs.

Along these lines, AmeriCorps relies on promotion through outside websites. Service Year (ServiceYear.org) is a nonprofit whose mission is to promote all national service brands. This additional website must be embraced by all national service programs or needs to be let go. Service Year claims to serve as a recruiter and promoter of all national service projects, however, it is not actually comprehensive to all national service projects.

AmeriCorps should distance themselves from Service Year and focus on streamlining their own systems for recruitment and promotion in one location. The AmeriCorps website is confusing to navigate. In conducting my research, I was impressed with the amount of

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information stored on the website, however, it was difficult to search for specific items.

AmeriCorps should hire a web designer to make the website more visually appealing and to improve navigation. As one AM stated, “I think the AmeriCorps website needs to be updated. It’s not the most user friendly and visually is unappealing. I had to have a friend help me use some of the features.” The members who completed the online survey are technologically fluent. The fact that this member needed the assistance of another person highlights the need for improvements in this regard.

The application portal must be modernized to streamline the application process and to improve the AmeriCorps brand. The portal does not have the capacity to auto-merge data from other websites such as LinkedIn. When compared with other employers who make use of these modern tools, AmeriCorps creates a barrier to service by providing outdated technology. As one staff member put it,

My impression is that most people get drawn into a position or a program and get recruited mentally, and then we are saying, ‘now, go into this horrible online portal, and put all your information in there.’ It would be great to have some kind of nice balance where it’s, ‘hey, there is a lot of paperwork, but it’s easy to do the paperwork’ (personal communication, 2019)

With this investment into modern application systems, AmeriCorps has the opportunity to improve the application experience for its potential members.

Having an outdated application system also associates negatively with the AmeriCorps brand; it shows AmeriCorps to be an outdated program. When thousands of competing opportunities are literally at the fingertips of young adults, it is imperative to lower barriers of entry to such programs.

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Improve (and Expand) Benefits

As a national service organization, AmeriCorps should demonstrate their appreciation for the sacrifices made by their members by providing desirable benefits. Benefits played a large role in motivations both for and against service. Although there are countless intangible benefits that are attributed to serving with AmeriCorps, the monetary benefits simply do not compare to those offered by more traditional jobs. For AmeriCorps to become more competitive as an option for recent graduates, it must consider increasing benefits for those who serve. This means addressing financial benefits, health coverage, the education award, housing and transportation, and the offering of non-competitive eligibility (NCE) status.

Increase the Living Allowance. Instead of encouraging members to “try on poverty” AmeriCorps should be providing a livable allowance and offer life-skills trainings on budgeting, debt mitigation, and saving for the future. This approach would encourage young adults to learn smart spending habits while beginning to save, skills that are imperative for future success.

By increasing the living allowance, members would be able to move away from their reliance on food stamps and other federal assistance programs. It is counterproductive to encourage thousands of young adults to join federal assistance programs as a means of getting by while serving economically disadvantaged populations. This assistance should be reserved for those who are actually in need and not for those seeking an experiential term of poverty.

The AmeriCorps living allowance is less than the minimum wage. As states push for a livable minimum wage of \$15 or more, AmeriCorps will need to increase the living allowance they offer to account for the cost of living and to remain a viable option. When asked about plans for the future, one currently serving AM indicated that she would rather not apply for jobs at non-profit

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organizations whose pay is minimal and rules restricting. Instead, she is choosing to work at a coffee shop that will pay her \$15/hour and volunteer at nonprofits in her free time. If

AmeriCorps does not increase their living allowance, they will encounter more and more young adults who choose to identify independent opportunities for service as opposed to a year of poverty with AmeriCorps. Increasing the living allowance will make AmeriCorps more accessible as an option.

Increase the Education Award. According to Forbes.com, the average student loan debt for public colleges is \$25,550. For private non-profit colleges, the average student debt was \$32,300, and for graduates of for-profit colleges, the average student debt was \$39,950 (Forbes, 2019). Although AmeriCorps members expressed appreciation for the \$6,095 education award provided at the end of service, this is not a significant amount in relation to the average amount of student loan debt. The education award is directly correlated to the maximum Pell Grant, and as a result, the education award can change annually (Pell Grant, 2018). By increasing the education award to \$10,000, members would be able to pay off a significant amount of their student loans after just one year of service.

Some schools will match the education award for students seeing to attend graduate school. AmeriCorps should encourage schools to participate in this sort of matching program. It would attract more students to their schools while offering members much needed assistance with school expenses.

Provide Housing and Transportation Support. AmeriCorps programs can encourage host sites to play a role in finding housing for their members, especially for those moving from out of state. By playing an active role in recommending housing or even providing housing stipends directly to landlords, members would be relieved of some of the burden they face with

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housing expenses. Similarly, providing transportation vouchers would be another easy way to alleviate a major stressor on members. As with housing, this might be something that programs encourage rather than provide as a guaranteed AmeriCorps benefit.

Rebrand

Rebranding would require a strategic plan that accounts for what AmeriCorps offers today and what they hope to offer in the future. It would be the most challenging of all my recommendations to implement but would also be the most significant for strengthening the program moving into the future. Based on my research, I believe that AmeriCorps needs to consolidate their brand, centralize operations, do away with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), and focus their mission.

As mentioned throughout this paper, AmeriCorps has too many brands. Between AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, AmeriCorps NCCC, and Senior Corps (which hasn't been touched upon due to the demographics of this research), there is a lot of information to sort through. Each sub-brand uses the AmeriCorps "A" in their brand, and yet each program operates dramatically different than the others and offers different benefits. To increase the reach of all programs and longevity of the organization as a whole, AmeriCorps must work to consolidate all programs under one brand and align the benefits so that when someone hears "AmeriCorps," they have a high-level understanding of what they are getting. As one employee stated, "Brands today, successful brands these days, are straight forward and pretty transparent and AmeriCorps, you know, you scratch the surface and good luck" (personal communication, 2019).

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One way to assist with this consolidation and brand improvement is to rework the mission statement. The current mission statement of AmeriCorps is, “Getting things done.” This is too vague. An outsider would not know that AmeriCorps has anything to do with service projects or addressing the many faces of poverty in the United States. A marketing expert should be hired to help AmeriCorps produce a new mission statement; one that encapsulates the grassroots approach to making positive change through service in one’s community for a given period of time and encourages future community service.

AmeriCorps should consider a complete restructuring of their organization. Many survey participants expressed confusion surrounding the structure of the organization and how their host site fit into the bigger picture. I would argue that they should be their own government agency or, at the very least, join forces with Peace Corps. This would mean dissolving the Corporation for National and Community Service to centralize operations. While some praise the decentralized approach that AmeriCorps takes to service as a way to empower individual communities and host sites, my research shows that it causes a great deal of confusion and unnecessary bureaucracy. One staff member explained, “CNCS is a horrible brand because the Corporation for National and Community Service, people don’t know that has anything to do with AmeriCorps” (personal communication, 2019). If AmeriCorps is to stay associated with CNCS, a marketing campaign prominently linking the two must occur.

AmeriCorps reliance on federal grants is limiting and cumbersome. AmeriCorps would benefit from a dramatic change to their current funding stream. One consideration would be to find a way to draw revenue from their programing. Understanding that the living allowance must increase to allow members to receive living wages in both AmeriCorps State and National and AmeriCorps VISTA, one consideration is to move to a model of paid volunteering for NCCC. Of

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the three branches of AmeriCorps, my recommendation would be to charge for NCCC participation as it is the most inclusive branch and could be most easily regulated. NCCC members are provided housing and transportation and their living allowance is roughly \$5,000 for the 10-month duration. If AmeriCorps began charging for this program, it might provide enough to cover the cost of NCCC programming, thus freeing up funds for the other branches within AmeriCorps to increase living allowances. There are currently a number of domestic pay-to-join programs that are accredited by the Gap Year Association (Gap Year Association, 2019) and cater towards young adults seeking experiences between high school and college. Reputable programs and rates include Outward Bound (\$2,000-\$7,000), Cross-Cultural Solutions (\$11,000-24,000), Education First (\$18,000-34,000), and the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) (\$8,000-17,000) with higher rates charged for longer programs. When all branding improvements have been made, AmeriCorps should introduce all changes at once and invest heavily in the promotion and visibility of the new brand.

Increase Visibility

The AmeriCorps logo, commonly referred to as “the AmeriCorps A,” is required to be worn by all members while serving. This on-site branding is an excellent way to guarantee visibility in communities served, but it does not promote AmeriCorps to new audiences. To increase visibility, AmeriCorps should hire full time regional recruiters, increase their presence in high schools and colleges across the country, and encourage alumni engagement.

Hire Full Time Recruiters. Hiring recruiters would go a long way to align messaging about AmeriCorps programs. Recruiters whose sole job was dedicated to understanding the various branches of the AmeriCorps brand would be in a better position to speak to potential

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applicants and direct them to the programs that best fit their personal interests and experiences. As it currently stands, AmeriCorps programs operate under state commissions who for the most part are unable to promote programs happening under other state commissions due to the sheer number of programs that exist and the structure of the organization. Recruiters would serve as connectors, screening applicants and pointing them towards appropriate programs for their skills and interests. As one employee put it, “I want to attract people to AmeriCorps but then I want them in a position that’s good for them, not serving in their hometown community because that’s what you do. But serve wherever is good for you” (personal communication, 2019). This ability to connect the right people to the right job would go a long way in increasing results.

Recruiters would be expected to participate in college career fairs, host information sessions, and do classroom visits to get young adults excited about this form of service. Many AMs and NMs mentioned that they would have liked to see more of a presence on their college campuses, some even noted that Peace Corps and branches of the military were often present to discuss their programs, but AmeriCorps was often missing. Additionally, many participants mentioned how valuable it would have been to learn about AmeriCorps while in high school. Recruiters and/or alumni could be tasked with presenting the AmeriCorps programs to high schoolers throughout the country to increase the understanding of how it might fit into a life plan, particularly for those considering a gap year between high school and college. As one employee and AmeriCorps alumna stated, “I tell everybody about AmeriCorps...I’m like a walking advertisement” (personal communication, 2019). AmeriCorps should capitalize on this kind of excitement to boost their public perception.

Engage Alumni. AmeriCorps should engage their large alumni network in recruitment practices. To implement this successfully, they must improve upon their materials and their

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website to make it easy for alumni to be spokespeople for the organization. They could devote a section of their website towards alumni recruiters and provide a recruitment package that anyone could use. Peace Corps went a step further by drafting alumni engagement activities into their very mission statement (the Third Goal of Peace Corps is to promote the understanding of people of other countries and cultures on behalf of Americans). AmeriCorps should incorporate a line into their mission that states that alumni will promote the concept of community service and remain involved in their communities following their service term.

AmeriCorps has the capacity to create an impressive mentor program with the number of alumni associated with the brand. Young adults would be matched with an alum in their field of interest and guided on how to maximize their service term, how to leverage their service term when applying for future jobs and offer inspiration on how AmeriCorps influenced their lives.

Marketing and Advertising

AmeriCorps should be conducting targeted advertising to attract individuals committed to the mission of the organization as well as to the mission of the host site they will eventually serve. In its early years, AmeriCorps programs were not particularly focused, and so they marketed to all young adults. These days, successful programs work to clearly define their intentions and how they differ from other programs. In Vermont, there are eight programs in operation and each target either a specific social issue related to poverty or a particular population, such as the environment, youth, opioids, food stability, and housing to name a few. This clarity allows for the Vermont programs to work together in making referrals to one another and promoting service throughout the state. If the programs were less focused, this would be a hard task to accomplish. Targeted advertising would require improved position descriptions so

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that recruits could better understand exactly what they were signing up for. For positions that have consecutive members serving, those members could be brought in to assist with updating their position description on a yearly basis so that each description remains as accurate as possible. Popular degrees amongst the AMs were Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, and Communications. Based on this information, CNCS should be targeting students who attend colleges known for these degrees.

AmeriCorps has produced a general Public Service Announcement that is intended to get people thinking about service, but in the end, each program requires their own advertising due to the variety in operations and offerings. Historically, AmeriCorps PSAs have run on public access television and national radio programs. This will be the first year that AmeriCorps runs their PSA campaign on new media sources such as Hulu and YouTube. This will be a huge step for publicity as new media sources are the most popular way that young adults consume media these days.

AmeriCorps must invest in centralized marketing materials to ensure consistent information and messaging is provided to potential applicants. Tabling materials such as brochures, FAQs, one-pagers on the different types of service available, and a member handbook explaining the benefits and responsibilities of service would be welcomed materials for promoting AmeriCorps in a consistent manner.

Consistent materials would also help promote brand related messaging. AmeriCorps currently brands itself as serving within one's own community; however, based on the reasons given for choosing Peace Corps over AmeriCorps, it is time for AmeriCorps to start branding itself as a way to see one's own country and experience the variety of local cultures without having to leave the country. AmeriCorps should start advertising their ability to promote

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domestic travel and exposure to different cultures within the United States. They should highlight their programs that literally cross state borders (NCCC) particularly in high schools and colleges so that young adults ages 18-24 are familiar with it as an option.

Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to better understand how to increase the percentage of young adults who choose to serve with AmeriCorps by further exploring what currently motivates and deters them from pursuing a term of service. This topic was informed by my own professional experience with AmeriCorps and was inspired by my conviction that participation in national service provides an environment for personal and professional growth, fosters community participation and engagement, and ultimately helps to shape young adults into informed, empathetic individuals. Investing in AmeriCorps is investing in the future of the United States. Guided by the real-life experiences of the AmeriCorps members who serve as well as those who opt to pursue alternative paths, I was able to compile a set of recommendations for AmeriCorps on what areas of recruitment work to attract young adults to serve, and what areas are in need of improvement.

The AmeriCorps experiences differ from program to program and from site to site. Therefore, it was important to hear from as many voices as possible to account for this variance. The two surveys that were made available through social media brought in a total of 99 participants, 73 of whom were either current AmeriCorps members or alumni and 26 of which had never served with AmeriCorps. This sample represented experiences in 24 different states. Participants shed light on the motivations for service, the idea of experiential poverty, preconceived notions of AmeriCorps, perspectives on compulsory service, challenges of service,

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and views on advertising and marketing. By learning about these factors, AmeriCorps can tailor their recruitment efforts to reflect the reasons people join and target potential members.

One of the most significant findings was that many young adults are drawn to serve outside of their home communities, which contradicts the current messaging offered by AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps markets itself as a chance to give back to your hometown or community; however, members named domestic travel and relocation as an attractive benefit of service.

One recurring challenge shared by the participants was the difficulty of getting by on the living allowance. While it is generally understood that a service term with AmeriCorps will not be easy due to the economic limitations of the living allowance, it became clear that AmeriCorps must increase their living allowance if they are to remain competitive in the currently strong economy. If members have the opportunity to take entry-level jobs that will pay a living wage, they are more likely to take that route than to engage in a term of service that will have a negative impact on their financial situation. AmeriCorps should not be promoting “experiential poverty;” it is far more valuable to promote healthy civic engagement while teaching responsible life skills such as budgeting and creative problem solving.

Another significant discovery was how limited the AmeriCorps presence is on college campuses. Many members and non-members mentioned this as a problem and indicated that they would have liked to have had an AmeriCorps presence on their campus.

It was encouraging to hear how many AMs would recommend AmeriCorps to a friend but less so to hear members emphasize that AmeriCorps is not for everyone. Reasons given included the need for outside financial support, clear personal and professional goals, and a project that is well implemented. It was unfortunate to reaffirm just how varied the quality of

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AmeriCorps programs are across the country, in part due to the decentralized nature of the program.

Based on these findings, the most significant recommendation I came up with to improve AmeriCorps recruitment was to completely restructure operations including staffing, funding, program management, and benefit allocation. Other significant recommendations included the need to rebrand, hire recruiters, streamline the AmeriCorps website and application portal, and to target recruitment efforts. Restructuring is a nearly impossible recommendation to fulfill without an extensive strategic plan and without the support of the US government. To function to the best of its potential, AmeriCorps must become its own government agency, no longer reliant on individual government grants, and with a central office that manages messaging, recruitment, benefits, and trainings. This restructuring must include the hiring of dedicated recruiters who will increase AmeriCorps presence in high schools and on college campuses, thus spreading the word about AmeriCorps at an important time in young adults' lives. AmeriCorps must bring itself into the 21st century with a rebranding campaign, one that introduces a new, targeted mission statement, and one that modernizes its online presence.

AmeriCorps has been in operation for 26 years, but if they are to remain relevant, they must learn from their members, alumni and the public to improve recruitment techniques, increase benefits, and convey the significance of national service to the next generation of volunteers.

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Appendix**Appendix A: Survey for Currently Serving Volunteers**

Baseline data:

1. Are you a currently serving AmeriCorps member?
2. In what state are you serving?
3. What year did you graduate college?
4. What was your major(s) in college?

Motivation to serve:

1. When did you first hear about AmeriCorps?
2. How did you first hear about AmeriCorps?
3. Did you consider other national service programs following college?
4. What inspired you to join AmeriCorps?
5. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being lowest, 5 being highest), how much did each benefit factor into your choice in serving with AmeriCorps?
 - a. Education Award
 - b. Living Allowance
 - c. Professional development trainings through AmeriCorps
 - d. Professional development funds
 - e. Skill Development (Through AmeriCorps)
 - f. Skill Development (Through your site)
 - g. Health benefits
 - h. Housing benefits
 - i. Professional network
 - j. Community
 - k. Location
 - l. Other:
6. How has your year of service influenced your future plans?
7. What social or economic challenges, if any, have you faced as an AmeriCorps member?
8. What would you say to a friend who is considering serving with AmeriCorps?

Recruitment:

1. How did you discover your AmeriCorps position?
2. Did AmeriCorps recruit at your college?
3. On a scale of 1-5, rate the following:
 - a. Ease of application:
 - b. Clarity in process:
 - c. Timeliness of communications:
4. What changes could have been made to improve your recruitment experience?
5. If national service was mandatory, which of the following programs would you volunteer your time with?
 - a. AmeriCorps?
 - b. Peace Corps?
 - c. Military?
 - d. Other:

Why would you choose this form of service?

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Appendix B: Survey Questions: Non-Volunteers

Baseline data:

1. Have you served with any national service programs in the past? If yes, which one(s)?
2. What year did you graduate college?
3. What was your major(s) in college?

Recruitment:

1. What social issues are you most concerned with?
2. Of the following benefits, which would be most likely to compel you to serve:
 - a. Educational awards (money towards student loans)
 - b. Student loan forbearance (loans put on hold)
 - c. Living allowance (financial compensation for service)
 - d. Health benefits
 - e. Professional development (skills, courses, trainings towards future)
 - f. Other:
3. Do you currently volunteer in your community?
4. What, if anything, did you know about AmeriCorps when you were in college?
5. What career path are you seeking/have you sought?
6. Did your current job inquire about past volunteer experiences?
7. How many members of your peer group (family, friends, academic acquaintances) are currently serving in AmeriCorps?
8. If national service was mandatory, which of the following programs would you volunteer your time with?
 - a. AmeriCorps?
 - b. Peace Corps?
 - c. Military?
 - d. Other:
9. Why would you choose this form of service?
10. What skills or benefits would you hope to gain from this service?
11. How many months would you be willing to give to this service?
 - a. 0-3 months
 - b. 3-6 months
 - c. 6-12 months
 - d. 12+ months
12. What recommendations would you provide to AmeriCorps to improve their recruitment of someone like yourself?

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Appendix C: Interview Questions for AmeriCorps Staff

Baseline Data:

1. Did you serve as an AmeriCorps Volunteer prior to joining as staff?
2. How long have you worked for AmeriCorps as a staff member?
3. If you served with AmeriCorps, how did it influence your future career path?
4. If you served with AmeriCorps, what drew you to serve?

Recruitment:

1. What is your involvement with the AmeriCorps recruitment process?
2. Do you feel supported by CNCS in your recruitment efforts?
3. What are some of the challenges faced in recruiting recent college graduates?
4. AmeriCorps has undergone several revisions over the years. Situated in the context of today, what do you feel are the benefits to service?
5. What changes have you seen to AmeriCorps recruitment processes since you began working for the organization?
6. What resources do you find most useful for recruitment?
7. What resources do you wish CNCS provided?

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Appendix D: Participant Informed Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent Template

Title of the Study: *How can AmeriCorps attract more young adults to serve?*

Researchers Name: Rachel Goldstein

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to examine the reasons that some young adults choose to volunteer with AmeriCorps while others opt out, and how AmeriCorps can attract more young adults to serve.

Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how AmeriCorps can do a better job attracting young adults who have completed higher education degrees to serve. The goal of my research is to gain a better understanding of: AmeriCorps recruitment and marketing practices; factors that influence ones' choice to serve; reasons young adults opt out of national service programs such as AmeriCorps; whether or not AmeriCorps is perceived as a valuable program; and, what practices should be implemented to increase the number of young adults who choose to serve with AmeriCorps following college. When complete, this study will provide valuable feedback to the Corporation for National and Community Service(CNCS), the organization that overseas AmeriCorps.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Currently Serving Volunteers and Non-Volunteers: Your participation will consist of a 5-10-minute online survey which will address your understanding of and experiences with AmeriCorps prior to graduation and your motivations for or against service. This information is important as it provides a baseline of understanding as to your choices and will inform recommendations to CNCS. This information will be collected anonymously unless you choose to identify yourself. There is no pressure to identify yourself.

Current AmeriCorps Staff: Your participation will consist of a 30-45-minute interview focused on your experience with recruitment, specifically the support and guidance you receive. With your insight, I will be in a better position to make recommendations to CNCS on what improvements are needed. Your participation is voluntary and will be recorded for review and analysis for the sole purpose of this study.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

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There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the survey and interviews, you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Anticipated benefits from your participation in this study include improved recruitment practices within CNCS leading to increased numbers of volunteers throughout the country and therefore increased participation in community service.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

No compensation will be provided.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information will be used. Recorded video data and notes will be destroyed after the final presentation on in August 2019.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

“I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.”

Participant's signature _____ *Date*

Researcher's signature _____ *Date*

Consent to Audio-Record Interview

“I have read the above and I understand that my voice will be recorded in either audio or video format during the interview.”

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

____ (initial) I agree to having my voice recorded.

____ (initial) I do not agree to having my voice recorded.

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RESEARCHER'S CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at (rachel.goldstein@mail.sti.edu or my advisor Alla Korzh at alla.korzh@sit.edu)

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at:

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