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Publication Date
1996-10-01

FINAL REPORT:

AN EVALUATION OF SELECTED AMERICORPS PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA

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Fall 1996

INTRODUCTION

Initiated by President Bill Clinton in 1992 as a centerpiece of his domestic social policy, AmeriCorps was conceived with, and dedicated to, the intention of fostering wide-ranging cooperation and collaboration among the many organizations that strive to make America a better place to live. Perhaps more importantly, AmeriCorps was also dedicated to the intention of promoting an inspiring ethic of volunteerism and service among American youth—to galvanize a generation of Americans in the interests of improving the lot of their fellow countrypersons. Since then, AmeriCorps programs have taken root in nearly every state in the Union, bringing together private citizenry and public institutions, community agencies and government bodies, local residents and the enormous variety of organizations which aim to serve them.

This document represents the culmination of six months of intensive research by the Institute for the Study of Social Change of the University of California at Berkeley, on seven AmeriCorps programs in the state of California. Our review of the programs was guided by an interrelated set of questions, all of which have practical, academic and policy-oriented dimensions. How effectively does the program address local and community needs? Does the program demonstrate enduring viability? Do the proposed programs provide a reasonable basis for successful social outcomes? In order to answer these questions, we conducted key informant interviews and field observations at seven selected AmeriCorps programs. We also reviewed program reports and documents. Finally, we supplemented our primary research with a review of the social science literature on the experience of programs operating in other communities, as well as survey research and other secondary data.

In gathering and evaluating the data, we relied upon one of our cardinal strengths as a research unit: a broad background in the diverse methodologies of program assessment over the last twenty years. Based upon a review of programs in the field, as well as an examination of the scientific literature on community-based organizations, it is our view that government programs ought not to be assessed according to their ostensible superiority (technical, programmatic, fiscal or otherwise) in the abstract. Rather, the most effective programs are those which best articulate the institutional, organizational and cultural character of the local communities and, concomitantly, the agencies and agency members under scrutiny. This report therefore reflects the results of an iterative process in which we have solicited input from AmeriCorps members, program managers, educators and parent and community groups in order to form a set of preliminary findings. In turn, we share these findings

with program managers, the Commission for Improving Life Through Service program officers and our researchers in the field. This produces guidelines for extending or modifying further lines of research. The Final Report incorporates this feedback process and integrates our research findings with the particular social concerns, community cultures and organizational structures of AmeriCorps programs in California.

This report is divided into four main parts. Part I discusses the rapidly changing social contexts—national, state and local—in which AmeriCorps has sought to carry out its mandate. In summary treatment, we document basic changes in the demographic composition of the United States and California and sketch out the fundamental transformation of the California economy over the last decade, emphasizing how these changes have exacted an especially difficult toll on youth and schools. It is vital to the findings of this report that we address these social contexts because it will properly illuminate the way in which AmeriCorps has transcended the expectations of its founders and transformed itself into a unique social program capable of meeting the changing needs of an increasingly diverse and global society.

These distinctive practices and features of AmeriCorps form the substance of Part II, which discusses the ways in which AmeriCorps differs from, and improves upon, existing programmatic efforts to effect social change. In particular, we underscore five crucial aspects of how AmeriCorps builds on what has been previously offered: its flexibility, its facilitation of developing and enhancing organizational bridges, its provision of alternatives to success for young people, its expansion of traditional approaches to mentoring and mentorship and its role in empowering communities to become agents in their own transformation.

Part III presents an analysis of concrete accomplishments of AmeriCorps in "getting things done" in the four core areas of Education, Public Safety, Human Needs and the Environment. In Part IV, we make a series of policy recommendations based upon all the gathered evidence and analysis. Implementation of these policy recommendations will not only improve the operation of AmeriCorps within the four core areas of "Getting Things Done," but will also provide a more secure foundation for continuing the expansion and transformation of social services and social programs of which AmeriCorps is simultaneously a worthy means and a worthy end. Finally, two appendices follow the main body of the report. Appendix I discusses our research methodology for the creation of the final report. Appendix II presents an overview of the seven AmeriCorps sites.

In summary, AmeriCorps in California is not simply another social program in a relatively stable world. Rather, AmeriCorps arrives as an alternative to facilitate the positive forces of community change necessary to address substantial demographic, cultural, linguistic and economic changes over the past two decades. Whereas more traditional patterns of community service provision can become disconnected or "out-of-touch" with the changing realities of new people, new cultures, new economics and reduced state and local budgets, AmeriCorps programs possess the qualities of adaptability and flexibility necessary for relevant and timely service provision which meets local conditions and situations of need.

AmeriCorps thus represents a fundamental paradigmatic shift in the nature of government-facilitated social change. At best, it can serve as the focal point of a broadly conceived social policy that can effectively deal with the unprecedented transformation of our state population by harnessing the minds and wills of American youth and affixing them to concrete goals emerging out of the everyday lives of real American communities. It re-knits the social fabric by building upon pre-existing programs, relationships and organizations; opening up lines of communication; facilitating the assembly of diverse and mobile coalitions; providing an occasion to rethink and reconsider the reality of community needs; and supplying the creative energy and commitment towards achieving social change. In short, AmeriCorps provides the necessary skills and resources that, if employed on a major scale, would enable communities to empower themselves.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITIES OF AMERICORPS: SOCIAL CONTEXTS, NATIONAL AND LOCAL

An evaluation of such a broadly conceived social program as AmeriCorps must necessarily begin with a discussion of the social and historical context in which it is inserted and in which it intervenes. We thus commence with a brief national overview of the inter-linking forces that have shaped the residential, demographic, economic and racial patterns of migration and segregation over the past two decades. This overview is crucial precisely because AmeriCorps has been mandated as a national initiative in order to relieve political gridlock and institutional paralysis in local, regional and state jurisdictions.

Since the early 1970s, remarkably striking patterns of poverty and racialization have characterized American cities. Massey et al. (1994) provide incontrovertible evidence that poverty has increasingly become concentrated in the large American cities.[1] Supported by a whole literature of related social scientific research on poverty and urbanization, it is not unreasonable to observe that the number of persons living in poverty increased substantially in the decades from 1970 to 1990 and that the spatial concentration of persons living in poverty also increased significantly. This acceleration and consolidation of poverty is due in large part to the globalization of the American economy and society and the restructuring of American capitalism, in which the capital mobility of increasingly prevalent multinational corporations has left residents of American cities without stable, well-paying manufacturing jobs. It is thus the deindustrialization of American cities along with the corresponding shift to a low-wage, low-stability service-sector economy that has resulted in such a deadly configuration of poverty and space.[2]

Along with the shift in the national economy from an industrial to a post-industrial base, the California state economy has undergone a fundamental restructuring as well. In addition, massive reductions in defense-related employment have exacerbated the loss of other skilled and technical jobs in manufacturing. The corresponding increase in the unemployment rate has had a differential impact on California's age groups. By far, young people have felt the burden most heavily. Even a cursory examination of social indicators show that teens are more at risk now than ever before.[3]

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[1]   Massey, Douglas, et al., "Migration, Segregation, and the Geographic Concentration of Poverty," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59 (June 1994: 425-445).

[2]   Wacquant, Loïck, J.D. and William Julius Wilson, "The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. January 1989: 501.

[3]   For instance, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1995), juvenile arrests have risen 54% from 1983 to 1993—despite a 10% decrease in the overall teenage population. Approximately 50% of the estimated 4.2 million non-fatal violent crimes in the U.S. in 1989 were committed by offenders ages 12 to 24 (California Wellness Foundation, 1994, "Grant Recommendations: Community Action Grants Program," Woodland Hills, CA). For California in particular, juvenile arrest rates exceed the national average by over 150 juveniles per 100,000 (California Center for Health Statistics, 1995). California is fifth in the nation among states in terms of the prevalence of teen homicide (U.S. Department of Justice, 1995, Op.Cit.).

These patterns of national *economic* change have been accompanied in California by patterns of *demographic* change. As Table 1 clearly indicates, the population of minorities in California has grown steadily from the 1970s onward. In 1970, the white population comprised more than three quarters of the state's total population but within two decades had decreased dramatically, from 78 to 56%. Meanwhile, from 1970 to 1990 the Asian/Pacific Islander population has grown from 3 to 9 percent of California's aggregate population, Latinos/as from 12 to 26 percent. In fact, the California Department of Finance projects that whites will become a numerical minority within the first decade of the twenty-first century.

CALIFORNIA PROJECTED POPULATION BY ETHNIC AND RACIAL CATEGORY: 1970 - 2010

Year	White	Latino	Asian/PI	Black	Other
1970	78%	12%	3%	7%	3%
1980	67	19	7	8	7
1990	57	26	9	7	1
2000	51	32	11	7	NA
2010	46	36	11	7	NA

Source: California Department of Finance, Population Research Unit, *Report 88 P-4, 93 p-1* and *1990 U.S. Census*, as presented in the *California Almanac*, Fay, James S. and Ronald J. Boehm, eds., Pacific Data Resources, 1993.

Perhaps an even more dramatic representation of the demographic trends can be obtained by juxtaposing the rates of growth of California's ethnoracial populations, as depicted in Figure 1. As the figure shows, every racial minority group, with the possible exception of Native Americans, will grow twice as fast as the white population. By the year 2000, the Asian/Pacific Islander population will be growing at a rate more than three times that of whites. In short, the trend in California over the next fifty years inexorably leads towards greater racial diversity.

FIGURE 1

California's Ethnic and Racial Populations: Projected Year Rate of Growth, 1995-2020*
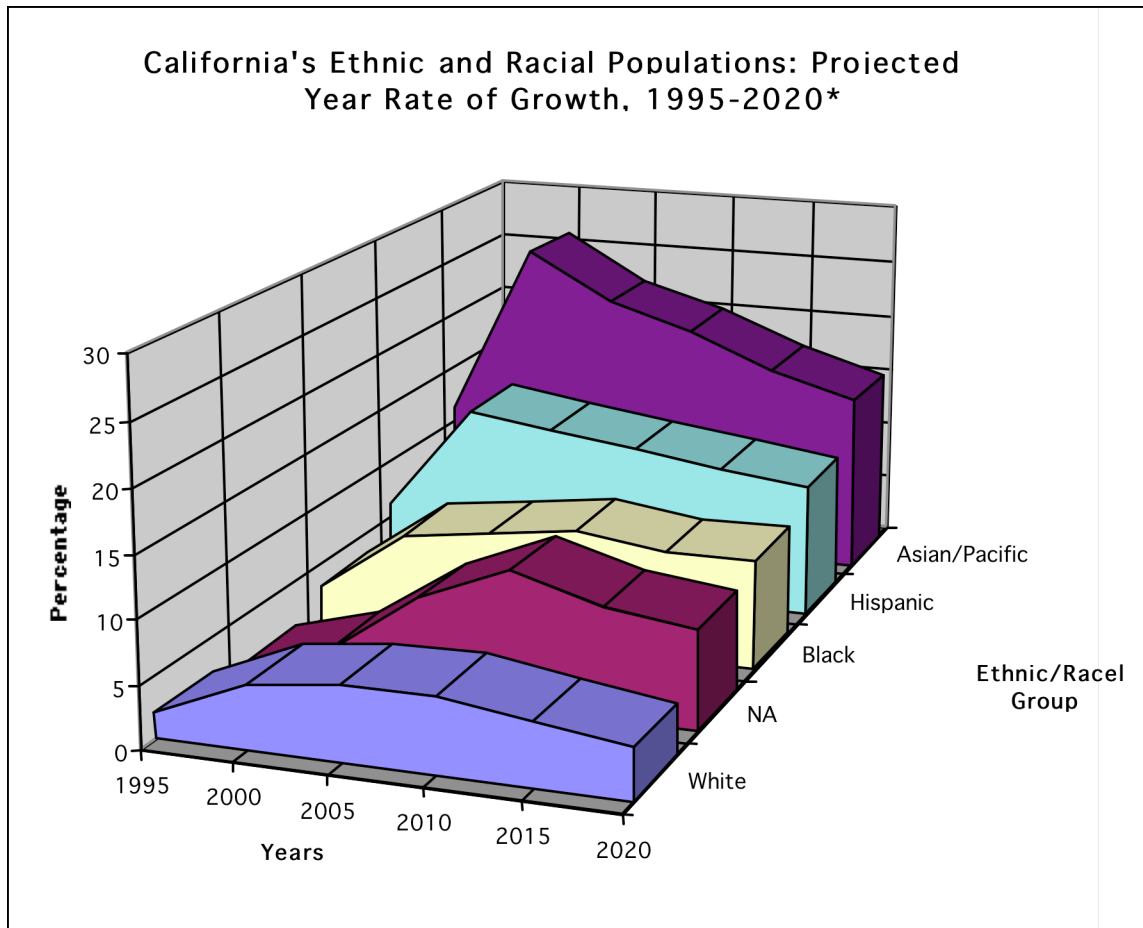
*Source: *U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population* Reports: 25-1111; *Population Projections for States by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1993 to 2020* by Paul R. Campbell. Washington: USGPO, 1994.

By itself, demographic change of this magnitude has profound implications for the provision of social services; however, the nature of this change has arguably more importance. First, unlike in previous decades, a significant number of ethnoracial minorities have migrated not merely from other regions of the United States, but also from overseas and abroad. These groups face linguistic, cultural and economic obstacles upon arrival in the US. Second, the statewide figures do not speak to the highly clustered pattern of settlement for newcomers in general; most now live in urban or rural areas where economic deterioration preceded their arrival. As a result, young people in these communities face new pressures.

Part of the reason for the difficulties experienced recently by young people may lie in the unanticipated changes experienced by our educational institutions. For example, many school districts are underprepared and underfunded, which severely undermines their ability to educate a diverse constituency. In 1994, over 85% of the students attending schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District were minorities, claiming over eighty different national origins and speaking over tens of different languages. The failure to adequately fund our schools has also contributed in many

other ways to the rise in the number of at-risk youth. The reduction of after-school programs and other creative diversions, coupled with a lack of employment, presents more opportunities for young people to fall into at-risk activities.

Nor are these social conditions isolated to merely urban areas. Rural counties, too, have faced rising levels of unemployment and a declining natural resource base. For instance, the northern counties of the state have experienced a severe decline in the timber and fishing economies. In Humboldt, Del Norte, Trinity, Lassen, Shasta and Mendicino, a sharp decline in the income derived from logging and the timber products industry has occurred, as well as decline in employment in fishing that stems from the decrease in the level of commercial landings of King and Silver Salmon, and the recreational catch of Steelhead and Salmon.

Thus, the context for AmeriCorps in the 1990s can be most effectively captured by one word: flux. A rapidly shifting social mosaic presents AmeriCorps with an unparalleled set of intersecting challenges: the diverse origins of California newcomers, their place of settlement once arrived, the decline of manufacturing and defense-related employment, the decline of natural resource-related industries, the increasing number of young people at risk and the deterioration of our educational institutions. These contexts provide a unique opportunity for AmeriCorps to demonstrate how it can adapt to, and even thrive in, its constantly changing surroundings; how it can bring people together in new and unprecedented ways; how it can provide alternatives for at-risk youth; how it can help people teach each other and thereby help themselves. At few other times in American history has a social program on the scale of AmeriCorps faced such a massive and mounting challenge: to do so much, for so many different kinds of people, experiencing so many different kinds of problems.

II. DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF AMERICORPS

"The big difference between AmeriCorps and all these government agencies is they [the government agencies] just give things to you...But AmeriCorps leaves us tools to help ourselves and our community." Community Member

A wide range of studies from community-based intervention programs and community organizing efforts validate the view that involving people as agents and partners in service to their communities is a powerful tool for self and community development. Such involvement creates unique opportunities for new types of learning and relationship building within communities, thus engaging people in their own education by allowing them to become agents in their own lives and in their communities. Our observations of AmeriCorps programs validate these findings of prior research on mentoring and learning through service to one's community: providing service is a powerful method of engaging youth in their own education.[1]

Involving agencies, members, professionals and communities as agents and partners, AmeriCorps programs provide opportunities for changing individuals and for creating new relationships between community members and agencies within AmeriCorps communities. Agencies enhance their organizational goals and activities as their relationships change with the communities which they serve. Professionals, from teachers and principals in schools, to foresters and fish and game employees in a watershed community, to health providers in a clinic or a hospital, change the ways in which they perform their disciplines as a result of their collaboration with AmeriCorps programs. AmeriCorps members develop new skills and new visions of alternatives for their lives through processes of providing service to their communities. These processes of transformation also involve collaborations leading to new pathways and platforms for building bridges and connections between community members and the institutions and organizations in their communities. The following discussion explores the distinctive successes of AmeriCorps in creating new relationships that provide opportunities for development and learning through shared service to one's community.

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[1]   Philliber, Susan and Joseph P. Allen, "Evaluating Why and How the Teen Outreach Program Works," Association of the Junior Leagues, 1991.

A.   Flexibility and Adaptability: The AmeriCorps Ability to Define and Address One's Community Needs

"It is very important to know what the community needs ... If you can learn to care about your community, you can learn to care about yourself ..."   Member

AmeriCorps members serve culturally, economically, linguistically, racially and regionally diverse populations. One strength of AmeriCorps, thus, is its ability to offer resources to different communities in a way that does not impose particular programs on them. Instead, it encourages agencies to use their own context-specific knowledge to develop projects which will work in their communities. It encourages relationships in which agencies and members learn from and build bridges with the communities they serve.

When agencies apply to AmeriCorps, they devise a plan for how they might utilize AmeriCorps members. Each program draws on its many years of experience working in its own community in order to decide how to best utilize AmeriCorps members. While AmeriCorps provides funding and a general structure, a lot of room still exists for each program to develop its own specific projects.   As a result, AmeriCorps supports and fosters the development of programs which are context-specific, which are organic to the communities in which they exist. AmeriCorps fosters grass-roots level involvement in making social change.

B.   Developing and Enhancing Organizational Bridges: Bringing People Together through AmeriCorps

"We had never worked together as a coalition of nineteen agencies ... AmeriCorps has allowed us to create new ways of relating.   To support this kind of project allows for a 21st century community."
Director, Community Agency

One of the distinctive successes of AmeriCorps programs in California is their ability to outreach to new populations and to establish links between these populations and the major organizations which provide health care, education and public safety services. In this capacity, AmeriCorps thus functions as a catalyst for developing and enhancing bridges between agencies and the communities they serve. Building upon pre-existing programs and services, this new structure represents a fundamental paradigmatic shift in the nature of government-assisted social change.

In some settings, the AmeriCorps requirement for collaboration has become an invaluable opportunity to build lasting relationships between agencies and communities.   Such collaboration has not only enhanced existing programs and services, but also has stimulated the creation and implementation of new programs and services which would not otherwise exist without the programmatic support made possible by AmeriCorps. In Los Angeles, for example, the effort to build a community policing program along the Yucca Corridor in Hollywood required the skills of bilingual AmeriCorps members. Through their partnership with police and human services agencies, members were able to build community programs and community policing organized around a network of apartment-based resident associations.

In areas with new settlements of Asian/Pacific Islander populations, Building Communities-CCBHC created community-based homework clinics in partnership with neighbors and merchants in the local neighborhoods. AmeriCorps members created a Cambodian after-school homework club in an apartment of a new development, donated by the project developer. They created a Laotian after-school program, LEEP (Laotian Educational Enrichment Program), in partnership with the Laotian Chamber of Commerce.

At Linking San Francisco, AmeriCorps members worked as facilitators between the schools and the communities and over 40 community-based organizations, contributing to an increase in parent participation in the schools by 75%. As a result, agencies began to "see youth as a resource."

In each of these cases, AmeriCorps functions as a cultural and linguistic "ambassador", enhancing and facilitating connections between community residents and local schools, neighborhoods and organizations. These links are powerful. Not only do they create possibilities for shared community service and transformative programs by agencies and organizations; they also enlist the participation, sponsorship and enthusiasm of local populations who have been at the margins of the routines of most agencies in the past.

C.   Member Development: AmeriCorps as an Alternative Route to   Success for Young People

> **"[AmeriCorps] has given me a sense that I am worthy... I can wake up and know I'm doing something very powerful...and this has helped me to focus."   Member**

"Success" in American society has been defined in very narrow terms, usually referring to high academic performance leading perhaps to further education or at least to stable and well-paying jobs in business, government or academia. The route to success has traditionally been achieved through formal education. Historically, access to formal education has been systematically denied to most members of communities in need who have come to perceive themselves as having two very limited options: either resist school and remain in their communities, or do well in school, go to college and seek jobs which take them outside of their communities and do not serve their communities' interests. AmeriCorps is unique in its ability to transcend this narrow definition of success by offering these young people more options: that is, by offering them different definitions of "success."

While AmeriCorps is open to people of all ages, it specifically targets young people as its Corps members. Furthermore, it engages young people usually excluded from challenging, self-motivated work. AmeriCorps not only hires young people who otherwise may remain unemployed; it also places them in positions of responsibility.

Many of the AmeriCorps members we met were very enthusiastic about their work. They felt motivated and important, excited to be providing services to their communities. One member, for example, mentioned that of all of her previous jobs, none had interested nor challenged her as much as this one. The nature of her work as an AmeriCorps member gave her a chance to prove herself—to show other people such as her advisor at school that she was responsible and capable.

AmeriCorps not only challenges young people; it specifically trains them for work in their own communities. They learn to schedule, plan and coordinate the pieces of a program or an event. They make important decisions. They initiate and run whole projects. They learn what it means to have others count on them. One AmeriCorps member, for example, did not have a college education and related academic and social skills that other young people learn through formal education. Through AmeriCorps, however, he now works with a program for youth based at a local park. He stressed to us the importance and joy of working in his own neighborhood, which has helped him to change his relationship with the youth in his neighborhood. AmeriCorps thus offers young people the chance to demonstrate and develop their skills without abandoning their communities.

When AmeriCorps engages young people and trains them to work in their own communities, it not only empowers them as individuals, but also empowers the communities and the agencies they work in as well. AmeriCorps members who work in their communities serve as positive role models for other youth. They develop skills that are meaningful to themselves and to their communities. They also help their agencies understand and work with the communities they serve.

Linking San Francisco, for example, places AmeriCorps members in schools where they work with students, teachers, administrators and members of community organizations. Often the AmeriCorps members develop positive relationships with students whom teachers have been unable to reach. When teachers see these students whom they consider to be "problems" interacting in positive ways with AmeriCorps members, their perceptions of the students change. Similarly, when community organization members see young people as AmeriCorps members doing good community work, they begin to see youth as resources and not just as "problems."

AmeriCorps not only enables those who have had less schooling to pursue new opportunities for personal and intellectual development, but it also enables individuals who are already on the pathway to higher education to develop "streetwise" skills. As a result of working together, the "streetwise" and the more formally educated members become effectively "bi-cultural." One AmeriCorps member, for example, provides direct services to clients in the farmworker community who need assistance in obtaining housing. She explained to us that in the past she had never experienced a situation in which her American and Mexican heritages had been affirmed simultaneously. She was enthusiastic about her work with AmeriCorps, acting as a bilingual and cultural advocate for the farmworker community.

AmeriCorps thus fosters a set of relationships in which young people are in positions of leadership and responsibility working with agencies and members of their communities. It offers youth a position where they can define their own needs and solve problems. By providing the resources and a structure in which young people can work in and "succeed" in their own communities, AmeriCorps allows youth to inspire other members in their communities to have a more active voice in the programs which serve them. Together, youth and other community partners thus assist each other in developing a greater sense of agency and a greater sense of belief in their own abilities to provide needed services in their communities.

D.   Mentors and Mentorship: Collaborative Learning through AmeriCorps

> **"The thing that makes me succeed more and go forward is that the
> youth look up to you and respect you because they know you've been
> there and they look up to you. I feel that being a positive leader can
> really make a change and difference, especially if it's youth with
> youth."   Member**

One of the most powerful aspects of AmeriCorps is the informal development of new relationships in which agencies, members and the community members they serve can learn from each other in the process of developing and implementing programs. Indeed, this is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the AmeriCorps program: it fosters mentoring *relationships between and among members, agencies and communities.* As a result, members change their communities as well as their agencies; agencies learn from members and transform their services; and communities and agencies are brought together in new ways.

Agency members have often learned from the AmeriCorps members working with them, as much as the AmeriCorps members have learned from agency members. For example, one site supervisor for the California Conservation Corps (CCC) was most enthusiastic about the mentoring relationships he had established with his AmeriCorps members. Although he admitted the challenges of supervising a crew ranging in age from eighteen to forty-five with varying degrees of formal education, he truly believed that he had made a difference in them, and they in him. Prior to AmeriCorps, his job mainly entailed teaching his crew members about equipment safety, occasionally touching upon issues of environmental conservation. Since working with AmeriCorps members, however, he admitted that he was learning more about the environmental protection movement than he had ever known before.

AmeriCorps members at CCC shared this enthusiasm for the mentoring opportunities that working with AmeriCorps had provided them. Many expressed how AmeriCorps programs had given them the experiences and funding necessary for them to determine and pursue possible careers. They identified AmeriCorps as a vehicle of self-discovery which enabled them to test out their professional interests, without having to risk an entire career. Through their work with AmeriCorps, they have been able to learn the educational and vocational skills that will assist them in obtaining leadership positions.

One AmeriCorps member with the CCC in particular had recently graduated from U.C. Berkeley from the Department of Conservation Resources. After having worked in the field of architecture for a while, he decided to apply for a position with the CCC, frustrated by the lack of "hands-on" experience he was receiving from working behind a desk and enticed by the educational stipend offered. He seemed to truly enjoy his work "in the field", for it allowed him to bridge the theoretical knowledge he had obtained in the classroom with "real life" experience: although as a student he had learned *why* it was important to build a fence around a natural preserve to protect it from predators, through AmeriCorps he learned *how* to build this fence. Although he will not be continuing with AmeriCorps next year, through his work as a volunteer he has been able to make some invaluable contacts with people in the

Forestry Service, who he hopes will assist him in hearing about and obtaining employment in the field of environmental preservation.

In numerous program settings, AmeriCorps members have become mentors to youth in their communities. Many members have expressed how through AmeriCorps they have learned to be concerned about events and behaviors that not only affected their own lives, but also those of others as well. By working as AmeriCorps members in their own communities, they have been able to reach out to others who have been neglected or thrust aside by mainstream social service systems, thus becoming mentors for many.

According to inner-city teachers and service providers, one of the most important methods of gang prevention is showing young people they have alternatives -- that there are other ways of learning and living. Youth involved with or on the fringe of gang activity have seen alternatives to such activity as a result of AmeriCorps. One youth involved with an AmeriCorps program through Build Up Los Angeles stated:

> "the people have been in my situation and some of them are former gang
> members and I think they can relate to where I'm coming from and with
> them it's a lot easier for me to talk to them instead of, like, talking to
> someone who don't even know where I'm coming from."

Local youth thus have not only responded better to members who have grown up in similar circumstances; they also look up to these members as role models.

These mentoring relationships have resulted in the transformation of professionals' knowledge and practices as well. Linking San Francisco, for example, makes a special effort to involve teachers as agents of change. Teachers attend a summer training institute, and work with AmeriCorps members and staff to develop and implement new curricula based on a pedagogy of service learning. The program sets a process into motion which engages the teachers in new ways of teaching. Teachers begin to develop a connection between their in-classroom practices and the larger community.

The literature on mentorship and community organizing all point to the importance of learning through practical and active relationships where one is part of a partnership or team. Developing and enhancing the relationships between programs, existing organizations and community members, AmeriCorps has contributed to a richness and complexity of new and existing relationships within communities. By bringing new people together as partners around practical tasks in their communities, AmeriCorps thus functions as a powerful vehicle of cultural and social change.

**E.   A Unique Opportunity for Self-Empowerment: How AmeriCorps
Provides Hope**

> **"AmeriCorps has provided us with the opportunity to show to the
> community that we're a local and safe environment for our community
> ... AmeriCorps has helped kids [in the community] to be more
> aggressive about their own education. The participants [AmeriCorps
> members] themselves have been changed by their new positions. [You
> have to have] loyalty, honor and pride to work here. I admire them very**

much. They're younger, but they're investing their lives into something—they're acting to change the community—acting for themselves and their future."   Community Member

AmeriCorps has reaffirmed the possibility for collective action and social change, giving community members a sense of confidence, faith and hope in their ability to serve as advocates for social change within their respective communities. The program has fostered a sense of patriotism, sacrifice and dedication to community and national goals. AmeriCorps has recaptured and restored hope, enthusiasm and emotional engagement with the ethic of service to one's community.

Empirical studies of community organizing, social movements and school reform all document the problem of creating organizations and personal commitments in communities which have experienced failed institutions and services, disappointment and betrayal. Whereas AmeriCorps cannot rectify a history which feeds despair and hopelessness, it has experienced relative success in establishing a sense of trust with the communities it serves in its ability to assist community members in meeting their needs. The distinctive feature of AmeriCorps is its role in supporting the belief among community members that they can be effective agents in changing their own lives. In this sense, the critical feature of community empowerment which AmeriCorps helps to instill is the role of community members as collaborative agents for molding their communities and neighborhoods to meet individual and group needs.

In the AmeriCorps mission, members are seen as agents assisting communities in meeting their own needs. It is not surprising, thus, that one of the most salient elements of creating partnerships of change is a change in the attitude and hopefulness of members concerning the possibility of making changes in their own communities. AmeriCorps members themselves frequently indicated that they had low or muted expectations of achieving real and sustainable social improvement before they joined AmeriCorps. While many members joined in part so that they could help their communities, others had no initial hope of serving others. Some admitted that prior to joining AmeriCorps, they only cared about themselves and their families. Now that they have worked in the community and have seen the differences that their involvement makes, they realize that "there's nothing wrong with caring" for other people. Their involvement with others in a collective effort with each other and other agencies has suggested to them the very real possibility for extensive and sustainable social improvement.

Through hiring community members and sponsoring a variety of community programs and services, AmeriCorps has actively increased the involvement of individuals in the community who otherwise might be alienated from, and hostile to, social service intervention programs. Instead of merely providing a service for the community, members have shown interested community members how to address their own needs. This has enabled the community itself to work towards its own solutions once the members are no longer available.

At various sites, members and community residents recalled the power of their shared agency in creating a special event or starting a new program. In Hollywood, for example, members and residents of the Yucca Corridor recalled how the community was brought together after a series of successful events, including a large Easter egg hunt attended by over 500 people. Community residents were impressed with their

own power and are now pressing AmeriCorps members to work on plans for subsequent community events and programs to improve the safety and quality of life for children and families in the neighborhood.

Writers on community organizing, such as Paulo Friere, discuss that in the process of working on a task together to create a collective solution, people are changed. Their sense of skill and competence in solving their own problems are transformed in fundamental ways. At the same time, Friere notes the difficulty in getting people who have lacked power and control over their lives to become active agents in changing their situations. AmeriCorps addresses this obstacle by bringing people together to work on issues of common need and interest in their community. As these individuals and groups work together, they develop new skills, new partnerships and a new belief in their ability to improve their communities through shared action. This process of community empowerment changes the relationships and skills of potential community partners, leaving people and communities better able to act together to benefit themselves and their communities.

III. "GETTING THINGS DONE"

> **"I have worked in the community for many years. I can go to my church
> and cook for people, but all we do is open the can and heat up the food.
> But here with [AmeriCorps] we are working with the community ... we
> are right there, we are seeing their place, we see how their lives are.
> When you work with other organizations, you stay in the office; you
> don't have any contact with the people. Even though some people have
> been working with residents for 20 years, many things were not done.
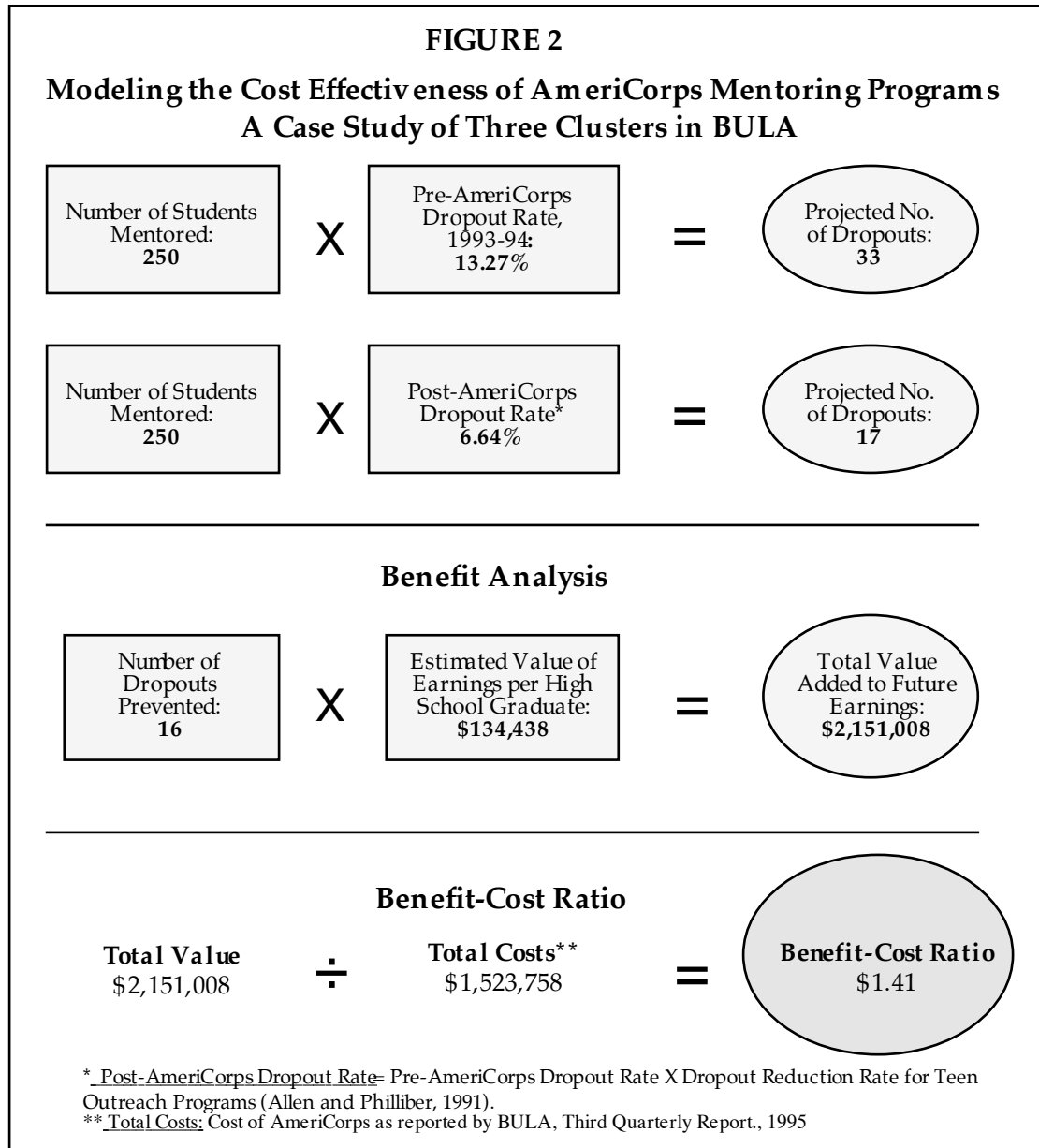> We work with people and try to help them more directly."   Member**

In its concern for "Getting Things Done," AmeriCorps concentrates on the successful delivery of direct services to local communities with an aim towards improving the conditions of their everyday lives. In this section, we will highlight a few major achievements of selected AmeriCorps activities within four core areas: Education, Public Safety, Human Needs and Environment. Where possible, in this section, we will also assess the impact of these program elements using findings and methodologies developed in other related studies.

A.   Education

Every AmeriCorps program we visited is involved in providing educational mentoring or after-school recreational services to youth in their communities. Two programs in particular, Linking San Francisco and W.A.T.E.R. Shed Project, make a deliberate effort to integrate their activities with the curriculum and school routines of teachers, school staff and community members. They design their programs to create richer links between the schools and their communities. The other five programs provide primarily after-school mentoring and recreational programs as either their primary mission or as one element of their program activities.

1.   Building Up Los Angeles (BULA)

Three of BULA's clusters successfully integrate various after-school services for youth. At Central City South, for example, 131 K-8th grade students received academic assistance and mentoring at Adams Middle School and Foshal Learning Center. At another school, thirty students completed an Apple Macmagineer training while 16 received post-secondary school opportunities. In the East Los Angeles cluster, AmeriCorps members tutor 17 students and run a daily after-school program for over 60 students. The Pico Union cluster provides daily after-school tutoring, mentoring and recreational activities to an average of 55-75 youth.

FIGURE 2

**Modeling the Cost Effectiveness of AmeriCorps Mentoring Programs
A Case Study of Three Clusters in BULA**

| Number of Students Mentored: **250** | **X** | Pre-AmeriCorps Dropout Rate, 1993-94: **13.27%** | **=** | Projected No. of Dropouts: **33** |

| Number of Students Mentored: **250** | **X** | Post-AmeriCorps Dropout Rate* **6.64%** | **=** | Projected No. of Dropouts: **17** |

Benefit Analysis

| Number of Dropouts Prevented: **16** | **X** | Estimated Value of Earnings per High School Graduate: **$134,438** | **=** | Total Value Added to Future Earnings: **$2,151,008** |

Benefit-Cost Ratio

| **Total Value** $2,151,008 | **÷** | **Total Costs**** $1,523,758 | **=** | **Benefit-Cost Ratio** $1.41 |

* <u>Post-AmeriCorps Dropout Rate</u>= Pre-AmeriCorps Dropout Rate X Dropout Reduction Rate for Teen Outreach Programs (Allen and Philliber, 1991).
** <u>Total Costs:</u> Cost of AmeriCorps as reported by BULA, Third Quarterly Report., 1995

After-school mentoring programs are a core element of BULA programs. As outlined by Philliber and Allen (1991), mentoring programs such as these are known to have positive impacts on dropout and school suspension rates.[1] According to their pathbreaking research, effective outreach programs must contain two key programmatic elements which are necessary though not sufficient to promoting program success: volunteer service and self-facilitation. Both of these features are essential elements of the Safe Haven programs—the type of after-school programs established by BULA. On this basis, Safe Haven programs are treated as qualified for

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[1]   Philliber, et al.

full inclusion in our modeling analysis. There is strong anecdotal evidence corroborating the effectiveness of these after-school programs in averting dropouts and/or expulsions: written testimony by teachers and parents indicated that students in the programs were more likely to take interest in school and therefore improve their academic performance.

Based on information reported in the BULA second quarterly report, which revealed that Safe Haven programs had mentored two-hundred and fifty students, Figure 2 explores the economic benefits of reduced dropout and suspension rates for three clusters: Pico Union, Central City South, and East Los Angeles.[1] These data suggest that the mentoring segment of BULA's programs produces "expected" benefits which exceed the cost of the programs.[2] Specifically, BULA after-school programs achieve a Benefit-Cost Ratio of 1.41—that is, nearly one and a half dollars of benefits for each dollar expended. The benefit figure represents current value added to earnings of high school candidates who are prevented from dropping out. The cost figure represents total program costs for the three clusters during the first three quarters of 1995. It is important to note that this yield applies to the Pico Union cluster, in which a Safe Haven program is the centerpiece, as well as the East Los Angeles and Central City South clusters, in which Safe Haven programs are only one in a entire panoply of programmatic elements.
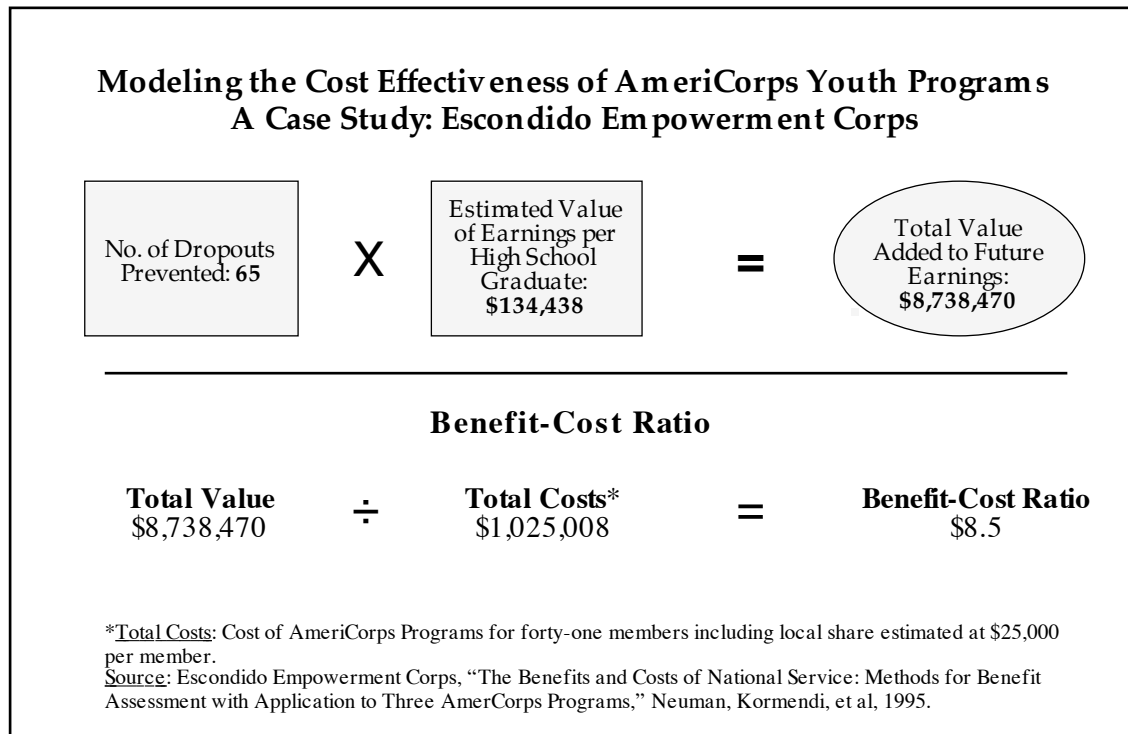
2.   Escondido Empowerment Corps (EEC)

According the project coordinator, Escondido Empowerment Corps reports that through the second quarter of 1995 their program has averted 65 expulsions or dropouts through conflict resolution and mediation intervention. Without the intervention of AmeriCorps, these expulsions were nothing if not eminent—with school authorities poised to expell the students.

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[1]   The values in Figure 2 are based upon the findings of Philliber, et al. on Teen Outreach programs, applied to the current dropout and expulsion rates of the Los Angeles Unified School Districts. Two caveats are in order: the reported dropout rates are for all Los Angeles High Schools, and BULA programs are located in neighborhoods with schools which are likely to have rates equal or greater than these. Second, the expected values of impacts of the mentor program on dropouts are modeled estimates.

[2]   We arrived at the cost estimate by totaling the member cost of clusters that established the reported Safe Haven programs (55% of BULA clusters). Thus, the cost cited in Figure 3 represents the cost of Safe Haven programs proportional to the number of members at those sites .

FIGURE 3

Modeling the Cost Effectiveness of AmeriCorps Youth Programs
A Case Study: Escondido Empowerment Corps

No. of Dropouts Prevented: **65**	**X**	Estimated Value of Earnings per High School Graduate: **$134,438**	**=**	Total Value Added to Future Earnings: **$8,738,470**

Benefit-Cost Ratio

Total Value $8,738,470	**÷**	**Total Costs*** $1,025,008	**=**	**Benefit-Cost Ratio** $8.5

*Total Costs: Cost of AmeriCorps Programs for forty-one members including local share estimated at $25,000 per member.
Source: Escondido Empowerment Corps, "The Benefits and Costs of National Service: Methods for Benefit Assessment with Application to Three AmerCorps Programs," Neuman, Kormendi, et al, 1995.

According to the formula employed by the Corporation for National Service cost-effectiveness evaluation of three AmeriCorps programs, these prevented expulsions and dropouts represent a positive value of $8,738,470 in lifetime earnings for those students. Compared to an annual AmeriCorps cost of about $25,000 per member, the increase in future earnings is remarkable.[1] Figure 3 provides estimates of the benefits related to the results of the Escondido Empowerment Corps in preventing 65 dropouts/expulsions. These benefits are modeled using values for added earnings resulting from preventing dropouts developed in Kormendi, et. al (1995). The Kormendi methodology makes no substantive distinction between expulsions and dropouts: both forms of at-risk behavior compromise the future earning potential of each individual student in identical ways. Costs used in this model are the total costs for all members of the EEC, although the benefits that are estimated reflect the direct benefits of only one of their complement of programs.[2] The significance of the findings lies in the astounding Benefits-Cost Ratio, which, according to the analysis presented above, is 8.5. This means that for every dollar spent on an AmeriCorps program with dropout prevention components such as those implemented by Escondido

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[1]   Member cost estimates are based upon Commission for National Service allocations, administration and the 25% local share from Escondido Empowerment Corps.

[2]   This represents a cost of $1,025,000 for 41 members, for benefits of $8,738,470; with a cost effectiveness ratio of 8.5 dollars of direct earnings benefits for each dollar of program costs. This does not include direct and indirect benefits of other service related outcomes. [Note: The difference *in present value of future earnings* between someone with less than a high school degree and someone with a high school degree or equivalent is $134,438 accrued over their lifetime (Neumann, Kormendi, et al, "The Benefits and Costs of National Service: Methods for Benefit Assessment with Application to Three AmeriCorps Programs." Unpublished report, June, 1995).]

Empowerment Corps, society will reap more than an eight-fold benefit—$8.50 for each $1 spent to be more precise.

3. Linking San Francisco

Linking San Francisco reports a 75% increase in parent participation at the nine schools with AmeriCorps members. It also finds that programs with members are incorporating more service learning through service activities into their class curriculum. At the same time, the number of students and teachers participating in the program has grown because of the participation of AmeriCorps site-based members. Educational literature suggests that increased parental involvement and increased use of service learning curriculum both correlate with enhanced academic performance in K-12 classes.

4. Building Communities-CCBHC

Building Communities-CCBHC reports that its five Homework Centers have offered academic assistance and mentoring to 89 children. Adult classes provided ESL instruction to 97 participants. Building Communities AmeriCorps members serve as linguistic and cultural bridges to new communities of immigrant populations. They work with students, parents and community members to support educational achievement.

5. The Sonoma Project

AmeriCorps members worked closely with the YMCA in further developing and facilitating a comprehensive 40-hour leadership training for youth, the Leader-In-Training Program (LIT), for YMCA summer camps. The program is geared to help 13-14 year olds develop leadership skills, self-esteem and confidence in working with younger children. In the past, LIT has had problems with attrition, with fewer participants over time in part because of the limited staff resources to invest into the program. AmeriCorps provided these needed resources, and members were instrumental in recruiting 41 new trainees and placing them in camps throughout Sonoma County to help deliver the program to 600 youth a day.

6. California YMCA PRYDE

The YMCA reports that over 2,000 youth participated in various after-school programs held by the California YMCA PRYDE consortium. The program provides a homework program, personal development group discussions and recreational activities five days a week for two hours per day.

FIGURE 4

Estimated Impacts of Mentoring Programs on Reducing Risk Behaviors*
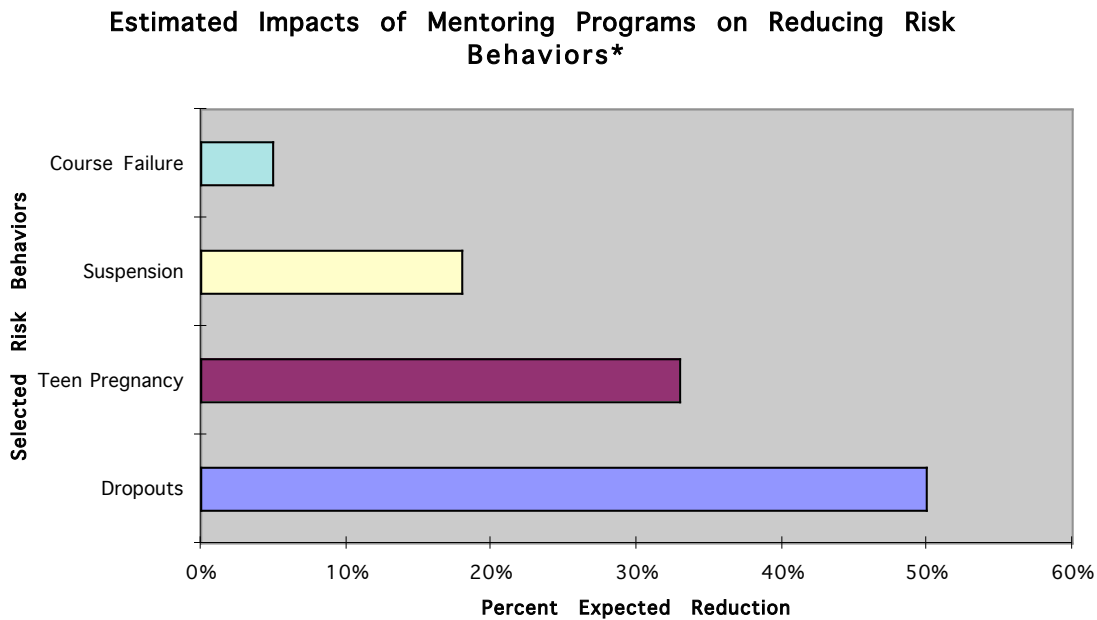
* Source: Philliber and Allen, 1991.

Figure 4 provides an estimate of the benefits of after-school mentoring service programs on noted risk behaviors. These figures are based on a study by Philliber and Allen (1991) of over 50 after-school outreach programs. These programs, like those at BULA, include mentoring, peer counseling and support services. Philliber and Allen (1991) observe that the outstanding feature of successful programs was a service component that features student-led activities. YMCA and other after-school programs include learning through service: students are taught to assist community members, tutor and teach others, provide services of community outreach and care of the site facilities. Thus, it is not unreasonable to expect that YMCA mentoring programs— because of their commitment to both service learning and student-led initiatives—will have tangible levels of positive social impact. Based upon other research outcomes, the power of the programs would appear to be enhanced by focusing on the importance of a service/volunteer component as a significant feature of the after-school program activities.

B.   PUBLIC SAFETY

The majority of the AmeriCorps programs which we visited are involved in service activities to enhance the public safety of their communities. In many cases, public safety goals are integrated with their activities around education. Programs like BULA, Escondido Empowerment Corps and YMCA PRYDE deliver mentoring and educationally related programs at program sites in community-based centers. These centers function as "safe havens," where youth feel protected from community conflicts around group and "turf" affiliations. Other programs focus on violence prevention through the development of mediation and conciliation skills at educational sites.

"Safe haven" programs report that their community-based programs provide opportunities for youth to come together and share activities with youth from other neighborhoods that are defined by neighborhood gangs and clubs as "enemies." In Escondido, for example, teens from different neighborhoods report meeting and establishing friendships with cross-town residents at various events organized by AmeriCorps members.

AmeriCorps members have also played a major role in facilitating collaborative relationships between the police and community members. Members function in neighborhood settings as community members who are able to build trust and create terms for meetings between the police and ethnic and minority communities who are reluctant to become involved with the police. Out of these meetings have emerged effective community policing programs grounded in community and resident associations.

1.   Building Up Los Angeles

The cooperation of BULA was integral to the 20% decline in targeted crimes in the Yucca Corridor, an area with high rates of drug and sex crimes and related problems of theft and burglary. BULA worked with the Los Angeles Police Department Drug Unit, "the Falcons" and neighborhood resident and business associations in the Yucca Corridor. The Falcons eventually left, but BULA continues to work with the neighborhood associations, the 13th District Council representative and the Los Angeles Police Department to involve residents and owners in working on community policing. According to Captain Glenn Ackerman of the LAPD, the results of the various neighborhood services conducted by BULA are quite obvious. The area is looking better and more residents have become involved in crime prevention efforts.

2.   Escondido Empowerment Corps

This program was developed by the Citizen Patrol and other concerned community members in reaction to the abduction of a child walking home from school one day. EEC organized a list of volunteers to watch students as they walked home and report any unusual incidents to either the police or proper authorities in order to insure safety. This particular event involved 15 EEC members who spoke to the community, youth and adults about the Safe Walk Home Program.

AmeriCorps members at EEC took part in the recruitment, orientation and provision of basic tests and processing for youth who will be involved in the Hire-A-Youth (HAY) Program out of SER/Jobs for Progress. The HAY Program targets "disadvantaged" teenage youth who will be provided employment, education and training skills by working for a business or organization during the summer. Members administered basic skills and interest inventory assessment tests to 275 youth. From these tests, 250 youth were certified. Americorps members then presented three different "work prep orientations" to the 250 youth on interviewing skills and "work ethic" requirements. As of the end of June, the program had placed 100 youths in jobs in North County for the summer; by the end of the summer, it hopes to place 900 youths in jobs.

EEC AmeriCorps members have also trained 40 youth as conflict resolution trainers. They are working at middle school sites to mediate conflicts. To date, they have prevented over 50 conflicts that would have led to arrests or adjudication. [1]

C.   HUMAN NEEDS

AmeriCorps members were particularly effective as facilitators of relationships between human service providers and resident communities. In the Hollywood Cluster, for example, BULA created a program which brought doctors and nurses to the residential complexes to conduct health referrals. They also developed outreach programs targeted at youth to encourage them to seek treatment at community-based clinics in their area. Many projects, in fact, have conducted health fairs where local providers and advocacy organizations set up booths providing health information and referrals to service providers in a culturally competent manner.

AmeriCorps members have also worked as advocates for housing. They have worked with City Housing and Code Abatement Programs to involve residents in getting landlords to make appropriate repairs, enhancing the health and safety of housing. They have organized resident associations which have worked to improve the social environment of the housing complexes, including bringing social services and educational/ESL training to the housing locations.

1.   Building Up Los Angeles

At the Hollywood Cluster, AmeriCorps members provided teen outreach for the Healthy Start Clinic in Hollywood, making 31 health education presentations to 312 students. Prior to their outreach efforts, the clinic was seeing two teens a week for sexual abuse, HIV/STD testing, and birth control. After outreach, the number rose to seven per week and continues to increase. As documented in Figure 5, this is a change from 100 to 350 teens served, an increase of 250%. Members also made 734 health and social service referrals to students, community residents and clients of the Los Angeles Free Clinic.

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[1]   Oral communication with Joy Covert, Project Director, Escondido Empowerment Corps, July, 1995.

FIGURE 5

**Impact of Outreach on Health-Seeking Behavior of Teens:
Hollywood Healthy Start Clinic***
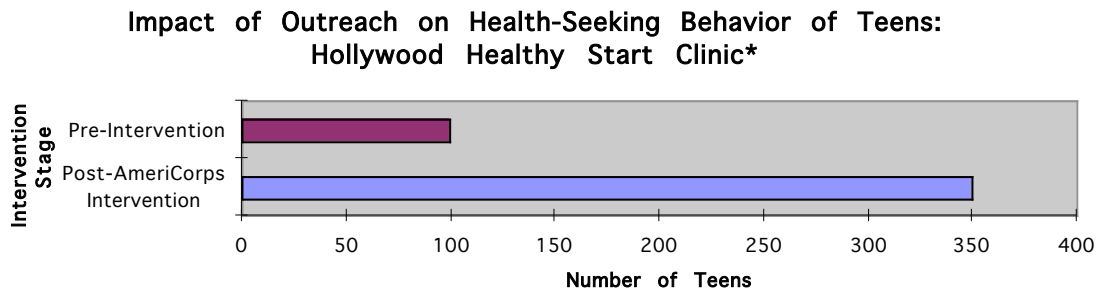
*Interview, Healthy Start Clinic, Children's Hospital, Los Angeles.

Figure 5 displays the impact of health outreach activities of BULA Hollywood on health-seeking behaviors of teens, focusing on the rate of change in care seeking at the Hollywood Healthy Start Clinic following BULA's outreach intervention. As the figure clearly demonstrates, BULA has had a significant impact on health-seeking behavior of teens, particularly with the assistance of AmeriCorps members.

2.   Building Communities-CCBHC

In Building Communities-CCBHC, AmeriCorps members assisted in the organization and planning of 37 Resident Association meetings with 503 logged-in resident participants. Members also assisted in the organizing and planning of training sessions in banking processes and procedures at which 111 residents were in attendance, as well as a health fair for 250 residents. Members and community volunteers dedicated over 2,897 hours to clean-up projects.

3.   CALIFORNIA YMCA PRYDE

AmeriCorps members provide 2,265 youth with recreational activities, drug prevention education and community-building activities and events. These additional contacts were made possible by AmeriCorps funding for the YMCA PRYDE program. The program reached three times as many youth as it projected in its first year. These youth participate in a comprehensive program, five days a week, two hours per day.

D.   ENVIRONMENT

Only one of the programs we visited was primarily focused on environmental issues, the W.A.T.E.R. Shed Project. In the words of one of its staff members, "the goal of the W.A.T.E.R. Shed Project is for community members to see their own watershed— their own backyard—in new ways." The W.A.T.E.R. Shed Project engages both youth and community members in a series of environmental service programs which have included clean-ups at parks and recreational areas around watersheds, restoring the watershed, and working with the Department of Fish and Game and the California Conservation Corps in fish habitat restoration. Additionally it delivers community-based science education using the watershed as a teaching resource. Other program sites have focused upon improving the urban environment through the monitoring of toxics in drainage, creeks and wastewater systems; beautification and graffiti abatement

efforts; the development of community gardens; tree planting efforts along streets and sidewalks; and the sponsorship of environmental awareness at community events.

According to W.A.T.E.R. Shed Project participants, AmeriCorps membership has increased the participation of teachers, schools and classrooms in the Adopt-A-Watershed Program by more than one hundred percent over the first year of AmeriCorps funding. The project engaged volunteers with specialized knowledge in hydrology, geology, forestry, soil sciences and biology for over 1000 hours per quarter. Evaluations indicate that more than 70% of teachers have integrated "Adopt-A-Watershed" curriculum into their regular K-12 classwork.

IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY CHANGES IN CALIFORNIA AMERICORPS PROGRAMS

In this section, we will put forward a number of policy proposals.   These proposals arise from the course of our evaluation of the various AmeriCorps projects. We welcome discussion around these proposals. The proposals are organized here in terms of themes rather than in order of importance.

At this point, AmeriCorps has still received remarkably little attention in the media.   AmeriCorps could work to increase media coverage of its objectives and accomplishments. Press releases to the local and national media about AmeriCorps events, for example, would be beneficial. As the public becomes more aware of the existence and activities of AmeriCorps, the identity of the program will be further shaped and enhanced.

- **Improve the Recruitment Process of AmeriCorps Members**

One of the strongest aspects of AmeriCorps is its ability to engage young people, train them, and engage them in work in their own communities. However, the scheduling of recruitment and the priority for many day to day program activities tends to limit the degree to which projects actually do recruit members from their local communities.

The different AmeriCorps sites are under considerable pressure to develop effective programs in a very short period of time. Most assert their desire to recruit members from a broad range of socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic and racial backgrounds. However, the pressures of needing to initiate and sustain new programs in their communities, along with the differences in economic and cultural resources of different groups of youth, work to dampen efforts at recruitment of a broad range of local/community-based members. From the program perspective, if they have to spend time and resources training members in organizational, writing and job skills, it will take them longer to get their programs up and running. As a result, they feel a certain pressure to recruit and hire members who already have the necessary skills—most of whom attended college and are from middle-class backgrounds—and in doing so to discriminate against less privileged youth from their local communities.

Programs which choose to recruit heavily from low-income, local youth find that their efforts are at odds with the national AmeriCorps structure. Their commitment to investing time and resources into member training and development conflicts with the pressure to engage in direct service delivery and to produce measurable results in a short amount of time. Further, some agency leaders feel that implicit pressures exist in the form of "advice" from the national AmeriCorps organization to refrain from recruiting low-income people because they are considered to be "unreliable" and "uncommitted."   If AmeriCorps is committed to engaging persons with lessor education but who have important knowledge of their communities, there needs to be a change in policy which grants programs allowance to spend more time on training and member development, accepting that the member development process is instrumental

to delivering effective service programs to a broad range of communities in need of services.

AmeriCorps should thus strengthen its commitment to recruiting members from all levels of the socio-economic structure. This means conducting outreach in the communities being served as well as through the national AmeriCorps pool. Programs should be encouraged and given the time and resources to begin recruitment as early as possible. Beginning recruitment efforts before the end of the school year, for example, would facilitate the recruitment of graduating high school seniors who have not already made plans for the fall. Including previous and current AmeriCorps members as an integral part of the recruitment process would also facilitate outreach to local communities. Finally, AmeriCorps materials and trainings should encourage programs to view local youth as resources instead of perpetuating the stereotype of low-income, local young people as less reliable or less committed than those who have attended college.

- **Encourage the Retention of AmeriCorps Members**

AmeriCorps' goals of training members and building communities are hampered when members leave before finishing their year of service. From an agency perspective, time and resources invested in training are lost when a member does not fulfill her/his commitment. From a community perspective, the trust and bridges which are often built through AmeriCorps programs are broken when members disappear. It is difficult for AmeriCorps to function efficiently if member continuity and retention is low.

Several programmatic practices actually contribute to the difficulty of retaining members. Most of these practices center around the low service stipend. Because of the low stipend, members often combine AmeriCorps service, with another job, or full or part-time schooling. This results in pressures both to sustain enough resources to live (financial) and to schedule school and service to allow for meeting both educational and AmeriCorps service requirements. One issue here is the pressure to meet the requirement for 1700 hours of service in order to earn an educational stipend for a year's service. Many programs work odd hours, often working during evenings and on programs or recruitment activities on weekends. However, there isn't a procedure to easily count these odd/overtime hours towards the required 1700 hours of service. If members cannot be compensated for extra hours worked on evenings and weekends, a mechanism should be established where these hours will count in part or in full towards their educational grant. Similarly, a more satisfactory mechanism could also be implemented by which members can make up service hours which are lost due to sickness, school, or family demands and other emergencies. From the perspective of program managers, the failure to schedule time sufficient to meet the 1700 hour requirement, is partly a program management issue. However, in the field we heard from members at various sites concerns related to both long hours worked for small stipends, and the difficulties of meeting the hour requirements for an educational stipend. Financial and time requirements place a burden on members, and while this is a "up-front" feature of the AmeriCorps program, both of these pressures undermine member retention.

AmeriCorps should reduce the child-care burdens which some part-time members face as well. For example, while child care is provided for full-time members who meet certain eligibility criteria, part-time members receive no such support. This has made it difficult or impossible for many strong AmeriCorps members to continue working. By providing child care to all members who qualify for such assistance financially, AmeriCorps will benefit in its ability to motivate and retain more members.

Finally, different programs offer different living allowances or stipends, to AmeriCorps members. While some programs can only offer the stipends set by the national AmeriCorps organization, others are able to supplement member living allowances through privately raised funds. The higher stipends these programs are able to offer greatly increase their ability to recruit and retain members. AmeriCorps could make focused technical assistance in grant writing and other means of raising funds a priority, encouraging and supporting programs which need such assistance to seek additional funding for member stipends and expenses.

While some AmeriCorps members can depend on their families for extra financial support, others cannot. Some members are working, going to school, paying tuition, supporting themselves and even contributing toward the support of other family members. These are the members who most often drop out of AmeriCorps. By taking the steps we have recommended, AmeriCorps can work toward retaining these members in higher numbers and realizing the full potential of a diverse AmeriCorps.

- **Modify Regulations for Replacing Members**

Agencies have been severely hampered in the delivery of services by rather strict and inflexible regulations regarding the hiring of new members to replace those lost through attrition. Because AmeriCorps sites can only engage replacements at specific times of the year, program development may be hindered since sites may be one or more members short due to attrition at any given time. As a result of this, project staff may be reluctant to fire ineffective members as well. While this reluctance to fire members may prevent agencies from being "short-handed", the retention of such members can lead to other problems such as lower morale and the disruption of AmeriCorps activity.

AmeriCorps funding should thus be established in such a way that program sites will not be penalized for member attrition. As members leave before the end of their commitment, funds could be made available to replace them. This would enable AmeriCorps to fully actualize its mission of simultaneously developing members, agencies and communities.

The California Commission on Improving Life Through Service should review the purpose and rationale for the existing rules around member hiring, and explore the possibility of changing them where there is little or no adverse consequence to the program. *Since our research, the staff and the Commission have established procedures to facilitate   the process of engaging replacement members for those who have quit the program.*

From an administrative perspective, lost workers also result in the loss of training dollars and new workers require security checks and enrollment in health

benefit programs. But, this is another arena where programs which seek to engage a broad spectrum of community-based local members are likely—in addition to gaining benefits from this approach—to experience program burdens of attrition and increased training and member development burdens.

- **Encourage Cooperative Development Across Projects**

AmeriCorps programs need more formal, more extensive and more sustained "cross fertilization" between the various projects. Such cross fertilization allows the sharing of knowledge and skills between projects, enhancing program development, member training and program implementation. This could be initiated by the Commission but should be done in ways that do not entail extensive administrative and bureaucratic requirements.

At present, there are several different types of cross fertilization occurring across the state. The Commission is currently conducting state-wide training for project teams which generally have been useful, but do not provide significant opportunities for informal exchange by teams from various projects. At the recent meetings at Cal Poly in August 1995, the program included opportunities for peer mentoring across projects in developing objectives and evaluation plans and for sharing experiences with training and member development. The feeling that we sense from the field, however, is that projects would welcome more opportunities to share and learn from each other. After the first year of activities, projects are more aware of shared program elements and shared obstacles. They could benefit from more opportunities to both exchange and share their wisdom from the field with other projects.

Another type of cross fertilization develops from the informal and ad hoc meetings between staff and members of the various projects. BULA offers a good example of this kind of sharing where staff and members from one project site may sometimes, even frequently, be involved in the activities of another cluster. In some cases, members from one cluster live in the community being served by another cluster. These personal contacts have resulted in a range of informal activities by members and/or staff from one project being involved in other projects to the benefit of both.

Because program directors/trainers and program members are great resources for projects facing parallel problems and issues, the model of cooperative development across projects needs to be encouraged across programs, perhaps by region. Although there have been some regional meetings to date, greater opportunities for informal sharing across programs would benefit the quality and mission of programs. This could be done by allocating local travel money and encouraging projects to release program staff and members to meet with other programs, since program staff have indicated that they would gladly share their skills with other staff. Such sharing should be nurtured, mandated and supported by small funds.

- **Upgrade Information Technology**

Virtually every program we visited could benefit from an upgrade in their computer technology. Such an upgrade would greatly enhance communication between agencies, members and projects. It would also facilitate communication with the

Commission. The availability of this technology will further assist program services to their communities as well.

Use of electronic mail and the Internet has been an area which has already been identified by programs and the Commission as a priority. Programs use the computers for documentation, reports, publicity and communication. Where there are education and after school programs, the computers are used as teaching tools for educational and recreational activities.

Even where there was a commitment in idea to getting members e-mail accounts and using e-mail for communication among members and between sites, the available technology was often lacking. Programs had neither the resources to purchase computers and modems, nor the resources to pay the monthly charges for e-mail access. A relative shortage in computer workstations also existed.

Computer access provides training and competency in arenas that are unrelated to the ways in which the computers are being used at a particular moment. Enhancing computer accessibility would thus improve project documentation and publicity, as well as provide a platform for member development and on-the-job training for community members. In addition, the computers can serve as a resource tool in the training of youth and adults in after-school and evening programs. Perhaps the Commission could work with programs and private funders on a separate development effort for funding e-mail and more computer stations for program sites.

- **Broaden the Availability and Scope of Focused Technical Assistance**

There is a real interest in focused technical assistance at the program site level. Programs seem to need and want technical assistance in program development, program design and evaluation on-site for focused, short time periods. If granted the authority to purchase small segments of technical support to meet focused program needs, overall program effectiveness and efficiency could be greatly enhanced.

Studies in educational re-structuring suggest that dollars spent at or close to the site are more effective at meeting on-site program needs. A transfer of some national technical assistance funds to a locally driven menu of support would constitute a cost-effective investment in program quality and improved evaluation and professional development. In part, this may be an issue of the Corporation for National Service developing a system for authorizing an allocation for technical services to programs, which may be used to procure services from a list of national or state providers. It would be similar to current technical assistance services from national contractors, but with more control at the local and state level over the choice of consulting services and the location of these services at the site level. *Commission staff have worked to have some funding dedicated for programs to engage consulting and professional development services at a more local level.*

A related issue, which has been discussed by the Commission, is the provision to programs of some simple "off-the-shelf" protocols for program development and evaluation that could be used at multiple sites.   It should be possible to provide programs with some core assessment techniques for evaluation of the effectiveness of

service delivery for education and after-school programs, human needs and public safety which could be used across sites with some adjustments. This approach would help to fill a void for projects which face the challenge of developing acceptable evaluation protocols with limited resources and limited experience/uncertainty about what would constitute acceptable approaches and practices.

• **Simplify the Reporting Process for Programs**

All of the projects experienced a relatively great burden from the need to prepare and complete quarterly reports, as well as draft final copies of applications in response to requests for proposals. The need for extensive program documentation resulted in removing program staff from overseeing program activities to generating required administration. Smaller projects and those less skilled in the preparation of such documents in particular were severely challenged by these reporting requirements. Given that quarterly reports have generally not been the basis for the termination of program funding, projects would be empowered in program operations by a reduction in major reporting from a quarterly to a bi-annual reporting period.

Again, since our research period in the 1995 fiscal year, the California Commission has moved in fiscal 1996 towards bi-annual program reports with a retention of quarterly fiscal reports.

• **Provide Earlier Confirmation of Funding Approval**

The first year was plagued by delay and uncertainty in the implementation of programs due to the lack of funding assurances and commitments from the state and national levels for the following year. Virtually all programs have indicated that problems were created in the first year because of late start-ups, particularly due to delays in receiving fiscal support. As a result, the effectiveness of AmeriCorps organizing and recruiting efforts have been hindered.

Programs have encountered difficulty in establishing relationships with potential community partners because of the possibility that the programs may not exist the following year due to budget cuts. Experienced staff members, in some instances, also have been reluctant to commit themselves to AmeriCorps for another year due to funding uncertainty. While it is clear from our discussions with the California Commission on Improving Life Through Service that assurances of continued funding could not be made to programs, some information could have been provided as to the likelihood of funding, so as to allay some anxieties. Within limits, programs would thus be strengthened in their ability to plan, make commitments to program staff (and thereby encouraging retention of experienced members) and to retain some members for a second year if they could receive at least an assurance of partial funding commitments by the end of the second quarter.

• **Increase Public Awareness of AmeriCorps Identity**

AmeriCorps needs to develop better public education and outreach materials about its philosophy and objectives. These materials should be culturally and linguistically accessible to local communities. Increased publicity about the goals and

objectives of AmeriCorps will not only improve public awareness about and trust in AmeriCorps, but also relationships between agencies and members by "clarifying boundaries" between local agency and national service identities. In addition, it would increase the sense of pride and identification of staff and members with AmeriCorps if the program were more publicly visible.

AmeriCorps has not gone sufficiently far in establishing a firm and clear identity, particularly one that is uniform across programs. While at some sites members easily identify themselves as AmeriCorps members, this is not necessarily the case at other sites. This is particularly true where AmeriCorps members work through existing organizations with strong local and regional identities. In part, this problem results from the first year nature of AmeriCorps and the delays in the delivery of training, publicity, and outreach materials. Additionally, AmeriCorps has not yet had time to firmly establish itself in the community.

One simple and cost-effective option for enhancing AmeriCorps identity and visibility would be the ample distribution of AmeriCorps clothing. Members everywhere report waiting for T-shirts and sweatshirts, and then receiving insufficient supplies. If the program invested funds in providing several items of clothing— perhaps four or five T-shirts, 2 sweatshirts, and several hats—the public profile of the program could be significantly increased. The more clothing the members have, the more they will wear.

In the local and national communities, new methods could be developed to increase public awareness of the mission and the scope of AmeriCorps programs. Continued distribution of AmeriCorps information to local community organizations, religious groups and schools will help to foster an awareness of AmeriCorps' objectives and accomplishments. Preparation of press materials for local and community newspapers and local radio stations would also appear to be an effective method of increasing public awareness of AmeriCorps programs and activities.

APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY

It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of AmeriCorps programs. First, most of the programs having begun between October 1994 and January 1995 are still involved in developing and implementing their programs.   Often, program development takes a front seat to the mandate to evaluate. Secondly, it is difficult to isolate AmeriCorps-related impacts and outcomes. More problematic is the fact that the behaviors that are the targets of AmeriCorps program interventions are notoriously difficult and slow to change. Changing the way teachers teach, the way students learn, the amount of youth crime or youth violence—changing culture and behavior, are difficult tasks which require a lot of time.

Projects dealing with multicultural and ethnic communities report that any type of formal survey instrument is viewed with suspicion and uncertainty within their communities. Because residents have fear of government intrusion into their lives and are uncertain about the "government" nature of AmeriCorps, formal-looking survey instruments are viewed with disdain and often remain uncompleted and unreturned. Members believe you need other devices to capture public opinion of their programs or assess community needs and concerns.

With these issues in mind, we took a collective, qualitative approach to this research. The core of our research was a series, over time, of in-depth site visits at seven different AmeriCorps programs. The seven sites were chosen in consultation with the California Commission on Improving Life Through Service. The rationale behind their selection was the maximization of variation in geographic location, program type, rural versus urban stature and length of existence.[1]

While our research focuses on these seven specific sites, it is crucial to note that our research is not fundamentally about these individual programs. We were not primarily interested in evaluating these programs for their individual merits or failures; to the contrary, we often used their experiences as a lens for understanding how AmeriCorps works as a whole. In other words, we evaluated AmeriCorps in a holistic, rather than atomistic, fashion. The distinction was critical to us in both the writing of this report and in the development of trusting relationships with people at the various sites.

In general, we relied upon four major sources of data in our investigation: interviews, field observations, programmatic documents and the literature on community programs and interventions. Nonetheless, the core of our research mainly consisted of in-depth interviews and observations at sites. Our research team included the following members:

Troy Duster, Principal Investigator
David Minkus, Project Director
Stephen Small, Project Research Associate

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[1]   Please refer to Appendix 2 for a brief description and discussion of individual AmeriCorps programs.

Janice Tanigawa, Fiscal Manager and Field Researcher
Sharon Bernstein, Graduate Student Researcher
Anthony Chen, Graduate Student Researcher
Lisa Hirai, Graduate Student Researcher
Wendell Thomas, Graduate Student Researcher

We conducted interviews during site visits, when we could speak with agency staff, AmeriCorps members and community residents. Some interviewees consented to tape recording and transcription of the interviews, whereas others did not wish to be recorded at all. Some interviews involved a structured set of questions; others were discussion-oriented, less structured and less formal. Still others were spontaneous and serendipitous. In some cases we interviewed the relevant parties in groups, rather than singly. During the interviews, we asked about impressions of AmeriCorps history and mission objectives, as well the genesis of AmeriCorps collaboration. We also inquired about their daily activities, their learning experiences and their opinions about what had been rewarding and what had been challenging for them. Since we visited each site at least three times, we had the opportunity to develop a sense of daily routines—to enhance a sense of local context and local realities.

APPENDIX II: THE SITES

1. Building Communities-CCBHC

This program links AmeriCorps members with resident associations of low-income housing developments. The program builds on the work of the housing development agency and its Director, who applied for AmeriCorps funding to consolidate and expand work that the organization had been doing for a number of years.   Orange County has a recent history of limited support for social service programs, particularly those targeted at lower income and immigrant populations, and the AmeriCorps program counters this by organizing and addressing the community's needs.

The program brings together the previously unorganized and under-served Laotian and low-income Latino communities in Santa Ana. A core project for the AmeriCorps program has been its efforts to link Asian and Latino populations (primarily women) with health care providers. Projects have included work on health issues, including education and outreach related to the low level of blood donation and blood availability among Asians and Latinos.

AmeriCorps members, many of them immigrants themselves, build on their unique position—in terms of their ability to communicate linguistically and their shared cultural and immigrant background—to bring communities that are atomized and unconnected to social services into social service provision. Members work at a number of different sites throughout their communities, many of them based around housing and residential projects. Members first work with the residents to create a resident association or build on the existing association. They also conduct a needs assessment to identify priority concerns for residents, subsequently assisting community members in implementing the most important projects.

2. Building Up Los Angeles (BULA)

The Building Up Los Angeles (BULA) project is the largest of all the AmeriCorps programs and is made up of six geographically distinctive sites, called clusters, and a central office. The clusters are: Central City South, East Los Angeles, Hollywood, Northeast Los Angeles, Pico Union and South Central/Watts. The central office houses three staff, including an Executive Director of BULA, who are responsible for coordinating the various clusters and organizing activities such as trainings that cover all the clusters.

The AmeriCorps program has been in operation since Fall 1994, although it has antecedents in President Clinton's Summer of Service Program which began in Spring 1993. At that time, a range of organizations were involved in a collaborative process that began after the civil disorders of 1992 (arising from the reaction to the Rodney King decision). These organizations included agencies in Central City South, Pico Union and East Los Angeles.

The primary goals of BULA are Education, Public Safety, Health and Human Needs and Environmental Improvement. The various clusters focus on these goals and

organize their priorities in different ways, according to the particular composition of the communities that they serve. For example, the Hollywood cluster has a primary focus on public safety and health. It works with hospitals and clinics to encourage people who are reluctant to use health services to take greater control of their health needs. It also works with police and community members to enhance safety and security along the Yucca Corridor.

Concentrated in an urban area, BULA services the needs of a diverse population with myriad problems focusing around the issues of social-economic change, including homelessness, crime, drugs, gang activity, sexually transmitted diseases (STD), prostitution and lack of recreational centers for young people. While Los Angeles as a whole reveals a culturally and racially diverse population, each community served by BULA has its own unique mix of people. For example, East Los Angeles is primarily Chicano; Hollywood has large enclaves of African Americans, Latinos and Armenians; Pico Union has a large Central American immigrant population; and South Central/Watts is heavily African American.

AmeriCorps members are drawn from all racial and ethnic groups in the Los Angeles area, and they clearly reflect the city's diversity. This strength allows BULA to easily integrate itself into the various communities. The members are overwhelmingly young people, many of them recently out of school, and the majority of whom are in their first role of working in an office-based setting. Some of the members are ex-gang members or "troublemakers". In many instances the backgrounds from which members are drawn enable them to understand and interact with the youngsters with whom they work. Members are primarily cast in the role of tutors to children in after-school programs, and they quickly become mentors, counselors, role models and parent figures to the children they serve.

BULA works in conjunction with a number of agencies including Bresee Youth, Children's Hospital, Community Outreach, Los Angeles Conservation Corps, Los Angeles County Office of Education and Mujeres Y Hombres Nobles. The agencies are actively involved in the work of AmeriCorps through the mechanism of a coordinating council composed of representatives from each of the agencies.

3. California YMCA PRYDE

The YMCA/CSU PRYDE Consortium was formed as a response to the challenge of providing "at-risk youth" with positive alternative activities and targeted interventions to improve school performance and reduce juvenile crime, thereby improving public safety. Concentrated in five geographic areas—San Diego, Long Beach, Los Angeles, San Francisco and the East Bay—YMCA PRYDE has served more than two thousand youth in the combined areas, a total that well exceeds their planned service objective. Their scope of services spans a wide variety of activities, mostly focusing on after-school programs for K-12 students.

YMCA PRYDE AmeriCorps members work intensively in these after-school programs, helping students with homework, mentoring them in important life skills, supervising constructive recreation, providing positive role models and offering edifying after-school alternatives to at-risk youth.

4. Escondido Empowerment Corps

Escondido's AmeriCorps program is distinguished by its developed and clearly defined training, its program development, and its personal development programs. The program has created its own techniques and organizational vehicles, like alternatives to violence group training and a "Culture Club", a vehicle for inter-ethnic and inter-regional exchange. The program has been effective in building support and partnerships with the city, with volunteers from the police for various dance and group functions, and with public and media attention. Some of these successes grow out of a long history of personal relationships of working together on issues. The program also owes some of its success to its ability to maintain good relations with city government, police and fire departments. These institutions are committed to proactive social services, including maintaining good relations with Escondido Youth Encounter (E.Y.E.), which has been a strong and active community partner for many years.

The program works in a setting which has changed dramatically, from a small town to a city of over 110,000 people, in the space of only 15 years. During this same period of growth, the Latino community has increased to a total of about 25,000.   The Latino population has been traditionally marginal and under-served in the North County of San Diego.

AmeriCorps has been successful in recruiting predominantly Latino members, and it employs many of these members to be part of a bilingual community development corps. This process alone represents an innovative and history changing pattern of action for North County.

5. Linking San Francisco

Linking San Francisco began two and a half years ago with a planning grant from the Stewart Foundation. The project applied for Summer of Service Grants and other programs to extend and transform the work then in progress. The program is built on the simple concept of linking community and community service to school practices and curriculum, and connecting schools with the communities surrounding them.

The main areas of Linking San Francisco include: teacher training; building a Strong Youth Voice with strong youth involvement in planning, program development and program implementation; and establishing strong school/community collaboration.

The San Francisco Unified School District is a 1/3 partner in Linking. Linking San Francisco also works in close partnership with the Volunteer Center of San Francisco. Its main concern is to make connections with agencies to educate them to using youth as part of their mission. At the same time, it works with teachers, principals and school sites to stimulate a school curriculum which is more connected to the issues and activities of these community-based agencies and organizations.

Linking San Francisco attributes its success to good planning, requiring schools and principals to buy-in as partners, providing schools with "top notch" members by

augmenting the regular AmeriCorps member stipends with additional pay, and by continuing to monitor its work. In this way, it uses successes and problems as the focus for professional and member development. It works at about three times as many schools (28) as its AmeriCorps schools.

A distinctive feature of Linking San Francisco is its clear mission to integrate its AmeriCorps members into the routines and organizational culture of the school sites. AmeriCorps members work with teachers and attend teacher meetings, as well as work to integrate AmeriCorps projects with teacher curriculum and Site Improvement Plan (SIP) objectives.   Through their facilitation, members bring community groups and issues into the schools—arranging for speakers and field trips which deal with cultural and ethnic issues, as well as issues of neighborhood safety, clean-up and environmental quality. In addition, members may assist the teachers in service learning projects by bringing architects and artists to the school to paint murals or plan for a community park.

6. The Sonoma Project

The Sonoma Project is organized around a number of rural and urban sites within Sonoma County. Sonoma County continues to face social issues emerging from the combination of rapid population growth and increasing urbanization, a change in the demographics of the population with a large increase in the Mexicano/Latino population and processes of growth and change in the economy. The "rural/urban" shift underway in many areas of Sonoma County has contributed to an increase in gang violence, juvenile crime and unemployment.

In an attempt to address the economic, political and social "dislocation" of community members as a result of the "rural/urban" shift, a variety of agencies convened for five months to discuss and identify the programmatic needs of Sonoma County, "with the goal of creating a County-wide service ethic among youth and adults to carry on the tradition of 'getting important things done' in the national target area of public safety (crime prevention and crime control)."

The group identified a range of needs and proposed programs around the following objectives, including the need to teach parents the importance of and how to be nonviolent role models; to provide consistent discipline and limit children's exposure to violent entertainment; to involve youth in meaningful service activities to build their self-esteem, their "resiliency factors" and their bonding to the community; to provide early grade tutoring programs to reduce the risk of school failure; to teach children social skills for avoiding violence, resolving conflict, expressing anger non-violently, and meeting other needs; to provide employment skills for at-risk youth and families; and to improve youth-directed adjudication of non-violent youth crime.

These program goals are addressed through the following activities: 1) "Safe haven" after-school centers; 2) In-home services for families; 3) Teen court support; 4) "After shelter" support; 5) Farmworker youth liaisons; and 6) rural environmental projects.

The program has member-led (i.e. member only) weekly meetings which focus on issues of member development in terms of strategic planning of activities, work at sites and member/staff relations. This format helps to set agendas and pace commitment among the older more formalized community-based agencies and organizations.

In order to oversee the project and build a strong foundation of inter-agency collaboration, the Community Service Coalition Coordinating Council was established and administered by the Sonoma County People for Economic Opportunity. Agencies work together in the assessment of community needs and in the development of collaborative approaches and strategies to address needs.

7. W.A.T.E.R. Shed Project

The W.A.T.E.R. Shed Project is designed to create an integrated, hands-on science curriculum known as Adopt-A-Watershed, with an implementation model based upon school-community collaboration and service learning. The program grew out of the Trinity River Task Force. The program is designed as a comprehensive K-12 science education and environmental curriculum. Students at each school, beginning in kindergarten, Adopt-A-Watershed and follow it through their school career, monitoring changes in the watershed. For the past year, the program has been most active with K-6 grades. While curriculum is available for some middle school units, the high school curriculum and programs are still in the process of pilot development and testing in a few school settings. Curriculum is developed in consultation with teachers—some teachers are paid stipends in the summer to assist as curriculum writers. In turn, these writers pay small $100 stipends to other teachers to assist in collaboration on the curriculum. The curriculum is then run through a testing and feedback period.

AmeriCorps members are employed as "community brokers" to support teachers by obtaining local professionals from the community like timber company biologists, Forest Service resource specialists and scientists to assist teachers in service learning projects, and to engage parents and community members in "seeing their own back yards" in new ways. Member successes reflect a focused mission, organizational history and a skillful view of keeping activities "politically neutral", while engaging different community partners. In addition, members work as site coordinators in developing appropriate solutions to the needs and interests/resources at the local school/community sites.