

AMERICORPS   
ALUMMS



A POINTS OF LIGHT ENTERPRISE

# UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Findings From a New Survey of Alumni of All AmeriCorps Programs

JUNE 2014



The economy is recovering, two wars are winding down and a presidential election is around the corner. Meanwhile, one in five children live in poverty, high school dropout rates persist and the rungs of the ladder to economic mobility are shaky at best. America’s challenges are real and urgent.

We need all Americans – especially those who have proven themselves to be citizen leaders – to get involved in changing lives and communities. And we need them now.

Since 1994, nearly 1 million Americans have served in AmeriCorps – a public-private partnership administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, sometimes referred to as “the domestic Peace Corps,” that engages individuals in intensive service at community and faith-based groups across the country. In the spring of 2014, more than 5,200 alumni of AmeriCorps responded to an online survey distributed by AMERICORPS ALUMS.

From all 50 states, Washington D.C., Guam and Puerto Rico, these alums told us their national service solidified their commitment to community and country, and that through national service, they developed skills to be better students, employees and citizens. Alums shared they wanted careers that mattered. They also told us that, all too often, like returning veterans and Peace Corps volunteers, they had challenges continuing their educations and transitioning from their service experiences into their next professional jobs.

Now, more than ever, America needs citizen leaders – and AmeriCorps alumni are ready recruits. These alums deserve our thanks, but they also need our support. Their voices are shared in the following pages.



*“AmeriCorps has influenced my goals in life, and how I want to contribute to helping my community. AmeriCorps helped change my life for bigger and better opportunities.”*

**- Survey respondent**



*“I was on a path of failing out of college without a lot of direction or motivation. It is not an understatement to say that deciding to serve with AmeriCorps was the biggest turning point in my life. Since then, I’ve graduated from college . . . and [am now] part of a powerful network of catalysts for social change.”*

**- Survey respondent**

## KEY FINDINGS

AmeriCorps alumni are ambitious. They want to change the world, and they know it takes hard work. But many say they struggled to navigate their professional next steps after service.

### **AmeriCorps positively shaped most alums' professional trajectories, but some young alums have difficulty turning their big aspirations into impact careers.**



- AmeriCorps alumni overwhelmingly say that AmeriCorps significantly shaped who they are today. Nearly all alums (88%) believe their AmeriCorps service was among the most significant professional experiences of their lives, including nearly half of alums age 36 or older (45%, n= 1,008), who strongly agree with this statement.

- Upon graduating from AmeriCorps, alumni believe they gained valuable workplace skills (64% strongly agree), and they want careers that impact the world around them (72% strongly agree). This is significant, especially when two-thirds of large companies report difficulty in filling job vacancies because applicants have unsuitable work habits or insufficient experience.<sup>1</sup>
- After their service, two-thirds of alumni (64%) work in the government or nonprofit sector. This stands in contrast to the national data that shows just 6 percent of college students plan to work for public sector institutions, and only 2.3 percent want to work at the federal level.<sup>2</sup>
- Only a third of alums (32%) – and just 30 percent of respondents from the class of 2013 (n=834) – strongly agree that upon finishing their service, they knew how to navigate “life after AmeriCorps” (e.g. find jobs, get into schools of their choice).

### **AmeriCorps alumni have high educational aspirations, but some have difficulty finding – and financing – the schools of their choice.**



- Two-thirds of alums (67%) and nearly nine in 10 alumni who had less than an associate's degree at the time of their AmeriCorps service (87%, n=752) report wanting to pursue additional higher education at the time they completed their service. These degrees aren't just nice to have – they're necessary. In fact, by 2020, 65 percent of U.S. jobs will require some form of postsecondary education.<sup>3</sup>

- Only one in three alumni strongly agree they had the knowledge necessary to finance their pursuit of higher education (26%) and to use their Segal Education Awards (32%) after their terms of service. (The Segal award is a modest college scholarship AmeriCorps members earn through their service.) This matters when Americans now have more than \$1 trillion dollars in school debt.<sup>4</sup>
- Despite these challenges, AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to have degrees than the national average for their age group. Nearly nine in 10 (88%) currently have a bachelor's degree or higher (versus 77% at the time of their service). The national degree attainment rate for young adults (ages 25 - 34) is 41 percent.<sup>5</sup>

## EMERGING THEMES

In analyzing the comments offered by more than 3,300 alumni, key themes emerged. Through their voices, we learned that the impact of AmeriCorps service extends far beyond the completion of service. Alums said their service shaped them personally and continues to impact the communities where they live. Alums told us they are patriotic, connected, well-informed and hungry to stay involved. They want to contribute to their communities and to their country. **These themes reinforced the survey findings that alumni of AmeriCorps are a national asset.**



### **AmeriCorps alumni see their AmeriCorps service as a way to serve their country.**

AmeriCorps presents a pathway to serving our country. Like military service, national civilian service shapes alumni's personal identities long after their term with AmeriCorps is complete. Alums who once wore an "A" on their sleeve and veterans who wore the uniform of our nation's military (and some with who have done both!) address our nation's toughest issues head on, with a commitment that's unmatched. One survey respondent said:

*"National service looks different to each person. ... Committing to make America a little bit better [when I joined AmeriCorps] is the single best thing I ever did and still continue to do."*

### **For many alumni, AmeriCorps was their first chance to engage with Americans from different backgrounds – and it remains an important connector.**



In many parts of American society, family, friends and neighbors are less connected than they were 25 years ago – with consequences to communities. AmeriCorps provides its members opportunities to connect and stay connected to the communities they're serving and to the national service professional network. Another survey participant told us:

*"AmeriCorps allowed me to be immersed in another culture. I have a better understanding of diversity and poverty. It has completely changed my life, and [through the alumni network], I'm a part of a vast network of people that want to better America."*

### **AmeriCorps alumni stay committed to the communities they served.**



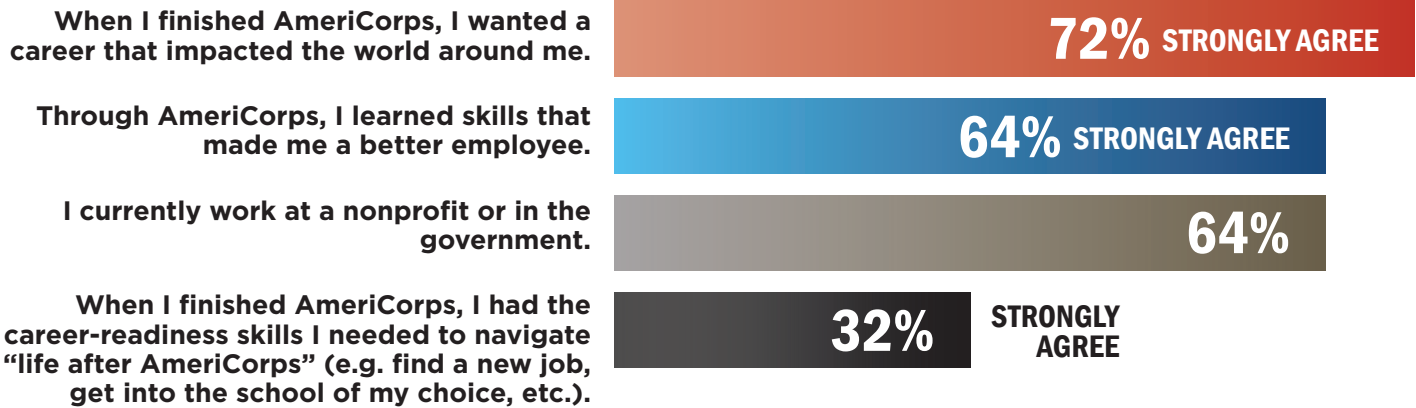
AmeriCorps is an opportunity to deeply engage with communities and learn about new issues. It can ignite – or reaffirm – a commitment to making America stronger. An alum who took the survey said:

*"Even though my [service with AmeriCorps] is over, I still remain actively engaged as a volunteer and have used my training to help other nonprofits. [Because of AmeriCorps], I still volunteer, when otherwise I wouldn't have."*

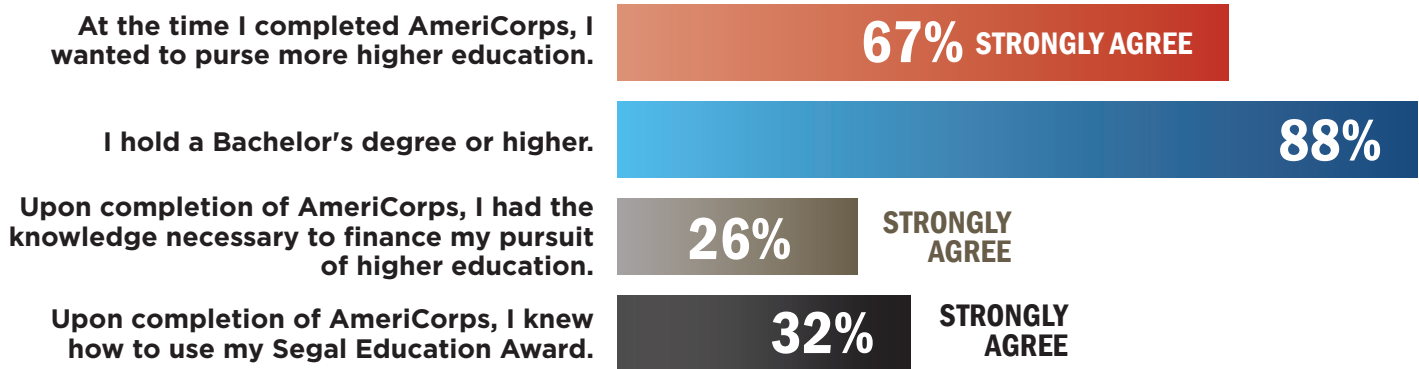
## CONCLUSION

Through AmeriCorps service, nearly 1 million people contributed to communities across America and learned skills to help them be better scholars, employees and citizens. They have given 1 billion hours of service to more than 15,000 community-based organizations since 1994. As alumni, they have proven to be civic leaders, team builders and problem solvers with a "get-things-done" attitude. They want to have careers – and lives – of impact. Yet, too often, this potential goes unrecognized, unrewarded and underleveraged. **With the future of our country at stake, why would we leave this talent on the sidelines? For the good of America, let's tap the potential of AmeriCorps alumni. Let's thank them, support them and count on them to keep getting things done for America.**

▶ AMERICORPS ALUMNI VIEWS ON PROFESSIONAL GOALS



▶ AMERICORPS ALUMNI VIEWS ON HIGHER EDUCATION GOALS



▶ SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

5,269 AmeriCorps alumni from all 50 states, Washington D.C., Guam, Puerto Rico and some international locations completed the AMERICORPS ALUMS “Life after AmeriCorps” survey between March 31 and May 12, 2014. The majority of respondents were recent alumni (53% of respondents graduated between 2010 and 2014), alumni of AmeriCorps State/National programs (54%, versus 28% VISTA and 18% NCCC) and served for one year (53%). About two-thirds of respondents were under age 30 (58%).

▶ METHODOLOGY

Survey questions were designed by the AMERICORPS ALUMS team in consultation with America’s Service Commissions, Civic Enterprises, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Franklin Project of the Aspen Institute, Points of Light, ServiceNation and Voices for National Service. Our data was based on self-reporting responses, and our survey was a reflexive design.

## About AMERICORPS ALUMS

**AMERICORPS ALUMS BUILDS A COMMUNITY OF ENGAGED CITIZENS AND CIVIC LEADERS THAT GETS THINGS DONE FOR AMERICA.** It is the only national network that connects the nearly 1 million alumni of all AmeriCorps programs (including an estimated 80,000 new alumni each year) to the people, ideas and resources that support their commitment to a lifetime of service. AmeriCorps alumni are predominantly between the ages of 21 - 35, more racially diverse than the U.S. population and over 60 percent female. For more information, please visit [www.americorpsalums.org](http://www.americorpsalums.org) and connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Manyika, James et al. "An Economy that Works: Job creation and America's future." McKinsey Global Institute. June 2011. [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/employment\\_and\\_growth/an\\_economy\\_that\\_works\\_for\\_us\\_job\\_creation](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/employment_and_growth/an_economy_that_works_for_us_job_creation)

<sup>2</sup> "The Outsiders: How Can Millennials Change Washington If They Hate It?" The Atlantic Monthly. August 2013. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/08/the-outsiders-how-can-millennials-change-washington-if-they-hate-it/278920/>

<sup>3</sup> "Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020." Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. June 2013. <http://cew.georgetown.edu/recovery2020/>

<sup>4</sup> "How the \$1.2 Trillion College Debt Crisis Is Crippling Students, Parents, and the Economy." Forbes. August 2013. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/specialfeatures/2013/08/07/how-the-college-debt-is-crippling-students-parents-and-the-economy/>

<sup>5</sup> A Stronger Nation through Higher Education. The Lumina Foundation. 2014. [http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A\\_stronger\\_nation\\_through\\_higher\\_education-2014.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A_stronger_nation_through_higher_education-2014.pdf) Note: In 2012, the most recent year for which data are available, the proportion of Americans ages 25 - 64 with a two- or four-year college degree was 39.4 percent.



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