

JANUARY 2020

THE READING PARTNERS EFFECT

REPORT 3: Influencing the civic engagement of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni

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THE READING PARTNERS EFFECT:

Influencing the Civic Engagement of Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni

Program & Study Overview

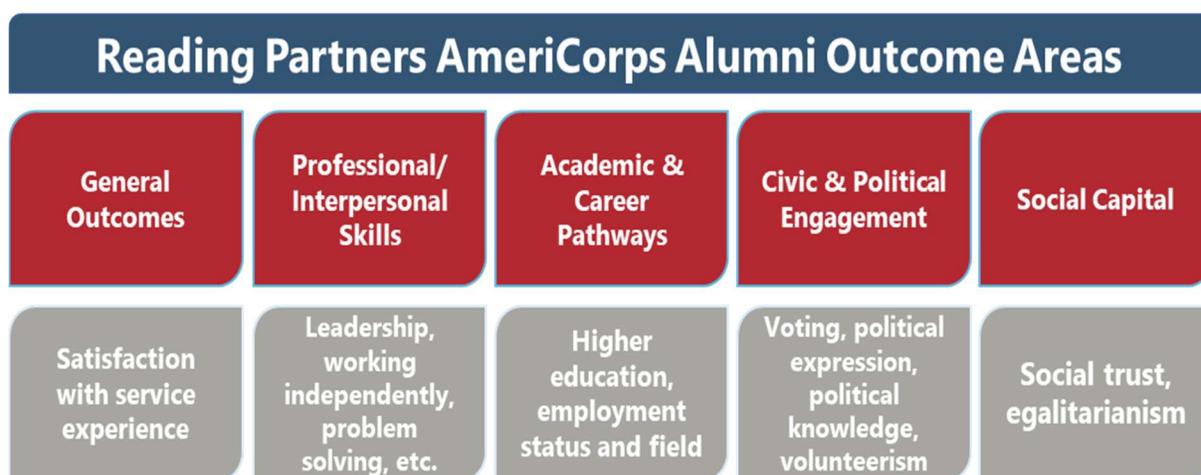
Reading Partners is a national literacy nonprofit that partners with under-resourced schools and engages community volunteers as tutors. Trained volunteers work one-on-one with students for 45 minutes twice a week, following a structured, research-based curriculum. AmeriCorps and VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) members are instrumental in delivering the Reading Partners program and serve in five different roles in the organization:

- **AmeriCorps Site Coordinators (SCs) & AmeriCorps Regional Site Coordinators (RSCs)** coordinate and lead all site-based activities of the program at reading centers.
 - SCs manage all site-based operations, administer literacy assessments, and provide individualized coaching to volunteer tutors.
 - RSCs, unlike SCs, are not assigned to a particular school but instead rotate among larger schools with the greatest need and provide additional direct service support.
- **AmeriCorps Volunteer Coordinators (VCs)** recruit volunteers to provide individualized instruction to students who are struggling with reading. VCs prepare volunteers for tutoring by providing orientations, managing background checks, and setting expectations.
- **AmeriCorps Literacy Leads (LL)** are placed at schools where it is more challenging to recruit volunteers and deliver tutoring sessions in tandem with volunteers.
- **AmeriCorps VISTA** members build organizational capacity toward the ultimate goal of ending poverty. VISTA members serve in various contexts at the national and regional levels to build systems and strengthen Reading Partners' ability to serve students and communities.

Reading Partners' theory of change asserts that, as members serve in these roles, they develop important professional and leadership skills. Moreover, Reading Partners believes that member experiences in the communities where they serve will influence their educational and career

pathways as well as their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs related to civic engagement. Reading Partners' AmeriCorps program is designed to impact members during and after their service terms. While in service, members cultivate in-depth relationships and witness the impact they have on students, while also engaging in a year-long training schedule that provides opportunity for civic reflection and exposure to other national service networks.

In spring 2018, Reading Partners contracted with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to design and conduct the Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Study, intended to deepen the organization's understanding of the quality of the Reading Partners AmeriCorps service experience and its effects on the civic engagement and educational and career pathways of their AmeriCorps and VISTA alumni. The outcome areas of interest are summarized in the figure below.

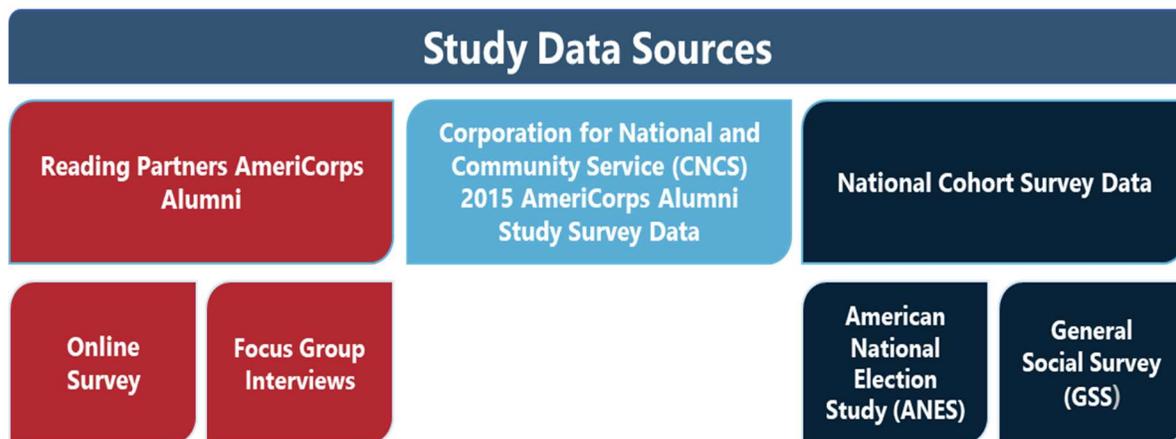


Specifically, the study sought to address the following research questions:

1. What outcomes do Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni attribute to their Reading Partners experience? Do these alumni perceive that serving as a Reading Partners AmeriCorps member helped them develop professional and interpersonal skills or influenced or change their career and/or academic pathways?
 - a. *In what ways, if any, do perceived member outcomes vary by member characteristics, including age, race/ethnicity, educational background, years of service with Reading Partners, role with Reading Partners, geographic region where they served, prior service with another AmeriCorps program, cohort year, or early vs. late cohorts?*
2. Controlling for other factors, do Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni demonstrate stronger professional and interpersonal skills and/or greater levels of civic engagement than similarly situated members of the national population?

The study analyzed patterns among respondents overall, as well as by key characteristics, including race/ethnicity, educational attainment, age when Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni began their service, number of service years completed, or region of the country (i.e., east coast, west coast, central U.S.). Where differences by subgroup were observed, they are highlighted throughout.

The study used a two-part mixed-methods design that included surveys and focus groups conducted with Reading Partners AmeriCorps and VISTA alumni.¹ We also conducted comparative analyses using data from (1) a 2015 AmeriCorps alumni survey conducted for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) (Cardazone et al., 2015), and (2) a statistically matched comparison group of similarly situated members of the national population. (See the text box on the following page and Appendix A for additional details about the study methodology.)



Findings from the study are described in a series of three reports, plus a technical appendix. This report, the third in the series, focuses on alumni civic engagement. It begins with a profile of the common characteristics of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and then describes the extent to which alumni are politically engaged, are civically engaged, and have social trust and a sense of egalitarianism.

The study analyzed patterns among respondents overall, as well as by key characteristics, including race/ethnicity, educational attainment, age when Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni began their service, number of service years completed, or region of the country (i.e., east coast, west coast, and central U.S.). Where differences by subgroup were observed, they are highlighted throughout.

Where possible, responses from Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni are placed in context with results from a 2015 study of AmeriCorps alumni by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). In addition, the report also measures the impact of Reading Partners service on alumni’s civic engagement by comparing the survey responses of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni with those of similarly situated members of the national population.² The extent to which there are measurable differences in the civic behaviors of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni compared with the statistically matched comparison group is an indicator of the program’s impact.

¹ Throughout this report, the term “Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni” includes alumni who were members of VISTA.

² National data sets include the American National Election Study (ANES) and the General Social Survey (GSS).

Methodology

Online survey: 526 alumni responses/59 percent response rate

The study surveyed 898 Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who completed their service term between 2010 and 2018. The survey asked Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni about their service experiences and whether they believed those experiences influenced their subsequent educational and career pathways as well as their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward community and civic engagement.

Focus groups: 50 respondents

To collect illustrative examples of the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni, the study team conducted 12 focus group interviews with a sample of 50 such alumni (i.e., on average, each focus group included 4-5 participants) who represent the variation in alumni characteristics and experiences. Interviewers asked Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni to elaborate on their service experiences, as well as their educational, employment, and civic experiences in the years following their completion of the program.

Comparison groups: To put the Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni findings into context, the study compared the survey responses of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni with those of the following similar groups:

CNCS alumni. The study compared the responses of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni with responses of AmeriCorps alumni who participated in the 2015 CNCS AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes study. CNCS surveyed a nationally representative sample of AmeriCorps alumni whose service experience ended in 2012, 2009, or 2004.

National cohorts. To better understand what Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni's experiences, attitudes, and behaviors would have been had they not participated in the Reading Partners program, the study used publicly available, national data sets, including the American National Election Study (ANES) and the General Social Survey (GSS) to create a synthetic comparison group very similar to the Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni population in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income, marital status, educational background, and other factors associated with their propensity to serve (e.g., volunteerism and religiosity). To the extent that there are measurable differences in the attitudes, behaviors, and life experiences of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni compared with those of a statistically matched comparison group is one indicator of the program's impact.

Limitations: Key limitations of the study design are (1) the data collected through the Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni survey and focus group interviews reflect only the perspectives of individuals who served in the Reading Partners program and who were willing to participate in the study, so the results may not represent the views of all Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni; (2) the results of the quasi-experimental design comparing the career pathways and civic engagement of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni with a "statistically matched" comparison group should be interpreted with caution because the design does not include a baseline equivalency measure nor is it a true random assignment and thereby does not allow us to infer with certainty what would have happened to Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni had they not participated in the Reading Partners program. Nevertheless, this analytic strategy provides a useful comparison with similar non-participants, puts their career pathways and civic engagement in useful comparative perspective, and provides insight into the potential impact of the Reading Partners program.

Key Findings

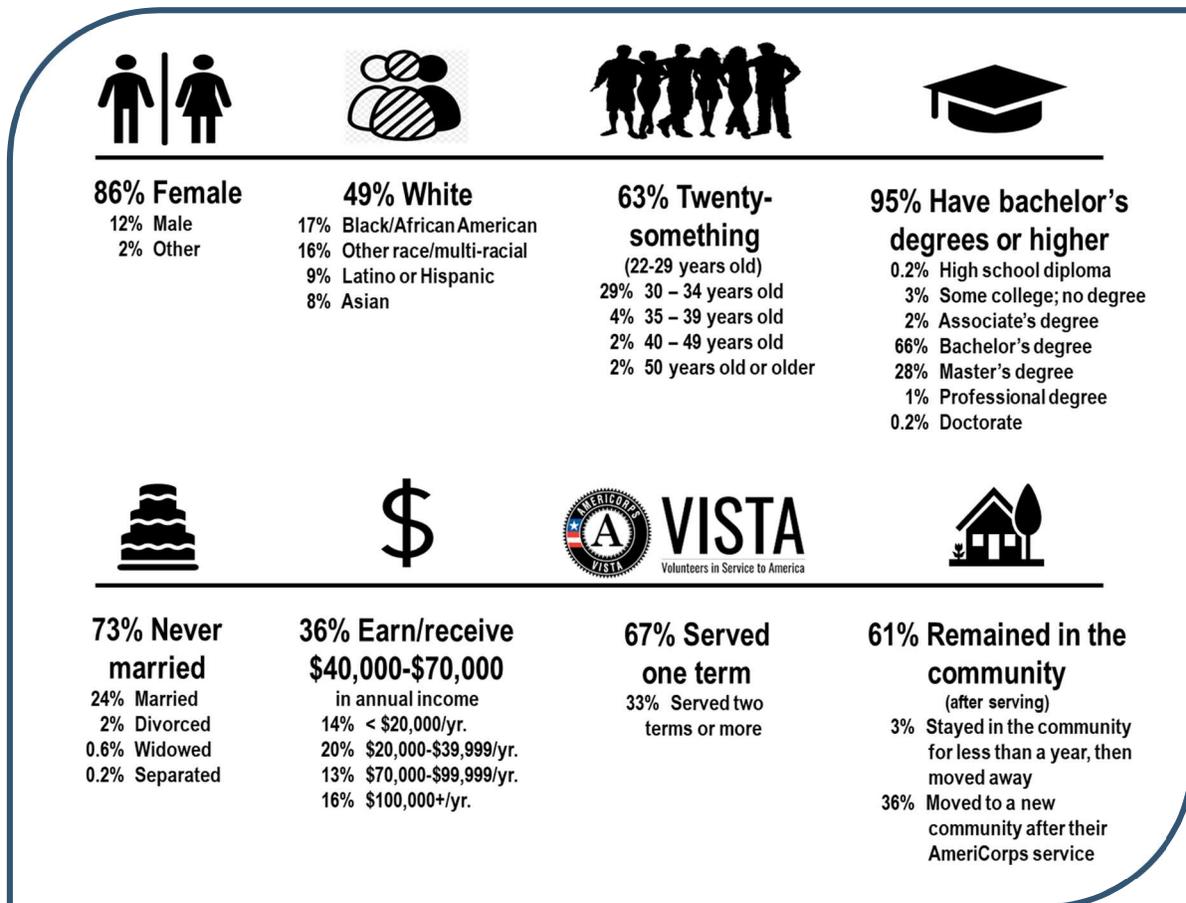
The study revealed the following key findings about the civic engagement outcomes of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni:

- The vast majority of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported that they had engaged in at least one act of political expression in the past 12 months and consider themselves to have a good understanding of the political questions facing our country. Very large majorities said they voted in the 2016 presidential and 2018 mid-term elections and that they volunteer at least a few times a month or more for at least one organization or issue that they care about.
- Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni took more actions to express themselves politically than did similarly situated members of a national cohort, and this pattern holds regardless of respondents' race/ethnicity.
- The Reading Partners program generated increased levels of civic engagement in their Corps members than would have been expected among similarly situated members of the national population. Specifically, compared to a similarly situated national cohort, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to:
 - Express themselves politically
 - Understand the important political questions facing our country
 - Volunteer in more activities for organizations or issue that they care about

Reading Partners Alumni Profile

Most of the 526 Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who responded to the survey were female; about half were persons of color; and the vast majority were between the ages of 22 and 34. As of early 2019 when the survey was administered, almost all responding alumni reported having a bachelor's degree or higher (95 percent). Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) had never married; 36 percent reported annual income between \$40,000 and \$70,000; and 61 percent reported having remained in the community in which they served after completing their service (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: Characteristics of Reading Partners AmeriCorps and VISTA alumni



Based on 526 of 898 completed or partially completed surveys administered to Reading Partners alumni (response rate: 59 percent).
Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019).

Alumni who responded to the online survey were well-distributed across Reading Partners region and service year (from 2010-11 to 2017-18), as shown in Exhibits 2A and 2B. Further, the distribution of survey respondents by sites and service years was very similar to that of the overall population of Reading Partners alumni, as described in detail in the Appendix.

Exhibit 2A. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni, by region

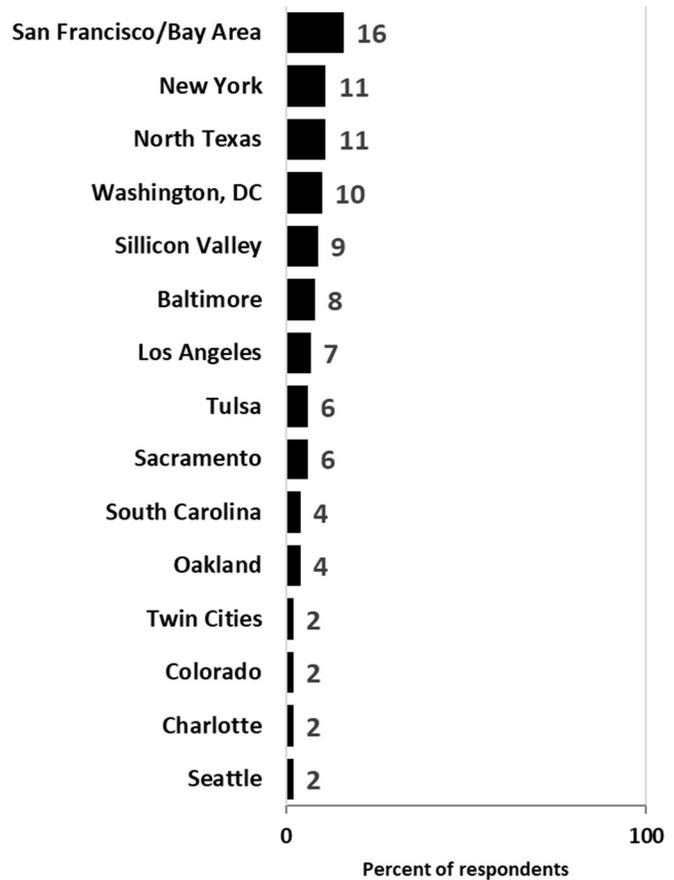
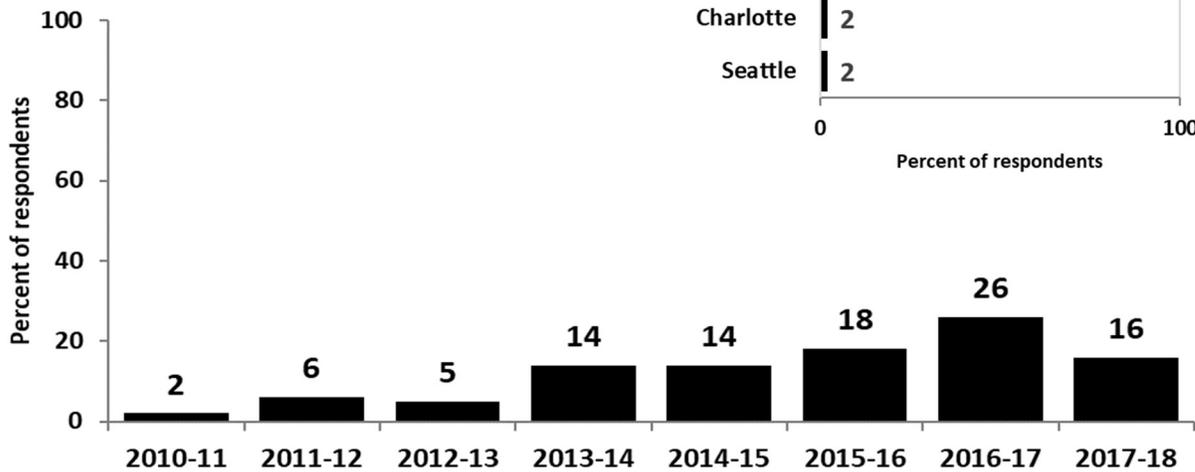


Exhibit 2B. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni, by service year



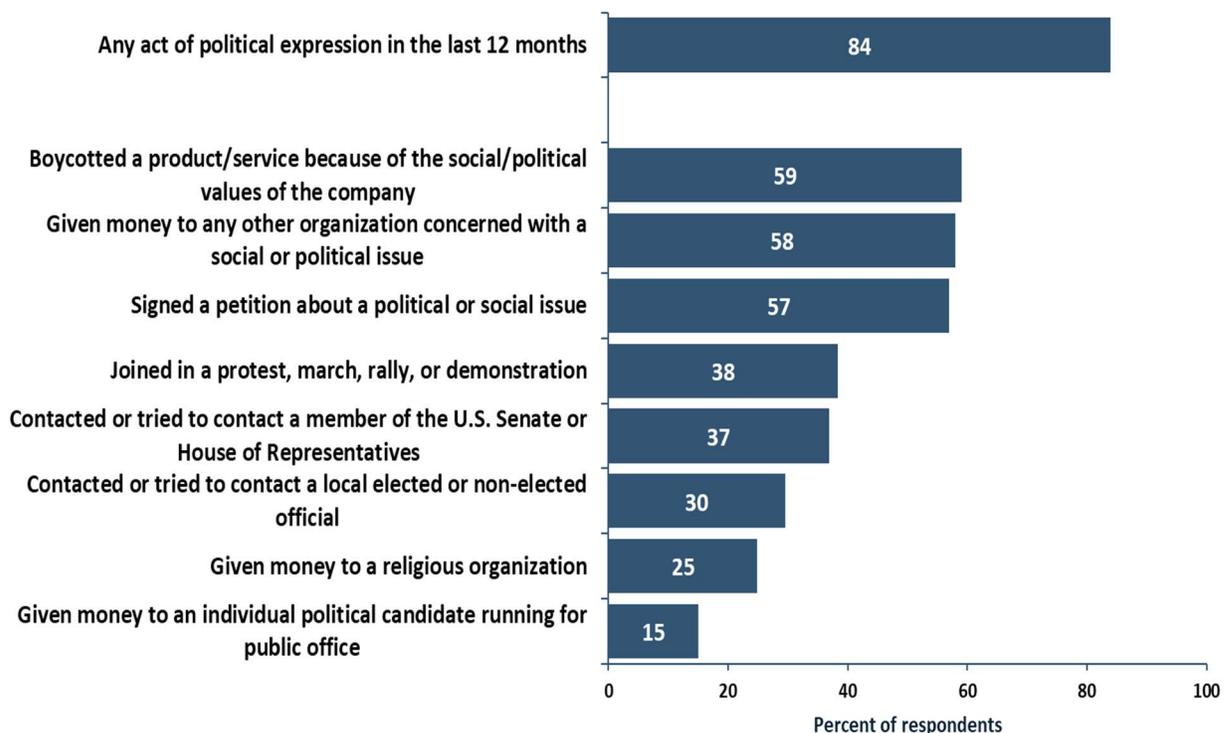
Based on 526 of 898 completed or partially completed surveys administered to Reading Partners alumni (response rate: 59 percent). Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019).

Political Expression

Most Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (84 percent) said they engaged in at least one act of political expression in the last 12 months.

As shown in Exhibit 3, the majority of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni have expressed their political views in the last 12 months in a variety of ways: boycotting a product/service because of the company’s values (59 percent); giving money to a non-religious organization concerned with a social or political issue (58 percent); signing a petition (57 percent); or joining in a protest, march, rally, or demonstration (38 percent). Few of the responding alumni said they gave money to an individual political candidate running for public office (15 percent).

Exhibit 3. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni’s acts of political expression in the last 12 months



Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); N=507

In Their Own Words

In focus group interviews, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni described their involvement in protests, letter-writing, and other types of political expression. Some attributed their advocacy efforts to their Reading Partners experience.

- *Each year I'm writing letters to make sure that AmeriCorps funding stays in the budget. I guess that's a direct action politically related to my year of service with Reading Partners.*
- *I've been to protests or community events at least a couple of times a month related to all the border/immigration issues.*
- *There's a group of politicians that really like to criticize SNAP and food stamps, and serving as a part of AmeriCorps has given me a perspective into that and has made me really quite passionate about it.... We can't get rid of SNAP. This is not people begging for money. These are necessary services that I have seen impact people in really positive ways."*
- *I have dug deeper into issues of education, health, transportation, housing, etc. From there, I was able to connect with other individuals—not political campaigns but organizing around writing to members of Congress and getting involved in other ways.*

Reading Partners made me feel more empowered to act; [to know] what I could do as an individual. Reading Partners showed me that I could be a real part of the action being taken.

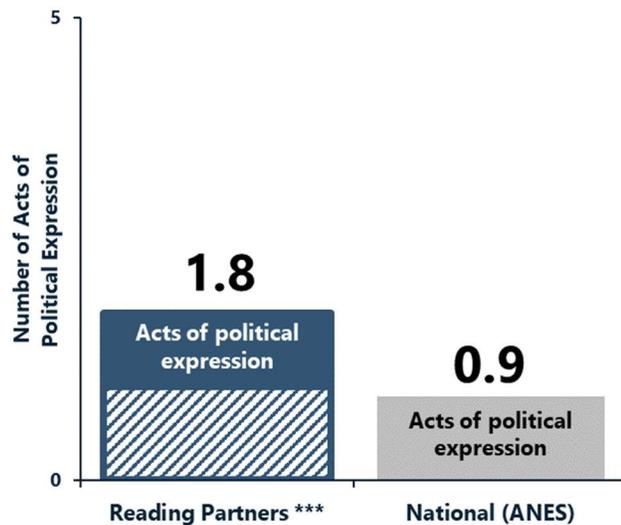
Comparative Analyses

In an effort to understand what Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni’s level of political expression might have been had they not served with Reading Partners, we compared their self-described levels of political expression to survey responses from a group of similarly situated members of the national population using publicly available data from the American National Election Study (ANES). We created a five-point scale from individuals’ responses to five questions, assigning one point to each activity in which they reported having participated in the last year. These activities included joining in a protest, march, rally, or demonstration; signing a petition about a political or social issue; giving money to [an] organization concerned with a social or political issue; contacting or trying to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives; and giving money to an individual candidate running for political office.

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni took significantly more actions to express themselves politically than did similarly situated members of a national cohort.

In particular, our analyses show that Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were significantly more likely to have expressed themselves politically during the previous 12 months than their counterparts in the national survey. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni, on average, took nearly two of the five actions listed above, compared with less than one action for the national cohort (1.8 actions versus 0.9 action) (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4. Political expression, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort

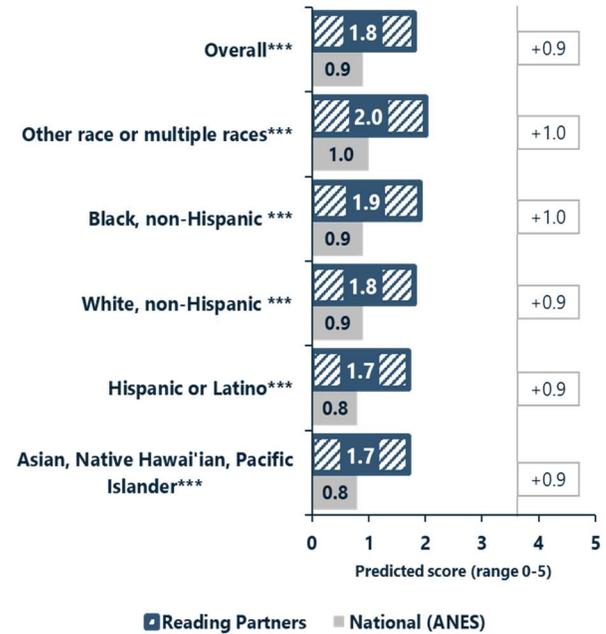


*** Difference is statistically significant, $p < 0.001$
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

These significant differences between Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and the matched comparison group hold across racial/ethnic groups and levels of educational attainment. Regardless of respondents' race/ethnicity, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni, on average, reported significantly more likely than the national cohort to have taken more acts of political expression in the last year (Exhibit 5). For example, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who identify as other or multi-racial or Black/non-Hispanic engaged in one more act of political expression than did their matched peers in the national cohort.

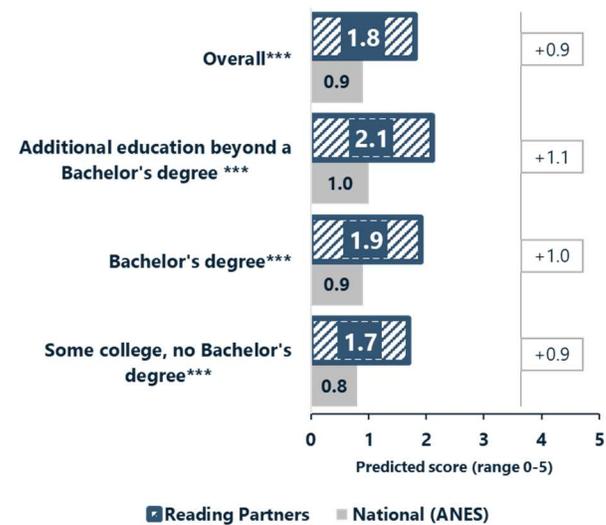
Similarly, regardless of educational attainment, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni, on average, engaged in one more act of political expression than did their matched peers (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 5. Political expression, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort, by race/ethnicity



*** Difference is statistically significant, $p <= 0.001$
 Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

Exhibit 6. Political expression, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort, by educational attainment



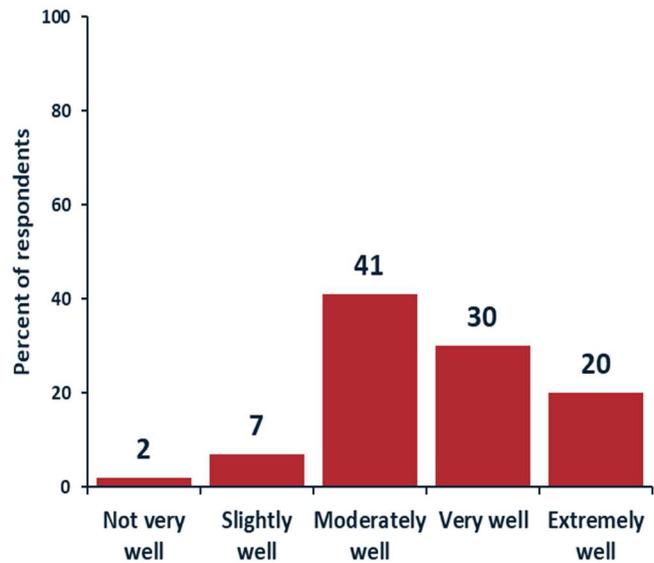
*** Difference is statistically significant, $p <= 0.001$
 Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

Political Knowledge

Most Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (91 percent) believe they have a good understanding of political issues.

When asked how well they understood the important political questions facing our country, 41 percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni responded “moderately well,” 30 percent responded “very well,” and 20 percent chose “extremely well” (Exhibit 7). The remainder said they understood political issues only slightly well (7 percent) or not at all (2 percent).

Exhibit 7. Extent to which Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni report understanding important political issues



Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); N=507

In Their Own Words

In focus groups, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni described how their service experiences raised their awareness of important political and social issues.

- *I think my awareness has definitely gone up in terms of what is happening, what ideally would change, and ways to be more involved. I also just have a [broader] understanding of what's going on in public education and how to be more of an advocate in different ways.*
- *I think that doing the service with [RP]s...opened my eyes to how much need there is in so many different industries and in so many ways.*

I'm starting to get a better idea of policy and how it impacts education, which is something I really didn't think about at all [before] Reading Partners.

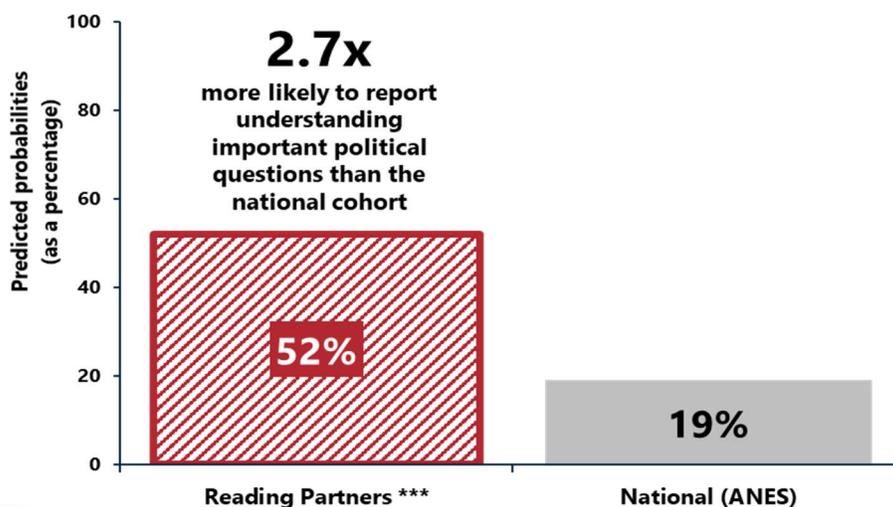
Comparative Analyses

To better understand the impact of Reading Partners service, we compared the political knowledge reported by Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni with responses from a matched comparison group of similarly situated members of a national cohort. In particular, we looked at the percentages of respondents in each group who said they had moderate to high understanding of the important political questions facing our country.

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were approximately 2.7 times more likely than similarly situated members of a national cohort to report that they understood the important political questions facing our country.

Specifically, an average of 52 percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported moderate to high political knowledge compared with an average of 19 percent of respondents in the national cohort—a 33 percentage-point difference (Exhibit 8)

Exhibit 8. Political knowledge, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni versus national cohort

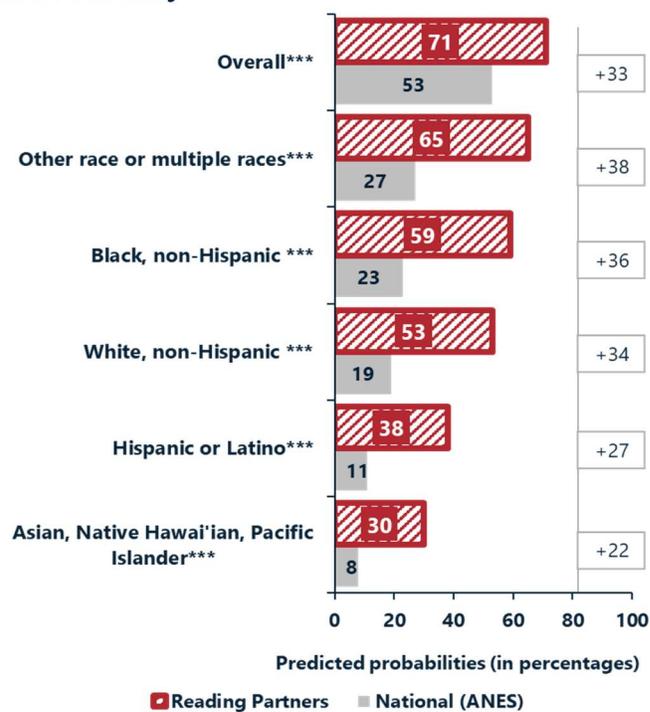


*** Difference is statistically significant, $p < 0.001$
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

Differences by race/ethnicity. Across racial and ethnic groups, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported significantly greater understanding of important political issues than did their matched peers in the national cohort. The size of the differences varied by racial/ethnic group, however. For example, among respondents who identified as “other or multi-racial,” 65 percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported moderate to high understanding of important political issues, versus 27 percent of the matched cohort, a difference of 38 percentage points (Exhibit 9). For those who identified as Asian, the difference between the Reading Partners alumni and the matched group was 22 percentage points (30 percent vs. 8 percent).

In both the Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and national cohorts, respondents who identified as Asian reported significantly lower political knowledge than did their white, black/African American, other/multi-racial, and Latino/Hispanic peers.

Exhibit 9. Political knowledge, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort, by race/ethnicity

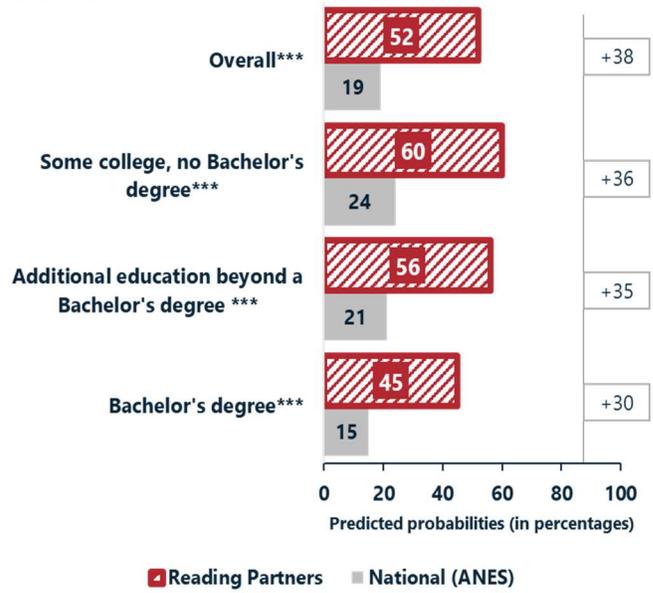


*** Difference is statistically significant, $p < 0.001$
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

Differences by educational background.

Differences in political knowledge between Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and the national comparison group also hold regardless of level of education (Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 10. Political knowledge, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort, by education



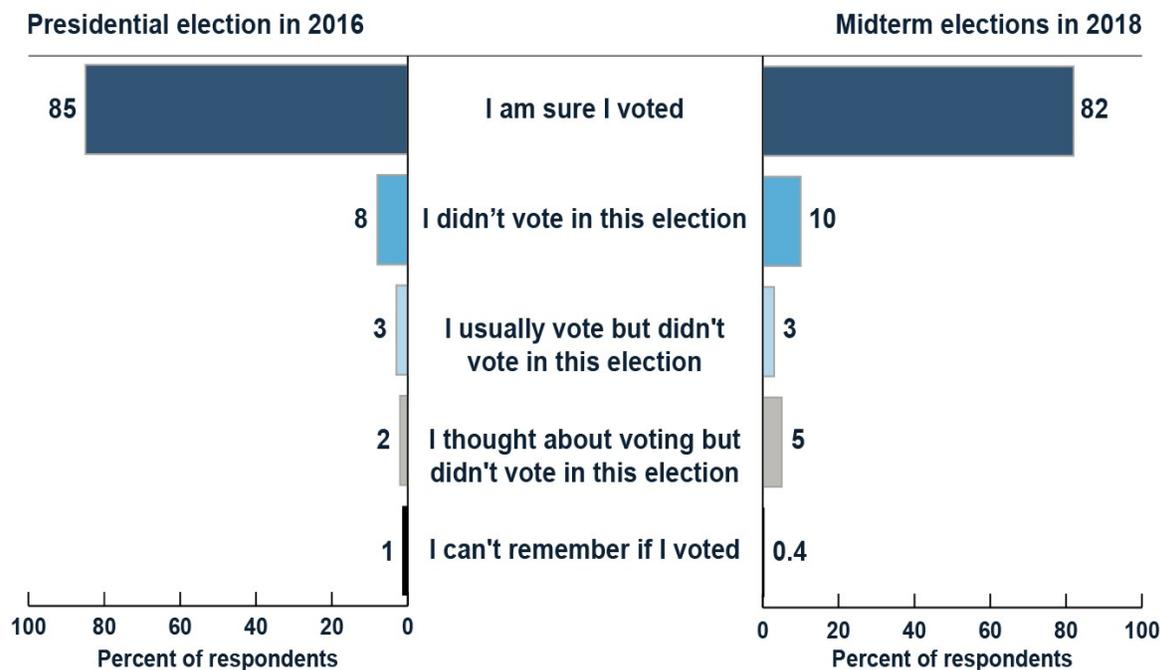
*** Difference is statistically significant, $p < 0.001$
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

Voting

Almost all Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (85 percent) reported voting in the 2016 presidential election.

Perhaps more significantly, however, almost as many Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (82 percent) reported voting in the mid-term elections, which historically result in lower voter turnout than presidential elections (Exhibit 11). Indeed, although overall voter turnout in the 2018 mid-term election was 11-percentage points higher than in the mid-term election of 2014 (53 percent vs. 42 percent),³ the percentage of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who reported voting in 2018 was still significantly higher than overall voter turnout in the national population (82 percent vs. 53 percent), as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (Misra, 2019).

Exhibit 11. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who voted in the 2016 presidential and the 2018 mid-term elections



Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019).

³ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/04/behind-2018-united-states-midterm-election-turnout.html>

In Their Own Words

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni expressed strong commitment to voting.

In focus group interviews, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni usually acknowledged their commitment to voting, but without elaboration. Several alumni emphasized that “voting is definitely a must,” or said they were “active voters” who track elections and support political candidates financially. One Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumna described how her political engagement has intensified: “I find myself reading more and more about presidential candidates and being involved in voter information sessions.”

Comparative Analyses

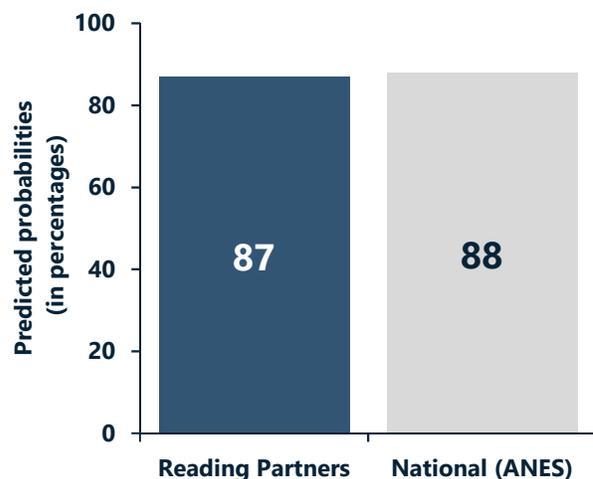
To gauge the influence of Reading Partners on voting behavior on AmeriCorps alumni—what their voting behavior might have been had they not served with Reading Partners—we compared the voting rates of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni in the 2016 presidential election with those of a matched comparison group of similarly situated members of a national cohort.

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni voted in the 2016 Presidential election at about the same rate as did similarly situated members of the national cohort.

The vast majority of respondents in both groups reported that they had voted in the 2016 Presidential election—87 percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. 88 percent of the national cohort (Exhibit 12).

Given these high rates of voting, there were also no significant differences among Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and the national cohort by educational attainment, race, gender, income, religion, volunteerism, and length of time living in their community.

Exhibit 12. Voting, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni versus national cohort



Difference is not significant.
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

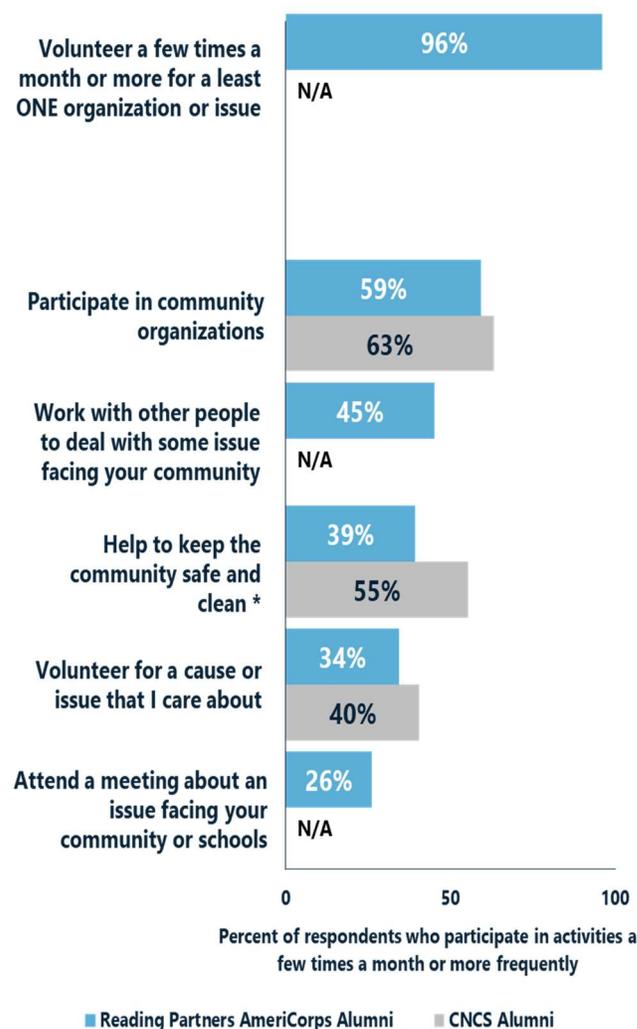
Volunteerism

Almost all Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (96 percent) reported volunteering a few times a month or more for at least one organization or issue they cared about.

Among the many activities to which Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni might volunteer their time, 59 percent reported participating in a community organization a few times a month or more frequently; 45 percent reported working with other people to deal with some issue facing their community; and 39 percent reported helping to keep the community safe and clean (Exhibit 13). No differences in these alumni’s reported volunteerism were discernable based on characteristics or background, including race/ethnicity, age when they began their Reading Partners service, number of service years completed, or region of the country.

The percentages of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni engaging in volunteerism were similar to those of alumni in the 2015 CNCS study for certain activities, including participating in community organizations a few times a month or more frequently (59 percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and 63 percent of CNCS alumni), and volunteering for a cause (34 percent and 40 percent). The apparent slight differences between the two groups for these activities

Exhibit 13. Volunteerism, by Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. CNCS alumni



*Difference is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$.

N/A: Item not included in the CNCS alumni survey.

Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019) (N=510); CNCS Alumni Survey (2015) (N=971)

were not statistically significant. The two groups did differ, however, in that alumni who participated in the 2015 CNCS study were more likely than Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni to report that they helped “to keep the community safe and clean.” This disparity may be attributable to differences in the service experiences of the two groups. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni focus heavily on literacy, while the broader population of CNCS alumni includes some AmeriCorps members who focused on environmental clean-up during their service year and therefore may be more inclined to engage in environmental volunteerism after completing their service.

In Their Own Words

In focus group interviews, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni said their Reading Partners program experience inspired them to either start volunteering or to volunteer more than they had before completing their Reading Partners service.

- *I never volunteered before but now I've been volunteering nonstop since I left, and I've also convinced many of my colleagues to become Reading Partners volunteers. I highlighted that they would have a one-on-one relationship with a student and that the materials made everything easy for them...and that they would find it rewarding, and they do, so it's great.*
- *Right after Reading Partners I started working with Meals on Wheels... Also, I volunteer here in my city with Keep [CITY] Beautiful, for which we do cleanup and beautification initiatives around the city and I also serve on the Keep [CITY] Beautiful commission, which tries to increase civic engagement around the city and people are starting to take more of an active part in our different cleanup events.*
- *It inspired me to try to volunteer more in the community.... I do try to find ways to stay engaged.*

I don't know if that fire was there before, but I have a willingness to give back and it's selfish, but volunteering makes me feel good.... If that fire was already lit, [Reading Partners] certainly made it bigger within my heart to give back.

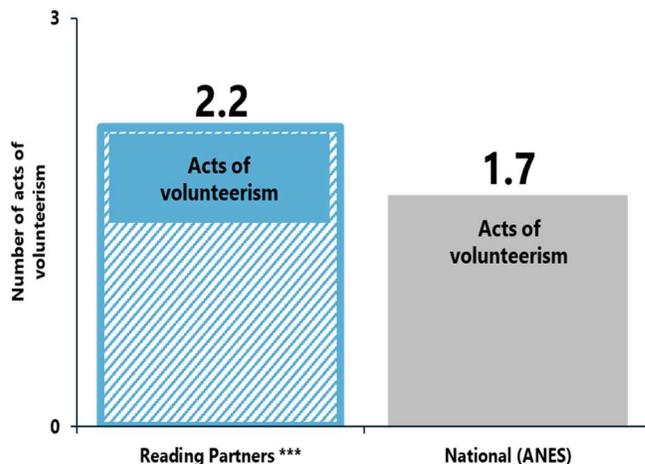
Comparative Analyses

We compared the level of volunteerism among Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni to that of a matched comparison group of individuals in the national cohort. We created a three-point volunteerism index by assigning one point for each volunteer activity that an individual reported participating in during the last year, out of three listed. These activities included working with other people to deal with some issue facing their community; attending a meeting about an issue facing their community or schools; and volunteering for a cause or issue they cared about.

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni participated in more volunteer activities than did comparable individuals in a national cohort.

Controlling for individual characteristics, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni, on average, reported significantly more volunteer activities than did their matched peers in the national cohort (2.2 acts of volunteerism vs. 1.7, respectively). Thus, on average, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni would be expected to have engaged in 0.5 more volunteer-related actions in the past year (Exhibit 14).

Exhibit 14. Volunteerism, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort



*** Difference is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.001$
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

About the comparative analyses on volunteerism:

The analyses we conducted on volunteerism varied by comparison group and therefore the results are slightly different:

For Exhibit 13, we looked at both the frequency and type of volunteerism Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported participating in during the last year, comparing it to the frequency and type of volunteerism reported by AmeriCorps alumni who participated in the 2015 CNCS survey. Because individual-level survey data were not available for CNCS AmeriCorps alumni, this analysis could not control for alumni characteristics that might impact the frequency and type of volunteerism (e.g., age, income).

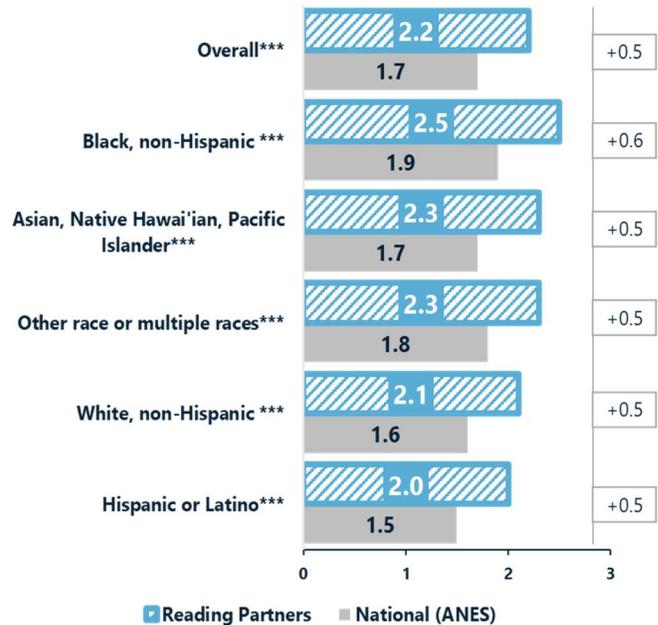
For Exhibit 14, we calculated index scores of the average number of volunteer-related activities (out of a total of three) that Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported participating in during the last year. We used a Poisson model to compare alumni index scores to their matched peers in the national cohort, controlling for age, race, income, gender, religiosity, work status, length of time living in present community, and volunteerism.

These differences in volunteerism remained when we disaggregated the data by race/ethnicity and by levels of education (Exhibits 15 and 16). That is, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni scored significantly higher than did their matched peers in the national cohort across racial/ethnic categories. For example, Black/non-Hispanic and Asian Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni scored 0.6 points higher on the volunteerism index than did their similarly situated Black/non-Hispanic and Asian peers in the national cohort. Similarly, White, non-Hispanic Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni scored 0.5 points higher on the volunteerism index than did their white peers in the national cohort (Exhibit 15).

Our analyses also revealed that Reading Partners alumni scored significantly higher on the volunteerism index than did their matched peers in the national cohort across educational levels. For example, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who had additional education beyond a Bachelor’s degree scored 0.6 points higher than did members of the national cohort with similar educational backgrounds (Exhibit 16). Significant differences between the two groups were also observed for those with some college but no bachelor’s degree and those with only a bachelor’s degree (0.5-point difference).

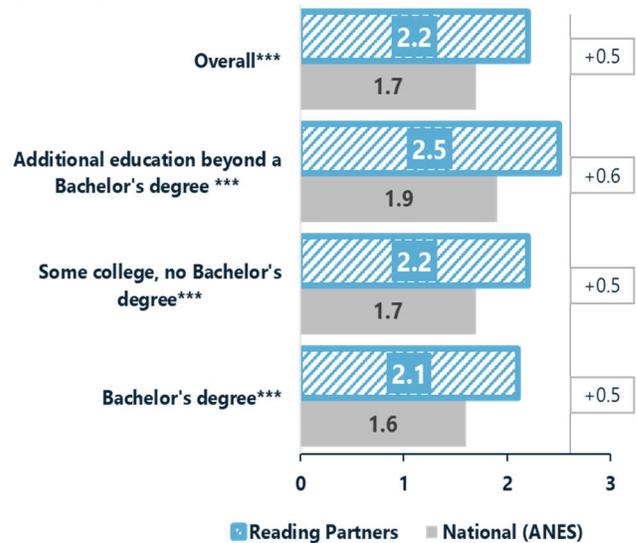
Finally, although there are slight differences among Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni by race/ethnicity and by education level, these differences were not statistically significant.

Exhibit 15. Volunteerism, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort, by race/ethnicity



*** Difference is statistically significant, $p <= 0.001$
 Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

Exhibit 16. Volunteerism, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort, by education



*** Difference is statistically significant, $p <= 0.001$
 Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

Social Trust/Egalitarianism

About half of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported generally trusting other people.

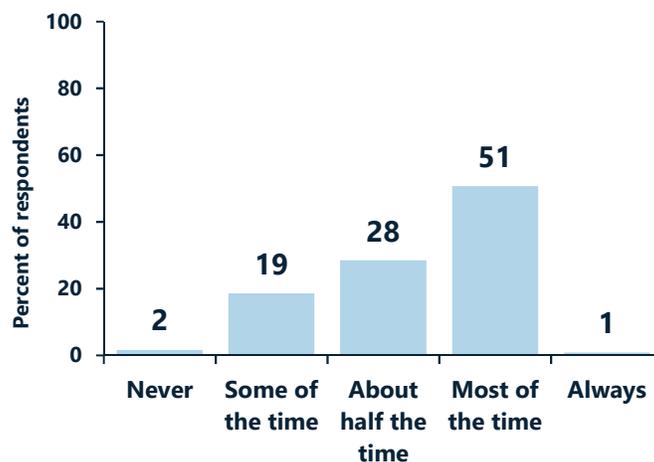
Specifically, 51 percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni said they trusted other people “most of the time” and 1 percent said they “always” trust other people. Among the remaining half, 28 percent reported trusting people “about half the time,” and 19 percent “some of the time.” Very few Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported that they “never” trusted people (2 percent) (Exhibit 17).

Almost all Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni expressed a strong sense of egalitarianism.

The vast majority of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (94 percent) agreed with the statement that society should “do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed,” and 81 percent agreed that “if people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems.” By contrast, very few agreed that society had “gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country” (3 percent). And only 2 percent of alumni agreed that it was “not really that big of a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others” (Exhibit 18).

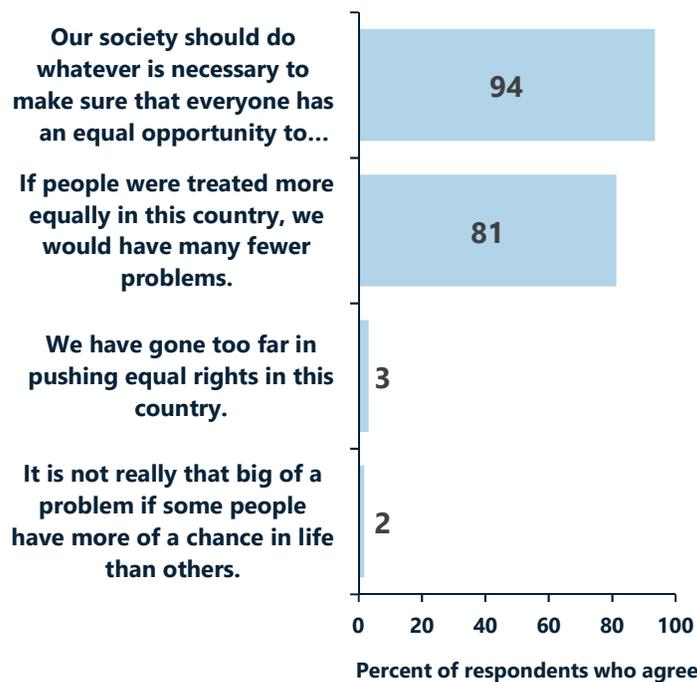
The sense of egalitarianism among alumni did not vary in any discernable way by alumni demographic characteristics or by their background and experience.

Exhibit 17. Extent to which Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni trust other people



Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); N=507.

Exhibit 18. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni’s sense of egalitarianism



Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); N=507.

In Their Own Words

In focus group interviews, several Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni credited their service experience with helping to deepen their understanding of and interest in social justice issues by giving them first-hand exposure to social inequities.

- *There were things that I sort of knew but didn't really understand until I was in [Reading Partners] and that's [an issue] that I want to keep fighting for as a counselor and beyond.*
- *What I think Reading Partners did—obviously I was aware of the problems with inequities and injustices that we had—but [unless] you actually see it on a day-to-day basis and the people and especially students that it's impacting, it's kind of hard to really grasp what it's like.*
- *I had students that came from very broken homes, and it's one thing to read about it as a statistic and to do research on it and write papers on it, but once you're actually in the community and you're talking to these kids about what their home life is like, it really hits you in a different way because you really see the humanity behind those numbers.*
- *Just seeing how inequality in so many forums affected the lives of the students we worked with, I think I was kind of interested in taking the tools that I learned for nonprofit development and fundraising; you can apply them to different issue areas. So, I worked in criminal justice and I'm [now] working for a legal aid organization. So, I've stayed within the realm of serving people that are dealing with a lot of things in their lives but trying to ameliorate that through [the criminal justice system].*

[Reading Partners] definitely helped me check a lot of my privilege, and it was humbling because some of these kids that showed up, they were the happiest-go-lucky kids that I've ever met, but their home life was not the greatest, [and yet] they still found a way to come to school with [a good] attitude...that really put things into perspective for me.

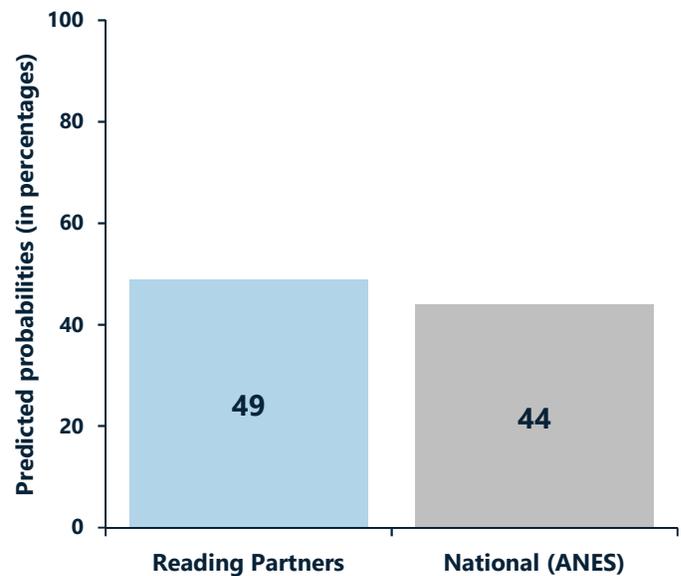
Comparative Analyses

We compared the social trust expressed by Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni to that of a matched comparison group of similarly situated members of a national cohort.

There were no statistically significant differences in levels of social trust between Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and the national comparison group.

On average, 49 percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni would be expected to report that, generally, they felt that they could trust people “always” or “most of the time,” compared with 44 percent of the national cohort, when demographic and background characteristics are controlled for, including race/ethnicity, work status, income, gender, religion, and volunteering. The percentage point difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. There were no significant differences by alumni demographic or background characteristics.

Exhibit 19. Trust, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort



Differences were not significant.
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); ANES (2017).

Summary

The service experiences of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni appear to have affected their civic engagement. In survey responses, the vast majority of these alumni reported that they had engaged in at least one act of political expression in the past 12 months, have a good understanding of the political questions facing our country, and voted in the 2016 presidential and 2018 mid-term elections. A large majority volunteer at least a few times a month or more for at least one organization or issue that they care about and strongly believe that society should do whatever is necessary to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

In focus group interviews, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni said that their service experience affected their interest in and willingness to express themselves politically and helped raise their awareness of important political and social issues. Many spoke of how their service inspired them to start volunteering or to volunteer more than they had before they joined Reading Partners.

Finally, compared to similarly situated members of the national population, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to express themselves politically; understand the important political questions; and volunteer for organizations or issues they care about. In other respects, the two groups were very similar. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and their matched peers were equally likely to vote and showed similar levels of social trust.

Together, these effects suggest that the Reading Partners program generated increased levels of civic engagement in AmeriCorps members than would otherwise have been expected of similarly situated members of the national population.

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