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# THE READING PARTNERS EFFECT

REPORT 2: Influencing the academic and career pathways of Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni

**Leslie M. Anderson**

**Julie Meredith**

**Jeanine Hildreth**



# THE READING PARTNERS EFFECT: Influencing the Academic and Career Pathways of Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni

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## 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.



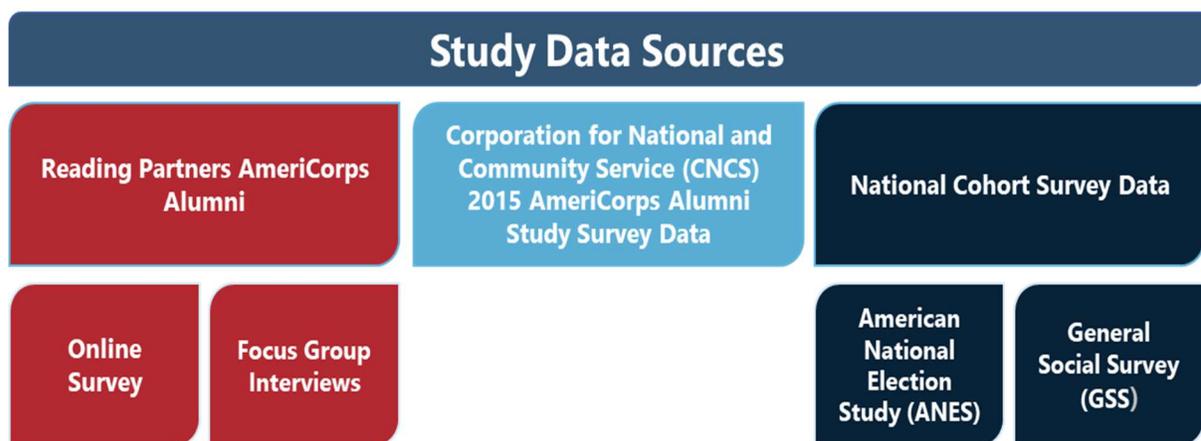
Specifically, the study sought to address the following research questions:

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.<sup>1</sup> 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 second in the series, focuses on describing Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni education and career pathways. It begins with a profile of the common characteristics of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni and then describes the educational and career pathways that alumni pursued upon completing their service year(s) at Reading Partners; and alumni perceptions of their career preparedness.

Throughout the report, we summarize alumni perspectives about their educational and career pathways, and career preparedness, along with their reflections about the extent to which their service with Reading Partners influenced their outcomes in these areas.

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 Reading Partners' impact on members' career paths by comparing the survey responses of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni with those of similarly situated members of the national population.<sup>2</sup> The extent to which there are measurable differences in the chosen career paths of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni compared with those of a statistically matched comparison group reflects the program's potential impact on members themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the term "Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni" includes alumni who were members of VISTA.

<sup>2</sup> 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). The extent to which 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

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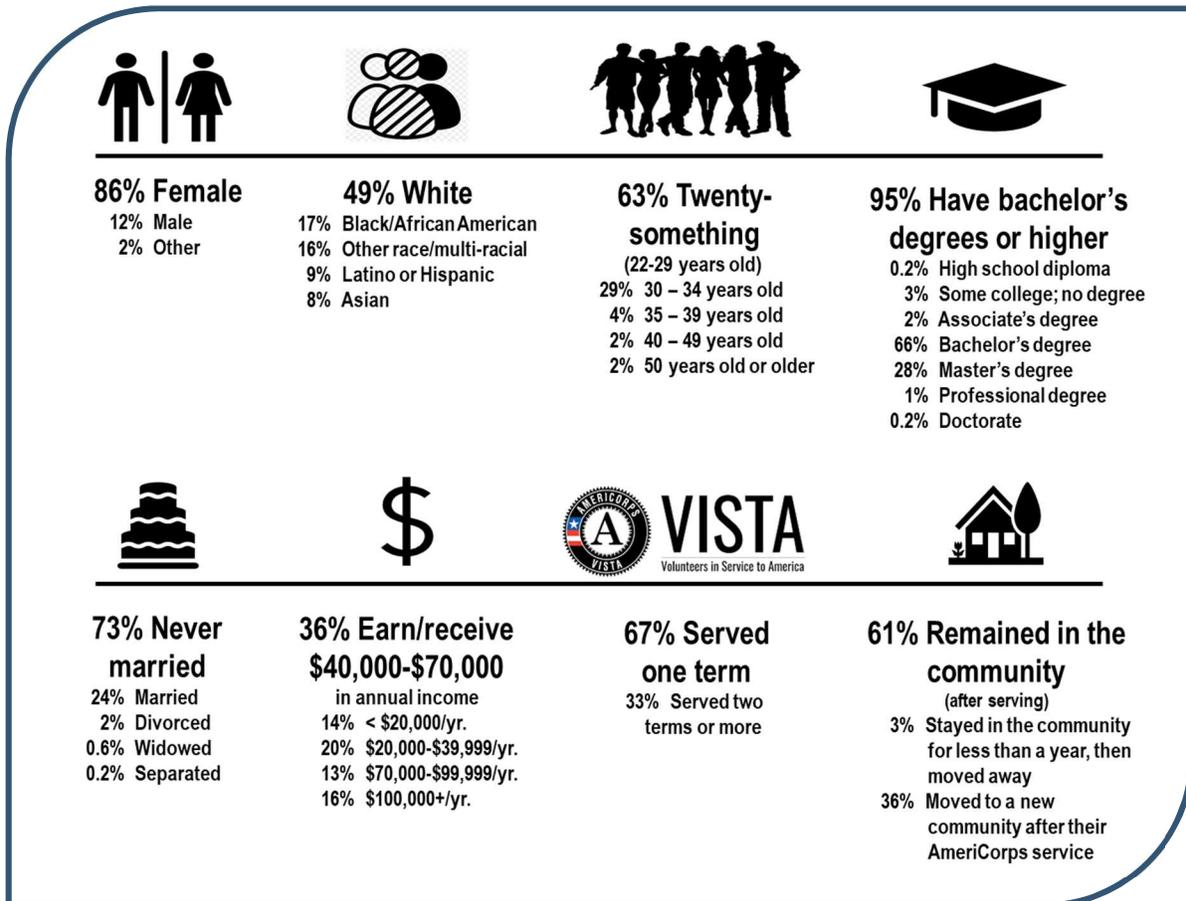
The study revealed the following key findings about the education and career pathways of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni:

- Taken together, study results suggest that AmeriCorps service with Reading Partners influenced the educational and career pathways of alumni and equipped them with numerous professional and leadership skills that prepared them well for future jobs or careers.
- About two-thirds of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (66 percent) reported that they plan to pursue more education in the future and, of those, 62 percent credited their Reading Partners service experience as influencing those plans.
- Eighty-four percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni agreed that their service confirmed or informed their professional goals and Reading Partners alumni were more likely to describe their service as a defining professional experience than were alumni in the 2015 CNCS study.
  - Members who served multiple service terms were more likely to describe the experience as defining than were members who served a single year; and
  - White alumni were more likely to believe their service experience was a defining professional experience than were their black/African American peers.
- Most Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (77 percent) reported that their service experience influenced their chosen career path somewhat or a great deal.
- Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were approximately 1.3 times more likely to report currently working in the non-profit, public, or government sectors—the type of sector in which they worked while serving—than were their matched peers from the national cohort.
- Most Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (85 percent) reported that their service experience prepared them for their current job and/or service activity somewhat or a great deal.
- Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were more likely than alumni in the 2015 CNCS study to report that their service experience enhanced their skills in over ten areas of leadership and professionalism.

# 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).

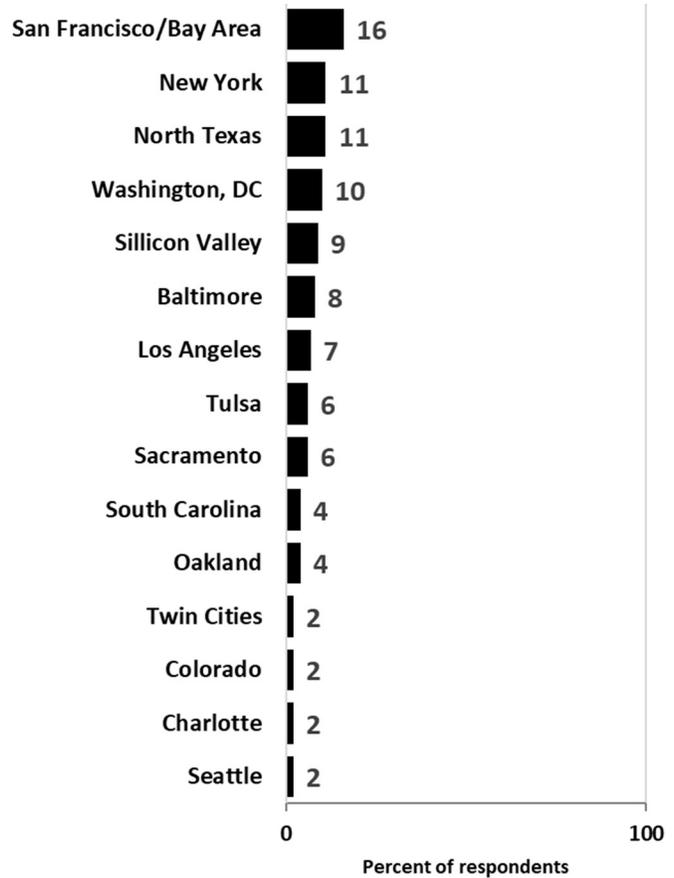
**Exhibit 1: Characteristics of Reading Partners AmeriCorps and VISTA alumni**



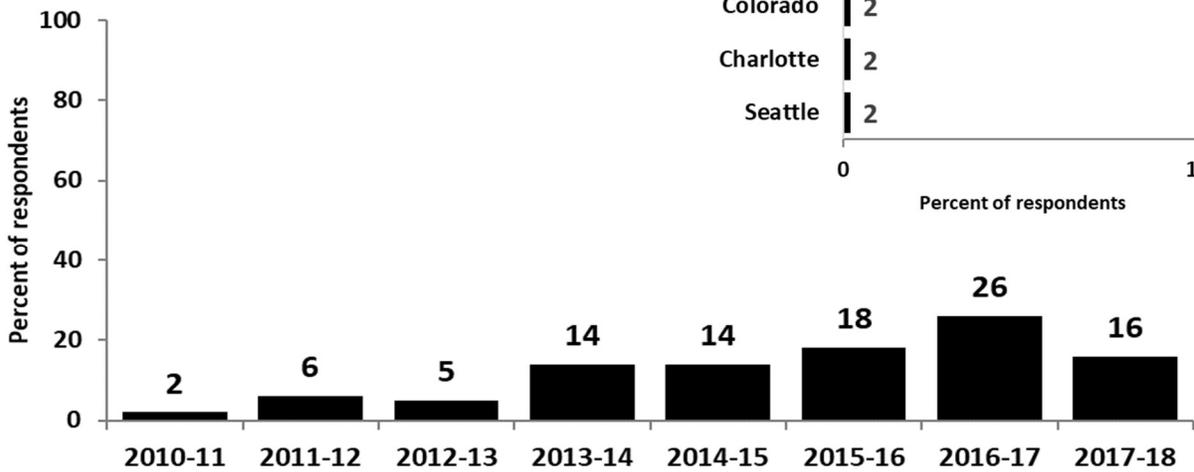
Based on 526 of 898 completed or partially completed surveys administered to Reading Partners alumni (response rate: 59 percent). Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019).

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).

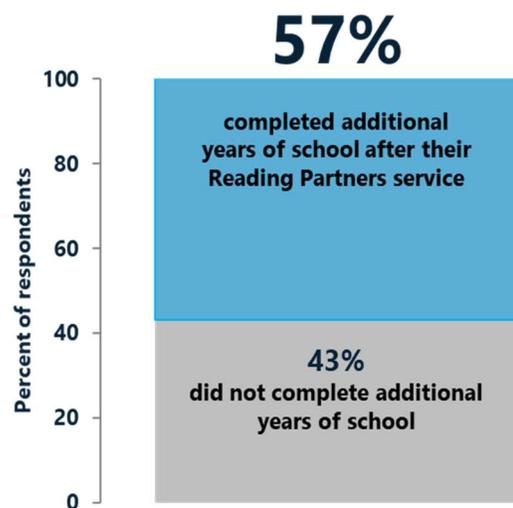
# Educational Pathways

A majority of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported completing additional years of school after completing their service.

Fifty-seven percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported completing additional years of school after completing their Reading Partners service year(s) (Exhibit 3). As a result, the percentage of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who reported having completed some graduate school grew from 6 percent when they started their service with Reading Partners to 27 percent by winter/spring 2019. Similarly, the distribution of alumni who reported having a master's degree grew from 10 percent when they started their service with Reading Partners to 28 percent by winter/spring 2019 (Exhibit 4).

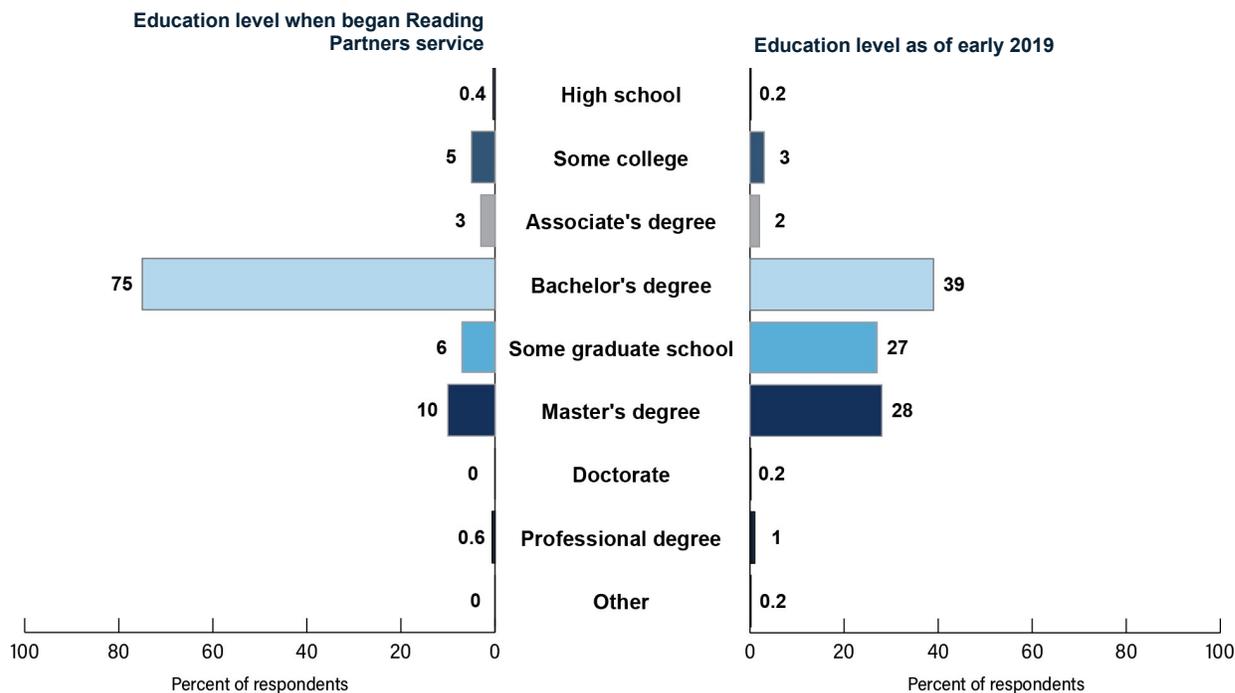
More specifically, of the Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who had bachelor's degrees when they began their service with Reading Partners, about half (49 percent) reported completing some graduate school and 41 percent reported completing a master's degree after completing their service. No discernable differences in Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni's educational attainment were evident by race/ethnicity, education, or other explanatory variables.

**Exhibit 3. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni's educational attainment following their service year**



Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); N=512.

### Exhibit 4. Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni's current education level vs. when they began their Reading Partners service year



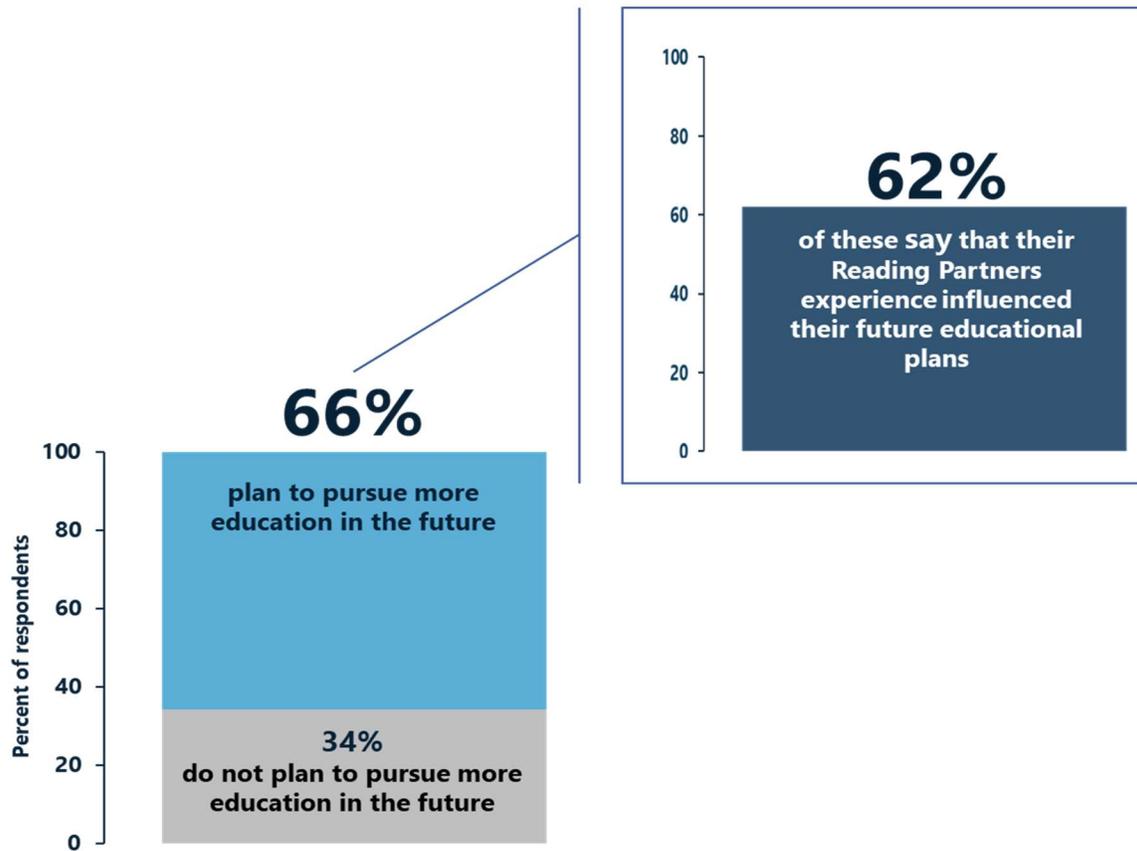
Source: Reading Partners Alumni Survey (2019).

Note: This analysis references the 290 alumni who reported both their current education level and their educational level when they began their Reading Partners service year. Consequently, the distribution of alumni by education level is slightly different from the distribution reported in Exhibit 1 of the Alumni Profile.

### AmeriCorps service with Reading Partners influenced the future educational plans of alumni.

About two-thirds of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (66 percent) reported that they did have plans to pursue more education in the future and, of those, 62 percent credited their Reading Partners service experience as influencing those plans (Exhibit 5).

## Exhibit 5. Reading Partners' influence on alumni's future educational plans



Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); N=512 and 338.

## In their Own Words

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported that their service experiences influenced their educational plans and aspirations.

In focus group interviews and open-ended survey responses, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni said that their service experiences influenced their thinking about their educational goals and aspirations, helping them not only to decide to continue their education but also to determine—or at least narrow—the educational pathway best suited for them. The following quotes shed light on some of the ways in which the service with Reading Partners influenced the educational pathways of alumni.

- *Reading Partners helped me to see where I wanted to go professionally, and I needed to continue to pursue my education to achieve my goal.*
- *The education award...helped me feel that additional schooling was within my reach. My experience also gave me more food for thought, which helped me narrow down what path to pursue.*
- *I knew I wanted to do literacy research and think about how literacy is influenced by the cultures we are part of. Reading Partners and the curriculum made me want to know more about how these decisions are made, who gets to make them, why, and how we can make the curriculum more relevant to the diverse population that we serve.*

I decided I wanted to keep working with people and in communities, and I went back to school for the degree that allowed me to get more jobs doing that.

In open-ended responses and in focus group interviews, several Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni described wanting to pursue teaching, but that their service experience helped them recognize that they needed to return to school to achieve that goal.

- *Reading Partners has shown me that advanced training and specialization in reading is highly recommended to equitably serve in underserved communities.*
- *I observed a lack of diversity in positions of influence, so I decided to work towards equipping myself with the degrees needed to explore ways to address it on a policy level.*
- *I knew I wanted to continue working in education and to open up more opportunities for myself, it was necessary to go to grad school and get a master's [degree].*
- *I discovered my passion for working in education and supporting school staff with instructional decision making. This made me decide that I needed to pursue a degree in school psychology.*

It helped me discover that management is not something I get really excited about, but that one-on-one connection, which I first got with RP.

Almost as important as determining what field of study to pursue was what field—or what profession—to not pursue. As one Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumnus explained in an open-ended survey response, Reading Partners helped him “rule things out.” In focus group interviews, several alumni credited the Reading Partners service experience with helping them to decide what they did not want to pursue professionally:

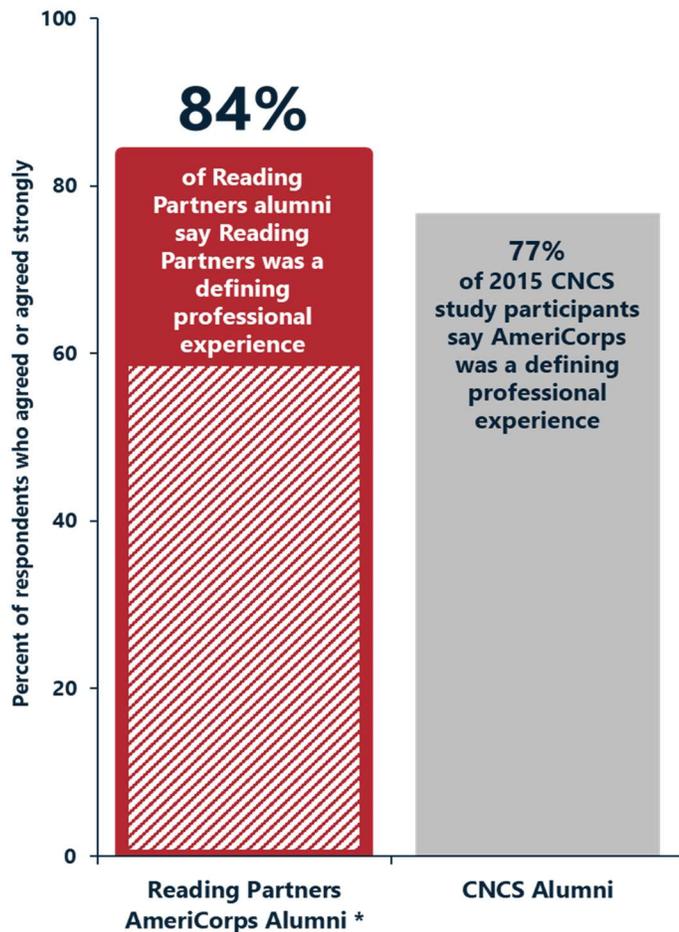
- *I'm a [high school biology] teacher now, but I hadn't anticipated becoming a teacher until I did my two AmeriCorps service years. Prior to that I had planned on going to medical school, but I just loved working with kids so much that I decided to pursue education instead. So, I got a master's in education as well.*
- *My previous plans were to pursue a career in the national security arena, but I now want to pursue my MBA and possibly work for a non-profit in the future.*

# Career Pathways

Reading Partners AmeriCorps service was a defining professional experience for most alumni.

Eighty-four percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni strongly agreed or agreed that their service with Reading Partners had confirmed or informed their professional goals. In addition, Reading Partners alumni were more likely than alumni who participated in the 2015 CNCS study to describe their service as a defining professional experience. That is, 84 percent of Reading Partners alumni agreed or strongly agreed that their service experience confirmed or helped them define their professional goals, compared with 77 percent of CNCS alumni who agreed with this statement (Exhibit 6).

**Exhibit 6: Service was a defining professional experience for Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni, by Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni versus 2015 CNCS study participants**



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

Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni survey (2019); CNCS 2015 alumni survey.

The percentage of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who considered their service experience to be a defining professional experience varied by two alumni characteristics:

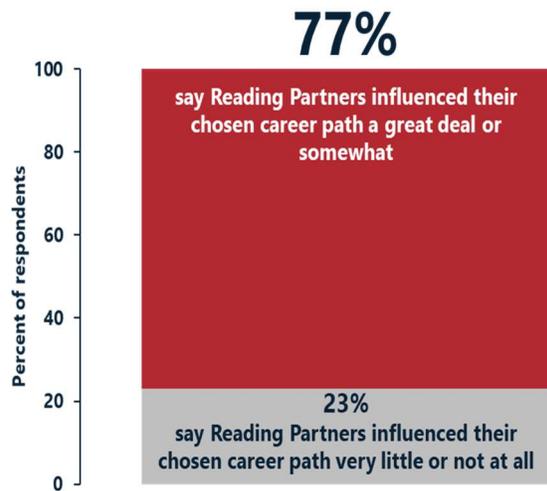
- (1) Members who served multiple service terms were more likely to describe the experience as defining than were members who served a single year (93 percent versus 79 percent); and
- (2) White alumni were more likely to believe their service experience was a defining professional experience than were their black/African American peers (88 percent versus 74 percent).

Both of these differences were statistically significant.

## The Reading Partners service experience influenced the chosen career path of most alumni.

Most Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (77 percent) reported that their service experience influenced their chosen career path somewhat or a great deal (Exhibit 7). Moreover, the percentage of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reporting that the Reading Partners program influenced their chosen career path did not vary in any discernable way by alumni demographic characteristics or by their background and experience.

**Exhibit 7. Reading Partners' influence on alumni's chosen career paths**



Source: Reading Partner AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); N=512.

## In Their Own Words

In open-ended survey responses and in focus group interviews, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported that their service experiences helped shape their career paths.

- *Because of my time with Reading Partners, I discovered my passion for supporting language and literacy skills for struggling students. As a result, I pursued a career in speech-language pathology and am very happy with my career choice.*
- *After Reading Partners, I ended up adjusting my career path and went into teaching. I am now in my eighth year as an educator and earned my master's in education a few years ago.*
- *I had an opportunity through Reading Partners to work one-on-one with students, write behavior plans, work with community members, and do progress monitoring to help students improve. All these very specific things directly translated to the counseling profession that I'm going into now.*

The different tasks that we had [in RP] really helped me [decide] to stay in the non-profit sector, which I didn't know [I wanted to do] coming out of college.

I was encouraged to use student and program data to find ways to improve student and program outcomes; that was something that I never really thought of before, but it just really interested me. So, right after Reading Partners, I went into education research and evaluation, which I don't think I would have [done] had I not had that experience at Reading Partners.

- *Reading Partners showed me how to use evidence-based practices to improve literacy in vulnerable communities; this is a driving force for my next career move to ensure that education practices are effective.*
- *I pursued my master's degree in education as well as my teaching certification. I will be a Teacher of Record this upcoming school year. Joining Reading Partners was one of the best decisions I have made! I would recommend the program to anyone.*
- *It very much helped me to determine what I wanted to do and also what [I] did not want to do. Because I was able to experience both of those things, I found how much I enjoyed being in a school and engaging in direct service more so than the office work associated with being a volunteer coordinator.*

Finally, in focus group interviews, some Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reporting using their AmeriCorps educational award to pursue further education, whereas others reported using their educational award to pay off their student loans. As one Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumnus explained: “I [*used the award to pay off my student loans*], which really helped me because it meant that I had a little more financial security to take risks with jobs.” Another alumnus reported using the educational award to take some certificate courses related to a current job.

## Comparative Analyses

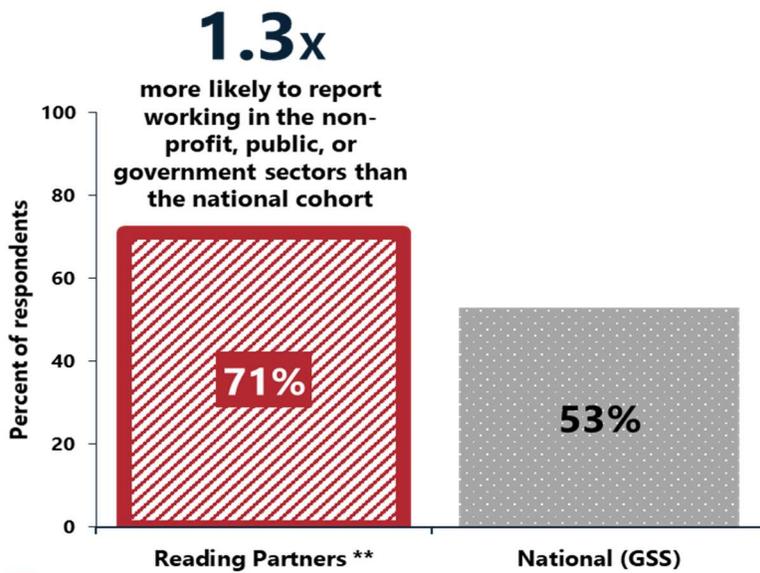
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In an effort to understand what the career pathways of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni might have been had they not served with Reading Partners, we compared survey data describing the employment sector in which Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported working—i.e., whether they worked in the non-profit, public, or government sectors—to survey data collected from a matched comparison group of similarly situated members of a national cohort.

**Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were approximately 1.3 times more likely to report that they currently work in the non-profit, public, or government sectors than do their matched peers from a national cohort.**

That is, 71 percent of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported that they worked in the public sector, compared with 53 percent in the national cohort, controlling for other characteristics such as race, gender, and age (Exhibit 8).

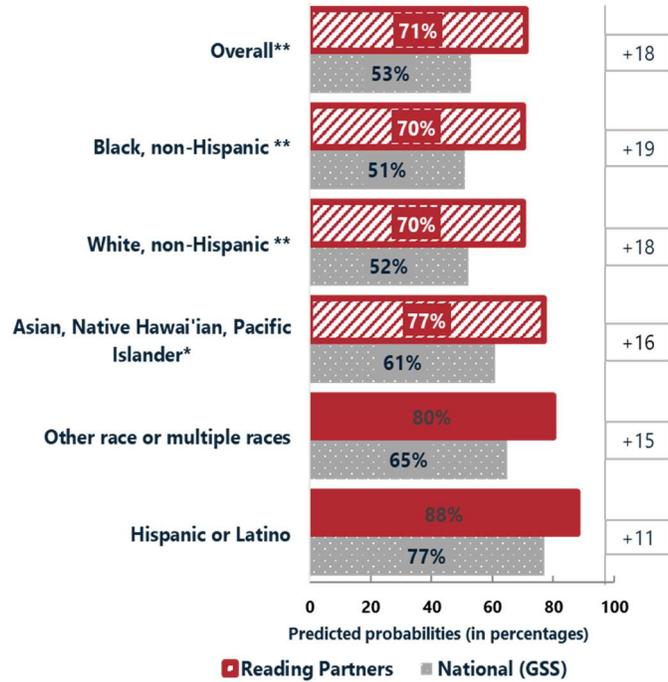
**Exhibit 8. Career pathway, by Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni versus national cohort**



 \*\* Difference is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$ .  
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); GSS (2017).

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni across racial/ethnic groups were more likely to report that they worked in the non-profit, public, or government sectors than did similarly situated members of the national cohort. That is, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni identifying as Asian, Black/African American, and white were significantly more likely to report that they worked in the non-profit, public, or government sectors than did their peers in the national cohort. Although Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni who identified as Hispanic/Latino or other/multi-racial identity reported working in these sectors at higher rates than did their counterparts in the national cohort, these differences were not significant (Exhibit 9).

**Exhibit 9. Employment sector, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni vs. national cohort, by race/ethnicity**



NOTE: Background shading indicates that differences are statistically significant.

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

\*\* Difference is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.01$

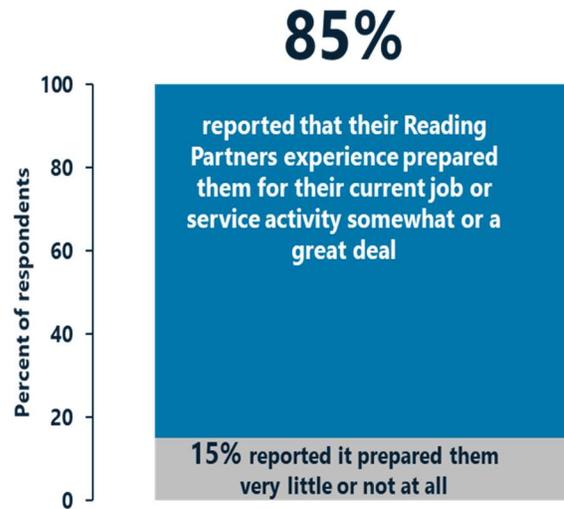
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); GSS (2017).

# Career Preparedness

The Reading Partners service experience prepared most alumni for their current job or service activity.

Most Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (85 percent) reported that their service experience prepared them for their current job and/or service activity somewhat or a great deal (Exhibit 10). Moreover, the percentage of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reporting that their service experience prepared them for their current job and/or service activity did not vary in any discernable way by alumni demographic characteristics or by alumni background and experience.

**Exhibit 10. The Reading Partners program experience as preparation for alumni's current job or service**



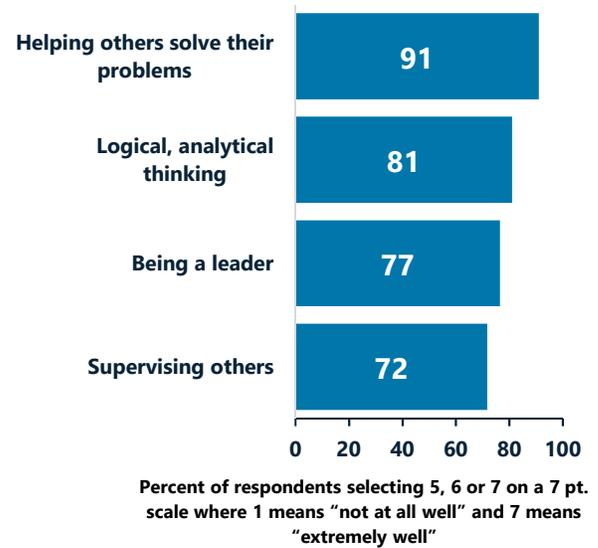
Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019);

## Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni rated their professional and leadership skills highly.

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 7 their professional and leadership skills compared to those of “other people.” For example, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were asked how they would compare their skill at “helping others solve their problems,” to the skills of other people, where 1 means that their skills compared “not at all well” to 7, which means their skills compare “extremely well.”

Almost all Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (91 percent) rated their skill at helping others solve their problems highly (i.e., they selected 5, 6, or 7 on the 1-7 scale). Most alumni also rated themselves highly on their ability to engage in “logical, analytical thinking” (81 percent), on “being a leader” (77 percent), or “supervising others” (72 percent) (Exhibit 11).

**Exhibit 11. Whether Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni perceive that their leadership and professional skills compare well to other people’s skills**



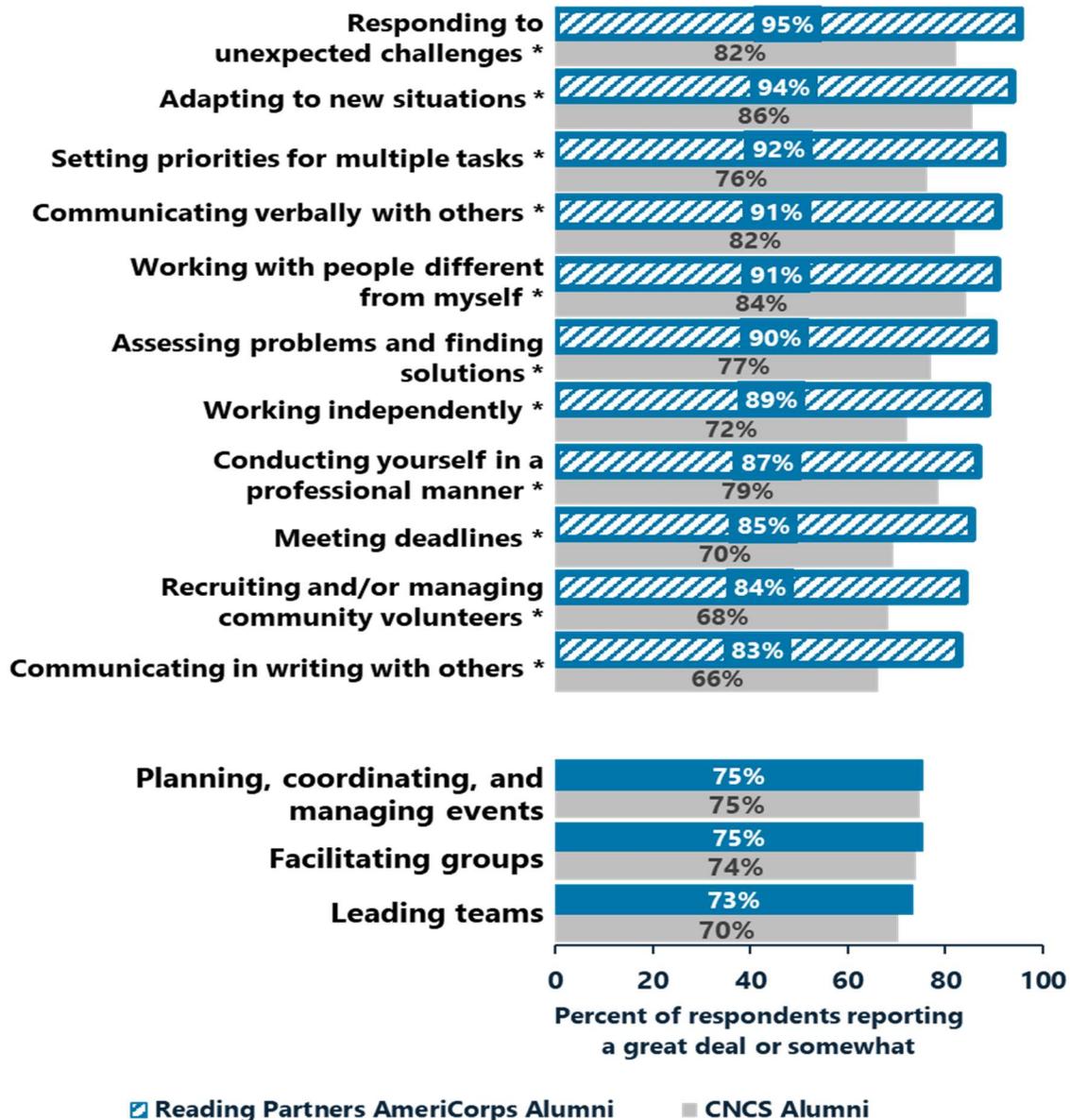
Source: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni Survey (2019); N=512.

## Compared with alumni who participated in the 2015 CNCS study, Reading Partners’ AmeriCorps alumni were more likely to credit their service experience as helping them increase their professional and leadership skills.

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were more likely than alumni in the 2015 CNCS alumni study to report that their service experience helped them to increase their skills in over ten areas of leadership and professionalism. For example, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were more likely than alumni who participated in the 2015 CNCS study to report that their AmeriCorps experience increased their ability to “respond to unexpected challenges” (95 percent of Reading Partners alumni vs. 82 percent of CNCS study alumni); “adapt to new situations” (94 percent vs. 86 percent); and “set priorities for multiple tasks” (92 percent vs. 76 percent).

The only skills in which Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni did not significantly exceed their peers who participated in the 2015 CNCS study were with respect to “planning, coordinating and managing events” (75 percent vs. 75 percent); “facilitating groups” (75 vs. 74 percent); and “leading teams” (73 percent vs. 70 percent). However, where there were differences, they were small and not statistically significant (Exhibit 12).

**Exhibit 12. Extent to which the Reading Partners service experience increased alumni’s professional and leadership skills, by Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni versus 2015 CNCS study participants**



▣ \*Difference is statistically significant,  $p \leq 0.05$ .  
Sources: Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni survey (2019); (N=512); CNCS 2015 alumni survey.

# In Their Own Words

Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni described how their service experience prepared them well for their jobs and/or careers.

In focus group interviews, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported that the skills they had developed during their service with Reading Partners helped them in their subsequent jobs or careers. Specifically, they reported that they had developed or enhanced their leadership, organizational, problem-solving, and communication skills while serving in the Reading Partners program.

A big part of my experience was handling challenging relational dynamics...how to build goodwill over time as well as [having] difficult, more confrontational conversations that need to happen. [I learned how] to handle conflict and work alongside people who may not always be 100 percent excited that [I'm] there.

I think being a part of Reading Partners, and the transferrable skills, you do learn a lot. You don't realize that you're learning them in the moment, but when you reflect back, you have a lot of skills under your belt.

## **Leadership/project management:**

- *I definitely honed my **organizational and scheduling skills** by [having to communicate] with all of our volunteers and teachers and figuring out how to schedule students.*
- *I learned a lot about **managing people**. Not only students, but also adults, which has helped me in the different roles that I've had at [my current job]. I learned a lot about myself and how to advocate for myself..., I can't just assume that people will know what I need.*
- ***How to ask for help** was definitely something big because I'm the kind of person that tries to do everything by myself. In that kind of position, you can't do that. You need all the support that you can get from your program managers, from the other site coordinators, from everyone around you.*
- *I grew in my ability to **problem solve** and coordinate because we had to schedule sessions for tutors and students, and there were sometimes unexpected changes and so [I learned] how to solve problems in the moment and be solution oriented.*

### **Communication skills:**

- *I think my **communication skills** definitely grew while at Reading Partners. We had so many people on campus that we had to constantly communicate with, whether it be the teachers, or the principal, or after school program directors.*
- *I can't even count the number of meetings I facilitated, so, just being able to **speak more confidently** with professionals has helped me tremendously.... I definitely learned to hone and cater my vocabulary and adjust my presentation style to a more professional environment and audience.*
- ***Public speaking skills** definitely were exercised a lot when I was at Reading Partners...[because] I was recruiting volunteers and would often have to go to club meetings, neighborhood association meetings, other nonprofit meetings, to talk about Reading Partners, our impact, and how they could help us.*

# Summary

A majority of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported that their Reading Partners AmeriCorps service experience influenced—and in some cases, altered—some of their most important life choices. In survey responses, most Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported that their service experience influenced their future educational plans (66 percent) and their chosen career path (77 percent); moreover, alumni frequently described serving with Reading Partners as a defining professional experience (84 percent). In addition, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were more likely than alumni in a 2015 CNCS study to credit their AmeriCorps service experience as helping them increase their professional and leadership skills, including responding to unexpected challenges, adapting to new situations, and setting priorities for multiple tasks.

In focus group interviews, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni reported their service experience influenced their thinking about their educational goals and aspirations, helping them decide not only to continue their education but choose their educational pathway. Similarly, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni said their service had helped shape their career paths by giving them real-world experiences that helped them discover their passion or identify their career interests. Perhaps most importantly, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni described their service as excellent preparation for their future jobs and/or careers.

Finally, as further evidence that Reading Partners impacted their life choices, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni were more likely to report that they currently work in the non-profit, public, or government sectors—the sectors in which they worked while serving with Reading Partners—than their similarly situated peers from a national cohort.

These effects, taken together, suggest that Reading Partners influenced the educational and career pathways of their corps members and equipped them with numerous professional and leadership skills that prepared them well for their future jobs or careers.

# References

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