

# READING PARTNERS AMERICORPS ALUMNI STUDY

## Executive Summary

### 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 a variety of roles, including as site coordinators, regional site coordinators, volunteer coordinators, and literacy leads. The 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 (see box for a summary of the study methodology).

### Alumni reflections on their service year(s):

- At least 80 percent of alumni agreed that their service experience **helped them gain an understanding of the community where they served and exposed them to new ideas and ways of seeing the world** (Exhibit ES1).
- A majority (>60 percent) of alumni agreed that their service experience caused them to **re-examine their beliefs about themselves or about other people** (65 percent).
- About two-thirds of alumni reported that they **did things during their service year(s) that they never thought they could do**.



#### Methodology

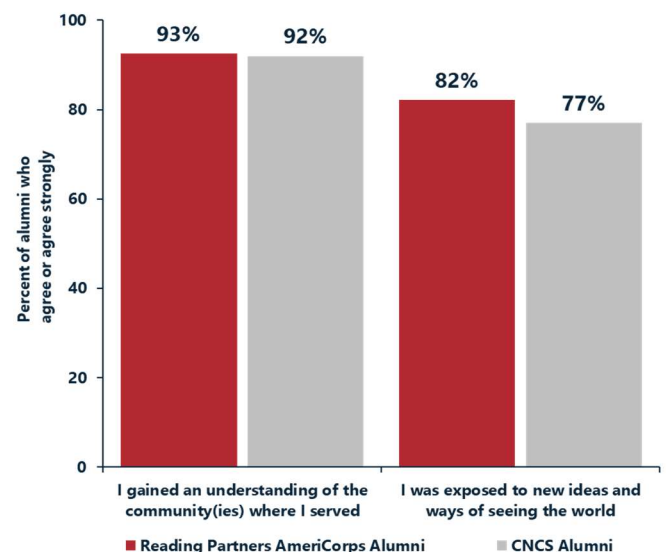
**Online survey** of 898 Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni (59 percent response rate; N=526) regarding their service experience and whether alumni believed those experiences influenced their subsequent educational and career pathways as well as their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward community and civic engagement.

**Virtual focus groups** of 4-5 alumni in each of 12 groups; 50 respondents total. Focus groups collected illustrative examples of alumni experiences, attitudes, and behaviors.

**Comparison groups** to put the survey findings into context by comparing survey responses of Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni with:

- CNCS alumni who participated in the 2015 CNCS AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes study
- National cohorts (American National Election Study and the General Social Survey) matched to the Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni on age, race/ethnicity, income, marital status, educational background, and other factors associated with their propensity to serve.

#### Exhibit ES1. Broadening perspectives



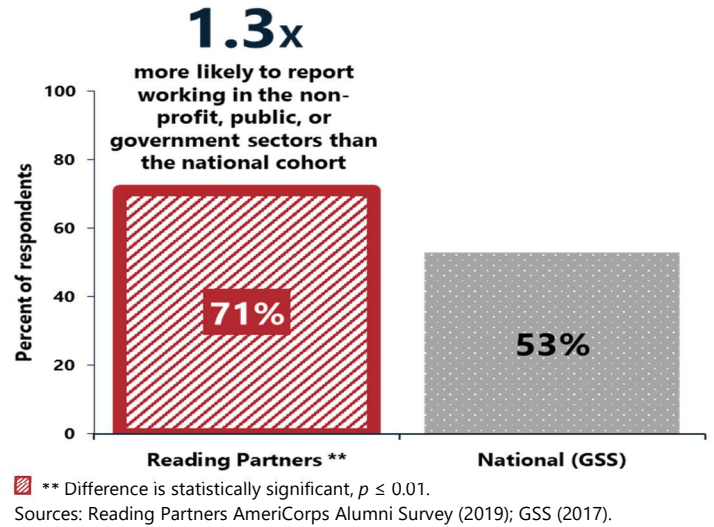
Sources: 2019 Reading Partners AmeriCorps Alumni survey; CNCS 2015 alumni survey.

# Influencing alumni academic and career pathways:

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 (Exhibit ES2).
- Said their service experience **prepared them for their current job and/or service activity** somewhat or a great deal (85 percent).
- 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**.

**Exhibit ES2. Career pathways**

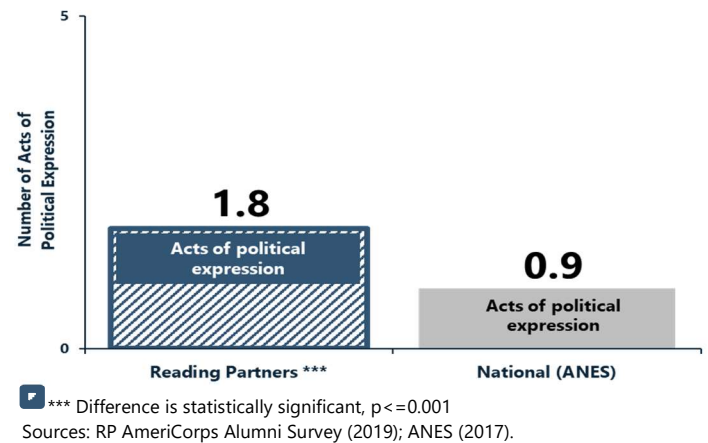


# Influencing the civic engagement of alumni:

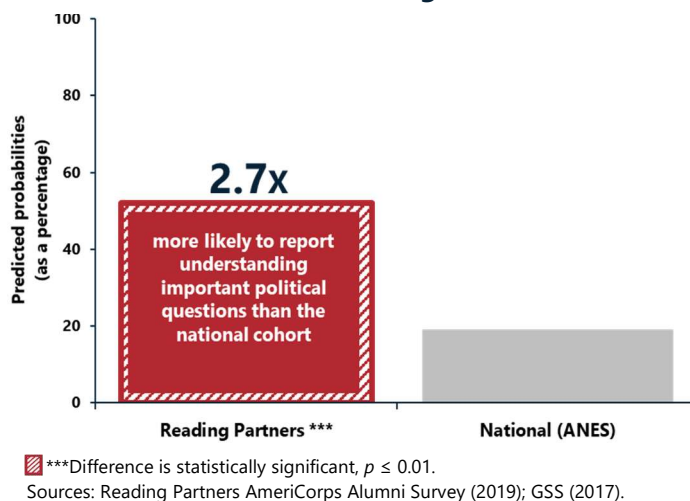
The Reading Partners program generated increased levels of civic engagement in their Corps members than would have been expected among similarly situated members of the national population. Specifically, compared to a similarly situated national cohort, Reading Partners AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to:

- Express themselves politically (Exhibit ES3).
- Understand the important political questions facing our country (Exhibit ES4).
- Volunteer in more activities for organizations or issues that they care about (Exhibit ES5).

**Exhibit ES3. Political expression**



**Exhibit ES4. Political knowledge**



**Exhibit ES5. Volunteerism**

