

### Citation

Price, C., Williams, J., Simpson, L., Jastrzab, J., & Markovitz, C. (2011). National evaluation of Youth Corps: Findings at follow-up. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, Inc.

### Highlights

- The study's objective was to examine the impact of Youth Corps, a diverse set of programs that offer educational services, employment and training, and community service activities to young adults.
- The programs' effectiveness was evaluated using a randomized controlled trial conducted at 21 Youth Corps program sites.
- The study found a statistically significant positive impact on participants' annual income 18 months after random assignment. There was no evidence of statistically significant impacts on employment, education, or training 30 months after random assignment, which was the primary follow-up period examined in the study.
- The quality of causal evidence presented in this study is moderate because, although it was based on a randomized controlled trial with high attrition, the authors demonstrated that the treatment and control groups were similar before the intervention. This means we have confidence that the estimated effects are attributable at least in part to Youth Corps, although other factors could also have contributed.

### Features of Youth Corps Programs

Typically, local community-based organizations and state and local government agencies operate Youth Corps programs. The programs' goals are to positively affect the communities in which they operate, as well as the education and employment outcomes of participants, known as Corpsmembers. In general, Corpsmembers must be at least 16 years old and commit to completing at least 300 hours of service.

There is no single Youth Corps model, but most programs provide educational services, employment and training, and community service activities, along with a modest stipend to participants. Corpsmembers perform a variety of services in their communities, including tutoring, mentoring disadvantaged students, working to improve parks and other public spaces, and helping with disaster relief.

Although populations varied across sites, about 85 percent of Corpsmembers were younger than 25; about 25 percent were African American, 30 percent were Hispanic, and 35 percent were white. Approximately 20 percent of Corpsmembers had education beyond high school, and about 25 percent came from families with incomes below the federal poverty level.

## Features of the Study

The study was a randomized controlled trial conducted in 21 community-based organizations. Eligible youth were randomly assigned to either receive an offer to participate in Youth Corps immediately or to not be allowed to participate in Youth Corps until 18 months later (the control group). The study team administered follow-up surveys to both groups 18 and 30 months after random assignment to collect data on the outcomes of interest. The sample included more than 1,500 youth who completed an 18-month follow-up survey and nearly 1,300 youth who completed a 30-month follow-up survey.

To estimate the effectiveness of Youth Corps, the authors compared the outcomes of those youth randomly selected to receive an offer to participate in Youth Corps with the outcomes of the control group. The study examined the effects of offering Youth Corps to eligible youth on their employment, education, and training outcomes. The study also examined outcomes related to civic engagement, life skills, risky behavior, and education plans and expectations (not described in this profile).

## Findings

- Youth Corps did not have a statistically significant impact on most of the employment or education outcomes measured 18 months after random assignment. It did, however, have a statistically significant positive impact on annual income: Youth Corps members earned over \$1,200 per year more than youths in the control group.
- Youth permitted to participate in Youth Corps did not have statistically significantly better employment or education outcomes than the control group when measured 30 months after random assignment.
- There were no statistically significant differences in impacts by gender.

## Considerations for Interpreting the Findings

The study was based on a randomized controlled trial with high attrition at both follow-up points. However, the authors demonstrated that the treatment and control groups were similar in age, race/ethnicity, and income before the intervention, and they controlled for these characteristics in their analyses.

The implementation of the intervention varied across the 21 participating sites, and there was substantial variation in outcomes across the sites. Only a few sites had statistically significant impact estimates for the three primary outcomes; these included both positive and negative impact estimates.

## Causal Evidence Rating

The quality of causal evidence presented in this study is moderate because, although it was based on a randomized controlled trial with high attrition, the authors demonstrated that the treatment and control groups were similar before the intervention. This means we have confidence that the estimated effects are attributable at least in part to Youth Corps, although other factors could also have contributed.