

Impact of AmeriCorps on RI Communities

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AmeriCorps plays a critical role in advancing opportunities for both service recipients and volunteers in Rhode Island. Primarily operating in economically disadvantaged urban areas, AmeriCorps members provide essential services to those in need. Volunteers from these communities gain access to education and employment pathways that may otherwise be inaccessible.

Through Segal Education Awards and extensive training, AmeriCorps leverages federal funding to help thousands of Rhode Island AmeriCorps members in completing higher education, entering the workforce, and contributing to the local economy. In addition to gaining valuable skills, these individuals remain civically engaged and contribute to the state’s social sector.

The Value of Service in Rhode Island:

AmeriCorps is a federally funded program addressing critical needs in education, environmental protection, and public safety. Rhode Island has benefited significantly from AmeriCorps, ranking 7th in the U.S. for per capita participation as of 2019, while Providence ranks 2nd nationally among small cities¹. Since the program’s inception in 1994, over 8,500 Rhode Island residents have contributed approximately 12 million service hours, earning more than \$30.4 million in education awards.².

Several features distinguish national service programs like AmeriCorps from other volunteer initiatives:

- Federal funding is leveraged to address local issues.
- Structured training programs equip volunteers with practical skills, enhancing program effectiveness.
- In addition to a living allowance, members receive student loan deferment and post-service Segal Education Awards, which can be used for higher education expenses or to repay qualified federal student loans.
- Service terms range from 300 hours to full-time commitments exceeding 1,700 hours. Volunteers serving 300 or more hours, classified as high-intensity volunteers, are more likely to provide substantial value and benefit from their service.

AmeriCorps awards federal funds to the Rhode Island Department of Education to administer local programs approved and supported by Serve Rhode Island (ServeRI), the Rhode Island Commission for National and Community Service.

This report focuses on a key group that has not only provided a huge benefit to Rhode Island communities through their service but who are positioned to make an ongoing impact in the state. The cohort includes the 506 AmeriCorps members who:

- Served in Rhode Island within the past 5 years.
- Were born in 1985 or later.
- Completed at least 300 hours of service in one year (high-intensity volunteers).

AmeriCorps Service Provides Pathways to Higher Education and Careers:

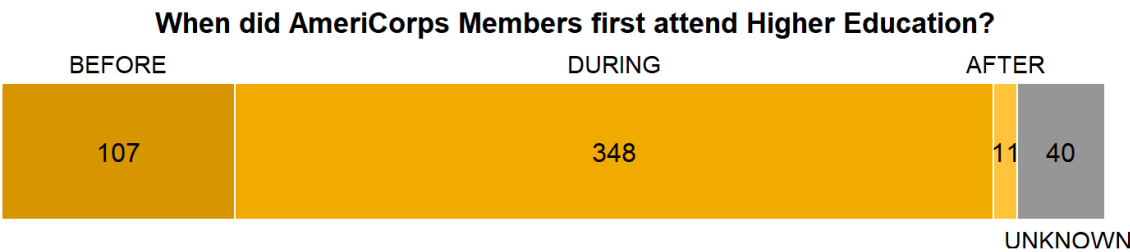


Figure 1: Cohort postsecondary enrollment timeline

Of the 506 members in this cohort, 466 were identified in RILDS' higher education data holdings. Figure 1 demonstrates that the majority enrolled in postsecondary education during or between their AmeriCorps terms, countering the misconception that AmeriCorps primarily serves individuals on a “gap year” before college. Additionally, most members in the cohort, including those from in-state and out-of-state, attended college in Rhode Island. Of the members from this cohort who were matched in the RILDS database, 66% attended public institutions and 79% attended four-year institutions.

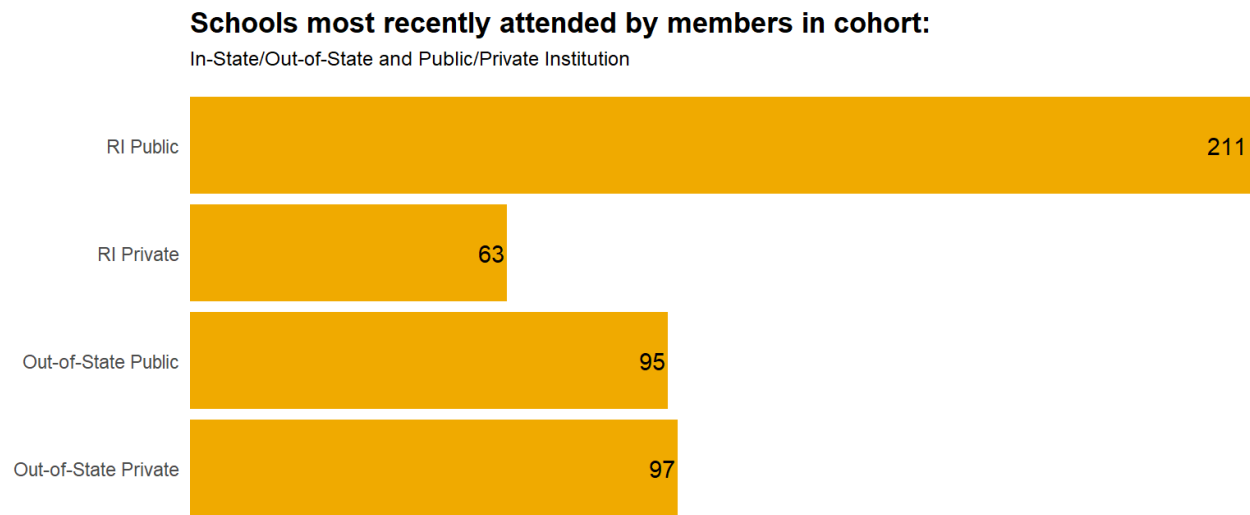


Figure 2: Cohort postsecondary enrollment outcomes

The cohort's most recent higher education enrollment data indicates that Rhode Island benefits from AmeriCorps members who remain in the state to pursue further education. Seven of the top ten institutions attended by this group are in Rhode Island, with the top three being public institutions. Many members likely utilize their AmeriCorps Education Award at these institutions. Between 1994 and 2020, over \$12 million has been paid to Rhode Island higher education and loan holding institutions.³

Beyond education, AmeriCorps alumni often remain in Rhode Island for employment. Figure 3 shows that the majority of alumni (those who have completed their terms of service) are employed in the state up to three years post-service, contributing to a “brain gain” effect, with skilled workers from both in-state and out-of-state boosting the Rhode Island workforce. Roughly one out of two members remain employed in Rhode Island four years after completing their service.

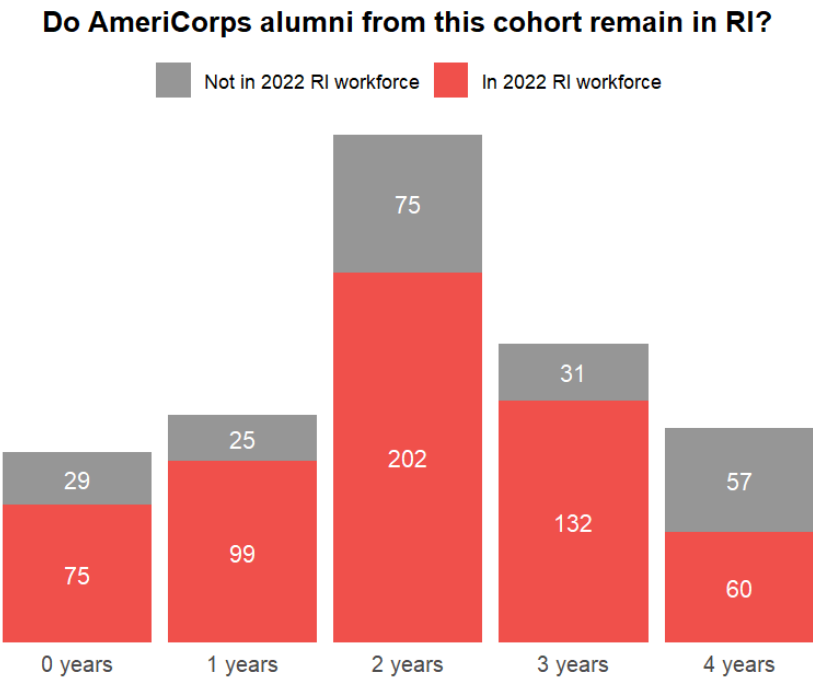


Figure 3: Cohort alumni by 2022 RI workforce participation and years since last service term

In addition, AmeriCorps alumni are more likely than not to be employed in public service sectors. Figure 4 highlights that the top three industries employing alumni are Educational Services, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Other Services (except Public Administration). The last category, a small industry in the state is probably more prevalent among this group because it includes sectors such as grant-making, advocacy, and religious services. Notably, 55% alumni work in Educational Services, which aligns with the finding that most of the cohort served in AmeriCorps programs focused on education. These findings are elaborated in the “Serving Neighborhoods in Needs” section below. Note that the industries in Figure 4 represent the alumni’s most recently available post-service wage record.

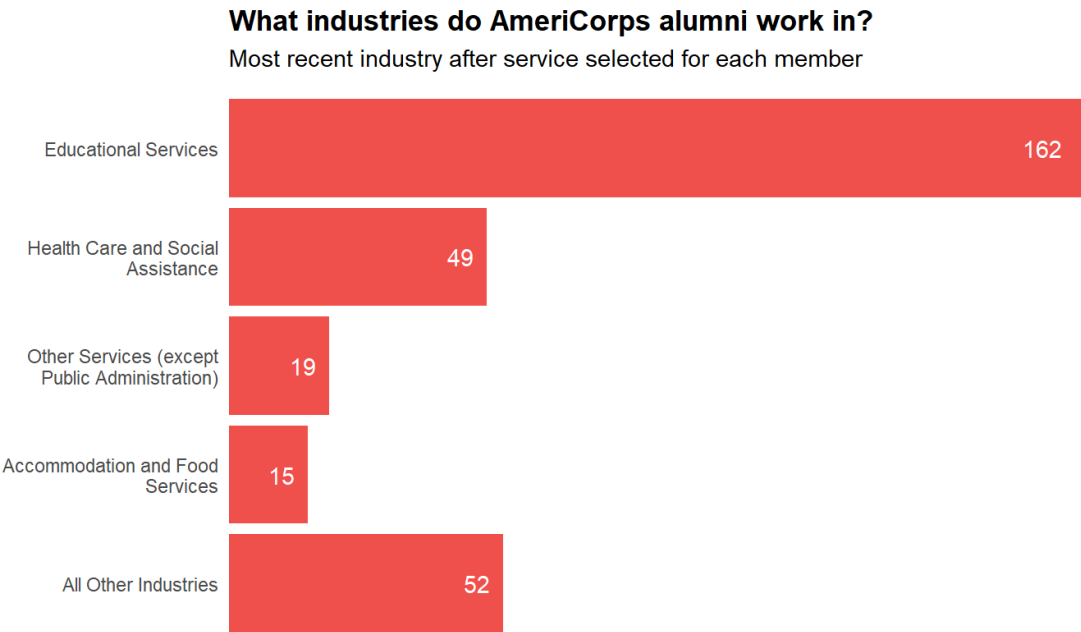


Figure 4: Most common industries of employment of AmeriCorps cohort

Employment data illustrates the significant role this cohort plays in strengthening Rhode Island’s economic and social framework. Healthcare and education, two key economic sectors, offer relatively high wages, job stability, and projected job growth.

Notably, these sectors align with AmeriCorps’ primary service areas. Through their service, AmeriCorps members not only develop a commitment to work in these fields but also acquire relevant skills and experience. This represents a form of demand-driven workforce development, where the needs of local communities shape skill development, which is then effectively utilized within the Rhode Island workforce.

Figure 5 displays the inflation-adjusted median annual wage of this cohort by age, compared to a comparison cohort. The comparison cohort consists of individuals born between 1985 and 2004, who attended any Rhode Island high school that members of the AmeriCorps cohort also attended. On average, AmeriCorps members surpass Rhode Island’s living wage by the age of 24. As shown in Figure 5, members of the AmeriCorps cohort consistently out-earn their counterparts beginning at age 23.

Workforce Outcomes of Cohort for All Operating Sites

Inflation-adjusted median annual wages of **AmeriCorps Cohort** vs. **Comparison Cohort**

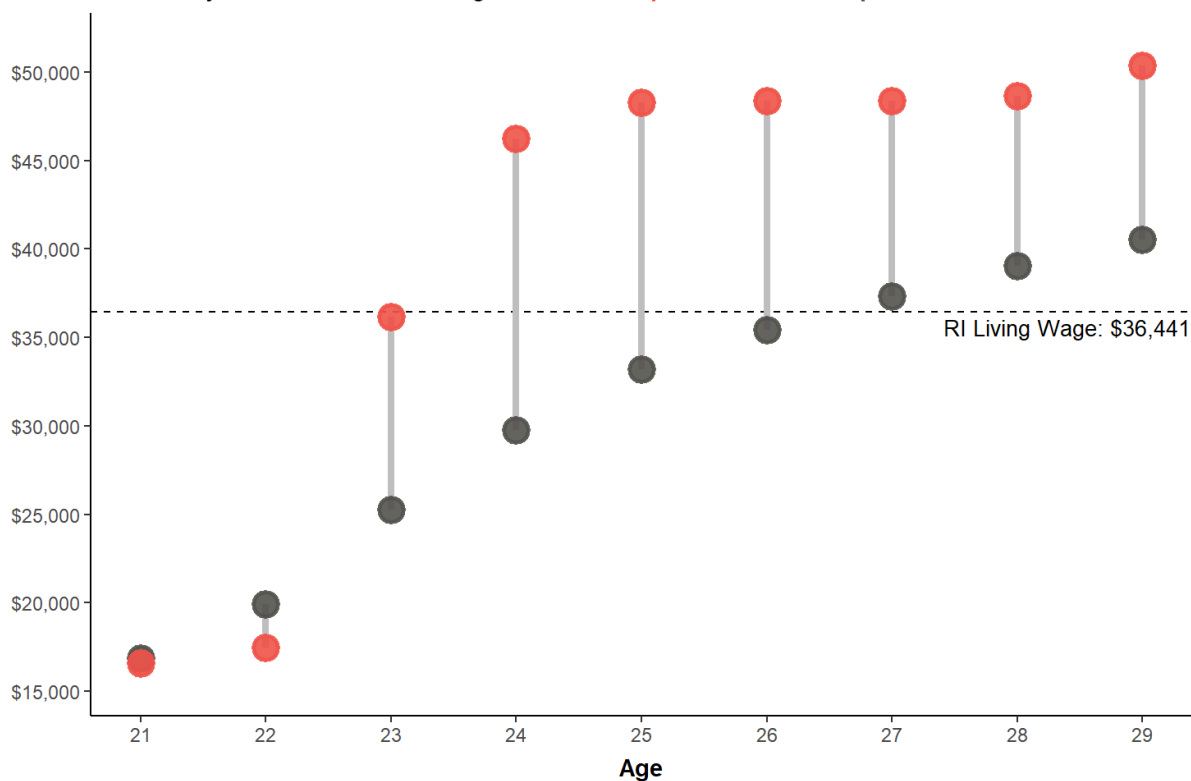


Figure 5: Wage outcomes of AmeriCorps cohort

Members come from the Communities they Serve:

This report focuses on a key group that has not only provided significant service to Rhode Island communities but is also well-positioned to make a lasting impact within the state. The cohort includes the 506 AmeriCorps members who:

- Served in Rhode Island within the past 5 years.
- Were born in 1985 or later.
- Completed a minimum of 300 service hours within one year (high-intensity volunteers).

Figures 6-8 present the demographic breakdown of this cohort by race/ethnicity, gender, and age. Of the 506 members in this cohort, 47% identify as White, 23% identify as Hispanic, 12% identify as Black or African American, and 8% identify as Asian or Asian American. These figures were derived from a dataset where race and ethnicity are combined into a single variable, so individuals may be represented in multiple categories. In comparison, U.S. Census Bureau estimates for 2022 indicate that the racial composition of Rhode Island was 83% White, 9% Black or African American, and 4% Asian, with ethnicity reported separately, showing that 18% of Rhode Islanders identify as Hispanic or Latino.

Roughly two out of three members of the cohort identify as female, consistent with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2022 estimate that 66% of the private nonprofit workforce is female. Lastly, two out of three members of the cohort were between 20-24 years old at the start of their AmeriCorps service.

Who are the members of this cohort?

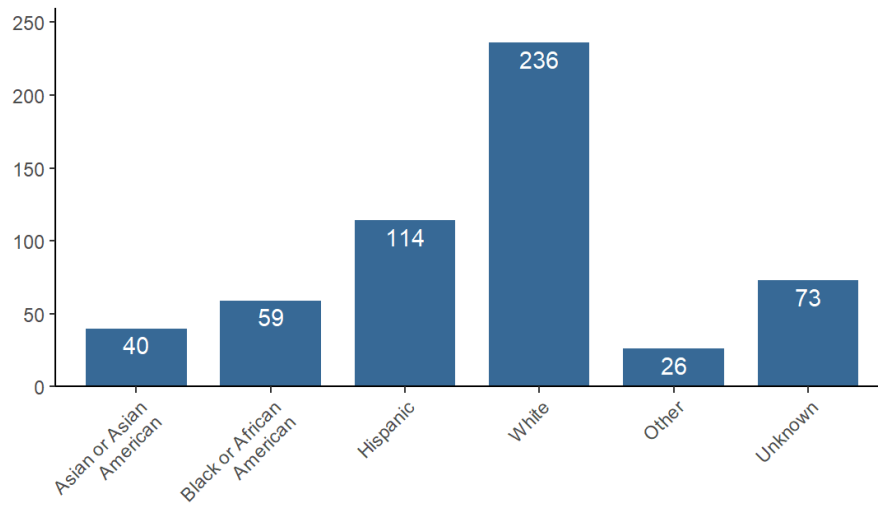


Figure 6: Cohort demographics by race

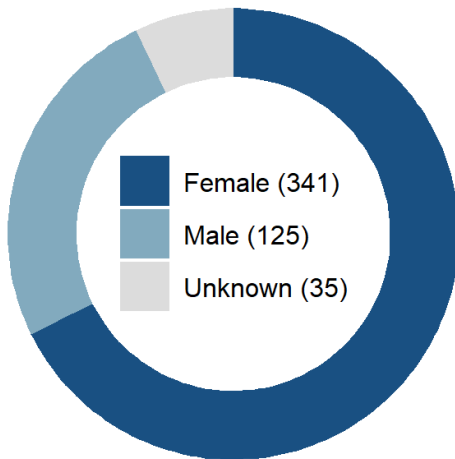


Figure 7: Cohort demographics by gender

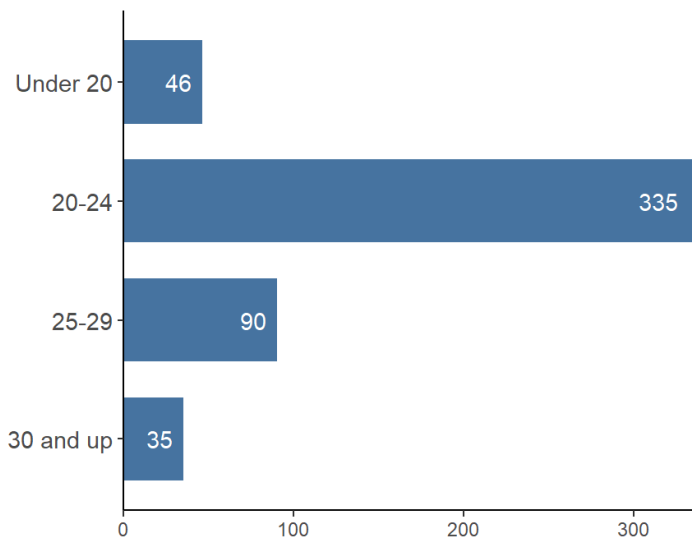


Figure 8: Cohort demographics by age

Rhode Island attracts AmeriCorps members from both within and outside the state. Of the in-state members, a substantial proportion originates from neighborhoods served by AmeriCorps programs. The largest subgroup, comprising 53% of the cohort, hail from Providence, with Woonsocket and Pawtucket—two other urban areas with high rates of child poverty—following in size.

Where do AmeriCorps Members come from?

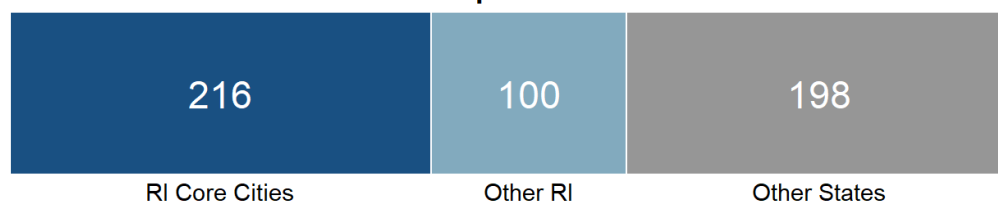


Figure 9: Cohort place of origin

Figure 9 shows the geographic distribution of the cohort's place of origin. By recruiting from these areas, AmeriCorps engages members uniquely equipped to address local challenges. Far from the concern that only privileged individuals disconnected from these communities can afford to serve, these volunteers are largely made up of individuals who are most likely to benefit from the training and funding AmeriCorps provides.

An analysis of the K-12 districts attended by in-state members further supports this. The majority of schools feeding into the AmeriCorps program are in Providence, the state's largest and one of its most economically disadvantaged cities. Other prominent feeder districts are from lower-income urban areas as well. The most common districts attended by members of this cohort are Providence (53), Woonsocket (16), Cranston (11), and All Other Districts (82). It is important to note that only 32% of the cohort appears in Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) enrollment data, with the remaining portion of the cohort's K-12 education records unknown.

With 10.8%⁴ of Rhode Island's population living in poverty and the state's unemployment rate at 3.2% as of December 2023⁵, the demand for volunteer services is undeniable. However, the degree of need varies significantly across neighborhoods.

Do AmeriCorps members focus on areas of greatest need?

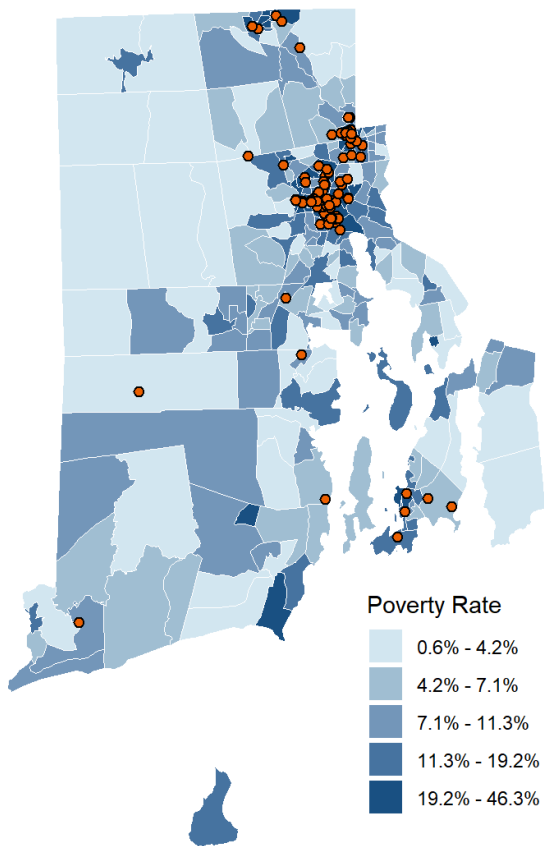


Figure 10: RI Service locations and poverty levels

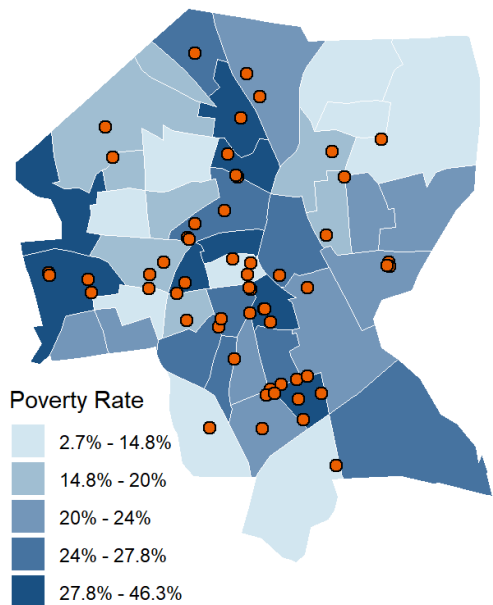


Figure 11: Providence Service locations and poverty levels

Figures 10 and 11 highlight the concentration of AmeriCorps programs in Rhode Island and Providence. Service efforts are focused in urban areas where poverty is most concentrated, such as Providence and Central Falls.

AmeriCorps programs also prioritize services with the greatest potential impact. Children are especially vulnerable to poverty, with 12% of Rhode Islanders under age 18 living below the federal poverty line⁶, and rates nearing or exceeding 30%⁷ in Providence and other urban areas. The majority of Rhode Island AmeriCorps programs focus on early childhood education, K-12 academic success, and college access, equipping children with the education necessary to secure good jobs and build wealth.

A High Impact Cohort:

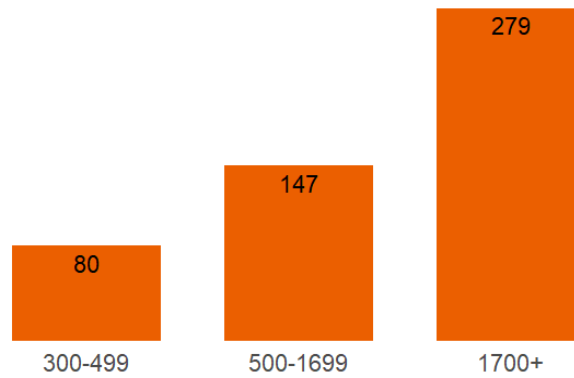


Figure 12: Cohort by number of hours served

In their service to these high-need communities, many of the AmeriCorps members in this cohort served over 1,000 hours each in Rhode Island neighborhoods. Nearly half of them (48%) serving two or more terms in Rhode Island. Figure 12 shows a breakdown of the cohort's hours served, which considers each member's cumulative hours.

A substantial portion of the cohort, approximately nine out of ten members, served at locations focused on education. The next two most common focus areas for this cohort are Environmental Stewardship and Economic Opportunity, which account for roughly one out of ten members. Healthy Futures and Veterans & Military Families round out the list, but the number of members were suppressed for disclosure avoidance.

An Education Focused Cohort:



Figure 13: Cohort by service focus area (focus areas with counts under 10 are suppressed)

Getting the Most from AmeriCorps:

With Rhode Island—and particularly Providence—ranking among the most active AmeriCorps programs in the country, the state is well-positioned to capitalize on the benefits offered by this federally funded initiative. High-intensity volunteers contribute valuable services in neighborhoods with the greatest need and bolster the state's long-term economic and civic health by staying in-state for education and employment, and by continuing to engage with their communities.

A key takeaway from this analysis is that AmeriCorps benefits its members as much as it does the communities they serve. Many of these young volunteers come from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, and through AmeriCorps, they gain the resources, training, and motivation needed to succeed in education and the workforce.

Key actions that stakeholders can take to ensure Rhode Island fully leverages the benefits of AmeriCorps include:

- K-12 leaders can inform students of available AmeriCorps programs and encourage them to participate.

- Higher education leaders in the state can offer matching funds for the Segal Education Award to help make in-state education affordable for dedicated students. For more information, including the benefits of enrolling service alumni and a list of organizations that have made this commitment, see the federal Schools of National Service⁸ initiative.
- Employers can prioritize hiring candidates with national service experience, recognizing the valuable skills and experience gained through service. For more information, including the benefits of employing national service alumni and a list of organizations that have made this commitment, see the federal Employers of National Service initiative⁹.
- Nonprofits, municipalities, faith-based organizations, and academic institutions can apply for federal grants to host AmeriCorps teams. Grants help fund recruitment and training of AmeriCorps members working in education, disaster services, health, environmental stewardship, economic opportunity, and service to veterans and military families.
- Individuals interested in making a meaningful contribution to their communities can apply to become AmeriCorps members, gaining valuable skills while earning financial support for their education.

For additional information or assistance with these actions, contact serveri@ride.ri.gov (<mailto:serveri@ride.ri.gov>) or visit www.americorpsri.com (www.americorpsri.com).

About this Report:

This report was developed by the Rhode Island Longitudinal Data System (RILDS) Center. The report is based on data stored in RILDS as of April 2024.

Additional information regarding the data sets used in this report:

- Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) - K12 Enrollment Data
 - Records covering terms Fall 2004 through Spring 2022.
 - Data set limitation: Only students who attend the Rhode Island public school system are included in this data.
- AmeriCorps/ServeRI via RIDE - ServeRI Program Participation Data
 - Records covering dates September 1, 2010 through September 1, 2022.
- Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) – Postsecondary Enrollment and Completions Data
 - Records covering terms Spring 2007 through Fall 2023.
 - Data set limitation: Only students who attend one of the three RI public institutions are included in this data.
- National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) via RIDE and OPC - Postsecondary Enrollment and Completions Data
 - Records covering terms Spring 2010 through Fall 2023.
- Department of Labor and Training (DLT) – Employment & Wage Data
 - Records covering quarters Q1 2011 through Q4 2022.
 - Data set limitation: Only employees of employers that pay into RI unemployment insurance are included in this data.
- U.S. Census Bureau – American Community Survey (ACS) Poverty Data (table C17002)
 - Records covering calendar year 2022.

All aggregated values below ten (10) were suppressed for this report.

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1. AmeriCorps Newsroom; Top 10 States, Cities Rankings (<https://americorps.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/new-list-ranks-top-10-states-cities-produce-most-americorps-members>)↵
 2. AmeriCorps State Profiles; Rhode Island 2024 (https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/upload/state_profiles/pdf_2024/RI_Glance.pdf)↵
 3. AmeriCorps Data; Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (https://data.americorps.gov/National-Service/Segal-AmeriCorps-Education-Award-Payments-and-Alum/8t8t-a6ry/about_data)↵
 4. U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts; Rhode Island (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/RI/BZA010221>)↵
 5. RI DLT; Unemployment Rate/Labor Force Statistics (LAUS) (<https://dlt.ri.gov/labor-market-information/data-center/unemployment-ratelabor-force-statistics-laus>)↵

6. KIDS COUNT Data Center; Rhode Island by State (<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/43-children-in-poverty?loc=41&loct=2#detailed/2/41/false/1095,2048,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868/any/321,322>)↵
7. KIDS COUNT Data Center; Rhode Island by County (<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/2850-child-poverty-rate?loc=41&loct=11#detailed/11/6233-6271/false/2454,2026,1983,1692,1691/any/5904>)↵
8. AmeriCorps Partners; Schools of National Service (<https://americorps.gov/partner/partnerships/schools-national-service>)↵
9. AmeriCorps Partners; Employers of National Service (<https://americorps.gov/partner/partnerships/employers-national-service>)↵