

Impact of National Service on RI Communities

AmeriCorps offers pathways to success for both service recipients and volunteers in RI. Working mainly in economically disadvantaged urban neighborhoods, AmeriCorps members provide vital services for those in need. AmeriCorps members who come from these same neighborhoods gain education and employment opportunities they may not otherwise have had.

Through Segal Education Awards and extensive training, AmeriCorps leverages federal funding to help thousands of RI AmeriCorps members complete college, enter the workforce, and contribute to the local economy. These young members also benefit the state by putting their skills to work in the social sector and remaining civically engaged.

Published: 2016

The Value of Service in Rhode Island

AmeriCorps, a federal program designed to meet critical needs in areas such as education, the environment, and public safety, makes an outsized impact on Rhode Island. RI ranks 6th among the states for per capita AmeriCorps participation, and Providence ranks 2nd in the nation among midsize cities (1). Since the state's program began in 1994, more than **4,600 AmeriCorps members** have provided **5.2 million hours** of service to RI communities, valued at **\$122 million** (2).

Top 10 AmeriCorps member-producing:

| States | Mid-size cities |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Montana | 1 Billings, Montana |
| 2 District of Columbia | 2 Providence, Rhode Island |
| 3 Minnesota | 3 Fort Collins, Colorado |
| 4 Vermont | 4 Provo, Utah |
| 5 West Virginia | 5 Madison, Wisconsin |
| 6 Rhode Island | 6 Lowell, Massachusetts |
| 7 Colorado | 7 Rochester, Minnesota |
| 8 Utah | 8 Rockford, Illinois |
| 9 Massachusetts | 9 Tempe, Arizona |
| 10 Maine | 10 Waterbury, Connecticut |

Why concentrate on AmeriCorps members in Rhode Island? Although any form of service is valuable, national service programs like AmeriCorps offer several features that set them apart:

- They leverage federal funding to address issues facing local neighborhoods.
- They offer training and structure to build skills and help ensure effectiveness.
- In addition to a living allowance, AmeriCorps offers student loan deferment and a post-service Segal Education Award, which members can apply toward higher education costs or toward repaying qualified federal student loans.
- AmeriCorps offers programs requiring varying levels of service, but all require at least 300 hours within a 12-month term, with full-time members serving 1,700+ hours during their term. This is important because volunteers who serve for at least 300 hours (termed high-intensity volunteers) are more likely to provide value and to reap the benefits of service.

The AmeriCorps State program is funded by the federal Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and administered in the state by Serve Rhode Island.

A High-Impact Cohort

This story focuses on a key group that has not only provided a huge benefit to RI communities through their service but who are positioned to make an ongoing impact in the state. Our cohort includes the **1,247** AmeriCorps members who:

- Served in RI within the past 10 years
- Were born in 1985 or later
- Have served at least 300 hours in one year (high-intensity volunteers)

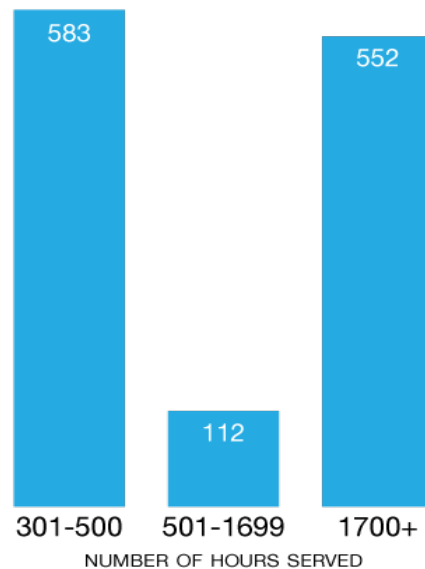
This is a dedicated group, as well as an unusually large one: many of the AmeriCorps members in this cohort served more than 1,000 hours each in RI neighborhoods. Nearly one-fifth of them (19%) served two or more terms in RI. The bar graph shows a breakdown of the cohort's hours served, which must be completed within one year.

This cohort represents only a portion of the federal investment that national service programs bring to RI. In 2015-2016 alone, CNCS committed nearly \$7 million to support national service initiatives in RI, leveraging an additional \$4.9 million in resources to strengthen community impact and increase return on taxpayer dollars [\(1\)](#).

The millennial members in our group provide insight not only into the current impact of service in RI but also into how high-intensity volunteers will affect the state's future civic, social, and economic development.

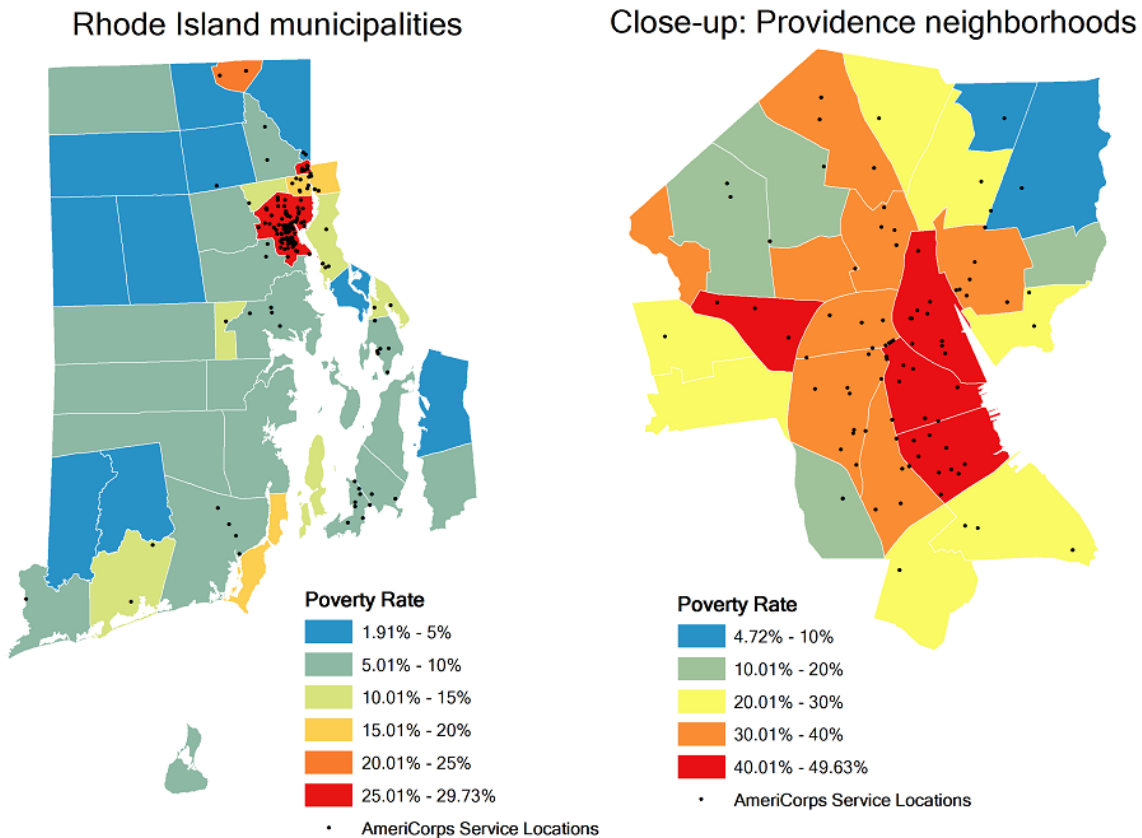
Data note: We explored the cohort of 1,247 AmeriCorps members within the RI DataHUB, which allowed us to find linkages among data from the RI Department of Education, the RI Department of Labor and Training, the RI voter database, and the National Student Clearinghouse. This linked data provided insightful information on education, workforce, and voting. While not every member was found in every dataset, 73% were found in at least two and 20% were in all four. For the analyses below, the number that linked to the corresponding dataset is referenced.

**AmeriCorps cohort
by number of hours served**



Serving Neighborhoods in Need

Poverty and AmeriCorps Service Locations



With poverty in Rhode Island at 13.2% (1) and unemployment as of February 2016 at 5.4% (above the national average of 4.9%) (2), the need for volunteer services in RI is indisputable. Need varies widely by neighborhood, though. Do our AmeriCorps members focus on areas of greatest need?

The answer is a resounding yes. The maps above show the locations of AmeriCorps service programs in Rhode Island and Providence. Service is concentrated in urban neighborhoods with the highest poverty rates, particularly in Providence and Central Falls, two areas with the highest concentration of poverty.

AmeriCorps programs similarly focus on services that will have the greatest impact. Children are among those hardest hit by poverty; 22% of Rhode Islanders under age 18 live under the federal poverty level, with those in Providence and other urban areas seeing rates near or above 40% (3). The majority of RI AmeriCorps programs focus on early childhood education, K-12 academic success, and college access services to help children get the education they need to secure good jobs and rise out of poverty.

AmeriCorps Members Come from the Communities They Serve

Rhode Island attracts AmeriCorps members from both in state and out of state. Of those in our cohort who originated in RI, a surprising number come from the very types of neighborhoods that AmeriCorps programs serve. The largest group comes from Providence, which has 1.12 AmeriCorps members per 1,000 residents. Other core cities (those with the highest percentages of children living in poverty) that draw AmeriCorps members are Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket.

Where RI AmeriCorps members come from



By recruiting from these neighborhoods, AmeriCorps engages members who are uniquely qualified to address local issues. Far from the stereotype of well-off members with time on their hands, these volunteers are the very people most likely to benefit from the training and funding AmeriCorps provides.

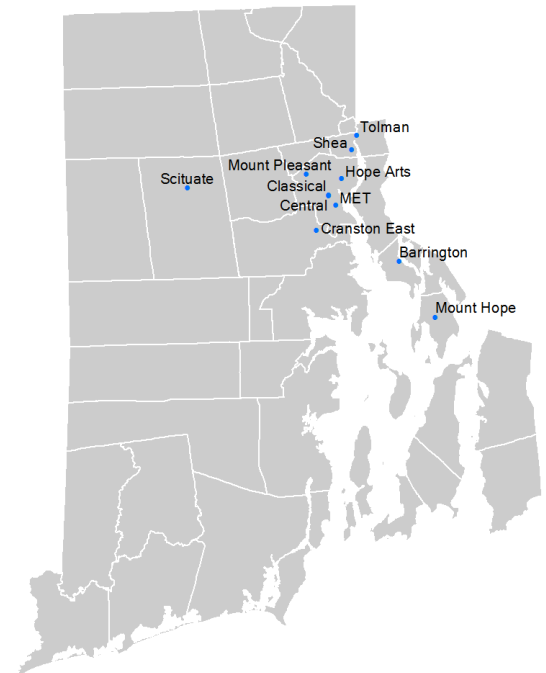
A look at the largest K-12 feeder schools for AmeriCorps confirms this notion:

- Classical High School (Providence): 25
- The MET in Providence (State-operated): 24
- Central High School (Providence): 16
- Cranston High School East (Cranston): 14
- Hope Arts High School (Providence): 13
- Mt. Hope High School (Bristol-Warren): 13
- Shea High School (Pawtucket): 11
- Mt. Pleasant High School (Providence): 11
- Scituate High School (Scituate): 11
- Barrington High School (Barrington): 10
- Tolman High School (Pawtucket): 10

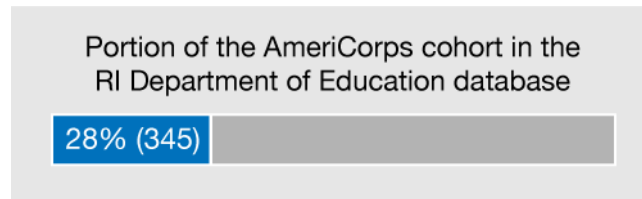
The majority of K-12 schools attended by in-state AmeriCorps members are in Providence — both the state's largest city and one of its poorest. (The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, or MET, has a statewide catchment area but is located in Providence and has similar demographics to other public schools in the district.)

Most of the other most common feeder schools are from lower-income urban areas. Notably, all of these schools are public.

Top 11 high schools of in-state members



Service Provides a Pathway to Success



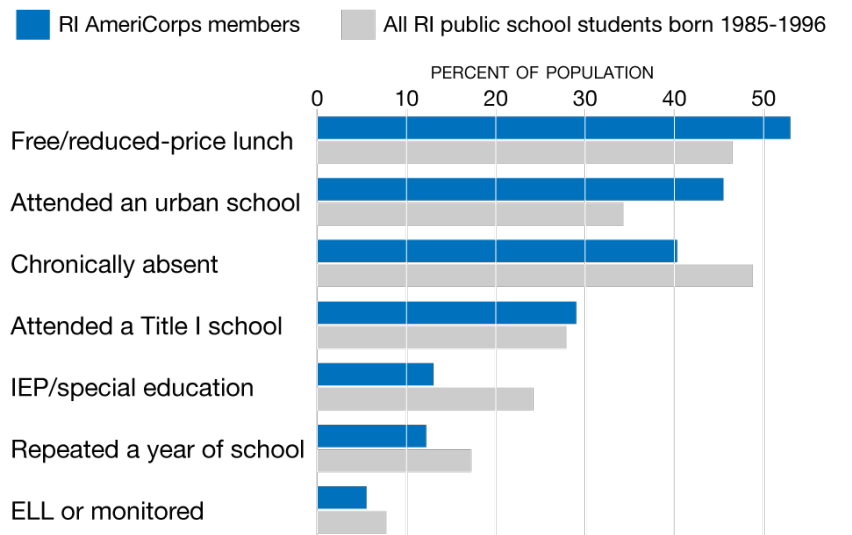
Looking at education characteristics provides further insight into who these RI AmeriCorps members are and how service affects their future prospects in the state.

SERVICE AND K-12 CHARACTERISTICS

Of the AmeriCorps members in our cohort, 345 were enrolled in a RI public school between the 2003-04 and 2013-14 academic years. The chart below shows some of their characteristics, along with those of a comparison group of all students statewide.

The AmeriCorps members in our cohort were more likely than the average Rhode Island student to have attended an urban school, and thus were more likely to have been directly exposed to the issues facing urban neighborhoods in the state. The proportion who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch was also higher than the statewide rate. Nearly 30% of our cohort attended a Title I school—that is, a school where at least 40% of students are from low-income families.

Comparing members to their peers: K-12 characteristics

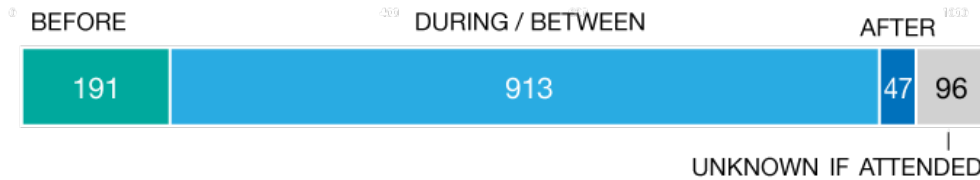


In addition to those coming from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, many members could be considered academically at risk, with 40% chronically absent in school and 12% held back a grade. Thus, AmeriCorps in RI engages those most likely to need the resources, training, and job skills they acquire through service.

SERVICE AND THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

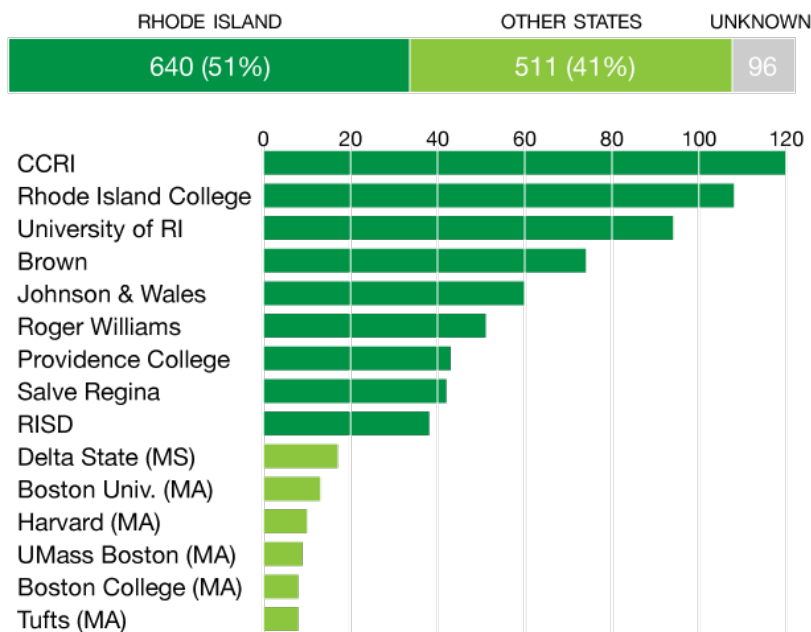
Nearly all of our AmeriCorps cohort (92%) was linked to the National Student Clearinghouse, meaning they have some higher education experience. This group is thus on a pathway to success, particularly given that the skills and practical experiences gained through service complement higher education learning.

When did AmeriCorps members attend higher education?



As the above chart illustrates, the majority of AmeriCorps members attend college during or between their AmeriCorps terms (when serving multiple terms). This defies the common notion of AmeriCorps members as solely those taking a "gap year" before starting college. It also aligns with the finding that most of the AmeriCorps members in our group, including those from in-state and out-of-state, stayed in RI for college.

Schools most recently attended by AmeriCorps members in cohort:



The cohort's most recent higher education enrollment reveals that Rhode Island is reaping the benefit of AmeriCorps members who remain in state to study. Among schools of enrollment, 9 of the top 10 are in Rhode Island, and the top 3 are all public institutions. A side benefit is that these members are likely using the Education Award that comes with AmeriCorps service at these institutions.

Note on the [Ed Award](#): The Ed Award is tied to the federal Pell Grant, whose value may fluctuate; for the 2013-2014 year, the award was \$5,550 for full-time AmeriCorps members. After completing their term of service, members can use their Ed Award toward student loans or to pay the cost of attendance at a qualified institution of higher learning. Some colleges and universities offer match funding or scholarships to provide further support for these students.

Impact of Service on the Workforce

Portion of the AmeriCorps cohort in the RI Department of Labor and Training database

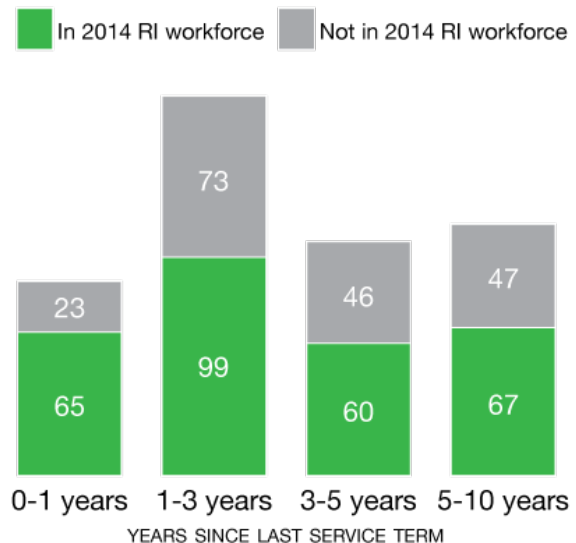
62% (771)

AmeriCorps members tend to remain in RI not only for school but also for work. The chart below shows 2014 workforce participation among AmeriCorps alumni (those who have completed their terms of service). The majority are working in the state, whether they finished their service one year ago or ten years ago. This contributes to a net "brain gain," with well-qualified employees from both in state and out of state contributing to the RI workforce post-service.

In addition, AmeriCorps alumni are more likely than not to be working in public service fields. As shown below, the top three industries of employment among our group are Education Services, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Other Services (Except Public Administration). The last category, a small industry in the state (just 3.8% of employment)¹ is probably more prevalent among this group because it includes fields such as grant-making, advocacy, and religious services, as well as other services.

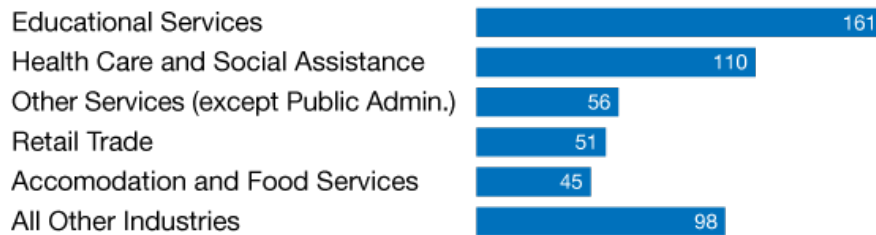
These findings correlate with national figures showing that after their service, 64% of AmeriCorps alumni work in the government or nonprofit sector (2). While many AmeriCorps members were already thinking of a career in service, 34% of alumni surveyed nationally said that AmeriCorps directed them toward a service-related field. In another key finding, 43% stayed in their community of service after completing their AmeriCorps term (3).

Rhode Island AmeriCorps alumni
by 2014 RI workforce participation and
years since last service term



Industries of employment of AmeriCorps members

As of 2014, a majority of the cohort held jobs in the education, health care, and social assistance industries.



Employment data also demonstrate this group's ability to contribute to the state's overall economic and social vitality. Health care and education are both important economic drivers, offering relatively high wages, employment, and projected job growth.

Tellingly, these industries also correlate with AmeriCorps service areas; those who serve develop not only the desire to work in the social sector but also the skills and experience to do so. AmeriCorps thus provides a form of demand-driven workforce development, where local need drives skill development, which is then deployed in the RI workforce.

1. For more information on wages, current size, and projected growth of RI industries, see the earlier data story, [RI's College to Career Landscape](#).

Service and Civic Engagement

Portion of the AmeriCorps cohort in the Rhode Island Voter Database

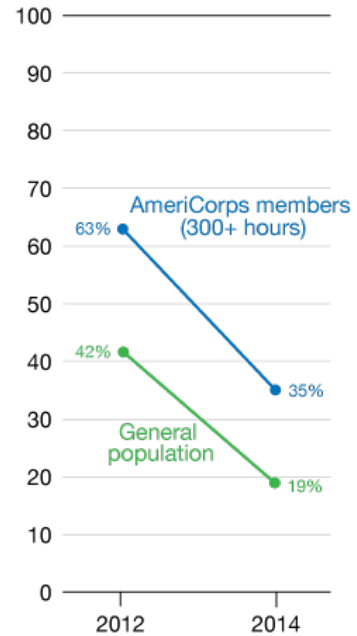
52% (648)

Nationally, both volunteers in general and AmeriCorps members have been found to be more engaged with their communities than their counterparts who have not served. Measures of civic engagement in these studies include donating to charity, participating in community events, and additional volunteering ([1](#)).

One immediate measure of civic engagement is voting. In the two elections in which our cohort was eligible to vote, 2012 and 2014, they did so at a much higher rate than the general population.

Among cohort members who were registered to vote in RI, 63% turned out to vote in 2012, compared with 42% among all voters of the same age. The numbers in the non-presidential general election of 2014 dropped for both groups, as they did nationally, but AmeriCorps members continued to turn out at a much higher rate than average.

Percent voter turnout
Registered voters born 1985-1994



Getting the Most from National Service

With Rhode Island, and particularly Providence, ranking among the most active AmeriCorps programs in the nation, the state is well positioned to take advantage of the benefits this federally funded program offers. The high-intensity volunteers who serve through AmeriCorps provide valuable services in neighborhoods that are most in need. They also contribute to the state's long-term economic and civic health by remaining in state for college and careers and by acting as engaged members of the community.

One compelling finding from this story is that AmeriCorps benefits its members in much the same way that it benefits the community members it serves. In recent years, hundreds of young volunteers from economically and academically disadvantaged backgrounds have gained resources, training, and motivation to succeed in school and become productive members of the workforce.

Following are actions various stakeholders can take to help ensure that RI reaps the full value that AmeriCorps can bring to the state's neighborhoods:

- K-12 leaders can inform students of available AmeriCorps programs and encourage them to participate.
 - Higher education leaders in the state can match the Segal Education Award to help make in-state education affordable for dedicated students.
 - Employers can make national service participation a preferential criterion for employment. This benefits employers as well as job candidates who have served, since service provides valuable experience in areas of demonstrated need. 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](#) initiative.
 - Nonprofits, municipalities, faith-based organizations, and higher education 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 can [apply to become an AmeriCorps member](#) in one of a variety of programs. AmeriCorps service offers members an opportunity to put their skills to work helping communities while earning money for education and acquiring essential job skills.
-