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# Workforce Development and the 4Rs in California and Vermont

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Final Report from the ECO and WSP Member Surveys

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## Executive Summary

How are service corps programs supporting communities as they build resilience, respond to and recover from disaster, and work to reduce their emissions? This paper provides insights into who is working in such service corps programs, what are their motivations for serving, and how they hope to contribute to creating more resilient communities. The study integrates data collected from members of two different AmeriCorps State and National service corps programs that worked in the states of California and Vermont. The results, which compare across the service corps programs, provide insights into who is participating and how these programs can provide workforce development while simultaneously engaging young people to support communities as they endeavor to become more resilient and prepare for and bounce-back from disasters.



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This research was conducted as part of the project “Workforce Development & the 4Rs,” which is coordinated out of the [Center for Environment, Community, & Equity](#) at American University.

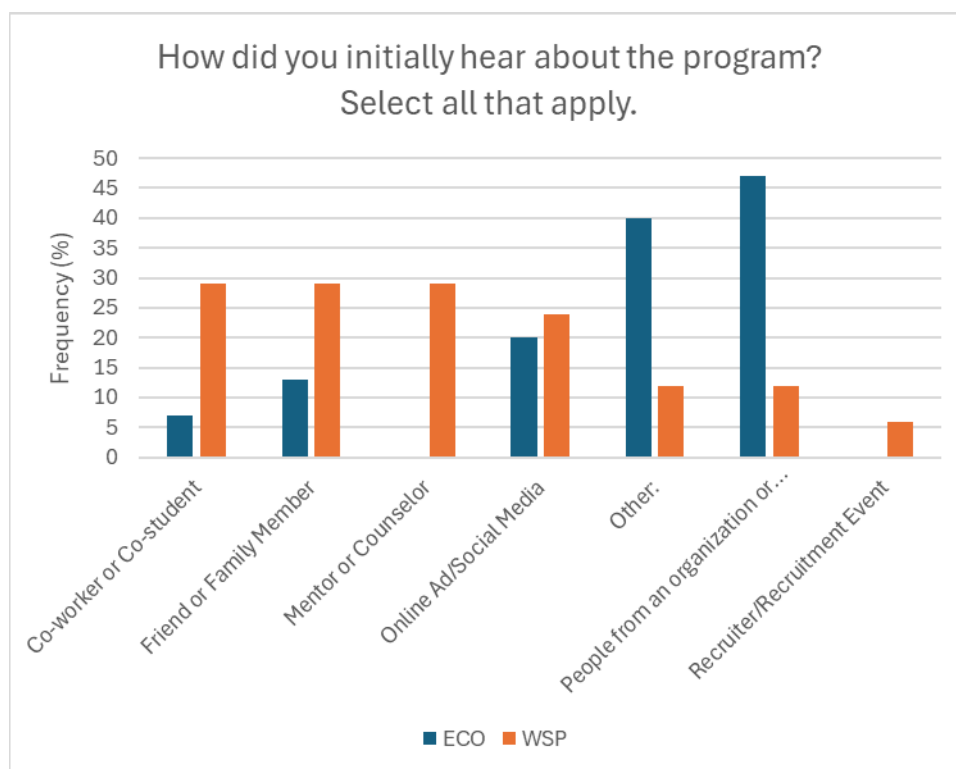
## Note on Methods

The research team asked the Vermont ECO AmeriCorps Program and the California Watershed Stewards Program (WSP) to share a voluntary survey with all their participants serving in Spring 2025. The survey link was shared with ECO and WSP participants by the programs’ organizational leadership via email, who encouraged participants to take the survey. The survey was open from February 27<sup>th</sup> until April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The response rates for each site were 60% (ECO) and 43% (WSP). The results discussed here are based on comparisons of the California and Vermont samples.

## General Background on Survey Respondents

Corpsmembers were asked the date on which they had started their service. At the time when the ECO corpsmembers took the survey, they had been serving for an average of 7.4 months. At the time when WSP corpsmembers took the survey, almost all had been serving for about 6 months.

How did participants learn about the program?



Who do participants know that currently or previously served in the corps?

WSP members were more likely than ECO members to have known someone who had served or was serving in the program when they applied. Again, the importance of social ties for WSP



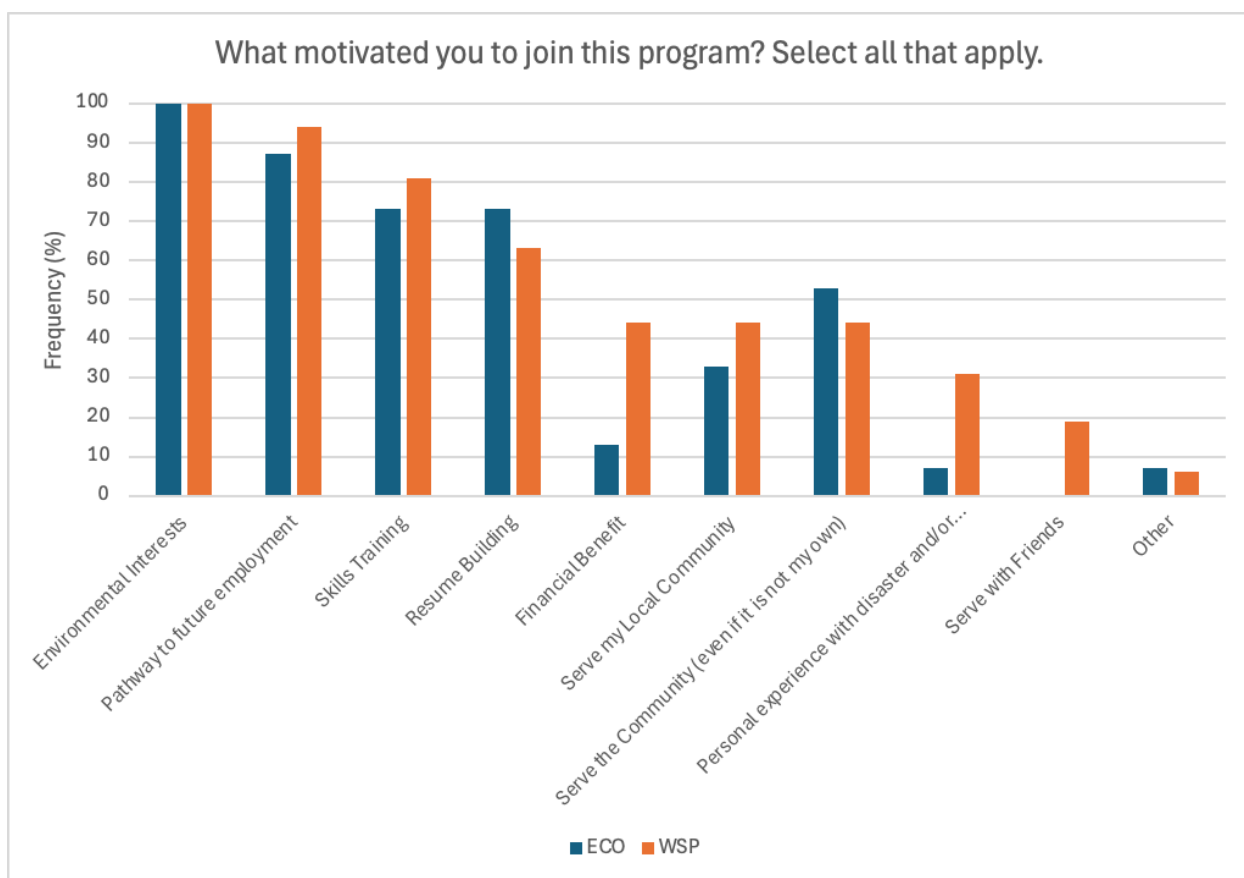
members is reflected in their responses. A majority (71%) of WSP members reported knowing someone, while only 29% of ECO members did. Nearly half of WSP members had known a friend or family member in or previously in the program (47%) compared to only 7% of ECO members. Among ECO members who had known someone in the program, they were most likely to be a co-worker or co-student (20%). Similarly, 29% of WSP member reported knowing someone in the program who was a co-worker or co-student.

<b>Did you know anyone who is currently participating or previously participated in this program when you applied? (Select all that apply)</b>	<b>CA WSP N=17</b>	<b>VT ECO N=15</b>
Co-worker or co-student	29%	20%
Friend or family member	47%	7%
Mentor or counselor	6%	0%
Person/people from an organization or group (e.g. environmental group, service group, religious group, social media channel)	6%	0%
Other	6%	0%
Did not know anyone	29%	73%



## Motivations for Joining the Corps

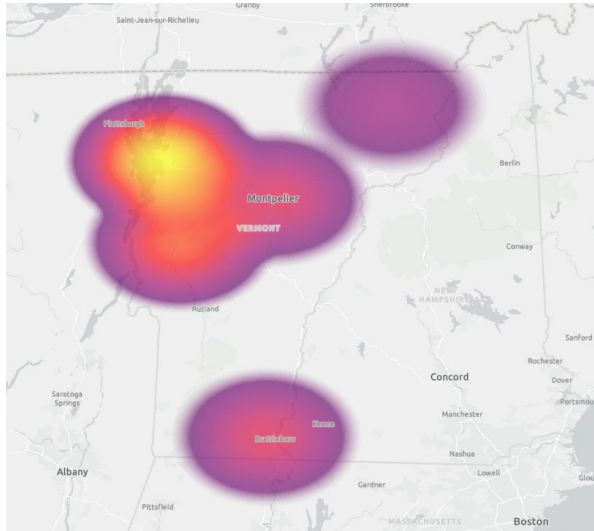
Participants were asked what motivated them to participate in the corps and were shown a list of possible options. Members across both groups were most motivated by environmental interests, a pathway to future employment, skills training, and resume building. Notably, every single respondent across both programs reported having been motivated by environmental interests to serve in the program. The overwhelming majority of both programs also reported pathway to future employment (ECO 86%, WSP 94%), skills training (ECO 73%, WSP 81%), and resume building (ECO 73%, WSP 63%) as motivations. Close to half of WSP members (44%) were motivated by financial benefit, which was much less common among ECO members (7%). Even though both California and Vermont have had climate change-exacerbated natural disasters in recent years, corpsmembers had variable personal experiences: nearly a third of WSP participants (31%) reported being motivated by personal experiences with disaster and/or environmental change while only participate in the ECO program was. The figure below represents motivation frequencies across the two groups.



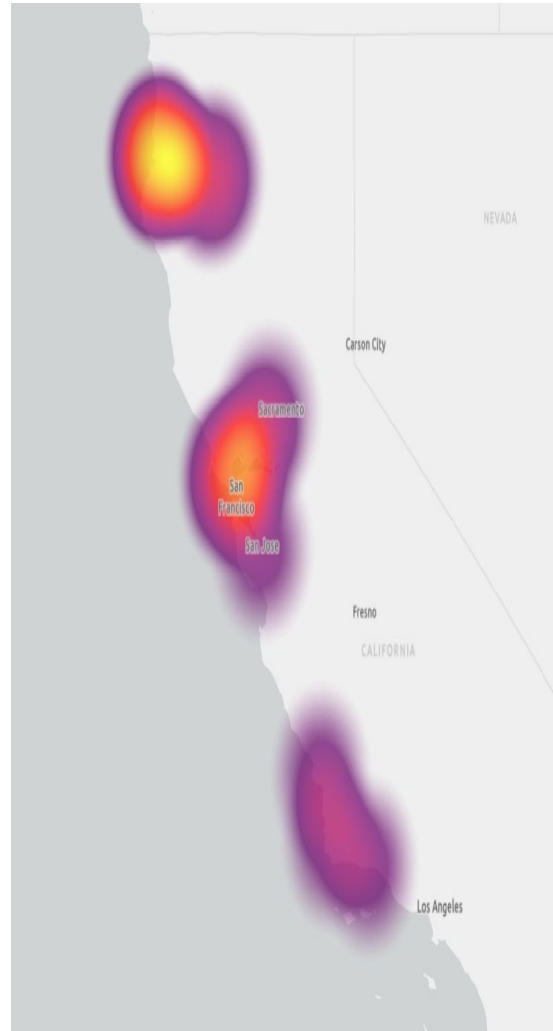
## Geography and Community

Participants in both Vermont and California reported coming from across the region to participate in their respective programs. There was more geographic diversity among WSP participants, who came from across the state of California. In both programs, participants served across the states in which they were located. Although the WSP is headquartered in the northern city of Fortuna, California, the program attracted a significant share of its membership from California's Bay Area, along with participants from the Los Angeles area.

ECO



WSP

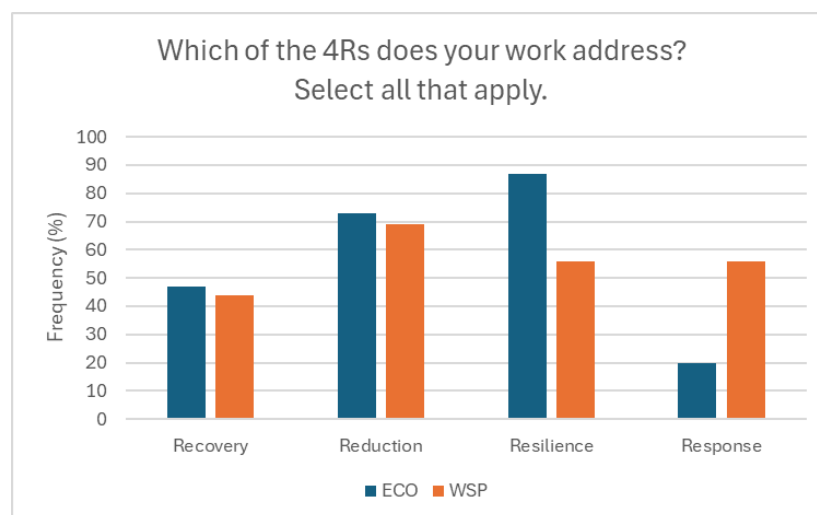


Participants were asked whether they had relocated to serve in their respective corps. ECO members were slightly more likely to have relocated: over half (53%) reported that they had relocated, compared to less than half of WSP members (44%). Participants were also asked whether they planned to stay in the community after their service. WSP members were somewhat more likely to report planning to stay in the community once their service had ended, with a majority (56%) of WSP members saying they plan to stay in the community compared to 44% of ECO members.



#### What types of disasters have participants worked on?

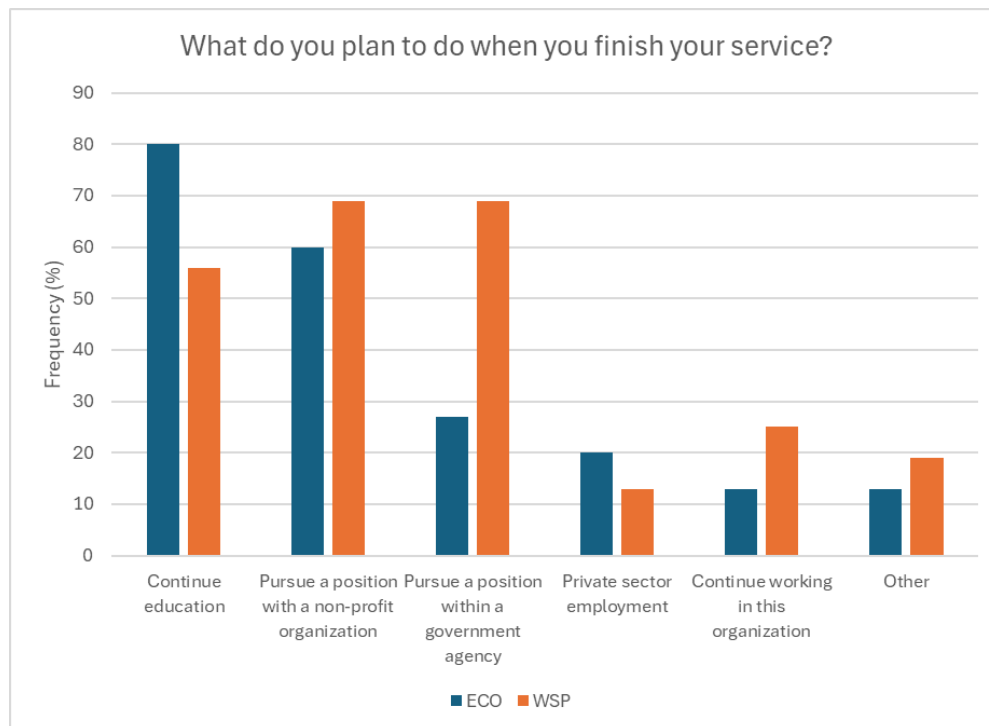
Corpsmembers were asked which of the 4Rs of climate work they were addressing in their service. Most ECO members (87%) reported working on Resilience; a smaller majority (56%) of WSP said the same. Majorities of both groups (67% of WSP, and 73% of ECO respectively) also said they had worked on Reduction. ECO members were more likely to classify their work as Resilience and Reduction, whereas WSP members were more equally distributed across the four areas of climate work.





### What are participants' plans after their service?

Participants were asked about their plans after their service ended and allowed to select all options that applied. Among ECO members, an overwhelming majority planned to continue their education after serving (80%). In contrast, only 56% of WSP members planned to continue their education post-service. More popular responses among the WSP members were pursuing a position within a non-profit (69%) or pursuing a position within a government agency (69%). Similarly, 60% of ECO members said they planned to work in a non-profit. However, ECO members diverged significantly on the question of government work, with only 26% saying they would pursue a position within a government agency.



## Civic Engagement and Environmental Attitudes

Participants were asked to select from a list of civic activities to indicate which activities they had participated in over the past year. WSP members were more civically engaged than ECO members across several categories. Notably, an overwhelming majority of WSP members had signed a petition (75%), volunteered for an organization or association (69%), or volunteered to do trail maintenance, park cleanups, tree planting, or another environmental project (69%), while less than 10% of ECO members had done each of those activities. ECO members (73%) were more likely than WSP members (31%) to have attended a public meeting, such as a zoning or school board meeting, to discuss a local issue. Members of both programs were more likely than the general public to have bought or boycotted products or services based on values or business practices of a company (94% of WSP and 67% of ECO respectively). Similarly, members of both programs were more likely to have attended a public meeting of some kind, contacted or visited a public official to express an opinion, attended a protest of some kind, or voted in an election than the general public.

In the past year, have you... (Select all that apply)	CA WSP N=16	VT ECO N=15	National Average
Attended a public meeting, such as a zoning or school board meeting, to discuss a local issue	31%	73%	11%*
Attended an organized protest, march, or demonstration of any kind	50%	47%	9%***
Bought or boycotted products or services based on values or business practices of a company	94%	67%	17%*
Contacted or visited a public official – at any level of government – to express your opinion	31%	27%	11%*
Contacted the media to express a view	0%	7%	11%**
Signed a petition online or in person	75%	7%	32%**
Volunteered for any organization or association	69%	9%	23%*
Volunteered to do trail maintenance, park cleanups, tree planting, or another environmental project	69%	7%	N/A
Voted in an election if eligible	81%	87%	56%*
None of the above	0%	0%	N/A

\*Source: AmeriCorps. 2023. CEV Findings: National Rates of All Measures from the Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement, 2017-2021. <https://data.americorps.gov/Volunteering-and-Civic-Engagement/2017-2021-CEV-Findings-National-Rates-of-All-Measu/rhng-qtzw>. (Accessed 06/28/2023)

\*\* Source: National Sample Data from National Social Survey. cumulative file 1972-2023. Data accessed from the GSS Data Explorer website at [gssdataexplorer.norc.org](https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/). (Accessed 06/28/2023)

\*\*\*Source: Data from Pew Research Database. <https://www.pewresearch.org/question-search/> (Accessed 06/28/2023)



## Environmental Beliefs

Participants were also asked whether they consider their personal environmental impact in three aspects of daily life. An overwhelming majority of members of both corps programs said yes to all three statements. All members across both groups said they considered their environmental impact when making purchasing decisions. The largest discrepancy was in making transportation decisions, where only 75% of WSP members said they considered their personal environmental impact while 100% of ECO members did.

Decisions based on Environmental Impact	CA WSP N=16	VT ECO N=14
Do you consider your personal environmental impact when...		
making decisions about what you eat?	81%	93%
making purchasing decisions?	100%	100%
you make transportation decisions?	75%	100%

Respondents were also asked the extent to which they feel that they as ordinary citizens have influence over governmental and business decisions related to climate protection. ECO members overwhelmingly agreed that they could influence government decisions on climate protection, while WSP members did not. Most ECO members (85%) strongly or somewhat agreed that they could influence government decisions on climate protection; in contrast, only 44% of WSP members strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement. Members across both groups were more in agreement on their ability to influence business decisions. A majority of WSP members (63%) strongly or somewhat agreed that they could influence business decisions on climate protection, as did 57% of ECO members.

Respondents were also asked their level of agreement with the statement “climate protection measures are determined by a few powerful persons; as a single citizen, I have no effect.” A majority of both groups strongly or somewhat disagreed with this statement (56% of WSP and 57% of ECO respectively). About a third of ECO members agreed (36%) and 44% of WSP members strongly or somewhat agreed.

Statement of Opinion		Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
<b>As an ordinary citizen, I can...</b>						
influence government decisions regarding climate protection	WSP	6%	50%	0%	38%	6%
	ECO	0%	0%	14%	57%	28%
influence business decisions regarding climate protection	WSP	13%	13%	13%	38%	25%
	ECO	0%	21%	21%	43%	14%
<b>Climate protection measures are determined by a few powerful persons; as a single citizen, I have no effect.</b>						
	WSP	6%	50%	0%	31%	13%
	ECO	14%	43%	7%	36%	0%



## Demographic Profile of Corpsmembers

The statistics below compare member responses to nationally representative data. The demographics of California and Vermont are compared to the national data.

### Gender Identity

Both groups were predominantly female compared to the national average, with ECO members being much more female than the WSP members. WSP was 69% female and ECO 80%.

Gender	CA WSP N=16	VT ECO N=15	National Average*
Male	19%	13%	49.5%
Female	69%	80%	50.5%
Trans Male/Trans Man	0%	0%	
Trans Female/Trans Woman	0%	0%	
Gender Queer/Gender Non-Conforming	6%	7%	
Other	6%	0%	

\*Source: US Census Bureau (2022). Quick Facts. Retrieved from:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222>

### Race and Ethnicity

Participants were asked about their race and ethnicity based on the US Census categories. Both groups were predominantly White (87% each). The only other racial category selected by corpsmembers was two or more races (13% WSP and 7% ECO respectively).

Race	CA WSP N=15	VT ECO N=15	National Average*
White	87%	87%	76%
Black	0%	7%	14%
Asian or Asian American	0%	0%	6%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	0%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%	0%	<1%
Other	0%	0%	—
Two or More Races	13%	7%	3%

\*Source: US Census Bureau (2022). Quick Facts. Retrieved from:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222>



The WSP, which is located in California, had more Hispanic/Latino representation than the national average. No members of the ECO program in Vermont reported being Hispanic/Latino.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>CA WSP N=16</b>	<b>VT ECO N=14</b>	<b>National Average*</b>
Hispanic or Latina/o	31%	0%	20%
Not Hispanic or Latina/o	69%	100%	80%

\*Source: US Census Bureau (2022). Quick Facts. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222>

### Educational Attainment

Participants were highly educated compared to the general population. The overwhelming majorities (94% of WSP and 86% of ECO) had completed a 4-year (Bachelor's) degree compared to 19% of the general population ages 18-29. The proportion who had a professional (Master's) degree was also higher than the proportion of the national population with any kind of advanced degree.

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>CA WSP N=16</b>	<b>VT ECO N=14</b>	<b>National Average (ages 18-29)*</b>
Some Middle School/Middle School Graduate	0%	0%	–
Some High School	0%	0%	11%
High School Graduate	0%	0%	32%
Some College	0%	7%	25%
2-year degree/Associate's, Technical, or Vocational	0%	0%	8%
4-year (Bachelor's) Degree	94%	86%	19%
Professional (Master's)	6%	7%	4%
PhD, MD, JD	0%	0%	

### Age

Members were largely similar in age, with WSP members leaning slightly older than ECO members. WSP corpsmembers were all between the ages of 23 and 32, with an average age of 26. All ECO participants were between the ages of 21 and 34, with an average age of 24. Below are the age distributions by percentiles.

<b>Percentiles</b>	<b>CA WSP N=16</b>	<b>VT ECO N=14</b>
25th	23	23
50th	26	24
75th	27	25



## Acknowledgements

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## Partners & Sponsors





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