

Civic and social engagement are vital to creating resilient and enduring communities. Communities with higher rates of civic engagement report higher levels of social trust, cohesion, and resource sharing in addition to the mental and physical health benefits experienced by civically engaged individuals (Alberti et al. 2022). One of AmeriCorps' stated goals is to promote civic engagement among their program participants through service and volunteering (AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation 2024). According to Rose Johnson (2024) of the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE), 28% of Americans participated in formal volunteering in 2023, some of whom volunteered with AmeriCorps itself. Less is known about whether AmeriCorps participants are civically engaged beyond their formal service. This gap led to the central question of this report: To what extent are AmeriCorps participants civically engaged outside of their AmeriCorps programs?

To explore this and other research questions, the Center for Environment, Community, & Equity (CECE) DataCorps Fellows and the Workforce Development and 4R's research team sent a cohort of researchers and graduate fellows to four organizations across the country to study AmeriCorps disaster response efforts and volunteer motivations. We visited worksites, distributed surveys, and conducted focus groups at each location. This report focuses specifically on survey and focus group results pertaining to civic engagement among AmeriCorps participants. Lynggaard and Boje (2026) conceptualize civic engagement as activities that provide no immediate personal gain while promoting social equity, justice, and inclusivity. This broader definition is particularly useful because it recognizes forms of participation beyond formal volunteering. The findings indicate that AmeriCorps program participants are generally civically active in activities and organizations outside of their formal service. However, the level and forms of engagement vary across programs and appear to be influenced by participant demographics and organizational contexts.

EarthCorps

EarthCorps, located in Seattle, Washington, is a year-long leadership training program targeted towards young adults with an interest in ecological restoration and environmental justice. Corpsmembers participate in a multitude of conservation-focused projects such as invasive species removal, trail maintenance, and volunteer outreach.

The survey results collected from EarthCorps members indicated high levels of civic engagement and involvement. The survey results indicated that 14.3% of EarthCorps members had participated in a strike in the past year (see figure 1). Of the four AmeriCorps programs evaluated, this was the highest rate of participation in a strike. Similarly, EarthCorps members had the highest rate of general volunteering at 57.1%. EarthCorps participants reported high levels of protest as well as values-based consumer behavior such as boycotting. EarthCorps members also reported that, outside of their formal service, they are involved in environmental organizations (57.1%), sports teams (17.9%), and charity or humanitarian organizations (7.1%) (see figure 2). These findings suggest that EarthCorps participants' engagement extends beyond

their AmeriCorps service and may reflect the organization’s focus on environmental justice and stewardship.

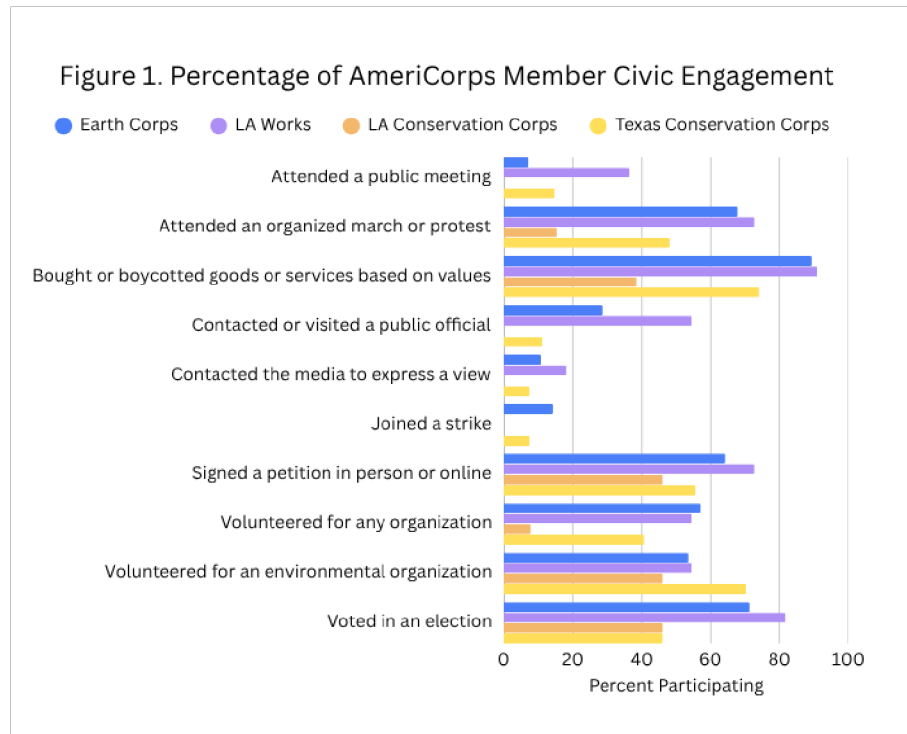


Figure 1

LA Works and Los Angeles Conservation Corps

In Los Angeles, members of two programs were surveyed, LA Works and the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC). LA Works aims to engage senior and retired volunteers in community outreach and volunteer programs. LACC is a workforce development program that operates with the goal of providing young adults with the skills and education to succeed while building community resilience. Although both organizations serve the Los Angeles community, survey results indicated markedly different patterns of civic engagement between the two groups. In a focus group, LA Works participants expressed greater interest in volunteerism following their retirement. In comparison, younger LACC participants reported significantly lower levels of civic engagement.

Compared to the other three groups surveyed, LA Works members reported the highest rates of attending public meetings, attending organized protests, boycotting based on values, visiting public officials, expressing views to the media, signing petitions, and voting (see figure 1). This pattern of high involvement was also reflected in the organizational membership reported by LA Works participants, 81% of whom reported being a member of either a charity or humanitarian organization, social club, sports team, or environmental organization. High rates of organizational membership further suggest that LA Works participants’ civic engagement extends beyond their volunteerism. In the focus group, many participants shared that leaving the workforce had given them the time to engage in more community service while also preserving social connections and a sense of purpose. These responses align with previous research showing

that retirees often expand their civic involvement upon leaving the workforce (Van den Bogaard et al. 2014).

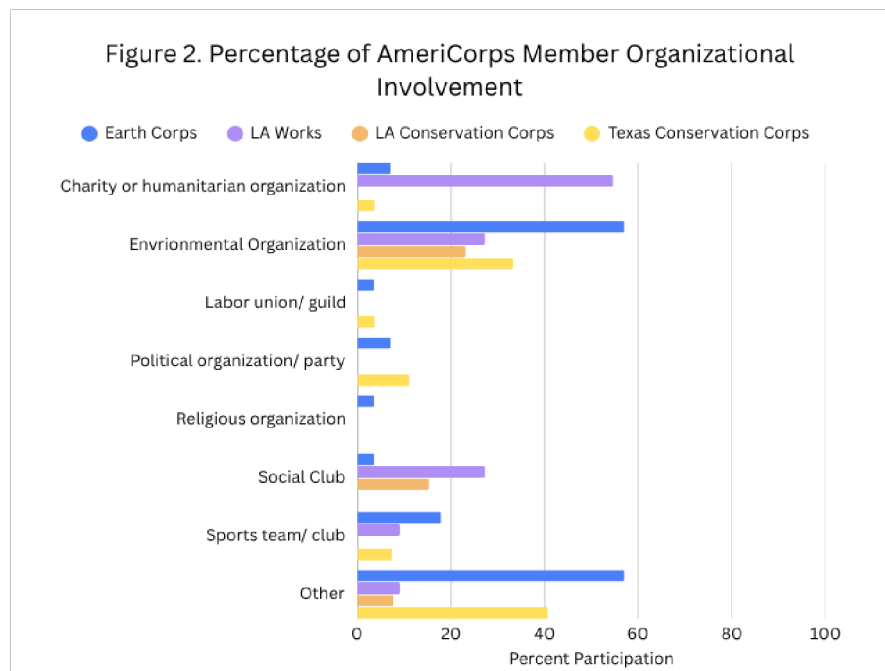


Figure 2

In contrast to the highly involved LA Works members, participants in LACC expressed substantially lower levels of participation in civic activities such as voting, attending public meetings, and contacting public officials (see figure 1). LACC members also indicated lower levels of organizational membership, with only 38% of survey respondents indicating that they were active members of groups such as sports teams, charities, or environmental organizations. Lower levels of engagement amongst LACC participants compared to LA Works members could potentially be explained by demographic differences, primarily age, as younger adults tend to be less civically engaged compared to older age groups (Finlay et al. 2011). According to Rose Johnson (2024) of the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation, individuals 18 to 24 have the lowest rates of voting in local elections, attending public meetings, and contacting public officials (Johnson, 2024).

Texas Conservation Corps

Texas Conservation Corps (TXCC) is a paid workforce development program that focuses on preparing young adults for careers in disaster response and conservation through training and experiential learning opportunities. Compared to the other three groups surveyed, TXCC participants demonstrated moderate civic engagement, with at least one member having participated in each engagement activity (see figure 1). Similar to LACC, TXCC participants indicated relatively low voting rates (46%), but unlike LACC, they reported high rates of protest participation (70%) and high rates of values-based consumer behavior (74%). TXCC members also reported that outside their formal service they are members of environmental organizations (33.3%), political organizations (11.1%), and sports teams or clubs (7.4%). The contrast between

TXCC and LACC suggests that age alone does not fully explain differences in civic engagement among young adults. Additional research is needed to fully understand how program differences or other factors shape patterns of civic participation.

Conclusion

Across the four organizations surveyed, participants consistently demonstrated civic engagement beyond their AmeriCorps service. However, the form and frequency of engagement varied by organizational context and demographic differences. EarthCorps participants expressed the highest levels of engagement in nearly all categories, possibly due to their program's emphasis on stewardship and environmental justice. Older adults at LA Works reported broad civic participation and organizational ties, while younger participants in TXCC and LACC engaged in fewer traditional civic activities such as attending public meetings, but remained active through other forms of engagement. These findings suggest that AmeriCorps' goal of fostering civic engagement amongst its participants is reflected across diverse programs, although engagement is impacted by participants' ages and organizational environments.

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