

Climate disasters in the U.S. are occurring with increasing frequency and intensity. The average number of extreme climate events occurring annually has increased from 3.3 during 1980-1989 to 19 events per year during 2015-2024 (NOAA, 2025). As extreme weather events continue to pose threats to the personal and economic well-being of those impacted by these disasters, AmeriCorps programs around the country have sought to deliver disaster-related services in the communities they serve to help them become more prepared and resilient to future climate events (Good et al., 2024). In this research report, I will argue that disaster training should be mandatory for all AmeriCorps team members because it enhances members' confidence in providing effective disaster relief in the communities they serve. In the following sections, I will illustrate the key role corpsmembers play in aiding their communities with disaster response and I will demonstrate how disaster training enhances members' self-efficacy and improves response time.

This summer, the DataCorps Fellows and the Workforce Development & the 4Rs research team visited various AmeriCorps sites to study the service corps workforce. Our team conducted surveys, site visits, and focus groups with members in corps programs based in Texas, California, and Washington to learn about what motivated them to join the corps, what experience they had with disasters, and what barriers they observed during implementation of services. While visiting with members of these corps programs, they described both their commitment to serving their communities and their experience putting their bodies on the line to provide much-needed support in times of crisis.

Throughout our site visits, we repeatedly heard from members that they often step in to provide disaster-support services when local governments are stretched to capacity and unable to meet community needs. Each of the corps programs we visited this summer delivered services related to disaster resilience and recovery, although the types of disasters members worked on during service varied by location, as seen in Figure 1.

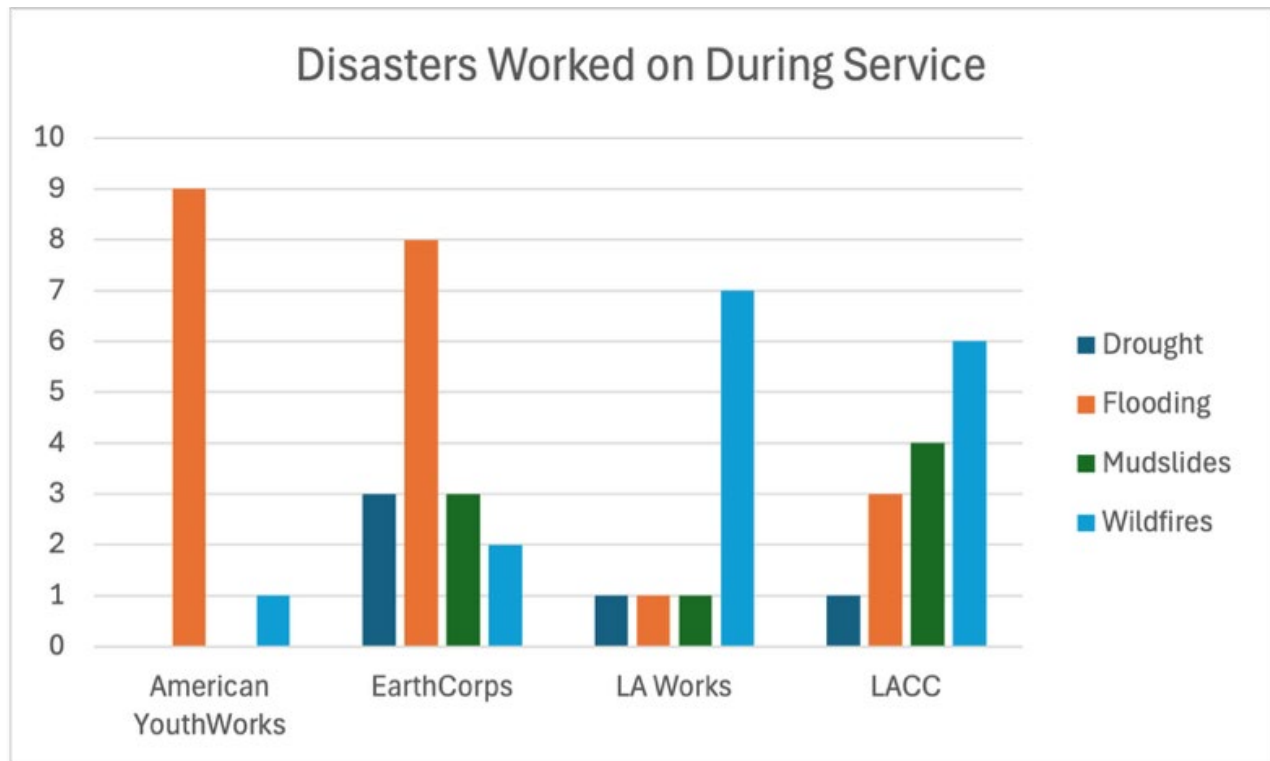


Figure 1

Corpsmembers in both Washington and Texas reported that flooding was the primary disaster they had experience with, although the flood-related services each program offered varied. In Seattle, EarthCorps members provided services that seemed to be primarily geared towards disaster resilience, whereas in Austin, American YouthWorks members conducted both disaster resilience and response services. Those serving either in the LA Conservation Corps (LACC) or the LA Works volunteer group reported that they primarily worked on wildfires during their service, which stands to reason given the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires that hit Southern California last year. Similar to Washington and Texas, we saw a difference in the disaster support services offered by the respective programs despite a shared context. Members in LACC provided immediate response services, and members in LA Works helped with longer term disaster recovery efforts.

Given corpsmembers' role in community resilience and response to disasters, I was particularly interested in disaster training offered to corpsmembers and whether these individuals felt adequately prepared to support communities with disasters. Overall, members from American YouthWorks and LACC had the highest rates of receiving disaster training. The amount of training reported in the survey is congruent with the responses from corpsmembers during focus groups and site visits. Upon speaking with corpsmembers, we found that the disaster training offered to members was dependent on location, available funding, authorized instructors, and length of service.

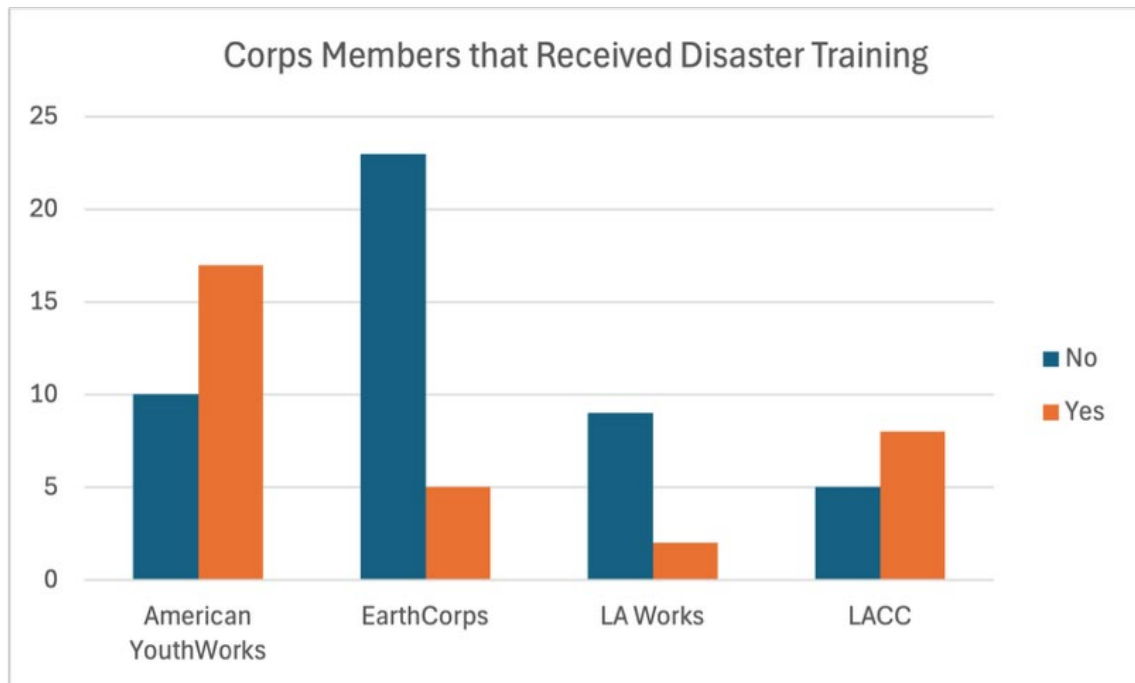


Figure 2

One example of the types of training offered to corpsmembers was shared by a participant in the LACC focus group who was part of a crew that delivered compost socks to prevent toxic water runoff to the soil and waterways. He explained that before he was able to assist with disaster response and recovery activities from the Eaton fires, he had to complete the HAZWOPER training, which is mandatory to ensure the safety of workers handling hazardous substances or conducting hazardous site clean-ups. Crew members also had to complete the OSHA safety courses and received hands-on instruction from the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, before they were able to safely deploy to do work related to wildfires (The Corps Network, 2026). While some corpsmembers received the training mentioned above, other members in the focus group noted that less training seemed to be offered this year and that training appeared to be restricted to members that had already served in the program for longer periods of time.

Considering that some corpsmembers did not receive disaster training, I was also interested in corpsmembers' self-efficacy in disaster response (i.e., the extent to which corpsmembers reported feeling prepared to respond to disasters). After surveying corpsmembers, a notable correlation was found between those that received disaster training and those that felt prepared to support their community with disaster response. Across all programs, 69% of those who received disaster training strongly or somewhat agreed that they could support their community post-disaster, while 40% of those who did not receive training strongly or somewhat agreed with this sentiment. Among those who did not receive disaster training, 33% strongly or

somewhat disagreed that they could support their community post-disaster, whereas only 6% of members who had received training expressed the same sentiment.

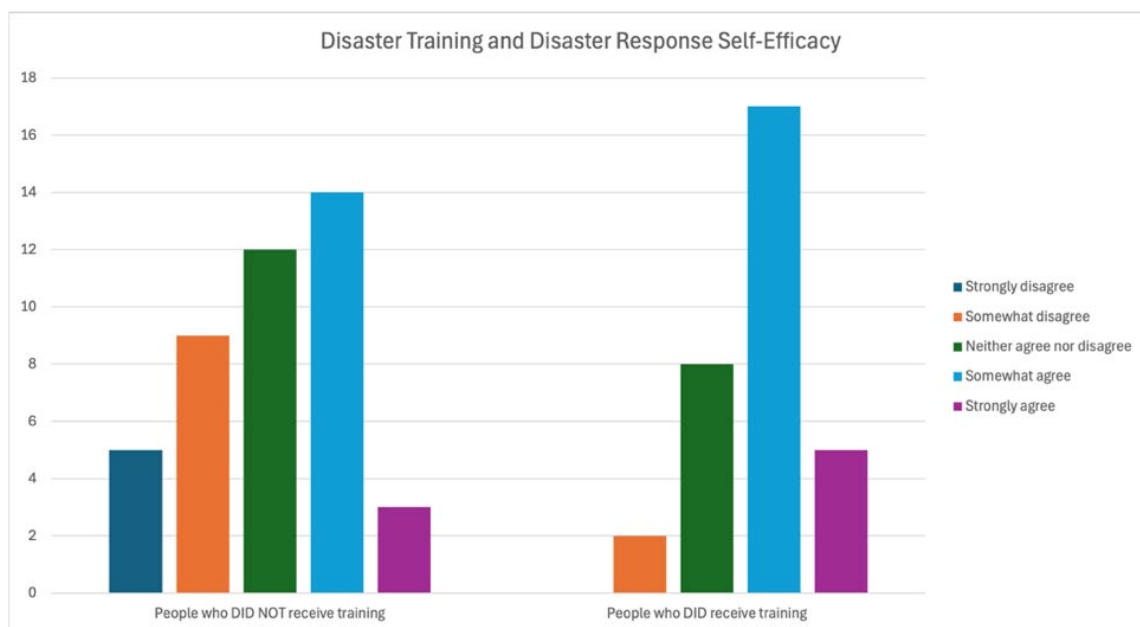


Figure 3

These findings are consistent with reported levels of self-efficacy of public health care workers in post-disaster contexts in the U.S. and globally. A recent study of Red Crescent relief workers showed significant increases in worker's self-efficacy in disaster contexts following the implementation of a rigorous disaster-management training program. Findings from this study showed that such training can lead to safer and faster emergency response post-disaster (Hosseini et al., 2025). Given that quick response times are critical in a crisis, a leader in one of the programs we visited said he hopes to create a disaster response unit comprised of fully trained members, so he could deploy them within 24 hours of disaster striking. He remarked that immediate deployment was not currently possible, as it takes more than a week to appropriately train and deploy crew members to disaster zones.

Throughout our site visits, we heard from corpsmembers who have worked on disasters ranging from floods to wildfires. The data shows that those who had received training during their service felt more confident in aiding their community post-disaster, a belief that was echoed during focus groups and site visits. Our evidence shows a correlation between training and higher levels of self-efficacy among corps members, which is supported by other research of public health care workers in disaster contexts. Despite the varying regional contexts in which disaster response and recovery activities took place, a common thread was clear: training is critical for corpsmembers' self-efficacy and rapid response times.

References

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