Whitepaper No.5

Comparative Results of Conservation Corpsmembers Experiences

Report from the WCC, EC, LACC, and TXCC Member Surveys

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Executive Summary

How are service corps programs supporting communities, training environmental workers, and creating a disaster response workforce? 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 in 2026 from members of four different youth service corps programs that train and employ environmentally interested youth at the start of their working life. The results, which compare member responses across the four 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 after disaster strikes.

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This research was conducted as part of the "Workforce Development & the 4Rs" Project, which is a project of the Center for Environment, Community, & Equity at American University.

Note on Methods

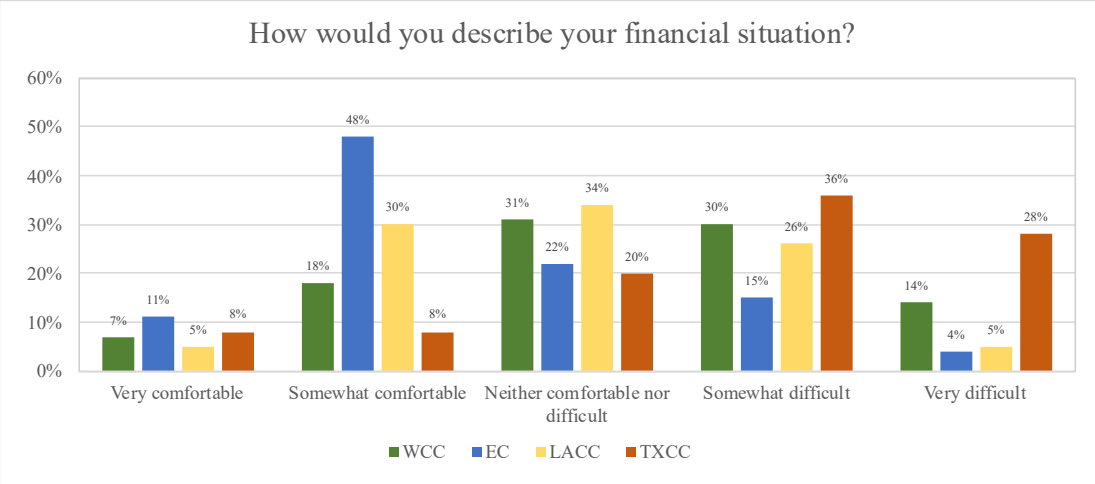
The Workforce Development & the 4Rs research team conducted site visits and focus groups with four separate youth-focused corps in summer 2026: Washington Conservation Corps (WCC), the Washington-based EarthCorps (EC), Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC), and Texas Conservation Corps (TXCC). Each program was asked to share a voluntary survey with all their current members. The online survey was distributed through Qualtrics in two ways: 1) the programs shared an anonymous link with all current members, and 2) the project team shared the link during an in-person focus group. Data were collected on a rolling basis: WCC was surveyed between April 9-June 8, 2026; EC was surveyed on June 11, 2026; LACC participants were surveyed on June 4, 2026, with an additional 61 corpsmembers taking the survey between July 8-July 10, 2026; and TXCC members were surveyed from June 10-18, 2026. The response rates ranged from 30% to 79% (30% for the WCC [n=74], 79% for the EC [n=27], 30% for the LACC [n=74, LACC], and 42% for the TXCC [n=25]). The results presented in this report are based on comparative analyses of these samples.

General Background on Survey Respondents

Corpsmembers were asked how long they had been working with their respective corps and the responses varied substantially. At the time the WCC corpsmembers took the survey, a majority had served for between six months and two years (84%), while eight percent of participants had served less than six months and eight percent had been serving for over two years. About three-quarters of EC members had been serving for less than six months and a quarter of participants had been serving for a period between six months and two years. Similarly, three-quarters of TXCC corpsmembers had been serving for less than six months and a small number had been serving for two years or more (5%). LACC corpsmembers had a larger spread of experiences with their program: half had been serving for less than six months at the time of the survey, about two-fifths had been serving between six months and two years, and a tenth had been serving for two years or more.

We asked corpsmembers to reflect on their personal financial situation. Respondents could select answers on a five-point scale from "Very comfortable" to "Very difficult." WCC and LACC corpsmembers reported relatively normally distributed financial security, with the substantial majority of participants from WCC (79%) and LACC (90%) selecting responses between "Somewhat comfortable" and "Somewhat difficult." On the other hand, respondents from EC recorded disproportionately high levels of financial security – with three-fifths of participants selecting either "Very comfortable" or "Somewhat comfortable." TXCC participants reported much less financial security, with two-thirds of them selecting either "Somewhat difficult" or "Very difficult." These distributions are presented in the figure below.

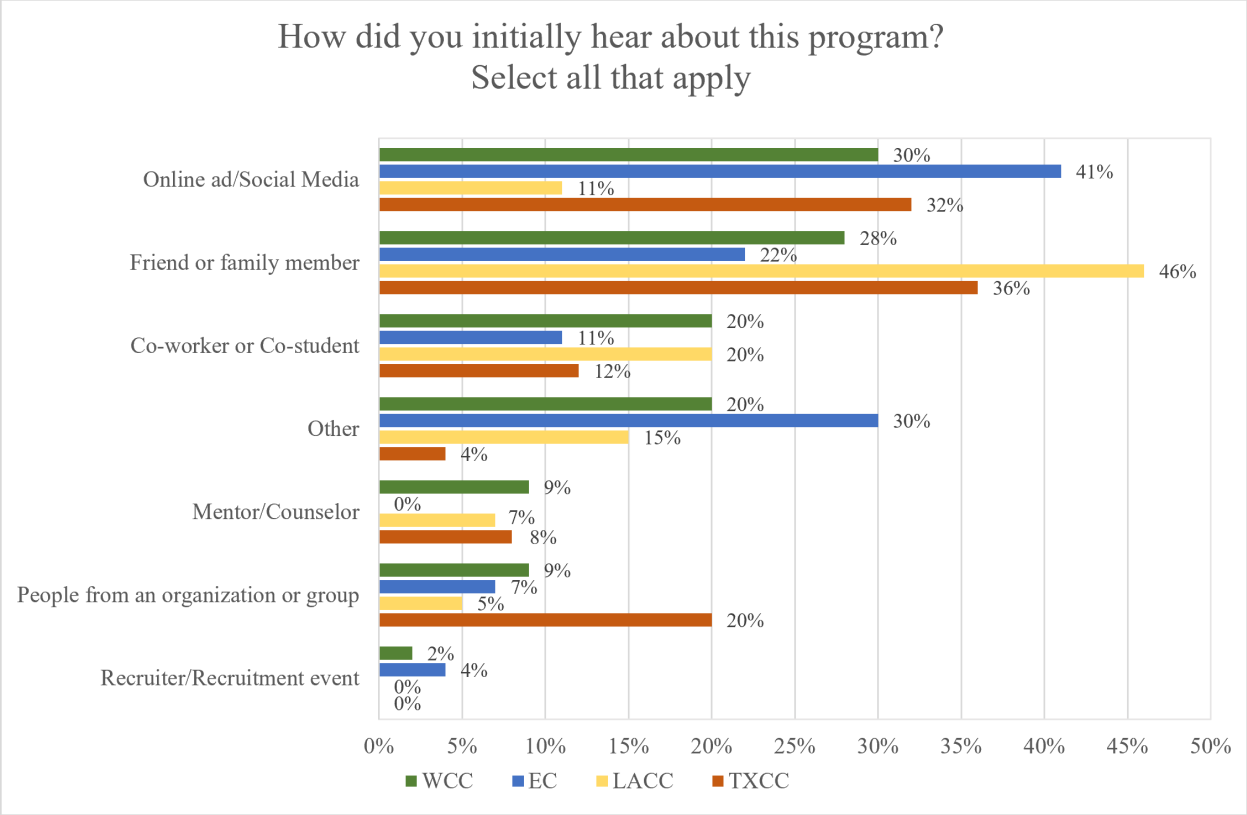
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How did participants learn about the program?

Participants were asked to select all of the ways they had heard about the corps programs from a set list of options. The most common option selected for members from LACC and TXCC was hearing about the programs through personal connections. Almost half of LACC and one-third of TXCC reported first hearing about the program from a friend or family member. Even for the other corps surveyed, personal connections played a significant role: about a quarter (28% for WCC and 22% for EC) of members reported first hearing about their program from friends or family. Hearing about the program from an online ad/social media was the most common answer among EC corpsmembers (41%) and a common answer among TXCC (32%) and WCC (30%). However, only a tenth of LACC corpsmembers reported having first heard about their program from an online ad or social media. A small number of responses also included hearing about the programs from co-workers or co-students, and a few responses indicated first learning of the program from a mentor or counselor. Almost a third of EC respondents reported initially hearing about their program from an online job board (all respondents from EC that selected "Other" wrote in an answer indicating they had initially head about EC from an online job board). The figure below displays the distributions for each of the 4 groups' responses:

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

A majority of participants in all programs reported not having known anyone who was currently participating in the program to which they applied. However, the most common existing connection respondents reported was a "Friend or family member," with two-fifths of TXCC members, a third of LACC members, and a quarter of WCC members selecting this response. Of the people participants had known, it was also common for corpsmembers to have known a co-worker or co-student who had previously served in the corps (21% of WCC, 7% of EC, 14% of LACC, and 8% of TXCC respectively).

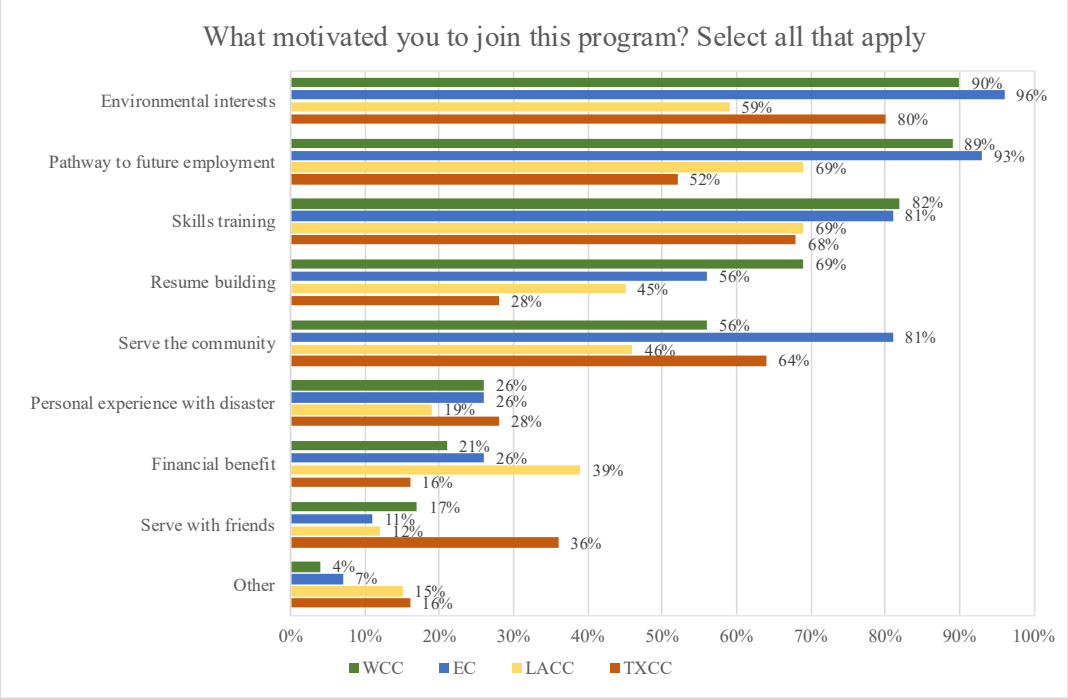
Did you know anyone who is currently participating or previously participated in this program when you applied? (Select all that apply)	**WCC N=71**	**EC N=27**	**LACC N=74**	**TXCC N=25**
Co-worker or co-student	21%	7%	14%	8%
Friend or family member	23%	11%	32%	40%
Mentor or counselor	0%	0%	3%	4%
Person/people from an organization or group (e.g. environmental group, service group, religious group, social media channel)	0%	0%	1%	4%
Other	0%	4%	1%	0%
Did not know anyone	61%%	78%	54%	52%

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Motivations for Joining the Corps

Participants were asked what motivated them to join the corps and were shown a list of possible options. They reported a variety of motivations for serving. The most common motivation for members across every program was "Environmental interests" (90% for WCC, 96% for EC, 59% for LACC, and 80% for TXCC). Otherwise, most corpsmembers reported motivations related to their employability and careers, including, pathway to future employment, skills training, and resume building. A majority of corpsmembers in each program were motivated by a pathway to future employment (WCC 89%, EC 93%, LACC 69%, and TXCC 52%). Across all programs, skills training was a strong motivator (WCC 82%, EC 81%, LACC 69%, TXCC 68%). However, for respondents from the TXCC, resume building was only reported as a motivating factor for a quarter of participants compared to almost double that proportion at other corps programs (WCC 69%, EC 56%, and LACC 45%). TXCC members also reported a higher likelihood of being motivated to serve with friends – they were over twice as likely (36%) compared to the other corps programs (17% for WCC, 11% for EC, and 12% for LACC). Serving the community was another answer that prompted significant variation among programs. While four-fifths of EC participants identified serving their community as a motivating factor, less than half of LACC respondents (46%) selected that same option, with both WCC (56%) and TXCC (64%) answering at rates somewhere in between.

Less common motivations across all programs included personal experience with disaster and financial benefit. All four programs selected "Experience with disaster" as a motivation at similar rates, with about a quarter of respondents selecting that answer (26% WCC, 26% EC, 19% LACC, and 28% TXCC). Two-fifths of LACC participants selected "Financial benefit" as a motivation compared to approximately one-fifth of respondents at the other three corps programs (21% WCC, 26% EC, and 16% TXCC).

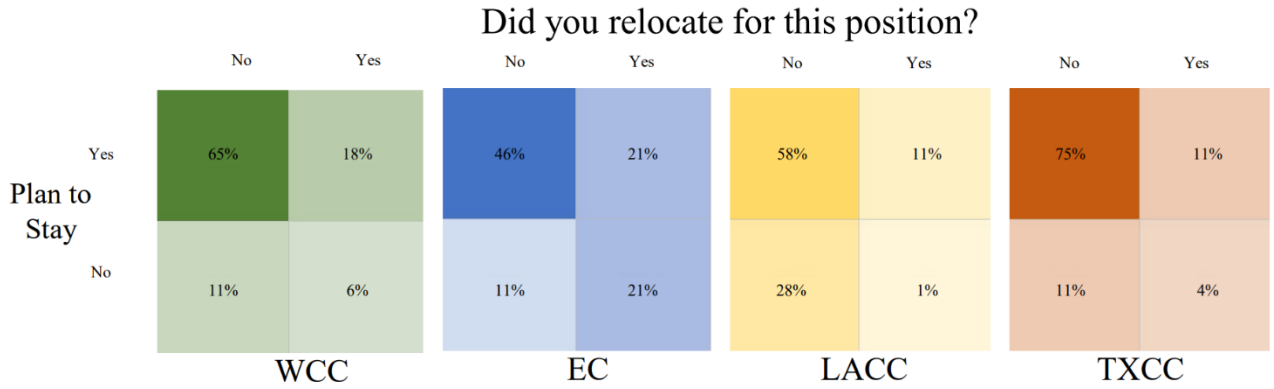


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Did corpsmembers relocate for their service and do they plan on staying?

Participants were asked whether they had relocated for their work with the corps and if they intended to stay in the area after their service term ended. Only a quarter of WCC, and about a tenth of LACC and TXCC said they had relocated to serve in the corps, while almost half of EC members (44%) said they had relocated for their position. However, most participants across all programs reported that they planned to stay in the area (83% of WCC, 70% of EC, 68% of LACC, and 84% of TXCC).

The figure below displays the frequency of each of the four categories of responses: participants who did not relocate but plan to stay, those who relocated and plan to stay, those who did not relocate and do not plan to stay, and those who relocated and do not plan to stay.



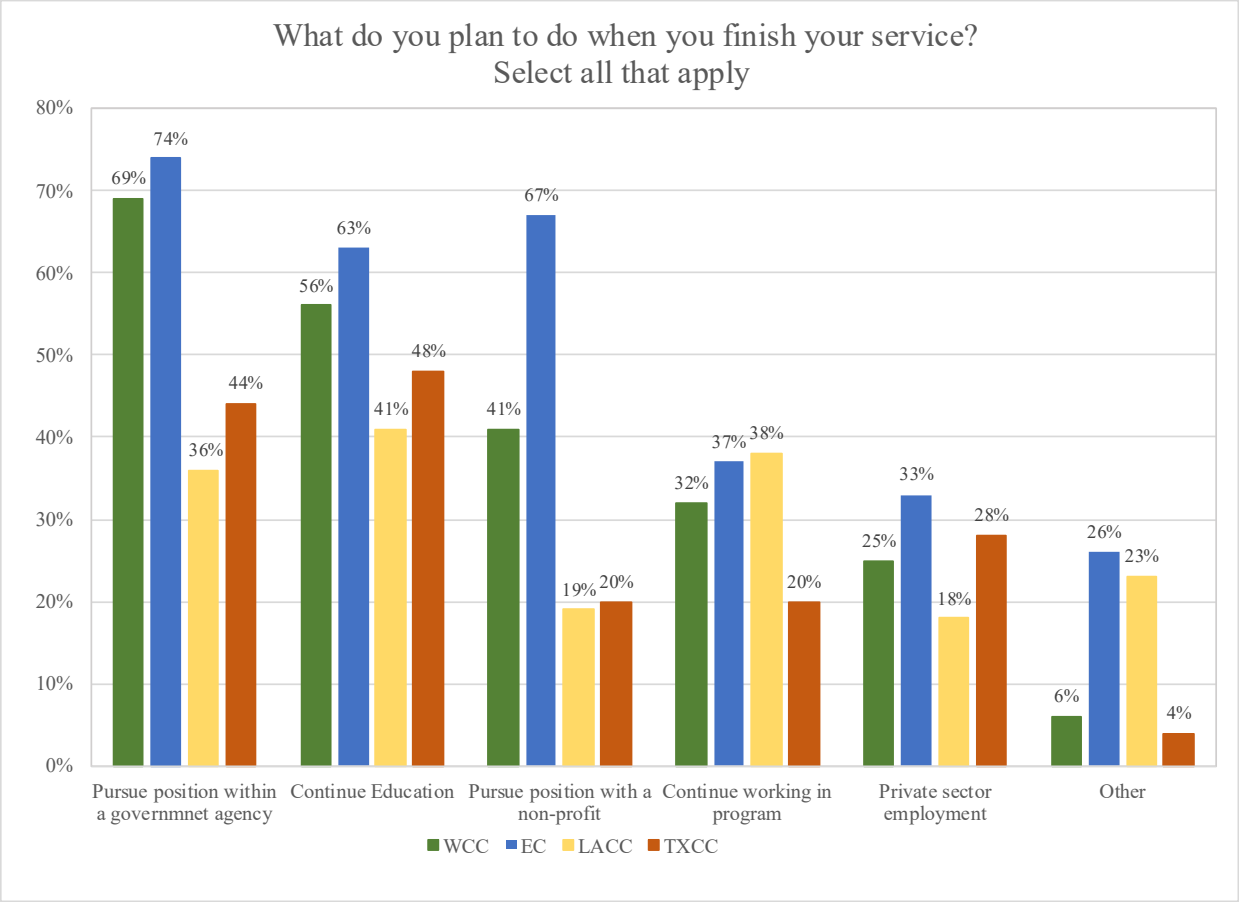
*Differences between the percentages in the figure and those listed above are due to some respondents not answering one of the questions and not being included in the figure.

What are participants' plans after their service?

In addition to asking corpsmembers about whether they planned to stay in the community, we also asked what corpsmembers planned to do after their service was completed. The answers to this question varied considerably by program. The most common responses to this question for the corps from Washington State (WCC and EC) were that members planned to continue their education or pursue a position within a government agency or non-profit organization. A majority of participants in both programs (69% WCC and 74% EC) reported planning to pursue a position within a government agency, while only a third of LACC and less than half of TXCC corpsmembers selected that option. Continuing education was slightly more popular among LACC (41%) and TXCC (48%); however, WCC and EC members still reported planning to continue their education at higher rates (56% and 63%, respectively).

A similar variation emerged in participants' answers to whether their plans for after service included working for a non-profit organization. Whereas two-fifths of WCC members and two-thirds of EC members selected that they planned to pursue non-profit work, only one-fifth of LACC and TXCC answered that non-profit work was part of their plans for the future. Additionally, many participants in WCC, EC, and LACC selected that they were planning on continuing to work in their program (32%, 37%, and 38% respectively), while only one-fifth of TXCC corpsmembers selected "Continue working in program" after their term completed.

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How have disasters influenced corpsmembers' experiences?

We asked participants what types of disasters they have experienced in the past 6 months and they were permitted to select all answers that applied. The most common disasters for respondents were flooding and wildfires, with over half WCC corpsmembers responding they had experienced them (53% for flooding, 51% for wildfires). Almost half of TXCC respondents had experienced flooding and about a third of LACC corpsmembers responded that they had experienced wildfire.

Participants were also asked to report what types of disasters they had worked on while serving in the corps. The most common type of disaster is flooding, with almost half of the WCC corpsmembers we surveyed reporting that they had responded to flooding. This finding is unsurprising, as Washington State faced significant flooding in the fall and winter of 2025. Similarly, the city of Los Angeles experienced significant wildfires in 2025 and a third of corpsmembers reported having worked on wildfires.

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What types of disasters have you experienced? (Select all that apply)	WCC N=70	EC N=27	LACC N=74	TXCC N=24
Drought	33%	15%	19%	29%
Flooding	53%	33%	15%	46%
Hurricanes	11%	0%	0%	0%
Mudslides	19%	4%	13%	0%
Tornadoes	9%	4%	7%	4%
Wildfires	51%	4%	38%	0%

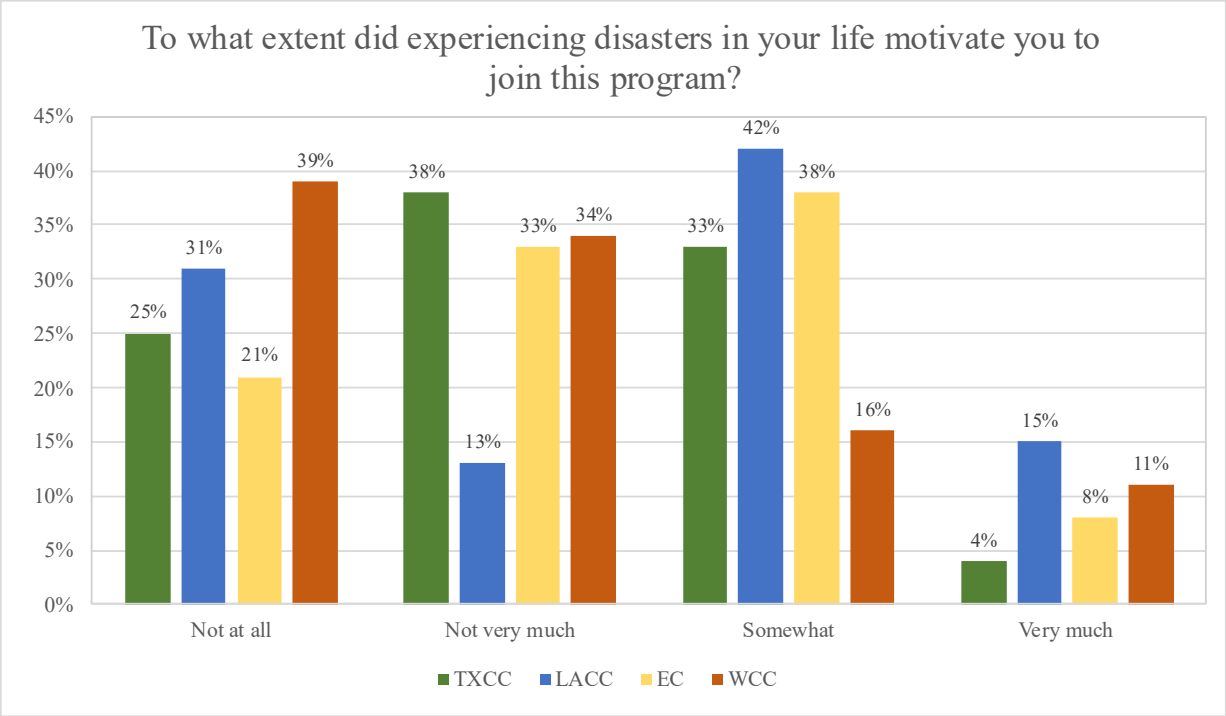
What types of disasters have you worked on during your time with the corps? (Select all that apply)	WCC N=70	EC N=27	LACC N=74	TXCC N=24
Drought	3%	11%	14%	0%
Flooding	43%	30%	21%	33%
Hurricanes	6%	0%	0%	0%
Mudslides	3%	11%	11%	0%
Tornadoes	1%	0%	0%	0%
Wildfires	6%	7%	32%	4%

To what extent did experiencing disasters in your life motivate you to join this program?

Our survey also asked participants to rank on a scale of "Not at all" to "Very much" what extent experiencing disasters had motivated their decision to join their corps program. For EC and TXCC, responses fell in an approximately normal distribution. However, for LACC, more than half responded either "Somewhat" or "Very much" (57%), while for WCC, three-quarters answered either "Not very much" or "Not at all." Despite WCC corpsmembers reporting an overall higher level of experience with disaster, LACC participants were more motivated by their experiences with disaster.



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Civic Engagement and Environmental Attitudes

Participants were asked to report about the civic activities they had participated in during the past year. The results show that LACC members were less civically engaged when compared to the members of the other programs. Members of the other programs, however, were much more civically engaged across almost all categories when compared to the national average. The only category in which members of the three other programs—WCC, EC, and TXCC—were not significantly more engaged was for attending a public meeting to discuss a local issue. Corpsmembers from these three programs were at least five times as likely to attend protests compared to the national average (10%), with over half of each program selecting that they had attended at least one protest or demonstration in the past year (51% WCC, 70% EC, and 54% TXCC). When asked if they had bought or boycotted products or services based on the values or business practices of a company, corpsmembers overwhelming said that they had, in comparison with a national sample of Americans (80% WCC, 93% EC, and 71% TXCC vs 30%). Corpsmembers from these three programs were also twice as likely to have signed a petition in the last year compared to the national average (58% WCC, 67% EC, and 63% TXCC, vs 32%). Additionally, while only six percent of the US population had volunteered to do trail maintenance, park cleanups, tree planting, or another environmental project over a similar timeframe, corpsmembers from these programs were ten times as likely to report having done the same (54% WCC, 56% EC, and 75% TXCC). Volunteering for an environmental project was also the most common response for LACC corpsmembers (33%), despite their generally lower levels of civic engagement.

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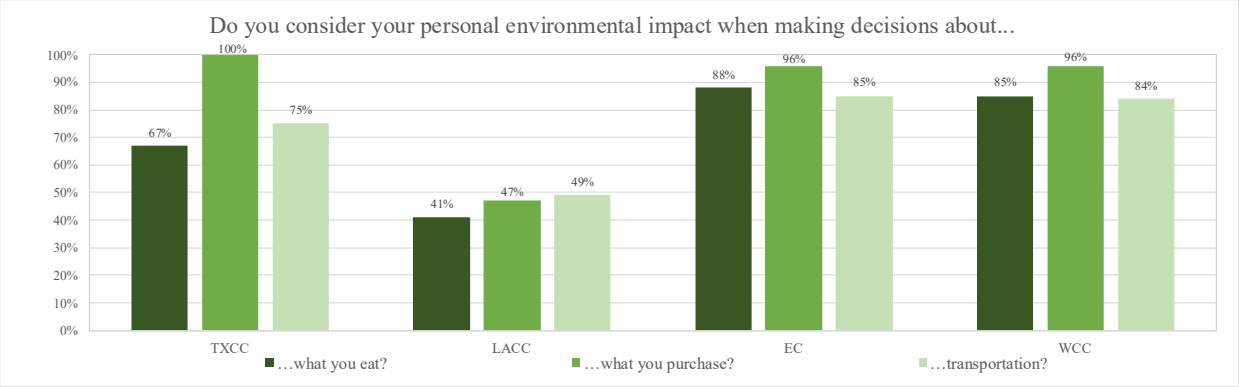
In the past year, have you… (Select all that apply)	WCC N=65	EC N=27	LACC N=70	TXCC N=24	National Average
Attended a public meeting, such as a zoning or school board meeting, to discuss a local issue	16%	7%	6%	17%	13%*
Attended an organized protest, march, or demonstration of any kind	51%	70%	10%	54%	10%*
Bought or boycotted products or services based on values or business practices of a company	80%	93%	14%	71%	30%*
Contacted or visited a public official – at any level of government – to express your opinion	46%	30%	4%	17%	17%*
Joined a strike	12%	15%	3%	13%	--
Contacted the media to express a view	3%	11%	0%	8%	6%**
Signed a petition online or in person	58%	67%	19%	63%	32%**
Volunteered for any organization or association	52%	59%	10%	50%	19%*
Volunteered to do trail maintenance, park cleanups, tree planting, or another environmental project	54%	56%	33%	75%	6%
Voted in an election if eligible	80%	74%	21%	50%	56%*
None of the above	3%	0%	37%	0%	--

*National averages are obtained from a nationally representative survey distributed by YouGov in October-November 2025 and commissioned by the Center for Environment, Community & Equity at American University.
**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.

Environmental Beliefs

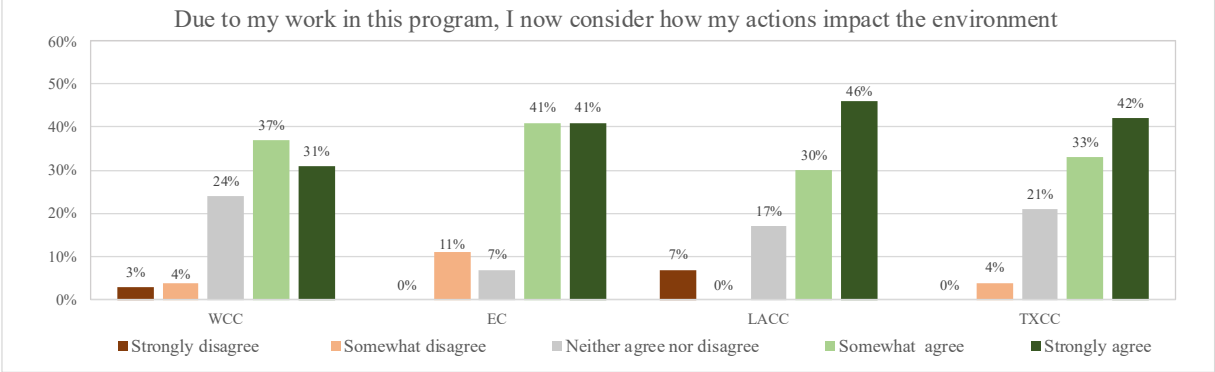
Participants were asked whether they consider their personal environmental impact in three aspects of daily life. A large majority of respondents from WCC, EC, and TXCC said that they considered their environmental impact when making decisions about what they eat (85% of WCC, 88% of EC, and 67% of TXCC, respectively). An even higher percentage of respondents from those three programs said that they considered how their purchasing decisions impact the environment (96% of WCC, 96% of EC, and 100% of TXCC). A majority of the members we surveyed from these corps programs also agreed that they consider the environment when making decisions about transportation (84% of WCC, 85% of EC, and 75% of TXCC). In contrast to these programs, LACC corpsmembers reported much lower levels. Across all measures, less than half of members reported acting based on their environmental beliefs.

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How has corpsmembers' work in their program changed their environmental consciousness?

Corpsmembers reported that their respective programs had a considerable influence on their perspectives regarding how their actions impact their environment. We asked corpsmembers to rank on a scale of "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" how much they agree with the following statement: "Due to my work in this program, I now consider how my actions impact the environment." Across all programs, corpsmembers reported high levels of agreement. The vast majority of corpsmembers selected either "Somewhat agree" or "Strongly agree" (68% of WCC, 82% of EC, 76% of LACC, and 75% of TXCC).



Demographic Profile of Corpsmembers

The statistics below compare the corpsmember samples to nationally representative data. It is important to note that the demographics of the States in which the programs operate and from which they draw the majority of their members may differ from the national population data.

Gender

Compared to national averages and to each other, the programs we studied were demographically varied. While WCC and EC were majority female (50% for WCC and 62% for EC), LACC and TXCC were each about two-thirds male. In WCC, EC, and TXCC a little over a tenth of members identified as Gender Queer/Gender Non-Conforming.

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Gender	WCC N=66	EC N=26	LACC N=71	TXCC N=24	National Average*
Male	26%	23%	66%	67%	49.5%
Female	50%	62%	28%	17%	50.5%
Trans Male/Trans Man	5%	4%	1%	0%	
Trans Female/Trans Woman	0%	0%	1%	4%	
Gender Queer/Gender Non-Conforming	15%	12%	1%	13%	
Other	2%	0%	1%	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 US Census categories. A high percentage of WCC corpsmembers selected "White" as their racial identity (85%). In addition, the majority of members of EC and TXCC identified as White. Members of LACC, in contrast, were much more likely to select other racial categories. The most common response for LACC members was "Other" and four-fifths of members selected "Hispanic or Latino/a" as an identifier of their ethnicity. This percentage is much higher than the national average. Corpsmembers from TXCC were twice as likely to select "Hispanic or Latino/a" to identify their ethnicity when compared to the national average (39% vs 20% respectively).

Race	WCC N=67	EC N= 25	LACC N=41	TXCC N=24	National Average*
White	85%	72%	15%	63%	76%
Black	0%	12%	27%	4%	14%
Asian or Asian American	3%	4%	0%	4%	6%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%	0%	10%	8%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%	0%	2%	0%	<1%
Other	0%	0%	34%	8%	–
Two or More Races	6%	12%	12%	13%	3%

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

Ethnicity	WCC N=66	EC N=24	LACC N=70	TXCC N=23	National Average*
Hispanic or Latino/a	6%	13%	83%	39%	20%
Not Hispanic or Latino/a	94%	88%	17%	61%	80%

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

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Educational Attainment

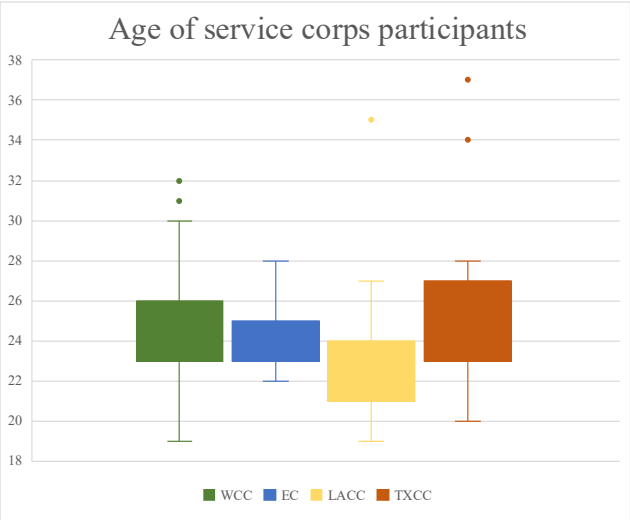
Participants were asked to report their highest levels of education. For the programs in Washington State, the majority of participants had attained a 4-year degree or more (76% of WCC and 96% of EC). In comparison, the majority of LACC corpsmembers reported that they had attained "High School Graduate or less" (72%) and almost half of TXCC corpsmembers selected "Some College" as their highest level of educational attainment. It is likely that this percentage is due, in part, to the fact that TXCC offers programs that take place over the summer so students may work as corpsmembers between semesters of college.

Education Level	**WCC N=66**	**EC N=27**	**LACC N=68**	**TXCC N=23**	**National Average***
High School Graduate or less	11%	0%	72%	13%	38%
Some College	8%	4%	22%	48%	15%
2-year Degree/Associate's, Technical, or Vocational	6%	0%	1%	0%	10%
4-year (Bachelor's) Degree	74%	96%	3%	39%	23%
Graduate Degree (Master's, PhD, MD, JD)	2%	0%	1%	0%	14%

*Source: US Census Bureau (2023). Newsroom. Retrieved from: https://www.census.gov/newsroom/pressreleases/2023/educational-attainment-data.html.

Age

Members of all programs were of relatively similar age ranges. LACC participants were the youngest with a mean of 22 years old, compared to WCC at 24 years old, EC at 23 years old, and TXCC at 25 years old. The age distributions for the four corps programs are displayed below in percentiles. EC was the narrowest in age distribution, which tracks with the program's marketing as a post-undergraduate program to launch young professionals into environmental careers.



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