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Launching AmeriCorps

First-Year Implementation of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993

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PREFACE

This report documents the first year of implementing the AmeriCorps program, which has recently become a target of the broad political pressure to reduce the scale and involvement of the federal government. AmeriCorps in fact is a relatively small undertaking—its $579 million appropriated for fiscal year 1995 is about .00036 of the $1.6 trillion federal budget. And it has the laudable aims of fostering voluntarism and service across the nation, and providing benefits to local communities and service participants alike. Its modest scale and benign goals little explain the notice and controversy it is has engendered.

Yet the signs of that controversy are clear enough. In March 1995, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut 72 percent of the budget of the Corporation for National Service—the newly established federal entity that manages AmeriCorps. This reduction would have effectively shut down AmeriCorps and the Corporation. The more modest cuts passed by the Senate, lowering FY 1995 funding to the previous year's levels, in effect would have reduced the program slightly below its first-year scale. There will be no effect in the short run, however, for President Clinton has vetoed the "rescission" package in which the cuts were included.

Whatever the reasons for the marked (and somewhat disproportionate) censure AmeriCorps is now receiving, it is clear that concerns about political support have been a consistent theme in its short history. From the point when the enabling legislation (the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993) passed—following an unexpected filibuster and a series of legislative compromises—the Act's framers and implementers were persuaded that maintaining or increasing support for programs and activities supported by the legislation was a basic and major priority. They acted to build a record of quick, tangible successes that would convince skeptics in Congress that a "national" service program could work, and that the idea merited continuing support.

This report traces how those decisions played out, the trade-offs and sacrifices they led to, the roles played by the Corporation and the states, and the process and results of implementation in the first year. We conclude that the considerable accomplishments in AmeriCorps' first year resulted from the efforts of both the Corporation and the states working in partnership—a partnership not without limitations and problems, but effective in moving AmeriCorps from idea to operating program with notable speed.

Our findings, the report makes clear, pertain to AmeriCorps' first year of existence, a turbulent phase in the life of any new program, and do not support broad and hard conclusions. In the current environment, particularly, there are risks that our findings will be construed as clear evidence of the value of a federally led partnership with states; or serve as grist for those who argue against a prominent and directive federal role in such traditionally local activities as voluntarism or community service. The report supports neither assertion. Instead, we hope, its facts and findings will help inform (indeed, encourage) sound debate about national service, and the appropriate roles of government at all levels in promoting it.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report chronicles how states carried out the first year implementation of AmeriCorps, the signature component of the 1993 National and Community Service Trust Act. The chronicle, in turn, is part of a larger study being undertaken by Public/Private Ventures, which addresses a broader issue: the effectiveness of the 1993 Act in creating or expanding national service activities in the U.S., particularly the role states play in that process.

The first-year report is based on three major sources of information:

- Extensive interviews with staff of the Corporation for National Service, with congressional staff, and with other national figures knowledgeable about the legislation and AmeriCorps;

- Field work in nine states that carried through the implementation of AmeriCorps:

California	Florida	North Carolina
Colorado	Maryland	Washington
Connecticut	New York	West Virginia

  Our work included interviews with commission directors, commissioners, and other individuals in each state who were involved in service in general, and with AmeriCorps in particular; and

- Review of documents, regulations, proposals and other written material that formed the record of AmeriCorps' first year.

BACKGROUND

In the 1980s, a burgeoning service movement worked to increase interest in service programs, and played an important role in generating support for service legislation at the national level—which culminated in the 1990 National and Community Service Act. This legislation recognized states as the administrative level for selecting and funding most programs.

The state role was formalized in the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, which established the new AmeriCorps program. States, through newly established commissions, and with significantly greater funding, would assume broad responsibility in planning and managing service programs funded by the new Act (particularly AmeriCorps), and over time, were expected to take on a large role in building infrastructure and support for service.

The new legislation contained a number of other key features as well:

- An intricate funding formula to support national-scale AmeriCorps programs (selected at the federal level), and provide funds to states through two mechanisms: formula-based allocations that each state received on the basis of population; and a pool of funds for which states applied on a competitive basis;

- Support for program operations, which included stipended service positions, to be filled by the participants in the funded programs, called AmeriCorps members;

- Funding for "education awards," available to AmeriCorps members after they serve in programs for a stipulated period of time—the hallmark of the AmeriCorps program; and

- Continuing support for previously funded service-learning and service programs at both the K-12 and higher education levels, as well as support for the Points of Light Foundation and some smaller initiatives.

The entity created to carry out the Act's provisions was the Corporation for National Service. The Corporation replaced the previous Commission for National and Community Service, and absorbed the staff and responsibilities of the federally funded ACTION programs (which included both senior service programs and the long-established VISTA program).

Early on, the Corporation made important choices regarding the pace of program start-up and the speed with which it would enroll participants—choices intended to establish an early record of success and results that would work in its favor when the legislation came up for reauthorization, and indeed when it came up for second-year funding decisions.

These choices are important to note, for they reflect an underlying reality: political and popular support for national service as an ideal is usually widespread, but is far less certain or strong when it comes to actually funding service programs. When such programs are up for public funding, underlying differences emerge about what service is, what forms it should take, who should be encouraged to participate, and what the proper role of the public sector is in encouraging or supporting it.

The 1993 Act in fact passed with but meager bipartisan support, and at a modest level of funding below that originally requested. Its framers were concerned that the new Act prove itself during its initial three-year authorization period.[1]

The Corporation thus concentrated its energies on getting programs operational and putting a large number of participants (its original target was 20,000) in place by early Fall 1994 (only a year after the bill was signed), when the congressional appropriation process for the coming fiscal year would wind up. For that to happen, regulation-writing and review, grant-making and program start-up had to be scheduled on the most optimistic timetable possible—and that timetable has to be maintained with minimal slippage. The first year was an intense, compressed, hectic—at times frenetic—experience for all involved.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings in this report are limited to the broad patterns discernible in the first-year implementation phase. Since, in fact, only a limited number of programs started up in our nine study states during the first year (in most cases, toward the end of the year), we cannot address such pivotal questions as the kinds of programs, the communities they serve, and the individuals who participate; these issues will be examined more fully in a subsequent phase of this project.

The most basic and central finding is that accelerated and hectic pace of the first year, which resulted from the decision to make program start-up a paramount goal, dominated the overall proceedings. Since both the Corporation and the states were so caught up in first-year implementation, it is difficult to draw hard conclusions about which policies or procedures worked and which did not. Apparent successes or failures could just as well reflect the highly compressed nature of the start-up phase as they could the intrinsic value or effectiveness of the policies and practices themselves.

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[1] In March 1995, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut 72 percent of the budget of the Corporation for National Service—the newly established federal entity that manages AmeriCorps—which would have, in effect, shut down AmeriCorps and the Corporation. The more modest cuts passed by the Senate, lowering FY 1995 funding to the previous year's levels, in effect would have reduced the program slightly below its first-year scale. The votes will have no effect in the short run, however, for President Clinton has vetoed the "rescission" package they were part of.

Whatever the reasons for the marked (and somewhat disproportionate) censure AmeriCorps is now receiving, it is clear that concerns about political support have been a consistent theme in its short history. From the point when the enabling legislation (the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993) passed—following an unexpected filibuster and a series of legislative compromises—the Act's framers and implementers were persuaded that maintaining or increasing support for programs and activities supported by the legislation was a basic and major priority.

In the context of that overarching conclusion, the report presents these main findings:

1. Federal-State Balance and Responsibilities: Although states are envisioned in the legislation as the key level for planning and carrying out AmeriCorps, the Corporation for National Service maintained an extensive role in shaping AmeriCorps, beyond the typically limited administrative functions of rule-writing, grant-making, oversight and management. Rather than being clear, distinct and well-understood, the roles of the Corporation and the states were in flux, causing some degree of tension and confusion.

The Corporation views its role as different from that of a typical administrative agency. It has energetically sought to establish and promote its version of national service, centered on the rubric of "getting things done." It stressed to states the importance of identifying or developing programs that were results-focused, and in both reviews of individual programs (which the Corporation organized and carried out to an unusually extensive degree) and negotiations with states, Corporation staff were often forthright in expressing their perceptions about specific programs.

The Corporation also had the explicit aim of making AmeriCorps' constituent state programs visible and recognized as part of a *national* program. It specified common areas of training for AmeriCorps members in all the state programs. It promulgated a national logo for AmeriCorps; conducted a national recruitment program for potential AmeriCorps members; designed and distributed "uniforms" for all state AmeriCorps members; organized and ran a national kick-off day for AmeriCorps (in September 1994), when its first members were formally sworn in by the President; and planned specific dates when AmeriCorps members in all the states would participate in signature projects.

The posture of the Corporation is unusual among federal agencies charged with the distribution of grant funds. It was activist in its approach to making grants; it stressed program quality and, in fact, developed and sought to implement quality standards in all the states (a point discussed further below); it took explicit steps to make AmeriCorps a national program; and it generally interacted with states not as a bureaucratic entity, but as a strong partner with a clear vision of how service activities, and AmeriCorps in particular, should be carried out.

At least in the first year, the Corporation was able to carry off this role. Although states frequently voiced criticisms about the degree to which they saw the Corporation second-guessing their decisions, or at times infringing on their latitude to make choices of what was "best" for their states, they by and large responded to the Corporation's directives. And while states still hold a substantial part of the administrative and decision-making responsibility, the Corporation, rather than being simply an administrative presence, is an active player in AmeriCorps, with considerable (albeit often informal) say in what states do.

2. Accomplishments in the States: We found that because they were consistently pressed to complete a highly ambitious timetable, the states were able to accomplish an extraordinary amount in less than one year. They developed, selected and staffed new com-

missions; carried out their own process of outreach and public hearings; and screened, ranked, selected and forwarded their program recommendations to the Corporation (which then undertook its own painstaking review of all the programs states included in their applications).

States then participated in negotiations with the Corporation—which involved discussions about which programs would finally be included, and in some cases, at what funding level—and completed arrangements to make grant money flow to individual programs by late summer. By September 1994, some states had gotten programs off the ground, and AmeriCorps members had started work in projects, though the approximate 6,000 new AmeriCorps members enrolled nationally fell far short of the goal of 20,000 that the Corporation had set for itself.[2]

As would be natural in any process so compressed and detailed, there was a fair amount of stress, delayed decisions and an undercurrent of confusion, none of which proved fatal to the process. Overall, however, the states' capacities to respond and keep pace were heavily taxed.

Realistically, the ambitious agenda established by the Corporation for itself and the states probably could not have been fully realized in the first year. To the extent the programmatic part of the agenda was attained, it occurred at the inevitable cost of coherent planning and capacity-building on the part of the states.

State commissions—a critical element of the state structure envisioned for AmeriCorps—were in fact established (though some not until midway through the year). However, most of the commissions' energies were taken up with forming a rudimentary understanding of the new regulations, overseeing the request-for-proposal procedures, selecting (or approving selection of) programs for their initial applications, and negotiating (or ratifying) final program choices.

Most state commissions we examined had little real role in shaping service priorities within their states. With few exceptions, they were uncritically adopted, more or less intact, from the federal legislative or Corporation-established priorities. Commissions had little time or capacity to plan, and few opportunities (until the end of the year, after most pivotal decisions had been made or approved) to consider what their role ought to be or to think through long-term goals, capacity-building, and political and funding support.

The first-year process was very much staff-driven. Even in study states where commissions had a relatively active role, it was their staff that set agendas and timetables. The complexity of the regulations, and sheer volume of administrative arrangements—the required technical steps of holding public hearings, selecting and ranking programs, then developing acceptable proposals and plans—made a strong staff role indispensable. And since program selection and start-up were the most critical priorities they faced, staff concentrated most heavily on those

[2] A total of 15,000 were enrolled by April 1995.

areas. The planning documents developed in the study states became afterthoughts, written following selection of programs.

This is not entirely negative: in the study states, staff performed commendably in a highly difficult environment. But to the extent the Act was meant to develop a coherent base for service at the state level, and to produce a broad-based, participative process of identifying service priorities and needs, the staff-driven effort that resulted failed to meet those expectations. AmeriCorps' first year was shaped for the most part at the professional staff level—not through a state entity and process that authentically reflected the community, grassroots level, as many had hoped.

A final point must be made. Many of the funding decisions made by states during the rushed and stressful first year will have long-term negative consequences that are not readily undone. Because first-year awards were intended to be part of a three-year commitment to selected programs, with continuation funding more or less assured (assuming satisfactory performance and availability of funds). Thus a major fraction of the funds states will receive in the second and third years of AmeriCorps is already spoken for.

Clearly, first-year choices, to a considerable extent, say much about what AmeriCorps will look like for the next two years as well. There will be limited latitude for states to act on hindsight, or to modify substantially the pattern of first-year decisions, given the nature of commitments they were required to make under deadline.

3. The Emphasis on Quality: To an unusual degree, the Corporation sought not just to establish AmeriCorps program priorities, but also to make quality an important aspect of its own (and states') decisions regarding programs. The Corporation, in tandem with issuing program regulations, took the ambitious and unusual step of promulgating detailed quality standards and expectations, which, it made clear to states, it wanted to see reflected in the criteria and procedures states used in identifying and selecting programs.

This was not just a one-time bureaucratic step. The Corporation followed up energetically and consistently on the quality theme. It carried out an extensive review of program applications, not only those for competitive funding, but also the states' formula applications, whose constituent programs were reviewed, by either external panels or Corporation staff. In negotiations with states, the Corporation cited quality issues in its appraisal of individual programs and the funding decisions it reached.

Thus, in a manner not commonly found among federal grant-making organizations, the Corporation, rather than establishing minimum standards for acceptability, set ambitious quality criteria, emphasized them consistently, and assessed the funding proposals submitted by states against them. To a considerable extent, the Corporation was effective in promulgating this approach, and struck a balance between appropriate concern for quality and intrusiveness.

As would be expected, this did not always happen smoothly. Although study states generally acquiesced to the Corporation's application of its quality standards, some did find the Corporation's application of quality standards to be intrusive or inconsistent, or to reflect a preference of the Corporation for particular kinds of programs, e.g., operating programs over planning grants.

The issue was particularly sensitive in cases that involved formula-funded programs—states presumably had the authority to select on their own. (See Point 4.) In two instances in the study states, the Corporation objected to formula-funded state programs on quality grounds, and dissuaded the states from funding them, even though the Corporation's position in both instances probably could not have withstood a formal challenge.

4. The Funding Mechanism: The financial basis for states' AmeriCorps programming consisted of two streams of funding: formula grants (allotted to each state on the basis of population) and a pool of "competitive" grant funds, for which any state could apply. Although the distinction between the funding streams seemed relatively clear in principle and in the regulations, this two-part funding mechanism created problems for both the states and the Corporation, and limited states' capacity to plan and program effectively.

The intent of the mechanism was that states in their formula allocation would have a known funding amount they could use for programs they selected (consistent with the quality standards and other rules established by the Corporation), so long as these programs responded to the four broad areas set forth in the 1993 legislation. States could also apply for competitive grants, which were intended to fund programs that met more narrow, Corporation-defined priorities, and which would be awarded by the Corporation based on its own review of the applications.

In practice, study states ignored this intent entirely. Most selected a top group of programs through their own RFP processes, then chose the funding stream in which to list programs, with Corporation-defined priorities playing no material part. For example, states put their strongest (i.e., most highly ranked) programs in the competitive portion of their applications; put their most expensive programs there (judging that they needed to use their guaranteed formula funds to "cover" a larger number of less costly programs); or put programs whose funding they wanted to ensure in the formula portion. Often, they combined such strategies.

The process was further complicated by the fact that the final regulations provided for a brief period (the "window") following the Corporation's funding decisions about competitive programs, in which states could adjust their overall applications. In particular, they could move unfunded competitive grant applications into the formula grant, by either displacing other programs or reducing funding for them.

Consequently, the overall funding mechanism proved unhelpful. It failed to achieve its regulatory aims, which partly were intended to build a national agenda for AmeriCorps, and it did not help states develop effective program strategies. It left individual programs uncertain of whether they would be funded (and thus unable to recruit or build staff), and if so, how much funding they would receive. This was true even for formula programs, since they could be displaced or reduced in scale by decisions made about competitive grant applications.

The mechanism actually blurred the distinction between formula and competitive grants, and left states with a program selection process that had uncertain rules. And it increased somewhat the Corporation's role in the content of states' formula grants, which were influenced to a considerable degree by decisions the Corporation made about competitive grant applications the states submitted.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the 1994 implementation year was successful in meeting the Corporation's central goal of recruiting and selecting AmeriCorps programs, and in actually getting them operational. Under difficult and stressful circumstances, states accomplished a great deal, and for the most part, what they accomplished was creditable in terms of both quality and responsiveness to the Corporation's guidelines and time pressures.

The Corporation was pivotal in the states' accomplishments. It drove the process consistently and intensively, as it sought to establish an active, shaping role in AmeriCorps. Although there were inevitable problems and a key funding mechanism complicated programming decisions, the Corporation was effective in getting a new federal initiative quickly into operation.

The picture is less positive when judging how effectively the first-year process fostered the capacities and decision-making latitude of states to develop long-term support and infrastructure for service. The state role in developing service during the first year was in great measure technical and administrative—the response of dedicated staff to a body of regulations for selecting and funding programs. The establishment of state commissions occurred mostly as a formality; they had a limited role in shaping service within the states. In most of the study states, the pressures to get programs operational precluded careful strategic assessment, thinking and planning during the first year.

The first year thus raises questions that cannot be answered at this stage. It is unclear how the federal-state balance in shaping AmeriCorps will play out. The Corporation extended the federal role to a considerable degree, seeking to make AmeriCorps a nationally visible and recognized program, albeit one for which states had programmatic and managerial responsibility. How effectively the Corporation continues to play this role, how comfortable states feel about the activist posture of the Corporation, and the extent to which states develop coherent and lasting service networks are all key issues to examine.

Likewise, it will be important to assess how much long-term capacity and support states can begin to build, even as they strengthen and consolidate the work they (very rapidly) completed in the first year; and how much they see the need to revisit arrangements or decisions made in haste in 1994. The ultimate soundness and effectiveness of these choices will be judged in the next few years, as the remainder of AmeriCorps programs start up, and it becomes possible to judge more fully whether AmeriCorps is, in fact, getting things done.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report chronicles how states implemented the first year of AmeriCorps, the signature component of the 1993 National and Community Service Trust Act. It draws on fieldwork conducted in nine of the 48 states that adopted the program in 1994.[1]

This fieldwork is part of a study being undertaken by Public/Private Ventures to assess the effectiveness of the 1993 Act in creating or expanding national service activities in the U.S., with particular focus on the role states play in that process.

The issues involved in this study are highly complex, since it is difficult both to define national service and to identify what role, if any, the federal government or the states *should* play in fostering or supporting it. Thus, it is important at the outset to be clear about the scope, intent and limitations of the study.

The project was initially undertaken to look at how states planned and carried out their responsibilities to channel the grant funding they received for national service to individual programs. Its original focus was to be the early experiences of states in carrying out their responsibilities under the predecessor to the 1993 legislation, the National and Community Service Act of 1990. Under that legislation, the states' role was both somewhat unusual and loosely defined. As a result, their capacities to define and fulfill that role were uneven; not surprisingly, their responses to the Act's demands were also uneven.

A study of how states were responding seemed a valuable effort, one that would yield findings about how effectively they could foster development of, and support, service programs. For the most part, such programs previously operated through federal agencies (VISTA and senior service programs, for instance) or developed at the local level. Now, major portions of the service agenda and programming were being delegated to the states. How states played their new roles would say much about how well the new federal presence in national service would succeed.

Even as the basic framework of this state-oriented study was being developed, however, a new opportunity presented itself. President Clinton, elected in 1992, followed through on a presidential campaign commitment to elevate national service and expand the federal role in making it happen. In May 1993, he introduced legislation—passed later in the year—that expanded funding for service activities, consolidated some of the existing service programs in a new organization, and established a different (though not altogether new) form of service support, which eventually became the AmeriCorps program.

[1] North Dakota and South Dakota chose not to participate in the state AmeriCorps process.

The new legislation retained—and, in fact, strengthened—the state role in shaping service programming. The basic issues we had first set out to study were now even more sharply portrayed in the context of new legislation, which we could track from inception.

We selected nine states for this study on the basis of information developed through review of earlier state plans and applications; a survey of state activity we conducted in Fall 1993; consultation with Corporation staff and staff of other organizations that had contact with or knowledge of states; and discussions with state officials themselves.

The nine states chosen for the study group were California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Washington and West Virginia.

Our primary criterion for selecting states was that they show clear indications of responding with energy and seriousness to the mandate of the new legislation. In addition, we wanted a group of states that reflected a diversity of starting points—on the one hand, states that had only limited prior service involvement; on the other, states that had supported numerous service programs or had responded energetically to the earlier 1990 National and Community Service Act.

THE MAJOR STUDY QUESTIONS

The key questions to be addressed by the study are:

- How effective is the new legislation, with its focus on the state role, in enhancing or increasing national service?
- How much do states, in their new role under the new legislation, increase visibility—and public, political and funding support—for the ideal of and involvement in national service?
- How might public policy be strengthened, modified or expanded to enhance states' effectiveness in providing service?

A number of obstacles must be overcome to address these questions convincingly in a practically focused research project. Two issues, in particular, are pivotal. First, there are numerous, widely varying expectations of what service programs should do—indeed, even differing definitions of what service is or ought to be. (This issue is addressed more fully in the next chapter). As a result, it is difficult to specify a set of outcomes for service programs that would be small enough to be researched dispositively, yet inclusive enough to satisfy the widely diverging points of view that characterize the service field.

Second, examining even a relative few of the most critical outcomes poses substantial methodological challenges. The major goals of the legislation are sweeping, and involve such difficult-to-measure issues as strengthening community, providing benefits to service participants themselves, and ensuring that demonstrable services and benefits occur in communities where service programs are supported. These results are to be achieved through a decentralized and newly formed network of state commissions charged with developing plans and programs for their states. In such a complex environment, substantial conceptual problems emerge in trying to gauge results with any precision.

Thus, it is important to note that our work is *not* an evaluation of AmeriCorps. We do not seek to develop measures of impact or effectiveness of the individual programs supported by AmeriCorps funding, nor ultimately to determine whether these programs are cost-beneficial. This would in any case be of small relevance for the current report, since in 1994, only a modest number of programs had started, and most of these were in their early operational stages.

In addition, we have limited our scope, somewhat artificially, to state AmeriCorps programs. In doing so, we bypass the range of other programs funded through the 1993 legislation. This does not mean we are ignoring other features of the 1993 legislation or other aspects of service and voluntarism. Where they connect to our main focus—the state-organized AmeriCorps initiatives—we have documented that and have sought to incorporate the connection into the study perspective. For example, we have spent time learning how the AmeriCorps National Direct programs were planned and funded, and have sought to detail their presence in our study states. Our work will not compile systematic information about them, but will make reference to them as they have an impact on the AmeriCorps programs on which we focus.

We take this approach because it allows us to examine more carefully a key aspect of the 1993 legislation—one that was consciously put forward as "national service"—and to gauge how successful such an initiative is. Our aim is not merely to document what happened, but to provide findings and conclusions that have value for other facets of service as well.[2]

THE FIRST-YEAR REPORT

This section presents a history of the first year of the National and Community Service Trust Act, and particularly of the implementation of the AmeriCorps program. It focuses on two major themes:

1. <u>The National Context</u>: This includes the legislative history of the 1993 National and Community Service Trust Act; the development of national regulations, guidelines and program priorities; and activities within the Corporation for National Service, including the merger of ACTION programs with AmeriCorps activities; and ongoing legislative developments.

[2] See Appendix C for a fuller discussion of the study project.

2. The State Role: This theme, a central focus of the study project, tracks the evolution of state commissions, state administrative and planning processes, the selection of programs, and the degree to which systems emerge, and the commitment to and capacity for service programs develop.

Our discussion of these two themes draws primarily on three sources of information:

- Extensive interviews with staff of the Corporation for National Service, congressional staff, and other national figures with knowledge of the legislation and AmeriCorps.

- Field work in the nine study states as they carried through the implementation of AmeriCorps, from formation of commissions to conducting outreach and proposal selection, through actual start-up of programs. Each state was visited twice by two-person research teams, who interviewed commission directors, other key staff, commissioners, and other individuals in each state who are involved in service in general, and with AmeriCorps in particular.

- A review of documents, regulations, proposals and other written material that form part of the record of AmeriCorps' first year. These include federal documents issued by the Corporation, as well as state and local documents—e.g., public notices, commission minutes, RFPs, state plans, program descriptions and applications.

The Accelerated Timetable

The start-up period of any new program is evolutionary and, to some degree, rushed. In the case of AmeriCorps, the pace of the first year was extraordinarily hectic. Indeed, it seems fair to state that the first year's pace was not just a background factor but a major issue that shaped the entire experience, and colored the findings of this report to a very considerable extent.

In fact, a central finding of this report is that the compressed timeline for implementation was the dominant theme of AmeriCorps' first year. It was responsible not only for the considerable accomplishments of the process to date, but for a series of incomplete tasks and untaken steps that must be addressed by AmeriCorps—both the states and the Corporation—in the period to come.

So rushed was the process that it is impossible to formulate solid conclusions about whether implementation was successful. Thus, our findings quite frequently are qualified; in the coming period, more sound determinations can be made about several issues—including whether AmeriCorps is succeeding.

The reasons for the compressed and accelerated timetable, and the unusually hectic way it played out, are rooted in two key decisions made by the Corporation. The first concerned the milestones that drove the pace of implementation. Early on, the Corporation adopted goals for program start-up and numbers of enrolled participants that were geared to establishing a record of results and success that would assist them when the legislation came up for reauthorization, and indeed when it came up for second-year funding decisions. For that to happen, regulation-writing and review, grant-making and program start-up had to be scheduled on the most optimistic timetable possible—and that timetable maintained with minimal slippage. As a result, states were forced to rush to get their AmeriCorps administrative structures in place and to complete the required tasks for accessing AmeriCorps funding. They had little opportunity to actively develop statewide service strategies.

The Corporation's second—and related—major decision was to maintain a strong role in the implementation of AmeriCorps. While it recognized and supported the role of states in planning and carrying out their responsibilities, the Corporation wanted to advance AmeriCorps as a "national" program—one that would meet high standards that the Corporation put considerable effort into developing and promulgating. The Corporation pressed to have its quality standards adopted by the states, thereby creating a complex implementation environment in which new issues arose in evolutionary fashion and making it difficult for states to keep to the ambitious timetable that the Corporation itself had established.

The following chapters detail how all of this came about, and with what results. Chapter II explores the key definitional issues regarding national service and how they were addressed in the 1993 National and Community Service Trust Act. Chapter III discusses the Corporation's role in designing and implementing AmeriCorps, while Chapter IV documents the states' role. Chapter V examines the ways in which the complex funding formula written into the legislation affected program selection, federal-state balance and states' ability to coordinate their AmeriCorps programs. Chapter VI presents our findings and conclusions.

II. THE ORIGIN OF AMERICORPS

A study of this kind must quickly address the question "What *is* national service and how can it be successfully embedded in legislation?" The answer is by no means simple. The term "service" evokes a bewilderingly wide vista of activities, beliefs and, indeed, emotions. And while "national service" enjoys wide political support as a concept, its various concrete manifestations have found both proponents and critics among leaders and opinion-makers of every political hue.

This chapter explores the key dimensions of the national service theme, and indicates how those dimensions have been put into practice through legislation and programming. We first summarize four main issues that arise in considering national service and motivate many of the different voices and interests in the service field. This context is important to understand, for it explains, in part, how recent national service legislation has been shaped. Next, we describe how the AmeriCorps legislation evolved, placing it in the context of arrangements that had been put into place in response to the 1990 legislation and of other major considerations that went into its development. Finally, we look at the key features of the 1993 legislation—the National and Community Service Trust Act—components that defined what AmeriCorps would look like and laid the groundwork for the manner in which the implementation process would play out.

DIMENSIONS OF NATIONAL SERVICE

National service, as advocates have persuasively argued, has enormous potential to assist persons and communities in need, to significantly affect lives and attitudes of those who engage in service activities (particularly the young), and to renew and strengthen the spirit of caring and community in the U.S. The allure of the term "national service" has been its very breadth: it has been, in effect, a great tent that accommodates many perspectives and many advocates.

Yet national service exists on two levels: as an ideal and as a reality. When it is evoked as an ideal, national service has few critics or dissenters. On this broad and undefined level, the notion of national service connotes selflessness and concern for others, giving back to one's country, a universal chance for all to participate in taking positive steps to make one's community a better place.

The range of real activities and programs, however, have met with far less agreement about what national service is, who should be involved, and how (or whether) it should be publicly supported. Some of this disagreement is along partisan lines—a point that figures in the evolution of national service legislation, as will be discussed later. Even among adherents of service, there are differing opinions about what service is, which features of it should be most strongly emphasized, and which versions of it merit support.

These differing perspectives are reflected in the complex mix of organizations involved with service and voluntarism. These include formally organized youth service and conservation corps; a panoply of informal volunteer service efforts in churches, clubs, community organizations and the like that address a limitless range of needs; higher education programs that encourage volunteering and service among students; national organizations, such as the Red Cross and United Way, that support local voluntary offices; a handful of state and local voluntarism offices; K-12 service-learning programs; and a small, enduring set of nationally funded programs, many of them under the ACTION umbrella.

The perspectives of these organizations and the emphases they have sought to build into service legislation have been highly diverse—and at times, contradictory. However, the differences in perspectives basically center around four key themes that are important to understanding both the service field in general, and the development of national service legislation in particular.

1. Service vs. voluntarism: Some service adherents distinguish between "service"—which they define as a more or less full-time commitment lasting up to a year or two, and typically as the province of the young—and the range of traditional, usually short-term or part-time volunteer efforts to be found in virtually every community in the U.S.—efforts that involve millions of Americans, most middle-aged or older. Service adherents do not denigrate the value of volunteering and volunteers, but seek special recognition for individuals willing to give up a year or more of their lives to serve their communities.

   This may seem an innocuous enough point, but in fact, it is a core issue in many discussions of service, and is particularly pivotal in understanding AmeriCorps. Federal support for full-time, extended service is sometimes characterized as a needless intrusion by the public sector, because large numbers of Americans already perform service through short-term and intermittent volunteer activities.

   While this debate typically occurs at a partisan level, views also differ among those in the service/volunteer community. Advocates for youth service and conservation corps—which represent one important model of the full-time, extended form of service—have argued that federal funding should be available, if not earmarked, for programs like theirs. Sponsors of more traditional volunteer activities, which include such entities as the Red Cross, prefer that "service" be defined broadly enough to provide support for the kinds of volunteering they sponsor, and be funded accordingly.

2. Compensated vs. uncompensated service: A theme closely related to service and voluntarism is the issue of whether volunteers—particularly full-time volunteers—should be compensated. Again, partisan feelings run strong on this topic. Perhaps the harshest statement of this position is that "paid service" is an oxy-

moron: if one is being compensated to do service or volunteer work, whether through a wage or through a stipend, one is neither serving nor volunteering. And, the argument goes, since many people already volunteer without monetary reward, the public sector should not, on principle, pay people to volunteer—and, indeed, should not need to.

Advocates for compensated service argue that full-time, extended service is an option few people—even those with the dedication to make such a commitment—can afford without some form of financial support. Providing stipends is not the same as paying people to volunteer, they point out, and in any case, the stipends are minimal; the absence of stipends or payment of some sort is an impediment that is justifiably removed to broaden the base of those who are able to volunteer. In response, critics argue that paid or stipended service is merely a form of work experience, with any "service" dimension overshadowed by the fact that the volunteer is being paid.

Although advocates might deny it, in some settings, stipends do have the effect, at least in part, of paying people to serve. Youth service and conservation corps, for instance, attract participants in good part because there is a wage, however minimal; at least one service program for senior citizens, Foster Grandparents (originally administered by ACTION and now part of the Corporation's National Senior Service Corps), does likewise. Service advocates respond that the stipend participants receive is quite modest, and that the service dimension of the programs remains central even if participants are compensated.

This issue is not solely one of political philosophy. It also has significant effects on the costs of service, since stipends significantly drive up program costs and cost per participant, leading to criticisms that service programs are too expensive. It seems clear that whatever one's position, the policy aim of encouraging service performance from a more diverse range of people can be achieved by compensating participants. It also is clear that compensated service remains a two-edged issue: the benefits are broad and intangible, while the costs are tangible and open to criticism.

3. <u>Targeted vs. untargeted initiatives</u>: If there is justification for a public role in support of voluntarism or service, and particularly if some form of payment to individuals is involved, the next issue to arise is: who should serve, or whose service activity should be supported with public funds.

On this basis, programs can be classified as targeted or untargeted. The Foster Grandparents program is an example of a targeted initiative. Participation is based on a means test; only seniors below a defined income level are eligible to participate. Besides helping to spur participation in service activities, public funds are used to assist poor people.

A strong argument against targeting can be—and in service debates, usually is—made. It holds that service should be an option for all, and that legislation supporting service programs, rather than having the effect of restricting access, should seek to broaden it as widely as possible. Low-income people should be encouraged to serve, but so should those who are better off—those who have benefitted the most from what the nation can offer. In fact, the impediments to serving experienced by the latter, such as college graduates' need to repay large educational loans, can be every bit as significant as for poor people.

The difficulty with implementing this position in legislation is that opponents will characterize it as a "middle-class subsidy." Particularly when compensated service is involved, criticisms inevitably arise that public funds are being used to provide jobs or "experiences" for middle-class people—perhaps at the expense of benefits to those of low income. Whatever the advantages of making service benefits universally available, such criticisms weaken support for service programs and complicate the task of finding a balance in any legislation.

4. Voluntary vs. mandatory service: This final theme is emphasized less often than the previous three, but is worth mentioning. There is a small but consistent school of thought that maintains that some form of service should be mandatory for all, both as a repayment for what society has provided and as an opportunity to benefit personally from helping others. The idea of universal mandatory service can be traced back to William James's *The Moral Equivalent of War* (1910), and is reflected in more recent history when conscientious objectors, who could be exempted from mandatory service in the military, were obliged to perform "alternative service" analogous to some of the activities that service participants now carry out.[3]

   No less a conservative figure than William F. Buckley, Jr., has publicly embraced this idea, and a few limited experiments have been tried. The state of Maryland, for example, has mandated 75 hours of community service for all students as a condition of high school graduation. Still, the idea of mandatory service is controversial enough that it was never a serious part of the discussions that led to recent national service legislation.

The controversy over mandatory service, the considerable disagreement about whether service participants should be paid, and the ongoing political debate over the worth of full-time

[3] A related, if somewhat more paradoxical, variant is the common practice in our judicial system of sentencing offenders to perform a set number of hours of community service, presumably on the theory that such activity helps the offender repay a debt to society, and that the activity is itself beneficial to the performer.

service as a federal investment, all point to a broader issue: national service has far more support as an ideal than as a programmatic reality that involves hard choices and real outlays. Unlike such issues as social security (regarding which there is wide awareness and deep support) or welfare (which has wide awareness and strong divisions), national service has neither a large base of strong supporters, core agreement about its basic shape, nor, in fact, even wide awareness of its existence. When it must be translated into legislation, the amiable support it enjoys as an ideal largely vanishes. It then faces a far harsher environment where national service has little deep support, and a spectrum of perspectives on how it should be designed among its advocates.

THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE ACT OF 1990

In light of the above discussion, it is no surprise that neither the National and Community Service Act of 1990 nor the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 formally define service. The regulations of the 1990 Act do, however, define the term "service opportunity":

> Service opportunity means a program or project, including service learning programs or projects, that enables participants to perform meaningful and constructive service in agencies, institutions, and situations where the application of human talent and dedication may help to meet human, educational, linguistic, public safety and environmental community needs, especially those relating to poverty.

The inclusiveness of this definition probably reflects the political need to accommodate a broad range of interests—an important consideration, particularly since the 1990 legislation was developed by bringing together elements of a dozen different service bills that had been introduced in Congress during the previous two years. In addition, President Bush, though a supporter of voluntarism, was unenthusiastic about creating much of a federal role for it, giving the bill only lukewarm encouragement.

The 1990 Act was a collaboration among some long-standing advocates of service in Congress, among them Senators Kennedy, Mikulski, Nunn and Durenberger, and the interest groups and more prominent programs that spoke for the service movement. They had seen a recent, large-scale service bill (Nunn-McCurdy) fail to make significant legislative headway, and thus recognized the need to keep service legislation modest in scale and funding if it was to have any chance at all to be passed.

Accordingly, the Act was quite modest. Its first-year funding, for a variety of disparate programming areas, was only $75 million.[4] Its Washington apparatus was a distinct "commission," the Commission for National and Community Service (CNCS), whose staff size was explicitly limited by the legislation to fewer than a dozen members and whose primary function was to provide grants to states, which would in turn distribute them to existing local programs.

Despite the bare-bones nature of the new Act, a considerable amount of activity took place. CNCS was established, a staff was created, and the first round of grant awards was made to states for service-learning programs, youth service and conservation corps, and a small number of demonstration programs.

The State Response

The state role under the 1990 Act was both pivotal and undefined. States were the usual, but not the only grant applicants for CNCS funding.[5] No specific agency was named to be the conduit for *all* funds; however, state education agencies were specified as the applicants for the service-learning (Serve-America) portion of the funding. Thus, when states designated a "lead agency" to write and administer the state application for other CNCS funds, it was often the state education agency, which was already handling the service-learning application. Less frequently, a state agency or state-based program, such as the California Conservation Corps, became involved and served as a lead agency for some types of funding, while the state education agency applied for service-learning funds.

The combination of modest funding and a loosely defined role and process resulted in state responses that were limited and uneven, and that focused on accomplishing required technical tasks. A survey of 31 states concerning the actions they took in response to the 1990 legislation revealed that:

- States typically did not conduct broad-based, intensive needs assessments or public outreach in determining needs or developing statewide service plans;
- Staffing levels in connection with CNCS funding at the state level were modest: 60 percent had fewer than two full-time equivalents; a third had less than one half-time equivalent;

[4] Of that first-year funding, $63 million went to grants in four areas: K-12 service-learning programs (Serve-America), higher education service programs, youth service and conservation corps, and national service demonstration programs. The rest of the funding was for the Points of Light Foundation—a new organization supported by President Bush—and a number of special projects.

[5] In states that did not submit an application for CNCS funding under subtitle C of the 1990 legislation (the youth service and conservation corps portion of the legislation), programs could apply individually to CNCS for funding.

- Almost two-thirds of the states, however, provided at least some matching funds to CNCS-funded programs.[6]

A few individual states did show a strong interest in service and had established solid networks of programs predating the 1990 legislation. Those states made use of CNCS funding to expand service activities further. And in some states whose previous interest in service had been minimal and whose response to the 1990 legislation was limited, informal networks of state officials and program managers began to develop; these were the beginnings of a service "infrastructure" within these states.

Nonetheless, CNCS funding was extremely modest, confined to Serve-America and higher education programs, youth service and conservation corps, and a handful of demonstration programs. And the Commission for National and Community Service, the Washington funding entity for these programs, was small and all but unknown except to its grantees and a circle of service advocates.

THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE TRUST ACT OF 1993

When President Clinton was elected in 1992, national service was among the first of his campaign promises that he addressed. Early on, he named Eli Segal to head the White House Office of National Service, which had been established originally by President Bush. Working closely with CNCS staff and with others in Washington who had helped develop and pass the 1990 Act, the Office of National Service was instrumental in preparing the National and Community Service Trust Act and shepherding it through Congress in 1993.

The Act, which built on the 1990 legislation, was designed to reflect the new Administration's emphasis on service, especially by young people. Its primary goal was to connect service opportunities to postprogram education benefits, thus linking commitment to serving with chances to further one's education.

The Act included a number of key features:

- <u>The establishment of a Corporation for National Service</u>. The Act consolidated earlier funding streams under the 1990 National and Community Service Act, and merged the Commission and ACTION—which ran VISTA (a long-standing, stipended volunteer program) and a collection of senior service volunteer programs,[7] into a new Corporation for National Service. The aim was to streamline the way that service initiatives

[6] Additional summary information from the survey, which was conducted by P/PV in conjunction with Youth Service America, is provided in Appendix B.

[7] See Appendix A for a summary listing of the major Corporation programs.

would be administered at the federal level.[8] While the move was described as a merger, it is more accurate to say that ACTION was folded into the Commission. ACTION was viewed as a traditional federal bureaucracy, while CNCS had a reputation in Congress for being flexible, cost-effective, and more collaborative than regulatory in its dealings with the field.

- A more prominent state role. Under the 1990 legislation, the key administrative role was taken by the states: in almost all cases, grants were made to the states, which subgranted to local programs. To a large extent, this federal-state relationship had evolved as the most feasible political strategy for winning approval of that earlier legislation. If the Commission were to be a small agency—and no one publicly supported the creation of a large federal service entity—it would be impossible for it to handle thousands of individual grant proposals.

  Moving beyond the structures that had been established in the 1990 Act, the 1993 legislation charged each state with developing an apparatus to promote wider participation in service planning and program decisions. As a former governor, President Clinton had a philosophical commitment to strengthening the role of states and encouraging every governor to participate in the service initiative. In addition, the definition of the state role was modified, based on lessons learned from the implementation of the earlier legislation—particularly those related to complaints from local organizations that some states' lead agencies had not been very inclusive about which local programs could become part of the state application for federal funds.

  Thus, while each state would still submit a single, consolidated application to the Corporation for funds, the new legislation made significant changes in the state administrative structure. Each governor was charged with creating a state commission that was expected—in the words of the Corporation—"to steer but not row" the state's service initiative. The commission would be bipartisan and inclusive, and represent a range of viewpoints about service programs and participants. Most important, the legislation provided funding to support states as they established and operated their commissions.[9]

- An intricate funding formula. As shown in Table 1, there are three funding streams for AmeriCorps, one of which is local program grants. One of the goals of the Act was to balance federal support for local service programs with responsibility and control at the state level. As one means of achieving this goal, AmeriCorps program grants were allocated according to three categories:

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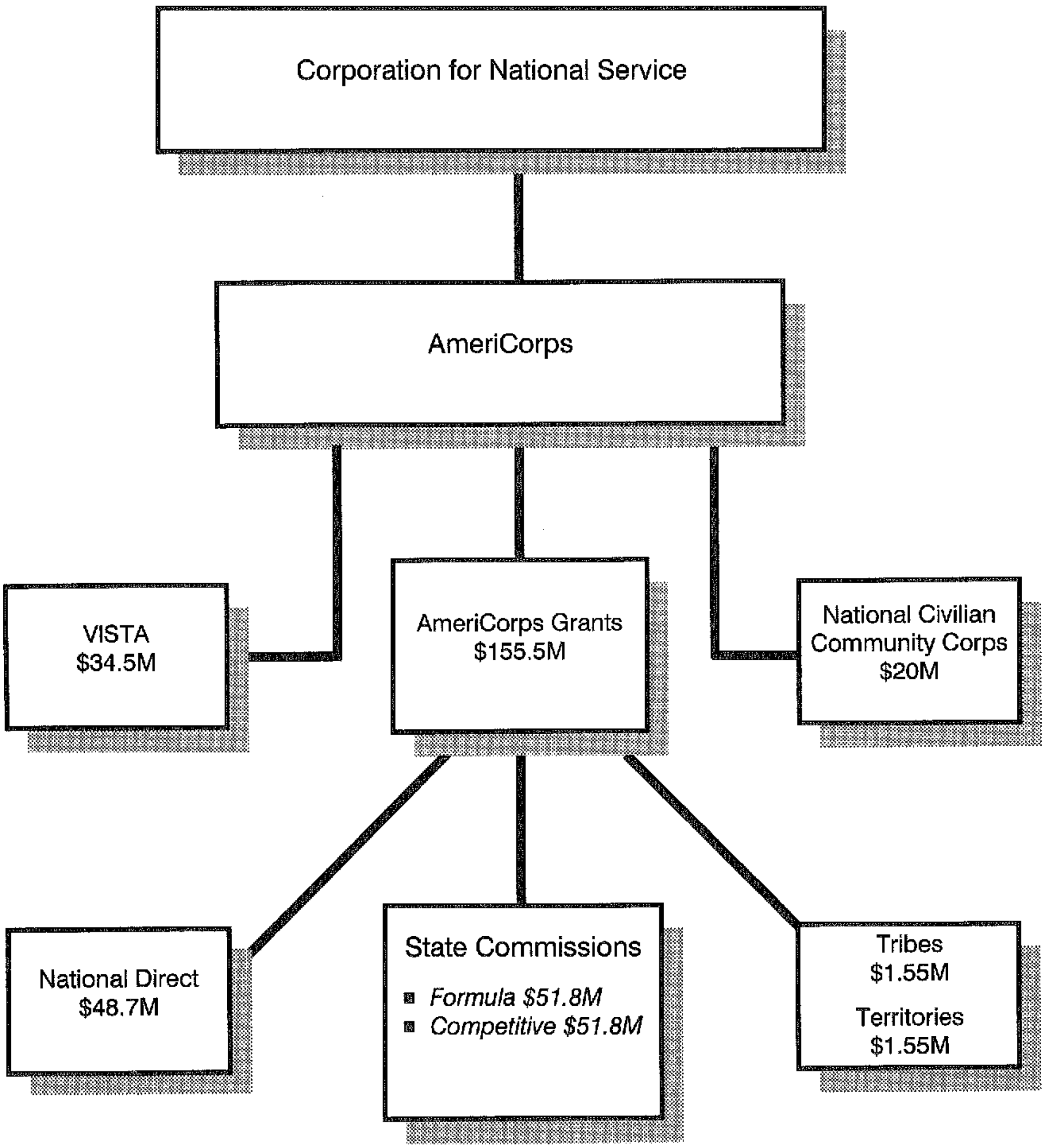
[8] The Corporation continued the process of consolidation by absorbing the White House Office of National Service.

[9] The legislation included a transition period of two years when states could substitute an alternative administrative entity (AAE) for the state commission.

Table 1

AMERICORPS PROGRAMS FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE TRUST ACT OF 1993

FISCAL YEAR 1994



1. State formula allotment–one-third of the funds were to be allocated to states based on population, as a way to ensure that states that did not yet have a strong service initiative would receive a share of AmeriCorps funding.

2. State competitive grants–not less than one-third of the funds were to be awarded to states on a competitive basis, as a way to give the Corporation control over choosing programs that were of the highest quality.

3. Direct national competition–the remainder of the funds was to be allocated on a competitive basis directly to public or nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education and federal agencies. Of those funds, not more than one-third could go to federal agencies.

- Stipends for participants. The Act provided a minimum living allowance of $7,662 per year for full-time AmeriCorps participants, while the maximum allowable stipend was set at $15,324; in no case would the Corporation provide more than 85 percent of the minimum cost ($6,513). All programs had to provide some matching funds to pay the stipend.

- Funding for education awards. While the 1990 Act included a provision for postservice education awards for some participants, this benefit was a relatively minor aspect of the legislation. In contrast, the 1993 Act was envisioned from the start as both an education-financing and service initiative. While opposition from a variety of sources–including veterans' groups and members of Congress–resulted in the size of the education awards being lowered significantly from Clinton's original proposal, they remained a hallmark of AmeriCorps. Education awards of $4,725 were made available to individuals who served full time for a year (or part time for the equivalent of a year) in an AmeriCorps program. These awards were to be provided separately through the National Service Trust Fund.

- An emphasis on "getting things done." When President Clinton spoke publicly about the service initiative during the presidential campaign and his first few months in office, he most often emphasized the benefits for participants–the tangible benefit of financial aid for education and such intangible benefits as an increased spirit of community. In Congress, however, critics attacked the bill's potential to waste federal dollars by generating "make-work" projects. In response, supporters of the legislation shifted their focus from the participants to their work, and argued that service was a cost-effective way for the federal government to meet the relentlessly growing human and environmental problems facing the nation. Thus, the legislation identified the four broad areas that projects were to address–education, human needs, public safety and the environment–and charged the Corporation with further defining the priorities within those areas.

- Continuing support for in-school service programs. Service-learning and service programs at both the K-12 and higher education levels were funded, as they had been in the 1990 legislation.[10]

The Act had a rocky passage through Congress. There was concern over its cost–it was scaled back from its original funding request–and over the lack of targeting in the program. There was a related concern about the new education benefits, which were depicted as a middle-class subsidy that could potentially siphon off funding from existing student aid programs–in effect channeling money from low-income college seekers to middle-class students and college completers. There also was concern about establishing a new federal bureaucracy and staff, about how the existing ACTION staff and functions would be absorbed, and about the degree to which the new service initiative would be "run" by Washington.

In the end, after a short filibuster and a series of legislative compromises, the Act passed with narrow bipartisan support.[11] At a ceremony held on September 21, 1993, President Clinton signed the bill into law, with the promise that, by the following September, 20,000 AmeriCorps members would be enrolled in programs across the nation.

With the celebration, though, came a hard realization: the new AmeriCorps program would be watched carefully and had to show tangible results to some skeptical critics if it were to continue to receive its funding, and more important, if it were to be reauthorized in 1996. The challenge of implementing AmeriCorps had begun.

[10] See Appendix A for a table of the Corporation's 1994 funding streams.

[11] The final vote in the House was 275 to 152, with 248 Democrats, 26 Republicans and 1 independent supporting the measure. In the Senate, the vote was 57 to 40, with 51 Democrats and 6 Republicans voting in the affirmative.

III. THE ROLE OF THE CORPORATION

The 1993 legislation attempted to set up a structure for AmeriCorps that would promote service programs that addressed local needs and were, nationwide, of consistently high quality. To accomplish this, it established both federal and state entities, each with a share of oversight, administrative authority and control.

This chapter examines the federal entity—the Corporation for National Service. It discusses the role the Corporation defined for itself and the effect of the compressed timeline on the Corporation's ability to fulfill that role.

AN ACTIVIST STANCE

Under the terms of the 1993 Act, the Corporation for National Service was established as an independent federal agency with a 15-member board of directors and broad authority to "prescribe such rules and regulations as are necessary or appropriate to carry out this act."

The Corporation took this mandate seriously. In structure as well as actions, it has distinguished itself from more typical federal bureaucracies. As an independent federal agency (and one whose chief executive officer, Eli Segal, had a background in private business), it organized itself on a corporate management model. Its top staff positions included a chief executive officer, an executive director/executive vice president, a chief operating officer and a chief financial officer.

The Corporation saw itself as a partner of the states with a clear vision of how service activities and AmeriCorps in particular should be carried out. Rather than just enforcing rules and regulations that enable states to receive and spend service dollars, the Corporation consciously sought to establish and promote its version of service, centered on its often-repeated theme of "getting things done." It thus emphasized to states the importance of identifying or developing programs that are results-focused. Indeed, in reviews of individual programs (reviews that the Corporation organized and carried out to an unusually extensive degree) and in negotiations with states, Corporation staff were often forthright in expressing their preferences about specific programs.

The Corporation also aimed explicitly to make AmeriCorps a "national" effort whose constituent state programs would be visible and recognized as part of a national program. It specified common areas of training, including conflict resolution and CPR, for AmeriCorps members (ACMs) in all the state programs; it designed a national logo and designed and distributed "uniforms" (t-shirts, hats and sweatshirts) for state ACMs; and it established a national pool of applicants for ACM positions to supplement state and local programs' participant recruitment efforts. It also organized, publicized and ran a national kick-off day for AmeriCorps in September 1994, when its first members were formally sworn in by the President; and it planned specific dates when ACMs in all the states would participate in "signature projects."

Refining Legislative Priorities

Central to the Corporation's effort to assure that all AmeriCorps programs were of consistently high quality was its definition of goals and priorities. From the beginning, the Corporation required that all programs provide "direct and demonstrable" benefits to the community. This meant that ACMs could not, as their primary work, perform clerical tasks or other support services. Rather, they were to be out in the community: tutoring children, renovating low-income housing or doing other work of visible, measurable value.

The Corporation also specified the areas of need this work was to address. The legislation laid out four broad areas—education, public safety, human needs and the environment—and charged the Corporation with further defining priorities within those areas. Once the bill was signed into law, the Corporation, after consulting closely with the existing service community, quickly laid out those more detailed priorities:

Education

1. School-readiness—furthering early childhood development.
2. School success—improving the educational achievement of school-age children.

Public Safety

1. Crime prevention—reducing the incidence of violence.
2. Crime control—improving criminal justice services, law enforcement and victim services.

Human Needs

1. Health—providing independent living assistance and home- and community-based health care.
2. Home—rebuilding neighborhoods and helping people who are homeless.

Environment

1. Neighborhood environment—reducing community and environmental hazards.
2. Natural environment—conserving, restoring and sustaining natural habitats.

Programs applying for state competitive funds were required to address one or more of these priorities, while each state commission had the option of establishing priorities within the same four broad areas that its formula-funded programs could address. As part of their grant applications, programs were expected to identify the impact their project would have on the priority they were targeting; they were to describe "significant annual objectives" that were "direct, demonstrable, clear, and challenging yet realistic" (Corporation for National Service, *Principles for High Quality National Service Programs*, p. 45). These objectives might include, for example, providing health outreach services that make 800 households better informed about health care services and lead 60 percent of those households to act on that information.

As the process of AmeriCorps unfolded, the requirements for detailed program goals became a key element in states' negotiations with the Corporation and a distinguishing feature of the Corporation's posture—a posture that is unusual among federal agencies charged with the distribution of grant funds. The Corporation has been activist in its approach to making grants; it has stressed program quality, and it has developed and sought to implement quality standards in all the states. While it was a partner with the states working toward a common goal, it was quite definitely an assertive partner—at times too much so, some state commissions believed.

THE FIRST-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PACE

The tensions likely to arise in any effort to establish a mutually beneficial federal-state relationship were exacerbated during the first year of AmeriCorps by the often frenzied pace of first-year implementation activities. (See Table 2 for key events in the process.) Inevitably, the need to quickly get programs up and running took precedence over the nuances involved in molding a smooth federal-state partnership. In fact, the decision to push for rapid implementation meant sacrificing time states needed to get active commissions in place—and to forge a strong state role for them. (See Chapter IV for a discussion of this issue.)

The legislation establishing the Corporation had passed after protracted and at times bitter debate. The final vote in the House and Senate made clear what limited support the new service initiative enjoyed. While Congress had authorized relatively generous increases in the Corporation's funding for years two and three of AmeriCorps, it was always seen as a test program that would have to provide strong evidence of its value. At best, the Corporation felt, it had three years to demonstrate that it could "get things done"—not a lot of time to both nurture new programs and help them through start-up problems. Thus, the Corporation had to make sure that a significant number of high-quality programs became operational quickly.

President Clinton's promise to have 20,000 AmeriCorps members enrolled in programs within a year after he signed the legislation in September 1993 further increased the pressure. (See Table 3.) During the following 12 months, the Corporation had to develop and issue regulations; educate the public and the national service community about the availability of funds; work with officials at the 48 state commissions and various federal agencies that planned to submit grants; develop and oversee a national and state RFP process; develop a technical assistance plan for funded programs; and devise a monitoring strategy for funded programs.[12]

[12] It should be noted that this summary of Corporation activities includes, for the most part, only activities specifically connected with AmeriCorps. Other Corporation staff were, of course, dealing with Learn and Serve, higher education service programs, the National Civilian Community Corps, VISTA and the National Senior Service Corps.

Table 2

FEDERAL CHRONOLOGY

<u>1993</u>	
September 21	President Clinton signs the National and Community Service Trust Act.
September	The Corporation for National Service management team is named.
	The Corporation convenes a meeting of state officials to present early information on the new legislation.
November	Preliminary administrative regulations are issued.
<u>1994</u>	
January	Preliminary program regulations are issued.
	The Corporation holds orientation conferences for state officials in four regions around the country.
February	Final administrative regulations are issued.
March	Final program regulations are issued.
May	Proposals for AmeriCorps National Direct programs are due in Washington.
June	The Corporation announces the 57 AmeriCorps National Direct winners.
	State AmeriCorps proposals are due in Washington.
July	The Corporation holds negotiations with semifinalists for competitive grants.
	States are informed of competitive grant winners.
August	The Corporation announces state AmeriCorps winners, including both formula and competitive grants.
September 12	The national launch of AmeriCorps programs takes place.
September	Program money begins flowing to states.

Table 3

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN AMERICORPS PROGRAMS
(By Month, September 1994 through April 1995)

Date	Number
September 1994	6,313
October 1994	10,315
November 1994	11,877
December 1994	12,566
January 1995	14,914
February 1995	15,535
March 1995	15,673
April 1995	15,774

Source: Corporation for National Service. The number of participants includes members of state and National Direct AmeriCorps programs and of the National Civilian Community Corps, a residential program located in four sites around the country, with approximately 1,000 members. The table does *not* include the approximately 4,000 participants in VISTA, which has become a component of AmeriCorps.

Many of these tasks were taking place almost simultaneously. In fact, during much of its first year, the Corporation was racing to issue the guidelines that states needed to follow if they were going to be able to meet the Corporation's expectations by its deadlines.

One of the Corporation staff's first tasks was to issue two sets of regulations: the administrative regulations for the state commissions that were forming, and the program regulations for AmeriCorps and other components of national service that were eligible for Corporation grants.

This task was made more difficult by the complexity of the legislation, which ran for 138 pages. The Corporation issued the preliminary administrative regulations in November 1993 and the final version in February 1994. The initial program regulations were issued at the beginning of January 1994. In late March, with clarifications and other alterations based on feedback it had received during the comment period, the Corporation issued the "Final Rule" for its grant programs. These regulations ran for 40 pages in the *Federal Register*. Interpreting the regulations, while probably not complicated for an experienced reader of federal documents, could easily have been daunting to a new organization preparing to submit its first proposal to the federal government.

At almost the same time the regulations were being written and amended, the Corporation began a series of outreach activities to educate key state representatives about AmeriCorps. During January 1994, the Corporation sponsored events, nicknamed "road shows," in four locations around the country. The "road shows" promoted AmeriCorps and provided opportunities for attendees, who included representatives from state government and from local nonprofit and service organizations, to ask questions about national service.[13] In the following months, the Corporation held regularly scheduled conference calls in order to update state commission staff and to give them opportunities to raise questions and learn from the experience of their counterparts in other states.

Inevitably, commission staff asked the Corporation questions for which there were, as yet, no answers. As local programs began to enter the process and prepare their applications, they had new sets of questions to ask their states, which the states, in turn, passed on to the Corporation, where answers (which would also have an impact on other applicants) had to be formulated. Even with everyone—the Corporation, state commissions and local applicants—working at full speed, deadlines were, inevitably, pushed back. (The final state application ultimately became due on June 22, 1994.) At any given moment, the process could seem as though it were in some degree of disarray.

[13] State commission staff had primary responsibility for educating the service communities in their state about AmeriCorps. See Chapter IV for a description.

But on August 12, the Corporation completed its detailed review of the state applications[14] and announced the winners: a total of 289 programs in 48 states.[15] It was exactly one month before the official launch of AmeriCorps.

[14] See Chapter V for a discussion of the state application and Corporation review process.

[15] Of the total number of programs, 42 focused on education, 33 on human needs, 26 on public safety and 17 on the environment. The remaining programs addressed two or more of the priority areas.

IV. THE ROLE OF THE STATES

While the Corporation for National Service "provides national regulations and promotes identity for programs at the national level," responsibility for the implementation of a successful national service initiative rests squarely on the states' shoulders (Corporation for National Service, "The Role of the State commission," 1994). With the passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act in 1993 came the directive for states to create the apparatus required in order to request and receive AmeriCorps funds from the Corporation. Forty-eight of the 50 states responded to the legislation's mandate. This chapter examines how the nine study states chose to interpret and respond to the 1993 legislation and the role the regulations delineated for them.

CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

States' responses to the 1993 legislation were affected by contextual issues that included their service history and the service-related administrative structures they had in place prior to 1993. Theoretically, states that already had a service infrastructure—characterized by a commitment to service on the state level, and reflected in the assignment of an office and/or professional staff dedicated to the promotion of service within and among localities—were in a position to move more quickly in response to the 1993 legislation.

Of the nine study states, six had administrative entities that represented at least some commitment to service at the state level.[16] Two of those six had established linkages among various streams of service, including K-12 service-learning programs and youth service and conservation corps. In addition, five of the six states described themselves as having a "shared vision" of service within their borders prior to 1993.[17]

However, the mere presence of an infrastructure did not guarantee that a state would be prepared to manage service as envisioned by the Corporation and rapidly build a coordinated network of programs and people that extended across the state. In fact, in at least three of the study states, the existence of a service-related administrative structure might have actually hindered progress, because the structures either were forced to shift priorities or were passed over entirely, creating tension and competition among rival factions. These factions, ostensibly inspired by the same vision, contended for power, turf and control of their states'

[16] All nine of the study states had received Serve-America (service-learning) funds that were made available through the 1990 legislation. (Nationwide, 47 states received Serve-America money.) The amount of money each state received at that juncture, as well as the number and variety of programs those dollars funded, reflected, in part, each state's interest in and commitment to service. For at least two of the states, those funds represented an initial foray into the service field; for others, Serve-America amplified the direction in which the states' service mechanisms were already moving.

[17] The sixth state, while supporting voluntarism at the level of the governor's office since the 1970s, had its service initiatives compromised by regional insularity.

AmeriCorps efforts. In two of these three states, the struggle over where the state's centralized service efforts would be housed took place between the entity responsible for obtaining and administering service-learning funds (Learn and Serve) and the entity where the commission would ultimately be located (in both instances, the governor's office). In the third site, the struggle took place between two factions that both resided within the governor's office. In this instance, the tension arose not around the issue of where service would reside, but around who would cultivate it. Ultimately, both sides "won." One side—the younger, service-career-oriented faction—became staff members; the other—the older, politically connected inside-tracker—chaired the commission.

Service history represents just one contextual factor that influenced how and how effectively the nine study states responded to the Corporation's regulations. The political climate, particularly in states where sitting governors faced strong electoral opposition, also had the potential to chill activity. In one state, appointments of commissioners were delayed because the governor was focused on his re-election campaign. Three of the study states had a gubernatorial change in November 1994; in one of those states, the governor's office changed parties and the commission's executive director and staff were fired shortly after the inauguration.

IMPLEMENTING THE MANDATE

The individual contexts within which the nine study states responded to the 1993 legislation helped to shape both how service was viewed and how the state organizational structures were developed. While context was important, however, the letter of the law also played a significant role. In fact, the regulations specifically defined how states would proceed *in spite of* contextual concerns.[18]

The regulations, complicated though they sometimes were, provided the blueprint by which all of the study states developed the required mechanisms that would enable them to launch the Corporation's nationwide service effort. (See Table 4 for a chronology of the states' activities.) The legislation mandated that each state develop a coherent apparatus for promoting wider participation in service planning and program decisions that would include and even extend beyond AmeriCorps. The aim was to build state service infrastructures (or improve on existing ones) that would lead states to have long-term roles in planning, coordinating and administering service initiatives. States were intended to have significant control over which local programs received AmeriCorps funding.

[18] One example of how the legislation and regulations did not take into account the context of individual states was the way money was allocated for setting up and running state commissions. The allocations were based strictly on state population, and one of the smaller study states expressed particular displeasure about the fact that despite its status as a service forerunner, it had access to fewer of those dollars than did neighboring states whose service apparatus was far less developed.

Table 4

STATE CHRONOLOGY

1993	
Autumn	States determine how to organize their commission in response to the 1993 legislation.
1994	
January	Regional technical assistance conferences (road shows) are held, with Corporation staff explaining how the AmeriCorps process will unfold in the states.
Winter/Spring	Executive directors or acting executive directors are named to head state commissions.
	State commissioners are named.
	States promote the availability of AmeriCorps funds.
March	Final program regulations are issued by the Corporation.
Spring	The Corporation staff conduct regional technical assistance workshops.
	States conduct their RFP process.
June 22	States submit their applications to the Corporation.
July/August	Commission staff negotiate details of their state application with Corporation staff.
August	States have five days to shift unfunded competitive programs into the formula portion of their application.
	States are notified of their AmeriCorps winners, including both formula and competitive grants.
	Commission staff attend a Washington, D.C. workshop focused on helping their AmeriCorps programs become operational.
Summer/Autumn	State commission staff negotiate details of grants with funded programs.
September 12	First state AmeriCorps programs become operational.

The Selection of Commissioners and Staff

According to the Corporation, "much of the responsibility for implementing national service rests with the state commissions" ("The Role of State commissions"). Selecting and convening this body and its staff, then, was the first hurdle to the implementation of the national service initiative on the state level.

The legislation left little latitude for states in terms of the *categories* of people who would sit on their respective commissions. It mandated that there be between 15 and 25 voting members on each commission, and that those members represent various constituencies, such as youth, older adults, labor, business and a national service program. Additionally, each state commission was to be "designed to look like America" in that it include both women and men of varying races and ethnicities, and people with disabilities. These commissions were, by law, to be bipartisan, with "not more than 50 percent of the commission's voting members, plus one additional member . . . from the same party" ("The Role of the State commission").

All of the states in the study endeavored to follow the letter of the law in this regard—some with more success than others. States described the nomination process for commissioners as "open" or "closed." Five conducted an "open" process that made the commissioner search a matter of public record and recognized self-nominated individuals. The four states that conducted more or less "closed" selection processes relied heavily on word-of-mouth through existing networks and contacts, doing little to inform and recruit the general public. In the nine states, the number of early candidates for commissioner positions ranged from about 50 to more than 350.[19]

Even in states with an open nomination process, the final decisions regarding appointments were, by and large, top-down, with the governor's office typically making the selections and with community representatives residing at the margins of the process. In one state, for example, there were more than 300 formal expressions of interest from would-be commissioners. That list was cut to about 50 by the governor's staff, who then followed up with those candidates.

In addition, political factors sometimes played a role in commission appointments. In at least two states, key selection criteria included people the governor "could trust" and "who would get along with the governor." One state, which conducted what it described as a fairly open nomination process that included outreach to solicit nominations from grassroots organizations, expressed pride in the fact that just three of its commissioners were selected for reasons that were politically motivated. In another state, there was political impetus for practically all commissioners selected.

[19] In two of the states, the number of nominees dropped considerably once potential candidates learned that they were required to complete financial disclosure and conflict of interest documents.

The commissions representing the nine study states range in size from 18 to 25 voting members. Ex officio members do not vote, but their numbers range from zero in one state to as many as 14. There are more women than men on all but two of the commissions, a significant majority of women on at least three. While all the commissions, as required by law, have members who represent a range of points of view, three have relatively large proportions of members representing a single sector: one includes a large number of appointed government officials; a second is dominated in numbers by representatives of nonprofit and volunteer agencies; and a third has a large number of members who represent community-based organizations and educational agencies or institutions.

The legislation also required that each commission include as a voting member at least one person who is between the ages of 16 and 25. Three of the study states invited just one young person to join; the remaining states invited from two to five youth members each. These individuals were typically recruited from high schools or college campuses. All have experience directly related to voluntarism or community service. In three of the study states, at least one youth member who was dedicated to service followed the legislation and nominated her or himself. These individuals reported that when they joined their respective commissions, they typically knew more about the service field and the legislation than did their adult counterparts.

The number of staff hired to work with commissions in the nine states ranges from one to 15. In seven of the study states, the executive directors are appointees of the governor and are typically veterans of state government, the service field or education. In one state, however, all five staffers are under the age of 30; nevertheless, all have relatively extensive service backgrounds.

The Role of Commissioners and the Role of Staff

While the legislation specifically defines the composition of state commissions, it describes the role that commissioners play in broader language. The Corporation says that commissioners should "serve as visionaries, collaborators, facilitators, ambassadors, administrators, advocates, strategic planners, fund-raisers, grant monitors and resource brokers" ("The Role of commissioners").

In fact, the first-year timeline significantly limited the initial role that commissioners could play. As states formulated the apparatus required by the Corporation, staff invariably took the lead. Most staffs were at least partially in place before commissioners were selected. Indeed, staff members in almost all study states played an active role in recruiting and selecting at least some of the commissioners.

In all study states, staff members were highly influential. They were the ones who communicated with the Corporation, particularly in the earliest stages, and oriented the commissioners at the early meetings. This is understandable: commissioners, unlike staffers, engaged in their respective state's service initiatives on a part-time basis and understood the process only to the extent that interest and opportunity would allow. In addition, the knowledge of staff relative to the commissioners was no doubt a function, at least in part, of the very compressed schedule within which everyone was forced to operate: commissioners had little time to absorb the extensive information the Corporation disseminated.

Unintentionally, all but the most dedicated and engaged commissioners found themselves entirely dependent on the commission staffs. Primarily, they relied on staff for information—not the reams of paper sent from Washington, but distilled versions that could be discussed at meetings or shared in a one- or two-page memorandum. A number of commissioners reported spending their first few months trying to understand AmeriCorps and its procedural complexities. In fact, while commissioners in all of the states played at least a minor role in information-sharing by attending regional meetings where information about AmeriCorps and proposal submission was disseminated to organizations and agencies throughout the states, more than one commissioner indicated in interviews that these occasions also served as information-gathering sessions for them.

Thus, despite the requirement by the Corporation and the efforts by states to assemble commissions that would represent broad points of view, commissioners, at least during the first year, had little influence on setting direction, shaping strategy or generating support for service across the state. While the role of at least some commissioners seems likely to evolve and take on stronger definition during year two of AmeriCorps, the typical relationship between staff and their state's commission is, in fact, currently most akin to that which exists between a nonprofit organization's staff and its board of directors. The board has fiscal responsibility and some role in shaping policy, but it is only tangentially concerned about, and rarely involved in, the organization's day-to-day operations.

The Role of Youth

The legislation and regulations made a particular point of including youth on the state commissions, and these youth technically share the same obligations as commissioners over the age of 25. While all nine states met the "youth" requirement, the extent to which these young commissioners participated was uneven.

While the Corporation called for youth participation, it did not define the role of young people any differently than that of the adult commissioners, nor did it recommend that they receive any special training.[20] It was unclear, therefore, whether the young people (whose ages in the nine study states ranged from 16 to 24) were there, like the adults, primarily to bring actual service experience and knowledge from the field to the table, or whether their primary role was to represent a "voice" for all people in their respective states who were younger than

[20] All of the study states provided their youth members with the identical preparation and orientation that adult commissioners received. This, for the most part, left the youth at a disadvantage when expected to participate as equals in a setting dominated by more experienced members.

younger than 25 (one young respondent, in all earnestness, indicated that was precisely what she did), or to represent the views and concerns of the typical AmeriCorps member.

Only a handful of the young members whom we observed effectively took on those roles. While in one state a youth member was appointed commission chair, at some state commission meetings we observed, the appointed youth were either absent or said nothing. At others, the young people who did speak up tended to be college-age individuals who participated as a function of their own initiative rather than through the support or nurturing of adult members. Some adult commissioners with whom we spoke expressed concern that the young people were simply there as "window dressing"; others proclaimed that the youth had value and importance not only as individuals who kept the adults "on their best behavior," but as sources of valuable information and experience.

THE STATES' PROGRAM-SELECTION PROCESS

With the selection of staff and commissioners, as well as the arrival of early information from the Corporation regarding opportunities and deadlines, came the decisions about not only *what* to do to promote service in the states, but *how* to proceed. Like everything else during AmeriCorps' pressured start-up year, the state RFP process was shaped to a considerable extent by the compressed timeline. Staff and commissioners from all nine study states lamented the constricted time frame in which they were expected to operate. Every decision, from selecting commissioners to selecting programs, was made under intense pressure caused by seemingly impossible deadlines. More than one staffer noted that quality sometimes suffered in the face of time constraints. This section discusses how, operating within that pressure, commissions solicited and reviewed grant proposals for their state applications and prepared the "state plans" required by the Corporation.

Educating the Public

When the executive director came on board, he or she was faced with the task of educating the public about AmeriCorps and about the process that programs were required to follow if they wanted to submit an application for funding. Considering the extremely compressed time frame, most states succeeded in reaching a fairly extensive audience using existing mailing lists and public media. States reported sending information to between 500 and 12,000 individuals and organizations. Many states also filed information at local libraries. Although states were fairly satisfied with their breadth of outreach, given the stiff time constraints, most felt that they failed to reach some sectors of the community that should be involved in the year two of the program.

The Corporation and the states encouraged three types of programs to apply for AmeriCorps funding: existing service programs, new initiatives, and collaborations between new and/or existing service programs that were working together for the first time. The amount of education required for the grant application process varied by program. Existing service programs had more experience with a competitive federal RFP process and a general appreciation for the type of program regulations involved; in some cases, their national advocacy groups, like the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps, had tracked the legislation and kept them informed. Newer programs and ones that were forming in response to the legislation had more difficulty with the process and, in some cases, were unclear about whether they were qualified to apply for funding. To fill these substantial information gaps, the Corporation required that commissions hold a series of public forums at locations across the state. States used these sessions not only to inform potential applicants about the AmeriCorps funding opportunity,[21] but also to bring together organizations in the hope of sparking collaborations.

Defining State Priorities

States typically distributed surveys at the forums in order to bring public input into the development of priorities. However, despite this information-gathering and the Corporation's invitation to commissions to develop state-focused priorities that could be addressed by applicants for formula funding, the study states did not deviate significantly from the Corporation-defined national priorities. Commissions explained that they viewed major deviations from the Corporation's agenda as risks to maximizing their funding. One state explained that there was no need to modify the Corporation's priorities, because that state was a microcosm of the country as a whole.

One study state, however, had its attendees at the public forums meet in small groups specifically to define state priorities. That state did establish priorities—including adult literacy, English as a second language, and "gaps" programming for youth (before and after school, on weekends and in summers)—that adapted the national priorities on its particular state needs. While the other states made few major alterations to the national priorities, some did make changes around the margins. One state, for example, required that all projects be in areas of documented high need,[22] and that organizations collaborate to address those needs. This requirement built on a strategy already in place in the state, and was advocated by the governor's office. Another state required that programs focus on small geographical areas and, preferably, provide multiple services to residents of those areas. Other state priorities that were established and incorporated into RFPs included parenting education and domestic violence prevention.

[21] For example, the director of an organization that advocated for the homeless wanted to expand her program to provide direct services. She was interested in AmeriCorps, but originally believed that only college students could enroll in it—and she felt that older, more experienced volunteers would better meet the particular needs of her clients. It was through one of the state forums that she learned that older volunteers could serve in AmeriCorps, and her program did eventually receive AmeriCorps funding.

[22] The legislation had stipulated that 50 percent of AmeriCorps state funding should be used for projects that are conducted in areas of "high need," broadly defined. It included, for example, areas with an unemployment rate above the national average and areas that are environmentally distressed.

Local Response to the RFPs

California, the largest study state, received 140 proposals in response to its RFP—not surprisingly, the most of any study state. Most, however, received far fewer—as few as 14. Not all of this variation can be attributed to simple differences in population or in the number of nonprofit and service organizations in the state. Interviews with state staff and commissions suggest several factors that may have limited the response among potential applicants.

Some commissions made a conscious effort to manage the expectations in the field. One commission in particular felt that it was important not to create the impression that a landslide of federal funding would be available through the 1993 Act: the first page of their RFP announced the size of their AmeriCorps allotment of formula funds, made clear that this would support only three or four programs with a total of fewer than 80 full-time ACMs, and added that the commission could legally recommend only five additional proposals for competitive funding.

One state with little service experience felt that it received fewer proposals (and thus was at a disadvantage in going after competitive money) because many of the programs in that state lacked the experience and capacity to respond to a complex RFP within such a short time frame. Another state, whose applicants consisted primarily of urban programs, felt the number of proposals it received from rural areas was limited for similar reasons. While rural networks of volunteer and church-based programs were in place, staff of those programs could not see themselves within the fairly sophisticated framework constructed by the Corporation.

In addition, the regulations called for each program to have at least 20 participants; this requirement further limited the number of applicants, particularly in states with large rural areas. Since a sparsely populated area would have little need for 20 participants working at one site, they would have to develop collaborative programs that placed participants in groups of two or three in sites around the area, something that required a degree of coordination and sophisticated organization that most programs did not yet possess.

The Proposal Review Process

The nine study states used similar proposal review processes to rank the applications numerically. All but one used at least some outside peer reviewers, though the states were not equally rigorous in the extent to which they trained reviewers to maximize the consistency of responses. One state, for example, had each proposal read and ranked by three peer reviewers. However, the three scores for the same proposal were often so inconsistent that the commission director decided to compensate by dropping the lowest score for each proposal and averaging the two remaining scores to come up with that applicant's final rating. In contrast, another state, building on a process that had previously been used to review service-learning proposals received by the state's department of education, hired an outside consultant who helped them develop a detailed protocol that described and weighted the categories in which the AmeriCorps applications would be ranked. With help from the consultant, the commission developed a complex system of review teams, which were recruited from the state's well-established service network and trained extensively. While commission staff were highly satisfied with the outcome of the process, they pointed out that it required a significant investment of money—approximately $80,000, much of which was used to train reviewers and fund their travel expenses.

In addition to numerically ranking proposals, at least two commissions interviewed finalists for their state application. In one state that required collaborations, a primary goal of the interviews was to see whether proposed collaborations had substance or were merely relationships on paper. Reviewers rejected several proposals when they observed that representatives of the collaboration were meeting for the first time at the interview. Another state probed finalists it suspected of submitting what it called "slick proposals crafted by professional grantwriters."

An additional issue that surfaced during the proposal review process was the potential for conflict of interest. In almost all the study states, one or more commissioners worked for, served on the board of, or were otherwise closely allied with programs applying for funding. In the one state that relied on commissioners for the entire review process, a number could not participate because of potential conflicts of interest. In other states, the issue became most prominent during the next stage of the process (described in the following chapter), when commissions were making decisions about the final shape of the state's application to the Corporation. At that point, a number of commissioners had to recuse themselves from the discussions.

The State Plan

As part of the application package, the Corporation required that all states draft a "state plan" that would define their service vision and drive the selection of AmeriCorps programs. The commissions were to oversee this process with input from the general public so that the document would reflect a shared and unified notion about what service would look like in their state.

While the states in our study all conducted public meetings during which they distributed surveys and collected information, none completed their state plans prior to selecting the programs they would include in their package to the Corporation. In fact, most states wrote the state plan in tandem with making program selections. Some states even based the content of their plans on the nature of their selections, and at least one study state completed its plan *after* having submitted its program package. As for who actually wrote the plan: among study states, a staff person typically drafted it and, in most cases, submitted it to the commission or to a committee of the commission for revision. The state plans were less blueprints than summaries (often with language borrowed from the Corporation) of decisions made under intense pressure.

The states' response to the legislative mandate of 1993 was, on the one hand, continually defined by the Corporation via all manner of communiques–from urgent faxes to mailed updates, from teleconferences to hurried late-night phone calls. At the same time, it was open to interpretation by staff and commissioners, who sought to define their own roles and responsibilities. The compressed timeline within which every decision seemed to be made only served to heighten the tension. All nine study states have commissions up and running; they all succeeded in getting a proposal package to the Corporation on time, and received at least partial funding in response. These significant accomplishments, however, did not necessarily mean that states would achieve a longer-term goal of the legislation–developing a strong infrastructure that might ultimately make service an ongoing part of a range of state initiatives.

V. THE FUNDING FORMULA AND STATE APPLICATIONS

If one of the goals of the National and Community Service Trust Act was to balance federal support for local service programs with responsibility and control at the state level, then a key mechanism for achieving this goal was the three-part allocation of program funds. This chapter of the report describes the funding formula, the ways that states packaged their applications in their efforts to accommodate the formula, and the extent to which the formula complicated the federal-state balance that the legislation sought to achieve.

THE FUNDING FORMULA

Under the 1993 legislation, the program funds—totaling approximately $150 million[23]—were divided into three categories. One-third of the funds (formula funds) were to be awarded to states based on population; at least one-third (state competitive funds) were to be awarded to states on a competitive basis; and the remainder (National Direct competitive funds) were to be awarded on a competitive basis to public or nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education and federal agencies.

Theoretically, this division meant that the Corporation would control which programs were selected to receive two-thirds of the allocated funds, while the states controlled program selection for one-third of the allocation—the programs that state commissions chose to include in their formula application. In addition, the division meant that at least two-thirds of the programs would operate directly under the purview of the state commissions, while one-third—the National Direct programs, which were meant to be multistate or national in scope—fell outside state commission control.[24]

The formula category was included in the legislation to ensure that states that did not yet have a strong service initiative would receive a share of AmeriCorps funding—and that states would be in a position to select which programs received the funding. The state competitive category aimed to inspire competition *among* states to encourage the development of the "best" programs and to give the Corporation control over choosing programs across the country that were of the highest quality. However, the Corporation tried to emphasize that states should not consider the formula funds to be an entitlement. In theory, only states that

[23] The $150 million did not include education awards, which were to be provided separately through the National Service Trust Fund.

[24] The Corporation had some latitude concerning how the competitive money would be divided between state and National Direct programs. More than half of the total competitive funding *could* have been used for state competitive programs, thereby increasing the number of programs that were funded through state commissions and decreasing the relative percentage of National Direct programs. However, at least for FY94, the Corporation essentially decided to split the money evenly between state and National Direct programs.

submitted high-quality formula applications and had an approved state plan would receive their formula allotment.[25]

Each state was allotted a specific amount of formula money, and the cost of programs in the state formula application could not exceed that figure. To prepare their formula application, states had to focus on the number of participant slots rather than the number of programs. The Corporation presented the allotment in terms of available slots, a number they arrived at by dividing each state's formula allocation by the anticipated average federal share of the cost of an AmeriCorps position ($13,800). The number of full-time slots, in turn, equalled the number of education awards the state was eligible to receive for its formula programs.

In addition, to keep the review process manageable for competitive funds and to try to ensure that states submitted only the highest-quality programs for that funding, the Corporation limited the number of programs a state could include in its competitive application. Each state was allowed to enter at least three programs, along with an additional program for each full percentage point of the population that state contained. Thus, since New York had 7 percent of the population, it could submit 10 (three plus seven) competitive proposals.[26] (See Table 5.)

Programs seeking state formula or competitive funding applied to their state commissions, which conducted the review process and prepared the state application. However, organizations seeking National Direct competitive funds applied directly to the Corporation. National Direct applicants were technically required to coordinate their planning with the state or states in which the program would operate, and their application to the Corporation was supposed to describe these coordination efforts. However, this level of coordination appears to have actually occurred only sporadically. While at least one state commission reported having been notified by 15 national organizations that they were seeking funding for AmeriCorps programs and might have a subgrantee operating in that state, several other commissions reported that the existence of National Direct programs in their states caught them completely by surprise.

[25] The Corporation's official stance was that if it rejected an application submitted by a state commission for formula funds, it would notify the commission of the reasons for the rejection and provide a "reasonable opportunity" for revision and resubmission of the application. If the commission requested it, the Corporation would also provide technical assistance to help the proposed programs meet quality standards.

[26] Several Corporation priorities further complicated the process. While the Corporation wanted every state to have at least 20 AmeriCorps participants, 12 states and the District of Columbia had populations too small to make them eligible for 20 slots through the formula funding. Those states could bring their number of slots up to 20 by applying for additional competitive funding for their formula programs. In effect, this rule established a small-state floor of $276,100 and 20 AmeriCorps educational awards. Grantees under the 1990 legislation also were supposed to receive priority.

Table 5

MAXIMUM SIZE OF STUDY STATE AMERICORPS APPLICATIONS

STATE	PROGRAM FUNDS AVAILABLE THROUGH FORMULA ALLOCATION	EDUCATION AWARDS AVAILABLE TO FORMULA-FUNDED PROGRAMS	MAXIMUM NUMBER OF PROGRAMS THAT COULD BE INCLUDED IN COMPETITIVE APPLICATION
California	$6,188,252	448	15
New York	3,607,947	261	10
Florida	2,712,156	197	8
North Carolina	1,376,996	100	6
Washington	1,041,917	76	5
Maryland	984,418	71	5
Colorado	707,036	51	4
Connecticut	649,736	47	4
West Virginia	360,854	26	4

Source: Corporation for National Service. "Corporation Grant Programs and Support and Investment Activities; Final Rule." *Federal Register*, March 23, 1994.

The three funding categories were also tied to the priorities that programs would have to address in order to be eligible to receive AmeriCorps grants. (See Chapter III for a discussion of the priorities.) Programs applying for competitive funds had to address the priorities established by the Corporation. However, for their formula package, each state could establish priorities that took into account that state's particular needs. These priorities would then be described in the state plan submitted to the Corporation as part of the application package.

The State Application Process

The Corporation originally wanted to keep separate the formula and competitive components of each state's application. State commissions would place each program in one section or the other, without the flexibility to rearrange the components of the application once it was submitted. The Corporation's thinking was that this approach would work best for states, local programs and the Corporation itself. It would give autonomy to the states by allowing them to decide where to place programs; let programs know up front which component of the state application they were in, so that they could better estimate their chances of receiving funding; and benefit the Corporation from a logistical point of view by keeping the review process relatively simple, a crucial point given the intense pressure it was under to get programs up and running quickly.[27]

This policy, however, exacerbated some of the tensions inherent in the legislation. While the Corporation wanted to ensure that funded programs met the high quality standards it had defined, state commissions had control over selecting which proposed local programs were included in their applications for federal funding. Under the Corporation's original policy, each state would have to decide whether to take a risk and put its best programs into the competitive pool, or to play it safe and place those programs in the formula portion of its application. If the state gambled and put its best programs in the competitive pool, and those programs did not receive funding, then the best programs in that state would go unfunded—an undesirable outcome for both the states and the Corporation.

Thus, in its final regulations, published on March 23, 1994, the Corporation changed the state AmeriCorps application process so that states would have the flexibility to replace programs included in the formula portion of their application with programs that were unsuccessful in obtaining competitive funding. The aim was to increase the chances of the highest-quality programs being selected.

Under this new policy, states would submit applications that included their state plan, formula programs and competitive programs. The Corporation would use a peer and staff review process to select the strongest competitive programs as semifinalists. State commissions

[27] The Corporation wanted to distribute competitive funds only to states that received their formula allocations. That meant evaluating the formula component of the applications before moving on to the competitive component. The Corporation felt that having separate applications would help the review process move quickly and meet its goal of distributing funds to programs in the field on a timely basis.

would be notified about which of their competitive applicants made this first cut, so they could begin to make plans to shift into the formula package any eliminated programs that they wanted to save. Then, the semifinalist competitive programs would meet with Corporation staff to negotiate changes in their grant proposal. Finally, states would be notified about which competitive programs were selected and given a brief opportunity—five days—to revise their formula applications. As a last step, the formula portions of the state applications would receive final approval from the Corporation.

The Corporation's official position was that it would be a neutral player in this process: it would not advise the states on whether to place their strongest programs in the formula or competitive portion of their application. "The Corporation has no expectations on this issue because the answer will vary from state to state," it wrote in one of the weekly updates to state commissions (*Corporation Update*, April 1, 1994). It also promised to be neutral as states made decisions about whether to alter their formula applications once the competitive programs had been selected. "This is the states' choice completely," it said, though at the request of the states, the Corporation offered to provide review forms and other information that might aid states in assessing the quality of rejected competitive programs (*Federal Register*, March 23, 1994).

HOW STATES RESPONDED

The formula/competitive split and the opportunity to shift programs between the two packages led states into a variety of strategies for structuring their applications.[28] However, having different priorities for the competitive and formula packages was not an issue. While the regulations had explained that states could set their own priorities for programs in their formula application, all nine states included in this study adopted the Corporation's priorities either completely or with very minor modifications. No commission adopted separate, state-focused priorities that could be addressed only by its formula programs. States explained this by saying that the Corporation's priorities were broad enough that they did not require modification. In fact, however, some commissions seemed unaware that they could develop state-focused priorities for their formula package.

In almost all the study states, a group composed of the executive director of the commission, and key staff and commissioners formulated a package to present to the full commission for review. (See Table 6.) Few states used what could be described as a single approach for making their decisions about which programs to put in the competitive portion and which to

[28] Of the nine states studied, eight included in their application the maximum number of competitive programs allowed, along with formula programs that matched the state's allotment of funding and participant slots. One state submitted fewer than its allowed maximum number of programs in the competitive package because it chose not to include any proposals that it considered relatively weak. In addition, five of the state commissions included proposals for planning grants in their applications to the Corporation. To some extent, they felt this strategy would give them an advantage for 1995 funding, when they expected that programs that had received planning grants in 1994 would be given priority for operating grants.

Table 6

NUMBER OF PROPOSALS RECEIVED BY STATE COMMISSIONS AND NUMBER INCLUDED IN THEIR AMERICORPS APPLICATION

STATE	NUMBER OF PROPOSALS RECEIVED FROM LOCAL PROGRAMS	NUMBER OF PROPOSALS INCLUDED IN APPLICATION
California	140	61 (including 24 planning grants)[a]
New York	67	28 (including 11 planning grants)
North Carolina	43	19 (including 7 planning grants)
Florida	37	17
Colorado	34	6
Maryland	26	9
Washington	17	7 (including 1 planning grant)
West Virginia	16	6
Connecticut	14	5 (including 2 planning grants)

[a] Among the planning grants included in California's formula application were a group of "hatching grants." These requested $5,000 each for 20 programs to use for very preliminary program planning. The Corporation rejected the "hatching grants," though it approved the four other, more traditional planning grants.

include in the formula portion. However, the strategies of the nine states that were studied can be categorized this way:

1. Rankings. All state commissions used a numerical review process for ranking proposals submitted by local organizations. In most cases, their criteria closely paralleled the criteria that the Corporation said would be used at the national level. These included, for example, program impact, infrastructure, capacity and sustainability. State commissions used the rankings from their review process to decide which of the proposals they received from local programs would be included in their state AmeriCorps application.

   In some cases, commissions also used the rankings to make decisions about which of the accepted programs would go into the competitive portion of the application. Of the nine states studied, four placed the proposals with the highest rankings in their competitive application. One state, in a slightly different version of this strategy, made the decision to place its lowest-ranked accepted programs into its formula package.

2. Program Size. Five states placed programs in the competitive application because they were too large for the formula portion. They would have used too high a percentage of available slots, or they required more slots than the state was allocated.

3. Geographical Diversity. Two states placed at least some proposals in the formula application because they wanted to ensure having AmeriCorps programs in a range of locations around the state.

Two other factors also entered into the decisions. In at least three states, political pressures led to the inclusion of programs that had otherwise ranked too low to become part of the state application.[29] In addition, at least six states encountered tensions between including new programs and including those programs—youth service and conservation corps—that had been funded under the 1990 legislation. On the one hand, commissioners wanted the national service initiative to reach new constituencies and to build the state's service base. On the other hand, the mandate to "get things done" and fund high-quality programs drove states to select programs that had demonstrated existing capacity. This was further complicated by the question of fulfilling funding "commitments" made under the 1990 Act. Ultimately, three of those states chose not to include the 1990-funded youth corps programs in their packages. One of the states that did include a corps application made that decision only after much internal struggle, while the other two states easily decided to include the previously funded programs.

[29] In one state, the governor wrote a letter to each commissioner the day before the meeting where final selections would be made, asking them to fund two desired projects.

Competitive-Formula Shifts

Of the nine states studied, six submitted their applications assuming that they would make adjustments based on the Corporation's response to their competitive package. One state that had placed its highest-ranking programs in the competitive package had a bluntly articulated strategy: it would move any unfunded competitive programs to the formula package and bump formula programs as necessary. The other five of those states planned to decide on their adjustments once they learned about the Corporation's response. One commission, for example, termed both the competitive and formula portions of its application "equally insecure."

In fact, once the Corporation made its decisions about funding for competitive programs, seven of the states shifted at least some of their unfunded competitive applicants to the formula package. The changes took these forms:

1. Three states moved all of their unfunded competitive programs into their formula package, displacing or reducing the size of formula programs to accommodate the switches.

2. Four other states shifted at least one of their unfunded competitive programs into the formula package. This included one state that had originally planned to make no changes; it moved one of its rejected competitive programs to the formula package, displacing planning grants but no operating programs.

States reported two reasons for making such shifts. One was what a commission director described as "fairness." In that state, several of the rejected competitive programs had earlier been moved from the formula to the competitive package to strengthen that package, and it seemed only fair to move them back. In addition, two commissions reported that the Corporation's decision to reject particular competitive applicants had disrupted the geographical balance of AmeriCorps programs in the state. Some rejected competitive programs were moved into the formula package to restore that balance, while formula programs were bumped that would have been operating in parts of the state served by competitive programs that were funded.

Several of the states reported using feedback from the Corporation as part of their decision-making process. In one case, a state that asked for an oral evaluation of each program received comments from the Corporation that seemed to fall into five categories: (1) we like this competitive program and we'll fund it; (2) we like this program but we can't fund it out of the competitive funds because there isn't enough money; (3) we don't want to fund this competitive program at all; (4) we like this formula program; and (5) we don't like this formula program.

The state commission interpreted the comments on each program as guidance in reshaping its application. In particular, there was a strong suggestion that when a competitive program was described as "strong, but there's not enough money to fund it," the program would be a good candidate to shift to the formula package to replace programs that the Corporation suggested were not particularly strong. At the same time, the director of this state commission emphasized that the Corporation did not compel her to remove any of her formula programs.

Two other states removed planning grants from their formula packages, one at the Corporation's insistence and the other after what might be described as a strong suggestion. In both cases, the Corporation was pushing toward funding programs that would show immediate results in place of grants for programs that would still be in their formative stage and would thus not be producing the kinds of outcomes needed to win over skeptical members of Congress.[30]

Two states made no changes in their formula applications after receiving the Corporation's decisions about competitive programs. One had its entire competitive package accepted. The other, which had four of its six competitive programs rejected, made no changes even though it seemed to feel that some of its best programs had been eliminated. Its decision resulted from a combination of political constraints and a desire not to disrupt the geographical balance of its formula package.

THE EFFORT TO REGAIN BALANCE

Neither the states nor the Corporation was satisfied with the year-one grant making process. States were unhappy with the ways that the Corporation's decisions affected the final outcomes—directly, by denying funding to some programs and asking some semifinalists to make changes in their proposals; and indirectly, by precipitating the states' need to juggle programs between competitive and formula pots, trim proposed budgets and otherwise manipulate programs in response to the Corporation's final decisions. Several state commissions criticized the Corporation for being too top-down, and one executive director said, "The Corporation wants to run programs."

The Corporation felt an equal degree of discontent. It did not like what it termed "excessive gamesmanship" on the states' part in response to the 1994 policy, and it also felt that some of the first-year formula-funded programs were not of particularly high quality.

Thus, in November 1994, the Corporation altered its formula/competitive application policy so that states would not be able to shift proposed programs between the two packages once their 1995 AmeriCorps applications had been submitted. This was a return to the original, but never used, policy; Corporation representatives hoped the change would encourage states to

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[30] While most of the negotiations involved strengthening or, in some cases, dropping programs, the Corporation encouraged at least one program that had applied only for education awards to *increase* the number of awards that it was requesting. However, it also pushed a different program in that state to decrease the amount of money it was requesting for each AmeriCorps slot.

put their best programs into the formula application or risk having those programs go unfunded if not accepted as part of the competitive package.

Quickly, however, the Corporation reversed its position—largely in response to complaints from the state commissions and the reemerging specter of states putting weaker programs into their formula packages in an effort to strengthen their competitive packages. In 1995, states will again be allowed to shift unfunded competitive programs and resubmit their formula application after the Corporation has made its final competitive funding decisions.

At the same time, in an effort to gain more control over the quality of programs—and at the risk of upsetting the federal-state balance—the Corporation has made explicit its right to reject individual programs in the formula package. It has notified state commissions that "the quality of formula programs will be evaluated with the same criteria used for competitive programs. The formulas must meet quality standards." Corporation staff have, once again, promised to work with state commissions, telling them why rejected formula programs do not meet standards and spelling out the state's options for bringing programs into compliance. But if the proposed formula program continues to fall below standards, the Corporation "reserves the right" to reject it ("1995 AmeriCorps State Application Guidelines" [draft version]).

COORDINATING AMERICORPS

The funding formula—specifically, the division between state and National Direct programs—created an additional problem. While the Corporation works to achieve a national identity for AmeriCorps, state commissions are similarly attempting to create a state AmeriCorps identity as a key part of a statewide service infrastructure. However, commission staff in almost all of the study states reported that the existence of National Direct programs had been an obstacle to their efforts to coordinate AmeriCorps initiatives and establish a coherent state service strategy. Seven of the study states have a larger number of National Direct AmeriCorps programs than they have state AmeriCorps programs. (See Table 7.)

Commissions' attitudes toward the existence of National Direct programs in their states ranged from considering them a relatively minor problem—a group of programs that must be acknowledged, but reside on the margins of state concerns—to viewing them, in the words of one commission staff, as "a violation of local priority setting." All the state commissions are beginning to grapple with ways to integrate locally based National Direct programs into their state service structure, but one commission director described the situation as "awkward": local programs that are part of the National Directs are, in a sense, chosen by their national programs, like Habitat for Humanity, and thus are fairly removed from the state commissions—yet the commissions still feel responsible for them.

Table 7

STATE AND NATIONAL DIRECT AMERICORPS PROGRAMS AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS[a]

STATE	NUMBER OF STATE PROGRAMS[b]	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN STATE PROGRAMS	NUMBER OF NATIONAL DIRECT PROGRAMS[c]	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN NATIONAL DIRECT PROGRAMS
California	19	1,010	24	885
New York	11	600	14	323
Florida	11	225	9	214
North Carolina	8	271	10	153
Washington	6	522	15	237
Maryland	6	289	12	177
Colorado	5	102	3	20
Connecticut	2	213	5	29
West Virginia	2	30	3	18

[a] Participants include both full- and part-time AmeriCorps members.

[b] The numbers include operating programs only. Four of the states also received planning grants. They are California (4 planning grants), North Carolina (6), Washington (1) and Connecticut (2).

[c] The number of programs reflects the number of federal agencies or national nonprofit organizations operating AmeriCorps programs in each state. For example, while the National Association of Child Care might have AmeriCorps members at four different sites around a state, it is considered one program for the purposes of this table.

Sources: State programs and participants—Corporation for National Service, August 1994. National Direct programs and participants—Corporation for National Service, March 1995.

VI. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The findings discussed in this chapter are limited to the broad patterns we observed in our study states during the first-year implementation phase of AmeriCorps. Since only a limited number of programs started up in these states during that period (and in many cases, not until the end of the year), we cannot address in this report such questions as the kinds of programs that were selected, the communities they served, and the individuals who participated. Those questions will be examined in a subsequent phase of this project.

FINDINGS

Perhaps the most central and basic fact about the first year of AmeriCorps is this: the extremely rapid, often hectic pace of the first year dominated the proceedings. Because both the Corporation and the states were caught up in what became an implementation race, it is difficult to draw hard conclusions about which particular policies or procedures worked and which did not. Apparent successes or failures could be as reasonably attributed to the circumstances of a highly compressed implementation pace as to the intrinsic value or effectiveness of any policy or practice.

In addition to this overarching fact, we find the following:

1. Federal-State Balance and Responsibilities: Unlike other national service programs, including Franklin D. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps, AmeriCorps is meant to be locally driven and community-based. This complex focus—a national program driven by 50 (or 48) different state commissions dealing with hundreds of local programs—means that the Corporation must perform a difficult balancing act. It has to retain enough control to ensure implementation consistent with its vision of AmeriCorps and seek to maintain a high level of quality within programs, while at the same time allowing states to define their own service needs and strategies for meeting those needs. Indeed, AmeriCorps has many of the characteristics of a demonstration project: among them the fragile balance between central control and local innovation; the compressed time frame; and the ongoing negotiations that must take place as a result.

In fact, the Corporation has taken an active role in shaping AmeriCorps. It has consciously sought to establish and promote its version of service, centered on its often-repeated theme of "getting things done," and has stressed to states the importance of identifying or developing programs that are results-focused. In reviews of individual programs (reviews that the Corporation organized and carried out to an unusually extensive degree) and in negotiations with states, Corporation staff were often forthright in expressing their preferences about specific programs.

The Corporation also aimed explicitly to make AmeriCorps a "national" effort, one whose constituent state programs would be visible and recognized as part of a national program. To this end, it specified common areas of training for AmeriCorps members, designed a logo, designed and distributed uniforms, and organized a national kick-off day on September 12, 1994.

The Corporation also made an early strategic choice that, at least in the short term, had tangible implications for the federal-state balance. It chose—in reality, it had little option to do otherwise—to accomplish the selection and start-up of programs within a comparatively short period, and set its timetable accordingly. In so doing, and in vigorously pushing ahead with that timetable, it limited the ability of states to build a careful and coherent base of support for service activities within the states. In addition, as will be discussed, states did not have adequate time to develop plans and strategies for service activities. The Corporation set the pace, and the pace limited or at least delayed the development of the state level as a solid base for service.

States, in turn, expressed some dissatisfaction, or at least confusion, about the Corporation's role. While the Corporation is not operating like a typical federal bureaucracy that lays down blanket regulations, it is also not operating like a private philanthropy that awards grants to approved programs while maintaining a relatively hands-off approach. To some extent, this in-between status accounts for the feeling among the majority of state commissions we studied that their relationship with the Corporation was "too top-down." Some of the complaints arose from commissions' displeasure that particular programs submitted in their competitive packages were not funded. Others resulted from the detailed reviews and rewriting that the Corporation required for some program proposals.

Some of what states perceived as imbalance can be attributed to problems that inevitably develop in the first year of a program that is being created as it goes along. These include what several states referred to as the "shifting guidelines" issued by the Corporation, where policies were changed either because of internal Corporation decisions or after feedback from the states. One of the states' complaints is relatively trivial: the centralized control of the September 12 AmeriCorps launch. However, the shifting guidelines and, at least in one state, the Corporation's handling of the launch, created problems for state commissions in their dealings with local programs, because the commissions had to change decisions that had been made on what they had regarded as definitive information.

However, the Corporation was, for the most part, able to carry off its role. Although states frequently voiced criticisms about the degree to which they saw the Corporation second-guessing their decisions, or at times infringing on their latitude to make choices about what was "best" for their states, they did by and large respond to the Corporation's direction-setting. Indeed, while the states hold a substantial part of the administrative and decision-making responsibility, the Corporation was generally accepted as an active partner with considerable, even if at times informal, influence. Still, at the end of year one of AmeriCorps, the roles of the Corporation and the states, rather than being clear and well-understood, were still in flux, and were cause for some tension and confusion.

2. The Emphasis on Quality: Along with issuing program regulations, the Corporation took the ambitious step of defining detailed quality standards and expectations, which, it made clear to states, it wanted to see reflected in the criteria and procedures states used in identifying and selecting programs.

This was not just a bureaucratic gesture. The Corporation followed up energetically and consistently on the issues and standards it had defined in its publication *Principles for High Quality National Service Programs*. It carried out an extensive review of program applications, not only of programs applying for competitive awards, but also of the states' formula applications, where states presumably had the authority to make decisions on their own. In its negotiations with states, the Corporation cited quality issues in its appraisal of individual programs, and as an explanation for funding decisions it reached.

The focus on quality—and the pressure to have AmeriCorps programs immediately accomplish specific kinds and measurable amounts of work—contributed to an imbalance in the federal-state relationship. While the Corporation took a broad view of the priority areas and encouraged local program planners to develop creative approaches to addressing the issues, its quality standards gave it the control to reject some programs that states favored and to require that other programs make specific changes before they would be approved for grants.

As would be expected, this approach was not without problems. Some states found the Corporation's application of quality standards to be intrusive or inconsistent, and argued that the Corporation was "micromanaging." For the most part, however, states acquiesced in the Corporation's interpretation and application of quality standards.

3. The Role of Commissions: State commissioners were expected to fill a variety of roles: in the Corporation's words, they were to be "visionaries, collaborators, facilitators, ambassadors, administrators, advocates, strategic planners, fundraisers, grant monitors and resource brokers." To help states fill these roles, the Corporation's administrative regulations carefully defined the categories of people required to be named to each commission—including, for example, representatives of private business, organized labor, community-based agencies and local government—to assure that multiple points of view would be represented and in the hope that the commission would provide multiple points of contact for nascent statewide service networks.

In the states we examined, however, most commissions had little real role during the first year of AmeriCorps. They had a minor part, at best, in shaping state service priorities (which often were adopted whole-cloth from the Corporation's national priorities), and few participated in the formative stages of key decision-making processes. This was, inevitably, another result of the compressed timeline. The commissioners' first task was simply to understand AmeriCorps, which required working through a massive amount of information in a very limited amount of time.

The complexity of the regulations and sheer volume of administrative arrangements to be made put the initial burden for shaping AmeriCorps heavily on professional staff in each state. Now, with their orientation behind them, commissioners are positioned to become more active participants in the process and to fill the roles that the Corporation has envisioned for them. But just as it is too early to know the extent to which individual commissions will foster statewide service infrastructures, it is too early to know what part the commissioners will actually play in that process.

4. Accomplishments in the States: We found that under the consistent pressure to complete a highly ambitious timetable, the states were able to accomplish an extraordinary amount in a very short time. States developed, selected and staffed new commissions. They carried through a process of outreach and public hearings, and of screening, ranking, selecting and forwarding programs to the Corporation. By September 1994, states had gotten programs off the ground, and about 6,000 AmeriCorps members had started work in projects across the country—a number that increased to approximately 15,000 by April 1995.

As would be natural in any process so compressed and detailed, fair amounts of stress and confusion were evident. Some areas were not well-addressed, and some consequences were not foreseen. Also, staff concentrated heavily on selecting programs, since it was the most urgent and important dimension of their work. Consequently, little time was left over for thinking through long-term issues of infrastructure, and political and funding support.

In fact, the highly ambitious agenda the Corporation established for itself and for the states probably could not have been fully completed. To the extent the agenda was attained, it was at the inevitable cost of coherent planning and capacity-building by the states. Still, as a result of their year-one efforts, states have the basic administrative structures in place to begin more coordinated statewide service efforts.

Still, one potential obstacle in state coordination efforts is the existence of National Direct AmeriCorps programs, which seem, in their own way, to be upsetting the federal-state balance. Commissions in the study states were struggling at year's end to find ways to bring the 90 or so National Direct programs into their state service network. This issue also extends to other Corporation-funded initiatives that should, in theory, be coordinated at the state and local level. The extent to which state commissions will serve as a mechanism to reach *beyond* AmeriCorps and other Corporation programs–to generate other state service initiatives or collaborate with state service organizations–was still very much an open issue at the end of year one.

An additional point should be made. Many of the AmeriCorps funding decisions made by states during the rushed first year will have long-term consequences that cannot readily be modified. This is because first-year awards were intended to be part of a three-year commitment to the selected programs, with continuation funding more or less assured, assuming satisfactory performance and availability of funds. Thus, a major percentage of the funds states will receive in the second and third years of AmeriCorps is already spoken for. Clearly, the first-year choices, to a considerable extent, say much about what AmeriCorps will look like for the next two years as well.

5. The Funding Mechanism: The financial base for states' AmeriCorps programming consisted of two streams of funding: formula grants, which were allotted to each state on the basis of population, and competitive grants, for which any state could apply. Although the distinction between the funding streams seemed relatively clear in principle and in the regulations, this two-dimensional funding mechanism created problems for both the states and the Corporation. It limited states' capacity to plan effectively, and it contributed to tensions between state commissions and the Corporation.

The intent of the mechanism was to allow states, in their formula allocation, to have a known funding amount that they could use for programs they selected (consistent with the quality standards and other guidelines established by the Corporation) as long as they addressed the broad areas of need set forth in the legislation. States could also apply for the competitive grants, which were to address Corporation-defined priority areas and which were awarded by the Corporation based on its own review of the applications.

With one exception, the study states took little advantage of the opportunity to have more precisely state-focused priorities for their formula programs and address national priorities in their competitive programs. Instead, most selected a top group of programs through their own RFP processes, then faced the task of deciding in which portion of their state application—formula or competitive—to include each program. For example, states put their most highly ranked programs in the competitive portion, or put their most expensive programs there, or put programs that they were most concerned to have funded in the formula portion. Often, they combined such strategies.

The process was further complicated by the fact that the final regulations provided for a brief period of time, following the Corporation's funding decisions about competitive programs, when states could adjust their overall applications and move unfunded competitive grant applications into the formula package, either displacing other programs or reducing funding for them.

Overall, the funding mechanism was, at best, unhelpful. It did not help states develop an effective program strategy. It left individual programs uncertain of whether they would be funded, and if so, how much funding they would receive. Thus, they were unable to recruit participants or build staff. This was true even for programs included in the formula application: theoretically, they *should* have been assured of funding, but in fact, they knew they could be displaced or reduced in scale by decisions about competitive grant applications.

The mechanism actually blurred the distinction between formula and competitive grants and left states with a program selection process that had uncertain rules. And it gave the Corporation a large role in the content of states' formula grants because those grants were, to a considerable degree, influenced by decisions the Corporation made about the competitive grant applications that the states submitted.

In addition, the time-consuming complexity of the mechanism further delayed the funding process. Programs were notified of awards only a month before the scheduled AmeriCorps launch. As a result, they had a highly compressed start-up period, and while it is too early to know if this had an effect on program quality, it did result in many programs delaying operations until later in 1994 or even 1995—ultimately slowing down the process of getting programs up and running.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the 1994 implementation year was successful in meeting the Corporation's overriding goal of recruiting and selecting AmeriCorps programs, and in actually getting them operational. Under difficult circumstances, states accomplished a great deal, and for the most part, what they accomplished was creditable in terms of quality and responsiveness to the Corporation's guidelines and time pressures.

There can be no doubt that the Corporation was pivotal in the accomplishments of the states. It drove the process consistently and intensively as it sought to establish an active, shaping role in AmeriCorps. Although there were inevitable problems, and a key funding mechanism seemed to complicate rather than support sound programming decisions, the Corporation's performance was highly effective in getting a new federal initiative quickly into operation.

At the same time, the picture is far less clear for judging how effective the first-year process was in giving states the capacities, decision-making latitude, and opportunity to develop long-term support and infrastructure for service. The state role in developing service during the first year was in great measure technical and administrative—the response of dedicated staff to a body of regulations for selecting and funding AmeriCorps programs. The establishment of commissions occurred mostly on a formal level; in practice, they had only a limited role in shaping service within the states. Real strategic assessment, thinking and planning did not take place during the first year in the study states: the pressures to get programs operational took precedence.

The first year thus raises questions that cannot be answered at this stage. It is unclear how the federal-state balance in shaping AmeriCorps will play out. The Corporation extended the federal role to a considerable degree as it sought to make AmeriCorps a nationally visible and recognized program, though one for which states had programmatic and managerial responsibility. How effectively the Corporation continues to play this role, how comfortable states feel about the activist posture of the Corporation, and the extent to which states develop coherent and lasting service networks are all key issues to examine.

Likewise, it will be important to track the extent to which both the Corporation and the state commissions can strengthen and consolidate the work they very rapidly completed in the first year, and how much they see the need to revisit arrangements or decisions made in haste in 1994. The ultimate soundness and effectiveness of those choices will be judged in the next few years, as the impact of AmeriCorps programs begins to be felt, and it becomes possible to judge more fully whether AmeriCorps is, in fact, getting things done.

APPENDIX A

MAJOR PROGRAMS AND FUNDING LEVELS OF THE CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL SERVICE FISCAL YEAR 1994

PROGRAM	FUNDING LEVEL (in Millions)
LEARN AND SERVE AMERICA	
Higher Education	$ 10.00
K-12 Programs	30.00
AMERICORPS	
AmeriCorps Grant Programs	
- National Direct Programs	48.70
- State (Formula and Competitive)	153.60
Tribes and Territories	3.10
NATIONAL SENIOR SERVICE CORPS	
Retired Senior Volunteers	34.40
Senior Companions	29.70
Foster Grandparents	66.10

Source: Corporation for National Service

APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF STATES' RESPONSES TO THE 1990 LEGISLATION

In Fall 1993, P/PV in conjunction with Youth Service America (YSA), identified the person in each state and the District of Columbia most knowledgeable about their state's experience with the 1990 legislation and mailed them a survey. Typically, this "key informant" was head of the state lead agency formed in response to the 1990 Act or was a participant in the group that was transitioning the administrative entity from that formed under the 1990 Act to the one forming in response to the 1993 Act. The survey included questions about the states' administrative structure for managing the service initiative, procedures for developing a state plan and promoting service, and questions about the application process and awards made under Subtitles B1 (K - 12), B2 (Higher Education) and C (Youth Service and Conservation Corps).

We received completed surveys from 33 states. To obtain this rate of return, we followed the mailing with repeated phone calls encouraging the key informant to complete and return the survey and, in cases where the informant reported that they didn't have sufficient time to complete the survey themselves, we interviewed them on the telephone and recorded their responses. While the overall response rate is acceptable and the states seem representative, we do not claim that these states represent the full range of possible experiences or that this group is statistically representative of all 50 states.

Seven tables are included in this Appendix. For each of the three subtitles, we present an application and award summary, the percentage of applicants to a state commission that received funding and the level of matching funds provided by the states to the subgrantees. Table B.7 lists the states that completed the survey. Two explanatory notes about the tables are necessary. The service establishment often referred to funds distributed in FY 1992 as the "year-one" experience and in FY 1993 as the "year-two" experience. Tables B.1 through B.7 use "FY 1992" and "FY 1993" rather than "year one" and "year two." Secondly, the number of states that responded to a question is included in each Table. If the number of respondents listed is less than 33 (the overall number of completed surveys) it could indicate that either the state did not have any experience with that subtitle, that the respondent was not aware of the experience or that the state applied for funding but did not receive any under that subtitle.

Table B.1

K-12 (SUBTITLE B1) APPLICATION AND AWARD SUMMARY FY1992 AND FY1993 FOR GRANTS MADE UNDER THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE TRUST ACT OF 1990

	FY1992	**FY1993**
Median Award from Commission to State Lead Agencies (N=32,32)	$375,000	$343,000
Median Number of Applications Submitted to State Lead Agencies (N=30,26)	54	47
Range of Awards From State Lead Agencies to Subgrantees (N=29,26)	$250 to $250,000	$500 to $250,000
Percentage of States Using RFP Process in Either FY1992 or FY1993 (N=32)	94%	

Source: Public/Private Ventures-Youth Service America State Survey.

Table B.2

PATTERN OF AWARDS FROM STATE LEAD AGENCIES TO K-12 (SUBTITLE B1) APPLICANTS AND PROVISION OF MATCHING FUNDS BY STATES TO K-12 PROGRAMS

PERCENTAGE OF APPLICANTS RECEIVING AWARDS FROM STATE LEAD AGENCIES	NUMBER OF STATES FY1992 (N=29)	FY1993 (N=22)
1 to 50%	20	8
51 to 99%	4	11
100%	3	3
Over 100%	2	0
MATCHING FUNDS PROVIDED BY STATES TO:	**NUMBER OF STATES FY1992 (N=31)**	**FY1993 (N=30)**
All or Most Programs	8	7
Some Programs	11	10
No Programs	12	13

Source: Public/Private Ventures-Youth Service America State Survey.

Table B.3

HIGHER EDUCATION (SUBTITLE B2) APPLICATION AND AWARD SUMMARY FY1992 AND FY1993 FOR GRANTS MADE UNDER THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE TRUST ACT OF 1990

	FY1992	**FY1993**
Median Award from Commission to State Lead Agencies (N=18,16)	$87,000	$97,000
Median Number of Applications Submitted to State Lead Agencies (N=11,9)	14	2
Range of Award From State Lead Agencies to Subgrantees (N=9,7)	$665 to $21,000	$500 to $25,000
Percentage of States Using RFP Process in Either FY1992 or FY1993 (N=21)	48%	

Source: Public/Private Ventures-Youth Service America State Survey.

Table B.4

PATTERN OF AWARDS FROM STATE LEAD AGENCIES TO HIGHER EDUCATION (SUBTITLE B2) APPLICANTS AND PROVISION OF MATCHING FUNDS BY STATES TO HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

PERCENTAGE OF APPLICANTS RECEIVING AWARDS FROM STATE LEAD AGENCIES	NUMBER OF STATES FY1992 (N=10)	FY1993 (N=6)
1 to 50%	2	1
51 to 99%	5	2
100%	3	3
Over 100%	0	0

MATCHING FUNDS PROVIDED BY STATES TO:	NUMBER OF STATES FY1992 (N=10)	FY1993 (N=10)
All or Most Programs	3	4
Some Programs	4	3
No Programs	3	3

Source: Public/Private Ventures-Youth Service America State Survey.

Table B.5

YOUTH SERVICE AND CONSERVATION CORPS (SUBTITLE C) APPLICATION AND AWARD SUMMARY FY1992 AND FY1993 FOR GRANTS MADE UNDER THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE TRUST ACT OF 1990

	FY1992	FY1993
Median Award from Commission to State Lead Agencies (N=20,19)	$700,000	$740,000
Median Number of Applications Submitted to State Lead Agencies (N=16,16)	8	3
Range of Award From State Lead Agencies to Subgrantees (N=12,12)	$15,000 to $530,000	$19,000 to $515,000
Percentage of States Using RFP Process in Either FY1992 or FY1993 (N=22)	41%	

Source: Public/Private Ventures-Youth Service America State Survey.

Table B.6

PATTERN OF AWARDS FROM STATE LEAD AGENCIES TO YOUTH SERVICE AND CONSERVATION CORPS (SUBTITLE C) APPLICANTS AND PROVISION OF MATCHING FUNDS BY STATES TO YOUTH AND CONSERVATION CORPS PROGRAMS

PERCENTAGE OF APPLICANTS RECEIVING AWARDS FROM STATE LEAD AGENCIES	NUMBER OF STATES FY1992 (N=13)	FY1993 (N=11)
1 to 50%	5	1
51 to 99%	2	3
100%	6	7
Over 100%	0	0
MATCHING FUNDS PROVIDED BY STATES TO:	**NUMBER OF STATES FY1992 (N=16)**	**FY1993 (N=15)**
All or Most Programs	7	7
Some Programs	6	4
No Programs	3	4

Source: Public/Private Ventures-Youth Service America State Survey.

Table B.7

STATES THAT RESPONDED TO MAIL SURVEY

Arizona	Louisiana	New Mexico
California	Maine	New York
Connecticut	Maryland	North Carolina
Delaware	Massachusetts	Ohio
Florida	Michigan	Oklahoma
Georgia	Minnesota	Oregon
Illinois	Mississippi	Pennsylvania
Indiana	Missouri	Rhode Island
Iowa	Nevada	South Carolina
Kansas	New Hampshire	Virginia
Kentucky	New Jersey	West Virginia

APPENDIX C

STUDY DESCRIPTION

BACKGROUND

The Ford Foundation provided grant funding to Public/Private Ventures to study implementation of the new National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. The Act, which builds upon earlier (1990) legislation, was designed to consolidate some extant streams of funding for service and volunteer activity, to reflect the emphasis of the new Administration on service, especially by young people, and in particular to provide funding for service opportunities connected to post-program "educational benefits," thus linking interest in serving with chances to further one's education.

The Act has a number of features, key among them:

- The consolidation of earlier funding streams under the 1990 National and Community Service Act; in addition, the merger of ACTION programs (including VISTA and a collection of senior service programs) into a new Corporation for National Service;
- A more prominent state role, and a more coherent state apparatus for promoting wider participation in service planning and program decisions;
- A complex funding formula that provides support for national programs funded directly by the Corporation, and both formula and "competitive" funding streams for states' use in developing their own networks of service programs;
- Funding for "education awards," made available to individuals who serve in funded programs for a stipulated period of time; and
- Continuing support for service-learning and service programs at both the K-12 and higher education levels, as well as support for the Points of Light Foundation and some smaller initiatives.

Developing and fostering a viable, stable, effective long-term role for states is viewed as a critical dimension of the new Act. The states received by far the most significant share of funding. They were responsible for planning, coordinating and administering the lion's share of service activities. And their role was complicated by the fact that most of the actual programs and service that result were "local": in urban and rural communities in the 50 states. Thus the way that states approached their tasks and challenges, and the degree to which they succeeded, has a major bearing on how successful the new legislation will be.

The Ford Foundation's major interest, in fact, lies in understanding how the "state role" envisioned in the new legislation helped to shape the way service unfolds under the new legislation. Thus the study project centers on documenting and understanding how the state role worked out in practice, gauging its effects on national service, and identifying lessons for policymakers and legislators. The first phase of the work will continue through the end of 1995; subsequent work may also be supported, depending on the results of this initial period.

Though other dimensions of national service will be reviewed or touched upon in the course of our work, their inclusion will for the most part be as background, necessary to understand state-level activities and the context in which they unfolded. Thus, we expected to document to some extent the role of the national Corporation, ACTION programs, the "National Direct" granting process, and the programs it supported, and the Learn and Serve America Program—but only to the extent (and in a fashion) necessary to help us develop a full picture of how states progressed in their role.

Thus our major effort was to *document* the process states undertook to organize themselves, to plan, and to establish and support programs; and to *assess* the results of that process and funding. The latter, it should be noted, is "evaluative," in the sense of isolating and measuring impacts, and rigorously determining the costs and benefits of service programs. As discussed below, such a research approach was infeasible. Instead, our aim was to chronicle the implementation of the new Act, and to draw conclusions, fairly and objectively, for the benefit of policymakers, legislators and practitioners.

RESEARCH ISSUES

The major questions addressed in the study project are:

- How effective is the new legislation, with its focus on the state role, in enhancing or increasing national service?
- How much do states in their new role under the new legislation increase visibility and support for the ideal of and for involvement in national service?
- How might public policy be strengthened, modified or expanded in order to enhance the effectiveness of states in providing service?

Though these may be the most appropriate questions, there are a number of practical obstacles to addressing them convincingly in a practically focused research project. Three issues, in particular, are pivotal.

First, there are numerous, widely varying expectations of what service programs should do, indeed even differing definitions of what service is or ought to be. In part this has been a long-standing characteristic of the field; in part, too, it reflects the idealism and altruism inherent in service, and the natural difficulty in "defining" what service is in a manner that would satisfy everybody. As a result, it would be difficult to specify a set of "outcomes" for service programs that would be small enough to be researched dispositively, yet inclusive enough to satisfy the diversity of expectations and results invoked by followers of the service field.

Second, examining even a relatively few of the most critical outcomes would pose substantial methodological challenges. The major goals of the legislation are sweeping, and involve such difficult-to-measure issues as strengthening community, providing benefits to service participants themselves, and ensuring that demonstrable services and benefits occur in communities where service programs are supported. These results are to be achieved through a decentralized (and newly formed) network of state commissions, charged with developing plans and programs for their states. There would be substantial conceptual problems involved in gauging results with any precision in such a complex environment.

Finally, the resources available under the new legislation for AmeriCorps funding are quite modest, though they represent a marked increase over earlier federal funding levels. States were developing plans to spend not millions, but in many cases hundreds of thousands of dollars, distributed among a number of individual programs.

It would be well-nigh impossible to isolate the "effects" of AmeriCorps funding in an individual program in a single community, with objective rigor. The impacts would be minuscule relative to the plethora of other programs, funding and activities, and thus "measurement" of effects would be an inappropriate aim, or an excessively costly exercise—if it could be done successfully at all.

However, our aim was not merely to document what happened, but to provide some findings and conclusions about what we learned that has value for the field. To do that, we organized our work around four main themes, derived from the legislation as well as from the kinds of expectations typically voiced for national service programs. These, we believe, represent a fair basis for assessing whether the AmeriCorps process and programs have productive effects, and for indicating where they succeed, and where not. The four themes, and the perspectives on each we adopt in our work, are:

1. Participation: The kinds of organizations that applied and were selected for AmeriCorps funding, the geographic (within-state) pattern of selection, and the characteristics of the participants in the projects and programs:

   To be judged a success, AmeriCorps must promote diversity of participation across economic and social lines, must involve a relatively diverse group of participants and organizations, and must also achieve geographic diversity in the pattern of programs that are supported.

2. Needs and Benefits: The manner in which the AmeriCorps programs states fund responded to identified priorities and needs, the kinds of benefits anticipated from the

program, and the characteristics of the areas and individuals to whom services were directed; a particular aim was to gauge the degree and manner in which national (i.e., Corporation-designated) priorities were achieved through the state process:

AmeriCorps funding and programmatic efforts should be directed to meeting important and substantial needs pertinent to the identified priorities of states. In addition, local AmeriCorps programs should reflect, with fidelity, priorities established by the national Corporation.

3. Programs: The size, diversity, quality and nature of the programs that received AmeriCorps funding; the nature of the organizations that received program funding and educational awards, as well as those that sponsored individual projects:

   AmeriCorps promotes programs that embody quality, innovativeness, and diversity of approach and aim, and should over time help broaden the base of organizations and programs that can participate in AmeriCorps activities.

4. Infrastructure: The degree to which the state processes of identifying priorities, encouraging participation, identifying, screening, selecting and funding programs led, over time, to the development or reinforcement of organizational and professional capacity, funding and financial (and other) support for service activities:

   AmeriCorps must succeed in establishing, enhancing, widening and institutionalizing the organizational networks, the professional capacities and the resources (especially non-federal resources) dedicated to supporting service programs.

Depending on the duration of the study, we will be able to assess the AmeriCorps effort against all of these elements, but only to varying degrees. For instance, the patterns of participation in the program (Theme 1, above) should be fairly established, and relatively clear, within the first two to three years of our study (1994-96), as should the mix and quality of programs (Theme 3). By contrast, our capacity to gauge AmeriCorps' success in addressing needs and building infrastructure is likely to be far more limited because these are more complex themes, less likely to be fully played out during the likely period of our study.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Our major method is thorough and consistent documentation of activities by the Corporation, selected states and individual programs. Beginning prior to passage of the Act, we interviewed Commission and Corporation staff, state officials, as well as representatives of key interest and advocacy groups, compiling and reviewing documents, proposals, plans, reports and other materials related to the evolution of the new Act and its programs.

We organized the documentation activity around three major strands:

1. National context: This strand includes development of national regulations, guidelines, program priorities and special initiatives and demonstrations; activities and developments within the Corporation for National and Community Service; the AmeriCorps "national direct" grants; merger of ACTION programs with AmeriCorps activities; significant service-related activities carried out by other federal agencies; legislative developments; and the activities of national interest and advocacy organizations.

This was accomplished through interviews and ongoing contacts with staff of the Corporation, federal agencies, public interest organizations, legislative staff, policymakers and staff of major service programs; and through monitoring and review of documents and reports pertaining to service activities.

2. The State role: This strand, a central focus of the study project, tracked the evolution of state commissions, state administrative and planning processes, the selection of programs, management and technical assistance, and the degree to which systems, commitment to and capacity for service programs developed.

The nine states to study for this purpose were selected on the basis of information we developed through review of earlier state plans and applications, through a survey of state activity we conducted in Fall, 1993, through consultation with Corporation staff and with staff of other organizations that had contact or knowledge of states, and through discussions with state officials themselves.

Our criteria for selecting states were two-fold. We were interested in states that showed clear indications of responding with energy and seriousness to the mandate of the new legislation (we did not consider states that showed only marginal interest in moving ahead with implementation, or that were taking few steps in that directions). At the same time we were interested in selecting states that reflected a diversity of starting-points, i.e., states on the one hand that had only limited prior service involvement, and on the other, states that had or supported numerous service programs, or had responded energetically to the earlier 1990 National and Community Service Act.

The nine states in the study group are:

Connecticut	Colorado
California	Florida
North Carolina	New York
Maryland	Washington
West Virginia	

These states were visited regularly by two-person research teams, who interviewed key staff, commission members and other individuals involved at the state and local level in service activities. We also collected and analyzed program-related documents: public notices, commission minutes, plans, RFP documents, program descriptions, proposals, applications, etc.

3. Programs in Communities: The third strand will examine how service "happens" at the local level, to achieve two objectives. The first is to document the mix of programs, participants, geographical distribution and anticipated benefits, beneficiaries and needs addressed. We expect that this work will be relatively clear in cataloging program mix and participants in the study states, though far less definitive in establishing whether actual benefits occur (since that latter work would require true impact analysis of a kind beyond the scope of this study).

The second objective is to trace the degree to which nationally established priorities are realized in local practice. This we will do by concentrating on specific priorities designated by the Corporation, one under the "Education" and one under the "Human Services" goals in the legislation.

We will then look at programs in the study states that were selected to be consistent with these specific priorities. Program site visits, conducted in tandem with scheduled state visits, will permit us to determine how faithfully the Corporation's priorities are carried through in state selection process, and actually implemented in the programs funded by the states.

Prior to passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, P/PV planned to study the experience of the states under the National and Community Service Act of 1990. The passage of the 1993 legislation meant that a full-scale study of the 1990 Act was not practicable. However, we needed to develop some understanding of the states' experience with the 1990 legislation before conducting a study of the 1993 Act.