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Comment from Farallon Strategies

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Farallon Strategies includes team members who have developed and led a range of climate and resilience focused AmeriCorps programs for over a decade. We are enthusiastic about the potential value of this Bundled Evaluation and offer some comments in the spirit of improving the outcomes and accelerating their proliferation into the field.

The urgency of climate change and the timeline for implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act suggests that such an evaluation should be completed in less than 32 months so as to most positively impact the field at a time when new resources are being deployed at scale.

We strongly applaud the focus on equity and member experience. Understanding how we build strong corps that are focusing resources where needed is important to climate work. That being said, we think there are also areas to clarify or strengthen
>First, it is important to get a definition of what it means to work on environmental justice from respondents.
>Second, it would be helpful to more explicitly ask how vulnerable communities / community members are involved in defining programs and serving in the programs.
>Third, exploring how we reduce barriers for vulnerable communities to engage with AmeriCorps is an important equity component.

Somewhat related to this, the evaluation project seems to suggest that input will come from program grantees and sponsors, but it would seem important to ask communities on the frontlines of climate change what they want and need from a service program as well.

The research questions feel somewhat isolated from the real-world status of AmeriCorps especially with respect to environmental stewardship. Given the challenges with recruitment nationally, and the national dialogue on equity - especially stipends - we suggest more directly confronting those issues by asking directly about recruitment, living allowances, and match funding.

Given the “all-of-government” footing of the Biden Administration with respect to climate action, we feel there is a potential to miss the opportunity to have the field inform explicit climate recommendations for AmeriCorps that (in the absence of CCC funding) might reduce barriers to participation, equity, and impact for climate programs. While some of the barrier questions are likely to elicit higher level responses, by not explicitly asking for those recommendations the clarity and consistency of responses may be diluted.

Climate change is a big topic and many potential AmeriCorps program implementers may not be as familiar with the variety of approaches to action. To stand up more programs effectively, it would be useful to ask how climate is being defined and operationalized so as to build a library of strategies that plug into larger national mitigation and resilience initiatives.

Related to alignment with national initiatives, AmeriCorps cannot fully fund programs and increasingly higher levels of match are required to meet equity goals. A deeper examination of funding sources and strategies might help the field as a whole identify reliable match funding to help stand up more robust programs. Such an examination would also help identify state and national partnerships that can help national service to scale for the climate fight.

We feel there is an artificial narrowing of focus on select topic areas (disaster response, conservation, wildfire mitigation, and energy efficiency) when we know there are a much wider range of critical fields for climate change (waste reduction, food security, heat management, green infrastructure, for example) that have some AmeriCorps presence. We suggest casting a wider topical net. We recognize there are more historical programs with conservation and energy focus, but assessing the field as it has been may not provide the best guide to where it needs to go.

We suggest that the evaluation strive to be inclusive of all types of service delivery models that can address climate (both service activity types - education, assessment, capacity building as well as direct service; and operational models - cohort and intermediary) as surveys we have conducted, and feedback we have heard suggest that demand is high for a range of service support options.

Some of the research questions have some very well known answers in the field (e.g. barriers to implementation) or are not climate specific (e.g. how has the pandemic affected operations). We suggest contextualizing the questions to acknowledge what is common (e.g. match resources, low stipends, etc.) and making sure to focus questions on the climate related elements within a research line.

Given the limited resources many programs operate with, some of the questions about long-term member outcomes and community impacts may be hard for participants to respond to. We suggest tailoring questions better to real-world capacities of programs small and large.

Sincerely, Kif Scheuer, Director of National Service Initiatives

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