

AmeriCorps Seniors Evaluation:
SDP Grantees Interview

Introduction

My name is _____ and I am a researcher at JBS International and this is my colleague _____ at Education Northwest. Thank you so much for volunteering to take part in the focus group discussion. I know you are busy, and I appreciate you taking the time to join me for this conversation today. I also want to introduce my colleague _____ who will take notes during our conversation.

Introduction

To briefly introduce you to the purpose behind this discussion: Our conversation today is part of a national evaluation that AmeriCorps Seniors is doing to build a deeper understanding of efforts to scale and sustain the American Rescue Plan (ARP) AmeriCorps Seniors Demonstration Program (SDP) to expand the impacts to reach more people. This evaluation will also examine outcomes of the SDP activities on volunteers. JBS International is an independent contractor. The information we gather is for the purpose of the evaluation. The report will not identify you or your organization. The report may contain some quotes, but neither you or your organization will be identified with the quote. Our conversation will take about **60 minutes**.

Each of you received a link to the consent form. Do you have any questions about the consent form? Could each of you please verbally confirm that you are willing to participate in this conversation today?

Confidentiality

To help us focus on our conversation, **I would like your permission to record the conversation to facilitate transcription and analysis.** (if yes, switch on the recorder)

The recording is to help me focus on our conversation, and to be sure that I report your experiences accurately. The recording and our conversation today will be kept confidential. The notes from the interview will not include any personally identifiable information about you. Again, we will present the evaluation results in summary, and not for any specific grantee or organization. Please provide candid answers. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, you do not have to do so, but we would like to capture everyone's insights. It is important that only one person speaks at a time. In order for people to feel comfortable sharing information, we ask that you not share what your colleagues have shared with those not in the discussion today.

There are no right or wrong responses to the questions. You can speak openly about your experiences. If you don't feel you can answer a question, that is okay, but please try to provide as much information as you are able.

Do you have any questions before we start? OK, let's begin.

To start, please briefly introduce yourself – state your name, the AmeriCorps Seniors program you are with, your role at the organization, program, and how long you have been in that role.

Section 1. Activities

First, we are going to focus on the work you do with your organization and the work you do with the community.

1. Has this program previously been funded by AmeriCorps? Can you describe the goals of the program funded by the SDP grant?
 - a. What aspects of the program are supported by the grant?
2. The SDP grant aims to help grantees address immediate community needs for the population(s) that they serve. How does your program address those issues? *[Moderator: this question is looking at inequities]*
3. Could you share what your current service delivery looks like *[Moderator: This question is also asking how volunteers provide service activities to beneficiaries: in-person; remote – virtual, phone call, Zoom; hybrid – in-person and remote?]*

Now, I would like to ask about your experience with your volunteers.

4. Can you describe some of the typical roles or activities of your volunteers? *[Probe: How does leadership at your organization decide which activities each volunteer will support?]*
5. How do you train volunteers for their role?
 - a. What kind of support for training, if any, do you receive from AmeriCorps?
 - b. How do you ensure volunteers feel a sense of ownership over their experience and role?
6. What are some of the ways in which you recruit volunteers?
 - a. What characteristics do you consider when you recruit volunteers?
 - b. As you know, SDP grants included temporary waivers and flexibilities of AmeriCorps Seniors Policies and Guidance due to Covid. To what extent did these temporary waivers and flexibilities contributed to the capacity of SDP projects to recruit and retain volunteers? *[Moderator review list of policies with grantees]*

Section 2. Effects of Covid and Covid-related programs

Next, we'd like to discuss the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on your program and the services you provided during this pandemic.

7. (If any) How has **COVID-19 impacted your AmeriCorps program?** *[Moderator: If program did not exist before COVID-19, ask instead "How do you think COVID-19 impacted the need for your program/services in your community?"]*
8. What were your biggest challenges related implementing your program during the pandemic? How did you overcome them? *[Probe for technology, trainings and supports from AmeriCorps]*

Section 3. Benefits for volunteers

Now, we are interested in learning about how you think your volunteers might also benefit from their work with your organization/program.

[Moderator: Listen and probe for programmatic components that affect volunteer satisfaction, health and psychosocial outcomes, such as physical and mental wellbeing.]

9. **Using the chat function/whiteboard/etc.**, please write down 2 or 3 positive benefits that you want your volunteers to experience as a result of their volunteer work. [Could provide an example or two to get started, e.g., “making friends” or “feeling a sense of purpose”]
10. Now, let's discuss what you wrote.
 - a. Can someone tell me more about how you are currently helping your volunteers experience these benefits?
 - b. How might you increase or expand volunteers' experience of these benefits?
 - c. What kinds of supports could AmeriCorps provide to help promote these benefits?
 - d. To what extent did the temporary waivers and flexibilities of AmeriCorps Seniors Policies and Guidance impact volunteers service experience?
 - What other kinds of supports could AmeriCorps provide to expand outcomes?

Section 4. Impacts on beneficiaries

We would like to discuss partnerships and contributions to beneficiaries. Using the chat function/whiteboard/etc., please write down 2 or 3 positive outcomes that you expect or heard your beneficiaries experience as a result of the AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer work. [Could provide an example or two to get started, e.g., “improve staffing” or “meeting the needs of the communities”]

11. Now, let's discuss what you wrote.
 - a. Can someone tell me more about **partnerships or relationships with beneficiaries** (clients) you are currently working with?
 - What are some of the **ways you engage with the communities you serve**? **[Moderator:** Probe for help with volunteer recruitment efforts, partner with other local organizations to provide services to the community? Others?]
 - How were stations identified, partnerships formed, etc.?
 - b. What are the impacts that your AmeriCorps Seniors program has had on the clients you serve?
 - c. How might you increase or expand beneficiaries' positive outcomes?
 - d. To what extent did temporary waivers and flexibilities of AmeriCorps Seniors Policies and Guidance impact the SDP grants' ability to provide service delivery to beneficiaries and their communities?

Section 5. Grantee and staff capacity-building and leadership

Next, we would like to understand the extent to which your involvement with AmeriCorps SDP grant has influenced your staff members' and your own skills, abilities, or motivation to do your current work.

12. How has participation in the AmeriCorps SDP grant program enhanced your knowledge, skills, or motivation/interest in your work? [Probing questions]
- a. Planning programs?
 - b. Budgeting?
 - c. Staff training and supporting participants?
 - d. Implementing programs?

13. What has your communication been like with other AmeriCorps SDP grantees? How has that communication influenced your work?

14. To extent did temporary waivers and flexibilities of AmeriCorps Seniors Policies and Guidance impact SDP grants' ability to increase capacity and leadership within the grantee organization?

Section 6. Replicating Program & SDP Policies and Guidance

We would like to discuss the possibility of replicating this program somewhere else or scaling up this program.

15. We understand that the SDP program funding cycle is limited. Are you planning to continue or expand the program after completing the SDP funding cycle? If yes, why?

- a. If no, why not?
 - What processes could AmeriCorps Seniors put in place before exiting the community so that beneficiaries/clients continue to receive services?

16. Could you see this program being scaled?

- a. Could you describe what the biggest impact would be if the program were to be expanded?

17. What are some best practices and lessons learned that would be helpful for expanding or replicating a program like yours?

18. What resources would you need to expand or replicate the program?

We would like to discuss the possibility of adopting the SDP policies with other AmeriCorps Seniors traditional programs.

19. Which, if any, temporary waivers and flexibilities of AmeriCorps Seniors Policies and Guidance for SDP programs can be adopted as policies for the three AmeriCorps Seniors traditional programs (RSVP, FGP, SCP)? **[The moderator should have the list of temporary waivers and flexibilities]**

Section 7. Closing

20. Of all the things we've discussed today, what would you say are the most important points you'd like to express?

[Moderator: Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this discussion! This has been very helpful. Your thoughts and opinions will form an important part of this study to understand the effects of COVID and its implications for AmeriCorps Seniors program.

If there is anything you would like to share with us or any concerns you have regarding this interview, you can call me at _____ or email _____.]