

**RESULTS** 2020 Invest in What Works  
**FOR AMERICA** Federal Standard of Excellence



**69**

FY20 Score

**AmeriCorps**

CRITERIA	 ACF	 ACL Administration for Community Living	 USAID UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	 AmeriCorps	 ED DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	 HUD U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT	 DOL DEPARTMENT OF LABOR	 MCC	 SAMHSA <sup>1</sup>
<b>TOTAL SCORE (100 points possible)</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>1. Leadership:</b> Did the agency have senior staff members with the authority, staff, and budget to build and use evidence to inform the agency's major policy and program decisions in FY20? (9 points possible)	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	7	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	6
<b>2. Evaluation and Research:</b> Did the agency have an evaluation policy, evaluation plan, and learning agenda (evidence-building plan), and did it publicly release the findings of all completed program evaluations in FY20? (10 points possible)	8	<u>10</u>	9	8	9	<u>10</u>	7	7	2
<b>3. Resources:**</b> Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY20? (10 points possible)	7	<u>10</u>	9	<u>10</u>	7	6	6	8	1
<b>4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:</b> Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY20? (10 points possible)	6	7	<u>10</u>	4	8	9	<u>10</u>	5	6
<b>5. Data:</b> Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY20? (10 points possible)	5	8	8	6	6	6	5	7	5
<b>6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:</b> Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY20? (10 points possible)	8	5	5	7	<u>10</u>	3	9	6	4
<b>7. Innovation:</b> Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY20? (7 points possible)	6	4	<u>7</u>	5	6	6	5	<u>7</u>	3
<b>8. Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs:**</b> Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its competitive grant programs in FY20? (15 points possible)	7	7	10	13	13	8	6	<u>15</u>	6
<b>9. Use of Evidence in Non-Competitive Grant Programs:**</b> Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its non-competitive grant programs in FY20? (10 points possible)	6	3	7 <sup>2</sup>	3	7	4	7	<u>10</u> <sup>2</sup>	5
<b>10. Repurpose for Results:</b> In FY20, did the agency shift funds away from any practice, policy, or program which consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (8 points possible)	6	4	6	6	5	5	4	<u>8</u>	4

\*\*Meeting this criteria requires both federal agency and congressional action.

<sup>1</sup> RFA gave SAMHSA several opportunities to review and edit the information in this document, but it declined to do so. Therefore, the SAMHSA portion of the 2020 Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence includes information previously supplied by SAMHSA as well as additional information from the SAMHSA website.

<sup>2</sup> USAID and MCC only administered competitive grant programs in FY20. Therefore, for both agencies, Results for America applied their relative score in criteria #8 to criteria #9.

**RESULTS** 2020 Invest in What Works  
**FOR AMERICA** Federal Standard of Excellence



**AmeriCorps**

Over the past several years, [AmeriCorps](#) (the operating name adopted for the Corporation for National and Community Service) has been the federal government's leader on evidence-based investing. In FY20, the agency's flagship grant program, AmeriCorps State and National, [invested](#) the majority of its grants in interventions with a moderate or strong evidence base. The allocation of 51% of funds to evidence-based grantees in FY20, a 10% increase from FY19, constitutes a major achievement and is delivering real [impact](#) in communities across the country.

This milestone is a result of the agency's rigorous approach to grantmaking which provides preference to grantees that propose evidence-based programs (the details of this grantmaking process are described in a Results for America case study, [Improving Elementary School Literacy in Minnesota by Prioritizing Evidence of Effectiveness in AmeriCorps](#), published in 2019). This approach has also had significant influence at the [state-level with 48 states](#) adopting the same preference point model in their state grantmaking process.

The Office of Research and Evaluation provides critical support in increasing the agency's evidence-based investments. The Office created resources to help the national service field identify and implement evidenced-based [interventions](#) and also provided individualized [technical assistance](#) to grantees to help them evaluate their efforts. Along the way, the Office of Research and Evaluation also continued to build the overall capacity of the agency by developing key resources such as the [Strategic Evidence Plan](#) and [Evidence Exchange](#).

Through these efforts, AmeriCorps has spread and scaled evidence-based interventions in order to deliver better results for communities across the country.

To advance the agency's investments in evidence-based policymaking, CNCS should address its need for an updated and comprehensive data inventory and should proceed with OPEN Data Government Act implementation based on forthcoming White House Office of Management and Budget guidance.

**1. Leadership:** Did the agency have senior staff members with the authority, staff, and budget to build and use evidence to inform the agency’s major policy and program decisions in FY20?

FY20 Score  
**7**  
(out of 9 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency’s Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)**

The Director of the [Office of Research & Evaluation](#) serves as the AmeriCorps evaluation officer. The Director of Research and Evaluation (R&E) oversees R&E’s FY20 \$4 million budget and a staff of eight. On average, the agency has invested ~\$1 million in the Office of Research and Evaluation staff over the past eight years.

**1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency’s Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))**

AmeriCorps hired a new Chief Information Officer (CIO) in FY19. The CIO was appointed by the agency’s CEO as the Acting Chief Data Officer (CDO) and remains the Acting CDO in FY20. The agency has a long-term plan for hiring a CDO and standing up a department overseen by a permanent Chief Data Officer. The plan will likely be formalized in FY21.

**1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support, improve, and evaluate the agency’s major programs?**

AmeriCorps established a Research & Evaluation Council in FY20, which was approved and is receiving internal clearance. The AmeriCorps Executive Team will appoint members from the agency’s departments to serve on this Council. A charter will be developed. Members of the Council will likely include the Director of R&E, the CIO/Acting CDO, the Chief of Staff, as well as representatives from the Chief of Program Operations and the Chief Operating Officer.

**2. Evaluation and Research: Did the agency have an evaluation policy, evaluation plan, and learning agenda (evidence-building plan), and did it publicly release the findings of all completed program evaluations in FY20?**

FY20 Score  
**8**  
(out of 10 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))**

AmeriCorps has an [evaluation policy](#) that presents five key principles that govern the agency’s planning, conduct, and use of program evaluations: rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics.

**2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))**

In FY19, AmeriCorps finalized and [posted](#) a five year, agency-wide strategic evaluation plan. The AmeriCorps CEO’s goal is to use the plan to guide FY20 budget planning.

**2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency’s process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)**

AmeriCorps uses the terms learning agenda, evaluation plan, and evidence-building plan synonymously. AmeriCorps has a [strategic evidence plan](#) that includes an evergreen learning agenda. The plan will be reviewed and updated annually. While the agency is open to the feedback of external stakeholders, it has not engaged external stakeholders in the development of the evidence plan.

**2. Evaluation and Research: Did the agency have an evaluation policy, evaluation plan, and learning agenda (evidence-building plan), and did it publicly release the findings of all completed program evaluations in FY20?**

**2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?**

All completed evaluation reports are posted to the [Evidence Exchange](#), an electronic repository for evaluation studies and other reports. This virtual repository was launched in September 2015.

**2.5 What is the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency’s evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 315, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))**

A comprehensive portfolio of research projects has been built to assess the extent to which AmeriCorps is achieving its mission. As findings emerge, future studies are designed to continuously build the agency’s evidence base. R&E relies on scholarship in relevant fields of academic study; a variety of research and program evaluation approaches including field, experimental, and survey research; multiple data sources including internal and external administrative data; and different statistical analytic methods. AmeriCorps relies on [partnerships with universities](#) and third party research firms to ensure independence and access to state of the art methodologies. AmeriCorps supports its grantees with [evaluation technical assistance](#) and [courses](#) to ensure their evaluations are of the highest quality and requires grantees receiving \$500,000 or more in annual funding to engage an external evaluator. These efforts have resulted in a robust body of evidence that national service allows: (1) national service participants to experience positive benefits, (2) nonprofit organizations to be strengthened, and (3) national service programs to effectively address local issues.

**2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?**

AmeriCorps uses the research design most appropriate for addressing the research question. When experimental or quasi-experimental designs are warranted, the agency uses them and encourages its grantees to use them, as noted in the [agency evaluation policy](#): “AmeriCorps is committed to using the most rigorous methods that are appropriate to the evaluation questions and feasible within statutory, budget and other constraints.” As of May 2020, AmeriCorps has received 42 grantee evaluation reports that use experimental design and 124 that use quasi-experimental design.

**3. Resources:** Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY20? (Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY20 Score  
**10**  
(out of 10 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**3.1** \_\_\_\_\_ invested \$\_\_\_\_\_ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing \_\_\_% of the agency's \$\_\_\_\_\_ million FY20 budget.

AmeriCorps invested \$8,200,000.00 on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing 1.0% of the agency's \$806,529,00 million FY20 operating budget.

**3.2** Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

Congress allocated \$4,000,000 to AmeriCorps for its evaluation budget. This is the same amount allocated in FY20.

**3.3** Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

R&E funds a contractor to provide AmeriCorps grantees with evaluation capacity building support (\$500,000 of the \$4,000,000 evaluation budget). R&E staff are also available to State Commissions for their evaluation questions and make resources (e.g., research briefs summarizing effective interventions, online evaluation planning and reporting curricula) available to them and the general public. AmeriCorps awards investment fund grants to State Commissions (\$8.5 million in FY20), of which approximately one-third will be used for data and evidence capacity building activities based on prior year activities.

**4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement: Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY20?**

(Example: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY20 Score

**4**

(out of 10 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?**

AmeriCorps continued to implement its [Transformation and Sustainability Plan](#) (TSP) in FY20. This plan aims to ensure AmeriCorps is maximizing its resources to achieve results. One of the key components of the TSP is creating a new regional office structure that relies on a new grant management model. The agency is conducting a process evaluation/rapid cycle assessment for each implementation phase of this aspect of the TSP. A staff survey was conducted and findings were used to improve onboarding, orientation, and training processes as well as training content. A focus group was conducted with leadership from the first phase of implementation and findings were used to inform and improve management practices.

**4.2 Does the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?**

AmeriCorps started the fiscal year with internal acquisition planning and budget formulation meetings that asked each office to identify in their budget proposals how evidence-based activities and evidence-building activities would be prioritized. All program offices are using data/evidence to improve performance. For example:

- AmeriCorps launched a grant management tool (the “Portfolio Navigator”) that allows Portfolio Managers to access data about grantee organizations in real time to facilitate improved oversight and support.
- AmeriCorps NCCC invested in a Service Project Database that provides staff access to data on all NCCC projects completed since 2012. The database thematically organizes projects, classifies project frameworks, and categorizes the

**4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement: Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY20?**

(Example: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

outcomes of these service initiatives. NCCC is investing in an evaluation of NCCC's impact. This research project was initiated in FY18 and is focused on evaluating member retention, studying how NCCC develops leadership skills in its members and teams, and the program's ability to strengthen communities. Finally, NCCC will continue to invest in research grants to better understand the outcomes of its disaster response efforts.

- NCCC made significant strides in improving the utility of the data it gathers regularly for continuous improvement.
  - Five years of service project data were digitized. A sample of projects was coded for outcomes achieved and these codes were applied to over 5,000 service projects completed to date to improve future project development and better assess community outcomes. The final analysis will be completed this fiscal year.
  - The Disaster Services Unit converted data collected from State Service Commissions into state-specific scorecards to illustrate readiness to respond to disasters and guide improvement efforts.
  - The Disaster Services Unit is using a new data collection instrument for improving the agency's situational awareness of how State Service Commissions and national service programs are responding to COVID-19 with the goal of using this information to improve internal and external (e.g., with FEMA) coordination and communication in responding to the pandemic. This unit provides weekly metrics on the number of national service members focused on various COVID-19 related activities (e.g., food distribution, wellness checks, on-line learning support) as well the estimated numbers served as part of a standing Senior Leadership Briefing document.
- AmeriCorps and the State of Colorado, in partnership with local public health authorities, are building a statewide corps of contact tracers to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus as the state gradually reopens. Approximately 800 NCCC, VISTA Summer Associates, and Senior Corps RSVP volunteers will be trained as contact tracers. The agency will assess the successes and challenges of this partnership and project with the goal of sharing lessons learned with other states as a promising role for national service in addressing the pandemic.

**4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement: Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY20?**

(Example: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

**4.3 Did the agency have a continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)**

The Office of the Chief Financial Officer meets quarterly to assess progress toward the goals of its performance plan. The plan includes strategic objectives, strategies for achieving the objectives, milestones, measures, and targets. Quarterly meetings are used to discuss actuals versus targets and identify promising practices used to achieve targets as well as areas for better optimizing the delivery of budget, procurement, grants, and financial management.

AmeriCorps Office of the Chief Risk Officer piloted a grantee risk assessment tool and is coordinating with the agency's new Office of Monitoring to establish an improved, more data-driven business process that better supports the new grant management model (e.g., delineating the roles of ensuring grantee compliance and providing grantees with programmatic coaching between distinct offices and positions within those offices). This tool was used to select a pool of grantees for monitoring in FY20. These monitoring activities are underway and are expected to increase compliance and improve performance during the grant life cycle.

Performance management and continuous improvement takes place primarily at the grantee management level and at the agency level. For the former, portfolio managers use various tools to ensure performance is on track and opportunities for continuous improvement are in place as needed. The Portfolio Navigator, FFRs, and progress reports are used in conjunction with regular check-ins and on occasion, site visits. At the agency level, evidence-building activities led by ORE are the primary mechanism for informing project development/innovation and improvement in grant making. The agency is in the process of strengthening its own systems and practices for establishing and managing office-level performance.

Over the past decade AmeriCorps and its grantees have invested significant resources in evaluating different agency programs and supported program models designed to improve a range of outcomes for national service members and volunteers, children, families, organizations, and communities. These investments have established the evidence base for both the effectiveness of the interventions implemented by its grantees, and more generally for the impact of national service. As this body of evidence has

**4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement: Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY20?**

(Example: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

emerged, ORE has broadened its perspective to include innovative methodologies to assess the impact of its national service programs. One methodology to extend the measurement of impact involves rigorously assessing and estimating a return on agency investments. Initial FY20 findings are promising and positive. Final findings will be available at the end of the fiscal year. The agency is in the process of procuring a contract to support annual, targeted return on investment analyses for the next five years.

The agency's emphasis on evidence is meant to support, not inhibit, innovation, improvement, and learning. The intent is to integrate the use of evidence and opportunities for further learning into all activities. Where an evidence base is lacking, evidence will be developed through systematic analysis. Where evidence exists, it will be used to encourage replication and expansion of effective solutions. As a learning organization, AmeriCorps uses many types of evidence and understands that a culture of continual improvement relies on multiple sources of information. AmeriCorps plans to procure a contract in FY20 to design and implement program evaluations that will have different purposes and uses such as program development, improvement, accountability, or replicability. Furthermore, in order to leverage limited evaluation resources and build the evaluation capacity of the national service field, the Contractor shall plan for the collaborative development of multi-site evaluations that pool (or "bundle") AmeriCorps grantees delivering the same or similar programs targeting the same or similar outcomes and that have a shared program evaluation purpose

**5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY20 Score

**6**

(out of 10 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)**

AmeriCorps has three policies related to managing the agency's data assets: Information Technology Management (policy 381), Information Technology Governance (policy 382) and Information Technology Data Management (policy 383).

The CIO/Acting CDO and the Director of Research and Evaluation/Evaluation Officer will be working together in FY20 to reconstitute and reconvene the agency's Data Council and determine what kind of charter/agency policy may be needed for establishing the role of the Council with regard to managing the agency's data assets. In essence, the role of the Council, under the direction of the Acting CDO, will be to prioritize data asset management issues such as creating an annual Fact Sheet (so all externally facing numbers have a single authoritative source), creating a more user-friendly interface for the agency's data warehouse/data inventory, and keeping the agency' open data platform current.

**5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)**

The agency's Information Technology Data Management Policy addresses the need to have a current and comprehensive data inventory. The agency has an [open data platform](#).

**5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

**5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))**

AmeriCorps has a data request form and an MOU template so that anyone interested in accessing agency data may use the protocol to request data. In addition, public data sets are accessible through the agency's [open data platform](#). The agency's [member exit survey data was made publicly available](#) for the first time in FY19. In addition, nationally representative civic engagement and volunteering statistics are available, through a data sharing agreement with the Census Bureau, on an [interactive platform](#). The goal of these platforms is to make these data more accessible to all interested end-users.

The Portfolio Navigator pulls data from the AmeriCorps data warehouse for use by the agency's Portfolio Managers and Senior Portfolio Managers. The goal is to use this information for grants management and continuous improvement throughout the grant lifecycle.

**5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)**

The agency has a new Privacy Policy (policy 153) that was signed in FY20 and posted internally. The Information Technology Data Governance Policy addresses data security. The agency conducts Privacy Impact Assessments which are a privacy review of each of AmeriCorps' largest electronic systems which are then published [online](#) (click on the first 3 listings or PRISM).

**5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?**

AmeriCorps provides assistance to grantees, including governments, to help them access agency data. For example, AmeriCorps provides assistance on using the AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey [data](#) to State Service Commissions (many of which are part of state government) and other grantees as requested and through briefings integrated into standing calls with these entities.

**6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:** Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY20?

(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY20 Score

**7**

(out of 10 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?**

AmeriCorps uses the same standard scientific research methods and designs for all of its studies and evaluations following the model used by clearinghouses like Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, the Department of Labor's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research, and the Department of Health and Human Services' Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness project.

**6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?**

AmeriCorps has a common evidence framework for funding decisions in the Senior Corps and AmeriCorps State and National programs. This framework, which is articulated in the AmeriCorps State and National program [notice of funding](#), includes the following evidence levels: pre-preliminary, preliminary, moderate, and strong.

**6.3 Did the agency have a *user friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?**

The AmeriCorps [Evidence Exchange](#) is a virtual repository of reports and resources intended to help AmeriCorps grantees and other interested stakeholders find information about evidence- and research-based national service programs. Examples of the types of resources available in the Evidence Exchange include research briefs that describe the core components of effective

**6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations: Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY20?**

(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

interventions such as those in the areas of [education](#), [economic opportunity](#), and [health](#).

R&E also creates campaigns and derivative products to distill complex report findings and increase their utility for practitioners (for example, this [brief](#) on a study about the health benefits of Senior Corps). R&E has categorized reports according to their research design, so that users can easily search for experimental, quasi-experimental, or non-experimental studies, and those that qualify for strong, moderate, or preliminary evidence levels.

**6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?**

AmeriCorps has an agency-wide approach to promoting the use of evidence-based practices by the field and employs a variety of strategies including evidence briefs, broad-based support to national service organizations, and targeted technical assistance to grantees. First, R&E creates campaigns and derivative products to distill complex report findings and increase their utility for practitioners (for example, this [brief](#) on a study about the health benefits of Senior Corps). Second, AmeriCorps has created user-friendly research briefs that describe the core components of effective interventions in the areas of education, economic opportunity, and health. These briefs are designed to help grantees (and potential grantees) adopt evidence-based approaches. Third, R&E funds a contractor to provide AmeriCorps grantees with evaluation capacity building support; R&E staff are also available to State Commissions for their evaluation questions and make resources (e.g., research briefs summarizing effective interventions, online evaluation planning and reporting curricula) available to them and the general public. Fourth, AmeriCorps funds and participates in grantee conferences that include specific sessions on how to incorporate evidence and data into national service programs. Fifth, as part of the AmeriCorps State and National FY20 application process, AmeriCorps provided technical assistance to grantees on using evidence-based practices through [webinars and calls](#). R&E and AmeriCorps conducted a process evaluation of grantees with varied replication experiences to produce a series of products designed to help grantees implement evidence-based interventions (including a forthcoming article in *The Foundation Review*). SeniorCorps continues to encourage and support the use of [evidence-based programs](#), as identified by the HHS's Administration for Community Living, by its grantee organizations.

**7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY20 Score

**5**

(out of 7 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**7.1 Did the agency engage *leadership and staff* in its innovation efforts to improve the impacts of its programs?**

Staff at all levels of the organization participate in work groups focused on implementing AmeriCorps's [Transformation and Sustainability Plan](#), aimed at supporting the agency's efforts to improve operations, results, and meeting its mission. The CEO has also conducted Service Jams to elicit feedback from staff to support the plan. Service Jam topics have focused on what a best-in class learning organization looks like and how AmeriCorps could break down silos.

**7.2: Did the agency have policies, processes, structures, or programs to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?**

AmeriCorps's Evidence Exchange includes a suite of scaling products on the [evidence exchange](#) to help grantees replicate evidence-based interventions.

AmeriCorps continued to learn from its [evidence-based planning grant program](#) which "awards evidence-based intervention planning grants to organizations that develop new national service models seeking to integrate members into innovative evidence-based interventions." AmeriCorps continued to learn from its [research grantees](#), who receive grant funds to engage community residents and leaders in the development of [new and innovative national service projects](#). In addition to national service project development, these grants foster civic engagement through community research teams and build community capacity for using research to identify and understand local issues as well as identify possible solutions. Examples of these research-to-action projects include:

**7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

- A researcher at the University of Nevada worked with NCCC Pacific leaders to craft a series of local projects, like building sidewalks and community cleanups, emerging from her CBPR project with youth scientists working together to understand slow violence in their own communities as well as that of people experiencing homelessness in the area. The partnership between NCCC, the University of Nevada is quite strong and the local government is supportive of the work in the region. Early in 2020, housing had been donated by a local community organization and the NCCC team was assigned and scheduled to begin on April 21<sup>st</sup> but the work was placed on hold due to the COVID19 pandemic. Recently, PI and ADP have resumed discussions about rescheduling the team's arrival.
- Researchers at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, State University Tech (Virginia Tech University), and Virginia Commonwealth University have brought together community partners and stakeholders in Martinsville, VA to address the local opioid crisis. They are using an evidence-based stakeholder engagement approach (SEED) that has led to successful outcomes in Martinsville. In Year 2, they collaborated with the Minnesota AmeriCorps state commission, ServeMinnesota, to replicate this project and approach with a focus on deploying AmeriCorps volunteers to meet unmet service needs around the opioid crisis in Minneapolis. Because of the success in rural Virginia and Martinsville, this approach will be further replicated in another town in rural Virginia and another town outside Minneapolis.
- A researcher at Mississippi State University collaborated with NCCC Southern Campus to draft a concept paper for a NCCC team when COVID-19 struck – both agreed to table ideas for FAFSA support and ACT preparation until the crisis had subsided.
- A researcher Drew University successfully collaborated with a former senior New Jersey state government official on a concept paper for VISTAs to work with their community partner, Family Promise, to build the organization's capacity to work with local landlord's and people experiencing homelessness – a role identified through their grant funded research. They were awarded two VISTAs.

**7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?**

**7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

As part of the evaluation of the Social Innovation Program, which was designed to identify and rigorously test innovative approaches to social service problems, AmeriCorps continues to receive evaluation reports from grantees. As of May 2020, AmeriCorps has received 129 final SIF evaluation reports, of which 31 (24%) were experimental designs and 74 (57%) were quasi-experimental designs. Further, the [evidence-based planning grant program](#) and the [research grant](#) program both seek to generate innovative national service models. The planning grants require an evaluation plan. The research grants use evidence to inform action planning and solutions. The Office of Research and Evaluation is planning an evaluation of this grant program to identify outcomes, including the outcomes of national service projects developed through participatory research. The goal is to contract with a third party to evaluate the effects of the research grant program before the end of FY20.

**8. Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs: Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its competitive grant programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY20 Score

**13**

(out of 15 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?**

In FY20, the 5 largest competitive grant programs are:

- 1) [AmeriCorps](#) State and National program (excluding State formula grant funds) (\$253,704,774 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations, state governments, tribal governments, local governments, institutions of higher education);
- 2) [Senior Corps](#) RSVP program (\$51,355,000 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations, local governments).

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grants were integrated into the Office of Research and Evaluation in FY19.

**8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)**

AmeriCorps's [AmeriCorps State and National grants program](#) (excluding State formula grant funds), allocated up to 44 out of 100 points to organizations that submit applications supported by performance and evaluation data in FY20. Specifically, up to 24 points can be assigned to applications with theories of change supported by relevant research literature, program performance data, or program evaluation data; and up to 20 points can be assigned for an applicant's incoming level of evidence and the quality of the evidence. Further, in 2020 AmeriCorps [prioritized](#) the funding of specific [education](#), [economic opportunity](#), and [health](#) interventions with moderate or strong levels of evidence.

Since AmeriCorps' implementation of a scoring process that assigns specific points for level of evidence, the percentage of grant dollars allocated to strong, moderate, preliminary, and no evidence categories has shifted over time (see chart below), such that

**8. Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs: Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its competitive grant programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

more FY20 grant dollars were awarded to applicants with strong and moderate levels of evidence for proposed interventions, and fewer grant dollars were awarded to applicants with little to no evidence of effectiveness. Note that 51% of FY20 grant dollars versus 41% of FY19 grant dollars were invested in interventions with a strong or moderate evidence base.

Percentage of competitive AmeriCorps grant funds that support evidence-based projects	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20
<b>Strong</b>	20%	18%	26%	27%	34%
<b>Moderate</b>	14%	11%	11%	14%	17%
<b>Preliminary</b>	44%	45%	34%	31%	28%
<b>No evidence</b>	22%	26%	29%	28%	21%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In FY18, Senior Corps RSVP embedded evidence into their grant renewal processes by offering supplemental funding, “[augmentation grants](#),” to grantees interested in deploying volunteers to serve in [evidence-based programs](#). More than \$3.3 million of Senior Corps program dollars were allocated, over three years, toward new evidence-based programming augmentations. Grantees will be operating with their augmentations through fiscal year 2021.

In a survey completed in FY20, Senior Corps grantees reported that 4,043 volunteer stations and 20,320 volunteers (10% of all volunteers) were engaged in evidence-based programming.

**8. Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs: Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its competitive grant programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

**8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)**

AmeriCorps State and National grantees are required to evaluate their programs as part of the grant's terms and conditions. Grantees receiving more than \$500,000 required to conduct an independent, external evaluation (see p. 23 of the [FY20 notice of funding](#) for a description of these requirements).

**8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant programs in FY20 (besides its five largest grant programs)?**

AmeriCorps administers only two competitive grant programs, described above.

**8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?**

AmeriCorps has summarized the accomplishments of its competitive grant programs in a series of research briefs that describe the core components of effective interventions in the areas of [education](#), [economic opportunity](#), and [health](#). The education brief was used to justify the FY19 funding priority for evidence-based interventions in the AmeriCorps State and National competition. All interventions described in these briefs illustrate how AmeriCorps competitive grant recipients have achieved better outcomes and built knowledge about what works. Our most current list was updated in FY20 and will be published as part of a larger report in the fall of 2020.

**8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?**

AmeriCorps State and National grantees, including city, county, tribal, and state governments, are required to use their AmeriCorps funds to evaluate their programs. In FY20, AmeriCorps awarded \$8.5 million for the [Commission Investment Fund](#) that supports

**8. Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs: Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its competitive grant programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

State Commissions, which are typically housed within state government— approximately one third of these grants will focus on building the capacity of State Commissions and their grantees to collect and use performance and evaluation data.

AmeriCorps’s Evidence Exchange includes a suite of scaling products on the [evidence exchange](#) to help grantees replicate evidence-based interventions.

**9. Use of Evidence in Non-Competitive Grant Programs: Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its non-competitive grant programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Evidence-based funding set-asides; requirements to invest funds in evidence-based activities; Pay for Success provisions)

FY20 Score

**3**

(out of 10 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**9.1 What were the agency’s five largest non-competitive programs and their appropriation amounts (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?**

In FY20, the five largest non-competitive grant programs are:

- 1) [AmeriCorps](#) State formula grants program (\$142,892,106 eligible grantees: states);
- 2) [AmeriCorps](#) National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) (\$32.5 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations);
- 3) [AmeriCorps](#) VISTA (\$93 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations, state, tribal, and local governments, institutions of higher education);
- 4) [Senior Corps Foster Grandparents](#) (\$118 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organization, local governments)
- 5) [Senior Corps Senior Companion Program](#) (\$50 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations, local governments).

**9.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in the largest five non-competitive grant programs? (e.g., Are evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Is evidence a significant requirement?)**

In FY18, Senior Corps Foster Grandparents and Senior Companion Program embedded evidence into their grant renewal processes by offering supplemental funding, “[augmentation grants](#),” to grantees interested in deploying volunteers to serve in [evidence-based programs](#). More than \$3.3 million of Senior Corps program dollars were allocated, over three years, toward new evidence-based programming augmentations. Grantees will be operating with their augmentations through fiscal year 2021.

**9. Use of Evidence in Non-Competitive Grant Programs: Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its non-competitive grant programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Evidence-based funding set-asides; requirements to invest funds in evidence-based activities; Pay for Success provisions)

In a survey completed in FY20, Senior Corps grantees reported that 4,043 volunteer stations and 20,320 volunteers (10% of all volunteers) were engaged in evidence-based programming.

**9.3 Did the agency use its five largest non-competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)**

In FY19, Senior Corps completed an evaluation with an independent firm to produce case studies and comparative analyses of select grantees that received an evidence-based programming augmentation to understand successes, challenges, and other issues. This report is being used to inform Senior Corps' approach to replicating this augmentation initiative, as well as the training/technical assistance needs of grantees.

Senior Corps and the Administration for Community Living have continued a dialogue about how to build and broaden the evidence base for various programs designed for older adults, particularly for [aging and disability evidence-based programs and practices](#). AmeriCorps previously utilized ACL's list of evidence-based programs for its augmentation grants and is encouraging Senior Corps grantees to move toward more evidence-based programming.

For FY20, Senior Corps continued funding five demonstration grants, totaling \$2,579,475, which authorize organizations to implement Senior Corps program model with certain modifications to standard AmeriCorps policies. Demonstration grants allow Senior Corps to analyze potential policy changes.

AmeriCorps NCCC invested in a Service Project Database that provides staff access to data on all NCCC projects completed since 2012. The database thematically organizes projects, classifies project frameworks, and categorizes the outcomes of these service initiatives. NCCC is investing in an evaluation of NCCC's impact. This research project was initiated in FY18 and is focused on evaluating member retention, studying how NCCC develops leadership skills in its members and teams, and the program's ability to strengthen communities. Finally, NCCC will continue to invest in research grants to better understand the outcomes of its disaster response efforts.

**9. Use of Evidence in Non-Competitive Grant Programs: Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its non-competitive grant programs in FY20?**

(Examples: Evidence-based funding set-asides; requirements to invest funds in evidence-based activities; Pay for Success provisions)

**8.7 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other non-competitive grant programs in FY20 (besides its five largest grant programs)?**

AmeriCorps only administers five non-competitive grant programs, as described above.

**9.4 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how non-competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?**

Senior Corps and the Office of Research and Evaluation completed a longitudinal evaluation of the Foster Grandparents and Senior Companion Programs in FY19 that demonstrated the [positive health outcomes](#) associated with volunteering. A [50 year retrospective review](#) of the research conducted on Senior Corps programs was completed at the end of FY19 and was posted on the Evidence Exchange in FY20.

**9.5 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?**

AmeriCorps does not prohibit the use of formula dollars for evaluation but each State Commission may have its own guidelines. Further, formula grantees over \$500,000 have to perform evaluations using their grant funds.

**10. Repurpose for Results: In FY20, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?**

(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY20 Score

**6**

(out of 8 points)

**AmeriCorps**

**10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?**

AmeriCorps's AmeriCorps State and National denied funding to six FY20 applicants that requested \$1,722,851 for new or re-compete funding because they did not demonstrate evidence for the proposed program. These funds were invested in applications with a demonstrated evidence base. This investment decision is consistent with the agency's prioritization of evidence-based interventions (see agency [TSP Goal #3](#)).

**10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?**

AmeriCorps launched a grant management tool (the "Portfolio Navigator") that allows Portfolio Managers to access data about grantee organizations in real time to facilitate improved oversight and support.

AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation continued to invest \$500,000 in evaluation technical assistance support for grantees which is available to all competitive AmeriCorps State and National grantees seeking to improve their ability to demonstrate empirically their effectiveness. FY19 investments targeted to grantees struggling to achieve outcomes continued in

**10. Repurpose for Results: In FY20, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?**

(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY20. More specifically, in FY20, the following ongoing support was provided to lower-performing grantees using reallocated FY19 program dollars:

- Two grantees required intensive evaluation technical assistance (TA) and are being closely monitored by AmeriCorps State and National. To ensure that two grantees are on track with implementing their evaluation plans, the grantees identified several milestones for their evaluation and with support have made progress in FY20.
- Tribal grantees have faced a variety of challenges in developing and implementing their evaluation plans. Through evaluation TA support, AmeriCorps hopes that the tribal grantees will receive the additional assistance needed to improve their plans. During FY20 11 tribal grantees received TA to improve the quality of data collection and evaluation plans.