

## Experience Corps: Stipends

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Experience Corps<sup>®</sup> (EC) is a program that brings older adults into public elementary schools to improve academic achievement of students, through one-to-one tutoring, small group academic help and assisting teachers. It has been in existence for over 13 years and currently operates in 20 cities across the country. The Atlantic Philanthropies provided funding to Washington University in St. Louis to conduct a national evaluation of EC.

In this report, we explore the issue of stipends in the EC program. Data derive from phone surveys with 263 members who joined the program in the 2006-2007 academic year and participated in a follow-up survey at the end of the year. Fifty six percent received stipends, with half being paid by AmeriCorps and half from other sources, including schools districts and private foundations.

There are no income eligibility requirements to receive a stipend. Americorps members must sign up for 9, 10 or 12 month “terms,” and they receive a monthly, taxable allowance of about \$290. Those members receiving non-AmeriCorps stipends are paid at an hourly non-taxed rate of about \$2.77; and they are not required to complete a minimum number of hours yearly. In the following analyses, we do not differentiate between the types of stipends received by EC members because characteristics of the groups are similar.

### Who are the stipended EC members?

Stipended members were more likely to be non-Caucasian (70%), compared to 50% of non-stipended members. Further, stipended members had less household income prior to beginning EC than non-stipended members.

The two groups are similar in terms of gender (primarily female), age (average of 65), education (average of 14 years), marital status, living situation, employment status, and physical and mental health. They also did not differ in terms of previous occupation.

EC members receiving stipends reported:

- the stipend was “somewhat important” or “very important” (71%)
- they could not have participated without a stipend or it would have been hard (62%)
- the stipend did not cover the costs of participating in the program (25%)
- the stipend helped meet living expenses (59%)

### Recruitment

Stipended members were more likely to learn about EC through personal contact with others; whereas non-stipended members learned of the program through some sort of written material, electronic media, or presentation.

Recruited by:	Stipend	Non
EC member or staff	51%	33%
AARP, newspaper, mailing, flyer, presentation, TV, radio	49%	67%

### Motivation

Motivations were not different between stipended and non-stipended groups. Most got involved for altruistic motives (68%), while just over 30% reported instrumental motives.

Motivations	Stipend	Non
To help children, teach, literacy, give back	68%	68%
Self-benefit, material, practical, attracted to program	32%	32%

### Duration & Completion

On average, stipended members worked 15 hours a week in the schools. This is nearly double the time provided by non-stipended members. Stipended members completed an average of 7 months during the academic year, whereas non-stipended volunteers completed an average of 5 months. Eighty-percent of stipended volunteers completed the program, compared to 55% of those not receiving a stipend. There was not a statistical difference of the number of days they took off during the academic year.

Stipend		Non
15	Average Hours Per Week	8
7	Average Months Served	5
80%	Completed Program	55%

When asked to rate the extent to which they took their work with EC as seriously as a job, stipended members reported taking their work more seriously than non-stipended.

Stipended and non-stipended members were equally likely to be first-time volunteers. However, 22% of non-stipended volunteers began volunteering with a new program other than EC, compared to 13% of stipended volunteers. This may be because stipended volunteers gave more time to EC and had less time to commit to another volunteer experience.

### Outcomes of volunteering

Stipended members were more likely to report that the experience “exceeded” their expectations than non-stipended members. Stipended members more strongly agreed that they helped the students and that the teachers found their work useful.

In the following table, higher ratings indicate more agreement; and in all cases, the differences are statistically significant.

Benefits of EC	Stipend	Non
I used my time more productively	3.56	3.01
I feel better about myself	3.65	3.32
My circle of friends has increased	3.42	3.05
My social activities have increased	2.82	2.19
My life has improved	3.20	2.92

Further statistical analyses showed that the higher levels of benefit reported by stipended EC members were partially related to the fact that these members committed more time. In other words, stipends led to increased volunteer time; and this increased time led to more benefits. Yet, the benefits experienced by stipended members go beyond what would be expected with increased time commitment.

There may be several possible interpretations of this finding: stipends are not only related to increased benefits because of increased time commitment, but also because of other meanings associated with these small monetary payments. Perhaps stipended volunteers feel more recognized or feel more positive about the experience because the associated costs of volunteering were not so burdensome.

When asked about changes in attitudes about public education since joining EC, stipended members reported that they were more likely to vote in favor of public education funding; were more interested in public education; and were more likely to speak up for public education than non-stipended members.

### Summary and Implications

There is on-going debate about providing stipends to volunteers. Some argue that offering stipends compromises altruistic intentions. Others propose that providing a small amount of money facilitates participation in volunteer activities. Clearly, stipends add costs to the EC program, and these costs need to be assessed in regards to the following outcomes:

1. *Achieving Diversity.* Stipends were effective in increasing the diversity of EC members. That is, older adults who earned less income and were non-Caucasian were more likely to participate if costs associated with volunteering were offset.
2. *Getting the Work Done.* The agreement associated with the stipend appeared to be effective in ensuring high levels of time commitment. Stipended EC members provided double the amount of hours per week, provided more months of service, and were more likely to complete the academic year. They also reported taking their work with EC more seriously.
3. *Maximizing Benefits.* Stipended members reported more benefits of the program to students and teachers as well as to themselves.

It is important to note that reasons to volunteer were not different between stipended and non-stipended members, suggesting that stipends do not necessarily attract people who are less altruistic; but they attract people who might otherwise remain uninvolved. We conclude from these data that stipends are effective in increasing diversity, time commitment, and outcomes

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