



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION



Impact Statement
Submitted 2024
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Title: Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State Program

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Geographic Scope: State

County: Clarke

Unit: 4-H & youth

Program Functions: Extension

Program Area: 4-H Youth

State Issue: Youth & Family Development

Topic: General 4-H

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Funds: State, Federal, Local, Private Grants

Collaborators: See statement for all collaborators

Summary

Georgia 4-H continues to receive federal funds through the AmeriCorps State grant. The Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State grant is funded by AmeriCorps (formerly referred to as The Corporation for National and Community Service - CNCS) and is administered by Georgia Serves (aka Georgia Commission on Service and Volunteerism - GCSV), housed with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). Georgia 4-H is a unit of the University of Georgia (UGA) College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) Cooperative Extension. Georgia 4-H first received the AmeriCorps State grant in September 2012.

During the entirety of the program, AmeriCorps has funded more than 344 Member Service Years (MSY). MSY is the terminology used to describe a full-time member (similar to FTE). The program primarily utilizes two member types - full-time and half-time. AmeriCorps State members (ACMs) have been a great benefit to Georgia 4-H while serving in county offices. The program is designed to increase the capacity of Georgia 4-H, with the goal of improving results for the beneficiaries of the organization.

Situation

The Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State Project serves youth from varied backgrounds, providing research-based positive youth development programming (PYD), aligned with Georgia Standards of Excellence designed to improve educational success and support post-secondary education opportunities.

The Georgia Budget & Policy Institute's Policy Report, "State of Education Funding: Opportunity is Knocking" by Dr. Stephen J. Owens focuses on "poverty in Georgia's schools and what can be done to support schools serving learners experiencing poverty" (Owens, 2023, p.1). Georgia has a higher childhood poverty rate than 43 other states and "black and brown children are much more likely to live in poverty" (p.1). Owens discusses how the "cumulative effect of slavery; Jim Crow legislation; school and housing segregation; explicit and implicit bias, and more created and cemented the persistent poverty in Black communities in the U.S." (p. 4). Despite removal of these



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policies, poverty persists and the "impact of a family's resources can be easily seen in educational outcomes" such as poor performance on standardized tests (p. 4).

Often referred to as an "achievement gap" the difference in test scores between students identified as "economically disadvantaged" and those as not can more accurately be called a "wealth grade curve." When factors tied to student academic achievement, including housing stability, food security, or mental health supports are not addressed, performance can be negatively impacted (p 3-4). It is important to note that there is "no connection between race/income and intelligence" (p. 5), rather, Student Growth Percentiles (a measure of improvement) show that "any difference in test scores between students in poverty and the rest of the state is a consequence of resources and opportunities, not intelligence" (p.5).

The effects of childhood poverty and limited funding to support students living in poverty pose a challenge to schools. Funding is determined by a system of weights, with more weight given to students requiring more accommodation; however, students living in poverty are not considered. Owens proposes that adding a weight to the formula to better support students living in poverty would "recognize the immense challenge of inequity and be a tool for racial justice" (p. 9).

As a partner in education committed to enhancing local education efforts, both in and out of school, the Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State program is a valuable resource to this effort. 4-H is the nation's largest youth leadership development organization, empowering nearly six million young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime. Georgia is proud to be one of the largest state programs with more than 173,500 active participants. Georgia 4-H is one of only a few state 4-H programs that use in-school program delivery coupled with out of school activities.

Georgia 4-H provides research-based positive youth development (PYD) programming aligned with the Georgia Standards of Excellence to enrich local education efforts and improve life chances for youth, with a focus on improving educational attainment. PYD programming assists youth in acquiring knowledge, development of life skills, and forming attitudes that will help them become positive, caring, and contributing members of society. According to the 4-H Thriving Model, long-term outcomes of 4-H participation include academic or vocational success, civic engagement, employability and economic stability, and happiness and wellbeing (Arnold, 2018).

Many of the youth served by Georgia 4-H's AmeriCorps program live in poverty or have experienced poverty and come from homes with low educational attainment. Under the direction of Extension Agents, ACMs provide PYD programming directly to youth in support of the mission of Georgia 4-H. The variety of programming and state-wide reach makes Georgia 4-H an ideal organization to host AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps members are poised for making a dynamic impact on the students of Georgia.

Response

The goal of the Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State program is to support the mission of Georgia 4-H and increase its capacity to better serve youth. Increased capacity refers to an increase in youth served, expansion of educational opportunities, and development of higher quality opportunities.

ACMs currently deliver 4-H programming to youth in grades 4-12 in 25 targeted counties in Georgia. These counties were identified based on need and the capacity to implement a high-quality AmeriCorps program. ACMs deliver a variety of 4-H programming, with an emphasis on two core programs: in-school educational club meetings and 4-H Project Achievement. These two programs were chosen as the primary focus because they are both consistently delivered by all counties, are aligned with Georgia Standards of Excellence, introduce youth to areas of postsecondary study and potential career paths, and reach a diverse audience through in-school delivery.

ACMs and site supervisors attend a two-day New Service Year Orientation (NSYO). The training covers the following: grant regulations and reporting, member best practices, member retention, CPR/First Aid Certification, team building, and 4-H program delivery. The NSYO is implemented by the Program Director, Program Coordinator, and other staff and faculty members from the 4-H State Office. Site supervisors orient members to their local community and train them to provide 4-H programming specific to county need. ACMs also participate in virtual meetings monthly, including relevant programmatic training throughout their year-long term of service. Seasoned ACMs provide peer support to new ACMs to improve retention, build confidence, and foster a sense of team spirit.

Currently in the 13th year of the program, ACMs continue to provide direct service and address critical community needs in the areas of education, public safety, health, and the environment. Current counties in the program include the following: Banks, Barrow, Ben Hill, Bibb, Bulloch, Candler, Carroll, Cherokee, Cook, Dougherty, Evans, Gordon, Greene, Houston, Laurens, Murray, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Paulding, Peach, Spalding, Tattnall, Tift, Toombs, and Whitfield.

Impact

During the thirteen years of the AmeriCorps State Grant, 252 full-time, 185 half-time, and two minimum-time members have served more than 500,000 hours, reached over 218,523 students through in-school programming, 158,625 students through 4-H Project Achievement, and recruited more than 2,687 volunteers that contributed 32,972 hours of service to Georgia 4-H.

The AmeriCorps State grant has grown significantly since July 2012. The first three-year grant provided 16 MSY per year. The current program year we were awarded 20 MSY, with our largest per program year at 35 MSY. Georgia 4-H is the third largest AmeriCorps State program in Georgia, among 18 grant recipients. We are proud to have been awarded a Fixed Cost Grant for the 2024-2025 grant year, based on past performance and successful reporting.

Our current federal award is \$497,220. In addition to the \$5,577,798 in federal funds awarded since 2012, the AmeriCorps State grant has leveraged over \$1,588,314 additional funds (county, state, and private) to support program implementation.

The Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State program consistently exceeds grant performance measures. A summary of the youth and volunteer related performance measures for the 2023-2024 program year is provided below. We are pleased to report that all outputs and outcomes were met.

4-H In-School Educational Club Meetings - A grand total of 16,157 students were served by ACMs in in-school educational club meetings. This exceeded our goal of 12,000. To measure content area learning, ACMs administered a total of 2,042 surveys to students after in-school educational club meetings. Of that sample set, 92% of students (1,869) showed an increase in and/or demonstrated knowledge of the content presented.

4-H Project Achievement - A grand total of 11,011 youth received instruction on the 4-H Project Achievement process from ACMs. This exceeded our goal of 9,500. Of the students that continued to compete at district-level Project Achievement, 869 completed a survey to measure mastery of best practices in public speaking and demonstration of or increase in confidence in public speaking. Of those students surveyed, 86% (748) demonstrated knowledge of best practices in public speaking or showed an increase in knowledge of best practices in public speaking and 91% (789) indicated confidence in public speaking or showed an increase in confidence in public speaking.

Volunteer Recruitment - ACMs recruited 283 new volunteers. This exceeded our goal of 120. These volunteers contributed 5,247 hours of service to Georgia 4-H.

A secondary goal of the AmeriCorps State grant is to provide meaningful experiences for ACMs, to prepare them for future employment, and to instill a sense of community service and civic engagement in members. At the end of the 2023-2024 program year, ACMs were surveyed regarding their overall satisfaction with the program.

- 93.33% strongly agreed and 6.67% agreed with the following - Through my service with the Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps program, I have gained skills and experience that I can use in future employment.
- 60.00% strongly agreed and 6.67% agreed with the following - During my service with the Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps program, I had opportunities to establish connections with other members and the broader National Service Network to build a sense of team spirit.
- 80.00% strongly agreed and 13.33% agreed with the following - As a result of my service with Georgia 4-H, I plan to continue volunteering and/or contributing to my community.
- 86.67% strongly agreed and 13.33% agreed with the following - As a result of my service with Georgia 4-H, I am better prepared for future employment.

This satisfaction with their service term along with the skills and experiences gained has resulted in many ACMs pursuing employment with Extension, specifically 4-H. Of the 272 distinct individuals that have served as an AmeriCorps State member (many serve multiple years), 21% (57) have been hired into Extension, many as 4-H Agents.