AmeriCorps VIP
Volunteer Capacity Study

November 2012

Prepared for:

Julie McClure & Sara F. Sitch
CalSERVES-NCOE
5789 State Farm Dr., Suite 230
Rohnert Park, CA 94928

Contents

Introduction ... 3
Description of Intervention ... 3
Research Questions ... 4
Description of Programs ... 4
Sampling & Data Collection ... 8
Volunteer Capacity Assessment Instrument ... 8
Data Collection Worksheet Instrument ... 9
Methods ... 9
Propensity Score Matching ... 9
Comparing Data Points from Partner and Comparison Group Sites ... 10
Differences between AmeriCorps VIP Sites and Non-participating Sites (Unmatched) ... 11
Differences between AmeriCorps VIP Sites and Non-participating Sites (PSM) ... 14
Reliability and Validity of the VCA Instrument ... 18
Internal and External Validity ... 18
Discussion/Findings ... 20
Conclusions ... 21
Appendix A: VCA Instrument ... 23
Appendix B: DCA Form ... 24
Appendix C: Test-Retest Reliability of the VCA Instrument ... 32

Introduction

The AmeriCorps Volunteer Infrastructure Program (VIP) was developed to build the volunteer capacity of non-profit and educational organizations serving California communities. These communities are facing challenges such as poverty, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, limited education and English Language ability. Often accompanying these issues are ills such as low student academic achievement and test scores; high dropout rates; and high rates of justice system involvement. Non-profit and educational agencies struggle to solve these problems at a time when their budgets have been severely diminished by the recession. The need for outreach, service, and support for these communities is high and climbing. Community volunteers could help meet these needs, but organizations often lack the infrastructure to effectively use them.

Since 2009, AmeriCorps VIP has placed over 400 members in community organizations with the specific targeted goal of systematically increasing their capacity to recruit, train, support, and utilize volunteers in order to more effectively serve their clients. Since 2009, CalSERVES, which operates AmeriCorps VIP, has tracked the number and proportion of organizations where members were placed that increased their volunteer capacity. During the 2011-12 program year, 79% of participating organizations were able to increase their capacity to work with volunteers by at least 20%.

The purpose of this report is to build on the outcome information available by providing evidence of the value-added impact of AmeriCorps VIP, to answer the question "What difference did AmeriCorps VIP make in volunteer capacity?" To accomplish this, CalSERVES engaged an external evaluation firm, JBS International Inc., to develop and implement an evaluation that included a comparison of organizations participating in the VIP program with a matched group of organizations without AmeriCorps VIP members. This comparison allowed for the determination of what amount of change in volunteer capacity would be expected without any intervention by AmeriCorps VIP, and correspondingly, what change can be attributed to AmeriCorps VIP.

Description of Intervention

Through the Volunteer Infrastructure Project, teams of AmeriCorps members are placed in communities to provide infrastructure support for volunteer programs in non-profit and educational organizations across California. Each VIP Fellow provides 1,700 hours of service to build the systems necessary for organizations to structure, implement, increase and maintain volunteer programs. All Fellows have a recruitment goal of 100 volunteers, specifically 50 long-term volunteers (over 8 hours of service) and 50 short-term volunteers (between 2 and 8 hours of service). The full range of specific member activiites varies by partner site but generally includes working with organization staff to:

- Develop volunteer roles/position descriptions;
- Develop and implement systems and proceedures for volunteer recruitment, screening, placement and scheduling;
- Provide volunteer training and volunteer training curriculum development;
- Provide volunteer supervision and supervision system development;
- Develop and implement recognition and reward systems; and,
- Clarify and promote the role of volunteers within the organization.

Fellows are provided with 255 hours of training, as well as support and supervision through supervising organizations, who oversee their placement at the individual partner sites.

Research Questions

The goal of the evaluation of the CalSERVES VIP program is to assess the impact of program participation on non-profit and educational organizations' volunteer capabilities and capacities. Specifically, the evaluation investigates:

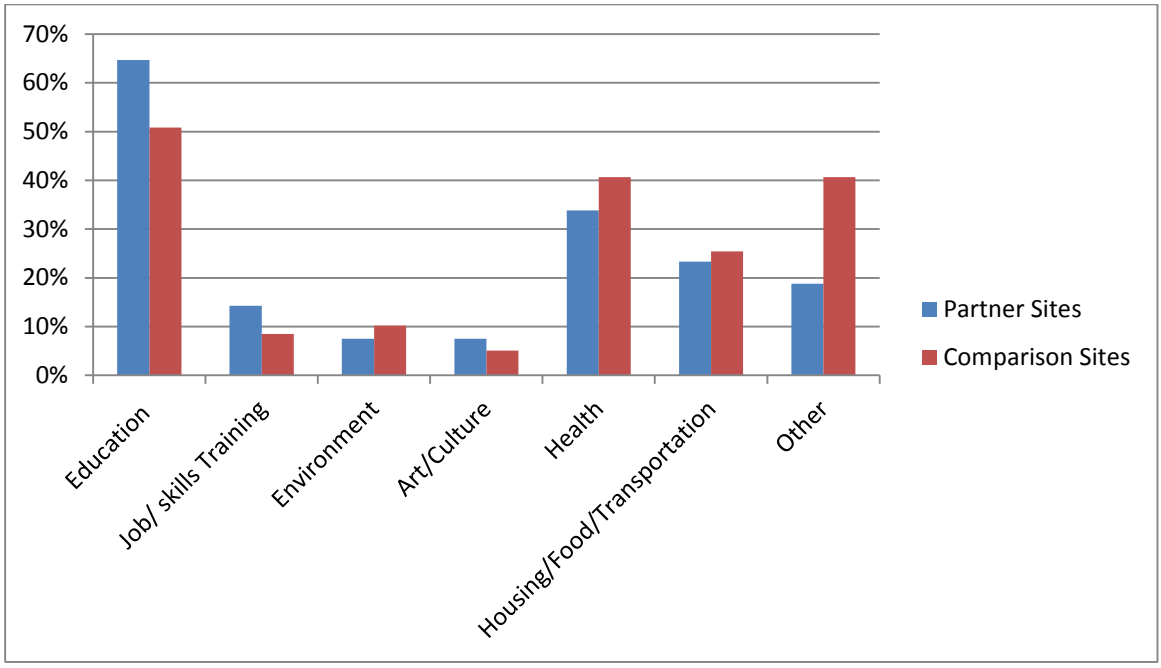
1. Does participation in the CalSERVES VIP program increase organizational capacity to utilize volunteers compared to organizations that did not take part in the CalSERVES VIP program?
2. Does participation in the CalSERVES VIP program improve organizational capacity concerning volunteer recruitment, training, and retention compared to organizations that did not take part in the CalSERVES VIP program?
3. Does participation in the CalSERVES VIP program improve organizational capacity to create and sustain successful volunteer programs compared to organizations that did not take part in the CalSERVES VIP program?

Description of Programs

The AmeriCorps VIP program worked with 8 supervising organizations that funded 133 partner sites in 2011-2012. The partner sites were located throughout the state of California, with 37 partner sites in northern California, 70 in central California, and 26 sites in southern California. In addition to the 133 partner sites that received services, data were collected on 59 comparison sites that did not receive services to assist in organizational development and volunteer capacity. This group was composed of like organizations in California that were recruited to participate in the evaluation study by the supervising organizations. Organizations that were included in the comparison group have never taken part in the AmeriCorps VIP program.

As can be seen from the descriptive data below, without any matching, the two groups of programs had many similarities, although the comparison sites were generally smaller, newer and less well-funded. Creating a propensity score-matched subset of programs for comparison can help rule out concerns that the differences in volunteer capacity are due to the programs rather than the VIP Fellows' service.

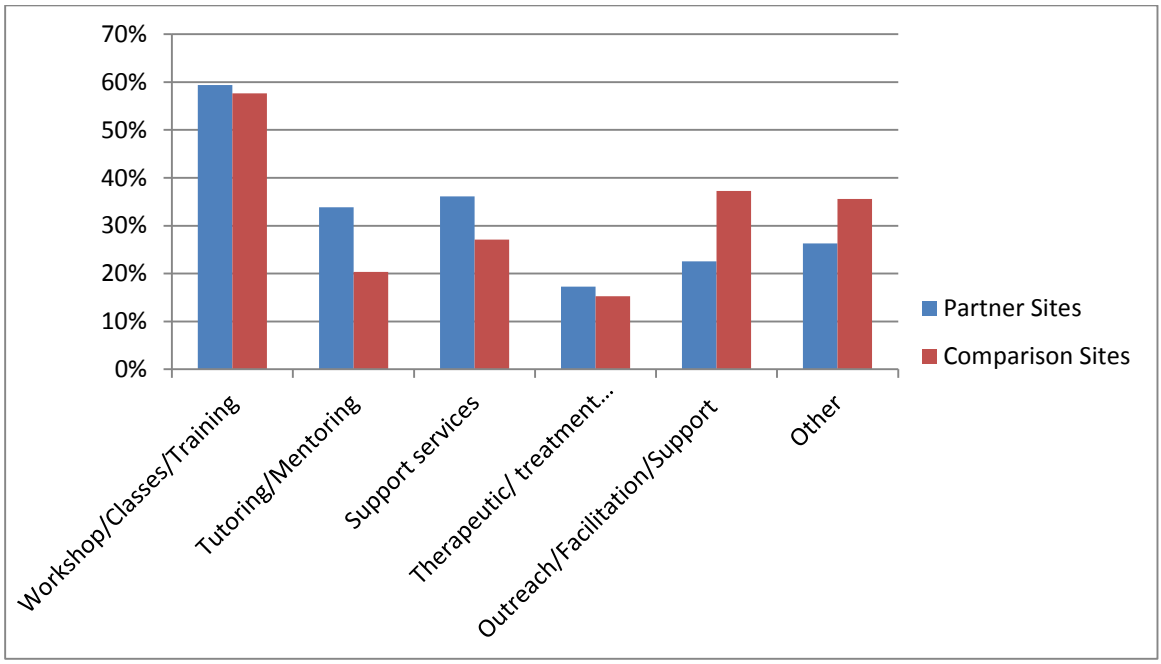
Figure 1: Program Service Areas



*Organizations could list themselves as having more than one service area, so columns do not sum to 100%.

The types of services delivered ranged widely, but many organizations offered tutoring or support to K-12 students, workshops, trainings, or classes to adults with a wide range of information needs.

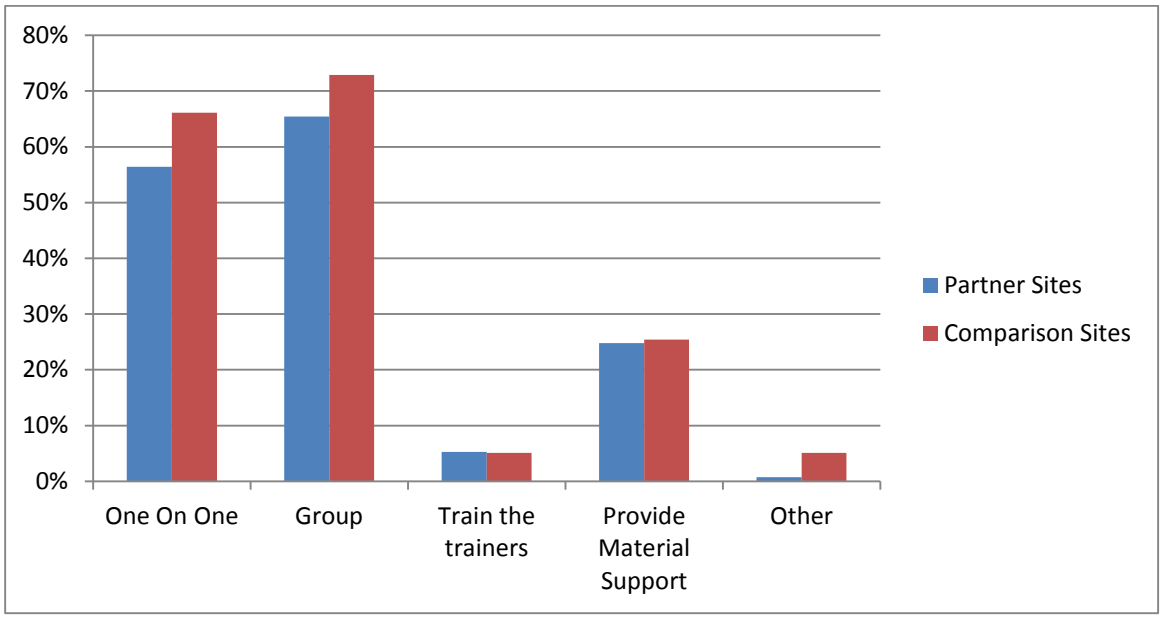
Figure 2: Types of Services Delivered



*Organizations could list themselves as having more than one service area, so columns do not sum to 100%.

Service delivery was primarily through one-on-one or group activities, although partner organizations also offered material support to clients as well.

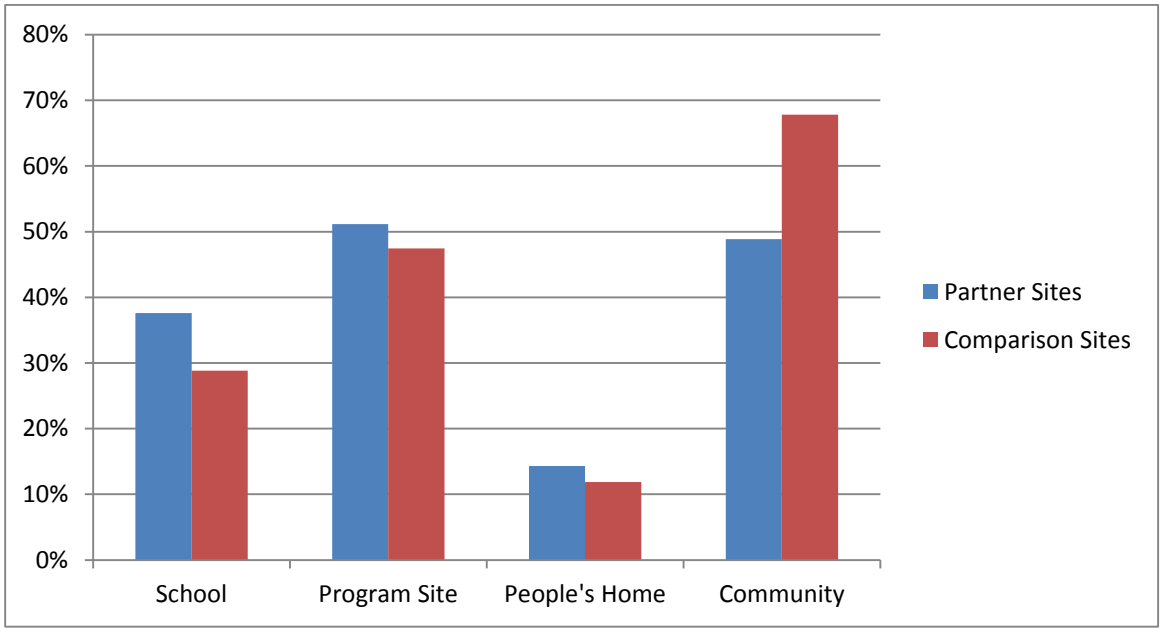
Figure 3: Manner of Service Delivery



*Organizations could list themselves as having more than one service area, so columns do not sum to 100%.

Partner sites provided their services at a variety of locations, while comparison organizations were slightly more likely to state that they offered their services either at their program site or in the community.

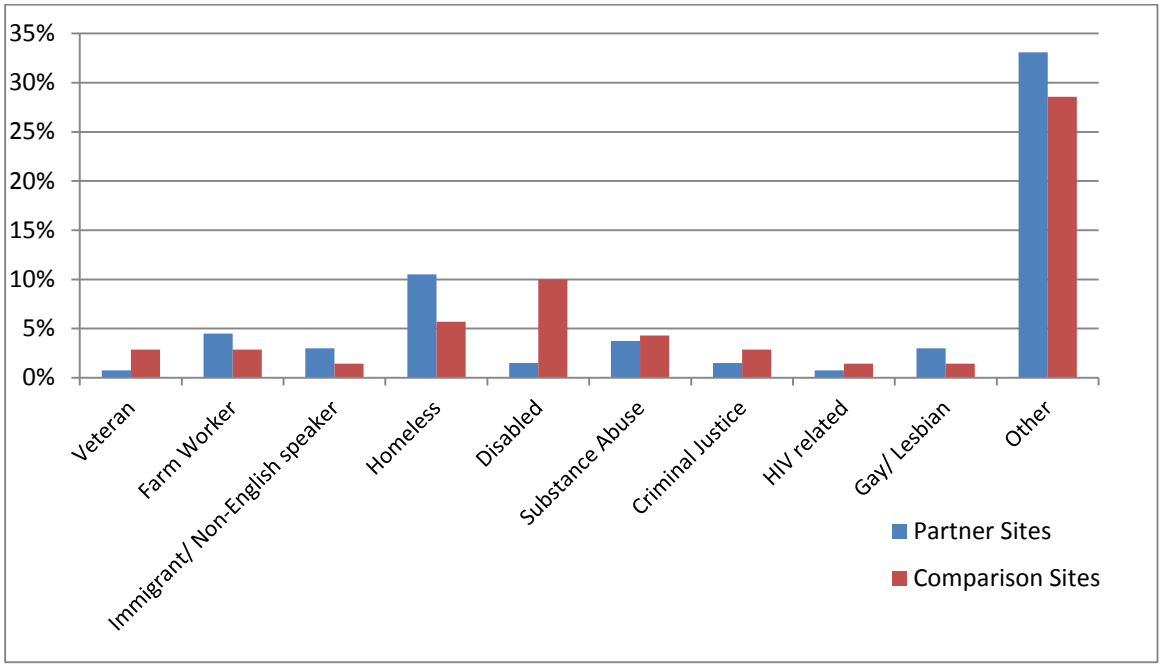
Figure 4: Site of Service Delivery



*Organizations could list themselves as having more than one site for delivery of services, so columns do not sum to 100%

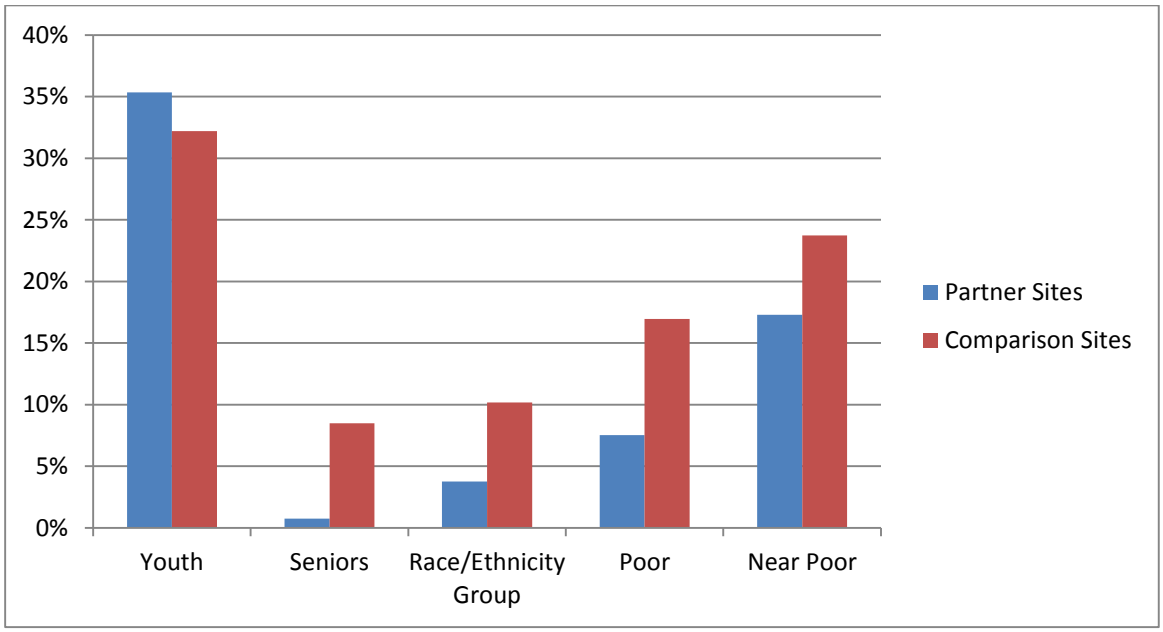
While organizations often target specific groups of people for their services, it is difficult to group together and classify such a diverse group of programs. However, many organizations focused their services on youth or low-income individuals and families.

Figure 5: Special Target Populations



*Organizations could list themselves as having more than one site for delivery of services, so columns do not sum to 100%

Figure 6: Target Demographic Populations



*Organizations could list themselves as having more than one site for delivery of services, so columns do not sum to 100%

Table 1 shows that the organizations varied in size and characteristics greatly. However, on average, the partner sites that participated in the CalSERVES VIP program tended to be larger, to be older, and to have bigger budgets.

Table 1: Characteristics of Organizations

	Partner Sites	Comparison Sites
Average Number of Staff (Total)	30	18
Average Number of Administrators	6	3
Average Number of Direct Service Staff	7	2
Average Number of Volunteers	1,300	260
Average Budget per Year	$3,100,000	$1,500,000
Average Number of Years in Existence	31	24
Average Number of People Served per Year	82,000	44,000

Sampling & Data Collection

The evaluation of the AmeriCorps VIP program examines the effect of the intervention on organizational development and volunteer capacity among non-profit and educational organizations.

CalSERVES funds eight supervising organizations throughout the state, which, in turn, select partner sites to receive an AmeriCorps member. Supervising organizations provide member training and supervision following a core curriculum from CalSERVES. To ensure some degree of similarity in the groups, comparison sites were also recruited through the supervising organizations, sometimes through their local knowledge of the community, and sometimes by engaging partner sites that had applied for, but had not received, an AmeriCorps VIP Fellow.

JBS and CalSERVES collected data on both volunteer capacity and organizational characteristics to allow for matching of participating and non-participating sites. JBS then used this data to create a matched comparison group.

Volunteer Capacity Assessment Instrument

To measure the effect of program participation on organizational and volunteer capacity over time, data were collected using the Volunteer Capacity Assessment (VCA), a survey that includes three sections with items focused on: organizational capacity, volunteer recruitment, and elements of a successful volunteer program. The VCA survey is attached as Appendix A of this report.

The VCA is designed to assess how well a non-profit or educational organization is prepared for recruiting, training, and utilizing volunteers to achieve its mission and goals. The instrument asks for organizations to report how well their practices align with the best practices listed on the survey.

AmeriCorps VIP partner sites provided information on the VCA three times, once each during the fall, winter, and summer, generating data on organizational and volunteer capacity prior to taking part in the program, mid-way through taking part in the program, and at the end of program participation. Data were collected in August or September of 2011,

December of 2011 or January of 2012, and in July of 2012 for organizations that took part in the program. Comparison group organizations completed the survey twice; once in April of 2012 and again in August of 2012.While the two groups did not complete the VCA instruments over exactly comparable periods of time, the use of propensity score matching helps diminish concerns about the effects of this discrepancy. (The methods and analysis sections below describe how data were used and adjusted as necessary to make the time periods comparable.)

Data Collection Worksheet Instrument

In addition to completing the VCA, all partner and comparison sites completed a Data Collection Worksheet (DCW). The primary purpose of this survey was to provide data for use in propensity score matching of partner sites with comparison sites for use in the analysis. This worksheet was completed electronically as a MS Word document, filled in by hand, or completed as an online survey using SurveyMonkey.com. In some cases, missing data was supplemented by phone contact with respondents or by web research on the organization (Appendix B includes a copy of the DCW). This survey asked questions about staff and volunteers, organizational characteristics including: budget, years in existence, services provided, and populations served. The DCW was collected for both partner and comparison organizations in the spring of 2012.

Methods

To evaluate the CalSERVES VIP program, data were collected from participating program sites and from comparable organizations; the data were used to form a counterfactual comparison group. Outcome data were collected using the VCA. Data were collected in the fall of 2011, in the winter of 2011-2012, in the early spring of 2012, and in the summer of 2012 for all partner sites. Comparison sites provided data in mid-spring of 2012 and in late summer of 2012. The comparison group was formed post hoc rather than at baseline because the methodology for the study and hence the comparison group sites were selected after the baseline data collection for participating programs. The different time points of data collection are adjusted for in the analysis (see below).

The evaluation of the AmeriCorps VIP program uses propensity score matching to match comparison group sites with partner sites to ensure a more robust assessment of program impact. A fuller description of the propensity score matching is included below.

Propensity Score Matching

To assess the impact of the AmeriCorps VIP program, the evaluation uses a matched comparison group. Comparing the outcomes of two groups – one of which received services and one which did not – in a statistically robust manner provides evidence that program participation is the likely reason for any observed changes on key outcome measures rather than other possible causes. In an ideal research scenario, organizations could be randomly assigned to receive an AmeriCorps VIP Fellow or not (eliminating any differences in the partner organizations that was not due to pure chance). However, this was not possible due to program constraints. Propensity score matching is a way of simulating an experimental design, although it does not do so perfectly.

In a propensity score matched design, the two groups are not formed by random assignment. Instead, the group that participates in the program is selected non-randomly as is the

comparison group. Because of this, the two groups may, before matching, differ in both observed and unobserved ways that could be the explanation for any changes observed in the outcomes. Propensity score matching minimizes the differences between the two groups statistically. The statistical procedure used in propensity score matching matches program participant organizations with non-participant organizations based on a wide range of characteristics (see below, Figure 7, for the characteristics used in this evaluation). The match is even more robust than simply pairing participants with non-participants because it is based on the statistical likelihood that a program that did not participate would have participated based on the characteristics of all organizations (both participants and non-participants). Thus, each participating organization is matched with a non-participating organization, based on the congruent characteristics of both organizations.

For this evaluation, data collected on the DCW were used to create a dataset of characteristics of all partner and comparison group sites. A review of the literature provided guidance concerning which characteristics were used to match the programs. Figure 7 includes all of the characteristics of the organizations that were used to match programs. In addition to those characteristics, the site's VCA score from either the mid-point data collection (for partner sites) or from the first data collection time point (comparison group sites) was also included in the model.

Figure 7: List of Characteristics Used in Propensity Score Matching

Organization Characteristics	Staff/volunteers' Characteristics	Program Focus
• Region of California • If the program is housed within a larger organization (such as a university) • If the program is part of a larger (regional, state, or national) organization • Number of people served by organization per year • Annual budget	• Total number of staff • Total number of volunteers • Most senior staff members' number of years at organization	• If the program is youth-focused • If the program is senior-focused • If the program is poverty-focused

The propensity scores were generated in SAS using a logistic regression model. Matches were made to the eighth decimal point. Because the ratio of participating organizations to non-participating organizations was nearly two to one, comparison group members were matched to participating organizations more than once. The propensity score matching process yielded matches for 75 participating program sites and for 18 non-participating sites.

Comparing Data Points from Partner Sites and Comparison Group Sites

To best understand the impact of the CalSERVES VIP program on partner sites, data were collected at three points throughout the program year to capture organizational capacity prior to taking part in the CalSERVES VIP program, approximately 4 to 6 months after baseline data collection, and once more approximately 10 to 12 months later. This data collection

strategy enables the assessment of change over time. Ideally, data would have been collected at the exact same time points for the comparison group sites. However, the comparison group sites were recruited mid-way through the program year, and data collection started significantly later than for partner sites. While partner sites had 10 to 12 months between the initial data collection and the final data collection, because of the later start with data collection for comparison sites, only approximately 4 months separated the two data collection periods.

Because of this, the analysis presented in this report compares partner site data from the mid-point data collection period and final data collection period with the comparison group sites initial and final data. Comparing these two time periods is appropriate because the amount of time between the mid-point and the final point for the partner sites is similar to that between the initial and final data points for the comparison group. The two windows are also more similar in terms of when the data collection occurred in the calendar year (both were in the spring and summer, respectively).

Differences between AmeriCorps VIP Sites and Non-participating Sites (Unmatched)

The VCA instrument includes items that measure a variety of organizational and volunteer capacity characteristics. The VCA items all asked respondents respond on a scale of zero to four, indicating "none", "little," "some," "much," or "completed," respectively. All programs were asked to rate how well their organization fulfills the statements on the form (in Tables 2-4 below). The goal of the AmeriCorps VIP program is to see 20 percent, or approximately 0.8, improvement in ratings from the first time point to the second or final time point.

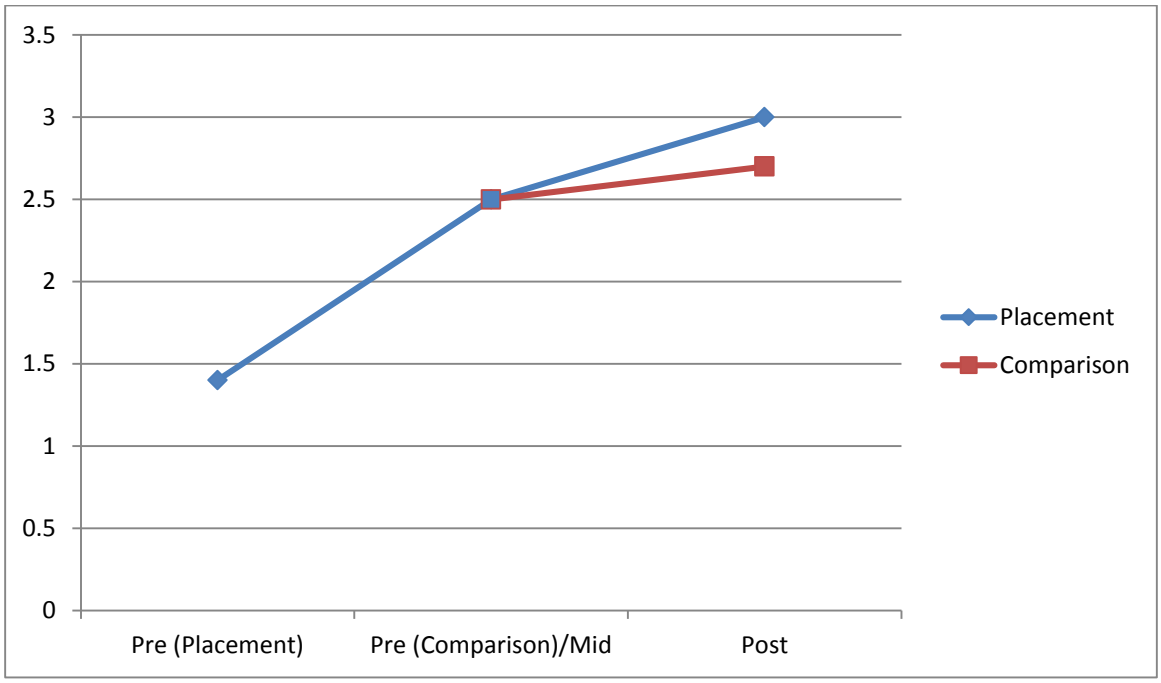
Figure 8 and Tables 2 through 4 show the differences between partner sites and comparison sites without matching sites between the two groups. The differences are instructive because they are taken from all data available from each group. However, these numbers cannot be used to understand the impact of the CalSERVES VIP program because the differences between the two groups may be due to other factors than program participation. In the section below on "Threats to Validity," the main concerns are explained in greater detail, but they are also briefly addressed here. When two unmatched groups are compared, other factors, such as organization characteristics (including, but not limited to, staff characteristics, budget size, or affiliation with a national organization, for example), might explain why a program has changed over time. The main worry is that these factors, rather than program participation, underlie the changes seen between the two data collection points. In the next section, the groups are matched and compared, which will allow for assessment of program impact net of organizational characteristics.

Even so, there are advantages in examining the unmatched data. The primary advantage is that these tables include all organizations for which data were collected. These data also show that even without matching the general trends remain the same, lending credibility to the impact illustrated in the matched data tables.

Figure 8 shows the overall average for partner sites and comparison sites. This mean is calculated by taking all 23 items on the VCA instrument and averaging them. This average gives a high-level, general assessment of organizational capacity related to volunteers. While both groups showed similar levels of overall organizational capacity at the first data

collection time point for the comparison group (the second time point for the treatment group), the organizations that took part in the CalSERVES VIP program appeared to experience much greater positive change over time.

Figure 8: Average Pre/Mid VCA Score and Average Post VCA Scores, Unmatched Comparison



*Not all 133 partner sites completed both mid-point and final data collection so the total number of partner sites is 117.

Table 2 includes the first four questions on organizational capacity on the VCA instrument. While the overall difference between the two groups was, on average, not very large, many of the individual items in this table, and in subsequent tables, illustrate the considerable differences. The change from the first time point to the second time point was positive and relatively large for the partner sites, but was very small (and sometimes negative) for the comparison sites.

Table 2: Organizational Capacity, differences between time points 1 and 2

Organizational Capacity	Partner Difference between Mid and Post VCA (N=117)	Comparison Difference between Pre and Post VCA (N=58)
The organization has a vision for what the volunteers can do for the organization and for the people it serves.	0.67	-0.07
Volunteers within the organization represent the diversity within the community.	0.76	0.09
The organization has strategically thought about the benefits and challenges related to volunteer involvement within the organization.	0.86	-0.10
The organization has developed a written statement of philosophy as to why the organization welcomes volunteers.	0.96	-0.07

Table 3 presents the second section of the VCA instrument. As with the items on organizational capacity, partner sites that participated in the CalSERVES VIP saw greater changes over time compared to the comparison sites.

Table 3: Volunteer Recruitment, differences between time points 1 and 2

Volunteer Recruitment	Partner Difference between Mid and Post VCA (N=117)	Comparison Difference between Pre and Post VCA (N=58)
Targeted recruitment efforts based on each volunteers' job description instead of generic volunteer recruitment campaigns.	0.98	0.09
There are strong publicity, public relations, and marketing campaigns in place that have built a positive image of the organization within the community.	0.86	0.14
The organization has a clear understanding of why people would want to volunteer.	0.89	-0.02
The organization is prepared to accept applications and is welcoming to prospective volunteers.	0.82	-0.07

Table 4 shows the change in responses to the items on the VCA that asked about the characteristics of successful volunteer programs. As with the previous sections of the VCA, CalSERVES VIP partner sites reported far greater and overwhelming positive changes over time.

Table 4: Elements of Successful Volunteer Program, differences between time points 1 and 2

Elements of Successful Volunteer Program	Partner Difference between Mid and Post VCA (N=117)	Comparison Difference between Pre and Post VCA (N=58)
The organization has planned for the resources necessary to support volunteers.	0.78	0.02
Training and supervision resources for volunteers have been identified.	0.87	0.07
Job descriptions have been developed for volunteer positions.	1.00	0.10
Flexibility has been built into volunteer positions to accommodate different skills and schedules.	0.80	0.09
The community understands what the organization does and is eager to support its efforts.	0.83	-0.03
There is a screening and selection process in place to aid in matching new volunteers to appropriate positions.	0.90	0.12
All volunteers participate in an orientation session that provides them with an understanding of policies, procedures, rights, and responsibilities.	0.96	0.10
Volunteers receive start up and ongoing training.	0.86	0.00
Positive volunteer/employee relationships are nurtured and problems are dealt with quickly.	0.85	-0.09
There is a clear leader within the organization that is seen as having the responsibility for coordinating and staffing volunteer programs.	0.96	0.04
Supervision is provided to all volunteers for support, communication, and accountability.	0.75	0.00
The work of volunteers and the impact of their activities are evaluated on a regular basis.	0.90	-0.09
Volunteers receive formal and informal recognition for their contributions.	0.85	0.03
Records are kept of what volunteers are doing, and results and reported and shared with the volunteers, administration, community, and funding sources.	0.81	0.02
The organization regularly seeks input from volunteers.	0.92	0.12

Differences between AmeriCorps VIP Sites and Non-participating Sites (PSM)

To assess program impact, it is essential to have a counterfactual comparison that helps diminish the likelihood of factors other than participation in the CalSERVES VIP program affecting the organizations during the 12-month data collection period. In the previous section, all programs from which data were collected were included in the tables. In this section, only data from programs that were matched are presented.

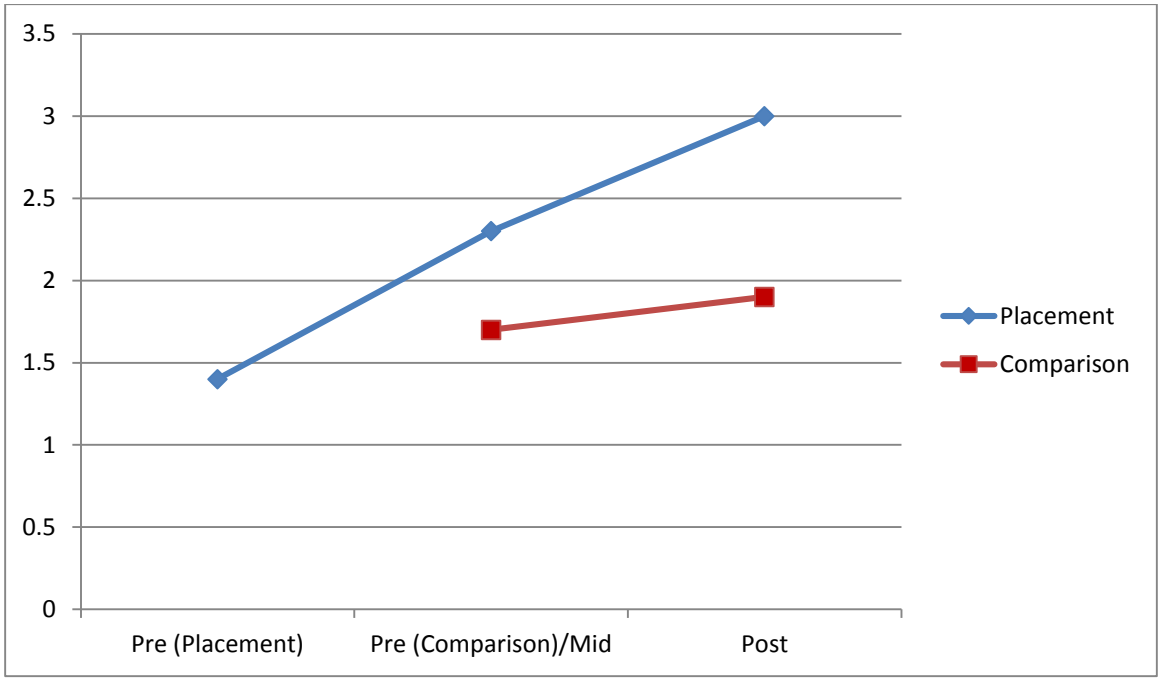
The propensity score process creates two groups of sites that are alike in many ways through the statistical matching procedure (see the section above for greater details regarding propensity score matching). Sites were matched on a variety of organizational and staff characteristics as well their initial VCA average score. Because of the diversity among partner sites and the smaller overall number of comparison group sites, not all organizations from which data were collected were included in the analysis using matched sites. Only partner and comparison sites that had very similar propensity scores were included in the

matched analysis. This matching procedure yielded a set of programs with very similar scores on the initial Pre-test VCA (1.4 for the treatment group, and 1.7 for the comparison) although by the Mid-test VCA, the treatment group had already increased in their average score to 2.2.

Even though the total number of sites included in the tables below is smaller, the comparison between the two groups is stronger than the comparison between all sites in the section above. This strength stems from the statistical matching that diminishes the likelihood that any differences between the two groups in the tables are due to characteristics of the organizations or their staff. The PSM procedure approximates the experimental design – the gold standard in evaluation research when trying to understand the causal impact of a program – and permits assessment of program impact. The tables below show that the CalSERVES VIP program has a strong impact on partner sites.

Figure 9 shows that when matched groups of partner sites and comparison group sites are compared, the overall average scores for the VCA are considerably higher for the partner sites, and increase significantly more, than for those of the comparison group sites.

Figure 9: Average Pre/Mid VCA Score and Average Post VCA Scores, Matched Comparison



*All differences between partner sites and comparison sites are statistically significant (p=0.01).

As was shown in the comparison of all sites, the differences between CalSERVES VIP partner sites and comparison sites are significant and positive. In the matched comparison analysis, the change over time for partner sites is larger than for the entire group of partner sites (in Figure 8 above).

The CalSERVES VIP program appears to positively affect the partner sites' organizational capacity to host volunteers. In particular, the program significantly impacts the partner sites' integration of volunteers through the organizations' strategic thinking about volunteer involvement benefit and challenges, and written statement of philosophy for welcoming volunteers.

Table 5: Organizational Capacity, differences between time points 1 and 2*

Organizational Capacity	Partner Difference between Mid and Post VCA (N=75)	Comparison Difference between Pre and Post VCA (N=18)
The organization has a vision for what the volunteers can do for the organization and for the people it serves.	0.56	0.00**
Volunteers within the organization represent the diversity within the community.	0.75	0.17
The organization has strategically thought about the benefits and challenges related to volunteer involvement within the organization.	0.76	-0.06
The organization has developed a written statement of philosophy as to why the organization welcomes volunteers.	0.81	0.06

*All differences between partner sites and comparison sites are statistically significant (p=0.005)
**Because of the small number of cases used in the comparison group and the small range of values, mathematically it is not unlikely that the average could equal 0.

The CalSERVES VIP program also has a positive and significant effect on volunteer recruitment as measured by the VCA instrument. Program participation appears most strongly to affect targeted recruitment efforts among partner sites.

Table 6: Volunteer Recruitment, differences between time points 1 and 2*

Volunteer Recruitment	Partner Difference between Mid and Post VCA (N=75)	Comparison Difference between Pre and Post VCA (N=18)
Targeted recruitment efforts based on each volunteers' job description instead of generic volunteer recruitment campaigns.	0.94	0.06
There are strong publicity, public relations, and marketing campaigns in place that have built a positive image of the organization within the community.	0.84	0.28
The organization has a clear understanding of why people would want to volunteer.	0.82	0.11
The organization is prepared to accept applications and is welcoming to prospective volunteers.	0.74	-0.12

*All differences between partner sites and comparison sites are statistically significant (p=0.05)

While all of the organizations included in the matched comparison saw positive changes as measured by the elements of successful volunteer programs on the VCA, the CalSERVES VIP partner sites all experienced considerably larger changes over time. In particular, the partner sites reported the greatest change concerning the development of job descriptions for volunteer positions, the establishment of screening and selection processes for volunteers, and the organizations' regular requests for input from volunteers.

Table 7: Elements of Successful Volunteer Program, differences between time points 1 and 2

Elements of Successful Volunteer Program	Partner Difference between Mid and Post VCA	Comparison Difference between Pre and Post VCA
The organization has planned for the resources necessary to support volunteers.	0.74	0.17
Training and supervision resources for volunteers have been identified.	0.78	0.22
Job descriptions have been developed for volunteer positions.	0.92	0.00**
Flexibility has been built into volunteer positions to accommodate different skills and schedules.	0.79	0.11
The community understands what the organization does and is eager to support its efforts.	0.75	0.11
There is a screening and selection process in place to aid in matching new volunteers to appropriate positions.	0.92	0.11
All volunteers participate in an orientation session that provides them with an understanding of policies, procedures, rights, and responsibilities.	0.89	0.28
Volunteers receive start up and ongoing training.	0.73	0.17
Positive volunteer/employee relationships are nurtured and problems are dealt with quickly.	0.87	0.17
There is a clear leader within the organization that is seen as having the responsibility for coordinating and staffing volunteer programs.	0.84	0.11
Supervision is provided to all volunteers for support, communication, and accountability.	0.76	0.17
The work of volunteers and the impact of their activities are evaluated on a regular basis.	0.89	0.11
Volunteers receive formal and informal recognition for their contributions.	0.89	0.00**
Records are kept of what volunteers are doing, and results and reported and shared with the volunteers, administration, community, and funding sources.	0.83	0.33
The organization regularly seeks input from volunteers.	0.96	0.17

*All differences between partner sites and comparison sites are statistically significant (p=0.01)
**Because of the small number of cases in the comparison group and the small range of values, mathematically it is not unlikely that the average could equal 0.

Overall, the partner sites that participated in the CalSERVES VIP program reported strong, positive changes over time on the items included in the VCA instrument. Organizations that did not participate in the CalSERVES VIP program reported much smaller (and sometimes negative) changes on the VCA items. The analysis of the propensity score matched groups confirms the initial results presented in the tables that included all partner and comparison group sites. Because the matching procedure diminishes the likelihood that factors other than participation in the CalSERVES VIP program influenced the change in reported scores over time, the evidence strongly suggests that the CalSERVES VIP program positively impacts organizations' capacity concerning volunteer programs.

Reliability and Validity of the VCA Instrument

Reliability and validity are key to understanding evaluation research. The VCA instrument does not have a long history of use with information about its reliability or validity, so these two concerns are addressed here using the data available.

Reliability refers to how likely it is that an instrument, or other data collection technique, could be used across populations, places, and time, and generate similar results given similar inputs. It refers to the extent that measures are repeatable and that any random influence which tends to make measurements different from occasion to occasion or circumstance to circumstance is a source of measurement error. To establish the reliability of the VCA instrument, test-retest reliability – or a measure of the degree to which responses are consistent over time – is used here. Because people who completed VCA forms for comparison group organizations did not (at least in theory) receive any sort of services or treatment during the time that they completed the VCA forms initially and subsequently, the data collected are suitable for test-retest reliability assessment.

Using a weighted kappa statistic to assess the test-retest reliability of the VCA instrument, the results show that overall the reliability of items on the VCA are considered "good" to "very good" using a commonly accepted scale (see Appendix C for tables with weighted kappa statistics and more detailed information on the weighted kappa statistic). Weighted kappas for the VCA items ranged from 0.61 to 0.86.

Validity refers to how well a particular measure captures the intended concept or idea. There are many dimensions to validity: content validity, face validity, predictive validity, concurrent validity, and construct validity. The VCA instrument has strong content validity, in that the items included on it are appropriate for understanding organizational capacity related to volunteering, and strong face validity, in that the items appear to measure what they purport to measure. Further, the VCA is content-aligned with the training curriculum that CalSERVES VIP utilizes. This curriculum and the instrument are based on materials from the Michigan State University Extension Services "Achieving Success Through Volunteers."

Internal and External Validity

To assess program impact, it is essential to address concerns about internal and external validity of a study. Internal validity refers to certainty that any changes because of program participation are due solely to the program and not to other characteristics of the individuals or organizations, factors external to the program (such as historical events), or things that happen during the process of evaluating the program (e.g.- errors in measurement). External validity refers to the generalizability of the findings from the program to other groups of people or organizations in different places and at different points in time. Conventionally, internal threats to validity are generally said to be mitigated or minimized by a good evaluation design, while external validity is generally said to be strengthened in a good evaluation design. Tables 8 and 9 list the common threats to internal validity and characteristics of strong external validity.

The evaluation of the CalSERVES VIP program attempts to minimize threats to internal validity in several different ways. First, data were collected before, during, and towards the end of program participation for partner sites. Second, a pre-existing instrument was used.

Third, data were collected from a comparison group of organizations that were similar to the partner sites. Finally, the comparison group was matched to the partner sites group using propensity score matching.

Tables 8 and 9 indicate how each of these aspects of the evaluation design worked to minimize particular threats to internal validity and to strengthen external validity. Overall, the evaluation of the CalSERVES VIP program addresses several key threats to internal validity by (a) collecting data over time and (b) using a propensity score matched comparison group.

Table 8: Potential Internal Validity Concerns

Threat	Addressed?	Reason
Selection Bias	✓	Propensity score matching the comparison group minimized the likelihood that characteristics of comparison site organizations were responsible for the differences seen between partner sites' and comparison sites' reported changes on the VCA forms.
Selection Additive Effects	✓	Propensity score matching the comparison group minimized the likelihood that characteristics of comparison site organizations were responsible for the differences seen between partner sites' and comparison sites' reported changes on the VCA forms.
Mortality	✓	By collecting data over time, mortality, or the having sites no longer take part in the program, was minimized.
Regression to the Mean		This threat was not addressed by this design and could not be adjust for because (a) the mean value for the VCA items among all organizations is unknown and (b) it is possible that if more data were collected from both partner and comparison group sites, each set of sites would eventually regress to the mean value.
History	✓	By collecting data over time and comparing similar time frames for both program sites and comparison site groups, history effects, or the likelihood that some external, large scale experience would affect sites differentially, was minimized.
Maturation	✓	By collecting data over time for both program sites and comparison group sites, maturation, or the likelihood that the passage of time might cause changes, was minimized.
Testing		These threats to validity are difficult to minimize in evaluations that use surveys that measure change over time. These four threats to internal validity all center on the effects of taking part in a program or an evaluation – that is, by simply receiving program services or taking part in evaluation activities an organization may do something differently than it would have otherwise. The evaluation protocol did, however use the same instrumentation for both groups, and both treatment and comparison programs were instructed to look at their pre-measure scores when completing their post measures.
Novelty		
John Henry		
Expectancy Effects		

Additionally, because of the diversity of programs included in both the partner site and comparison site groups, the external validity of the evaluation design is strengthened. However, the results are likely most generalizable within the state of California; additional research in other states would be necessary to understand if the results would likely be replicated elsewhere.

Table 9: External Validity Characteristics

Concern	Strengthened?	Reason
Applicability to other populations	✓	Because the partner and comparison site groups include a wide variety of programs working with different populations using different modalities, this evaluation likely has some applicability to other groups of programs.
Applicability to other settings/locations	✓	Because of the geographic distribution of the partner and comparison group sites across California, this evaluation likely has applicability across the state (but more research would need to be conducted to determine its applicability in other states).

Discussion/Findings

The evaluation of the CalSERVES VIP program's impact on organizational capacity concerning volunteer operations shows that this program has a strong positive impact on participating sites. The CalSERVES VIP program partner sites reported positive changes on all measures of the VCA instrument. These changes were much larger and statistically significantly different from the changes that were reported by the comparison sites. The difference between the partner sties and the comparison group sites was evident both in the unmatched and in the propensity score-matched comparisons of VCA items.

The VCA instrument used in this evaluation appears to be both reliable and valid based on initial analyses. The evaluation minimizes many threats to internal validity and has some external validity due to the diversity of programs and sites. The findings from this study are likely generalizable to other social service programs that use volunteers across the state of California, although more research would be needed to know if the findings are applicable to other states.

The items that partner sites reported the largest change over time for were (with change between time point one and time point two for all partner sites reported in parentheses):

- Job descriptions have been developed for volunteer positions. (1.0)
- Targeted recruitment efforts based on each volunteers' job description instead of generic volunteer recruitment campaigns.(0.98)
- The organization has developed a written statement of philosophy as to why the organization welcomes volunteers. (0.96)
- All volunteers participate in an orientation session that provides them with an understanding of policies, procedures, rights, and responsibilities. (0.96)
- There is a clear leader within the organization that is seen as having the responsibility for coordinating and staffing volunteer programs. (0.96)
- The organization regularly seeks input from volunteers. (0.92)
- There is a screening and selection process in place to aid in matching new volunteers to appropriate positions. (0.90)

- The work of volunteers and the impact of their activities are evaluated on a regular basis. (0.90)

These items center on ways in which partner sites improved how volunteers join and become part of the organization. The CalSERVES VIP program appears to impact these types of actions or policies in partner sites to the largest extent.

- The organization has a vision for what the volunteers can do for the organization and for the people it serves. (0.67)

This lowest recorded change (which, at 0.67 is still a significant and positive change) may indicate that CalSERVES VIP may wish to offer more guidance to partner sties regarding establishing a vision for what organizations might do with volunteers.

Conclusion

While there are a number of program practices that could contribute to these significant evaluation findings, CalSERVES VIP's utilization of research-based best practices likely plays an important role. In terms of professional development, the CalSERVES VIP program places a significant focus on growing AmeriCorps Fellows' professional and capacity building skills. To achieve this, the program uses a diverse set of methods.

AmeriCorps Fellows attend a statewide training conference at the beginning of their service term. This conference includes relevant workshops led by trainers who are experts in the field of volunteer program management. Additionally, fellows are given the opportunity to learn from and network with their peers from around the state. While at their partner sites, AmeriCorps Fellows attend biweekly team trainings with the other members serving with their supervising organization, which gives them the opportunity to develop and receive support on an ongoing basis. Unique to the CalSERVES VIP program, online training is utilized to efficiently disseminate research-based practices in volunteer program capacity building. Finally, the CalSERVES VIP supervisors at each supervising organization receive training on how to best support and grow their AmeriCorps Fellows as well as how to select, maintain, and provide support for their partner sites. By providing this high-quality professional development through a diversity of mediums, CalSERVES VIP effectively increases the likelihood of success for AmeriCorps members and the program in building volunteer capacity at their partner organizations.

In addition to utilizing best practices in AmeriCorps member development, CalSERVES VIP also incorporates many research-based volunteer management best practices proven to be successful in other programs. From targeted recruitment campaigns to volunteer evaluations, CalSERVES VIP uses models for building volunteer infrastructure at partner sites that have track records of success across the United States. These models and methods increase the likelihood that the partner sites will report growth and success in their volunteer program capacity building efforts.

An AmeriCorps Fellow, reporting back to her supervising organization and to CalSERVES, provides a useful illustration of how the training and best practices come together to build volunteer capacity. She notes:

"I accomplished two of the chief goals my Partner Site set for me over the last few months. The first was to create a volunteer tracking system that could be used campus wide. A few months ago, I was invited to be a member of the software development task force and we have selected a software company that will track our volunteers across departments and throughout the campus. More significantly, I learned about co-curricular transcripts at the last AmeriCorps regional training, and plan to incorporate that knowledge into the software that is being developed. The other big accomplishment this quarter was the creation of a co-curricular community service position. This week, I learned that the University is ready to hire its first Community Service Center Coordinator. This position came about due to my service as a VIP. I am so excited to see that my work to help build the program's sustainability is taking root!"

In review, the evaluation of the CalSERVES VIP program indicates that the program impacts the organizations in which Fellows serve. The CalSERVES VIP program has a measurable impact on capacity related to the organizations' abilities to prepare for volunteers, to recruit volunteers, to train volunteers, and to establish positive on-going relationships with volunteers. The evaluation further demonstrates that these impacts are likely caused by the program as shown through the comparison of program participating partner sites with non-participating comparison sites matched by propensity score.

While the current evaluation uses a counterfactual design to assess impact, future evaluations could greatly strengthen the evidence of program efficacy through a more robust research design. Several aspects of the evaluation could be improved. Selection of comparison groups at baseline would improve baseline comparability between the comparison group and the partner sites that received program services. On that same note, larger comparison groups would increase the certainty in the results by providing a stronger counterfactual. Additionally, it would be useful to develop a stronger set of measures developed more closely in line with the actual practices of the program and reflect programmatic activities more strongly, including more direct/observational measurement of treatment and comparison group volunteer capacity (e.g. numbers of volunteers, examination of volunteer job descriptions, recruitment materials and recognition programs), rather than program self report. These steps would assist in ensuring that future evaluation efforts would produce higher-level evidence to continue expanding the knowledge base of programs designed to develop volunteer program organizational capacity.

Appendix A: VCA Instrument

CalSERVES AmeriCorps VIP

Volunteer Capacity Assessment

Supervising Organization -- Select -- **Partner Site**

Person Completing Form **First Name** **Last Name**

Job Title **Submission** -- Select -- **Submission Date**

Note: Our goal is 20% improvement. For Mid and Post Assessments, please review earlier assessments before completing this form.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY	
The organization has a vision of what volunteers can do for the organization and the people it serves.	None (0)
Volunteers within the organization represent the diversity within the community.	None (0)
The organization has strategically thought about the benefits and challenges related to volunteer involvement within the organization.	None (0)
The organization has developed a written statement of philosophy as to why the organization welcomes volunteers.	None (0)
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT	
Targeted recruitment efforts based on each volunteer job description are conducted instead of generic volunteer recruitment campaigns.	None (0)
There are strong publicity, public relations, and marketing campaigns in place that have built a positive image of the organization within the community.	None (0)
The organization has a clear understanding of why people would want to volunteer.	None (0)
The organization is prepared to accept applications and is welcoming to prospective volunteers.	None (0)
ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM	
The organization has planned for the resources that will be necessary to support volunteers.	None (0)
Training and supervision resources for volunteers have been identified.	None (0)
Job descriptions have been developed for volunteer positions.	None (0)
Flexibility has been built into volunteer positions to accommodate different skills and schedules.	None (0)
The community understand what the organization does and are eager to support its efforts.	None (0)
There is a screening and selection process in place to aid in matching new volunteers with appropriate positions.	None (0)
All volunteers participate in an orientation session that provides them with an understanding of policies, procedures, rights, and responsibilities.	None (0)
Volunteers receive start-up and ongoing training.	None (0)
Positive volunteer/employee relationships are nurtured and problems are dealt with quickly.	None (0)
There is a clear leader within the organization that is seen as having the responsibility for coordinating and staffing volunteer programs.	None (0)
Supervision is provided to all volunteers for support, communication, and accountability.	None (0)
The work of volunteers and the impact of their activities are evaluated on a regular basis.	None (0)
Volunteers receive formal and informal recognition for their contributions.	None (0)
Records are kept of what volunteers are doing, and results are reported and shared with the volunteers, administration, community, and funding sources.	None (0)
The organization regularly seeks input from volunteers.	None (0)

Volunteer Capacity Average 0.00

Reset Form | Save Form | Email Report

Adapted from *Achieving Success Through Volunteers*, Michigan State University Extension 2005.

Appendix B: DCA Form

AmeriCorps VIP Data Collection Worksheet

General Information

Organization Name	
Address	
If you are housed in another larger organization, such as a university or non-profit, please list:	

Staffing and Budget

Number of staff and volunteers	Staff:	Volunteers:
Background and characteristics of staff; enter information below for up to *ten* key staff members (include: name; position; number of years at organization; number years working in the field; and highest level of education. Use the back of	1.	

the form as necessary.)	
	2.
	3.
Annual budget (in dollars)	
Source(s) of funding	

General Organization Information

Service Areas (i.e. what issues does the organization address or deal with? For example, childhood literacy, housing, substance use, youth development, etc.)	
Services (i.e. how does the organization actually work with people? What are the types of activities that are done in the organization?)	
How are organization services delivered?	

Where are organization services delivered? (i.e. at the office, at a local school, community center, people's homes, etc.)	
Who delivers the organization's services? (i.e. staff, volunteers?)	

Organization History

How long has the organization existed?	
Has the organization always been at this site? If not, when did it move here?	
Is this part of a larger organization? If so, please describe (i.e. is it part of a university center, a larger non-profit, etc.? Is it an off-shoot of another organization?)	

Organization Participants

Number of people served annually	
Geographic catchment area for people served (i.e., how far away do participants come from to take part?)	

Demographic characteristics of people served: (*race/ethnicity, age, gender, income levels*)

Race/ethnicity (circle all that apply)

Caucasian

African American

Hispanic or Latino

Asian

American Indian or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Multi-racial/Ethnic

Other (specify below)

_____

_____

Gender (circle all that apply)

Female

Male

Age (circle all that apply)

Under 18

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65 and over

Income levels (circle all that apply)

Below $10,000

$10,001 to $20,000

$20,001 to $30,000

$30,001 to $40,000

$40,001 to $50,000

Above $50,001

Organization Participants (continued)

Describe any other demographic or personal characteristics the organization's services are specifically targeted at	
Other characteristics of population served (i.e. anything else about participants that the program targets?)	

Organization Efficacy

Has there been an evaluation of the program? If so, when, and by whom?	

What did the evaluation show?	

Thank you!

Appendix C: Test-Retest Reliability of the VCA Instrument

To assess test-retest reliability, a weighted kappa statistic is used.[1] The kappa statistic is calculated based on the distribution of responses of a given item across two (or more) points in time. The VCA items that were completed by comparison sites are used here. Table C.1 provides a guideline for assessing weighted kappa values.

Table C.1: Kappa Values

Value of *K*	**Strength of agreement**
< 0.20	Poor
0.21 - 0.40	Fair
0.41 - 0.60	Moderate
0.61 - 0.80	Good
0.81 - 1.00	Very good

(Adapted from Altman 1991 – reference below)

Tables C.2-C.4 present the weighted kappa values for all items on the VCA. The weighted kappa values range from 0.61 to 0.86, or from good to very good, indicating that the items on the VCA have test-retest validity.

Table C.2: Organizational Capacity, Test-Retest Reliability

Organizational Capacity	Weighted Kappa
The organization has a vision for what the volunteers can do for the organization and for the people it serves.	0.74 (p <0.0001)
Volunteers within the organization represent the diversity within the community.	0.76 (p <0.0001)
The organization has strategically thought about the benefits and challenges related to volunteer involvement within the organization.	0.77 (p <0.0001)
The organization has developed a written statement of philosophy as to why the organization welcomes volunteers.	0.73 (p <0.0001)

Table C.3: Volunteer Recruitment, Test-Retest Reliability

Volunteer Recruitment	Weighted Kappa
Targeted recruitment efforts based on each volunteers' job description instead of generic volunteer recruitment campaigns.	0.65 (p <0.0001)
There are strong publicity, public relations, and marketing campaigns in place that have built a positive image of the organization within the community.	0.66 (p <0.0001)
The organization has a clear understanding of why	0.72 (p<0.0001)

[1] Altman, DG. (1991). *Practical Statistics for Medical Research*, Chapman & Hall, London.

people would want to volunteer.	
The organization is prepared to accept applications and is welcoming to prospective volunteers.	0.78 (p <0.0001)

Table C.4: Elements of Successful Volunteer Program, differences between time points 1 and 2

Elements of Successful Volunteer Program	Weighted Kappa
The organization has planned for the resources necessary to support volunteers.	0.71 (p <0.0001)
Training and supervision resources for volunteers have been identified.	0.73 (p <0.0001)
Job descriptions have been developed for volunteer positions.	0.75 (p <0.0001)
Flexibility has been built into volunteer positions to accommodate different skills and schedules.	0.86 (p <0.0001)
The community understands what the organization does and is eager to support its efforts.	0.61 (p <0.0001)
There is a screening and selection process in place to aid in matching new volunteers to appropriate positions.	0.72 (p <0.0001)
All volunteers participate in an orientation session that provides them with an understanding of policies, procedures, rights, and responsibilities.	0.62 (p <0.0001)
Volunteers receive start up and ongoing training.	0.72 (p <0.0001)
Positive volunteer/employee relationships are nurtured and problems are dealt with quickly.	0.75 (p <0.0001)
There is a clear leader within the organization that is seen as having the responsibility for coordinating and staffing volunteer programs.	0.74 (p <0.0001)
Supervision is provided to all volunteers for support, communication, and accountability.	0.67 (p <0.0001)
The work of volunteers and the impact of their activities are evaluated on a regular basis.	0.62 (p <0.0001)
Volunteers receive formal and informal recognition for their contributions.	0.71 (p <0.0001)
Records are kept of what volunteers are doing, and results and reported and shared with the volunteers, administration, community, and funding sources.	0.64 (p <0.0001)
The organization regularly seeks input from volunteers.	0.71 (p <0.0001)