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Research Objectives, Background, and Conceptual Framework

Research Objectives

We propose to directly study the economic benefits of national service, volunteering, and civic engagement, with a focus on the competitive advantage of national service participation in the job market, specifically the preferences of employers for job candidates with AmeriCorps experience. We will employ a randomized experiment to test the effects of including a national service experience in one's resume on the prospect of employment, and are specifically interested in the question: What is the effect of listing AmeriCorps on one's resume on receiving a job interview? The outcome will be the likelihood of being selected for an interview by a real hiring manager. We will vary the service experiences and how they are described to see which forms of service and which ways of presenting service are most attractive to hiring managers.

Because this will be a randomized study, the measurement of impact will be reliable and easy to explain to a public audience. We will have a simple model and findings that are readily accessible to the general audience based on a simple statistical technique. We will be able to say that listing an AmeriCorps program on a resume boosts an applicant's chance of getting an interview by X percent, an easily digestible and compelling data point.

Background

The Corporation for National and Community Service's (CNCS) 2013 study (Spera, Ghertner, Nerino, & DiTommaso, 2013) found strong evidence that people without jobs have better odds of becoming employed if they volunteer. In the brief that CNCS released to disseminate that study (and which Tisch College's Peter Levine helped to draft), Levine is quoted as saying, "The evidence is accumulating that service and civic engagement boost employment. This new study... makes the strongest case so far... and shows that those who volunteer are more likely to get a job after being out of work. For individuals, the message is clear: if you are looking for work, get experience and contacts by volunteering. For policymakers, the message is to support organizations that enlist volunteers. That will pay off for the people who serve as well as for those they help."

Similarly, our own research in collaboration with the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) has found that communities, counties, metro areas, and states with higher levels of civic engagement recovered their employment levels more rapidly after the recession of 2008-9 than communities that

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were similar except in their civic engagement levels. We hypothesize that one reason may be that individuals fare better on the labor market if they have civic experiences (Kawashima-Ginsberg, Lim, & Levine, 2012). Additional research that finds economic or educational benefits from the levels of civic engagement in communities includes Levine (2013), Putnam (2001), Safford (2009), and Sampson (2012).

Among young people, research finds that teenagers who participate in community service have much better outcomes than their peers (Dávila & Mora, 2007; Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, 2003; Fredericks & Eccles, 2006; Spera et al., 2013). For instance, Dávila & Mora (2007) found that participating in community service during high school strengthens the odds of college graduation, and Fredericks and Eccles (2006) found a relationship between that high school participation in school clubs and organized sports with positive indicators of academic and psychological outcomes. However, these correlations do not prove causation. Teenagers who serve may have personality traits or positive influences from peers, families, institutions, and communities that also explain why they succeed academically. Moreover, service clubs and programs have other features (apart from service) that may explain their benefits, such as positive peer norm toward academic engagement.

In addition, young people $\hat{\epsilon}$ particularly at-risk youth $\hat{\epsilon}$ who are enrolled in certain service-related programs see substantial improvements in academic and economic outcomes (CIRCLE, 2012; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Millenky, Bloom, Muller-Ravett, & Broadus, 2011). A recent study examining YouthBuild program participants found that the program provided participants with access to educational and personal opportunities they would have not received otherwise (CIRCLE, 2012). Similarly, participants in the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program (targeting at-risk youth who have dropped out of high school) were more likely to obtain a GED and be employed than those in the control group. Yet, the YouthBuild and the ChalleNGe programs always include other components beyond service, including access to caring adults, academic coursework, social capital, and sometimes residential living. The evaluation methods also leave some uncertainty about causation.

Service programs have also been found to have characteristics that resemble the 21st Century Workplace, such as ability to plan and work towards objectives and communicating effectively with supervisors (Larson & Angus, 2011; Levine, 2015). Therefore, these programs should prepare students

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for success in the job market. However, service programs may vary in the degree to which they impart valuable skills and habits, and other factors besides skills and habits influence success in the job market (e.g., social networks). Moreover, students may actually obtain valuable skills but not be able to demonstrate those skills to potential employers.

Also, there is some evidence that hiring managers see volunteering as relevant experience to consider when making employment decisions. In a recent Deloitte Volunteer IMPACT Survey (2013), which surveyed human resource executives, the respondents said that volunteerism provides benefits to their organizations and that skills-based volunteering can increase a job candidate's chances to be hired. Day & Devlin (1998) found that volunteering increases individuals' earnings, which may suggest that volunteering signals the presence of certain skills or abilities to future employers (Ziemek, 2006). However, much of the research in this area is based on surveys of managers who may say they want to hire volunteers even though volunteering may not actually matter in reality.

Although the existing research is significant, we propose that a randomized study using resumes is a crucial next step, for the following reasons. First, a randomized study is a more stringent and persuasive method. Respondents may give socially-desirable answers to survey questions (e.g., claiming that, they value volunteerism and it positively affects hiring). Also, alternative explanations can often be proposed for relationships that are uncovered through statistical analysis. For instance, perhaps some factor other than the service experience itself explains why the people who serve are more likely to get a job interview or a job. Those alternatives can be ruled out by an experiment.

Second, the results of an experiment are more likely to persuade skeptical audiences. It is hard to argue with a finding that a resume yields more call-backs if it includes a service experience. Previous research has successfully used resumes and job application materials to uncover labor market biases and discrimination related to factors such as race (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003) and gender (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012), but has not investigated the impact of national service.

Third, our study focuses on one specific and important hypothesis: that people who claim national service experience fare better on the labor market. That is different from other plausible hypotheses, e.g., that people who volunteer learn about better job opportunities through the contacts they form in their service positions. Although that would also be a welcome finding, in this study we focus cleanly

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on the impact of listing service on a resume.

Fourth, we can yield practical guidance for individuals about how to describe their own service. We would vary the descriptions and observe any differences in the impact on hiring managers, and inform AmeriCorps host organizations about the types of experiences and skills that are particularly valued by employers.

Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses

We predict that including national service experience of one year or more on a resume will increase the odds that employers will contact the hypothetical applicant for an interview. We further hypothesize that the effect of national service will be stronger if the experience is paired with a list of relevant skills, such as collaboration, leadership, and ability to make decisions. These skills represent an overlap between the skills promoted through national service and the skills that employers want in new hires according to a survey by National Association of Colleges and Employers (Forbes, 2013).

Using exploratory techniques, we will further identify covariates and explanatory factors for the effect of national service in resumes. For example, we will explore the extent to which the effect of national service varies across demographic backgrounds of the hypothetical candidates.

Research Design and Work Plan

Design: We will conduct an experiment using systematically varied resumes as the stimuli to explore the probability that job candidates with or without national service record or related qualifications would get a call back for a job interview. Because the study involves human subjects, we will obtain approval through the Tufts University Institutional Review Board.

Procedure and data collection: Identities will be created for factitious applicants. Resume templates will be generated using two methods: 1) using resumes of actual job searchers (guided by CNCS's resume recommendations or another career website that has publicly available resumes) within the past six months (but altered), and based on skill levels and other factors that are representative of the average job seeker, and 2) by reviewing surveys that asked employers what they are looking for in young people who have 1-3 years of job experience.

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As in Bertrand & Mullainathan's (2003) resume study, we will create resumes in two groups: of high and low quality. Quality will be defined by criteria such as labor market experience, career profile, existence of gaps in employment, and skills listed and would be assessed before national service was added to the resume. This resume manipulation needs to be subtle to avoid making a higher quality job applicant overqualified for a job. We will also include things like specific skills, leadership experiences, and other experiences in the context of national service. Each resume will contain a fictitious addresses based on real streets in the cities that we select, with a real email address and a LinkedIn profile.

We will search and apply for positions in all three sectors: public, nonprofit, and private. (According to the most recent AmeriCorps Alumni Association survey [AmeriCorps Alums, 2014]), two thirds of alumni work in the government or nonprofit sector.) The specific site or sites that we select would allow us to understand not only whether increase the odds of getting an interview, but in which sector national service and associated skills are valued. We are considering the following multi-sector sites to look and apply for positions: CareerBuilder.com, Indeed.com, SimplyHired.com, Monster.com [all multi-sector jobs], and Idealist.org [nonprofit or social sector jobs]. We will also utilize LinkedIn's algorithm for determining "appropriate" positions by analyzing the types of positions that are suggested by LinkedIn via the four profiles we create for the purpose of this study. An analysis of these jobs will provide us with realistic ideas about the kind of jobs to search for the study. We will establish job search criteria in each job sector based on this preliminary research. We will then deploy student research assistants to search for and apply for jobs using customized resumes during two labor market period in spring and fall of 2016. We are considering conducting this study in labor markets that have both tight and slack labor markets for youth employment, and will also consider the nonprofit economy of each city.

In responding to ads (which will be done via email), we will use the bank of resumes to sample four resumes (two high-quality and two low-quality) that fit the job description and requirements as closely as possible. One high and one low quality resume will be selected to receive the national service identifier, and the other high and low quality resumes will not include a national service identifier. We will assign a resume based on national service, relevant skills, covariates (race, gender, education), and city.

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We intend to apply to approximately 2,000 employment ads over the sample period and send close to 8,000 resumes (up to four resumes to each sampled ad). Each job will be counted as a case and we will systematically distribute each type of resume across three occupational categories (e.g., programming, research, communications, etc.). To save time and funds, we will hire student research assistants to conduct job searches and submit resumes for this research. After the study period, each employer will receive a debriefing statement stating the purpose and design of this study.

Definition of the population under study: The target population for the current study includes prospective employers who would receive applications for the open jobs for which national service alumni are likely to apply after completing their service. These employers will span for-profit and non-profit sectors, and the positions will cover entry-level positions requiring 1-3 years. Employers will be identified based on advertisements on their websites (see above).

Analysis plan: For the main hypothesis, we will first simply ascertain whether the call-back rate is higher (to a statistically significant degree) for the treatment group, using probit analysis. Probit will allow us to test the extent to which treatment group resumes over-perform the control group resumes in attracting call-backs.

We will also explore whether the effect of national service on a resume varies for applicants with various backgrounds and various service experiences. There is reason to expect some variation. The CNCS study (Spera et al., 2013) found that the effect of volunteering was relatively strong for people who might otherwise be disadvantaged in the labor market, such as people without college experience and those who lived in rural areas. It may also be the case that certain service experiences add more labor market value than others.

Thus we will investigate: 1) Whether the finding holds for different kinds of applicants, as expressed in resume types (e.g., resumes indicating a lot of experience vs. little experience). In other words, having a national service entry in the resume especially useful for a certain kind of candidates? For this purpose, we will divide the sample into types of resume and use the same initial probit model.

2) Which individual factors predict better chance of call-back, aside from national service? For this purpose, we will enter additional factors (such as educational background, years of relevant

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experience, and type of AmeriCorps program educational attainment) into the probit model.

3) Are there specific combinations of factors (e.g., levels of experience, when the AmeriCorps experience occurred, and what types of job the applicant applies for) that make a given resume very successful in getting a call-back? For this purpose we will conduct Configural Frequency Analysis (Lehmacher, 1981; Von Eye, 2002), which will permit exploratory tests of the effects of specific combinations of factors on the call-back yields.

Estimated work plan

Phase I: Job market research (October 2015 – April, 2016)

- Review of literature on resume quality and candidate characteristics
- Job search
- Construction and transmission of resumes
- Track callbacks/email invitations

Phase II: Job market research (represents a different hiring season) (August – November, 2016)

- Job Search
- Revisions (if needed) and transmission of resumes
- Track call-backs and email invitations

Phase III: Analysis and dissemination (December 2016 – June, 2017)

- Data analysis
- Synthesis of findings and report writing
- Dissemination/capacity building

Dissemination Plan

CIRCLE at Tufts University's Tisch College has a strong record of public dissemination. We are highly experienced in issuing effective press releases and reaching out to specific reporters. Since July of 2014, we have been cited or quoted in 782 news articles. During the period, our data or quotes were cited by, among others, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, the Associated Press, NPR's *All Things Considered*, NBC News, Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN. In the last year, our staff has published opinion pieces in USA Today, Politico magazine, and Fox News. The

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CIRCLE website at www.civicyouth.org attracts many visitors interested in topics like volunteering and civic engagement. We are accustomed to working with the Corporation, the National Conference on Citizenship, and other key players on joint dissemination strategies. We also maintain an intense schedule of presentations and speeches to policymakers and citizens across the country.

CIRCLE staff have previously been cited in articles about the economic benefits of volunteer service. Some examples include:

• Natalie DiBlasio, “College students and graduates volunteering for longer terms,” USA Today, 11/28/2011

• Darin Mellott, “How employers can help Gen Y change the world,” MetroWest (This article appeared in 46 additional media outlets.)

• Fawn Johnson, “Civic Engagement Can Help Millennials Get Jobs,” National Journal, 12/1/2014

In 2009, recognizing our experience with outreach, the research office of the Corporation made a grant to us to work with other CNCS research grantees to assist with their dissemination. Thus, for instance, we took a study by Constance Flanagan et al. (Finlay, Flanagan, & Wray-Lake, 2011) of the political impact of AmeriCorps (CNCS Agreement 08BIHPA001) and turned that into a CIRCLE Fact Sheet meant for a public and press audience. It is one of the products we use when talking to reporters about volunteering.

For this project, we would propose to write a scholarly article for peer-reviewed publication, because that citation would ultimately be evidence of rigor. The scholarly article would include a full literature review and detailed methodology section. However, we would not wait for the peer-review process to unfold but would immediately release fact sheets and press materials aimed at a public audience, coordinating with the CNCS on the message, timing, and outreach strategy.

Organizational Capability

The research team at Tufts University’s Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service is well-suited to conduct this research with required methodological rigor, and if appropriate, disseminate the findings to influential stakeholders and general public, because of the network position of Tisch College and CIRCLE. As described above, CIRCLE and Tisch College researchers are often quoted in major media outlets and would be able to promote the study and its findings widely if CNCS approves. CIRCLE also has a long history of working with practitioner organizations (including many that host

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AmeriCorps members) and helping to build their capacity. CIRACLE staff members Abby Kiesa and Felicia Sullivan have expertise in outreach and training, and will translate this study's complex findings into actionable recommendations for practitioners, as we did with the AmeriCorps impact study.

Dr. Peter Levine (PI) is the Associate Dean for Research of Tufts University's Jonathan Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service and Lincoln Filene Professor of Citizenship and Public Affairs, and a leading expert in service and civic engagement. He will oversee the project and play a key role in designing the study and interpreting the findings. Levine is the author of *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America* (Oxford University Press, 2013), five other scholarly books on philosophy and politics, and a novel. He has served on the boards or steering committees of AmericaSpeaks, Street Law Inc., the Newspaper Association of America Foundation, the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, Discovering Justice, the Kettering Foundation, the American Bar Association Committee's for Public Education, the Paul J. Aicher Foundation, and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium. Levine has been the PI on multiple successful CNCS proposals in the past.

Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg is the director of CIRACLE, and will lead the design and analysis. With a background in program evaluation, and strong quantitative skills, Kawashima-Ginsberg has advanced statistical skills and extensive experience with experimental design and multilevel modeling of large datasets, which has resulted in such publications *Civic health and unemployment II* and *The Case Builds*, for which she was the primary author (see references), as well as *Policy Effects on Informed Political Engagement* in *American Behavioral Science*. Kawashima-Ginsberg has designed and successfully executed several large experimental studies at CIRACLE.

Jodi Benenson, Ph.D. is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University with an interest in the relationship between civic engagement and economic mobility. She will assist with the execution and analysis of the study.

Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

Understanding the economic impact of national service has been identified as a top priority by CNCS. The budget requested is reasonable, necessary, and sufficient to document the causal impact of national service utilizing a randomized experimental study design. The budget requested will support

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staff time to conceptualize and implement a complex study with a sample size (N = 8,000) of strong statistical power. Student workers will assist with research administrative tasks, thereby reducing and maximizing investigator effort with analysis and dissemination.

Executive Summary

Previous research suggests that participation in civic engagement activities, such as membership in AmeriCorps State and National programs, can have positive labor market outcomes for young people and that hiring managers see volunteering as relevant when making employment decisions. However, little is known about whether including service on a resume increases prospects of employment for AmeriCorps alumni.

We propose a randomized experiment to test the effects of listing an AmeriCorps service experience on one's resume. We will create fictitious resumes for applicants and will vary the service experiences and how they are described to see which forms of service and which ways of presenting it are most attractive to hiring managers. The outcome will be the likelihood of being selected for an interview by a real hiring manager. Use of a true experimental design will allow us to yield simple and compelling findings.

Presuming the results are positive, this research has the potential to strengthen the case for governments at all levels & as well as the private sector & to expand support for volunteer service as a strategy for improving economic prosperity and inclusion. This study could also provide a strong argument for individuals to seek volunteer experience as a step toward their own employment. Finally, by varying the volunteer experiences and how they are presented on a resume, we can yield practical advice for volunteers and former volunteers about how to present themselves on the job market.