

Experience Corps: Who Are the Members?

June 10, 2010

Experience Corps[®] (EC) is a program that brings older adults into public elementary schools to improve academic achievement of students, through one-to-one tutoring, small group academic help and assisting teachers. It has been in existence for over 15 years and currently operates in 22 cities across the country. The Atlantic Philanthropies provided funding to Washington University in St. Louis to conduct a national evaluation of EC.

These data derive from telephone surveys with 467 members who joined the program in the 2006-2007 academic year in 18 cities.¹ The members of EC are diverse, as demonstrated in the descriptions in this report.

Age

The average age of EC members is 65 years. However, this number does not capture the diversity, as ages range from 50 to 87 years old.

Age	
50-54	8%
55-59	22%
60-64	23%
65-69	22%
70-74	13%
75-79	8%
80-84	3%
85-89	1%

Gender

EC members are overwhelmingly female, with only 14% (67 out of 467) being male. Although this gender disparity is somewhat expected, there are fewer males than in other service programs. This is probably due to the nature of the work: educating children, a stereotypically female job.

Race

African Americans make up 53% of the volunteers, with Caucasians making up 39%. Other ethnicities are represented in cities where diverse children are served in the public schools. For example, of the 8

members who identified as Asian, 5 of them are associated with the Bay Area EC program.

Living Arrangements

EC members are evenly split between living alone and living with others. Only 5% live in senior housing. Forty-one percent are not married, while 37% are married and 22% widowed.

Education

Most (96%) of the participants finished high school, and over 42% have a college degree. Years in school range from 5 to 17 years, with the average being 14 years of school. In general, EC volunteers are more educated than the older population as a whole.²

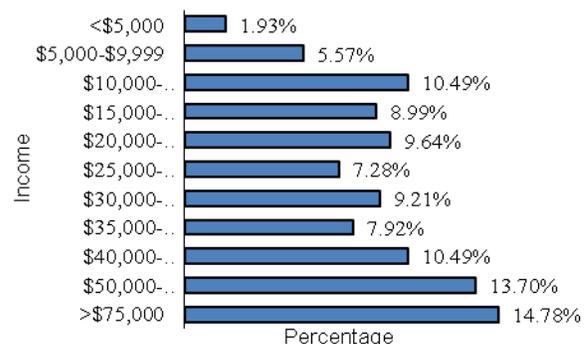
Highest Grade Completed

Less than high school	4%
High school graduate	20%
Some college	34%
Four-year college graduate	16%
Post-college	26%

Income

Incomes vary widely among EC volunteers. Almost 20% earn less than \$15,000, and 15% earn more than \$75,000. At least one quarter could be considered “low income;” with 9% of the sample below the poverty line.²

Income of EC Volunteers

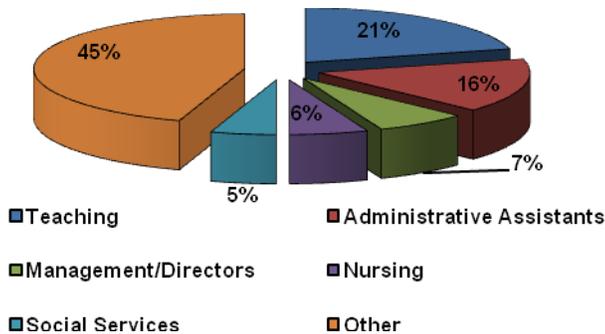


Work status

Most volunteers (73%) are retired, while the remaining are still working (15%) or unemployed (12%). Of those volunteers who are retired, the average length of retirement is six years. Twenty percent reported that they are looking for work.

Former occupations

More former teaching professionals (teacher, teacher's aid, education administrator, professor) joined the program than any other profession (21%). The second largest former profession is administration assistants/clerks at 16%. Also included in the top five professions are nursing, management, and social services.



How volunteers found out about EC

Members learned about the program from various sources. Over 40% were approached by another person, consistent with previous research indicating that asking people to volunteer is the most effective recruitment strategy. Only a small percentage learned about EC through presentations, booths, or religious organizations (included in *Other* below).

How heard about EC

Written media	26%
Approached by non-EC person	21%
Approached by EC member or staff	21%
AARP letter, magazine or flyer	11%
Another program (e.g. Foster Grandparents)	5%
Media (TV, internet)	6%
Other	10%

Reasons for volunteering

Most EC members serve in the program because of their desire to help children. Twenty-four percent were attracted to educational and literacy activities; and a somewhat smaller percentage were looking for self-improvement.

Reasons for volunteering

Help Children	31%
Continue/want to teach, literacy	24%
Self-benefit (keep mind active, career development, to feel needed)	17%
Give back	10%
Attraction to program	8%
Material (money, part time work)	3%
Practical (convenient, had time)	7%

More about the EC men

Males are very under-represented among EC members. Compared to EC women, the men were more likely to be Caucasian, have higher education and income, be married, and not live alone. The men tended to be healthier than the women. The men expressed the same motivations to volunteer, and they were just as likely to have volunteered before. However, there is some indication that men were more likely to learn about the program through AARP publications or another person, including wives. It is important to note that the men were not distributed evenly across all the sites. For example, the Bay Area and Cleveland programs included 22 of the 67 men.

In sum, the older adults who serve in EC are diverse in terms of age and income. Almost one-quarter have a high school diploma or less, they are more educated than the older population in general. Recruitment efforts focused on men and ethnic groups representing the student population (i.e. Hispanic and Asian) could further strengthen the program.

¹Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, DC, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, Mesa, Minneapolis, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, Port Arthur, Portland, San Francisco, St. George, Tempe, Tucson.

²Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics. Older Americans 2008. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. March 2008.

Research team at Washington University in St. Louis: Nancy Morrow-Howell, Stacey McCrary, Ernest Gonzales, Amanda McBride, Song-lee Hong, Wayne Blinne

Mathematica Policy Research provided data collection services

This work was funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies