



**Gap Year Alumni
Survey 2020**
Supplemented with
**2015 AmeriCorps National
Civilian Community Corps
Survey Data**

Original Report Prepared by:

Nina Hoe Gallagher, PhD
ninadgallagher@gmail.com

Kempie Blythe, MA
kempie.blythe@transformativetravelconsulting.com

AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps 2015 Survey Response
Integrated by Kempie Blythe
October 2020

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Executive Summary	2
Background	4
Gap Year Association	4
Research Objectives	4
Methodology	5
Design	5
Recruitment	5
Limitations	6
Unknown Population	6
Recruitment of Sample	6
AmeriCorps Data	6
Definition of a "Gap Year"	7
Comparison Group	7
COVID-19	7
Sample	8
Findings	11
Gap Year Structure, Components and Destinations	11
Timing	11
Gap Year Components	12
Geographic Distribution	14
Gap Year Finances, Motivations and Obstacles	16
Financial Aspects of Gap Years	16
Motivations for Gap Years	17
Obstacles for Gap Years	18
Gap Year Outcomes	19
Skills and Learnings Acquired During Gap Year	19
Experiences Contributing to Growth, Learning, & Development	22
Post Gap Year Actions	24
Summary & Conclusions	25
Demographics	25
Gap Year Components	25
Motivations	26
Obstacles	26
Outcomes	26
Recommendations	25

Executive Summary

According to Ethan Knight of the Gap Year Association, it is estimated that around 40,000 Americans and Canadians participate in gap year experiences every year. The popularity of these types of experiences has increased in recent history and although there is a growing body of research dedicated to gap year experiences, there continues to be a dearth of research in regards to the specific experiences of U.S. and Canadian gap year participants and a lack of knowledge about the “American” gap year.

The Gap Year Alumni Survey of U.S. and Canadian gap year participants was conducted in 2020, following the first ever survey of its kind in 2015. Like the previous survey, the 2020 survey sought to capture the scale, scope, and outcomes of gap year experiences. Additionally, this survey focused on the impact that gap year experiences had on U.S. and Canadian gap year participants. While nearly 1,200 gap year alumni completed this survey (more than double the number of responses than the 2015 survey), this data still represents a small fraction of the estimated population of U.S. and Canadian gap year participants. For the purposes of this report, we do not make any assumptions that this sample is representative of the larger population of gap year participants in the U.S. and Canada, and we do not generalize our findings to this broader population. In this report, respondents to the Gap Year Alumni 2020 Survey are referred to as “GYA survey respondents/participants.”

In order to offer a more comprehensive scope of gap year experiences for U.S. residents, this report includes supplemental data from the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Survey 2015. While AmeriCorps offers several programs, the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is promoted as a gap year program and thus, provided the most comparable data to the Gap Year Alumni 2020 Survey. Given that these two data sets are unique, they will be shared alongside one another, highlighting points of similarity and difference.

This report details the key findings of the 2020 survey including:

- Both GYA and NCCC survey respondents reported **positive outcomes** as a result of their gap year
- The majority of respondents enrolled in a **structured program** specifically for gap year participants
- **Travel abroad, service work, and language learning** were defining elements of gap year experiences for GYA survey respondents
- **Personal development and cultural experiences** continue to be the primary motivator for taking a gap year for GYA respondents
- **Interactions with difference** during a gap year promote the greatest learning, growth, and development for GYA respondents
- Gap year experiences fostered **internal and external skill development** for survey respondents
 - GYA: Self-direction, maturity, self-confidence, interpersonal communications, and cultural awareness
 - NCCC: Cultural competency, civic engagement, adaptability, and self-efficacy

- Gap year experiences helped **prepare** survey participants for their **next steps** (educational, professional, personal)
 - Almost all of the GYA respondents reported that their gap year prepared them well for higher education and/or the workforce
 - Most NCCC respondents attributed their AmeriCorps experience to furthering their educational, professional, and/or personal goals.
- Almost all respondents enrolled or resumed **higher education** post-gap year
 - Nearly half of GYA respondents reported that their gap year experience increased their likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree
 - Almost all NCCC respondents used their educational grant for higher education; the majority of respondents had completed a bachelor's degree at the time of the survey
- There are many different "recipes" of gap years, but the **benefits of taking a gap year seem equally distributed** across types/activities/costs for GYA respondents

Background

A gap year experience is a structured period of time when a student takes an intentional break from formal education. It can last anywhere from two months to two years and typically takes place between high school and college, during college, or between undergraduate and graduate degrees. While the practice of taking a gap year is common in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, it is believed to be less common in the U.S. and Canada. Furthermore, little is known about **who** in the U.S. is taking a gap year, **why** they take a gap year, **what** they do during their gap years, and **what** impacts they experience, both personally and professionally.

Gap Year Association

Founded in 2012, the Gap Year Association (GYA) is the only national nonprofit working to coordinate the growing Gap Year Movement. As a public benefit not-for-profit Association with members, they believe that all intentional gap years have significant and positive practical outcomes, whether independent or as part of a formal program. The GYA focuses on four core areas: Research, Equity & Access, Resources, and finally Standards and Accreditation. Each year they advance gap year research with member-initiatives, an annual State of the Field Survey, and regularly direct larger research efforts such as the 2015 and 2020 National Alumni Surveys. They also believe strongly that young adults of all walks of life benefit from an intentional gap year and thus work to promote scholarships, as well as inclusivity efforts within their membership and the broader community. Finally, the GYA is the Standards Development Organization for Gap Year Education in the US, as recognized by the US Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission.

Research Objectives

In 2015, the Gap Year Association conducted the first ever survey of U.S. and Canadian gap year participants ("gap year participants"). The National Alumni Survey (NAS) was designed collaboratively by GYA staff and Nina Hoe Gallagher, and [the report](#) was made public in 2015. This object of the survey was to measure the scope, scale, and outcomes of gap year experiences for U.S. and Canadian gap year participants.

To further advance our understanding of gap year experiences for U.S and Canadian gap year participants, GYA commissioned the Gap Year Alumni 2020 Survey. Like its 2015 predecessor, this survey sought to understand the experiences of U.S. and Canadian gap year participants. The 2020 Survey was designed to measure:

- Demographics of gap year participants
- Types of gap year experiences
- Motivations for taking a gap year
- Obstacles faced in taking a gap year
- Personal and professional impacts of a gap year
- Gap year activities that contribute to impacts

Methodology

Design

The Gap Year Alumni 2020 Survey was designed by Nina Hoe Gallagher, PhD, and Kempie Blythe, MA in collaboration with the Gap Year Association Research Committee. The survey sought to address some of the challenges faced by the 2015 survey including but not limited to survey drop off rates and fatigue. Through several collaborative iterations, the 2020 survey was intentionally crafted to:

- Reach a larger population of gap year alumni
 - Include those who participated in domestic experiences and/or organized their gap year independent of structured programs
 - Be more concise than 2015 to encourage a higher response rate
- Measure the biggest change agents or transformative activities of gap years
- Determine the relationships between gap year types and profiles, and associated outcomes

The resulting survey included 21 questions and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey was anonymous, though respondents were given the option to enter their email addresses for a chance to win one of the five \$100 Amazon gift cards. The survey was live for approximately 7 months from December 27, 2019 to July 31, 2020¹.

Recruitment

The GYA respondents were recruited through several channels to encourage a diverse sample of profiles and gap year experiences.

Recruiting was conducted through word-of-mouth with the support of gap year program providers and a combination of non-paid posts and targeted advertisements on social media. Regular posts were placed on Instagram and LinkedIn where they were shared and reposted by other users. Twitter was utilized for two paid advertisements to specifically target an audience that had expressed an interest in the gap year and were located in the United States or Canada. While live, the survey was also announced monthly in the Gap Year Association's newsletter which reaches approximately 2,200 people each month.

Interested participants were invited to click on the survey link provided in an email or on a social media profile where the promotion was initiated. The Gap Year Association incentivized participation by offering five \$100 Amazon gift cards to those who chose to include their email address at the end of the survey.

¹ Initially the survey was set to close in April of 2020, but the deadline was extended because of COVID-19 and the related disruptions to gap year providers.

Limitations

Unknown Population

This research study included several limitations. To date there is no centralized or consolidated record of gap year alumni. Even though gap year networks have become more robust over the past 5 years, there continues to be a challenge (as there was in 2015) in reaching all gap year alumni. The true population of all gap year alumni, or those US and Canadian residents who took a gap year at some point in their lives, is largely unknown, which makes knowing whether or not the sample we reach is in fact representative of our target population challenging. Given that several large gap year organizations had low or nonexistent alumni response rates and several smaller organizations had a much higher alumni response rates, **we cannot claim that these findings are representative of the U.S. and Canadian gap year population at large. As such, the findings in this report only refer to these particular “gap year participants” who responded to the Gap Year Alumni Survey.**

Additionally, certain demographics such as females and those identifying as White are more likely to respond to surveys than other demographic groups. It is possible that our survey sample is influenced by general trends in survey participation.

Recruitment of Sample

Given that survey participants were primarily recruited through gap year organizational networks, there may have been a shortage of data from gap year alumni who did not participate in a program. Additionally, some organizations encouraged participation or circulated the survey more widely within their network of alumni than others. Similarly, other large gap year organizations that work with very diverse populations were not able to share this survey with their alumni for concerns such as survey fatigue, participant privacy, and question-relevance or overlap.

AmeriCorps Data

In order to supplement the data from the GYA survey, this report includes publicly available data from the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Summary Report 2015. The AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes survey collected stratified data of AmeriCorps alumni who participated in 3 distinct AmeriCorps programs: ASN, NCCC, and VISTA. Because AmeriCorps' National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is promoted as a U.S. domestic gap year program, this analysis examines the findings from NCCC participants only. Although this survey used a different instrument and methodology than the GYA 2020 Survey, we have chosen to include points of convergence and divergence to enrich our findings.

In order to incorporate this data, the survey instruments of both surveys were mapped for similarities. The NCCC data was obtained from the Raw Frequencies of the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Summary Report 2015 (see Appendix B).²

Note that the NCCC data from the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Summary Report 2015 has been selected because it most closely aligns to the data collected for GYA 2020; however, the different survey instrument and methodology prevent this from being an identical comparison. Additionally, the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Survey was conducted 5 years prior to the GYA 2020 Survey. While there are inherent limitations in the inclusion of this data, this choice was made to more fully illustrate the outcomes that gap year participants report from different types of experience.

Definition of a "Gap Year"

This survey may also have been limited to some gap year alumni who did not consider their definition of a gap year to align with the definition presented in this survey. For the purposes of this survey, a gap year experience was defined as "a structured period of time when a student takes an intentional break from formal education." As such, those taking a break between professional endeavors, for example, may not have considered themselves eligible. Of 1,795 respondents who began the survey, 163 were not eligible to take the survey, as they reported that they did not participate in a gap year according to this definition. Additionally, another 36 were not sure whether their gap year experience aligned with this description.

Comparison Group

Another important limitation was that this survey did not include a comparison group of non-gap year participants. Thus, it is impossible to know how the outcomes experienced by gap year participants compare with the outcomes experienced by those who entered college or the workforce directly.

COVID-19

Finally, the global coronavirus pandemic began while this survey was live. As a result, the survey was extended several months beyond its original closing date. It is unknown how the pandemic impacted data collection and participant responses. On one hand, prospective respondents who may not have otherwise had the time to engage in a survey may have been inclined to while they were sheltering in place. On the other hand, prospective respondents who may have been willing to participate may have been occupied by other concerns as a result of the pandemic and its consequences.

²https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_CNCS_Alumni%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report.pdf

Sample

In total, 1,795 respondents began the Gap Year Alumni 2020 Survey, and of those, 1,596 participated in a “gap year” that aligned with the definition in the survey and 1,139 were eligible as permanent residents or citizens of the U.S. or Canada. A total of 1,190 gap year alumni completed this survey.

The Alumni Outcomes Summary Report 2015 collected stratified data from a total of 498 NCCC alumni from 2004, 2009, and 2012 (respectively 10, 5, and 2 years after the end of service).

➤ ***Survey respondents predominantly self-identified as White and female.***

In terms of race/ethnicity, 78% of GYA survey respondents identified as White, 5% as Asian, 4% as Hispanic or Latino/a, 3% as more than one race, 3% as “other,” 2% as Black or African American, and 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native. 3% identified as “other,” predominantly self-reported Jewish or Middle Eastern, and 3% did not wish to share their racial or ethnic identities.

With respect to gender, 68% of GYA respondents self-identified as female, 29% as male, and 1% as gender non-conforming or non-binary. Only 2% did not wish to share their gender identification.

Of the NCCC respondents, 71% self-identified as female and 28% as male. 90% identified as white, 6% as “other,” 4% as Black or African American, and 4% as Asian. Almost all (95%) identified as not Hispanic or Latina/o.

➤ ***GYA respondents primarily attended public high schools.***

As far as high school backgrounds, 64% of the GYA respondents attended public high school and 34% attended private high school. 2% attended a charter high school and 1% attended “other,” including home school and getting a GED. Only 2 respondents reported not graduating from high school.

AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Report did not collect data on the type of high school their respondents attended.

The table below shows the racial/ethnic backgrounds, genders and high school backgrounds of GYA survey respondents as compared to the U.S. population.

Table 1. Demographics of GYA survey respondents compared to the US

	Gap Year Alumni	US Census³		Gap Year Alumni	US Census⁴
White	78%	73.6%	Female	68%	50.8%
Asian	5%	5.9%	Male	29%	49.2%
Hispanic or Latino/a	4%	18.5%	I do not wish to share this information	2%	
More than one race	3%	2.8%	Gender non-binary/non-conforming	1%	
I do not wish to share this information	3%			Gap Year Alumni	US⁵
Other	3%		Public	68%	91%
Black of African American	2%	13.4%	Private	34%	8.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	1.3%	Charter	2%	
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%	0.2%	Other	1%	

➤ ***Respondents to the 2020 GYA survey were similar to those who responded to the 2015 survey.***

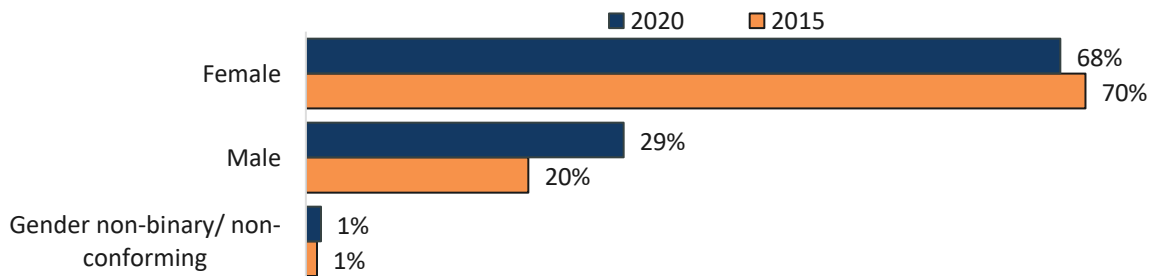
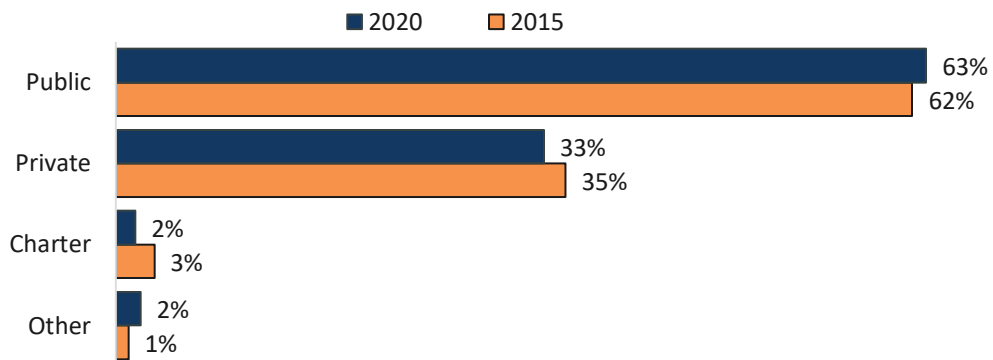
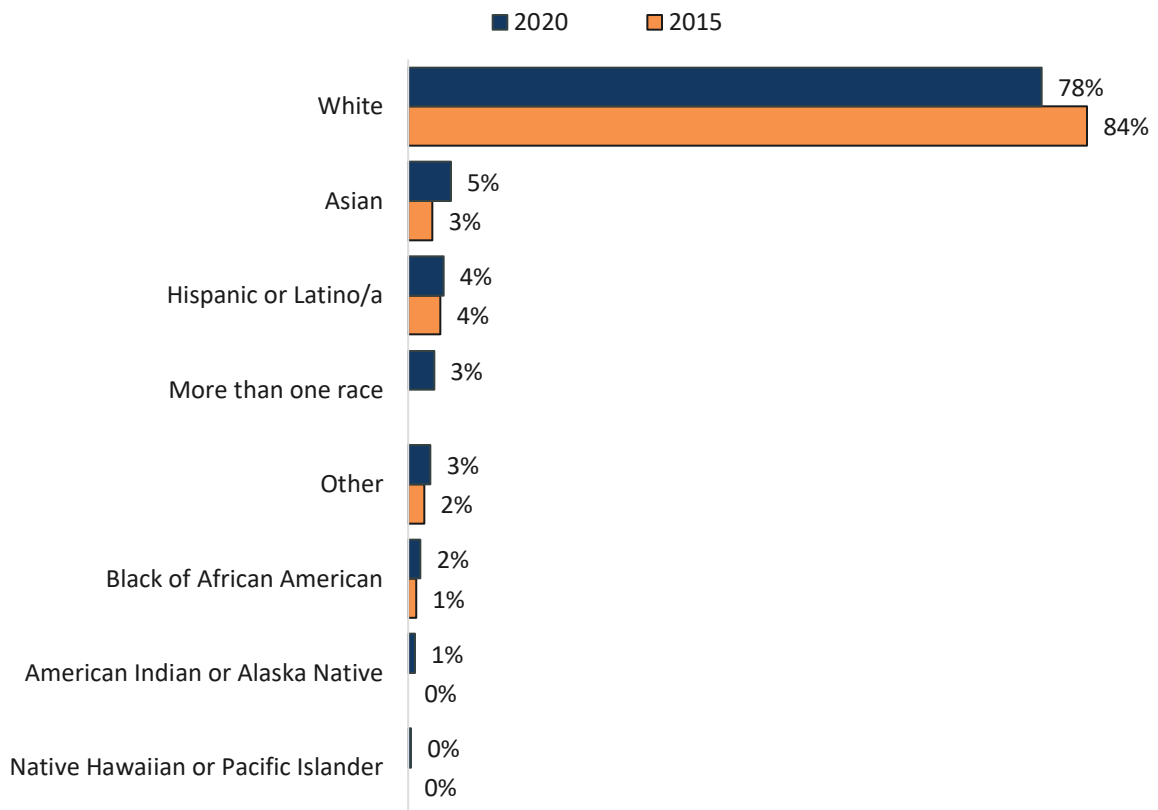
The demographics reported by the 2020 survey respondents were very similar to those reported by the 2015 NAS survey respondents.

³ Data reported by the U.S. Census. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/IPE120218>

⁴ Data reported by the U.S. Census. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?d=ACS%205-Year%20Estimates%20Selected%20Population%20Detailed%20Tables&tid=ACSDT5YSPT2015.B01001&hidePreview=false>

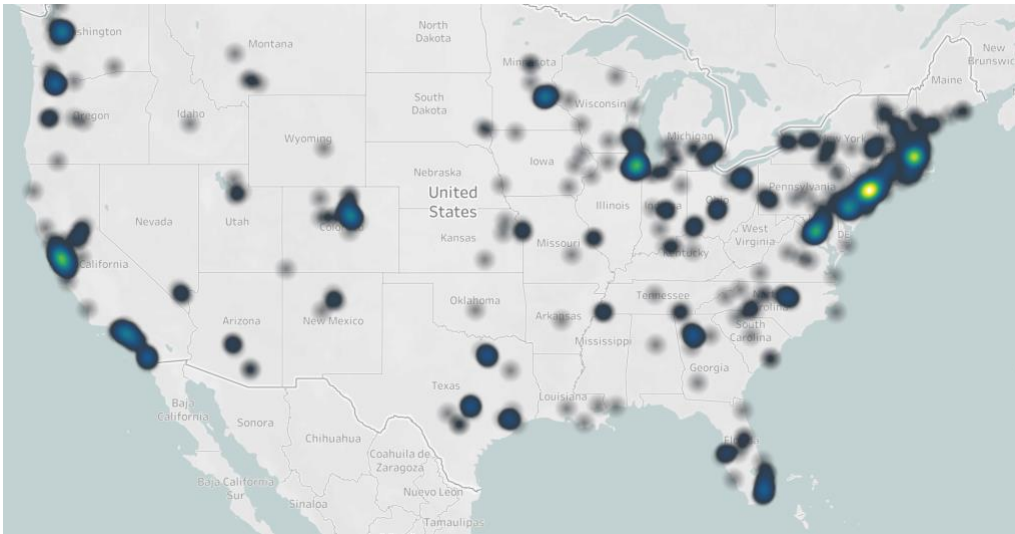
⁵ Data reported for Fall 2018 from National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_201.20.asp?current=yes

Figures 1-3. Race/ethnicity, high school background and gender of GYA survey respondents



GYA survey participants spent their childhood in 48 different states in the U.S. and Puerto Rico as well as several provinces in Canada, with the majority of alumni concentrated in urban areas.

Figure 4. GYA survey respondents' home ZIP codes



Finally, 89% of GYA respondents started their gap year experience in the last decade (2010-2019), indicating the majority of respondents were likely between the ages of 18 to 30.

As AmeriCorps participants, all NCCC respondents had to be U.S. citizens, nationals, or permanent residents. These respondents were NCCC alumni from 2004, 2009, and 2013, indicating the likelihood of the majority of these respondents to be between the ages of 23 and 36 at the time of the survey (2015).

Findings

Gap Year Structure, Components and Destinations

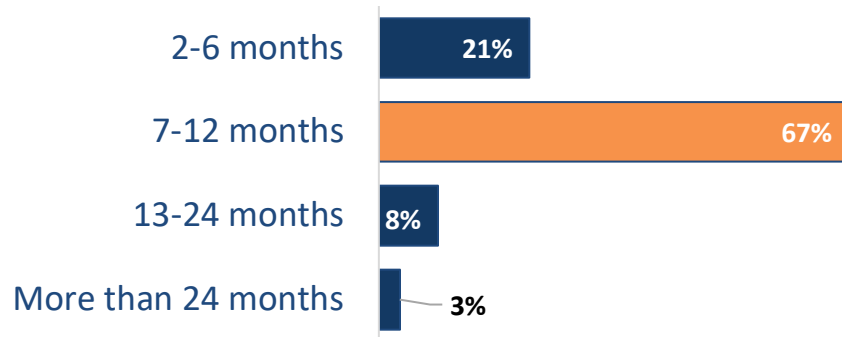
GYA survey respondents were asked a series of questions in regards to the timing, components, location, structure, and cost of their gap year. These findings, as well as relevant NCCC data from the AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Summary Report 2015, illustrate the landscape of gap years for those U.S. and Canadian gap year participants.

Timing

- *Survey respondents' gap year experiences typically lasted between 7-12 months.*

Two-thirds of all GYA survey respondents reported that their gap year lasted between 7-12 months, while 21% reported shorter gap years (between 2-6 months). The smallest proportion of participants reported longer gap years.

Figure 5. Reported length of GYA respondents' gap year experiences



AmeriCorps' NCCC program requires a 10-12 month commitment.⁶

- ***GYA survey respondents most commonly took gap years between the ages of 18-21, while the majority of NCCC respondents were between 20 and 25 years old.***

The majority (80%) of GYA respondents participated in a gap year when they were between 18-21 years. At the time of their respective gap years, 14% of survey participants were under 18 and only 5% were over 21 years old.

Of the NCCC respondents, only 19% were under 20 years old at the time of their first service. The majority (81%) reported serving in their first AmeriCorps program when they were between 20-25 years old.

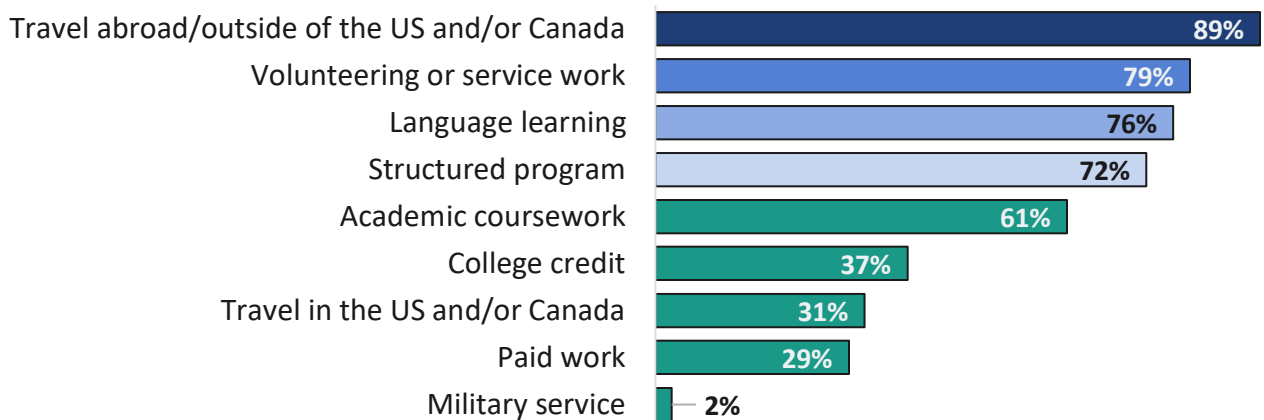
Gap Year Components

- ***There were 246 unique "recipes" for gap years; the majority of gap years for GYA survey respondents included travel abroad, volunteering or service work, structured programming and academic coursework.***

Survey respondents recorded 246 different types (combinations of activities and components) of gap year experiences. The majority (89%) of participants traveled abroad/outside of the U.S. or Canada during their gap year experience. Over three quarters of those who traveled abroad (77%) also participated in a structured program. The majority of participants engaged in volunteer or service work (79%) and language learning (76%). The majority (83%) of respondents also engaged in language learning. Additionally, 61% of respondents engaged in academic coursework, however, only 37% indicated that they received college credit during their gap year.

⁶ As stated on the AmeriCorps' NCCC webpage: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/ameri-corps-programs/ameri-corps-nccc/gap-year-nccc>

Figure 6. Gap year components reported by GYA survey respondents



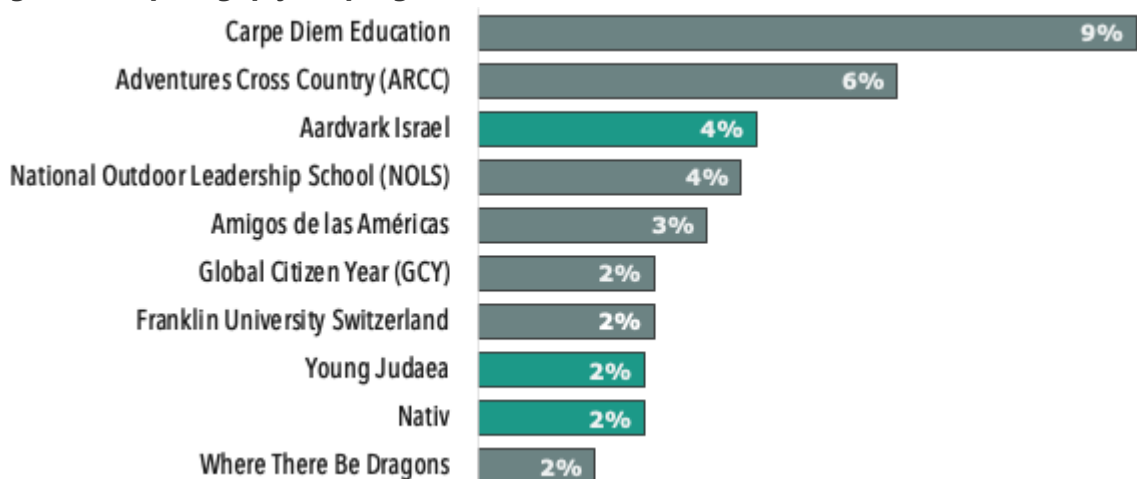
Of the 28% of GYA respondents who did not spend part or all of their gap year with a structured program, 55% of them worked for pay, as compared to only 20% of those who participated in a program.

As advertised, NCCC is a structured “all-expense paid gap year” dedicated to national and community service. During the 10-12 month commitment, NCCC participants travel the U.S. with a diverse cohort of peers and engage in 6-8 week service projects across the country. As such, structured programming, service work, and travel within the U.S. seem to be core components of the program.

➤ ***GYA survey respondents participated in over 500 unique structured gap year programs.***

72% of GYA survey participants spent part or all of their gap year on a gap year program designed for gap year participants. Survey respondents identified over 500 unique, structured gap year programs in which they participated. These organizations ranged from local community based organizations to international organizations. Carpe Diem was the most popular program amongst respondents, followed by Adventures Cross Country. Three of the top ten most popular programs are in Israel: Aardvark Israel, Young Judea, and Nativ.

Figure 7. Top 10 gap year programs

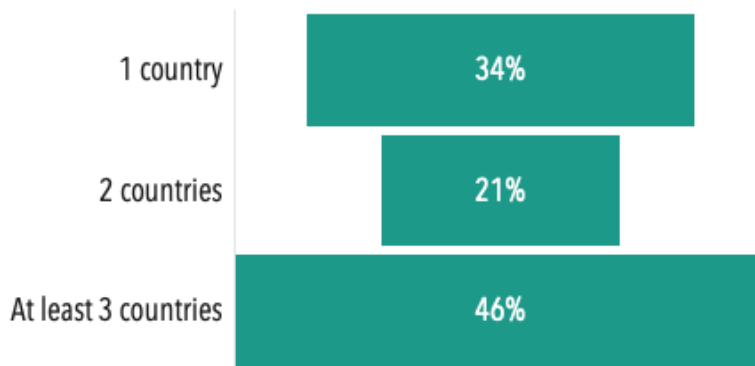


Geographic Distribution

- ***GYA survey participants reported spending their gap years in 95 different countries throughout the world.***

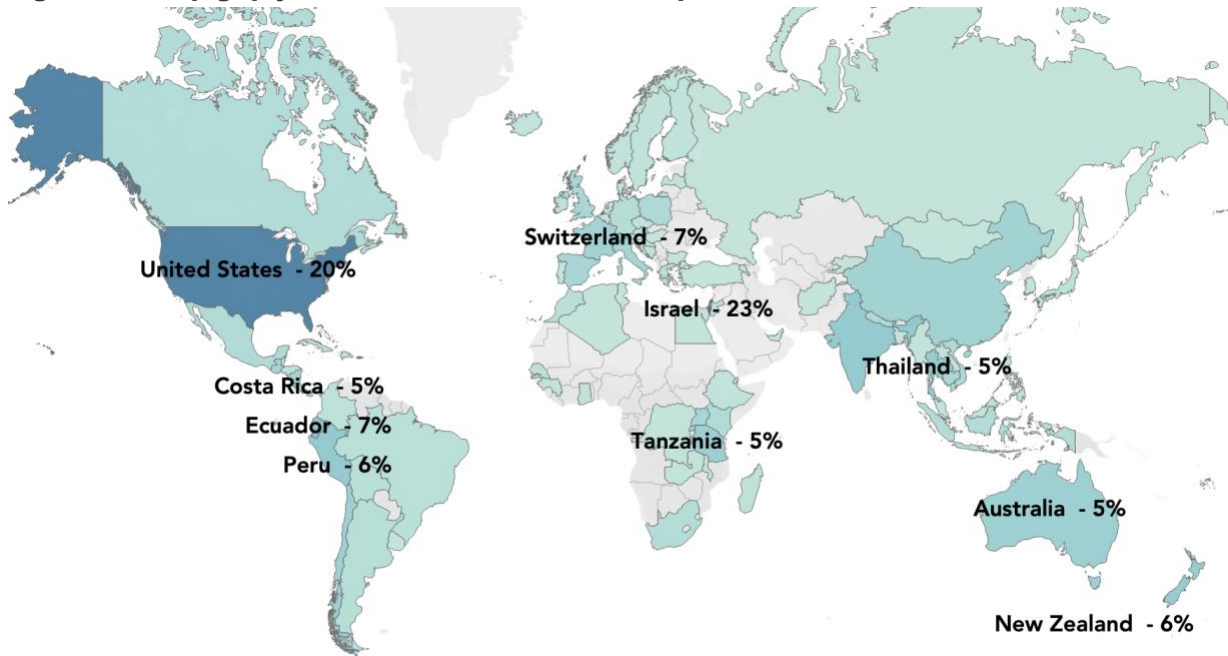
Survey participants were asked to indicate the three countries in which they spent the most time during their gap year. Overall, 34% of participants reported that they spent most of their gap year in 1 country, 21% reported 2 countries, and 46% of participants reported they spent their gap year in at least 3 countries.

Figure 7a. Proportion of GYA survey respondents who spent time in different countries during their gap year



Responses included 95 different countries spanning across 6 continents. The figure and table below show countries respondents indicated as one of their top 3 destinations - the countries labeled are the most reported destinations. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) spent part of their gap year in Israel and a fifth of participants (20%) spent part of their gap year in the U.S.

Figure 7b. Top gap year destinations for GYA respondents



Europe was the most commonly reported continent, followed by Asia. The table below shows the distribution of primary destinations by global region.

Table 2. Regional distribution of top 3 gap year destinations for GYA respondents

Region	% of Participants
Europe	32%
Asia	29%
The Middle East (including Egypt and Turkey)	25%
North America	24%
South America	22%
Africa	19%
Central America & the Caribbean	17%
South Pacific/Oceania	13%

In 2015, the U.S., Ecuador, Israel, India and Australia were the most reported gap year destinations for the NAS respondents. Similarly, these countries ranked among the most reported 11 countries in the 2020 GYA survey.

Table 3. Top 10 gap year destinations in 2020 compared to 2015

2020	2015
Israel	United States
United States	Ecuador
Switzerland	Israel
Ecuador	India
India	Australia
Peru	Senegal
New Zealand	Thailand
Thailand	Fiji
Costa Rica	France
Tanzania	Peru
Australia	Nepal

Gap Year Finances, Motivations and Obstacles

Financial Aspects of Gap Years

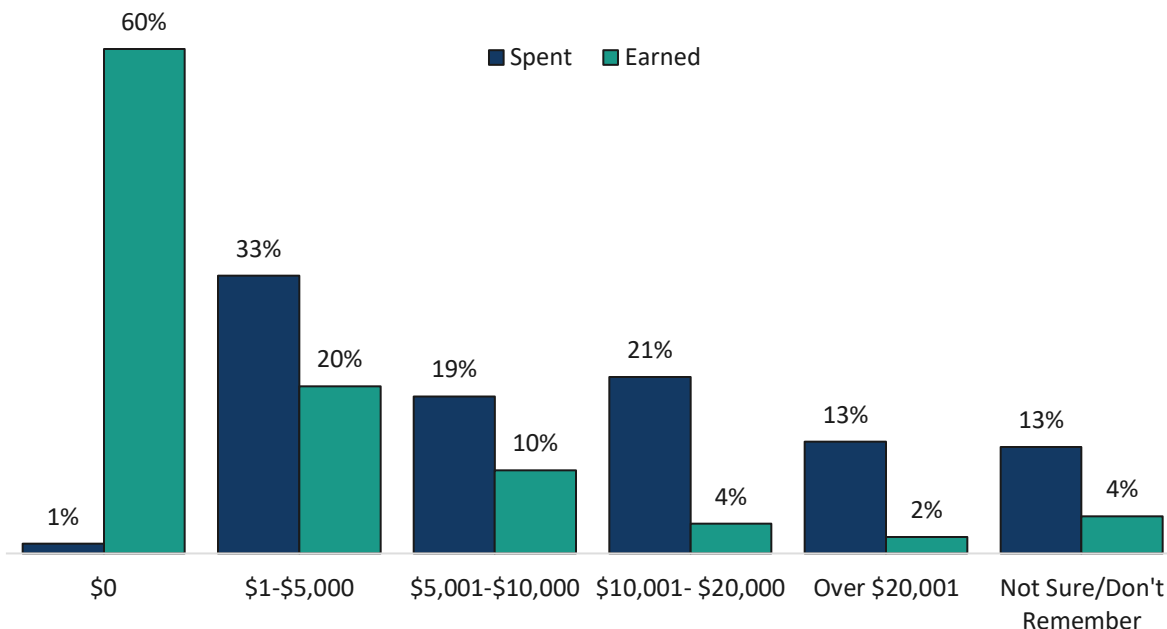
- ***GYA survey participants generally spent more than they earned.***

Over half (60%) of the GYA survey respondents did not earn any money at all during their gap years. Approximately half of participants (52%) spent \$10,000 or less, while about one third (34%) spent more than \$10,000. Thirteen percent of respondents could not remember how much they spent.

- ***A third of GYA respondents spent \$5,000 or less on their gap year.***

33% of GYA respondents reported spending less than \$5,000 on their gap year. Of those 33%, there was not a significant difference in the types of gap years in which they participated (i.e., international, domestic, language, academic, or service focused, structured).

Figure 8. GYA respondents' gap year spending and earning



In contrast, NCCC participants receive a modest living stipend of approximately \$4,000 for their entire term of service, and they do not spend any money on travel, meals, and accommodations. In addition, they receive an education award upon completion.⁷

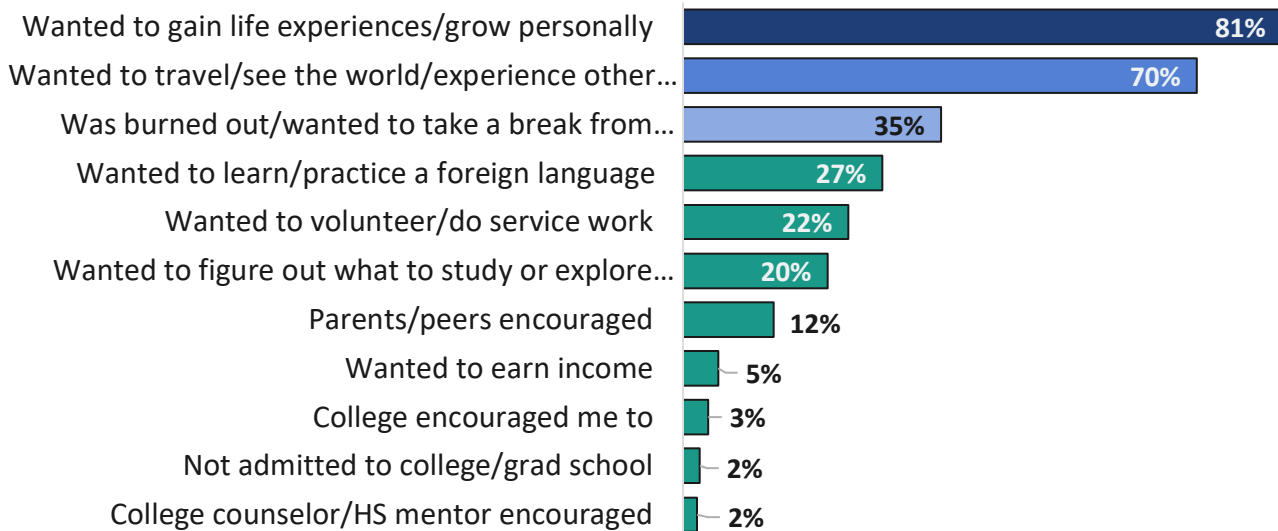
Motivations for Gap Years

- ***The majority of GYA survey respondents were motivated to take a gap year to gain life experience and develop personally as well as to travel, see the world and experience cultures.***

Reported motivations for taking a gap year in 2020 mirror those same motivations reported in the 2015 NAS. The figure below shows the factors which contributed most to GYA respondents' decision to take a gap year. No comparable NCCC data was available with regards to motivations.

⁷ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amicorps/amicorps-programs/amicorps-nccc/nccc-benefits>

Figure 9. Motivating factors in taking a gap year for GYA respondents



Over a third (35%) of respondents expressed feeling burnt out and wanting to take a break from school to be a central motivating factor for taking a gap year, which was also reported in 2015 NAS.

➤ ***Encouragement from others is not a primary motivator for most GYA respondents.***

Only 12% of GYA respondents cited their parents and peers' encouragement as a central motivating factor for taking a gap year. Even fewer cited encouragement from colleges (3%) and high school staff (2%) as a driving force to participate in a gap year experience. Encouragement from others was also not a primary motivating factor for those who participated in the 2015 NAS.

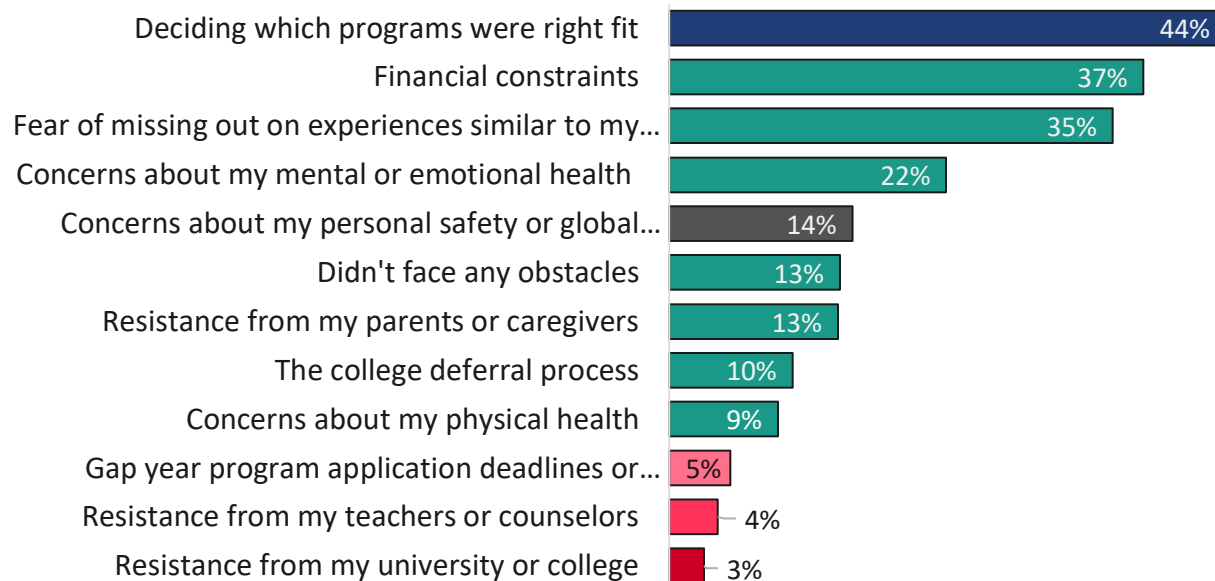
Obstacles for Gap Years

Although gap years have increased in popularity and there is a more widespread knowledge of their existence across the U.S. and Canada over the past decades, gap year participants still report facing obstacles. The following data highlights the obstacles that those who participated in a gap year faced. Given these respondents participated in gap year experiences, these obstacles were most likely able to be overcome. It is essential to note that this data does **not** include those who wanted to take a gap year and were not able because the obstacles were insurmountable. No comparable NCCC data was available with regards to obstacles.

➤ ***Deciding which programs were the right fit, financial constraints and fear of missing out were the most commonly reported obstacles faced by GYA survey participants.***

Nearly half (44%) of GYA respondents faced challenges when selecting a program that fit their interests and goals. Only 37% of those who were able to take a gap year reported finances as being a constraint. Note that this survey did not include those who did not take a gap year, potentially due to financial constraints. Over one-third (35%) of respondents reported concerns over missing out on experiences similar to their peers. The figure below shows the obstacles GYA survey participants reported facing.

Figure 10. Obstacles faced by GYA survey respondents



- ***GYA survey participants said resistance from parents, teachers/counselors and colleges/universities were not major obstacles.***

Only 10% of GYA respondents faced challenges if/when deferring their college acceptance or enrollment, and only 13% of survey participants considered resistance from their parents and caregivers as a major obstacle in planning a gap year. Even fewer faced resistance from their respective colleges and universities (3%) and teachers or counselors (4%).

Thirteen percent of GYA survey respondents said they faced no obstacles in taking their gap year.

Gap Year Outcomes

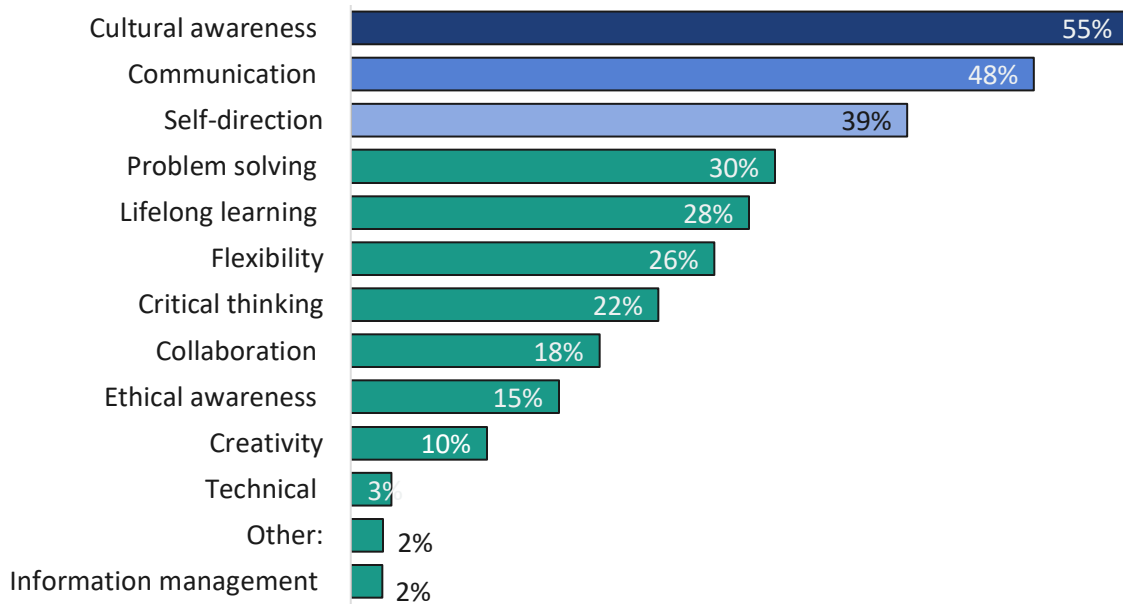
Aligned with the findings from the 2015 NAS, gap year alumni continue to report positive outcomes as a result of their experience. Those who participate in gap years report improvements in both internal and external skills. Additionally, gap year experiences influence alumni's future decisions in academia and beyond.

Skills and Learnings Acquired During Gap Year

- ***GYA survey respondents said cultural awareness, communication and self-direction are the skills they improved upon the most during their gap years.***

GYA respondents were asked to indicate the three skills they improved upon the most. Overall, 55% reported that their gap year experience helped them improve upon their cultural awareness, 48% reported that their communication skills improved, and 39% reported they improved their self-direction. The figure below shows the proportion of survey participants who said they improved upon the following skills.

Figure 11. Skills GYA survey participants improved upon the most during their gap year



With regards to skills improvement, NCCC respondents were asked a series of questions to the extent to which the AmeriCorps experience helped them increase 14 skills. The following skills were ranked the highest for those who strongly agreed that their AmeriCorps experience helped them develop that skill:

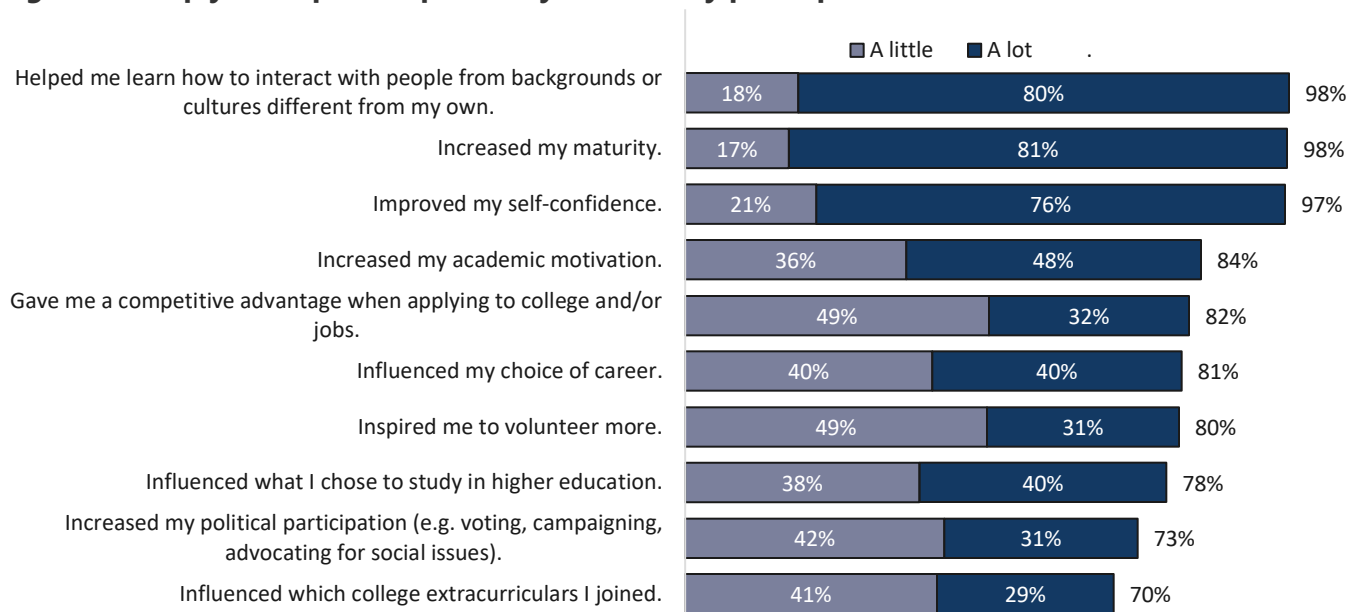
1. Adapting to new situations (71%)
2. Responding to unexpected challenges (66%)
3. Working with people different from myself (66%)

Although communication did not have the highest percentage of “strongly agree” responses, 89% of NCCC respondents agreed that their communication skills improved (49% strongly agreed, 40% agreed).

➤ ***GYA survey participants felt their experiences helped them learn how to interact with people from other cultures, increased their maturity and improved their self-confidence.***

Similar to the responses of the 2015 NAS, GYA survey respondents felt that their experience greatly contributed to their intrapersonal and interpersonal development. 98% of respondents reported that their gap year experience helped them interact with people from background or cultures different than their own to some extent, and 80% reported that it significantly helped. Survey participants also reported that their gap year experience increased their maturity (98% to some extent, 81% a lot) and improved their maturity (97% to some extent, 76% a lot). The figure below shows the proportion of respondents who said their gap year achieved the following outcomes to some extent (a little or a lot).

Figure 12. Gap year impacts reported by GYA survey participants



Like GYA survey participants, NCCC respondents also reported improved cultural competency skills. When asked the degree which they agree/disagree with the following statement after their AmeriCorps experience, “ (Now) I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures and backgrounds,” 92% of respondents agreed (51% strongly agreed, 41% agreed).

Additionally, NCCC respondents reported an increase in civic engagement. When asked “Would you say that your AmeriCorps experience has made you more or less likely to: ...Volunteer for a cause or issue that I care about,” over three quarters (77%) of respondents reported being more likely to volunteer (38% much more likely, 39% somewhat more likely). When asked the same questions with regards to voting in elections, almost half (46%) were much more or somewhat more likely to vote and 52% reported it having no effect on their likelihood to vote.

➤ ***Gap years affected the future drive, decisions, and success of most survey respondents.***

Over 75% of GYA survey participants also reported that gap years contributed to some extent to increasing their academic motivation, giving them a competitive advantage when applying to college and/or jobs, influencing their course of study, influencing their career of choice and inspiring them to volunteer more. These findings align with those from the 2015 NAS.

NCCC respondents also attributed their AmeriCorps experience to furthering their educational, professional, and personal goals. When asked the degree to which they agreed/disagreed that “Participating in AmeriCorps was a worthwhile experience in terms of furthering my educational goals and future educational endeavors,” 73% of NCCC respondents strongly agreed or agreed. The same statement was posed from professional and personal goals and endeavors. 84% of respondents strongly

agreed or agreed in regards to professional goals and endeavors and 94% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with respect to personal goals and endeavors.

Table 4. Influence of AmeriCorps experience on furthering goals of NCCC respondents

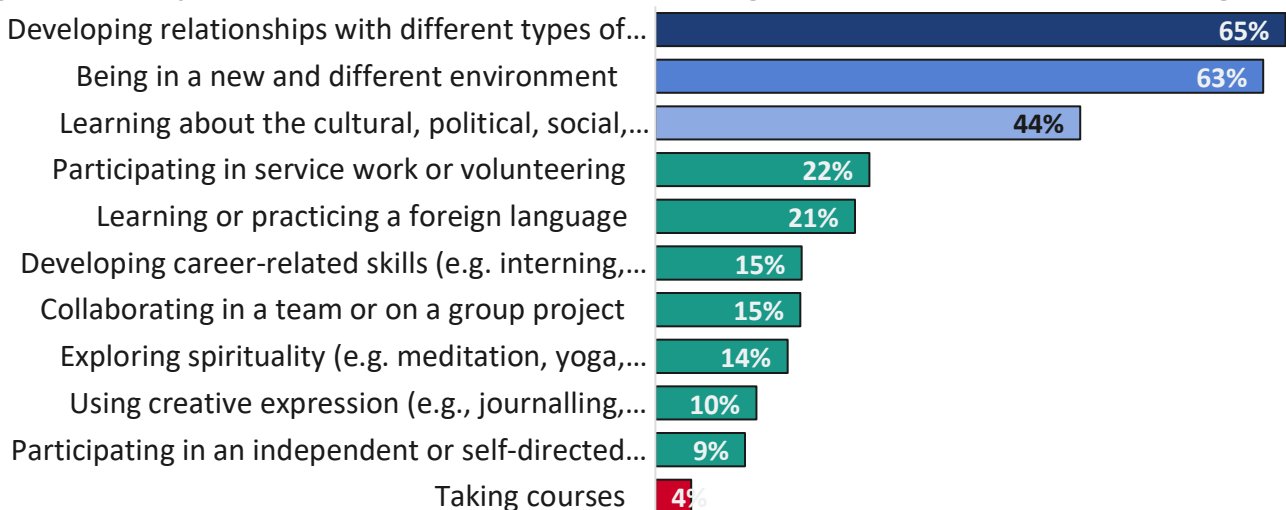
	Educational	Professional	Personal
Strongly Agree	43%	51%	68%
Agree	30%	33%	26%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	19%	11%	3%
Disagree	6%	4%	1%
Strongly Disagree	2%	2%	2%

Experiences Contributing to Growth, Learning, & Development

- *Growth, learning and development were fostered through new environments and people for GYA respondents.*

65% of GYA respondents attributed forming relationships with different types of people to be most impactful for their growth, learning, and development and 63% cited the significance of being in a new and different environment. Nearly half of the GYA survey participants (44%) cited learning about the cultural, historical, social, political, and religious histories of their gap year location to be one of the primary contributors to their growth, learning, and development. The figure below shows the experiences that GYA respondents felt contributed most to their growth, learning and development.

Figure 13. Gap year experiences that contribute most to growth, development, and learning.



NCCC respondents reported that their AmeriCorps experience exposed them to and gave them a better understanding of new environments. Specifically, 95% of all NCCC respondents agreed or strongly agreed that because of AmeriCorps, they were “exposed to new ideas and ways of seeing the world.” 92% of NCCC respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they “gained an understanding of the community(s) where [they] served.”

- **Engaging in particular types of activities or learning specific skill sets, including taking courses, was less influential for most GYA survey participants.**

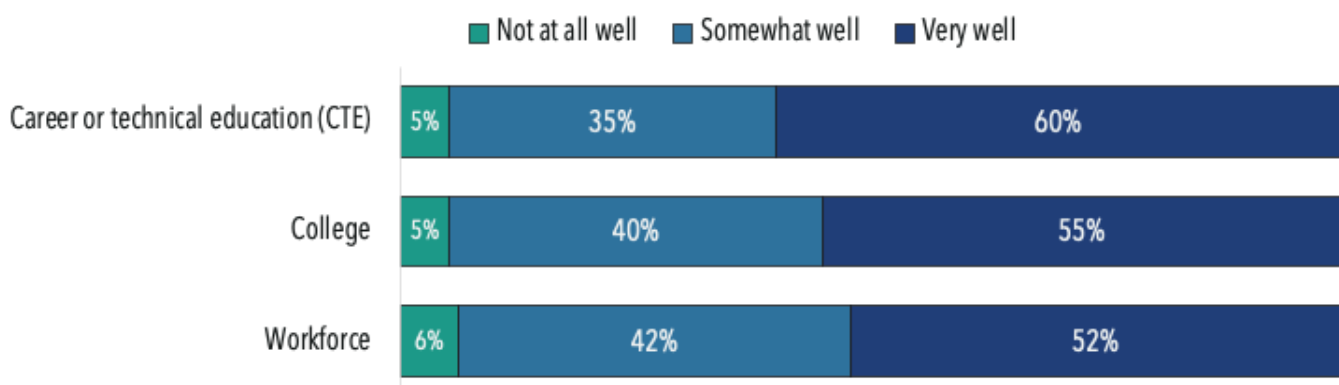
Less than a quarter of GYA respondents reported service work (22%), language learning (21%), and developing career-related skills (15%) to be one of the most significant contributors to their overall learning, development and growth. Even less attributed their growth, learning, and development to independent or group work. While 64% of respondents said their gap year involved academic coursework, only 4% reported that taking courses contributed to their growth, learning, and development.

- **Gap years prepared most survey participants for their transition to future education and the workforce.**

Overall, 95% of GYA survey participants said their gap year prepared them somewhat or very well for their next step. There were no significant differences between the type of next step (college, workforce, career and technical education) and the degree to which participants reported being prepared. The figure below shows the participants’ responses.

95%
say their gap year prepared them well for their transition to education and/or the workforce

Figure 14. Extent to which gap years prepared GYA survey participants for next steps



In comparison, NCCC respondents reported more variance on whether their AmeriCorps experience helped them figure out their next steps. About half (48%) of NCCC respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they “figured out what [their] next steps are in terms of educational goals.” 31% neither

agreed nor disagreed and 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Over half (59%) of NCCC respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they “figured out what [their] next steps in terms of career/professional goals.” 24% neither agreed nor disagreed and 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, the majority of respondents reported that AmeriCorps was a worthwhile experience towards furthering their personal, educational, and professional goals (as indicated in Table 4).

- ***Taking a gap year increased, or didn't change, the likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree for most GYA survey participants.***

While the majority of respondents (53%) said their gap year had no effect on their likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree, 44% said that it increased their likelihood. Only 4% said it decreased their likelihood.

Figure 15. Extent to which GYA survey participants said taking a gap year affected likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree



- ***Gap year outcomes were NOT associated with type of gap year, length of gap year, amount of money spent or earned during a gap year, or next steps after a gap year (college, workforce, CTE) for GYA respondents***

While different programs emphasize different learning outcomes, there were no significant correlations between the type of gap year (domestic, international, involving service work, language learning, etc.), length of gap year, cost of gap year, or next steps and the outcomes reported.

Post Gap Year Actions

- ***The majority of survey participants started or resumed higher education after their gap year.***

83% of respondents enrolled or continued their higher education after their gap year. Only 13% worked or resumed working. The small percentage (11%) that did not begin or resume their education, traveled, continued their gap year, or joined the military.

NCCC alumni were asked what they did in the six months after their AmeriCorps service. 71% worked, 43% went to college or graduate school, and 3% enrolled in a vocational/technical training program.

Although less than half enrolled in higher education in the six months following their service, the fact that 96% of NCCC respondents used their AmeriCorps education award to attend college (33%), repay student loans (42%), and attend graduate school (21%) suggest that these alumni eventually enrolled or resumed higher education or had already completed it.

➤ ***Over half of the GYA respondents are currently employed.***

62% of respondents are employed full or part time and 38% are not currently employed. Of those who are employed, 20% are employed in educational services, 12% in the non-profit sector, and 11% in leisure and hospitality. As the majority (89%) of respondents participated in a gap year in the last decade, the 38% unemployment rate is likely related to participants' still being enrolled in college/university, or potentially being impacted by Covid-19.

Recommendations

➤ ***Consider ways to better identify the true population of gap year participants.***

As stated in the limitations section of this report, the true, present, population of gap year participants in the US and Canada is unknown. While this survey likely accesses one of the largest samples of gap year participants, we chose not to assume that it captures a representative sample. Thus, we recommend that future research consider ways to better understand the population of gap year participants, and in particular, to understand the representativeness of these survey respondents.

➤ ***Identify and access comparison groups for future research.***

The 2015 NAS and 2020 GYA surveys have sought to measure the demographics and outcomes of gap years for U.S. and Canadian gap year participants; however, in order to determine whether gap years do in fact contribute to the outcomes reported, there is a need to identify and survey a comparison group or groups of non-gap year participants. Currently, there is dearth of research on how to better support "would-be" gap year participants.

➤ ***Investigate the impacts of COVID-19.***

In the midst of the global pandemic of Covid-19, international travel has halted and/or slowed for the Spring of 2020 and likely longer. It is worth researching whether this will lead to more domestic programs and independent gap years and the ways in which the impacts of these gap years compare to those outcomes of the previous GYA surveys (2015 and 2020). Given that international travel was a prominent component for GYA survey respondents, it will be worthwhile to examine the ways in which gap years and their outcomes evolve with a shift towards domestic experiences during the coronavirus pandemic.

- ***Consider the implications that gap year types and activities have little bearing on outcomes.***

This research uncovered that although nearly half of participants struggle with finding a program that fits their goals and interests, the program type and activities have little influence on the outcomes of a gap year. On one hand, there seems to be a need for more (and/or more widely accessible) resources to help participants make these decisions. On the other hand, these decisions seem to have limited influence over the outcomes. Intention and motivation for taking a gap year may have more of an influence on outcomes than program or activities. This tension is worth a deeper investigation as well as holds implications for program providers, gap year advisors, and others who work with this population.