

Contract No.: K-4279-3-00-80-30  
MPR Reference No.: 8140-530

**MATHEMATICA**  
Policy Research, Inc.

**National Job Corps  
Study: Impacts by  
Center Characteristics**

*Executive Summary*

*June 2001*

*John Burghardt  
Peter Z. Schochet*

Submitted to:

U.S. Department of Labor  
Employment and Training Administration  
Office of Policy and Research  
Room N-5637  
200 Constitution Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20210

Submitted by:

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.  
(Prime Contractor)  
P.O. Box 2393  
Princeton, NJ 08543-2393  
(609) 799-3535

Project Officer:

Daniel Ryan

Project Director:

John Burghardt

Principal Investigators:

Terry Johnson  
Charles Metcalf  
Peter Z. Schochet

In conjunction with:

Battelle Human Affairs Research  
Centers (Subcontractor)  
4500 Sand Point Way NE, Suite 100  
Seattle, WA 98105-3949

Decision Information Resources, Inc.  
(Subcontractor)  
2600 Southwest Freeway, Suite 900  
Houston, TX 77098

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Job Corps is a major part of federal efforts to provide education and job training to disadvantaged youths. It provides comprehensive services--basic education, vocational skills training, health care and education, counseling, and residential support. More than 60,000 new students ages 16 to 24 enroll in Job Corps each year, at a cost to the federal government of more than \$1 billion per year. Currently, the program provides training at 119 Job Corps centers nationwide. The National Job Corps Study is being conducted under contract with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to provide Congress and program managers with the information they need to assess how well Job Corps attains its goal of helping students become more employable, productive citizens.

This report is one of a series of reports presenting findings from the study. It examines whether the impacts of Job Corps on students' employment and related outcomes differ according to the characteristics of the Job Corps center that a student attended. Overall, Job Corps increased education and training, increased earnings, and reduced youths' involvement with the criminal justice system. This report asks: Were these positive findings concentrated at centers with certain characteristics or in certain regions of the country, or were they similar across diverse centers in the system? The center characteristics considered are type of operator, student capacity, region of the country, and performance ranking.

## **STUDY BACKGROUND**

The cornerstone of the National Job Corps Study was the random assignment of all youths found eligible for Job Corps to either a program group or a control group. Program group members were permitted to enroll in Job Corps, and control group members could not (although they could enroll in other training or education programs). The research sample for the study consists of approximately 9,400 program group members and 6,000 control group members randomly selected from among the nearly 81,000 applicants nationwide who applied for Job Corps for the first time between November 17, 1994, and December 16, 1995, and were found eligible by February 1996. Data used to estimate impacts are from interviews conducted at baseline (shortly after random assignment), and at 12, 30, and 48 months after random assignment.

To support analysis of the effects of center characteristics, Job Corps admissions counselors were asked to record on a special study form the name of the Job Corps center that they believed each applicant was likely to attend. This information was provided before random assignment was performed, so it is available for both the program group and the control group. Moreover, admission counselors' predictions proved to be very accurate for those program group members who ultimately enrolled in Job Corps. Because of the high coverage and accuracy of the center assignment designations, we are able to compare the outcomes of program group members for specified groups of centers exhibiting a particular characteristic (say, large capacity) with the outcomes of control group members who were designated for the same centers. These types of comparisons form the basis for the analyses reported here. Data for individual students were reweighted in such a way that the weighted count of eligible applicants assigned to each center is the same for each center.

## **TYPE OF OPERATOR**

*Impacts were similar for contract centers and Civilian Conservation Centers (CCCs).* Most Job Corps centers are operated by private organizations under competitively awarded contracts with DOL. At the time of the study, approximately 80 contract centers served about 88 percent of new students. Thirty CCCs were operated by agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of the Interior. The two types of centers differ in several important ways. First, staff at CCCs are federal civil service employees, while contract center staff are employees of private for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Second, to continue operating their centers, operators of contract centers must win competitive procurements, while CCCs are not subject to this requirement. Third, nearly all CCCs are small (225 students or less) and most are located in isolated rural areas, while contract centers range in size from 200 to more than 2,000 students. Fourth, at CCCs, the trades offered are heavily weighted toward construction trades, much of the vocational training offered is through national training contractors, and much of the training is through hands-on work projects aimed at improving National Forest and National Park facilities. In contrast, at contract centers, trades are more diverse, more likely to be provided by center operator staff, and less likely to entail work projects.

The characteristics of students at CCCs and contract centers differ in several noteworthy ways as well. At CCCs, more students are male, under age 18 at enrollment, without a high school credential at enrollment, and likely to have been arrested. CCCs are more likely to be in the Pacific Northwest or Mountain states. Reflecting this locational difference, a higher proportion of CCC students are from small towns and a higher percentage are white, non-Hispanic.

Despite the many differences between CCCs and contract centers, students at a typical CCC and contract center had similar gains in attainment of the GED or vocational certificate over the follow-up period, similar gains in weekly earnings during the 4th year after random assignment, and similar reductions in the percentage arrested over the 48-month follow-up period.

## **CENTER CAPACITY**

*Impacts were similar in large, medium, and small centers.* The capacity of Job Corps centers ranges from 200 to more than 2,000 students. Capacity may affect students' experiences and, thus, impacts in several ways. Large centers may offer more diverse recreational and vocational training opportunities. Yet in large centers it may be more difficult to create the connections among staff and students that foster successful learning.

The characteristics of students are similar at medium centers (226 to 495 slots) and large centers (496 or more slots). At small centers (225 or less), however, more students are under 18 years old, high school dropouts, white, and from a small town.

Impacts for key education and earnings outcomes were positive for all three center size groups. The estimated year 4 earnings gains were somewhat larger at the larger centers, although the difference in earnings impacts is not statistically significant. Large reductions in arrests occurred at the small and medium centers but not at the large centers.

## REGION

***Impacts were positive in most regions.*** Regions are an important administrative unit within Job Corps. Regional office staff not only contract for center operation, outreach and screening, and placement in each region, but they also provide oversight and leadership. Each region also has a distinctive mix of large- and small-capacity centers, CCCs and contract centers, and urban and rural centers. Furthermore, there are differences across regions in the gender mix, ethnic composition, and high school completion status of Job Corps students.

The positive overall impacts of Job Corps occurred in most regions, although the earnings gains were small (or even negative) and not statistically significant in a few regions. Impacts on GED attainment were positive and statistically significant in all regions. Similarly, impacts on arrest rates were negative in all regions and statistically significant in four of the nine regions. Impacts on earnings were positive and statistically significant in five regions, positive but not statistically significant in two regions, and negative but not statistically significant in two regions.

The analysis indicates that the beneficial impacts of the program overall were broadly distributed throughout the country and not confined to a few regions. We do not believe the patterns of difference in impacts across regions lends itself to any programmatic interpretation.

## PERFORMANCE LEVEL

***Impacts were similar for centers rated as high-, medium-, and low-performing centers based on the Job Corps performance measurement system.*** The Job Corps performance measurement system is intended to focus staff throughout Job Corps on ensuring that students achieve important milestones in Job Corps and positive outcomes after the program. Our process study concluded that this goal of the performance measurement system is met: Job Corps is a performance-driven system. Center staff, and especially managers, are aware of standards and care about their center's ranking. Center managers use the system for day-to-day management, and many receive financial incentives linked to center performance.

The performance management system used during the period when study sample members participated in Job Corps incorporated a series of measures in three areas: (1) program achievement measures, including reading gains, math gains, GED attainment rate, and vocational completion rate; (2) placement measures, including the rate of placement into work or further education, the average wage at placement, the percentage of students placed in a job that matched their training, and the percentage engaged in work or training full-time; and (3) during the first year (program year [PY] 1994), the ratings of regional office staff. Using standards set by the national office, each center's outcomes on each measure are compared to the national standard and expressed as a percentage of the national standard. The overall performance score is a weighted average of the individual measures. Each center's performance ranking is determined by its overall score.

The measures, standards, and weights for summing individual measures are established for each program year and change annually. Since sample members in the National Job Corps Study were enrolled during PY 1994 to PY 1996, and since performance rankings differed markedly in the three years, high-performing centers were defined for this analysis as those that were in the top third of the performance ranking during PY 1994, PY 1995, and PY 1996. Similarly, low-performing centers are those that were in the bottom third of the performance ranking in each year. The high- and low-performing groups each comprise just under one-fifth of centers. The remaining centers were designated medium-performing centers.

The impacts of Job Corps were similar across the three performance groups. Low-performing centers had essentially the same impacts as high- and medium-performing centers. As one would expect, outcomes of the program group were better among the high-performing centers. However, so too were the outcomes of the control group who would have attended the high-performing centers.