



**THE CITY YEAR ALUMNI STUDIES:
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

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Every year since 1990, City Year has recruited a diverse group of 17- to 24-year-olds to participate in 10 months of full-time community service, leadership development, and civic engagement. City Year's mission is to "build democracy through citizen service, civic leadership, and social entrepreneurship" by breaking down social barriers, inspiring citizens to civic action, developing new leaders for the common good, and promoting and improving the concept of voluntary national service.¹ Founded on the belief that young people in service can be a powerful resource for addressing the nation's most pressing issues, City Year seeks to cultivate a core set of values among corps members, including teamwork, empathy, perseverance, courage, service, idealism, tolerance, and civic commitment. Its theory of change asserts that fostering these values through service and youth development activities will lead corps members to engage in activities that build social trust and empower them to promote the common good, paving the way for a lifetime of effective civic engagement.

Study Purposes and Methods

Under contract to City Year, Policy Studies Associates (PSA) conducted three interlocking studies designed to assess City Year's impact on alumni after the completion of their City Year community service experience. The three studies included: (1) the Alumni Cohort Study, a mail survey of all alumni who had served with City Year from its founding until 2003; (2) the City Year Parent Study, a telephone survey of parents of younger City Year alumni; and (3) the Longitudinal Study of Alumni, a series of telephone interviews that tracked a sample of alumni who graduated from City Year in 2003, along with a matched sample of non-participants, over the course of two years. Together, these studies assessed the impact of the City Year experience on the civic engagement of alumni in the years following their service with City Year.

This report summarizes findings from the three studies of City Year's impact on its alumni. (Full final reports on each study are available from City Year.) The following briefly describes the methods and purposes of each study:

- The *Alumni Cohort Study* drew on data collected from 2,189 City Year alumni who had served with City Year between 1988 (the summer of the program's first pilot project) and 2003. In the fall and winter of 2004-05, PSA administered a mail survey to the universe of 6,416 City Year alumni. After accounting for alumni who proved unreachable, the final survey response rate was 45 percent. The cohort study was designed to accomplish three purposes: (1) describe the population of City Year alumni, including the career and educational choices made after City Year;

¹ *City Year Mission Statement*. Retrieved January 10, 2007, from <http://www.cityyear.org/about/who/mission.cfm>.

(2) describe the perceived effects of the City Year experience, as reported by alumni; and (3) explore City Year's impact on alumni's civic engagement, including volunteering, voting, and other forms of political participation. To evaluate City Year's impact, the study drew comparisons between City Year alumni and similarly situated members of the general population, through secondary analyses of publicly available datasets.² The study compared each City Year participant with an individual in the national population who shared the same background characteristics known to be related to civic engagement (e.g., race, gender, education, employment, religion and religiosity, and income). The difference between each alumnus's *actual* civic engagement—as measured in the cohort study survey—and his or her predicted engagement—based on estimates taken from the national population of 18- to 40-year-olds—was interpreted as a measure of program impact. The cohort study also examined the ways in which alumni outcomes varied by the race/ethnicity, educational level, and age of alumni. To supplement data collected through the mail survey, PSA conducted focus groups in June 2004 with a sample of alumni who attended City Year's *cyzygy* conference in Boston.

- The *City Year Parent Study* was based on interviews with 210 parents of City Year alumni who had graduated from the program between 1999 and 2003.³ The parent sample was selected from the pool of year City Year alumni who responded to the cohort study survey and who agreed to allow PSA to contact their parents for an interview. As a result, each parent interview was matched with an alumni survey. The final response rate for the parent sample was 60 percent. The parent study was designed to tap parents' unique perspective on the growth and development of their children in the years immediately following their period of service with City Year. Parents have special insight into the ways that their children mature and change, and typically take a strong interest in their children's choices regarding career, education, and other commitments (e.g., volunteer activity). In addition, PSA used responses on the parent survey to triangulate responses of younger City Year alumni to identical items on the cohort study survey. To the extent that parents' responses confirmed alumni self-reports,

²The key datasets were the National Election Studies (2000 and 2002 surveys) and the Center for Research on Civic Learning and Engagement's (CIRCLE) National Civic Engagement Survey I (2002).

³ The sample was limited to parents of younger alumni because younger adults are more likely to rely on their parents for support and guidance as they make life choices. The study team expected these parents to be better informed about the details of these choices and their children's thinking about them than the parents of older alumni might be.

the parent study provided evidence confirming the validity of the cohort study findings.

- The *Longitudinal Study of Alumni* used a random sample of approximately 100 corps members who participated in the 2002-03 cohort year, and assessed participants' levels of civic engagement, civic leadership, and development of social capital over four years, comparing their outcomes to those of a group of approximately 100 similarly situated youth who applied to City Year and were accepted, but ultimately decided not to participate. The main purpose of the longitudinal study was to validate the findings of the alumni cohort study and to test the persistence of City Year effects over time. In addition, the study was designed to permit an in-depth exploration of the process of developing social capital in the years following the City Year experience.

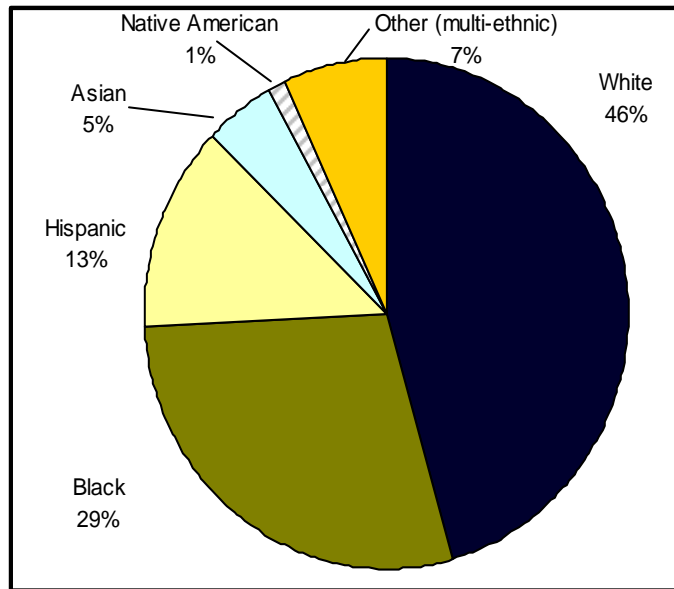
City Year Participants and the City Year Experience

The racial/ethnic distribution of the alumni who served with City Year between 1998 and 2003 reflects the organization's efforts to achieve racial/ethnic diversity among corps members. Of these City Year alumni, 46 percent are white, 29 percent are black, 13 percent are Hispanic, 5 percent are Asian, 1 percent are Native American, and 7 percent are other (multi-ethnic) (see Exhibit 1). The percent of black, Hispanic, and Asian alumni well exceeds national averages. The majority of City Year alumni are female (54 percent, compared with 46 percent of alumni who are male).

When they entered City Year, the majority of corps members (57 percent) had not yet attended college. Another 26 percent had attended college but not yet received a bachelor's degree. A minority (17 percent) served with City Year after completing college. Alumni who served from 1988 to 1993 tended to be slightly less well educated, on the whole, than alumni participating in the later two cohorts.

Nearly all City Year alumni (87 percent) reported that they spent their service year working on programs aimed at serving the needs of children and youth. The majority of corps members (54 percent) provided literacy tutoring and other academic support to students in local schools. Another 30 percent of corps members worked in after school programs, day camps, or service learning programs, like Young Heroes, for younger students. A small number of alumni (3 percent) offered health education and outreach to young students. Other alumni (12 percent) spent their service year building or renovating houses, parks, or playgrounds, or working on other projects.

Exhibit 1
Distribution of City Year Alumni by Race/Ethnicity,
1988-2003 Cohorts



Source: Alumni Cohort Study

In focus groups, alumni said they had joined City Year to explore options in order to decide what they wanted to do with their lives. Whether they came to City Year directly from high school, after a year or two of college, or immediately after college, many alumni saw their service as an opportunity to take a year off from school or career, evaluate what they really wanted from life, and decide their next steps. The following comments were typical from alumni:

I joined for I think a similar reason as a lot of people. I was graduating from high school and didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life, and City Year was a very attractive option, and it really did help me figure out what I wanted to do with my life, or at least take a step towards that.

I needed a stepping stone between high school and college; I wasn't ready to go right back to school. [City Year] was something I had heard about so I just applied and got in, and it was a learning experience from that point on.

I was turned on to City Year after I graduated from college and saw it as kind of post-graduate year, helping me to kind of transition, determine what I wanted to do, career-wise, education-wise. And again, it seemed like a very logical step in helping me determine what the next step would be. So it was kind of like an intern year.

In focus groups, many alumni said that before joining City Year they had lost their enthusiasm for or were not doing well in school, and were looking for an alternative to continuing formal education. For these alumni, a year of service provided a chance to do meaningful work outside of school. City Year work had special appeal because it was hands-on and made a tangible contribution. City Year also gave these alumni time to refocus and reevaluate the importance of college in their life plans. Many who participated in the focus groups echoed the following comments:

I went straight from high school to college and did very poorly and decided to take some time off. I thought if I was going to take my time off I might as well do something useful for the community.

I did a year of college and I decided that I didn't really like college and I decided to take a year off and I knew I wanted to do something besides working at a retail part-time job and I wanted to move to a new place that I hadn't been before and I like working with kids and I found all of this in doing City Year.

Perceived Effects of the City Year Experience

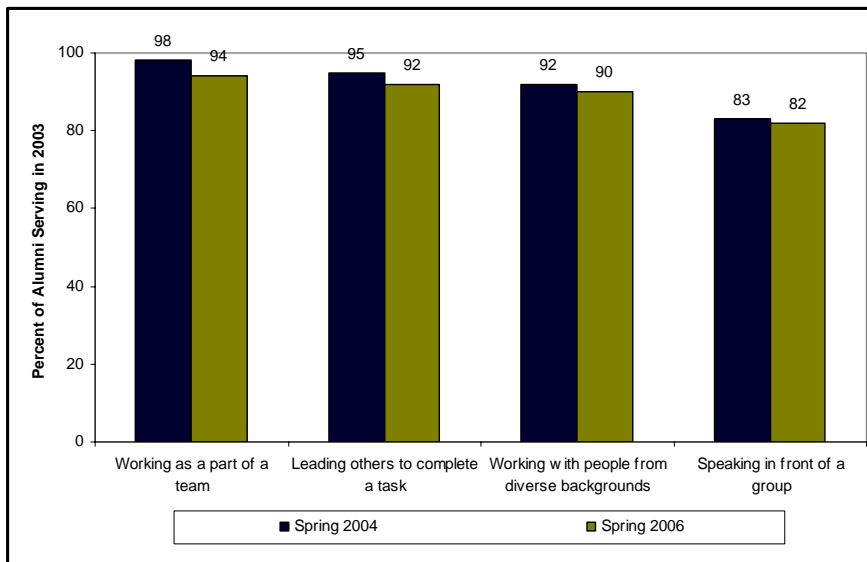
City Year seeks to cultivate in corps members a set of civic values and skills that its founders believe are necessary for promoting active civic engagement and participation. Its founders believe that a year of service will, in the short term, result in corps members: (1) learning team leadership and civic participation skills; (2) showing increased interest in democratic institutions; (3) becoming passionate about social issues; and (4) developing a sense of civic efficacy. In the long term, City Year expects that alumni will continue their educations and develop lifelong habits of volunteerism and community service.

Skills and Knowledge

The vast majority of City Year alumni reported that their City Year experience had helped them develop many of the skills necessary for effective participation in civic life. More than 80 percent of alumni who served with City Year between 1988 and 2003 reported that City Year had contributed to their ability to work as part of a team, to work with people from diverse backgrounds, to lead others to complete a task, and to speak in front of a group. Alumni from the earliest cohorts, who had served with City Year more than 10 years earlier at the time of the study, reported these effects at the same rate as younger alumni, whose service experience had been more recent. The longitudinal study of alumni who served in 2003 also found that alumni's assessment of City Year's influence in these areas had changed little with the passage of time. That is, alumni reported that City Year had contributed to the development of their skills and

knowledge at about the same rate in spring 2006, nearly three years after the conclusion of their City Year, as they had in spring 2004, immediately following their year of service (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2
Extent to Which Alumni Believe That City Year Contributed to the Development of Their Civic Skills, Over Time



Source: Longitudinal Study of Alumni

Exhibit reads: 98 percent of City Year alumni who had been corps members in 2003 reported that City Year had contributed to their ability to work as part of a team at the time of the first follow up in spring 2004, compared with 94 percent of those same City Year alumni in spring 2006.

Many alumni explained that working on teams with other City Year volunteers had been the most valuable aspect of their service year. They learned to work effectively with a group and to collaborate with others whose backgrounds and personal experience were very different from their own. In fact, nearly all of the City Year alumni who commented on City Year’s contribution to the development of their skills in the longitudinal study mentioned the value of working with diverse groups of people. The following comments on this topic were typical of many others:

I think City Year basically helped out with me being able to work with a team of people. The whole year I was put in a team with people I wouldn't have associated with [otherwise]. It helped me be open-minded about people who were very different from me. It helped to be in a group that I had no choice [but] to be with.

The City Year program is very much about teams. You really learn to work with people and that's something that you always do. I learned strategies that I could use after City Year. I remember little things, like

don't criticize [other] people's ideas. Instead, City Year taught us to offer new suggestions rather than just tear down someone else. I do that now and as a result I help to reduce negativity within the group.

City Year gave me the opportunity to work with a diverse group and that changed my life in a major way. You are told all your life that skin color does not matter and everyone has a contribution but you have to experience it to really know it, and City Year provided that opportunity and that opportunity would not have come from anywhere else.

Other alumni highlighted the leadership skills they had developed in working with others, organizing projects, and speaking in public, and the self-confidence that they had developed as a result. The following comments were typical of many others:

City Year gave me the opportunities I hadn't had before. We had to learn how to speak in front of a group, organize things, lead groups. I'm very small in stature so I used to just hang back. City Year gave me a lot of confidence that people started to see.

I had just graduated from college and I had no idea what I wanted to do. For the first time, City Year gave me a lot of responsibility and expected me to do things I'd never been expected to do. I don't think I was confident when I graduated from college. I was given a lot of trust, and it helped build my confidence and helped me learn what I was really good at and what I really enjoyed doing.

Speaking in front of a group: I never liked to do it, but City Year gave me opportunities and eased the nervousness.... Forcing people to deal with these things in a constructive way helped develop my skills and a sense of unity.

Alumni also reported that their City Year experience had provided them with new awareness, information, and understanding, and had given them the skills to talk with others about political and social issues. In focus groups, alumni explained that after City Year, they were more comfortable expressing their views to others—particularly to their family and friends—and challenging others' attitudes and beliefs. Several alumni commented that City Year had constantly challenged them to question their assumptions about themselves and about political and social issues, and that they in turn had begun to challenge others:

When I went home [after City Year], I noticed that I was less tolerant of my brothers' and my father's chauvinistic and racial comments. They would say, 'Oh, that's so gay.' I thought, 'Oh, my God!' I mean, in City Year, you know, we had so much intense conversation about those things and I just couldn't... So, I sat my brothers down and I said, 'Look, that's

not mature; I don't want to hear that from you. You can say it if you want to around your friends, but you do not say it where I can hear you.' And they whined and moaned. I think that I changed in being less tolerant of some of the racial epithets and stereotypes that they expressed and that I listened to growing up in a very small town, and then I came back after experiencing the diversity and the intense training and the talks [at City Year] in a very urban setting in Boston, and I just couldn't put up with it.

I guess I'm not as afraid of certain things or certain areas, and I'm more able to stand up to my friends. I take a lot of risks and my friends I think appreciate the fact that I'm challenging them to take risks with just certain things as well, and not taking—when it comes to communities and like perspectives, not taking community rules as the end-all, be-all to break through those borders.

Civic Participation

Alumni of all ages credited City Year with preparing them to participate in civic life and prompting them to continue their service to the community. More than three-quarters of all of the alumni who served with City Year between 1998 and 2003 reported that City Year had helped them to exercise public responsibility and community service, become involved in some type of service/volunteer activity, and work to solve problems in their community. Among the 2003 cohort, assessments of City Year's impact in these areas diminished slightly over time, although these changes were not large (see Exhibit 3).

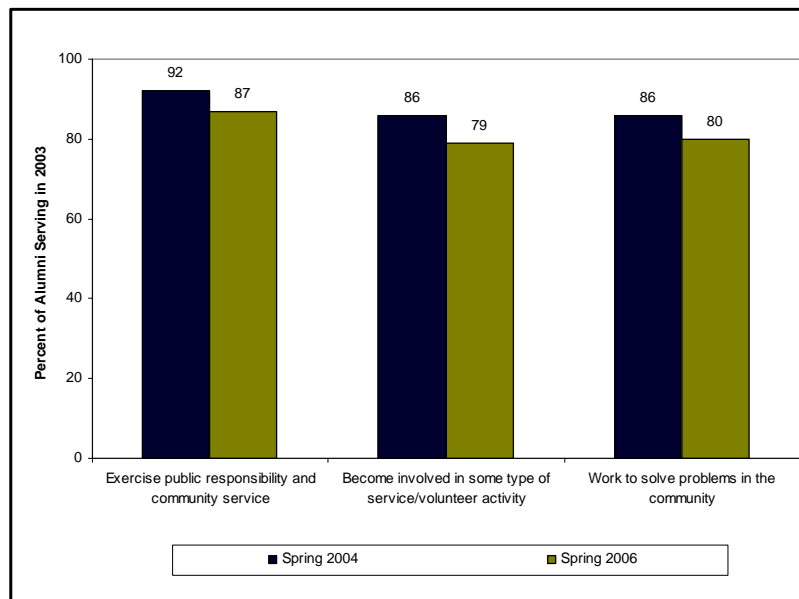
In focus group sessions and in telephone interviews, alumni explained that City Year had deeply affected their attitude about the importance of community service in civic life. Several alumni described City Year's impact on their attitudes and beliefs regarding community service with considerable passion, as the following comments suggest:

I couldn't just have this year with City Year where I realized that what you do has such a huge impact. To have that knowledge and not do anything with it, it just felt a little selfish to me. That's why it's really important to me to keep [volunteering].

[City Year] made me recognize what is possible. That individual people can make a difference. They also helped me to realize that community activities are important because they help strengthen the community. This in turn makes people happier with where they live.

I think part of what City Year teaches you is that it is your obligation to volunteer and if enough people do it, it will change things.

Exhibit 3 Extent to Which Alumni Believe City Year Helped Them to Participate in Civic Life, Over Time



Source: Longitudinal Study of Alumni

In addition, alumni credited their City Year experience with helping them to learn about additional opportunities to work in their communities. Alumni left City Year with the tools and connections they needed to continue their participation in community service and volunteer work. As one alumnus put it:

I learned that there are a lot of resources and organizations out there, and you can get involved if you care. They helped me find that whole subculture of organizations that I wouldn't have known existed.

Cross-Boundary Relationships

One of City Year's most important program goals is to teach young people to work effectively with other corps members from a diverse array of backgrounds and to build relationships across racial, economic, and social boundaries. The program recruits aggressively to ensure racial, ethnic, and social class diversity on City Year teams, and devotes a substantial amount of training time to teaching team members to interact and work together productively.

The vast majority of City Year alumni reported that their City Year experience had helped them to cultivate relationships with a more diverse group of people. For example, 76 percent of alumni who served between 1998 and 2003 reported that they had at least one close personal friend who was a different race. In interviews, many alumni from the 2003 cohort credited City Year with helping

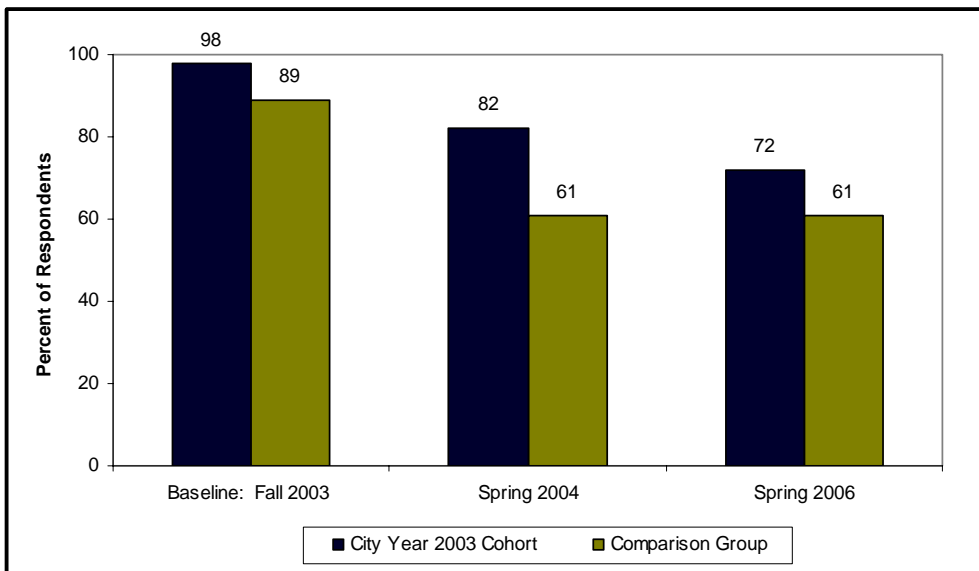
them to understand and accept issues of diversity and thereby develop lasting relationships—both professional and personal—with people from diverse backgrounds. The following comments were typical of many others:

City Year gave me the opportunity to form relationships with people who are different from me. It made me see that just because we don't have the same background, same gender, or sexual orientation, there is the possibility we may become really good friends.

Before, I just wanted to work with people just like me, but I realized that different people can change your thoughts for the better.

My core group of friends now is people from City Year. None of them is the same group or same race or background. I know City Year did that. It had to. I pursue different friendships now, outside of City Year. Not just black [friends]—also other people.

Exhibit 4
City Year Alumni and Comparison Group Members
With Close Friends of Another Race, Over Time



Note: The difference between baseline data and spring 2004 data can be attributed in part to slight differences in the wording of survey items.

Source: Longitudinal Study of Alumni

The longitudinal study found that City Year alumni tended to have slightly larger networks of close friends than did members of the comparison group (young adults who applied to City Year, were accepted, and ultimately decided not to serve). In the year immediately following their service with City Year,

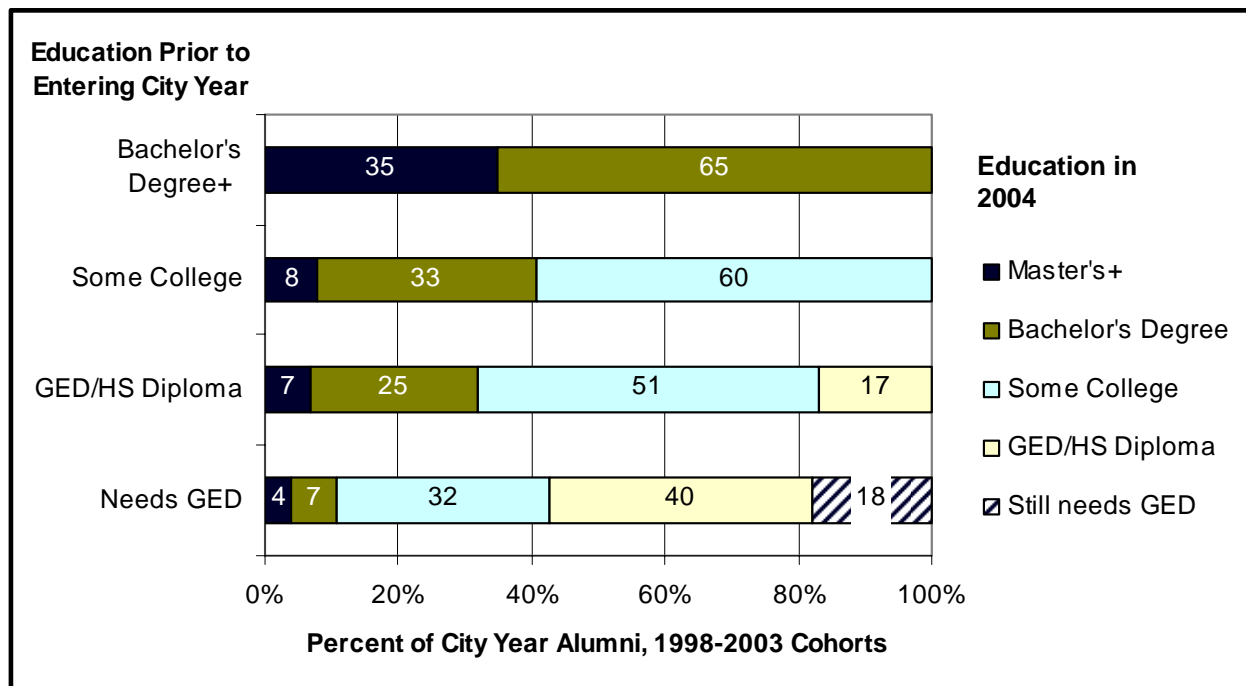
these alumni were more likely to report cross-boundary relationships with close friends than were members of the comparison group. Although this difference had diminished somewhat by the time of the second follow-up survey, City Year participants were still more likely to have such relationships than were members of the comparison group (see Exhibit 4, above).

Educational Attainment

After graduating from City Year, 81 percent of all alumni returned to school at some point to continue their education. Among those alumni who completed additional years of education following their City Year experience, 69 percent reported that City Year played a positive role in helping them achieve their educational goals.

By 2004, 32 percent of all City Year alumni who had entered City Year with only a high school diploma or a GED had attended college after their year of service and completed a bachelor's degree (and in a few cases, a master's degree), as shown in Exhibit 5. Another 51 percent had completed at least some college. Among those alumni who entered City Year having attended some college without yet graduating, 41 percent had returned to school after completing their year of service and had earned a bachelor's degree (or better).

Exhibit 5
Educational Attainment of City Year Alumni
Following Their Year of Service



Source: Alumni Cohort Study

Replying to an open-ended survey question about the ways City Year had influenced their educational plans, about a quarter of the alumni who served with City Year between 1988 and 2003 (28 percent) said that City Year had prompted them to think about focusing their education on service, social issues, public health, and/or non-profit work, in order to be able to help people or to make a difference. Another quarter of alumni (26 percent) said that City Year had helped them explore and set new priorities for their education. Finally, 16 percent said their City Year experience had sparked their interest in majoring in education and/or teaching.

Several focus group participants described the ways in which City Year had influenced their choice of what to study:

I ended up changing my major after City Year. I always had the same set mind, but after doing in-service projects working with kids, working with people less fortunate than you, it gets your mindset off of you so much. Often in college your mindset is based on you and what you're doing with your life and a lot of people will become self-absorbed during their college years. Just having City Year in the back of my head and all these experiences I've had just drives it a little way, and towards the bigger picture. Things might not be as crucial as you once thought.

It gave me time to think about what I was interested in. I originally started off as a geology major [and have since switched majors to community planning]... [City Year] gave me time to think about what major and what course in my life I wanted to take rather than being a scientist or a technician.

More than three-quarters of the parents interviewed for the parent study reported that City Year had influenced the course of their child's education "somewhat" or "very much." About a fifth of parents reported that their children had chosen to prepare for careers in teaching or social service after discovering a passion or aptitude for these fields in City Year. Another 10 percent of parents explained that their child's experience in City Year made their subsequent schooling more meaningful, and gave them structure, focus, or direction that they hadn't had before their City Year experience. A number of parents also noted that their children had developed organizational skills and a work ethic in City Year that later served them well in college. The following comments from parents were typical in this regard:

She started thinking about grad school because of City Year, [about] maybe going into social work so she could work with families. She really liked the part about just working a lot with younger people.

Before he went in City Year, he was in college locally—academically he was doing very badly. City Year gave him some time to assess what he really wanted to do with his life and he knew he needed more education to do it.... He wants to teach underprivileged kids music... All of his ideas about this came out of City Year.

City Year gave him skills to be organized at school, make himself more effective by strategizing and keeping a certain order, which was not his normal inclination. [City Year staff] were more effective than I was at helping him develop that. Having these jobs that he had to complete [in City Year] really helped, too.

Career Attainment

In 2004, nearly all City Year alumni (85 percent) said they were satisfied with their current job and two-thirds (66 percent) credited City Year with preparing them for it. These findings held true for alumni of all ages, whether they had completed their year of service recently or many years previously.

Approximately one-third of City Alumni reported that they were working in areas closely related to their service experience: social service, community service or non-profit management; teaching or other school-based occupations; or work with children or youth outside of school (see Exhibit 6). Older alumni were more likely to report that they were professionals, managers, or business owners than younger alumni, and younger alumni were more likely to report that they worked in retail, customer service, or other clerical positions. Alumni participation in education and social services did not vary with alumni age, however, with older alumni just as likely to report that they were working in education and social services as younger alumni whose City Year experience was more recent.

The longitudinal study, which included a comparison group of young adults who had applied to City Year but ultimately decided not to serve, found that City Year alumni were more likely than comparison group members to report that they were working in education, youth, or social services—areas in which they had worked while at City Year (see Exhibit 7). Among these alumni, 50 percent reported working in education, youth, and social services three years after the conclusion of their service with City Year, compared with 28 percent of the comparison group.

Exhibit 6
Occupations of City Year Alumni in 2004, by Year of Service

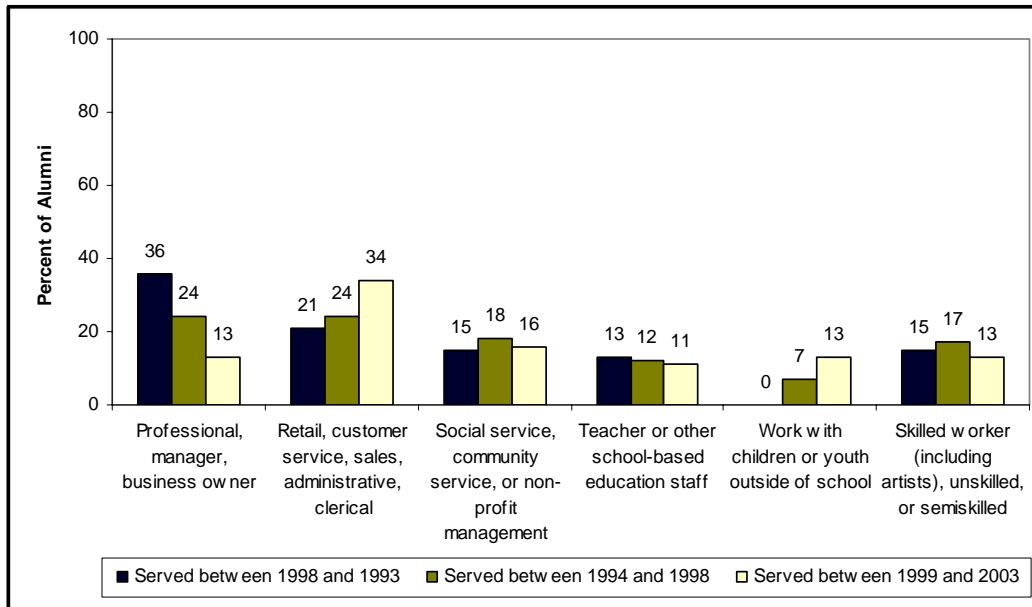
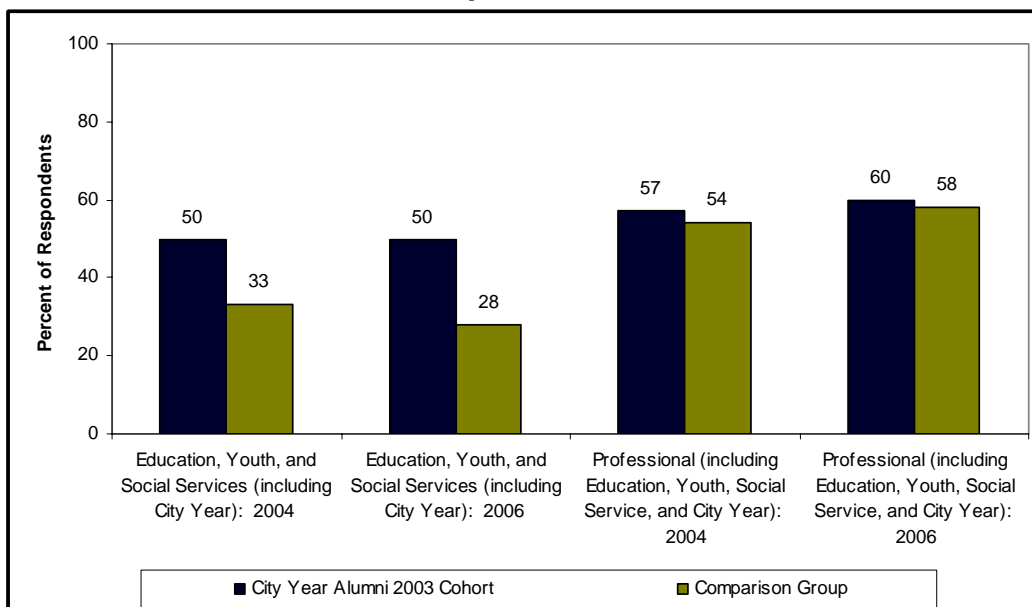


Exhibit 7
Occupations of City Year Alumni (2003 Cohort) and Comparison Group, Over Time



Source: Longitudinal Study of Alumni

At the same time, City Year participants were no more likely to be working in professional jobs (including education, youth, social services, and City Year) than comparison group members (see Exhibit 7, above). In addition, City Year participants were no more likely than comparison group members to report that they were very satisfied with their current job or that they were on a career path that they intended to pursue for some time.

Open-ended survey data shed some light on the ways in which City Year had influenced alumni's career choices. About a fifth of the alumni responding to an open-ended question about City Year's impact on their lives credited City Year with influencing their choice of career or with helping them to develop skills that they carried forward into their working lives after City Year. Many alumni who ended up becoming teachers or working in the non-profit sector reported that their City Year experience had directed this choice of career. Other alumni reported that their City Year experience had convinced them to work in urban or high-need communities. Some alumni reported that the specifics of their service experience (for example, teaching) had influenced their choice of career. Others reported that their service year sparked a more general commitment to community service and social change that has influenced their career path since graduation. Typical comments about City Year's impact on their choice of career included the following:

City Year helped convince me to be a teacher. If it weren't for City Year, I don't think working in a diverse, urban community would have been so important to me (I've worked in Harlem and Hoboken).

Public service has been the focus of my life since graduating from City Year. . . . My experience in Boston taught me about the power of working together and the importance of working within your community to get things accomplished. My experience with City Year has impacted every career decision I have made so far in one way or another.

Other alumni reported that the skills they had learned in City Year had proved useful in their work lives since. Alumni reported that the skills they developed in leadership, problem-solving, public speaking, and working in groups while they were in City Year helped prepare them for later careers:

I believe City Year has affected my life tremendously. I learned many skills while in the corps, from public speaking to management. I was trained very well to enter the work force. I was also taught how to work with others from diverse backgrounds.

I have learned how to organize events and plan more effectively. Additionally, City Year has given me the ability to work at team dynamics and use the strengths and weaknesses to be a more effective and efficient team.

Nearly all of the parents interviewed for the parent study (89 percent) reported that City Year had helped their child explore career options. In response to an open-ended question about City Year's impact on their children, about a quarter of the parents interviewed volunteered that serving with City Year had caused their children to become more focused on their educational and career goals.

Parents who commented on City Year's effect on their children's career choices reported that City Year either introduced their children to new career options or solidified the direction in which alumni were already headed. Other parents noted that the self-confidence and communication skills their children had developed during City Year had helped them in the job search. The following comments from parents were typical in this regard:

In her City Year project in Seattle she worked with middle-schoolers. Before that, she wasn't on a teaching track at all. But it turned out she was really good at it.

[After City Year], he had career goals that were more practical. Before he wanted to be a CEO but had no idea what to do to get there. It clarified what he wanted to do, and gave him clear ideas of steps to take to reach those goals.

She was always very shy but has become more outgoing. Even meeting new people she can start a conversation with them instead of being intimidated by them. She made a lot of different excursions in to the job market and has been able to account for herself. The experience she got helps her stand up for herself better in a job interview.

Personal Development

While the alumni studies set out to examine City Year's impact on civic skills, civic participation, cross-boundary relationships, and education and career choices, the parents of City Year alumni offered their own perspectives on City Year's effects. In particular, parents highlighted the personal growth and development they had witnessed in their children, changes that parents are perhaps in the best position to observe and report.

Parents interviewed for the alumni studies were overwhelmingly positive about their child's service with City Year, with more than 90 percent reporting that the experience had been a positive one. Parents reported that the City Year experience had helped their children grow up, become more self-confident and out-going, and develop empathy for those in need. When asked an open-ended

question about City Year’s effects on their children, these personal changes were the outcomes most frequently reported by parents:

- ***Maturity and independence.*** More than a third of the parents interviewed for the study reported that their children had matured significantly while serving with City Year. Many of these parents noted that their child had lived independently for the first time while serving with City Year, and that this had been an important learning experience. Other parents noted that the service work itself had been an important opportunity for growth.
- ***Self-confidence.*** More than a quarter of the parents interviewed said that City Year had boosted their child’s self-confidence. A number of parents reported that their children had joined City Year at a time of uncertainty in their lives—after dropping out of college or deciding not to attend college after high school. Other parents noted that their children had always been somewhat shy or withdrawn. In both cases, parents reported dramatic changes in their children’s self-confidence and sense of purpose after completing their year of service.
- ***Empathy and understanding.*** One-quarter of parents observed that their child had become more empathetic, or that he or she had acquired a better understanding of the world and the challenges faced by the disadvantaged. More affluent parents who had raised their children in relatively homogeneous settings reported that their children had benefited from working with a diverse group of corps members in an urban setting. Other parents reported that their children had come away from City Year with a deeper appreciation for the challenges and disadvantage faced by the people they were serving.
- ***Ability to set and reach personal goals.*** Parents reported that City Year had provided many alumni with their first serious job responsibilities, taught alumni valuable organizational skills, and given alumni their first experience of working hard for a cause. As a result, many parents credited City Year with providing their children with the skills they needed to carry through on other goals.

Antecedents of Civic Engagement, Measured Through National Comparisons

City Year’s theory of change asserts that participating in City Year enhances the attitudes and values as well as the concrete civic and workplace

skills that promote civic engagement. As a result of participation, City Year expects that corps members will develop high levels of social trust, attain a strong sense of political efficacy and belief in egalitarianism, and know how to express themselves socially and politically. Then, as corps members engage with a set of institutions during their year of service (including City Year itself, corporate and nonprofit partners, and friendship networks), they experience new opportunities for participation and develop skills that will support continued high levels of civic participation later in life. Accordingly, this combination of attitudes and values, concrete skills, and membership in institutions works to set participants on a life path of heightened civic engagement and social capital.

The alumni studies examined alumni's political and social attitudes and beliefs, as well as their group membership and media usage—all antecedents to civic engagement and, ultimately, factors that contribute to the currency of social capital. To evaluate City Year's impact on these factors associated with civic engagement, PSA compared alumni attitudes and behaviors with those of two comparison groups. For the sample of all alumni who served with City Year between 1988 and 2003, PSA used a statistically matched comparison group of 18- to 40-year olds drawn from other studies of the national population. From alumni from the 2003 cohort, PSA tracked a group of similarly situated young adults who had applied to City Year, been accepted, and who had opted not to participate.

Attitudes and Beliefs

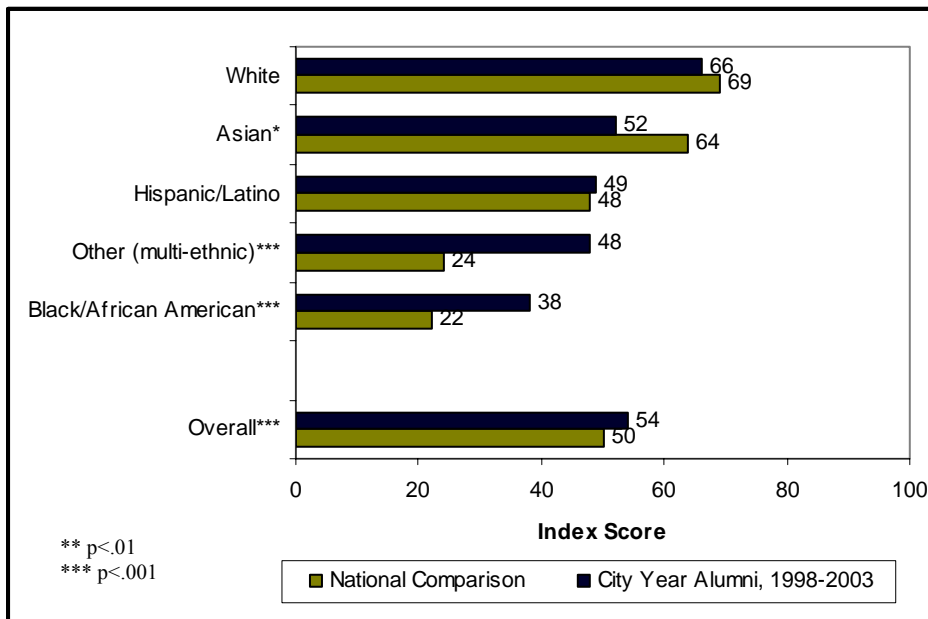
Compared with both the national population and a more select group of young adults who had applied to City Year but elected not to serve, City Year alumni exhibited a stronger sense of political efficacy (the belief that they are qualified to participate in the political process and that their participation matters), a stronger commitment to egalitarianism (the belief that social, political, and economic privileges should be equally distributed), and a stronger sense of social trust (the belief that other people can be trusted and that other people usually try to be fair). Each of these sets of attitudes has been linked in the literature on civic engagement with more frequent volunteer activity, with various kinds of political participation, and with participation in community organizations (Putnam, 2000; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

To illustrate these differences with one set of comparisons, Exhibit 8 shows that City Year alumni scored four points higher on an index of social trust (54 out of 100 points) than did similarly situated members of the national population (50 out of 100 points). The magnitude of the City Year "effect" varied for different racial/ethnic groups and different educational levels, however,

When asked whether they agreed with a series of statements that measured the extent to which they trusted society, alumni who were multi-ethnic and

black/African American scored higher (by 24 and 16 index points, respectively) than similarly situated members of the national population. By contrast, Asian alumni scored 12 points *lower* on the social trust index than members of the national comparison group, and scores did not differ significantly for white and Hispanic alumni, suggesting that City Year had a stronger impact on the attitudes of black and multi-ethnic alumni than it did on alumni from other racial/ethnic groups. Similarly, compared with alumni who came to City Year with their bachelor’s degree—presumably with greater amounts of civic resources, including social trust—City Year had a stronger impact on the social trust of those who came to City Year with less education.

Exhibit 8
Average Social Trust Score, by Race/Ethnicity,
City Year Alumni vs. National Comparison



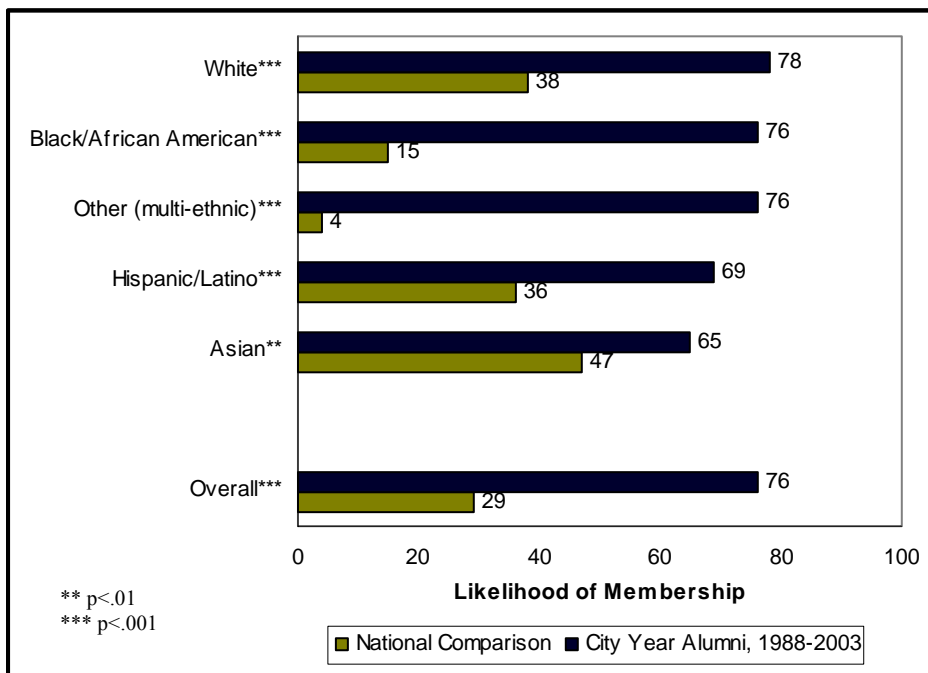
Source: Alumni Cohort Study

Organizational Membership

People gain information about life beyond their narrow individual and family lives through a wide network of contacts and informal associations. These networks provide them with access to information and opportunities they might otherwise not have. Membership and participation in a wide range of activities teaches social trust, which is the basis for collaboration and other forms of social cooperation (Putnam, 2000), and participation in community organizations—for example, running the PTA fund drive or managing the church soup kitchen—can develop organizational and communications skills that are transferable to politics (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

The percent of alumni who belonged to some kind of group or organization—for example, a school group, a faith-affiliated group, or a neighborhood association—was more than double the rate expected, when City Year alumni were compared with similarly situated members of national population. Among 18- to 40-year olds with demographic characteristics similar to those of City Year alumni, 29 percent belonged to a group or organization, compared with 76 percent of City Year alumni (see Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9
Organizational Membership, by Race/Ethnicity
City Year Alumni vs. National Comparison



Source: Alumni Cohort Study

The City Year effect on organizational membership was particularly large for black and multi-ethnic alumni, where the difference in the rates of organizational membership between black and multi-ethnic City Year alumni and similarly situated members of the national population was 61 and 72 percentage points, respectively (Exhibit 9). This result suggests that City Year participation may have had an equalizing effect; where all City Year alumni were about equally likely to belong to a group or organization, there were significant differences by race in the general population of 18- to 40-year olds.

Media Usage

Media usage (reading a newspaper, watching the news on television, listening to the news on the radio, and discussing current events with family or friends) is an antecedent to civic engagement. The quantity and quality of information that citizens receive forms the basis upon which they decide whether or not to vote or participate in civic life in other ways.

Compared with similarly situated members of the national population, City Year alumni were slightly more likely to report that they use the new media to follow issues that concern them. When asked about the extent to which they used various forms of media to get news and information, City Year alumni scored an average of 48 points (on a scale of 0 to 100). By comparison, similarly situated members of the national population received an average score of 45 points. With only a few exceptions, these comparisons suggested a City Year effect for all groups of alumni, regardless of race/ethnicity, prior education, or age.

In telephone interviews conducted for the longitudinal study, many alumni from the 2003 cohort said they had learned from their City Year experience about the importance of staying abreast of current events by regularly listening to or watching the news or reading the newspaper. By staying informed, alumni explained, they can act more readily in response to issues that affect them and their communities. The following comments illustrate these lines of reasoning:

City Year has definitely taught me about being more community focused and to pay more attention to what is going on around me. It also exposed me to more people from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. I have a more in-depth knowledge of important events and issues going on around me now.

Since City Year, I have been better at keeping up with national, global and local issues—especially issues related to civil rights and poverty. Being immersed in the community of Columbia, South Carolina, really opened my eyes to the rest of the world.

Evidence of Civic Engagement, Measured Through National Comparisons

City Year has long believed that engaging young adults in service and teaching them leadership skills that use inventiveness and compassion to solve current social problems will ultimately engage them in political and social life. Findings from both the alumni cohort study (a snapshot of all City Year alumni in 2004, compared with similarly situated members of the national population) and

the longitudinal study (which tracked members of the 2003 cohort over two years, compared with a group of young adults who applied to City Year but ultimately opted not to serve) suggest that City Year had a strong, positive impact on the civic engagement of alumni. That is, City Year increased—in some cases, substantially—the percent of alumni who volunteer, vote, and make political contributions.

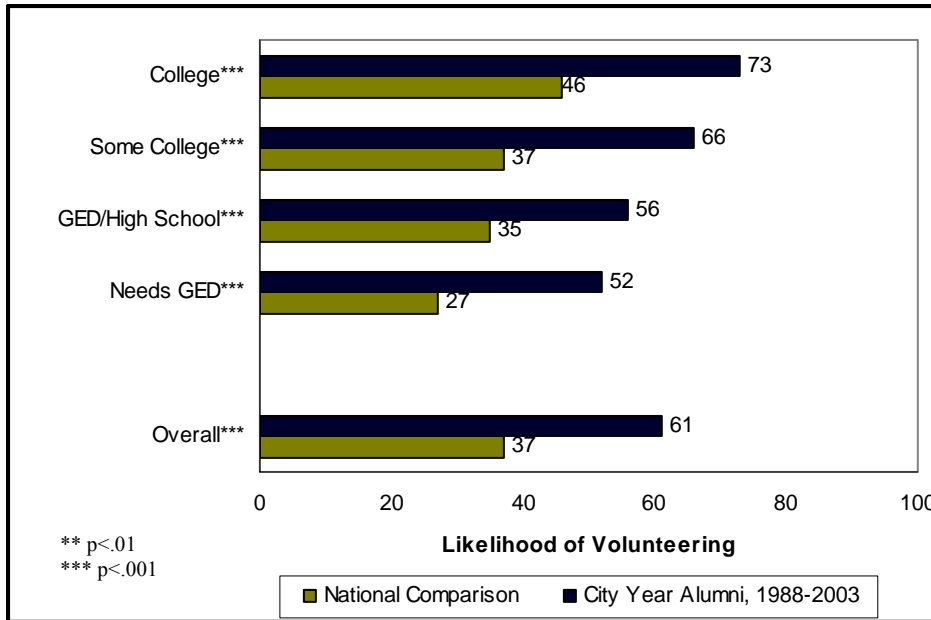
Volunteering

In 2004, 60 percent of all City Year alumni had volunteered for at least one organization or group in the past 12 months. On average, alumni who volunteered spent 10 hours per month doing community service or other kinds of work without pay. Younger alumni (those who served between 1999 and 2003) spent more time volunteering than older alumni (those who served between 1988 and 2003); younger alumni averaged 12 hours per month of volunteering, compared with 7 hours per month for older alumni.

When compared with similarly situated members of the national population, City Year alumni volunteered in much higher proportions than would be predicted. City Year had a strong, positive effect on the volunteerism of alumni regardless of their racial/ethnic characteristics, their educational background at the time they joined City Year, or their age, compared with the volunteerism of 18 to 40-year-olds in the national population. That is, 61 percent of City Year alumni had done some volunteer work in the past 12 months, compared with 37 percent of members of the national population (see Exhibit 10). In addition, City Year alumni volunteered for a wider variety of organizations than members of the national comparison group.

Regardless of their educational attainment when they joined City Year, alumni volunteered in higher proportions compared with similarly situated members of the national population. The size of the gap between City Year alumni and members of the national population did not vary, whether they had a bachelor's degree or a GED/high school diploma when they joined City Year. For example, analyses of the national comparison group predicted that 27 percent of alumni with no GED at the time they joined City Year would have volunteered in the past 12 months. The actual proportion of City Year alumni with that level of education at the time of their entry into City Year was 52 percent, a difference of 25 percentage points. Indeed, for every education level—college, some college, GED/high school, no GED—City Year had a similar, positive impact on alumni volunteerism (Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 10
Volunteering, by Prior Education
City Year Alumni vs. National Comparison



Source: Alumni Cohort Study

In response to an open-ended question in the longitudinal study interviews about the aspects of their volunteer work that they found most worthwhile, many City Year respondents reported that the issues addressed by the organizations for which they volunteered were important. Many credited City Year with instilling in them a sense of commitment to community service. Others reported that City Year had given them the contacts and the resources they needed to continue volunteering. The following comments were typical:

It makes me feel like I'm giving something back. My (paid) job is mostly pushing papers around and [my volunteer work] makes me feel like I've accomplished something.

I guess I've always been interested in this [volunteer work], but I've been more likely to put some action into this interest since City Year.

I have always been interested in volunteering, but City Year really boosted my confidence in my ability to do different things. I had ideas, but City Year showed me how to do it. Also, City Year showed me that there are many others getting involved everyday all over the place, and that really inspired me.

[I volunteer at this organization] because the academic achievement of the students in our area is poor. My interests have changed over the years.

After college and City Year, I became more intense about getting into social work. Beforehand—just like everybody else—I had a generic sense of wanting to try and help people, but I didn't have anything to take action on.

About half of the parents who commented on City Year's impact on their children's volunteer activity said that their children were more active volunteers now than they had been before joining City Year. Many parents reported that their children had simply continued the same type of volunteer activities that they had begun with City Year after they graduated:

He already had those interests and the civic responsibility in him. City Year heightened that and made it more of a priority. [He] wasn't the greatest student, yet he served as a tutor for kids in school and has done work along that line that wouldn't have been something he would have gravitated to in the past. He has more and more confidence that he can be of assistance to kids in school.

With City Year in Columbus, the main thing was tutoring in the schools. After she got out, she continued to go to schools and do reading tutoring and even helped to teach computer classes. She wants to continue to be involved.

Other parents reported that their children's City Year experience had developed a mindset that has supported a continuing commitment to community service:

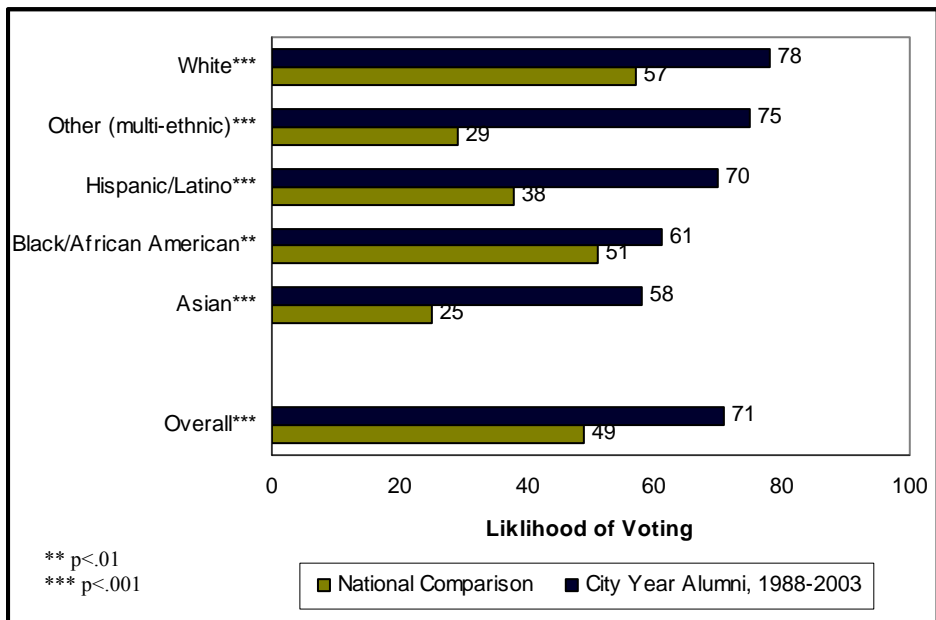
The simple fact is that this is his choice of life. Involvement in City Year really has formulated his image of himself and his image of himself in the community and world because when he went to City Year he wanted to do something for our nation. That has evolved into where he wants to stay involved with the community.

City Year gave her the mindset to be civically engaged. Going out into the community during her City Year experience made her understand what it is like to try to make changes hands-on.

Voting

Among those eligible, 71 percent of City Year alumni voted in the 2000 presidential election. When compared with similarly situated members of the national population, City Year alumni had a much higher likelihood of voting than predicted (see Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11
Voting in a Presidential Election, by Race/Ethnicity
City Year Alumni vs. National Comparison

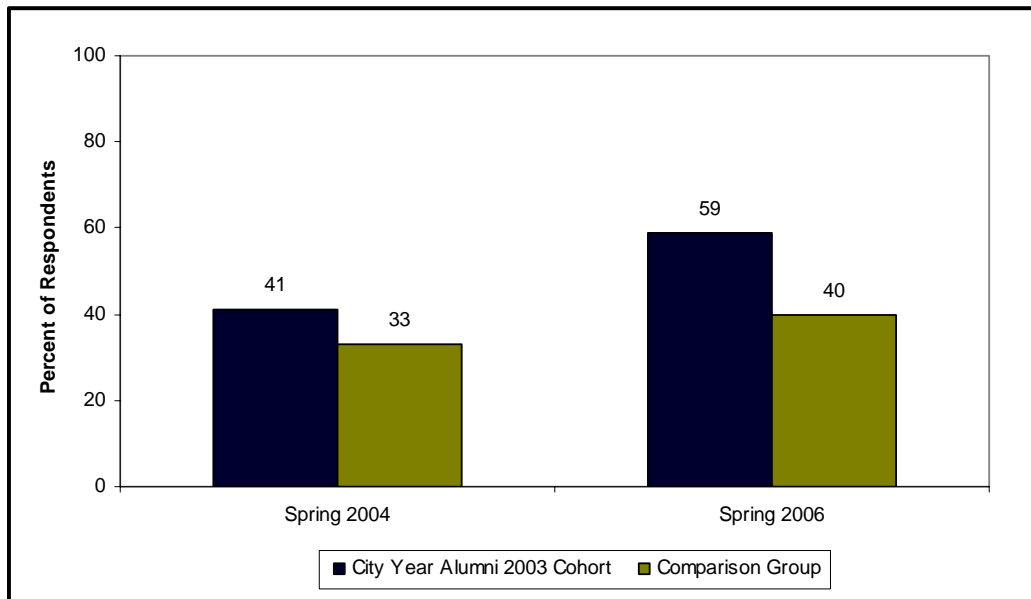


Source: Alumni Cohort Study

Across racial/ethnic categories, the size of the City Year effect varied slightly by group. Asian alumni, for example, voted at a much higher rate (33 percentage points higher) in the 2000 presidential election than similarly situated members of the national population (Exhibit 11, above). City Year appears to have had the smallest impact on the voting behavior of black alumni. Black alumni voted at a rate 10 percentage points higher than would be predicted based on the general population, compared with a City Year “effect” of 21 percentage points among whites, 32 percentage points among Hispanics, 33 percentage points among Asians, and 46 percentage points among multi-ethnic groups.

The strength of City Year’s impact on the civic engagement of its participants is particularly evident with respect to voting in state and local elections. In spring 2004 and again in 2006, alumni who served with City Year in 2003 reported voting at a significantly higher rate in the 2003 and 2005 state and local elections than did members of the comparison group. That is, in spring 2004, 41 percent of all eligible City Year participants reported voting in the 2003 state and local elections, compared with 33 percent of the comparison group. By spring 2006, the differences between the two groups grew stronger, where 59 percent of City Year participants reported voting in the 2005 state and local elections compared with 40 percent of the comparison group (Exhibit 12).

Exhibit 12
Voting in Local Elections, Over Time,
City Year Alumni (2003 Cohort) vs. Comparison Group



Source: Longitudinal Study of Alumni

In focus group sessions, several alumni said that participating in City Year ultimately convinced them that they needed to vote or that they needed to reconsider the way they thought about voting. Some alumni said they believed it was their civic responsibility to vote; others said that although they have always voted, they now try to be better informed about the candidates they support.

City Year stimulated a desire to want to know more. Prior to becoming involved with City Year, I had never voted. I was a registered voter, but I reached voting age right as I was going away to college, so I didn't vote in local elections because I didn't feel like I lived anywhere...So it's reading newspapers and just kind of being involved in that, and City Year has kind of taught me that and it's, I guess, it's just a different lens to look at things.

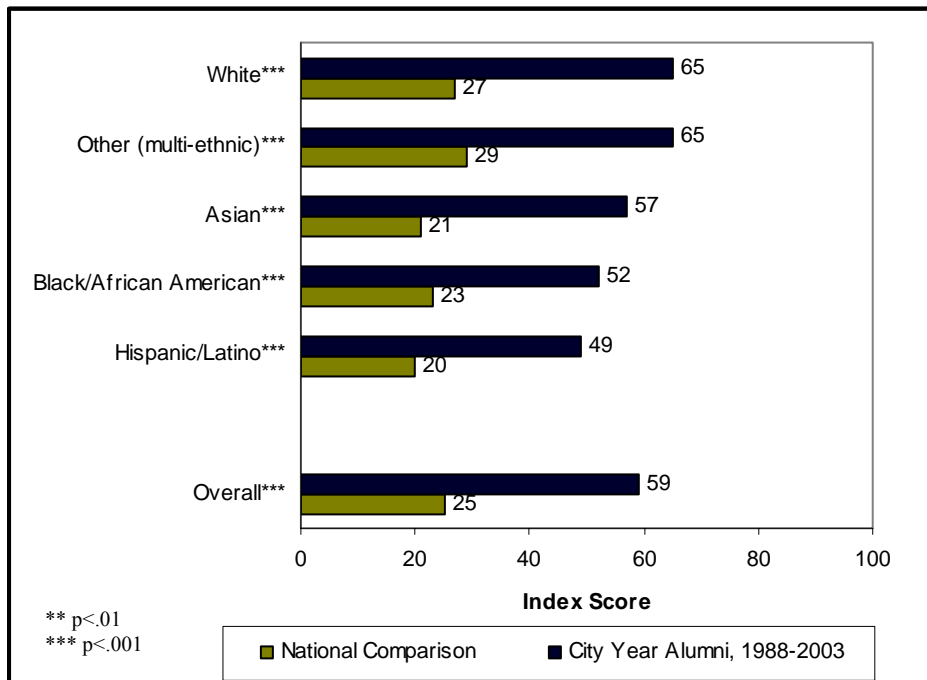
I voted before City Year, and I've been a registered voter. But I think City Year has just kind of made me think about who I'm voting for, and to be informed about what candidates stand for, and so forth—just to be more informed and aware.

That was definitely one of the biggest gains from City Year that I was probably intimidated by politics. Before that, in high school, no one really talks about voting. It's really not taught, at least not at the high school I went to.

Other Forms of Political Expression

There are a number of ways to manifest civic and political engagement and participation, including expressing one’s views through public discourse. Both the cohort and longitudinal studies found that City Year alumni engaged in a broader variety of political and social expression than similarly situated members of the national population. For example, when asked whether they expressed their political or social views through various means—by contacting a newspaper, magazine, radio or television talk show, taking part in a protest, march, or demonstration; by signing a petition; buying or not buying something because of the conditions under which a product was made; or working as a canvasser—City Year alumni scored an average of 59 points (on a scale of 0 to 100). By comparison, similarly situated members of the national population averaged a score of 25 points (see Exhibit 13). This City Year effect was the same for all racial/ethnic groups.

Exhibit 13
Political Expression, by Race/Ethnicity
City Year Alumni vs. National Comparison



Source: Alumni Cohort Study

In addition, national comparisons suggest that the proportion of City Year alumni who had contributed money to a political candidate or campaign was higher than it would have been had they not participated in City Year. Among

similarly situated members of the national population, 4 percent of 18- to 40-year olds had ever made a political contribution. Among City Year alumni, 20 percent reported having made a political contribution.

Conclusion: Generating Social Capital

Building social capital, City Year’s founders argue, strengthens democracy, generates new resources to solve societal problems, strengthens civic values, and increases tolerance—all factors contributing to the public good. Both the cohort study and the longitudinal study demonstrated that City Year had indeed generated a greater amount of social capital for its alumni than would have been expected, based on the attitudes, values, and behaviors of these studies’ respective comparison groups.

As had been described above, City Year alumni exhibit the following indicators of civic engagement, compared with similarly situated members of the national population:

- Stronger feelings of political efficacy
- Stronger commitment to egalitarianism
- Higher levels of social trust
- Higher rates of organizational membership
- More frequent use of the media to get news and information
- Higher rates of volunteerism
- Higher rates of voting
- Higher rates of participation in various forms of political expression
- Higher rates of political contributions

These indicators of attitudes, values, and political and social behaviors, taken together, constitute a persuasive case demonstrating the social capital accrued by City Year alumni.

As measured by a summary index that combines the indicators described above, City Year alumni demonstrated more social capital than similarly situated members of the national population. City Year alumni received an average score

of 58 points on an index of social capital (on a scale of 0 to 100). By comparison, similarly situated members of the national population who had not participated in City Year received an average score of 40 points.

The relative strength of City Year's impact on alumni's social capital, varied somewhat by race/ethnicity and by prior education. That is, the alumni cohort study suggested that City Year's effect on the social capital of Hispanic and black alumni was somewhat stronger than the effect on white and Asian alumni. In addition, City Year had a somewhat stronger impact on the social capital of alumni who came to City Year with very little education—still needing a GED—than it did on those who came to City Year with a bachelor's degree.

Findings from the alumni cohort study suggest that City Year's differential impact on alumni may mean that City Year is closing the gap between traditionally advantaged and disadvantaged populations with respect to civic resources and social capital. City Year not only increased the social capital of alumni across racial/ethnic categories (with the exception of Asian alumni) and all levels of prior education, but also reduced the gap between alumni who came with large initial civic resources (i.e., who are not from minority groups and/or who came with a bachelor's degree) compared with those alumni who came with fewer such resources.

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- Verba, S., Schlozman, K.L., and Brady, H.E. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.