

## Active Citizenship – What is A Citizen?

In this lesson, National Service members consider qualities or traits of effective citizenship. In AmeriCorps, citizenship can mean much more than memorizing names and dates from a history book or spending a Saturday cleaning up a vacant lot. What is citizenship *really* about, and how can it help you make a real and lasting difference in your own life and the life of your community?

### Introduction

AmeriCorps and all National Service streams encourages its members, and indeed all of America, to embrace a renewal and expansion of the idea of citizenship. At a basic level, citizenship means voting, obeying the law, and serving on juries. On another level, it means much more. Citizenship also means:

- Becoming informed about the critical issues facing our nation and communities.
- Making a commitment to personal responsibility for the welfare of ourselves, our families, and our neighbors.
- Getting involved at the grassroots level to solve problems and build a better future for everyone.

### Facilitator Instructions

<b>Skills Needed:</b>	Facilitation skills Familiarity with brainstorming training method (see page 7 for review)
<b>Time Required:</b>	1 hour
<b>Materials Needed:</b>	Member Instructions Handout – What is a Citizen? (1 per participant) Handout – Kinds of Citizens (1 per participant) Paper, pens, pencils Chart paper and markers
<b>Learning Objectives:</b>	At the end of the lesson, members will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gain a broad understanding about how they can be effective citizens within their communities.</li></ul>
<b>Goals:</b>	<b>Knowledge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The history and understanding of the American tradition of private voluntary action.</li><li>• The rights and responsibilities of citizens.</li></ul>

### **Skills**

- The ability to translate American principles into practice.
- The ability to engage effectively in the democratic process.

### **Attitudes**

- Respect for the principles and values that we hold in common.
- Recognition of the responsibilities that typically accompany rights and freedoms.
- A sense of personal efficacy.

## **Member Instructions**

1. Ask members: “Who in your community do you consider to be an effective citizen? Why?” List answers on chart paper.
2. Tell members that today they are going to explore the notion of effective citizenship. Distribute a copy of the **Handout–What is a Citizen?** to each member. Tell them they are going to read an article about three citizenship categories. Ask members to read Part 1 – Three Kinds of Citizens. To make the activity more interactive, ask for volunteers to read the selection aloud.
3. When they finish reading, hold a discussion using the following questions:
  - What are the three categories of an effective citizen described in the reading?
  - In your opinion, which of these three categories would be most important in a democracy?
  - Do you think that the three categories of citizens can work together in a democratic society? Why or why not?
4. Tell members that, in order to develop a better working knowledge of citizenship, they are going to work in small groups to break the concept of citizenship into separate qualities of traits. Divide them into small groups of 3-5 members. **Review Part 2 – Citizenship Brainstorm** on their handout. Tell them to brainstorm answers to the four questions on the Handout.
  - What **Knowledge** does an effective citizen need?
  - What **Skills** does an effective citizen need?
  - What **Attitudes** does an effective citizen need?
  - What **Actions** does an effective citizen need to take?Have members use **Handout–Kinds of Citizens** as a resource to aid them in the Citizenship Brainstorm.
5. Have each group choose a best answer to each brainstorm question. Write “**Knowledge**,” “**Skills**,” “**Attitudes**,” and “**Actions**” on a piece of chart paper. When groups finish choosing their best answer to each question, ask them to report their findings to the others. List them under the appropriate heading on the chart.

6. Debrief the activity by discussing or writing about the following questions:

- How does knowledge of citizenship traits promote effective citizenship?
- Which citizenship traits best apply to you?
- How can you apply these traits to your service experience? Be specific (*Example: a citizen who has knowledge of the workings of local government could apply to the parks and recreation department for permission and resources for a cleanup project. A citizen who has skills communicating could persuade others to begin a petition drive to influence public policy.*)

7. Additional Discussion Questions:

- What do you think are the three most important citizenship skills? The three most important attitudes? Items of knowledge? Actions? Explain.
- How can the AmeriCorps experience help develop citizenship knowledge, skills, attitudes, and action?
- What do you think makes a good citizen?
- What could AmeriCorps do to encourage good citizenship?

# Handout – What is a Citizen?

## Part 1 – Three Kinds of Citizens

In order to consider notions of effective citizenship, we can begin by exploring the meaning of citizenship. This reading—written by professors Joseph Kahne, Mills College, and Joel Westheimer, University of Ottawa—charts the emergence of three differing categories of effective citizens: personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens, and justice-oriented citizens. These three categories represent different beliefs regarding the capacities (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) and commitments of effective citizenship.

The **Personally Responsible Citizen** acts responsibly in his or her community by, for example, picking up litter, giving blood, recycling, volunteering, and staying out of debt. The personally responsible citizen works and pays taxes, obeys laws, and helps those in need during crises such as snowstorms and floods. The personally responsible citizen contributes to food or clothing drives when asked and volunteers to help those less fortunate whether in a soup kitchen or at a senior center. She or he might contribute time, money or both to charitable causes.

The **Participatory Citizen** actively takes part in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at local, state, and national levels. This category of citizen gets involved in the planning and implementation of organized efforts to care for those in need. Skills associated with such efforts such as how to run a meeting are also viewed as important. While the personally responsible citizen would contribute cans of food for the homeless, the participatory citizen might organize the food drive.

Participatory citizens believe that civic participation transcends particular community problems or opportunities. They see community as a place where, as Alexis de Tocqueville writes in *Democracy in America*, citizens “with competing but overlapping interests can contrive to live together communally.” Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and others viewed informed participation in civic life as a fundamental support for a democratic society.

The **Justice-Oriented Citizen** calls attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice. Justice-oriented citizens evaluate social, political and economic structures and consider collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and, when possible, address root causes of problems. The justice-oriented citizen shares with the participatory citizen and emphasis on collective work related to the life and issues of the community.

The justice-oriented citizen differs from the participatory citizen by attempting to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices. Whereas participatory citizens might choose to organize the collection of clothing for members of the community who can't afford it, justice-oriented citizens would search for root causes of poverty and devise possible responses to those causes. By comparison, if participatory citizens organize a food drive and personal responsible citizens donate food; justice-oriented citizens ask why people are hungry and act on what they discover.

## Part 2 – Citizenship Brainstorming

You have just read how citizenship can involve more than memorizing names and dates from a history book or spending a Saturday cleaning up a vacant lot. What is citizenship *really* about? How do you translate the principles of citizenship into practice? In order to develop a better working knowledge of citizenship, you are going to work in small groups to break the concept of citizenship into its separate traits.

Brainstorm answers to the four questions below. You will need a separate sheet of chart paper to list your brainstorm answers. Use these **Brainstorm Tips**:

- Say anything that comes to mind.
- Do no judge or criticize what others say.
- Build on each other's ideas.

Brainstorm as many ideas as you can in response to these four questions:

- What **Knowledge** does an effective citizen need?
- What **Skills** does an effective citizen need?
- What **Attitudes** does an effective citizen need?
- What does an effective citizen need **To Do**?

When you complete the brainstorm, choose the best answer to each brainstorm question. Be prepared to report your choice to the other groups.

## Handout – Kinds of Citizens

Description	<b>Personally Responsible Citizen</b>	<b>Participatory Citizen</b>	<b>Justice Oriented Citizen</b>
	<p>Acts responsibly in his/her community</p> <p>Works and pays taxes</p> <p>Obeys laws</p> <p>Recycles, gives blood</p> <p>Volunteers to lend a hand in times of crisis</p>	<p>Active member of community organization and/or improvement efforts</p> <p>Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development or clean-up environment</p> <p>Knows how government agencies work</p> <p>Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks</p>	<p>Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes</p> <p>Seeks out and addresses injustice</p> <p>Knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change</p>
Sample Actions	Contributes food to a food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
Core Assumptions	<b>To Solve Social Problems and Improve Society Citizens Must:</b>		
	Have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community.	Actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures.	Question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time.

(Source: From "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy" by Joel Westheimer & Joseph Kahne)

## Training Method - Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a technique for generating lots of ideas. In a brainstorming session, people do not judge or criticize any idea because that would stop people from coming up with ideas. All judgments are left to after the brainstorm session.

In a typical brainstorm, a group is given a clearly stated question such as, “What is the most serious problem in your community?” Within a limited time, participants are told to think of the greatest possible number of answers. One group member records the answers. The time pressure short-circuits judgment: If participants must come up with lots of ideas quickly, they have no time to judge or censor their own thought process. Here are a few quick rules for brainstorming:

- Say anything that comes to mind.
- Do not judge or criticize what others say.
- Build on other ideas.

After all items have been brainstormed and listed, participants can discuss, critique, and prioritize them.

### **Additional Resources:**

For more information about citizenship and civic engagement visit:

- Citizenship Resource Center - <http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship>
- University of Nebraska Lincoln Center for Civic Engagement - <http://engage.unl.edu/resources>
- Nebraskans for Civic Reform - <http://nereform.org/>