

Building Team Spirit within the Corps – “What Does It All Mean?”

The primary goal of this training is to use the exercises in the beginning months of orientation and training with national service participants (AmeriCorps, VISTA and Senior Corps).

Team Building Exercise

This exercise focuses on orienting AmeriCorps members to the community, to one another and to national service. This activity will assist in initiating a “team” atmosphere. Use these exercises in the beginning of members’ development. In this stage the members are getting to know one another. Many people will have “walls” up and others will be willing and ready to share information about themselves with other Corps members. It is important to be sensitive to this fact and be willing to make adaptations to the exercises according to the group atmosphere.

This is a critical time to stress the fact that the local AmeriCorps program is part of a larger picture-National Service. (This exercise can be used for VISTA and Senior Corps members as well.) The facilitators’ goals should be getting the Corps members comfortable with one another and setting up roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the Corps members for their term of service. Open communication is a key element in this phase.

Exercise/Activity: What Does It All Mean?

(Source: Corps Design by DynaTEAM Consulting)

Type of Training: Communication tool, expectation, clarification

Goals:

- ✓ To enhance communication
- ✓ To provide an understanding of participation in AmeriCorps (VISTA, Senior Corps)
- ✓ To discuss the concepts of volunteerism and community engagement

Time: 45 – 60 minutes

Materials: Make copies of the provided worksheet “What Does It All Mean?” for each participant (see page 3)

Introduction: This exercise will enable us to unify our purpose as members of AmeriCorps. I will be distributing a worksheet for you to fill out and then we will have a group discussion. This will help us identify feelings, thoughts, and ideas about the meaning of volunteerism and community service.

Instructions: Distribute the provided worksheet and give members 20 minutes to respond in writing. Utilize the processing questions to facilitate group discussion.

- Processing:**
- What does volunteerism mean to you?
 - How does your definition of community service fit with the purpose of AmeriCorps?
 - Should volunteers be paid for service?
 - How do you feel about the provided living stipend and the educational award to AmeriCorps members engaging in community service?
 - What are the challenges of being involved with community service as a full-time commitment?

Special Tips: It is common for AmeriCorps members to have varying viewpoints about their role as a volunteer. The living stipend and educational award are often viewed as a paycheck or a sum of money paid per hour of service performed. This is not a jobs program. The money is not a wage, it is a living allowance.

It is crucial in the beginning of the program to hear different perspectives. At this time, it is also important to convey the programs expectations for the entire year. The unity formed by everyone coming to terms with their idea of service and the program will lessen miscommunication and personal frustration. The Members' commitment and productivity will be enhanced and stable.

Additional Resources:

For more information about member living allowance, benefits, forms and using the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award visit:

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ Americorps/current-members>

What Does It All Mean?

1. What is volunteerism? What is community service? Is there a difference?

2. What is an appropriate award for community service?

3. What does it mean to be an AmeriCorps member?