



A Facilitator's Guide to Effective Citizenship

Through AmeriCorps

Corporation for National Service



The Corporation for National Service

Established in 1993, the Corporation for National Service engages more than a million Americans each year in service to their communities—helping to solve community problems. The Corporation supports services at the national, state, and local levels, overseeing three main initiatives:

- AmeriCorps, whose members serve with local and national organizations to meet community needs and, after their service, receive education awards to help finance college or training;
- Learn and Serve America, which helps link service and education for students from kindergarten through college; and
- the National Senior Service Corps, through which Americans 55 and older contribute their skills and experience.

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Constitutional Rights Foundation

Established in 1962, Constitutional Rights Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to educating young people to be more effective citizens. Governed by a board of directors representing community leaders in law, business, government, education, and the media, CRF provides programs and materials throughout the nation.

Recognizing that future citizens must possess knowledge, attitudes, and skills to effectively participate in civic affairs and democratic decision making, CRF offers students a wide variety of programs on law and government and civic participation. It provides teachers with technical assistance and training, classroom volunteer services and student conferences, and curricular publications on law, government, civic participation, and business.

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Introduction

Making Connections: Citizenship and the Mission of AmeriCorps

In leading an AmeriCorps program, you have an exciting opportunity to apply a rich, full meaning of citizenship to the pressing needs of contemporary America. We all understand citizenship as the right to vote and the responsibility to obey the law. When linked to the mission of AmeriCorps, citizenship can also mean improving our nation's quality of life.

Getting Things Done—AmeriCorps members explore their potential as citizens by helping communities meet their education, public safety, environmental, or other human needs.

Strengthening Communities—AmeriCorps members broaden the meaning of citizenship by helping to unite groups and individuals from all different backgrounds.

Encouraging Responsibility—AmeriCorps members exercise citizenship by fulfilling responsibility to their communities, their families, and themselves through service.

Expanding Opportunity—AmeriCorps members accumulate valuable leadership skills, job experience, specialized training, and opportunities to further their education, thus becoming more effective citizens for the future.

With strong leadership, careful planning, and an ethic of active citizenship, AmeriCorps members can effectively address a broad range of national needs. Members can work with day-care and parenting programs to provide our children with a healthier future. Members can build teams to clean up urban neighborhoods or restore precious rural habitats. They can act as liaisons between law enforcement officers and community members in an effort to bring public safety to neighborhoods accosted by violence and fear. Because AmeriCorps is designed to address the needs of almost any community, the opportunities for active citizenship are practically limitless.

By linking the mission of AmeriCorps to the concept of citizenship, AmeriCorps members can

realize their potential as individuals. Working together to improve the quality of life for a community can do wonders for personal growth. Team efforts help individuals develop social skills, and gain self-confidence. Linking citizenship to the AmeriCorps mission helps members develop vital connections between their sense of themselves and their value to the community.

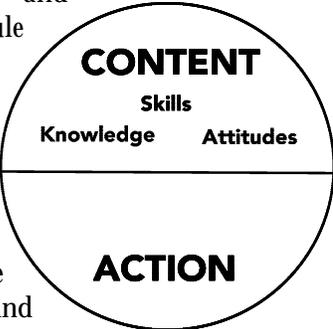
This publication provides tools for integrating active citizenship into the AmeriCorps experience through interactive educational modules.

Overview

The handbook is divided into 10 modules of two hours apiece. The modules are based on four elements essential to active citizenship: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and

action. Each module has two sessions: a content session and an action session.

The content sessions provide activities that help members delve into the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of effective citizenship. The action sessions guide members through a service project in the community.



Knowledge

To function effectively as a citizen, AmeriCorps members should have some basic knowledge about citizen rights, community issues, and their community's institutions. Many activities in the modules provide members an opportunity to gain some of this knowledge.

Skills

The ability to use information effectively, to make a plan and act on it, and to move others to support your efforts requires special skills. Skill activities give AmeriCorps members methods to evaluate public issues and public opinion polls. Other activities help members learn how to find information about community issues.

Attitudes

An effective citizen upholds democratic attitudes—values, dispositions, and outlooks. Activities on attitudes will give members the opportunity to discuss methods for dealing with conflicting rights

and values, the pros and cons of getting involved in community problems, why different perspectives exist, and how to accommodate them.

Action

An effective citizen, working with others, can improve the community. The second part of each module is an action session. The action sessions take members through a service project in the community. AmeriCorps members can learn much from planning, implementing, and evaluating an action project in the community.

This publication is intended to support your efforts to help members make the challenging but fulfilling connection between citizenship and the mission of AmeriCorps.

When doing a service project, keep these things in mind:

Make sure the project . . .

- **Can be accomplished, given your resources and time frame.**
A successful “small project” is preferable to a failed grandiose project.
- **Does not fall under “Prohibited Program Activities.”** (See **Handout 2C.**)
- **Serves the community.** An essential part of every project should be to involve members of the community in planning and giving input.
- **Promotes good citizenship in general or fits within one of the AmeriCorps issue areas: education, the environment, public safety, and other human needs.**

Ask members to keep all the handouts from one session to the next. They will prove helpful at all stages of a project.

Photocopy and distribute the resource guide to help members with their project. The resource guide, located at the back of this guide, contains a reading list and additional ideas for community-service projects.

How to Use This Guide

Review the guide carefully. Look through each module’s content and action sessions to familiarize yourself with the material.

Plan each module carefully. Read the facilitator’s instructions and the member handouts well in advance and plan how you are going to present the material. Make sure you have all the material listed under “Facilitator Checklist.” You will need to photocopy the member handouts to distribute to all the members who attend. The checklist may call for a chalkboard or chart paper. If your meeting room does not have a chalkboard, you can usually find pads of low-cost chart paper (27" x 34") in most office-supply stores.

Most modules follow the same pattern. They are divided into two sessions. In each session, typically you . . .

1. Distribute the member handout.
2. Begin with a short introduction.
3. Ask members to read a brief article in the member handout.
4. Have them do an activity in small groups.
5. Use the questions listed on the handout under “For Discussion” to discuss the activity.

Exact instructions for leading every session are detailed in this guide.

Use the tips in “Training Methods” on pp. 4 to help you. “Training Methods” includes sections on brainstorming (which you are asked to do in some sessions) and on directed discussions and small groups (which every session requires). The final section on handling controversy will help you in case an argument erupts during a session.

Training Methods

This publication aims to broaden members' vision of citizenship through selected readings, group study, directed discussions, brainstorming, and ultimately a civic action project in the community. As a facilitator, it will be your job to introduce the information in this booklet and guide AmeriCorps members to participate effectively in the sessions and activities. In short, you will be acting as a teacher. Here are some teaching techniques.

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, members are told to think of the greatest possible number of answers. One group member records the answers. The time pressure short-circuits judgment: If members 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.

Directed Discussions

A discussion section is included in every handout. Discussions allow members to explore the material further. There may not be a single, easy answer to the questions raised.

As a group facilitator, it will be your responsibility to direct the discussion. Try to arrange the seats in a circle so members can look at one another when they are speaking. Use the discussion questions to get the process going. Once the discussion is going, try to take a back seat and allow the discussion to take its course.

Your role, however, is not passive. In a directed discussion, all participants should be treated as equal partners. Encourage everyone to participate. Be sure members listen to one another. Don't allow the conversation to stray off the topic.

Make a list of ground rules for all discussions and ask members to agree to them prior to the first discussion. Here are some suggested ground rules for discussions:

- State your ideas and opinions clearly.
- Support your statements with facts or logical arguments.
- Define the terms you use.
- Keep an open mind and listen to one another.
- Respect the opinions of others.
- Work together to answer the questions posed.

Small Groups

By working in small groups of two to five members, people get the opportunity to communicate, cooperate, persuade, bargain, and compromise. They learn that problems are best solved through the efforts of groups rather than individuals. In small groups, it is harder for members to blend into the background. Each must make a contribution. Here are a few tips to make small groups work:

- Make sure people understand the activity before they begin.
- Give each group member a task.
- Monitor progress by circulating among the groups.
- Make sure all members participate inside the group.

Handling Controversy

Disagreement is a real—indeed necessary—part of dealing with community issues. Controversy cannot, and should not, be avoided. When properly handled, disagreements can bring information and understanding to a discussion. When controversy arises in discussion, clarify the disagreement. Identify the issue under dispute. Point out areas of conflict and agreement, and look for assumptions that give rise to the controversy. When conflict becomes apparent, ask members to follow these ground rules:

- Argue ideas, not personalities.
- Admit to weak points in their own position.
- Listen carefully and represent the opposite viewpoint fairly and accurately.
- Concentrate arguments on facts and information.

If necessary, bring in one or more resource persons who can provide a balanced perspective on the issue at hand.