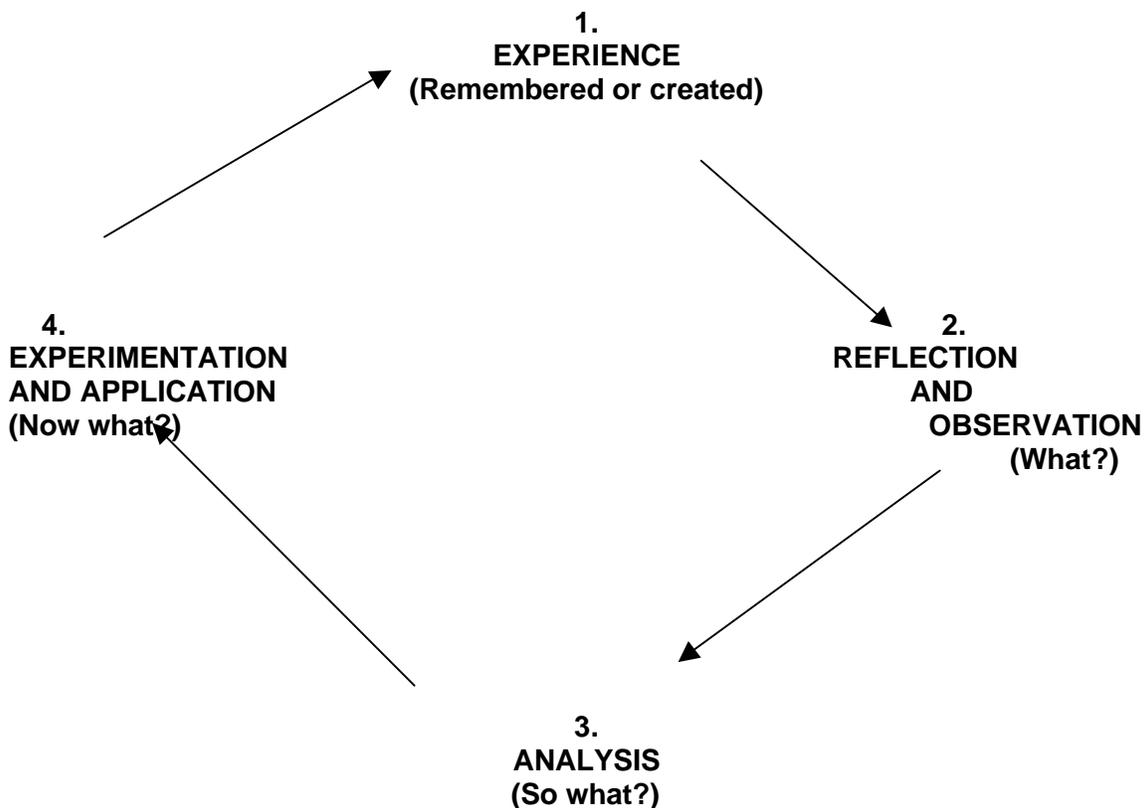


TRAINING TIPS

The following information will help you get started with facilitating sessions in this Guide. We'll start with training theories and then move to more specific ideas to help the training run smoothly.

The Experiential Learning Model (ELM)

The Experiential Learning Model serves as a blueprint for most of the session designs. It is a four-step process that looks like this:



David Kolb¹ developed this model to show how adults analyze an experience in order to understand and apply it in new situations. We start by (1) having some sort of experience, and then we (2) reflect on this experience, (3) analyze and generalize from it, and finally (4) apply what we have learned from it to a new situation. This is an inductive method of learning. It is also a very natural method of learning – we do it daily, and mostly unconsciously.

¹ Adapted from Non-Formal Education Manual, by Helen Fox.

Kolb thinks that people are more adept at learning from some stages of the cycle than they are from others. Some of us rarely reflect on our experiences. Some of us are good reflectors but shy away from experiencing anything too unusual. Others can reflect and generalize, but stop there, without being able to apply the learning to new situations. Kolb suggests that adult educators can facilitate learning by consciously taking participants through the entire cycle of experience, reflection, generalization, and application.

This can be done with AmeriCorps members by helping them think through an experience. In this Guide we do this by having members discuss their experiences and the Field Assignments related to their service. You'll be asking them questions that draw out their ideas about what the experience meant to them and how this meaning might be applied to their own personal interest for learning.

Step 1: Experience -- The facilitator has one of two choices about which type of experience to draw upon.

The first type is an actual experience. This means that the facilitator has designed a relevant experience for the learners. Examples include field assignments, case studies, and role-plays.

The second type is an "evoked" experience. This means that the facilitator has asked the learner to remember an experience from the past rather than an experience drawn from the member's personal history or designed by the facilitator. For example, if you wanted to help your members learn about characteristics of good citizens, you might ask them to recall good citizens from their life experiences and then ask them to list their characteristics.

Step 2: Reflection/Observation – The facilitator helps the learner recall what happened by asking well-designed questions or drawing out discussion about the experience. Types of instructions help members recall and reflect on their experience include the following:

- Please describe what you did on the Field Assignment.
- What struck you as particularly interesting or significant?
- Please share in your small group what you found with your assignment.
- How did you feel about that?

Step 3: Analysis – The facilitator helps the learner draw conclusions, see patterns or formulate rules or theories – all based on the experience. This is also a point in the session where new material from outside sources can be introduced. In this training guide, handouts play a prominent role in this part.

Types of questions to help members interpret and learn from experience include:

- What might we draw or pull from that?
- What did you learn or relearn?
- What common themes did we hear?
- Did any patterns emerge from our experiences? If so, please describe them.

Step 4: Experimentation/Application – The facilitator assists the learner to use their new skill or plan a way to use their new skill. This part of the ELM can occur either in session or in the field. Most often, in this training, it occurs in the field. Types of questions to ask your members to help them apply their learning include:

- How could you apply that?
- How could you make it better?
- If you had to do it over again, what might you do differently?
- What might be the advantages and disadvantages of this approach for you?
- What changes would you make?

Adult Learning Theory²

Adult learning theory was developed in the 1960s and the 1970s. The following list outlines its important tenets:

- a) Adults expect to be treated with respect and recognition.
- b) Adults want practical solutions to real-life problems.
- c) Adults can reflect on and analyze their own experiences.
- d) Different adults have different learning styles.
- e) Adults can be motivated by fulfilling their personal needs and aspirations.
- f) Adults need the support of their peers in their learning.
- g) Adults need to communicate their feelings in culturally appropriate ways.
- h) Adults are capable of making their own decisions and taking charge of their own development.

Another tenet that has proven true over the years and is based on the personal observations of the authors is that adults learn best when their daily adult responsibilities are under control. For example, it is very difficult for most adults to focus on learning when someone they are responsible for is sick at home or some other crisis demands their attention. A facilitator needs to be sensitive to this dynamic among the members.

² Adapted from *Non Formal Education Manual*, by Helen Fox.

Training Methods

In each session we have included detailed instructions for the training activities. The following clarifications give you a bit more information about some of the more commonly used methods. You are encouraged to choose any of the training books found in the bibliography and read them on your own to learn more about the skill and art of adult education.

- **Small groups**: This is a format in which three to six members exchange opinions about a particular topic or accomplish a task together. It is useful to ensure that all members of a large group get a chance to participate. The facilitator can divide the large group into smaller groups either by asking members to count off (“All the number ones go together.”) or simply divide the group into smaller clusters where people are sitting. Do not spend a lot of time breaking into groups.

The task for small group discussions may be given orally (for simple tasks), written on a wall chart, or given to members as a handout. Remember to give members the amount of time they have to complete the task.

- **Field Assignments**: Because field assignments are an essential component of these sessions, it will be helpful if you check in with your members between sessions concerning their progress towards completing their assignments. Some of us are shy and struggle in silence, and some of us procrastinate, so we recommend the check-in procedure.
- **The Learning Store**: From these response sheets, you will be able to learn what your group members think and how they feel about the training. This activity will be an invaluable tool to keep you in tune with your group. Adjustments can be made using their feedback. As a facilitator you will benefit by gaining information you can use to improve your training performance. Look for common themes in the feedback and respond to them.
- **Warm-Ups**: These are short activities designed to relax and energize participants and set the tone for an upcoming activity. We have used warm-ups in a number of activities and have designed them for this reason: The content of the warm-up relates to the theme of the session it proceeds. Warm-ups play an important role in the learning process and can be a lot of fun.
- **Fishbowl**: This is a technique to create the feel of a small group discussion within the context of a large group. The group is divided in two with some members being “observers” and the others “active participants.” The observers stand or sit in a circle around an active, inner group. The inner group is given a task and the outer group observes the activity and provides feedback.

- **Panel discussion:** This is a presentation of an issue by several resource people sitting rather formally at a head table in front of an audience. Usually, each presenter speaks briefly on the topic and then a moderator asks for questions from the audience. The moderator introduces the presenters, keeps the discussion on the topic and within time limits, and sums up the discussion at the end of the session.

Physical Comfort

It is important to consider your learners' physical comfort and the physical environment of your training room. Here are a few pointers:

- Take many stretch breaks.
- Arrange seating to be conducive to interaction among the participants. Whenever possible, ask members to sit in a circle or have chairs configured in a semi-circle so that posted wall charts and other visual aids are visible.
- Ensure good ventilation. Even the most enthusiastic learner will struggle if the room is hot and airless.
- Mornings are better than afternoons for most people to learn.

Psychological Comfort

Learning is inherently risky because at the root of learning is change – and change can excite and scare people at the same time. So, to create an atmosphere that embraces change, consider the following ideas:

- Set group norms: Before you start these sessions, host a meeting with your group to answer this question, "What rules or guidelines do we want to establish to make our group work harmoniously?"
- Periodically check in with group members to elicit their feedback on the sessions.
- Respect all answers. Members may make some mistakes in answering questions: It is important to acknowledge their replies.
- Try to involve all members in the discussions. Allowing one or two members to dominate the discussion will negatively impact the training. Be aware of who is answering questions and try to make sure all members have their turn.
- Use humor, have fun, and learn together.

Timing of Sessions and Activities

We have included the amount of time you should spend to complete an activity. You will judge the time needed for the short steps within an activity. This should not be a problem. The groups will either let you know directly or indirectly when they are ready to move on.

With the direct method, some members will simply say they have finished and would like to move on. In the indirect method, the room will usually become silent – an indicator that the task has been finished.

Most Frequently-Asked Questions

Q: Does the time devoted to completing field assignments count towards members' service hours?

A: Yes.

Q. What if a few members do not complete their field assignments?

A. It is unlikely to be a major problem because the time devoted to completing the field assignments counts towards service hours. However, if a problem with a member occurs, it is suggested that you speak to him or her privately to ascertain the reasons for the incomplete assignments. Try to work collaboratively on a solution. If this does not work, speak privately to the individual about the importance of the content and the need to complete the field assignments to fully acquire the new knowledge and skills.

Q: What if some of my members continually display outstanding effort and enthusiasm for the training sessions?

A: Give them positive feedback in private and consider involving them in the planning or delivery of selected sessions.

Q: What if some of my members disrupt the training sessions?

A: Here are a few ideas:

- For the overly talkative: Say, "That's an interesting point...now let's see what the rest of the group thinks."
- For side conversations: Politely call one of them by name and ask an easy question, or, if you can, slowly walk to that area of the room as you facilitate a discussion or explain an activity.

- For two or more members who clash: Emphasize a point of agreement, refer to the training objectives, close that portion of the discussion, and open up a new, but related, one. You might also consider calling a stretch break and deal with it privately.
- In general, do not embarrass your adult learners and remain positive and productive. Most of the time group members will police themselves.

Q: What if a member gives a completely wrong response?

A: You might say, "I can see how you feel about that;" or "That's one way of looking at it." Another option is to ask the group what they think or feel about the response. It needs to be handled thoughtfully.

Q: What if I ask a question during a session and nobody responds? What can I do?

A: Rephrase the question. Sometimes people need a little time to think about an answer, so don't be concerned if there is some quiet time before an answer. You may need to ask the group how they are feeling and give a stretch break if they say they are hot, tired, or simply overloaded. Another option is to offer your own response and ask if they agree. If all else fails, ask the group why they are not responding and work with their answers.

Q: How much of the session material can I change or adapt?

A: In general, try to stay with the content offered in the sessions. If you have ideas to enhance the content then go ahead and modify it a little bit. As much as possible, stay true to the questions you are given to ask the members during the sessions. Again, you can modify them slightly to suit your own speaking style.

Conclusion

Trust the group. If you keep this simple thought in mind, the training will be fine.

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