

**NEXT STEPS**

**Life After AmeriCorps**

Where do I go from here?

How can I  
continue  
to serve?

How do I find a job?

Do I need more education?

What's next?



Created in 1993, the Corporation for National and Community Service gives more than a million Americans opportunities to improve communities through service. The Corporation supports service 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
- **Senior Corps**, through which Americans fifty-five and older contribute their skills and experience.

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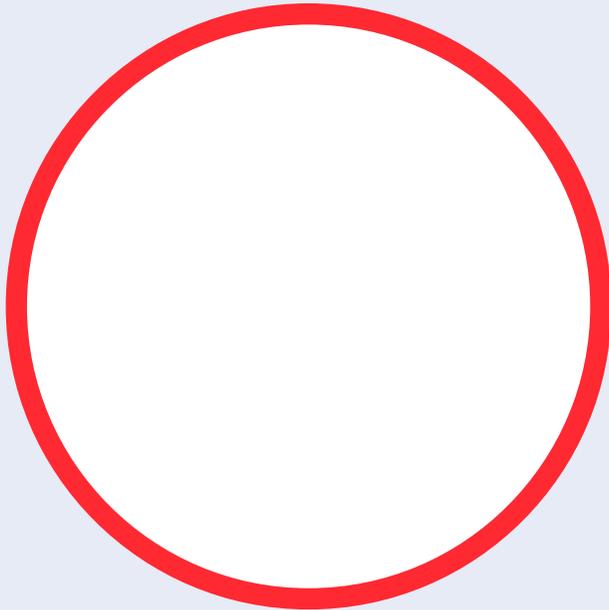
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**Contents**

# I

## Introduction

**B**efore you know it, you will have completed AmeriCorps service. Whether you are a full-time or part-time AmeriCorps member, you may already be thinking ahead to the future—what you will do, where you will go to do it, and so on. This workbook can help you decide not only what you want to do next, but also where you want to be a few years from now. In other words, it can help you lay out short-term and long-term plans, which will help you work through the transition from your AmeriCorps experience to the next step along your path.

**Shorter-Term Plans.** Among the immediate decisions that face you is the question of whether you will leave the community where you are serving. If so, where will you go? Why? Will you go alone or with others? When will you go? What will you do at the new location to keep yourself going while you make

longer-term decisions? If you aren't relocating, what will you do to manage your finances and focus your energy? Will anyone help you? Who? These decisions are examples of the kind of short-term planning that lies ahead.

**Longer-Term Plans.** Other decisions you may be working on concern longer-range planning. For example, you may be giving a lot of thought to the career you will pursue. Certainly, this will be a decision with long-range implications. Once you establish your career goal, you will need to address some mid-range planning. Will you seek additional training, for example? If so, where will you get it, and how much will it cost? Other longer-term planning might concern ways to move yourself closer to the region in which you eventually want to live.

**What's Inside.** Be sure to read the sections in this workbook concerning any options that interest you. Many of the options are discussed in Part 6. Whatever decisions may face you, gather as much information as you can before making up your mind. Consider your options and the pros and cons of each.

Throughout your decisionmaking process, talk things over with others whose opinions you respect. Get feedback on your plans and ideas. By thinking and planning ahead, you'll be able to make your decisions in a calm and

reasoned way, rather than having them forced upon you.

As you search for your path, try to use as many "tools" as you can. One such tool is this workbook, which is designed to help you:

- plan your transition to your next step;
- reflect upon the personal and professional growth you've experienced as a result of your AmeriCorps service;
- assess your skills and accomplishments;
- weigh your choices for what comes next; and
- identify resources and strategies for the transition and whatever you choose to do next.

After this introduction, the workbook is divided into six parts. Following are descriptions of each section.

### MANAGING YOUR TRANSITION

How will you cope with the transition from AmeriCorps service to the next phase of your life? This section can help you begin to assess your readiness for your post-AmeriCorps transition.

### AMERICORPS AND YOU

What has your AmeriCorps service meant to

you personally and professionally? This section can help you begin to assess the impact of your service.

### CONTINUING TO SERVE

How will you continue to serve after AmeriCorps? This section addresses your commitment to continuing to serve, the rewards and challenges of service, and your readiness for future service opportunities.

### MAKING DECISIONS THAT WORK FOR YOU

What next step best suits you? This section can help you define what you want next in general terms, research how to get what you want, and make good decisions for your next step.

### LOOKING AT YOUR OPTIONS

What are your options after AmeriCorps service? This section describes five options—another year of AmeriCorps, more education or training, employment, starting your own community-based organization or business, or doing nothing—and gives suggestions about pursuing any of the options that appeal to you.

### MOVING ON

This section provides some final words of guidance as you take action on your next steps.



The workbook also contains several appendices that provide detailed information to help you figure out and take your next steps.

### A. HIGHER EDUCATION: GOING ABOUT IT

This appendix describes the nuts and bolts of selecting and getting into a school and program of study, earning academic credit through traditional and non-traditional means, utilizing campus resources, and making the most of higher education.

### B. GRADUATE SCHOOL: A CLOSER LOOK

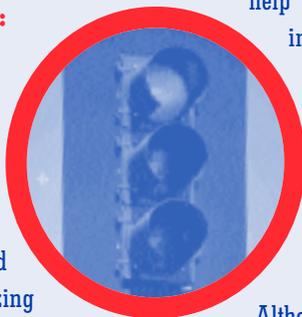
This appendix contains advice about the decision to attend graduate school and how to select and get into the program of your choice.

### C. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This appendix lists sources of more detailed information about topics covered in the workbook.

### Using the Workbook

This workbook is intended to be user-friendly—relevant, helpful, and easy to use. It is not necessary for you to read the workbook from beginning to end. Rather, you should focus on the sections that apply to you. For example, if



you're not considering further education right now, skip to other portions of the workbook that fit your interests and plans.

The exercises in each section are designed to help you clarify your wishes and intentions. This is particularly true in the self-assessment section of Part 5. Only when you know yourself well can you be reasonably sure of making decisions that pay off over the long run.

Although there are no rules for using this workbook, the self-assessment section should be your first focal point. This is true regardless of which section you choose to work with next. After you've completed the critical step of self-assessment, it will be clearer to you which material you need at this time and which you do not. Then work through whichever sections you choose in any order that makes sense to you.

If you find that some of the material repeats work you've done during your year of service, move on to another section. However, you should review "Leaving Right: Final Administrative Issues" in Part 2 and "Continuing to Serve" in Part 4. This material applies to all AmeriCorps members.

# 2

## Managing your transition

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Whenever you find yourself working your way from "here" to "there," you are going through a transition. When you left grade school to enter junior high, for example, you went through a transition—possibly a painful one. Passing from junior to senior high or from high school to college represents another transition, as does moving from one geographical region to another or from one job to another.

Whether these and other transitions ultimately lead to better or happier times, the process itself sometimes feels hard when you're passing through it. Some AmeriCorps members, for example, may view the end of their service as a loss to themselves—one that will be difficult or perhaps painful to deal with. On the other hand, others may see this period as a chance for continued growth and opportunity—a way to move on.

you can expect things to change for you

Whatever your views concerning the end of your own service, you can expect things to change for you. If you give some thought to your upcoming transition and how well prepared you are to face it, you may find your path an easier one. To help with some of your thinking, the next two sections briefly discuss the views of two transition theorists, William Bridges and Nancy Schlossberg. (If you'd like to pursue the topic of transition in greater depth, see the list of resources in Appendix D.)

### Stages of Transition

According to William Bridges' theory of transitional stages, adulthood encompasses a lifetime of transitions (*Making Sense of Life's Changes: Transitions* Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1980). These generally take place in three stages:

**Stage One.** The first stage begins with an ending or loss: An identity is lost, and a new one has not yet been developed. Disenchantment may set in. Before the person in transition can move on, the ending must be confronted and resolved. This description could apply to AmeriCorps members who either have left their placements or have begun to lose their AmeriCorps focus. During this stage, these members may be sad or angry about the loss of affiliation with AmeriCorps.

Sometimes people leave situations quickly, without saying goodbye. It is best, however, to plan your transition so you have a chance to say goodbye to both co-workers and community members, no mat-

ter how hard that will be. Ensuring that your project is left in good hands will also help with your transition. Many program leaders will have a closing ceremony to give members an opportunity to formally close their year of service. If you do not close that chapter, it will be hard to move on.

**Stage Two.** Severing connections and letting go lead to stage two. Feelings of emptiness usher in this middle stage, a neutral zone that often includes confusion. Although it is temporary, the neutral stage must be endured before the person can move on. Some AmeriCorps members in the second stage of transition may feel confused and unsure about their new direction. According to Bridges, people in this stage are "in the middle of a road." He points out that although one cannot cross a road without at some point being in the middle, the middle of the road can be a dangerous place because people tend to get stuck there.

One good way to minimize your time in the

middle stage is to start taking small steps toward the future. For example, if thinking about long-term goals seems too overwhelming, decide what you will do next week. Then do it. Action is the best tonic for the distress of the neutral zone. If, however, you find yourself stuck or immobilized in the neutral zone, ask for help. Very likely someone in your family or circle of friends and colleagues can help you move on.

**Stage Three.** In stage three we find a new beginning, the final stage of transition. New beginnings can be problematic, and the secret is "to do more than simply persevere." In this stage, you will fare better if you take action and concentrate on goals. According to Bridges, the transition ends not when all decisions have been made and everything is "wrapped up," but when action and goal setting are under way. Former AmeriCorps members who are actively working on their next steps are at the end of the transition. This workbook will help you identify those next steps and lay out your goals.

What stage are you at right now? Why? Note the date and your response to this question below. Return periodically to determine whether your stage has changed and why.

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## Readiness for Transition

Another model, that of Nancy Schlossberg, also may help you gain perspective as you leave AmeriCorps (“A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition.” *In The Consulting Psychologist*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 2-18). Like Bridges, Schlossberg believes that adult life is characterized by one transition after another—transitions that are inevitable and often unpredictable. Three assumptions underlie this transitional model:

- ❑ A transition can result from a lack of something happening (a nonevent, such as not being accepted into the college of your choice) as well as from something happening (an event, such as getting a new job).
- ❑ Every transition has both positive and negative aspects.
- ❑ Most transitions move from a turbulent and crisis point to a point at which the event or nonevent is integrated into the individual’s life.

Schlossberg’s transition model contains four assessment areas—situations, supports, self, and strategies. The four short sections that follow provide an opportunity for you to assess your exit from AmeriCorps according to Schlossberg’s model.

**SUPPORTS. What support do you have for the transition?** You can expect the upcoming transition to affect several areas of your current life—your roles, your relationships, your routines, and your assumptions. How much support do your family, co-workers, friends, and community give you? Will your transition from AmeriCorps disrupt any of that support? For example, AmeriCorps members who leave the communities in which they’ve been working may lose the support of co-workers and community members, or at least some of that support. Thus, their experience will likely differ from members who remain in the community.

What do you think your own support options are? Can you think of ways to increase these options? Take some time to think about the level of support you have, and then write your thoughts in the following space.

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**SELF. How will your own nature, or personality, affect your transition?** Do you have a positive outlook on the transition from AmeriCorps to your next step? Do you have physical and psychological energy for the transition? What type of coping skills do you have? Do you fully understand the financial requirements of the transition, and can you meet them? How will your health affect your energy? Do you take good care of yourself even when under a lot of stress? During and after the transition, will you be able to take care of whatever is important to you? Reflect upon the state of your personal readiness for the transition, and write your thoughts below.

**STRATEGIES. How will you cope with the transition from AmeriCorps service to your next step?** Do you need to learn new ways of transitioning? Can you modify and/or change the transition? Do you want to? How will you manage the stress of the transition?

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**SITUATIONS. How do you view the transition from AmeriCorps to your next step?** Is the timing good or bad? How much control do you have over the transition? What other stress do you have in your life? Are you looking forward to the transition? Do you have experience with similar transitions? Think about how you have coped with past transitions. What worked then that might also work in this situation? What would need to change? Use the following space to write your general view of the transition you now face.

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# 3

## AmeriCorps and you



### Examining Your AmeriCorps Experience



As part of your thinking about the future, it will be helpful to spend some time reflecting upon the ways your AmeriCorps experience has affected you. Has AmeriCorps made a difference in your life? If so, in what ways? Take a look at what you've learned and accomplished over the past year. Use the questions that follow to help you do that. In answering them, be as honest with yourself as you can.

After giving the questions some careful thought, write your answers in the spaces provided. If you run out of room, continue on a separate sheet of paper.

**1. What did you do well during your AmeriCorps experience?**

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**2. What are you most proud of about your AmeriCorps experience?**

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**3. What do you wish had been different?**

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**4. Do you believe you made a difference during your AmeriCorps experience? If so, how? If not, why not?**

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**5. How have you changed as a person since your AmeriCorps service began? How are you different as a friend or spouse or family member?**

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**6. How have you changed as a community member since your AmeriCorps service began?**

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**7. How have you changed as a worker since your AmeriCorps service began?**

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**Things to Work On**

Thus far, the workbook has focused on the skills you've learned and what you've accomplished. Yet almost every experience leaves people with some idea of what they couldn't do, what is lacking, or what is needed next. For example, an AmeriCorps member working in public safety may know little about how certain local ordinances are enforced. Or someone working with seniors may only partially understand the effects of isolation upon them. Someone working with children may not know what a four-year-old child should be able to do. These are examples of skill and knowledge areas those AmeriCorps members would need to address if they wanted to develop careers in their areas of service.

Sometimes what members may need to work on is more basic than the skills outlined above. Perhaps they need to learn to read, or to read better...or maybe to get up early enough in the morning to get to work on time...or to be more

dependable. Maybe they need to be more patient with and tolerant of others...or to control a temper...or to feel comfortable meeting new people. Everyone has limitations. What do you need to work on for your next step after AmeriCorps? Be specific.....

**People to Remember**

These days the term networking seems to be everywhere. (Part 6 discusses this important job search technique.) As you approach the end of your service, there will be people you want to remember—whether or not they may be part of your future work or educational strategy. And you'll be surprised at how quickly you can forget names, telephone numbers, etc., unless you have this information written down. Take some time to list these special people you have met during your AmeriCorps service. Gather this information about each person you want to remember from your AmeriCorps assignment.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax: ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**AmeriCorps and the Rest of Your Life**

To get a sense of how your AmeriCorps experience might affect your future, let's take a look at "graduates" of other national and international service organizations. Individuals who have served in Peace Corps and other volunteer corps, for example, often describe their time of service as life-changing. The impact of their experiences on these service "alumni" may be similar to what you will encounter as well. If so, your AmeriCorps service will probably always remain with you in some way. It's possible, for example, that your future choices about career, family, community, and civic responsibilities may be profoundly influenced by your AmeriCorps experience.

According to the Peace Corps' alumni association, volunteers are "active" full-time for only two years of their lives, but they are former Peace Corps volunteers for the rest of their lives, charged with "bringing the world back

home." In essence, they are expected to share with their U.S. neighbors what they have learned abroad. You too have a post-service charge. As an AmeriCorps member, part of your pledge was to get things done during your term of service and beyond. How will you carry out your AmeriCorps commitment beyond your term of service? Do you want to work together with former AmeriCorps members in the national and local networks of AmeriCorps Alums? You can consider those questions in depth in the next section.

**I need to work on the following skills and knowledge for the future:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





# WORKSHEET

## What you've learned



Through AmeriCorps service, you've gained a broader understanding of how to identify and address the needs of communities. Another part of what you've learned through your AmeriCorps service and will learn through the exercises in the workbook is how you fit into the needs of communities. What will you do with what you have learned through your AmeriCorps service? Respond to the following questions about what you have learned.

**What specific skills, talents, and/or interests have you gained through your AmeriCorps service?**

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**What lessons have you learned about yourself?**

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**What lessons have you learned about working within a community and with different types of people?**

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**How has the community benefited from your AmeriCorps service?**

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**What specific skills, talents, and/or interests would you like to use in your next service opportunity?**

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**What type of setting—e.g., school-based, community-based—are you considering for your next service opportunity? Why?**

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**What issues—e.g., education, children, literacy, health, environment, public safety—are you considering for your next service opportunity? Why?**

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# WORKSHEET

## Rewards of service



Time and again you've been asked to think about or to describe the positive aspects of AmeriCorps service. Here's how some other AmeriCorps members view service.

### INDIANA AMERICORPS

In the spring of 1996, Indiana AmeriCorps members described these aspects of their service as the most exciting and/or inspirational.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making a difference                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing results                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being involved                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Starting a program from the ground up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being creative                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Having an opportunity for input       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experiencing the rewards of service (reciprocity) | <input type="checkbox"/> Giving hope to others                 |

**How does this list compare with what you found most exciting and/or inspirational during your AmeriCorps service? Place a checkmark next to the entries that you experienced, and add entries to the list if you have some others.**

Your additions:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### VOLUNTEER MARYLAND!

Volunteer Maryland!, a program engaging AmeriCorps members, focuses on the attributes of servant leaders. Servant leaders take great care to ensure that "other people's highest priority needs are being served." The servant leader works to empower others to become "healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants." Servant leaders are in service first, then aspire to lead. A servant leader hopes to benefit, or at least not further deprive, the least privileged in society (R.K. Greenleaf. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. Mahway: Paulist Press, 1977).

Were you working toward becoming a servant leader during your AmeriCorps service? How do your skills and experience compare with servant leaders' attributes? Place a checkmark in the appropriate boxes to indicate which attributes you have fully developed; those you are working on; and those you don't possess and/or need to work on.

| ATTRIBUTE                          | Possess/Use              | Working on               | Don't Have/<br>Need to Work on |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Listening                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Healing                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Persuasion                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Foresight                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Commitment to the growth of people | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Commitment to building community   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Empathy                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Awareness                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Conceptualization                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Stewardship                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       |

**How might you work on the attributes you need to develop? Who might help you to do this? In what ways?**

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# WORKSHEET

## Challenges of service



Most experiences in life have positive and negative aspects. As your AmeriCorps experience comes to an end, you may feel burned out. It wouldn't be surprising if you have experienced many challenges during your service. Consider again the experiences of AmeriCorps members in Indiana and Maryland.

### INDIANA AMERICORPS

Here is a list of frustrations and challenges to service that some AmeriCorps members in Indiana identified. Place a check next to the challenges in the following list that you have experienced as an AmeriCorps member.

- Too much administrative work
- Apathy/lack of initiative from community members
- Lack of continuity in programming and with community members
- Lack of understanding of AmeriCorps by others
- Lack of consistency among volunteers and other program persons
- Having to learn to deal with people where they are, not where they are "supposed" to be
- Limited resources

### VOLUNTEER MARYLAND!

The Volunteer Maryland! program produced the following list of challenges to serving as a way of life. Place a check next to the challenges in this list that you have experienced as an AmeriCorps member.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking failures personally | <input type="checkbox"/> Personality conflicts             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of money              | <input type="checkbox"/> Not making a difference in agency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No end to the need         | <input type="checkbox"/> Ignorance                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Materialism                | <input type="checkbox"/> Complacency                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Isolation                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Cynicism                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration                | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Powerlessness              | <input type="checkbox"/> Impatience                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exhaustion                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lone voice                 | <input type="checkbox"/> "Know-it-all"-ism                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apathy                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Polarization                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Negativism                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Insincerity                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Autocracy                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bitterness                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrogance                         |

What challenges have you experienced that are not mentioned on either the Indiana or Maryland list?

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## STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH CHALLENGES

Within every opportunity for service lies challenge. However, it is often true that lasting lessons are learned through coping with adversity. How have you coped in the past, and how will you cope with challenges in the future?

List below the actions you've taken to cope with the challenges of your AmeriCorps service. Have these methods been effective, counterproductive, or somewhere in between?

|                   | Situation                           | Methods                                   | Effectiveness                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Sample:</b>    | Lack of books for tutoring sessions | Canvassed local businesses for assistance | Provided 1,000 books for sessions |
| <b>NOW YOURS:</b> |                                     |   |                                   |
|                   |                                     |   |                                   |
|                   |                                     |   |                                   |
|                   |                                     |   |                                   |
|                   |                                     |   |                                   |
|                   |                                     |   |                                   |

## Renewing Your Commitment

To sustain, nurture, and renew commitment to service as a way of life, Volunteer Maryland! compiled the following list of strategies. This list, written for those employed in a service capacity, was adapted for the use of AmeriCorps "grads." Consider it as you renew your commitment to serve and consider how to cope with future challenges.

- \* Stay in contact with other people in service; go where the action and good vibes are.
- \* Recognize the effects of your hard work and results.
- \* Emphasize your commitment to solving common problems.
- \* Set realistic goals and work toward meeting them.
- \* Take time off.
- \* Share.
- \* Access support networks; ask for support.
- \* Regroup—step back.
- \* Be tolerant/patient.
- \* Be assertive; say no to daily crises.
- \* Focus on the big picture.
- \* Pace yourself.
- \* Be honest.
- \* Look for balance.
- \* Take advantage of small perks.
- \* Seek allies.
- \* Move beyond the negative into the positive.
- \* Keep your social life alive.
- \* Stay involved.
- \* Find ways to be empowered.

**What coping strategies have you used successfully during your AmeriCorps service? Why do you think they worked?**

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► **What coping strategies might you use in future service opportunities? Which of the suggestions in the list might be useful for you?**

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### "Generative" Community Members

AmeriCorps members are "generative" community members. As described by noted psychologist Erik Erikson, generative adults actively invest in their societies. Erikson suggests that adults need to be needed and need to teach. One of the tasks of adults is to find a way to direct those needs outward to create a society that sustains its members. The alternative attitude—stagnation—is rooted in self-absorption. Stagnated adults focus on their own needs rather than on caring for the welfare of others (C. Widick, C.A. Parker, and L. Knefelkamp. "Erik Erikson and Psychological Development." In *Applying New Developmental Findings*, edited by L. Knefelkamp, C. Widick, and C.A. Parker. San Francisco, Calif. Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1978, pp.1-17).

Erikson's concept of "generativity" is akin to the process of supervising children as they "come up"—helping them to grow and guiding them to become strong, positive contributors to society. A generative person helps society's members "come up"—they go the extra mile to ensure that the young and underserved have opportunities to grow. Whether focusing on a community as a whole or on its individual members, as an AmeriCorps member you had the chance to invest actively in society and were able to reach outward for the benefit of society. You were a generative community member. In fact, you probably helped other community members become generative as well. Empowering others was one of your goals.

Respond to the following questions about your experience with and potential for generativity.....

► **Who has been generative toward you in your life so far? In what ways?**

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**What generative behavior have you used in your life so far?**

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**What part will generativity play in your next service opportunity?**

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## Readiness for Your Next Service Opportunity

As an AmeriCorps member, you've been intensely involved in service over many months. Your next step after AmeriCorps service may involve a very focused pursuit of a goal that does not include a significant service element. Sometimes basic concerns, such as a salary to buy food and pay the rent, take precedence. It is normal to experience periods of intense involvement in service, and also times of less than all-out commitment. You may have already experienced ebbs and flows during your AmeriCorps service.

**During what period of your AmeriCorps service have you experienced the greatest commitment, energy, and effectiveness? Why?**

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**During what period of your AmeriCorps service have you experienced the least commitment, energy, and effectiveness? Why?**

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At some time in your life you will probably step out of service altogether, pulling away for a while to revitalize or perhaps to rethink your commitments. The key is to not stay away too long, for you will need the strength and spirit you get from service to sustain you through the next steps you will be pursuing. Because of your AmeriCorps service, the ethic of service will probably permeate your life. Ideally, you will never be far from it.

Please also consider a very practical part of continuing to serve as you leave AmeriCorps. Help AmeriCorps recruit dynamic, worthy, committed persons as new members. Be on the lookout. Talk about your service. Who better knows the pros and cons of AmeriCorps membership? Refer poten-

tial members to the AmeriCorps recruitment hotline at 1-800-942-2677. The TDD number is 1-800-833-3722. To find out how you can help recruit AmeriCorps members, call the AmeriCorps Recruitment Office at (202) 606-5000, x566. You can also access information from the AmeriCorps website: [www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov).

And if you or your fellow AmeriCorps members are looking for another full-time service opportunity, you may want to consider applying your skills overseas as a Peace Corps volunteer. Call 1-800-424-8580 or visit [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov) for information.

A way to stay directly involved with your fellow National AmeriCorps Association alumni is to join the National AmeriCorps Association. The National AmeriCorps Association is an independent nonprofit organization that is building a national network of former AmeriCorps members and friends who are ensuring that AmeriCorps is a year in a lifetime of service. It is an organization for alums run by alums. It can provide you with job leads, career advice, and national and local networking and service opportunities. Members of the National AmeriCorps Association receive a quarterly newsletter, have access to the National AmeriCorps Association listserv, and receive other service-related information. The National AmeriCorps Association keeps up-to-date records of former AmeriCorps members so they can be involved in helping local programs with recruitment, training, evaluation, and service opportunities. For information, contact:

**AmeriCorps Alums**  
**600 Means Street**  
**Suite 110**  
**Atlanta, GA 30318**  
**(404) 979-2900**  
**website: [www.lifetimeofservice.org](http://www.lifetimeofservice.org)**

For other information on volunteer and service opportunities, you may also want to visit [www.servenet.org](http://www.servenet.org), [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org), or [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org).

Your service commitment is ongoing. Go forth and continue to do good works. The next sections of this workbook can help you focus on your next steps.



# 5

## Making

## decisions that

## work for you



As you move closer to making decisions about your future, the material in the next part will help you weigh the benefits of several possible options, some of which you may already be considering. Before you lock yourself into something, however, why not spend some time really thinking things through? This part can help you with some of your thinking.

This chapter is divided into three sections:

- self-assessment;
- research and gathering information; and
- decisionmaking and goal setting.

### Self-Assessment

Whether we heard or read it, whether we heeded or ignored it, nearly all of us have at some time received this message: Know who you are. Before plunging into your plans for the

future, spend some time getting to know yourself a little better. The questions and tasks here can help you do that. As you go through them, try to be as honest with yourself as you can; see if you can become the person who knows you best.

#### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- What opportunity will you look for personally and professionally? Will it be school, a job, or something else entirely?
- What are the ideal qualities and components that you would like in your next opportunity?

#### TASKS TO COMPLETE:

- Identify your values, skills, interests, accomplishments and personal considerations.
- Begin to describe generally what you are seeking in your next opportunity.

#### Values

Values are principles or standards that influence the way we live our lives. Our values are the things that matter to us. Here are some examples of things people may value—family, friends, children, community, wealth, good health and physical activity, material possessions, power and/or prestige, education, interconnectedness, religion, and social justice. Not everyone values all of these items, and those who care about some of the same things might differ in the degree to which they care. As you

move ahead with your life, you may find that you share certain values with those around you and don't share others.

Our values come from our life experiences. When we are young, we often learn values from our parents

and other important adults in our lives; as we age, our friends, spouses, teachers, and co-workers influence our values as well. Although values sometimes change over time, the shift is not always dramatic. Usually, value changes reflect changing circumstances and experiences. For example, sometimes people's values undergo a modification as a result of their AmeriCorps service.

During transitional periods, values become particularly significant because they form the basis for both decisions and actions. If your next opportunity is to be satisfying, it must fit into your value system. Even though the following exercise was designed for people thinking of an employment opportunity, it will be helpful to you regardless of your next step.

values are particularly significant because they form the basis for both decisions and actions

# WORKSHEET

## Work values exercise

(Adapted from D. Borchard, J.J. Kelly, and N.P.K. Weaver, *Your Career: Choices, Chances, Changes*, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1992 by Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company. Reprinted with permission of Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.)

Read the definitions of the work values listed in the three categories below—work conditions, work purposes, and work relationships. As you read, think about how they are relevant to you. Then rate them using the following scale:

1 = Unimportant in my choice of career/in my work

2 = Somewhat important in my choice of career/in my work

3 = Very important in my choice of career/in my work.

Place the number corresponding to your rating in the box to the left of each work value.

### WORK CONDITIONS

- Independence/Autonomy—doing what you want to do without much direction from others
- Time flexibility—arranging your own hours, working according to your own time schedule
- Change/Variety—performing varying tasks in a number of different settings
- Change/Risk—performing new tasks or leading new programs that challenge the way things are usually done and may be initially resisted
- Stability/Security—performing regular, predictable tasks in a job you are sure of and that pays you reasonably well
- Physical challenge—performing dangerous tasks that challenge your physical capabilities and involve risk
- Physical demands—performing physically strenuous, but relatively safe activities

- Mental challenge—performing demanding tasks that challenge your intelligence and creativity
- Pressure/Time deadlines—performing in a highly critical environment with constant time deadlines
- Precise work—performing prescribed tasks that leave little room for error
- Decisionmaking—making choices about what to do and how to do it

### WORK PURPOSES

- Truth/Knowledge—pursuing knowledge and understanding
- Expertise/Authority—seeking recognition as an expert or leader in a particular area
- Creativity/Innovation—developing new and different ideas, programs, and/or structures
- Aesthetic appreciation—seeking out the appreciation of beauty in all of its various forms
- Social contributions—seeking to improve the human condition
- Material gain—accumulating money or other material objects
- Achievement/Recognition—seeking public recognition for your work contributions
- Ethical/Moral—acting according to a set of moral and ethical standards
- Spiritual/Transpersonal—looking beyond ordinary consciousness to a more spiritual plane

### WORK RELATIONSHIPS

- Working alone—doing assignments by yourself with minimal contact with other people
- Public contact—interacting in predictable ways with a continuous flow of people
- Close friendships—developing strong relationships with the people at work
- Group membership—belonging to a group with a common purpose and/or interest
- Helping others—assisting other people directly to obtain information and/or resolve problems
- Influencing others—affecting others in ways designed to change attitudes or opinions
- Supervising others—being in a position to oversee the work of other employees
- Controlling others—maintaining some control or power over the destinies of other people

List below your top three or four most important work values in each of the three categories. Add any others that are important to you but were not listed earlier.

Work Conditions

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

Work Purposes

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

Work Relationships

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

Now list your three or four most important work values on the "Next-Step Summary Sheet" on page 35.

Skills

Skills come in a variety of forms. We all have them, although they differ from person to person. Skills may be described as:

...any of the widest possible variety of attributes that represent your strengths, your key abilities, the characteristics that give you your greatest potency, the ways in which you tend to be most successful when dealing with problems, tasks, and other life experiences. There can be little doubt that you do some things better than other things. You are more comfortable in certain situations than in others. You consistently prefer particular tasks over all others. Your strengths reveal much of what makes you unique, a person who is different from any other individual alive.

(H. Figler, *The Complete Job Search Handbook*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1988, p. 57)

Put a shorter way, a skill is something you do well.

**Self-Management Skills.** Certain personality traits, developed through experience and rooted in your temperament, are those you use to manage yourself—whatever the setting. These traits can and do affect work habits. Sometimes self-management skills are also known as adaptive skills or personality traits. (In speech, they are often expressed as adjectives.) In the exercise on page 23, you will evaluate yourself against a fairly long list of self-management skills.

**Transferable Skills.** Among the skills you now have are those you can transfer. Transferable skills—skills related to performance and ability—can be used in (transferred to) many different types of work and organizations. These skills, which apply to people, data, and things, are often called functional skills. (In speech, they tend to be expressed as verbs.)

**Special-Knowledge Skills.** The third type of skills addressed in this self-assessment are special-knowledge skills. These skills, learned through education, training, and/or on-the-job learning, relate to special work situations. For example, a budget analyst may be required to have accounting skills. Accounting is a special-knowledge skill—not everyone has it, and it is not necessarily transferable to many other types of work. Other examples of special-knowledge skills are emergency medical assistance, personnel administration, child development, plumbing, natural resource management, law enforcement, heavy-equipment maintenance, and newsletter design skills. (Special-knowledge skills are usually expressed as nouns.)

# WORKSHEET

## Self-management

### skills exercise



(Adapted from D. Borchard, J.J. Kelly, and N.P.K. Weaver, *Your Career: Choices, Chances, Changes*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1992, pp. 32-33. Reprinted with permission of Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.)

**1. Read through this list of skills. Then circle the skills, or traits, you now possess.**

|                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Alert              | Diplomatic            |
| Ambitious          | Dynamic (high-energy) |
| Assertive          | Easygoing             |
| Authentic ("real") | Enthusiastic          |
| Calm               | Ethical               |
| Careful            | Fast                  |
| Cautious           | Flexible              |
| Cheerful           | Friendly              |
| Conforming         | Hard-working          |
| Cooperative        | Helpful               |
| Determined         | Honest                |
| Dependable         | Humorous              |

|             |                  |
|-------------|------------------|
| Independent | Resilient        |
| Kind        | Responsible      |
| Loyal       | Results-oriented |
| Mature      | Self-controlled  |
| Motivated   | Self-confident   |
| Optimistic  | Sincere          |
| Orderly     | Spontaneous      |
| Patient     | Strong-willed    |
| Persistent  | Tactful          |
| Poised      | Thrifty          |
| Polite      | Tolerant         |
| Prompt      | Trustworthy      |
|             | Versatile        |

**2. Read through the list again. Now, put checks next to any self-management skills you need or want to develop. (We all have habits or ways of dealing with others that need to be improved. Admit to yours by placing checkmarks next to them.)**

**3. Look again at the self-management skills you checked—the skills you need or want to develop. Although there are many ways to develop better self-management skills, doing so will require that you set goals and stick to them. For example, if you believe you need to become more orderly, a good way to achieve this might be to create a plan and then stay with it until orderliness becomes a habit. As part of your campaign, enlist colleagues or supervisors. Let them know what you're trying to do, and ask them to make suggestions whenever they see an opportunity for improvement. Sometimes just making yourself aware of the need for new self-management skills helps. For example, being aware and reminding yourself regularly of the need to be more tactful may make you more likely to become so.**

**4. Think about people who might be evaluating you for your next step. Then list six self-management skills you would most want these people to know you possess.**

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**5. Transfer the list of skills from the previous question to the "Next-Step Summary Sheet" on page 35.**

**6. List the self-management skills you don't want to use or develop more. For example, you may be very flexible but would like your next work site to be more orderly, with a greater emphasis placed upon planning. Or you may want your next environment to be one that tolerates, or even values, nonconformity.**

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**Below, list the top five self-management skills you want to improve upon. How might you develop them?**

**SKILLS**

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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You may be surprised by the number of self-management skills you possess. It is often true that other types of skills get you hired at a workplace, but self-management skills are the ones responsible for most promotions within a workplace.



SKILL Possess Like to Use Good At

**Innovative/Original**

|  |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Use imagination to create                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Design graphically                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Use intuition                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Design programs, events, activities                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Originate ideas                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Act/Perform  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Write creatively                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Think of many possibilities                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have artistic sense                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Draw/Design artistically                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Move creatively/Dance/Mime                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Put facts and ideas together in new, creative ways | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Innovate/Invent something new or different         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Compose music, songs, lyrics                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Social/Interpersonal**

|                                |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Listen skillfully              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Develop rapport, understanding | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Counsel/Help/Guide/Mentor      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Draw people out/Interview      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Instruct/Train/Educate         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Put others at ease             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Facilitate groups              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SKILL Possess Like to Use Good At

|                            |                          |                          |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Communicate with tact      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Serve/Respond              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Provide information/Advise | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cooperate with others      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Show warmth and caring     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Support and cooperate      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Heal/Nurse/Nurture/Cure    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Managing/Influencing**

|   |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Administer program or resources                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Direct/Supervise others                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Make business-related decisions                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Negotiate/Contract with others or groups          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sell/Persuade/Influence                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Convince others through force of personality      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Oversee programs, projects, activities            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Organize/Set group goals/Plan                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Undertake entrepreneurial activities              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Organize and manage activity, task, or project    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Exercise leadership in a group                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Take risks in a public setting                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Negotiate deals or transactions                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Coordinate people and activities to work together | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SKILL Possess Like to Use Good At

**Detail/Data**

|   |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Work with numerical data                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Proofread/Edit/Write technically            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Inspect/Examine/Inventory                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Type/Word processing                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Follow directions, procedures accurately    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Be careful and accurate                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do math quickly and accurately              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Schedule/Organize activities or events      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Complete details on schedule                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Keep track of data or numbers/Accounting    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Categorize/Sort/Place items in right places | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remember numbers or specific facts          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attend to details                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| File/Classify/Record/Retrieve               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**4. In the first column below, list the transferable skills that you marked all three times. These are the skills you possess, like to use, and are really good at. If your next step is to seek employment, you probably will want to look for jobs that use these skills. (Be sure that prospective employers know you have them!) Even if you're not looking for employment as your next step, you probably will want to let people know you possess these skills in order to apply them.**

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

Copy your list of transferable skills onto the "Next-Step Summary Sheet" on page 35.

**5. Determine whether your skills focus on people, data, or things. Do this by writing People, Data, or Things next to each skill you put down in number 4. If you are unsure, ask yourself, "Who or what would these skills be used with—data, people, or things?" You may have a strong preference for one or more of the areas. After completing this exercise, indicate whether you prefer People, Data, or Things on the "Next-Step Summary Sheet" on page 35.**

**6. Check to see which three categories (e.g., manual/technical) you marked most often. List them below, starting with the category that has the most marks. These three categories represent your major transferable skill areas.**

|       |
|-------|
| _____ |
| _____ |
| _____ |

**7. Finally, look at the master list to see which skills you possess and/or are good at that you do not want to use. These would be the transferable skills you want to avoid using to a great extent. For example, you may be a great writer but may not enjoy writing. List your ten to fifteen least-preferred transferable skills below.**

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |



## Interests

The third major area of self-assessment concerns interests. How do you spend time when you can do what you want to do? What would you do with your time if you won a lottery and didn't have to earn money any longer?

According to research conducted by John Holland (*Making Vocational Choices*, 2nd Edition, Odessa, Fla.: Psychological Assessment Resources, 1994), we develop preferences for certain related activities during our early years. These preferences largely determine our likes and dislikes throughout life. Holland has identified six personality styles, which he describes as Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Nearly everyone has characteristics of each type.

Holland's theory stipulates that persons are attracted to roles in work environments that meet their personal needs and provide them with satisfaction (Zunker, V.G., *Career Counseling*, 5th Ed. Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1998, p. 53).

That makes sense, doesn't it? Try to match your needs with the work situation/type work that you will do. In Holland's scheme, the match leads to occupational satisfaction. In other words, the more compatible your Holland style is with your activities, organizations, and work, the more satisfied you will be.

Here's some general information about what types of work environments each "pure" Holland type is most attracted to. Remember that no one is a pure Holland type, however (Zunker, p. 54).

- Realistic types like skilled trades such as plumber, electrician, and machine operator; they like to use skills such as those needed by airplane mechanics, photographers, draftspersons, and some service occupations.
- Investigative types like scientific-related work such as chemist, physicist, mathematician, laboratory technician, computer programmer, and electronic worker.
- Artistic types like artistic work such as sculptor, designer, artist, music teacher, editor, writer, and musician.
- Social types like education pursuits such as teacher and college professor, and social service positions such as social worker, rehabilitation counselor, and professional nurse.
- Enterprising types like managerial and sales positions such as personnel, production manager, and life insurance, car, or real estate salesperson.
- Conventional types like office and clerical work such as teller, accountant, secretary, receptionist, and credit manager. The following table describes and compares each Holland type further.

**Comparison of the Holland Personality Types**

|   | <b>Realistic</b>  | <b>Investigative</b>   | <b>Artistic</b>  | <b>Social</b>  | <b>Enterprising</b>   | <b>Conventional</b>  |
|---|---|--|--|--|---|--|
| <b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>                    | Stable<br>Physical<br>Practical<br>Frank<br>Self-reliant  | Analytical<br>Independent<br>Curious<br>Intellectual<br>Precise  | Imaginative<br>Idealistic<br>Original<br>Expressive<br>Impulsive   | Cooperative<br>Understanding<br>Helpful<br>Tactful<br>Sociable   | Persuasive<br>Domineering<br>Energetic<br>Ambitious<br>Flirtatious  | Conscientious<br>Orderly<br>Persistent<br>Conforming<br>Efficient  |
| <b>LIKES</b>                              | Outdoor work<br>Mechanics<br>Athletics<br>Working with plants, tools, and animals   | Abstract problems<br>Science<br>Investigation<br>Unstructured situations<br>Working alone  | Ideas<br>Self-expression<br>Creativity<br>Unstructured situations<br>Working alone   | People<br>Attention<br>Discussion<br>Helping<br>Socializing  | Power<br>People<br>Status<br>Influencing<br>Managing  | Order<br>Carrying out details<br>Organizing<br>Structure<br>Working with data  |
| <b>DISLIKES</b>                           | Educational activities<br>Self-expression<br>Working with people  | Repetitive activities<br>Rules<br>Working with people  | Structure<br>Rules<br>Physical work<br>Details<br>Repetitive activities  | Physical work<br>Working with tools<br>Working outdoors  | Systematic activities<br>Precise work<br>Concentrated intellectual work   | Unsystematized activities<br>Lack of structure<br>Ambiguity  |
| <b>ORIENTATION</b>                        | Hands-on activities   | Problemsolving   | Idea creating  | People assisting   | People influencing  | Detail and data  |
| <b>PREFERRED SKILLS</b>                   | Building<br>Repairing<br>Making and growing things  | Problemsolving<br>Analytical reasoning<br>Developing models and systems  | Creating<br>Visualizing<br>Unstructured tasks<br>Imagining   | Interpersonal activities<br>Establishing rapport<br>Communicating<br>Helping   | Leading<br>Managing<br>Persuading<br>Motivating others  | Detailed tasks<br>Following directions precisely<br>Repetitive tasks   |
| <b>PEOPLE WHO CHARACTERIZE THE STYLES</b> | Thomas Edison<br>The Wright Brothers<br>Antonio Stradivari<br>Chris Evert Lloyd<br>Johannes Gutenberg<br>Neil Armstrong<br>Amelia Earhart<br>Arthur Ashe<br>Michael Jordan<br>Jackie Joyner-Kersey<br>Nancy Lopez | Albert Einstein<br>Sherlock Holmes<br>George Washington Carver<br>Madam Curie<br>Sigmund Freud<br>Charles Darwin<br>Admiral Grace Hopper<br>Charles Drew<br>W.E.B. Dubois<br>Thurgood Marshall<br>Dr. Taylor G. Went | Alex Haley<br>Beverly Sills<br>Ludwig von Beethoven<br>Michelangelo Buonarroti<br>William Shakespeare<br>Mikhail Baryshnikov<br>Emily Dickinson<br>Frank Lloyd Wright<br>Maya Angelou<br>Emilio Estevez<br>Duke Ellington<br>Janet Jackson<br>Sinbad | Helen Keller<br>Joyce Brothers<br>Carl Menninger<br>Kenneth Clark<br>Florence Nightengale<br>Mother Teresa<br>Mahatma Gandhi<br>Albert Schweitzer<br>Jaime Escalante<br>Jocelyn Elders<br>Coretta Scott King<br>Desmond Tutu | Henry Ford<br>Winston Churchill<br>Martin Luther King<br>Margaret Thatcher<br>Lee Iacocca<br>Laura Ashley<br>Golda Meir<br>Cesar Chavez<br>Connie Chung<br>Barbara Jordan<br>Nelson Mandela | E.F. Hutton<br>Dr. Watson (Sherlock Holmes' assistant)<br>Noah Webster (dictionary)<br>Melvil Dewey (Dewey decimal system)<br>Herman Hollerith (keypunch card)<br>Carolus Linnaeus (botanist)<br>Clarence Thomas |

# WORKSHEET

## Interests exercise



Your Holland type becomes important as you begin to make choices about your future. By understanding your Holland type you may be better able to focus on the learning, service, work, and leisure activities you prefer. The interests exercise that follows may help you to determine which Holland type fits you best.

**1. Based upon the Holland table, list the personality types you think best describe you. Are you Realistic? Investigative? Artistic? Social? Enterprising? Conventional? List the three that come closest.**

Most Like You: \_\_\_\_\_

Second Most Like You: \_\_\_\_\_

Third Most Like You: \_\_\_\_\_

**Review the two columns that follow. They show how the skill categories discussed in the transferable skills exercise relate to the six Holland types.**

| TRANSFERABLE SKILL CATEGORIES | Holland Types |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Manual/Technical              | Realistic     |
| Analytical/Problemsolving     | Investigative |
| Innovative/Original           | Artistic      |
| Social/Interpersonal          | Social        |
| Managing/Influencing          | Enterprising  |
| Detail/Data                   | Conventional  |

**2. In this part of the exercise, you will relate the three major categories of transferable skills you listed in number 5 of the transferable skills exercise to a Holland type. For example, let's say that one of your major transferable skills is to "construct/build." Looking at the skills matrix, you see that construct/build falls under the "Manual/Technical" category, which relates to the "Realistic" Holland type. If one of your skills is to "design graphically," you will find that skill under the category of "Innovative/Original" on the matrix. "Innovative/original" relates to the "Artistic" Holland type. Now write your top three transferable skills to the space below. Check the matrix to see its category, and then find the related Holland type in the right column above.**

| TRANSFERABLE SKILLS CATEGORY | Holland Type |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. _____                     | _____        |
| 2. _____                     | _____        |
| 3. _____                     | _____        |

**3. Compare your two lists (numbers 1 and 2 above). Do you have the same three skill categories in each response? In the same order? \_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**4. No matter which assessment method is used, you are the best evaluator of yourself. Given what you have read in the table about the six Holland types, which three types best fit you and why?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. List your three Holland types and explain why you are like each type in the space at number 5 on the "Next-Step Summary Sheet" on page 35. Then, using the first letter of each of your three types, write your Holland Code in the space provided. (For example, if your Holland types are Artistic, Investigative, and Enterprising, your Holland Code is AIE. If your types are Realistic, Enterprising, and Social, your Holland Code is RES.)**

A final note: Because this interest assessment is fairly simple, it may not satisfy your need to understand the extent and applicability of your interests. If you need more help, consult a career counselor who can administer and interpret a formal and in-depth assessment. *The Self-Directed Search* (Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc., Odessa, Fla.) and the *Strong Interest Inventory* (Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, Calif.) are two common interest assessments based on the Holland types.

Career counselors can be found in many places. High schools sometimes call them guidance counselors. All colleges and universities, state and local job services/employment agencies, some county or local governments, and certain community organizations (such as the American Association of Retired Persons and the Jewish Social Service Agency) may offer the services of career counselors. The phone book is another good source to locate people in the private practice of career counseling. You may request information about state licensure or national certification, as well as references, from prospective counselors. A good starting point is your local community college. If its career office doesn't offer assistance to community members, ask the career staff to refer you to a community resource.

### Accomplishments

The fourth major area of self-assessment is accomplishments. You have had many opportunities to work hard and accomplish a lot as an AmeriCorps member. Sometimes, however, it is difficult for alumni to describe their service in terms understood by employers, admission officers, and others who are unfamiliar with AmeriCorps. The purpose of this section is to help you think and write about your accomplishments as an AmeriCorps member in language that most people will understand.

#### A. GATHER YOUR SOURCES

A lot of work toward the goal of describing your accomplishments has already been done. The first step in identifying your AmeriCorps accomplishments is to gather the various sources that already describe them in detail. Those sources might be:

Training descriptions and certificates

Training conducted by you

Training received by you

Weekly/quarterly/monthly reports of activity

Project completion reports

Your journal, if you have kept one

Ambassadorship/special events reports

Site reports

Awards

Conference attendance/subject areas

Your job description(s)

Your responses to the "what you've learned" and "rewards of service" exercises in Chapter 4 and the previous skills exercises of this chapter

What sources of accomplishment descriptions do you have? Where are they? Find them and take copies of them with you as you leave your AmeriCorps service. List your sources of descriptions of accomplishments and their locations here:

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### B. CATEGORIZE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

From the various sources gathered above, categorize your accomplishments by skill area. Some examples of skill areas might be training/teaching, environmental, educational, supervisory, communication, computer, youth development, community development, etc. Into what general categories do your accomplishments fit? Name them below. If you are having trouble naming your general skill categories, refer to pages 25 to 27. Transferable skills categories and special knowledge skills may be helpful. List your accomplishment categories below:

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### C. USE ACTION VERBS AND NUMBERS

The next step is to write accomplishment statements. This will take time. Start by just writing as much as you can in each category of accomplishments you have identified. Then rewrite each statement using action verbs and numbers, when possible.

Refer to page 69 for a list of action verbs. Begin each accomplishment statement with an action verb. If the list is not adequate, find a resume guide at your local public library that may have a much longer list.

A key to describing accomplishments is to use numbers. Concentrate on the results of your work, not the problems and problemsolving processes. Issues and processes are appropriate for discussion during interviewing, but accomplishment statements are the most attention-getting for initial contacts.

EXAMPLE: You might start with the following draft accomplishment statements.

#### Education/Teaching

- ✎ Work in after-school program
- ✎ Plan activities

#### Community Development

- ✎ Determine what needs to be done

Then rework the accomplishment statements several times, adding detail, action verbs, and numbers, and making the statements accurate and strong. The above statements might then look like this.

#### Tutoring

- ✎ Tutored 15 fifth-grade students in reading and math, two hours a day, five days a week for nine months after school. Students' average reading scores increased 40 percent and average math scores increased 15 percent.

#### Materials Development

- ✎ Created 35 reading and math exercises and activities to keep disinterested grade school students who were chronically poor achievers interested in reading and math.
- ✎ Developed tutoring materials from music, magazines, television shows, and movies of interest to the students. For example, used the lyrics from a popular CD for a phonetic pronunciation exercise.



# NEXT-STEP SUMMARY SHEET



Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Month/Year: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. VALUES

My three most-important work values for my next step are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS

The six most-important self-management skills I want employers (or people who will influence my next step) to know I have are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

The transferable skills I like to use and am really good at are:

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I prefer working with (mark preference: 1 is most preferred, 2 is next, 3 is least preferred):

People  Data  Things

The transferable skills I want to avoid in my next step are:

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## 4. SPECIAL-KNOWLEDGE SKILLS

The special-knowledge skills I will take to my next job are:

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The special-knowledge skills I would like to develop at my next job are:

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**5. INTERESTS**

According to the Holland typology, my three top preferences and the reasons I choose them are:

| Type     | How I Am Like That Type |
|----------|-------------------------|
| a. _____ | _____                   |
| b. _____ | _____                   |
| c. _____ | _____                   |

Therefore, my Holland Code is \_\_\_\_\_

**6. MAJOR CATEGORIES OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

My major categories of accomplishment have been:

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**7. PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Personal considerations for my next step are:

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▶ **3. Read about each occupation on your second list in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. Also published by the U.S. Department of Labor, the handbook outlines the education and/or training needed to work in occupations and the current demand for these occupations. You will see, for example, that the current occupational outlook for dental hygienists is much brighter than for blacksmiths! Using the information you derive from the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, reduce your list to a maximum of ten possibilities. Most public libraries have a copy of the handbook.**

**TEN POSSIBLE JOBS**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: The U.S. Department of Labor hopes to have an improved DOT on-line in 1999. It will be called O\*Net: *The Occupational Information Network*. It will be found at [www.doleta.gov/programs/onet](http://www.doleta.gov/programs/onet).

**Five Sources of Information for Research**

In researching your list of possibilities, be sure to make use of five important sources of information:

- ☛ Print and Video
- ☛ Computerized Career Information Systems
- ☛ World Wide Web

- ☛ On-Site Experience
- ☛ Information Interviews

**Print and Video.** Some people find it helpful to first read about an occupation, making notes as they go, and then watch a video about it. By reading about a career field, you can get a background and begin to think of questions. (Be sure to keep your notes!) Sometimes, videos “shadow” a worker in a specific occupation, giving the viewer a chance to see what workers

▶ in that particular field do during a typical day.

A good place to find these resources is your local public library or a nearby college library, both of which probably have career-related books and videos. You can probably find the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* and *Occupational Outlook Handbook* there. United Way descriptions of area employers, government employment guides, and files about local private employers are common resources in local libraries. Another possibility would be to visit the guidance counselors at local high schools, who might be able to give you information or tell you where to get it.

Many smaller libraries can borrow resources from larger libraries. So if you can't find what you need, ask the research librarians for help in identifying and securing resources that can help you.

A word of caution: Some libraries may have outdated career resources. Although these books may offer good basic information, they may also be misleading about both the nature of certain fields and their future prospects. For example, much manufacturing is now computerized, a fact probably not mentioned in a 1970s book on manufacturing. Always check the date of the book or video you are using, and judge its information accordingly. Generally, information more than ten years old should be double checked with another source.

**Computerized Career Information Systems.** Another way to identify prospective occupations and/or career fields is through computerized career-information systems. Some libraries may have databases of private sector employers nationally and in your geographic

area. Ask about what's available. Other types of computerized career information systems also exist in career centers and libraries nationwide.

Some of these systems can match people's self-assessment information with possible occupations and/or career fields. Such systems can suggest occupations and career fields to consider, given the information with which the computer has been supplied. Use these systems, such as DISCOVER or SIGIPLUS, to supplement your own self-assessment, research, and instincts. Remember that no computer can tell you for sure what occupation or career field is best for you; that's a decision only you can make.

**World Wide Web.** So much is happening on the World Wide Web and the Internet that it is difficult to keep up. Cyberspace makes it much easier to do career-related research than it used to be, however. Take advantage of the possibilities. Here is a partial list of what can be done on the World Wide Web and/or through the Internet about careers: find out about job vacancies, self-assessment, resume advice, applying for vacancies by placing your resume in a databank, organizational information, and labor market information.

There are many sites—with varying usefulness—to help you research career-related decisions. In fact, it can be overwhelming. Take the advice of the experts who have already checked out most of the sites. Following are cyberspace addresses and a short description of what can be found in each. The first three “review” many other sites for you.

**[www.jobhuntersbible.com](http://www.jobhuntersbible.com)**

Richard N. Bolles, author of the *What Color is Your Parachute?* series, is on-line through this

address. He candidly reviews many other sites—job vacancies, career counseling, and other related sites for you. Check it out and take his advice seriously.

#### [www.dbm.com](http://www.dbm.com)

This is the well-known “Riley Guide.” This site contains links to many other sites, including population- and occupation-specific resources. It offers excellent advice about how to use the Internet for career planning and job searching.

#### [www.jobweb.com](http://www.jobweb.com)

This site is offered by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. It contains links to many other sites, including employment centers that are listed by field (education, business, government, health care, not-for-profit) and regions of the United States.

#### [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com)

This is an on-line job center.

#### [www.ajb.dni.us](http://www.ajb.dni.us)

This is a U.S. Department of Labor site that lists job vacancies from 1,800 state employment offices nationwide, most from the private sector covering every type of work.

#### [www.doleta.gov](http://www.doleta.gov)

This U.S. Department of Labor site has sections on planning your future and starting a new career.

#### [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov)

This U.S. Office of Personnel Management site lists federal government vacancies worldwide.

Former AmeriCorps members interested in jobs with the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Department of Housing

and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Education, and other federal employers can get very specific and helpful application and vacancy information there.

#### [www.nationalservice.gov/resources](http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources)

This site gives information about job searching on the Internet and provides links to AmeriCorps-related sites.

#### [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)

The Peace Corps’ website for former volunteers is a wealth of career information. In particular, the section on federal employment provides links to other government agencies. Click on *RPCVs Only*, then this sequence of screens: *Career TRACK*, *Job Searches & Career Planning*, *Career Fields & Employers*, and *Federal Sector*. Another good site for information about federal agencies, but not necessarily employment information, is [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

Finally, one of the best uses of the Internet is for career-related research about workplaces. Most large organizations have or will soon have web pages that contain valuable information about the organizations. Many annual reports are now available on the Internet, for example.

Search under the organizations’ names first. If you don’t get links that way, search next under the general headings. For example, search under “Kodak” for information about that company. If you don’t link with a web page for Kodak that way, search under “camera.” If you are not yet familiar with cyberspace, take a course or get tutored. Find a way to get familiar—fast.

**On-Site Experience.** Other ways to gather information directly are to intern, volunteer, and/or “shadow” people who work in the jobs/career fields/occupations in which you are interested.

## INTERNING AND VOLUNTEERING

Few better ways exist to get a good feel for a particular work setting or career field than to intern or volunteer. These activities are excellent ways to discover whether the career field and type of organization that interest you are as you believe them to be and to get a good grasp of what the work entails. Sometimes people’s perceptions of certain occupations and organizations are at odds with the reality. By interning and volunteering, one can temper dreams with a dose of the real thing.

Consider using intern and volunteer opportunities to get hands-on experience in the career field or type of organization that interests you. For example, if you are interested in fundraising for a nonprofit organization, arrange to intern or volunteer with a fundraiser in a nonprofit organization, not with the human resource manager of that organization.

Getting realistic experience is just one of the many benefits of interning and volunteering. They are also excellent ways to make contacts for the future. You will, however, generally find that both paths offer few financial rewards for your time commitment. Internships, for example, usually require a specified level of effort while rarely providing much of a salary—if any. Most good volunteer programs require both training and a regular

time commitment.

One way to reap the benefits, yet keep the time commitment shorter, is to intern or volunteer for a specific, time-limited project. For example, you might serve as an adult leader (with others) of a field trip for third-graders, volunteer at a neighborhood immunization clinic one Saturday, research potential funding sources for a project at a community-based organization, or devise a marketing strategy for a new anti-litter campaign at an environmental organization.

## SHADOWING

Shadowing is another way to get more information about possible career fields, jobs, or organizations. Ask someone who is doing work you are interested in if he would permit you to follow him around for a morning or day. You should stay in the background and observe him at work for a predetermined period. Afterward, the two of you can discuss any events you observed that interested or puzzled you. That way, you have a chance to ask the questions you couldn’t when you were shadowing. Again, the time invested in this activity is time well spent. Sometimes the appearance and reality of a particular type of work differ greatly. Better to discover this now rather than later, after you have already made a commitment.

**Information Interviews.** As soon as you can, locate and interview people who work in the ten occupations you’ve identified and researched. You may be able to find some of them by asking the people you know—parents, friends, community members, church members, co-workers, and supervisors—for suggestions and referrals. For example, if a preschool teacher or

police officer is on your list, ask everyone you can think of if they know someone who works as either of these. If you get a “yes,” ask for phone numbers or other specifics. (Be sure the people who give you this information agree before using their names to contact those you want to interview.) Repeat this process for the other occupations on your list.

Another good way to locate and interview people in your ten occupational areas is to connect with professionals in those fields through their affiliated groups—professional associations, informal groups, labor unions, and so on. For example, counselors may belong to the American Counseling Association, small business owners in a community might gather every few weeks through the local Chamber of Commerce, and telephone installers might belong to the Communications Workers of America.

When you’ve located some people in the fields you’re thinking of entering, try to schedule an information interview. This type of interview differs from a job interview in that you are seeking information only, and are not being considered for a job. Remember, at this step you’re not ready to apply for a specific job anyway. You’re still researching your options.

In an information interview, your objectives are to gather as much information and advice as possible and to make contacts in the occupational areas and/or organizations that interest you most. Information interviews can serve a variety of functions: they can be used for background research on a field of work; for researching a type of organization; for finding out where the jobs might be; or for exploring a particular organization and talking with decisionmakers.

Getting an information interview, particularly without an introduction from a mutual acquaintance, can be difficult. In your initial contact to request an interview, you need to cover several points:

- ☛ Your name, why you chose that person to interview, and who referred you (if applicable).
- ☛ An indication of what kind of information you are seeking. (Be sure to make clear that you are seeking information and advice, not a job.)
- ☛ Something flattering that you know about the person.
- ☛ A request for twenty to thirty minutes of time at the person’s convenience.

In making the four points above, your rehearsed request for an information interview might go something like this, without any pauses: “I’m Shantel Hernandez, and I’m calling because I am considering [name the career or job in the interviewee’s field or organization] following my AmeriCorps service. [Robert White] suggested that I call you. I’m looking for information about the [career, job, field, or organization], and I’ve heard you are a [knowledgeable, experienced, informed] person. May I have twenty to thirty minutes of your time, at your convenience, to ask some questions and get advice?”

Once you’ve secured an interview, prepare your questions ahead of time. Some of the following questions may be useful:

- ☛ What experience and education are required in your work?

- ☛ How did you get into this type of work?
- ☛ Why did you choose this type of work?
- ☛ What do you do in a typical day?
- ☛ What are most and least rewarding about this type of work?
- ☛ What types of employers hire people in this type of work?
- ☛ What is the future outlook for this type of work?
- ☛ If you could begin your work life again, is there anything you would do differently?
- ☛ What skills and abilities are most valued in this type of work?
- ☛ What other areas of work relate to this type of work?
- ☛ What is the range of entry-level salaries?
- ☛ What is the financial potential?
- ☛ How much variety is involved in the work?
- ☛ Are there peak hiring seasons?
- ☛ What is the best way to conduct a job search in this field?
- ☛ What other employers in the area hire persons in this line of work?
- ☛ Are there others in the area I should consult about this field? Will you refer me to them?
- ☛ May I use your name when I contact them?
- ☛ What advice would you give someone who is considering this type of work?

If you think this might be a field or place of work for you, ask for brochures, annual reports, or any other information that might be available. Remember, however, that the intent of information interviews is to get information and advice from seasoned professionals. Don’t use the information interview as a job interview. Be clear about your research intent. After the interview, say thank you in person and follow up with a thank-you note.

### Reducing through Record Keeping

Try to stay on top of the information you gain from books, videos, and computerized career information systems and from talking with people. Look at the pros and cons of the career fields and jobs, occupations, or organizations you research. Then begin to reduce your list of ten career fields/ jobs/ organizations to about five. But don’t cut anything from your list until you are ready to do so.

# Decisionmaking and Goal Setting

After completing your research, you are ready for some decisionmaking and goal-setting tasks. These will help you decide which career field(s) or type(s) of job(s)/occupation(s) you are going to seek—or which options you will choose for your next step. Then you can set some goals. If the option you are considering is something other than employment, apply the information and suggestions to your own pursuits.

## QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- What will be the focus of your job search?
- How will you describe your plans to prospective employers?
- What steps will you take to reach your goals?

List the five (or more) career fields/jobs/occupations you have selected, and summarize your job options on the worksheet on page 47. Decide what, if any, information you still need to know and note it on the worksheet. Then gather that final information and enter it either under “positive aspects” or under “negative aspects.” Now you are ready to enter the next step of your job search (or exploration of future options)—the decisionmaking phase.

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- How long will you give yourself to achieve your goals?

## TASKS TO COMPLETE:

- Narrow the focus by integrating the self-assessment and research information you have gathered.
- Understand your decisionmaking style.
- Set some specific and realistic goals for yourself. Write them out in such a way that you can measure your progress.
- Create a realistic timeline for your goals.
- Begin to “own” your focus/decision by talking about it.

## Decisionmaking Strategies

When people make decisions, they are choosing between two or more alternatives. In your own case, any decision that you make in regard to your job search will depend upon what you believe you are able to do (your abil-

ity) and also upon what you are willing to do (your motivation). In the weeks ahead, you may find yourself using any or all of the decisionmaking styles described below.

**Confused.** This decisionmaking strategy is perhaps better described as a style. It is characterized by mental paralysis and confusion. If you are in this mode, you may be feeling powerless and unable to deal with the decision at hand, whether from lack of knowledge about your environment or about yourself. You find yourself in a state of anxiety—a state in which it is almost impossible to make a decision.

**Dependent.** People whose decisionmaking styles are dependent generally prefer to leave choices to others—often believing that while they may not know enough to make a decision themselves, others do. This strategy may be used out of fear of making a choice or to avoid the work of exploring options. Dependence is not necessarily negative. In some cultures, dependent decisionmaking is expected. For example, elders may make important decisions for young people.

**Intuitive.** Intuitive decisions are “gut-level” reactions with little supporting factual data. For intuitive people, data gathering is usually an internal process in which they decide whether the course of action “feels good.”

**Planful.** People using a planful decision-making strategy explore both their needs and their environments, and weigh possible alternatives. The planful strategy combines four approaches—gathering information, comparing alternatives, checking out personal feelings, and seeking the opinions of others.

(Styles are from Carney, cited in J. Hoppin and H. Spetle (Eds.), *Curriculum for Career Development Facilitators*, Oakland University, Rochester, Mich., 1996.) Think of your own decision to join AmeriCorps. Which strategy did you use for that decision—confused, dependent, intuitive, or planful? Then think of a day-to-day decision you made recently, such as where to have lunch, which work project to tackle next, or which movie to see. Which strategy did you use for that decision?

Most people use all four strategies over the course of a lifetime. If you use one strategy more than others, which one is it? That one is likely to be your consistent decisionmaking style.

How does your most consistent decisionmaking style affect your life? For example, a person who consistently uses dependent decisionmaking may feel that decisions are really not his, so he will not feel committed to them. Consider the ways your own style affects you in both positive and negative ways. Then write them in the spaces provided below.

My most consistent decisionmaking style is: \_\_\_\_\_

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This decisionmaking style affects my life positively in the following ways:

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This decisionmaking style affects my life negatively in the following ways:

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Based on what you've written, would you like to change your most consistent decisionmaking style? Why or why not?

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Parents, friends, spouses, children, other family members, co-workers, supervisors, and club members are some of the people who can affect an individual's decisions. Who are influential people in your life, and how do they affect your decisions?

People influential  
in my life:

How they affect  
my decisions:

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| <hr/> | <hr/> |

Please remember that the purpose of this workbook is to help you make a planful decision about your next step after AmeriCorps service.

► **Making Good Decisions: Three Steps**

Standard decisionmaking is composed of three basic steps. More discussion on the steps covered in the following sections appears in *Career and Life Skills Series, Making Decisions: Learning to Take Control of your Life* (Michael Farr and Susan Christophersen, Indiana, Ind.: JIST Works, 1991). If you have trouble making decisions or want to understand your decisionmaking process better, the exercises in that book may help you.

**1. IDENTIFY THE CHOICE TO BE MADE**

Initially, the decisionmaker identifies options and criteria. For example, an AmeriCorps member may have identified five jobs/occupations/career fields of interest. Thus, he has identified five potential job options. His clear goal is to decide which option among the five he will pursue in his job search.

**What are your job options at this time?**

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**For example, what criteria might a job-seeking AmeriCorps member use to choose among his five options? Perhaps he has six criteria for any job he seeks, in order of importance:**

- ☛ he must be able to work with elementary school-age children;
- ☛ he wants to be able to create programs for elementary school-age children;
- ☛ he wants to attend school during the day;
- ☛ he must be able to enter his next job with no additional training or experience;
- ☛ he needs a salary of at least \$15,000 a year; and
- ☛ he doesn't want to work shifts or put in much overtime.

► **How will you choose among your own options? What are your criteria for your choice? List them below.**

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**2. PRIORITIZE AND COMPARE**

During your search, you will need to prioritize your criteria—that is, rank them from most important to least important. Let's take the case of the AmeriCorps member just described. For him, working with elementary school-age children, having the opportunity to create programs for the children, and being able to attend school during the day while working were the three most important criteria for his decision.

Following is an example of a simple decision matrix. It lists options horizontally along the top and criteria vertically down the left.

**SAMPLE DECISION MATRIX**

| Options          | Social Work Assistant               | Parent Educator          | Pre-School Aide                     | Elem. During-School Aide            | Elem. After-School Aide             |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Criteria</b>  |                                     |                          |                                     |                                     |                                     |
| Elementary       | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Programming      | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Day School       | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| No More Training | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Salary           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| No Shifts        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |







## Becoming Confident About Your Decision and Goals

The next step is to become comfortable with and confident about the decision(s) you have made and the goals you have set. One way to practice talking about your decision and goals is to talk with important people in your life. They can help you "fine-tune" and articulate your future as you would like it to be.

Look back to the section where you listed the most influential people in your life. Choose five of them and make an appointment with each. If they do not live within local traveling distance, call them on the telephone, correspond by e-mail, or write them a letter. Tell each person about your goal and about how and when you plan to meet it. Seek feedback and encouragement. Ask for support as you begin your search. ....

**In the space below, list the five people you identified and describe what happened during your meeting with each.**

| Name of Contact   | Advice/Encouragement |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. _____<br>_____ | _____<br>_____       |
| 2. _____<br>_____ | _____<br>_____       |
| 3. _____<br>_____ | _____<br>_____       |
| 4. _____<br>_____ | _____<br>_____       |
| 5. _____<br>_____ | _____<br>_____       |

## Announcing Your Goal

Your final step is to announce your goal and the plans you have made to achieve it. Make copies of your revised goal and tape it above your desk, in your car, on the refrigerator, and anywhere else you can think of so you will be confronted with your goal every day. These will serve as a reminder to keep going.

Share your goal with the important people in your life, and describe the methods by which you will work toward it. When you talk about your decision, it will seem less frightening and more do-able in your own mind. At the same time, it lets others know of your commitment. Both will be helpful as you begin your job search or move along the path toward another option.

### MORE HELP AVAILABLE

There are scores of resources available to help you with self-assessment and career planning. See Appendix D, page 96, for career planning resources. Some of the self-assessment process can be done through a computerized career planning program and follow-up with a career planning professional. DISCOVER from American College Testing and SIGI and SIGI+ from the Educational Testing Service are two such programs. They may be found at local community colleges, colleges and universities, government job services, and one-stop career centers. Those organizations may also sponsor career planning workshops or classes. Check out the career planning resources in your local libraries and career centers.



# 6

## Looking at your options



After taking a close look at yourself and doing some research and goal setting, you may feel more ready to think about future options.

In October 1997, 135 former members responded to a survey by AmeriCorps Alums, Inc. Among respondents, 44 percent were going to school, 37 percent were working with nonprofit organizations, 17 percent were working in education, and 13 percent were working in governmental organizations. (Percentages add up to more than 100 percent because many respondents are doing more than one thing.) What option will you choose? To help you with your planning, this part of the workbook explores several possible options:

- ☛ another year with AmeriCorps;
- ☛ more education or training;

- ☛ employment;
- ☛ starting a community-based organization or business; and
- ☛ doing nothing.

Read the sections you believe most apply to you right now, but don't reject other possibilities too hastily.

### Option: Another year with AmeriCorps

One option is to enroll in a second term of service with AmeriCorps. Because policies concerning re-enrollment vary among programs, check with your program leader or supervisor or the state commission for current information.

**Returning to the same program.** Although second terms are possible, program directors have no obligation to re-enroll any AmeriCorps member. To be eligible for a second term, members must satisfactorily complete the first term of service (which will likely include a good performance review, among other program-specific expectations). If you are interested in a third term, be aware that

economics provide a good reason for returning to school

education awards are not available for more than two terms.

**Enrolling in another AmeriCorps program.** AmeriCorps members seeking to enroll in a different program will have to do the legwork to find that program. Your program director or the state commission may be able to help you find AmeriCorps positions for the next year.

The main differences among AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps\*VISTA, and AmeriCorps\*NCCC positions are outlined in a handout, *Summary of Programs*, available from the AmeriCorps recruiting office. The handout can be obtained at [www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov) or by calling 1-800-942-2677. The handout also indicates how to apply for each program.

### Your Motivation

Why are you considering a second term of service? Do you want to complete a project you started in your first term? Do you want a similar experience in a different community? Will you gain new knowledge or skills? Be clear about your motivation, both with yourself and with program directors.

If your reasons for wanting to re-enroll are not totally clear to you, review your self-assessment, which may help you decide what option is best for you—maybe it's another year of service, but maybe not.

The main differences among AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps\*VISTA, and AmeriCorps\*NCCC positions are outlined on the AmeriCorps website, [www.americorps.gov/for\\_individuals/ready](http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/ready), or by calling the AmeriCorps information hot-

line, 1-800-942-2677. Information on how to apply for each program is also available on the website, by e-mailing [recruitops@americorps.org](mailto:recruitops@americorps.org), or by calling the AmeriCorps information hotline.

### Option: More education or training

A key purpose of AmeriCorps is to further the education of AmeriCorps members. As you know, a major benefit of your service will be your education award—which you may use at any point within seven years of completing your AmeriCorps term of service. This section and Appendixes A and B contain information on a variety of topics for members who are thinking about finishing high school, entering a Job Corps program, or seeking postsecondary education or training.

As you consider how you will use your AmeriCorps award, please bear in mind that—in this country, at least—the more education workers have, the more they often make in salary. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, these were the weekly salaries by level of education for full-time wage and salary workers over twenty-five years of age. (These statistics refer to both sexes of all races in 1994.) Notice the regular increase of average salary as educational levels rise, particularly the change from high school graduate to college graduate.

| Level of Education               | Average Weekly Salary |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Less than high school diploma    | \$374                 |
| Under one year of high school    | \$325                 |
| 1-3 years of high school         | \$382                 |
| 4 years, no diploma              | \$525                 |
| High school graduate or above    | \$657                 |
| High school graduate, no college | \$488                 |
| Some college, no degree          | \$571                 |
| Associate degree                 | \$587                 |
| Occupational program             | \$577                 |
| Academic program                 | \$599                 |
| College graduate                 | \$937                 |
| Bachelor's degree                | \$855                 |
| Master's degree                  | \$998                 |
| Professional degree              | \$1,435               |
| Doctoral degree                  | \$1,245               |

As you can see, economics provide a good reason for returning to school. There are other compelling reasons as well. Before making your decision, however, you will want to reflect upon at least three questions:

☛ What do you expect to get out of more education?

☛ Will going back to school get you where you want to be?

☛ Do you realize the commitment necessary to complete a degree?

These questions can be answered best if you conduct a thorough self-assessment and do lots of research. Refer to your self-assessment in Part 5 and to the research and information gathering section that follows the self-assessment. More education is almost always a good investment, particularly when you have your AmeriCorps education award to help finance it.

### Finish High School

In today's job market, a high school diploma is just about essential. If you have not yet completed the requirements for your diploma, there are two routes you can follow. Each requires time and energy.

**more education is almost always a good investment**

### RETURNING TO HIGH SCHOOL

One way to get a high school diploma is to return to a high school in your region. In many school districts, you can do this in one of three ways:

☛ You can attend classes just as any student of high school age does, spending

five days a week at school.

☛ You can enter a work-study or cooperative education program. As an adult who's been out in the world, you might prefer to go to school part-time, attending only the classes needed for graduation and working as well. Some schools even offer programs in which the school works with local employers to place selected students in work situations.

☛ You can enter a special high school program focusing on job training. In these programs, commonly called vocational education programs, students learn mechanics, barbering, electronics, plumbing, licensed practical nursing, carpentry, medical assisting, clerking, hairstyling, or other vocations in actual laboratory settings at a vocational high school.

To find out what your local options are, make an appointment with the principal or guidance counselor at your local high school. If the school doesn't offer the kind of program you want, ask if other schools in the district do. Generally, you will need to go through a special application process for work-study, cooperative education, and vocational education programs. Because school districts usually offer only one vocational school or cooperative education program, competition can be tough for the few slots available. You may find, however, that your AmeriCorps experience (and other

work) enhances your prospects for admission.

### GETTING YOUR GED

Another way to complete high school is to pass the General Educational Development (GED) test, a very common way for people over age eighteen to get a high school credential. Instead of attending classes, people only need to pass a high school equivalency test offered in both English and Spanish. Upon passing, test takers receive the GED credential, which is recognized nationwide. Generally, about 70 percent pass the test on the first try.

Although people are often nervous about taking the GED test, they can take classes that help prepare them. (These are often offered by local school districts.) GED preparation classes offer an introduction to the test and, sometimes, a chance to practice taking a test. In addition, most public libraries have guides to help you prepare. Even if you feel confident about passing the test, it would be wise to check out one of these guides. That way, you can familiarize yourself with the test format and get some helpful tips. If your local high school or public library has no information about GED testing and/or preparation, call your state's Department of Education for help.

If you lived in Madison, Wisconsin, for example, here's how you could go about finding GED information. First, you could contact the principal or guidance counselor at your neighborhood high school, or the career center or academic advisors at the Madison Area Technical College, or your neighborhood public library staff. If none of those avenues worked, you could call the Adult Education or

Basic Education Division of the Wisconsin Department of Education in Madison.

Currently, the GED test covers writing skills, social studies, science, literature and the arts, and mathematics. According to the American Council on Education, which develops and administers the test, the GED measures “broad concepts and general knowledge, not how well they [test takers] remember details, precise definitions, or historical facts. In that way the test can be more fair to those who lack academic or classroom experience or have gained their education informally.”

### Job Corps Training Programs

A program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Job Corps offers tuition-free training in more than 150 occupations to eligible U.S. citizens between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four. In addition to their job training, Job Corps participants can receive basic education, room and board, medical care, clothing, counseling, parenting education, recreation, placement services, and a monthly living allowance.

To be eligible for the Job Corps, you must be from a home considered low-income; be from an area that makes it hard for you to get an education or a job; and be able to complete and benefit from the training you would get at a Job Corps center. Following are just a few of the occupations in which Job Corps offers training:

- ☛ dental and medical assistant
- ☛ licensed practical nurse
- ☛ bookkeeper

- ☛ secretary
- ☛ word processor
- ☛ pre-apprentice for bricklaying, carpentry, electrician, plasterer, and plumber
- ☛ cosmetologist
- ☛ teacher aide
- ☛ surveyor and drafting assistant
- ☛ air conditioning and refrigerator mechanic
- ☛ heavy-equipment mechanic
- ☛ security guard
- ☛ baker
- ☛ cook
- ☛ meat cutter

Call 1-800-733-JOBS to locate the nearest Job Corps center.

### Postsecondary Education

The next level of education after high school requires attendance at one of three types of schools—postsecondary vocational school, community college, or four-year college.

### POSTSECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

Designed for high school graduates, postsec-

ondary vocational schools train students for specific vocations. Sometimes these schools are called technical schools. Although very similar to the high school vocational programs already described, post-high school training is more complete and/or complex.

Postsecondary vocational schools can be public or private: A public vocational school is a nonprofit institution; a private vocational school, sometimes called a proprietary school, is operated for profit. Generally, public vocational schools offer many courses of study, and private vocational schools offer just one. For example, barber colleges or computer schools, which teach only one specific skill, are usually privately owned.

Often, because they are supported by taxpayers, public vocational schools are less expensive than private vocational schools. If you qualify, however, financial aid is often available for either type of school. To check on your eligibility, call the financial aid office of the school you wish to attend.

This office will have information on eligibility requirements and on the application process for financial aid. In the unlikely event the school has no such office, contact the Registrar.

Depending upon the course, you may spend anywhere from a few months to two years in a postsecondary vocational program. Most schools offer classes at night and/or on weekends to accommodate adult students who work. Instructors tend to be people with lots of hands-on experience in the field. This type of

instructor (and school) can be particularly helpful to students who learn better by doing than by reading or by hearing lectures. Upon completion of their courses of study, graduates of postsecondary vocational schools earn a certificate of completion or an Associate degree.

Sometimes students are preparing for careers that require certification or licensing by the government. For example, in most states electricians and licensed practical nurses must pass written exams if they are to practice their vocations there. If you decide to enroll in a program that requires government licensing, be sure to find out what material the course covers and how well the school’s graduates have done in past testing. That will give you an idea of how well the school prepares its students.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Public schools offering an Associate two-year degree, community colleges provide academic programs such as English, psychology, and math. Because classes are usually taught by professors rather than by teaching assistants, students may find the instruction at community colleges better than that available for first- and second-year students at some universities. Sometimes community colleges also offer vocational programs. Like vocational schools, community colleges welcome working adults as students, scheduling classes in the late afternoon, at night, and on weekends.

Often, a community college serves as a path to public four-year schools in the same state. Thus, many credits earned at the community college will transfer to public four-year col-



leges. This is not true for all courses, however. So if you plan to attend a community college for two years and then go to a four-year school, check about transferability of credits before signing up for classes.

In most states, you will find a community college within commuting distance. The quality of the instruction, the relatively short drive, and the ability to live at home and/or keep a local job while studying leads many people to attend these schools. Moreover, a community college may cost less overall than a four-year school.

#### FOUR-YEAR SCHOOLS

A four-year college graduate earns either a Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.) or a Bachelor of Science degree (B.S.). If you major in French literature, say, or Latin American studies, you would earn a B.A. History, political science, and African-American studies are other examples of a major that would yield a Bachelor of Arts degree. If your primary emphasis is biology or chemistry, your degree would be a B.S. The same would hold true for mathematics and engineering.

Within the four-year category are both colleges and universities, with the difference relating to size, mission, and/or funding source.

**Colleges.** These schools tend to be smaller than universities and often emphasize quality teaching. Many of these schools are private and rely upon tuition, fees, and fundraising for their budgets.

**Universities.** Generally schools with large enrollments, universities often place considerable emphasis on research (sometimes more so than on teaching). If they are public institutions, as universities often are, they can charge less tuition because of state subsidization. The larger the school, the wider the possibilities for study. Some small liberal arts colleges, for example, can't offer such specialized programs as engineering, forestry, or nursing.

Most states have a comprehensive state university system into which community colleges feed students. In California, for example, there are three branches of higher education—the community college system; the University of California (which has several other campuses besides the more commonly known Berkeley and Los Angeles); and California State University (also with several campuses). Students can attend four-year colleges for the entire four years or begin at a community college and then transfer at some point. Not all state university systems are required to accept community college graduates for admission, however.

If you decide to pursue a four-year degree in your home state, you will need to know the components of its system of higher education. For example, is there a community college system feeding into the four-year colleges? What is the closest college or university to you? Is it public or private? Does it offer a degree pro-

gram that closely matches your career interests? Find out what's available.

#### MORE HELP AVAILABLE

For information on the world of higher education in general, see Appendix B, which covers a number of topics in some depth. Whether you need help in choosing a course of study or in figuring out how to apply for admission and/or financial aid, the discussions in Appendix B can provide you with the information you need or give you tips on finding it. A bibliography relating to higher education is included in the Higher Education section of Appendix D, page 97.

deciding to go to graduate or professional school is a big decision that can lead to quality education and entry into a profession or career of your choice

#### Graduate School

At the next educational level are graduate schools where students pursue specialized, professional-level knowledge and skills. A college degree is a prerequisite to entering graduate school. If such a path interests you, read through Appendix C. Also check the Higher Education section of Appendix D, page 97.

## Option: Employment

Will you seek work as your next step after AmeriCorps? If so, what type of work and

where? In what type of organization? How will you look for work? Do you have marketable skills and experience? This section focuses on employment and job searching. In working your way through the material, you will be referring to the self-assessment you completed at the beginning of Part 5 and to the sections on research and information gathering and on goal setting in Part 5.

#### Current Employment Trends

**Job Opportunities.** You've probably heard the term "downsizing," which refers to decreasing the number of employees in a company or organization through layoffs. According to *People Trends* (published by the Strategy Group in Dublin, Ohio), from 1992 to 1995, IBM laid off 122,000 employees; AT&T, 83,000; General Motors, 74,000; the U.S. Postal Service, 55,000; and Sears, Roebuck and Co., 50,000. Most new jobs are being created in small and medium-sized companies.

In projections for U.S. employment through 2005, the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics expects the largest increases in job opportunities in services, retail trades, health, and education. Twenty occupations will make up half of all employment growth—cashiers, janitors, waiters, home health aides, guards, nurses' aides, retail salespersons, teachers' aides, child care workers, registered nurses, managers, systems analysts, secondary and elementary school teachers, marketing and sales supervisors, receptionists, secretaries (except legal and

medical), clerical supervisors and managers, and maintenance repairers.

Occupations that will have the highest percentage growth, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, are personal aides, home health aides, systems analysts, computer engineers, electronic-pagination systems workers, occupational therapists and assistants, physical therapists and aides, residential counselors, human service workers, manicurists, medical records technicians, amusement and recreation attendants, corrections officers, operations research analysts, and guards. (Note: To get information about what people in these occupations do, ask at the local public library for the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, both published by the U.S. Department of Labor. More about these two books appears in the self-assessment section of Part 5.)

### **Contractual Employment.**

In a recent survey of its membership, the American Management Association (which includes 8,000 of the nation's largest companies) found that employees who survive layoffs work longer hours to make up for the absence of those who have been laid off. Further, hiring of temporary and/or contractual workers after the downsizing is common. Hiring these employees tends to be less expensive because they accrue no benefits and they work for a limited time only, with no further expectations.

According to some business authors, contractual and temporary employees are the

wave of the future. For some, "traditional" employment already seems to be on its way out; increasingly, the forty-hour week for twelve months a year (and a salary that includes benefits) is giving way to part-time and temporary and contractual work.

Some futurists predict that employment success in the next century will require each worker to create a "portfolio" career, with one or two very specific knowledge and skill areas and several employers. Basically, such workers will be their own employers, marketing and hiring themselves out to various organizations and companies for certain projects.

For example, in the new scheme, a technical writer might have an editing contract that requires one week a month for a year; a three-month contract to write a manual at home, with an agreed-upon compensation package no matter how many hours go toward the manual; and a third contract to teach two technical writing classes per semester at the local community college. A writer and teacher, this worker markets herself as both. Because she is not a "full-time" employee at any of the three locations, she must pick up her own health, life, and disability insurance; her Social Security contributions; and any savings for her retirement. She earns no vacation or sick-leave time with this employment pattern.

If the trend toward contractual employment intensifies, individuals will have much more responsibility for their work lives in the near future. For example, they will have to:

- know and articulate regularly their knowledge areas and skills;
- market themselves all the time;
- stay very current in their fields; and
- remain flexible and be skilled at time management and financial planning.

For those who get bored easily, want to be challenged regularly, and/or like change, the new work dynamic will be easy. It will be harder for people who like stability, dislike change, and/or seek supervision.

**A Technical Trend.** Another major employment trend is toward technical training and jobs. By the year 2000, eight of every ten jobs will not require a bachelor's degree, according to several national job surveys. The new jobs will be technical—such as film and video production, dental lab work, laboratory research support, and microcomputer repair. Of Florida's top thirty future jobs recently described in the *Miami Herald*, none required a bachelor's degree. (J. Barry. "Career paths going technical," October 29, 1995). Most required a two-year associate degree or training certificate. Among the thirty top prospects were dental hygienist, licensed practical nurse, automotive technician, truck driver, graphic and commercial artist, electrician, police officer, firefighter, legal and/or medical secretary, and paralegal.

## The U.S. Economy: Three Sectors

Throughout this chapter there are references to three sectors of the U.S. economy—public, non-profit, and private.

**Public Sector.** The public sector encompasses the government—federal, state, county, regional, and local. Into this sector fall AmeriCorps members who worked with or through state universities, the Environmental Protection Agency (national or state level), the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state or city departments of parks and recreation, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, and so on.

**Nonprofit Sector.** Here we find organizations whose intent is to break even rather than make a profit. Often, such organizations are service organizations—the Red Cross, agencies, hospitals and clinics, homeless shelters, food banks, professional associations, public policy groups, advocacy groups, and counseling centers. Also falling within the nonprofit sector are such organizations as Habitat for Humanity, United Way, Teach for America, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, I Have a Dream Foundation, and YWCAs/YMCAs. All of these are examples of nonprofit organizations that host AmeriCorps members.

**Private Sector.** Organizations and companies in the private sector are created to make money for their owners and/or shareholders. Some examples of large organizations in the private sector include IBM, AT&T, General Motors, and Sears. Smaller private sector organizations include restaurants, accounting firms, welding companies, grocery stores,

attorneys, small manufacturers, and private medical and dental practices.

If your next step after AmeriCorps is employment, which sector of the economy do you think might offer the best employment possibilities for someone with your skills, knowledge, goals, and interests? The material that follows will help you look at that question in some depth.

### Career Development Theory

As you consider an employment plan, it might be useful to look at the way some experts believe careers progress. The following model presents four stages, the first of which is exploration—where you may find yourself today. (This model was developed by Donald Super in *The Psychology of Careers*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.)

**Exploration.** People in this stage are exploring career possibilities,

making decisions about which career field to enter, and beginning to pursue that field.

**Establishment.** At this step, people are working hard to establish themselves, to become secure, and to advance in their chosen careers.

**Maintenance.** Here, people are seeking to maintain higher levels of responsibility and to stay abreast of new developments in their fields. At this stage, employees may face challenges created by age, family issues, health, and/or increased competition.

**Disengagement.** In this stage, people begin to reduce workload, delegate certain responsibilities, and plan for post-employment life.

Progression through the career development stages was originally thought to be linear—that is, moving from one stage to the next over a lifetime. The past pattern of career development is depicted by the first graphic below. Over the past decades, however, career “recycling” and career adaptability have become widespread. For example, contemporary workers may go through several cycles of the four stages in a lifetime as depicted in the second graphic below. New cycles begin as workers’ values, interests, abilities, and needs change—or as their employers downsize or change their orientation. In the second graphic below, each circle represents a cycle of experience, establishment, maintenance,

and disengagement (D.E. Super, A.S. Thompson, and R.H. Lindeman. *Adult Career Concerns Inventory: Manual*

*for Research and Exploratory Use in Counseling*. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, p. 88).

individuals will have much more responsibility for their work lives in the near future



AmeriCorps service may have opened a possible new path of employment to you, turned you on to some new ways of thinking about work, helped you to eliminate certain possibilities, and/or made you even more confused about your employment future! If you are in a confused state, don't worry. Help is on the way in the upcoming sections.

### Conducting a Self-Directed Job Search: Five Phases

The most effective job searches require several phases—self-assessment, research, decision-making, action, and, quite often, readjustment. Although the first of these phases—self-assessment, or taking stock—is often ignored, it is really the foundation upon which all others depend. The importance of self-assessment cannot be overemphasized.

You will notice that taking action appears as the fourth phase in the search. Usually, however, this is the first thing novice job seekers do—writing a resume, applying for vacant positions, and so on. But if you skip the first three phases, you may find yourself conducting a longer job search and one that yields disappointing results.

Part 5 guides you through these first three vital phases; perhaps you have done them already. If not, work through them thoroughly. Then move ahead to the fourth and fifth phases. Although it doesn't relate directly to your job search, the section “Being Smart at Your

New Job” on page 72 can help you keep the job you find. Be sure to work through that material as well.

### Phase One of the Job Search: Self-Assessment

In this phase, job seekers begin to sort out what they want in a job. One way they can do this is by examining their values, interests, skills, and preferences. Perhaps you did this already in the self-assessment portion of Part 5. If not, work through it now because it will help you discover who/where you are at this moment.

### Phase Two: Research and Gathering Information

You may have done much—or possibly all—of this work already in Part 5. If you did not, refer back to pages 38–41 now, as that material will help you research, identify, and explore work options. In this phase, you are looking for the types of work and/or employers that share the values, interests, skills, and personal considerations you identified in your self-assessment.

### Phase Three: Decisionmaking and Goal Setting

When you have thoroughly researched your career and employment options, you are ready for the tasks of the third phase. You will decide



which career fields or types of jobs or occupations you are going to seek. Then you will be ready to set some goals for the job search process. To get some help with this phase, refer to Part 5, which deals with making decisions and setting goals.

### Phase Four: Taking Action

In this phase, job seekers begin their active search for a job. You will note that some tasks of this phase are those most job seekers do first, such as writing a resume and applying for jobs. However, the process usually is shorter, with better results, when the job seeker first takes the time and thought to go through the first three phases—self-assessment; research and information gathering; and decisionmaking and goal setting.

Please don't take shortcuts, because you may sabotage yourself. After all, if you don't know where you are going, how will you get there? Follow the road map through every step of the job search cycle.

#### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- ☛ How can you best represent yourself to prospective employers?
- ☛ What strategies are most effective for your job search?
- ☛ Who will help you with your job search?

#### TASKS TO COMPLETE:

- ☛ Develop an action plan.
- ☛ Write a basic resume.

- ☛ Network, network, network!
- ☛ Target employers who hire people who do what you want to do.
- ☛ Apply for work formally and informally.
- ☛ Practice interviewing.
- ☛ Interview.

#### JOB SEARCH ACTION PLAN

When you reach this point, you may find it useful to create both a long-term plan and a

short-term plan. For example, use your long-term plan as a way to plot out what you will do for the next several weeks or months. For your short-term plan, determine a specific plan for action every week. Following is an example of a weekly plan. You can copy it or design your own plan for each week.

Besides keeping you focused on the matter at hand—seeking work—a weekly plan will help you keep track of what you've done (and what you haven't). Sometimes job seekers fool

themselves into thinking they've done much more than they actually have. So check your expectations. Make them reasonable, yet challenging. The more time you spend on the job search, the better. In fact, try to treat job searching as a full-time job; spend up to forty hours a week on the various elements of your search. But also be reasonable. Take time to enjoy family, friends, and community and leisure activities.....

#### Job Search Action Plan for Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

| What I'll Do | What Resources I'll Use | By When | What Happened | Follow-Up |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------|---------------|-----------|
| 1.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 2.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 3.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 4.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 5.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 6.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 7.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 8.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 9.           |                         |         |               |           |
| 10.          |                         |         |               |           |

## YOUR RESUME

One way to get your foot in the door of a prospective employer is by developing a resume that summarizes your skills, accomplishments, and experience. Even for information interviews, you will need a resume. Think of this document as a form of advertisement for you—one that helps you get interviews. (See the end of the fourth phase for a sample cover letter to accompany resumes you send out.)

Although several types of resume formats exist, the two most common are chronological and functional.

**Chronological.** In the chronological resume, job seekers describe their skills, accomplishments, and experience. They list these by job, starting with the most recent and working backward. (See page 62.) You probably should use the chronological resume unless you have a compelling reason not to.

**Functional.** Not all employers like this form of resume, though it helps career-changers or generalists show what they can do for a new employer. The functional resume lists skills and accomplishments by skill area, rather than by job. Actual job titles, organizations, and years of employment appear in a separate section. (See page 63.) Even if you decide that a functional resume is best for you, you should create a chronological resume as well. Some prospective employers will ask for the chronological type eventually, even if they accept the functional at first.

think of your resume  
as a form of  
advertisement for you

## RESUME ELEMENTS

Here are the general elements of a resume, listed in order:

**Contact Information.** In this section, put your name, address, and telephone number (one with an answering machine). Also include a fax number and e-mail address if you have them.

**Objective.** List an objective here, if you have one and it is specific. For example, a job title such as "After-School Program Aide" could be used as an objective. If your objective is not specific, don't put it in your resume.

**Summary of Qualifications.** For this section, write a brief summary highlighting your skills, experience, and accomplishments that apply to the job you are seeking.

**Employment Experience.** For chronological resumes, list employment by position, noting job titles, names of organizations, locations, and dates by year. For a functional resume, list employment by skill areas, focusing on skills and accomplishments rather than duties and responsibilities.

Be as specific as you can about your skills and accomplishments. Begin each description of your work with an action verb in the past tense. You will find a list of action verbs at the end of the fourth phase. Choose from that list, or use other action verbs. Also, use numbers as much as possible if they are impressive. For example, instead of writing "supervised staff members," write "supervised three clerks and two interns."

**Education and Training.** If you have a degree, list it, along with institution and date granted. Do not list courses, majors, and college activities unless they are clearly relevant. Be sure to include all the training you have received as an AmeriCorps member. There's no need to list your high school; if you haven't attended college but are a high school graduate, concentrate on training only—create a section called "Training," as shown in the sample of a chronological resume

**Special Skills.** If these will be needed in the job for which you are applying, list them. Consider listing computer and language skills also.

Note: Your resume should not include a reference list or personal information such as birthdate, health status, or family information.

## GETTING STARTED ON YOUR RESUME

The process of drafting a resume—particularly describing your experience in the language of action and accomplishments—can be intimidating. If you're unable to get started, follow these steps:

1. Complete all the easy resume elements from the previous list, using the sample resumes on pages 61 to 63. Make room for the summary of qualifications and descriptions of your experience even if you're not ready to do those.
2. Start with your AmeriCorps experience. If you have a description of your service assignment, review it and divide your responsibilities into general categories—such as direct ser-

vice, administration, community development, budgeting, program design, evaluation, and needs assessment. Begin by writing down what you did today as an AmeriCorps member. Then place each of those activities or tasks into one of the responsibility categories you've created. At this point, don't worry about language; just match activities and tasks with categories.

If there are things you do often as an AmeriCorps member but didn't do today, add these to your activity/task list. Categorize them by responsibility.

Next, decide which of your responsibility categories you think your resume should emphasize. Of these, choose the two or three that are most important. Then reword each activity or task in those responsibility categories. One way to do this is to have your description incorporate an action verb from the list on page 69. Use numbers whenever you can to describe your accomplishments. (Review the resume samples to get an idea of how you might use numbers in your own resume.)

3. Using the process described above for responsibilities, follow these steps:

- ☛ Describe each entry in the experience block of your resume.
- ☛ Look for common themes among your experiences. If you find them, use these for your summary of qualifications. (Review the resume samples again for reference.) If you see no common themes, ask others to help you identify them.
- ☛ Continue to refine your resume, seeking feedback from the people who know you best.

Here are a few general trends to keep in mind as you put your resume together:

☛ Because the use of personal computers and word processing have become so commonplace for resumes, it is expected that resumes submitted for a specific job vacancy will be tailored to that vacancy. So create a comprehensive “generic” resume on your computer. Then, use only those parts of it that directly relate to the job you seek.

☛ A summary of qualifications is increasingly used as the first entry on resumes.

☛ Quantifiable accomplishments are becoming the name of the game. So as much as you can, use numbers to describe your work. For example, cite the size of the budget you created, the number of employees you supervised, the amount of savings your management resulted in—or how many trees you planted or schools you helped repair. When the numbers are impressive, use them.

☛ Some careerists predict that resumes will become obsolete in the near future. To apply for jobs, people will instead use letters that highlight accomplishments, skills, and experience. Furthermore, this letter will be “broadcast” via e-mail rather than hand-delivered or sent through a mail-delivery system.

follow the road map through every step of the job search cycle

☛ With the widespread use of the Internet, many job seekers will need to design an electronic version of their resume. That version must look very different than a hard copy so that it transmits well. Richard Bolles has recommended several websites to consult for advice about this process. Check out the section on resumes in *Job Hunting on the Internet*, Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 1997.

#### Some Final Words of Advice

☛ Refer to the skills exercises and self-assessment summary sheet you completed in Part 5. Both contain excellent information to use on your resume.

☛ Keep your resume to one page if possible. If you have worked for more than ten years, go to two pages, but remember that the second page will get little attention. A study in the late 1980s found that each resume received an average of eleven seconds of attention during initial screenings. Put all important information about yourself on the first page.

☛ Get feedback on your resume from supervisors, peers, and anyone whose opinion you value. But also remember that if you ask ten resume “experts” about your own resume, you’ll probably get ten different suggestions about how to revise it. As you finish up, you might want to ask yourself these questions:

—Is the resume accurate? Don’t embellish, but also don’t be humble.

— Is the resume easy to read? Does it have enough white space?

— Does the resume highlight your experience that’s relevant to the job you are seeking? (For example, you don’t want to use a lot of space describing your experience with computers if you are applying to become a counselor.)

— Are you pleased with your resume? If you think your resume represents you well, go with it. If you are not so sure, keep working.

— Critique your resume using a method described by one expert who suggests seven areas to evaluate in a resume (Ronald Krannich. *High Impact Resumes and Letters*. Manassas, Va.: Impact Publications, 1990).

☛ Overall appearance

☛ Contact information

☛ Objective

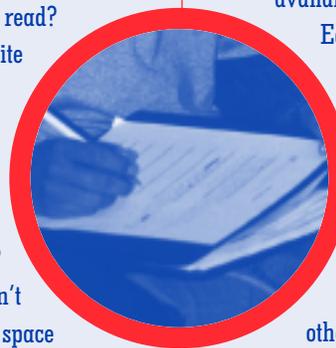
☛ Organization

☛ Content

☛ Language

☛ Length

If you would like more help with resume writing, look through some of the many guides available. They include *Resumes* (2nd Edition) by the National Business Employment Weekly, *Through the Brick Wall: Resume Builder* by Kate Wendleton, and *The Damn Good Resume Guide* and *The Resume Catalog: 200 Damn Good Examples*, both by Yana Parker. These and other resources should be available at your public library, career center, or bookstores.



**SAMPLE**

**AmeriCorps \*NCCC**

**Resume**

**JAMES B. WHITMORE**  
888 Green Valley Drive  
Piney Fork, KY 12345  
(555) 666-7777  
jbw456@compu.com

**SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS**

- 3 years of community service experience
- Excellent communication skills
- Energetic, committed, self-starter
- Computer literate

**COMMUNITY SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

**AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps**

Member, Denver, Colorado

1997-98

- Selected to participate in a one-year, residential, national service program.
- Worked on community projects as part of a team in Rocky Mountain region of U.S. with emphasis on environment, education, public safety and human needs.
- Completed 1,700 hours of community service.
- Built a nature preserve and hiking trail in the Snake River Park, Idaho.
- Sampled water from rivers and tributaries and conducted lab analysis of samples with EPA, Denver, for 6 months.
- Tutored 15-3rd and 4th graders in reading and arithmetic at Williams School, Denver, three times per week for 6 months.

**Madison University Community Initiatives Program**

Community Service Volunteer, Charlottesville, VA

1995-97

- Tutored 3 adults in neighborhood literacy program, twice a week for 2 years.
- Sorted and distributed food to service agencies and families once a week for a year.
- Served as a Big Brother to a 12 year old community resident for 3 years.

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**Bachelor of Science (Biology)**

Madison University, Charlottesville, VA

1997

**AmeriCorps \*NCCC Training**

Certified in American Red Cross First Aid, Disaster Relief, CPR and Child CPR.  
Completed training in Diversity, Trailbuilding, Tutoring and Community Development.

1997-98

# SAMPLE

## Chronological

## Resume

**JUAN SANCHEZ**  
123 Main Street  
St. Louis, MO 44444  
(555) 222-3333

**OBJECTIVE:** After-School Program Aide

### QUALIFICATIONS

- Four years of experience as pre-school aide
  - Bilingual in English and Spanish
- Resourceful, reliable team-worker with sense of humor

### EXPERIENCE

#### **Preschool Aide** (AmeriCorps Member)

ABC Preschool, St. Louis, MO

1995-96

- Supervised group of 10 three-year-olds, four hours a day.
- Created language and math readiness activities.
- Taught Spanish to English-speaking children and English to Spanish-speaking children daily.
- Wrote 35-page orientation manual for new aides.

#### **Kindergarten Aide**

St. Mark's Elementary School, St. Louis, MO

1992-95

- Assisted teacher with activities for 25 children.
- Monitored individual reading levels; tutored individuals.
- Supervised children during recess.
- Planned field trips outside neighborhood three times a year.

### EDUCATION AND RELATED TRAINING

#### **Bachelor of Arts**

Wallace James College, Adena, MO  
Major: English

1994

#### **AmeriCorps Training**, St. Louis, MO

Cross-Cultural Communication, Time and Stress Management, Community Development, Needs Assessment

1995-96

#### **Diocese of St. Louis Training**, St. Louis, MO

Creative Play, Reading Readiness

1992-95

# SAMPLE

## Functional Resume

### SHANTEL WHITE

Route 2, Box 888

Everytown, Texas 33333

Tel: 444-666-7777

e-mail: shanteltext@bol.com

**OBJECTIVE:** Police Dispatcher

### EMERGENCY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT SKILLS

- Police aide for two years
- Member of rural volunteer fire department for six years
- Certified EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) in Texas

### CLERICAL SKILLS

- Excellent typing skills: 75 words per minute with 100 percent accuracy
- Computer literate: Word Perfect and DBase III software
- Extensive record-keeping, filing, and office machinery experience

### EXPERIENCE

#### Police Aide (AmeriCorps Member)

Jefferson County, Texas

1994-1996

#### Volunteer Firefighter

Smithfield Township, Jefferson County, Texas

1990-1996

#### Co-op Student/Office Clerk

XYZ Oil Refinery, Port Arthur, Texas

1992-1994

### TRAINING

#### Police Aide Training:

80 hours of law enforcement training

Jefferson County, Texas

1994

#### AmeriCorps Training:

Cross-cultural communication; community project development; time management

Jefferson County, Texas

1994-96

## Job Search Strategies

As you carry out your search, you will discover many ways to find a job—classified ads, state and private employment agencies, direct application, placement services, union hiring halls, information from friends and family about openings where they work, electronic job searching through the Internet. Don't rely upon any one method—use as many methods as you can.

Two search methods, networking and direct targeting of employers, are particularly effective because they tap into the hidden job market. The "hidden" job market refers to jobs that are vacant but not advertised publicly. It is estimated that as many as 75 percent of jobs are unadvertised (J. Hoppin, editor. *Workforce in Transition: A Blueprint for Adult Career Development and Job Search Training*. Stillwater, Okla.: NOICC Training Support Center, 1994, p. C-39). Work smart in your job search. Spend the bulk of your time in the most effective job search activities. Use other methods as well, but spend less time on them.

**Networking.** A network is an informal group of people (and all the people they know) who can help a job seeker. As you look for employment, try to expand your network to gather in as many people as possible who can give you information.

Who is in your network right now? People who influence your decisionmaking to some

degree are definitely members of your network. Family members, co-workers, former co-workers, fellow AmeriCorps members, current and past supervisors and teachers, members of your church, people who granted you information interviews, community group members, social friends, sports team members, parents of your friends and neighbors—all the people you know are potential members of your network.

Use the same methods for networking that you use for information interviewing. Make contact, ask for help, follow up on suggestions, stay in touch, and always write thank you notes. Keep the network alive by constantly working it. Keep the people in your network informed about where you are in your job search and whether their suggestions have worked. Expand your network by getting together with new people you've met through people in your existing network.

Think of this process as a spider's web, with each connection (each person in the network) leading you to several others who lead you to more connections. The larger the web, the stronger it becomes, until you have a solid network of job information and leads. The worksheet on page 68 may help you visualize the networking function. Begin by listing at least twenty people you know right now who will be willing to help you with your job search.

**Cold Contacts (or Direct Targeting of Employers).** As you were conducting information interviews, you may have identified employers that hire people who do the things

you hope to do. After you've clarified your job search goals, contact those employers again and let them know you are interested in working in their organizations. Even if there are no vacancies, ask for job interviews. Talk about how you, your experience, and your goals fit into the organization. Stay in contact. You never know when a vacancy will occur. When one does, you want to be in the hiring person's mind.

Make a list of employers that you would like to work for and that offer jobs like the one you are seeking.

Expand your list of desirable employers by working your network. Ask people to help you identify employers who offer the kind of work you want to do. Follow up on each suggestion. And keep networking and targeting specific employers even when it appears that you have saturated the market. Remember that 70 percent of jobs are found through these two methods.

**Job Search Correspondence.** The best job search methods use personal, one-on-one contacts. Sometimes, however, job seekers have to use conventional methods. One of these is the cover letter. (See sample letter on page 69.)



| Places I Would Like to Work | My Contact There |
|-----------------------------|------------------|
| _____                       | _____            |
| _____                       | _____            |
| _____                       | _____            |
| _____                       | _____            |
| _____                       | _____            |
| _____                       | _____            |
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| _____                       | _____            |
| _____                       | _____            |

When applying for jobs without personal contact, cover letters are critically important—whether they go out through the mail or electronically. Such letters, which take the place of personal contact, must make a compelling connection between the enclosed resume and the job.

Your cover letter needs to make three points, concisely:

- ☛ why you're writing;
- ☛ how your background matches what the employer is seeking; and
- ☛ when you will contact the employer again.

For additional tips on writing cover letters, you may want to refer to *The Perfect Cover Letter*, by Richard H. Beatty, and *Dynamic Cover Letters*, by Katherine Hansen.

## Interviewing

At this stage, the purpose of an interview generally is to get a job offer if you want it. At a minimum, however, you will be gaining practice in interviewing.

**Before the Interview.** You need to do some important work before you ever set foot in the door for your interview. In fact, what you do before the interview can be as important as what you say during the interview itself. Here are some steps that will help you prepare yourself:

you need to do some important work before you ever set foot in the door for your interview

☛ Identify at least three of your strengths, and practice describing them.

☛ Think about the three most important or difficult problems you've solved as an AmeriCorps member or at another work setting. Employers like people who can solve problems.

Describe the actions you took to solve the problems and the results of your actions.

☛ Choose four or five questions about the job or organization to ask the interviewer. The questions you ask are almost as important as those you answer. Your questions indicate to the interviewer understanding of, preparation for, and interest in the job. Use the list of sample questions for prospective employers on page 65 to develop questions specific to your situation.

☛ Anticipate questions you may be asked. Think about what an interviewer would want to know; then put together a response and practice it. For example, what do you like best/least? Discuss a problem you have had at a previous job and how you resolved it. What is your greatest strength/weakness?

☛ Have a written list that includes the employer's name and location, the date and time of the interview, the interviewer's name, and direc-

tions to the location. Make an initial "dry run," so you won't get lost or underestimate the time it takes to get there. If you will be driving, locate a parking lot nearby. (Plan to arrive about fifteen minutes early. This gives you time to freshen up and displays your punctuality.)

☛ Gather materials you have written or produced that are relevant to the job you are seeking. Take these with you to the interview.

☛ Compile a reference list. Type it in a neat form, with your name at the top (e.g., References for John Doe). Take this list with you, just in case you are asked for it.

☛ Try to find out who will be interviewing you and how long the process will take. You want to minimize the number of surprises you encounter.

☛ Prepare a "cheat sheet" with two lists to take into the interview. The first list should contain the questions you want to ask. The second list should contain the four or five most important things you want the interviewer to know about your qualifications for the job.

☛ Practice answering tough questions. Videotape yourself if you can. You will be amazed at how well you do with some parts of the interview and will also realize what you need to work on. Ask someone you trust to review the videotape with you.

☛ Plan how you want to look and what you will wear for the interview. This task is not a frivolous one. The image you project to prospective employers may be as important to the selection process as are your skills, experience, and references.

The general rule is to be very clean and neat. You may need to get your hair cut, send your dress or suit to the dry cleaners, or polish your shoes. Your clothing, jewelry, make-up, and general appearance should be downplayed and not distracting. In some settings, for example, an open neckline, short skirt, or sleeveless shirt may be unacceptable. Consider wearing subdued colors, and don't wear flashy, noisy, or large jewelry. It's a good idea to avoid fragrances, whether cologne or aftershave.

If you have questions about how you should look for an interview, ask employed acquaintances about dress codes in their workplaces. It is always better to be overdressed for an interview—wearing a suit and tie to an office where most men work in sport shirts, for example—than it is to find yourself looking very informal in a formal environment.

**During the Interview.** Here are some guidelines you may find useful to remember when you arrive at the interview:

☛ Shake the hand of the interviewer(s) firmly at the start and end of the interview.

☛ Make eye contact with all interviewers.

☛ Maintain a positive attitude, and speak with enthusiasm.

- ✦ If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- ✦ Discuss only job-related information. Don't philosophize, tell stories, or bring up unrelated personal information.
- ✦ Respond to each question as fully as you can. Keep responses to a minute or two, then offer to talk more about the topic if the interviewer wants you to.
- ✦ Make only positive or neutral remarks about past employers.
- ✦ Be prepared to discuss your career plans for the next five years.
- ✦ Before you leave, check your "cheat sheet." Ask the questions you have prepared, if they haven't been answered, and be sure that you have covered the basic points you identified about your qualifications.
- ✦ Ask what the next steps in the process will be and how long they will take.
- ✦ If true, state your strong interest in the job.
- ✦ Thank the interviewer(s).

**After the Interview.** Even after your interview, you are not "home free." There are still some tasks for you to carry out—tasks that can affect the ultimate success of your employment goal.

- ✦ As soon as possible, review the interview. Make a written list of what you want to work on for the next interview. On your list, note which questions gave

you problems and why. Also note which questions you answered easily and how you answered them.

- ✦ Write the interviewer(s) a brief thank you letter. Include an expression of strong interest in the job, if you have it. If you decide you don't want to be considered further for the job, call the interviewer with this information and then send a thank you letter. (See page 71 for a sample thank you letter.)
- ✦ Once the process deadline (which you should have asked about during the interview) has passed, follow up with the employer. However, don't call too often; you don't want them to find you a nuisance. No response may mean that you were not selected, as many employers find it difficult to give applicants this information; it may also mean that the process is taking longer than expected.

(All of this interviewing advice is adapted from "Interview Preparation Checklist for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers," by Mona Melanson. The checklist is a handout from Returned Volunteer Career Services, Peace Corps, Washington, D.C. 20526.)

**Interviewing Resources.** Just as there are resources to help people with their resumes, there are also resources that focus on interviews. For example, community career centers often offer interview practice; some of them

videotape the practice interviews and then provide feedback to the person who's practicing. If you have a career center in your area, check to see if it offers assistance in preparing for interviews.

Your public library may lend videotapes on interviewing to community members. There are many excellent videotapes available. Your library will certainly offer written material on interview techniques; two resources are *101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions*, by Ron Fry, and *Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed*, by H. Anthony Medley.



### Decisionmaking and Negotiations

Review Part 5, "Making Decisions That Work for You," and use your decision matrix on page 45 to help you decide whether to accept a job offer. In addition, ask for the advice of people who know you and your work well. Talking over a decision is often a good way to see how the decision feels and "fits" you.

If you believe you can influence the amount of the salary offered in the proposed job, you may want to read *Negotiating Your Salary: How To Make \$1,000 A Minute*, by Jack Chapman. Salary negotiation used to be an expected part of private sector hiring and at times was possible as well in the nonprofit and public sectors. These days, however, salary setting is often less flexible. If that is true with

your job offer, you might try to negotiate for other benefits such as disability insurance or more vacation time.

### Barriers to Employment

When looking for a job, you may find your efforts hindered from time to time. Not having enough information is a major barrier, but there are others that can slow you down as well. Read quickly through the list on the following page, and put a check next to barriers you believe exist for you. (For now, ignore the part of the chart that asks how you'll overcome your barriers. It's important to do the work quickly.)

### MORE HELP AVAILABLE

There are scores of resources available to help you with your job search. See Appendix D, page 96, for a listing of job search resources. Community colleges, colleges and universities, government job services, and one-stop career centers in your area may sponsor job search workshops. Check out the job search resources in your local libraries and local career centers.

| POSSIBLE BARRIER                             | Now Present? | How I'll Overcome It |
|--|--------------|----------------------|
| <b>Focus:</b> None, too narrow, or too broad |              |                      |
| <b>Discrimination</b><br>Type:               |              |                      |
| <b>Stress</b>                                |              |                      |
| <b>Poor time management</b>                  |              |                      |
| <b>Hate or fear of networking</b>            |              |                      |
| <b>Shyness</b>                               |              |                      |
| <b>Low self-esteem/ lack of confidence</b>   |              |                      |

| POSSIBLE BARRIER                                   | Now Present? | How I'll Overcome It |
|--|--------------|----------------------|
| <b>Difficulty in requesting help</b>               |              |                      |
| <b>Lack of desire for a job</b>                    |              |                      |
| <b>Competing demands</b><br>(e.g., family, school) |              |                      |
| <b>No experience with job searching</b>            |              |                      |

Now look carefully at the possible barriers to employment you identified. Think about how you'll deal with these barriers; then jot down how you plan to overcome them. The idea behind this list is to anticipate roadblocks you may face in your job search. If you realize that some problems will arise, you remove the element of surprise and can begin to consider ways of coping.

# NETWORKING WORKSHEET



| Persons to Contact  | Contact Information   | Who Referred Me?                             | Data & Results of Contact   | Additional Contacts Gained   |
|---------------------|---|--|---|--|
| <b>SAMPLE ENTRY</b> |   |  |   |  |
| Shirley Freeman     | Red Cross,<br>51 N. High St.,<br># 700<br>Columbus,<br>OH 43215<br>614-555-1212 | James Rodriguez,<br>Catholic Social Services | 7/2/97 Info Interview<br>-see notes<br><br>7/2/97 Sent Thank you letter | 1. John Coe,<br>Dir. of Dev.,<br>United Way,<br>614-555-6666<br><br>2. Kathy Kaminski,<br>Fundraiser,<br>Am. Environmental Congress,<br>614-555-8888 |

| Persons to Contact and Why | Contact Information | Who Referred Me? | Data & Results of Contact | Additional Contacts Gained |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
|                            |                     |                  |                           |                            |

# SAMPLE

## Cover Letter



Your Street Address  
Your City, State, Zip Code  
Today's Date

Name of Manager or Human Resources Director  
Job Title of That Person  
Organization's Name  
Street Address or Post Office Box  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to apply for the position of "X" that you advertised in the Sunday "Good Jobs R-Us" newspaper. Having four years of experience as an "X," I think I may be a good match for your requirements.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume for your review. As you will see, my background includes "a, b, and c" (skills or experiences asked for in the ad). My strengths are in the "x, y, and z" areas you need (these are the "preferred" or "desired" items listed in their ad).

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to being able to meet with you so that I may explain how I think I could make a contribution to "Organization's Name" as an "X". I will call next week to arrange a time to meet with you.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Your Telephone Number

enclosure

Source: Career Resource Manual for Returning Peace Corps Volunteers. Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps Office of Returned Volunteer Career Services, 1995.

### Action Verbs for Effective Resumes

|              |              |             |              |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>A</b>     | <b>D</b>     | helped      | <b>N</b>     | <b>R</b>     | spoke        |
| achieved     | decided      | hired       | noted        | recognized   | streamlined  |
| adapted      | defined      |             | negotiated   | recommended  | strengthened |
| addressed    | delegated    | <b>I</b>    | nominated    | recorded     | structured   |
| adjusted     | demonstrated | identified  |              | reduced      | supervised   |
| administered | designed     | implemented | <b>O</b>     | re-evaluated | supported    |
| arranged     | determined   | improved    | observed     | referred     |              |
| assembled    | developed    | increased   | obtained     | refined      | <b>T</b>     |
| assessed     | directed     | informed    | organized    | regulated    | trained      |
| needs of     | drafted      | initiated   | originated   | reported     | transferred  |
| assigned     |              | instructed  |              | represented  | transformed  |
| authored     | <b>E</b>     | interpreted | <b>P</b>     | reorganized  | translated   |
|              | eliminated   | introduced  | participated | researched   | treated      |
| <b>B</b>     | ensured      |             | perfected    | resolved     |              |
| built        | entered      | <b>J</b>    | performed    | responded    | <b>U</b>     |
| budgeted     | established  | judged      | persuaded    | restored     | updated      |
|              | evaluated    | justified   | piloted      | retrieved    | upgraded     |
| <b>C</b>     | examined     |             | pinpointed   | revamped     | used         |
| calculated   | expanded     | <b>K</b>    | planned      | reviewed     |              |
| changed      | expedited    | kept        | prepared     | revised      | <b>V</b>     |
| checked      |              |             | presented    |              | validated    |
| collaborated | <b>F</b>     | <b>L</b>    | prevented    | <b>S</b>     | verified     |
| communicated | filed        | launched    | produced     | saved        |              |
| compared     | finalized    | led         | promoted     | scheduled    | <b>W</b>     |
| completed    | fixed        | located     | proposed     | screened     | won          |
| conceived    |              |             | proved       | selected     | wrote        |
| conducted    | <b>G</b>     | <b>M</b>    | provided     | set up       |              |
| coordinated  | generated    | maintained  | purchased    | simplified   |              |
| created      | guided       | managed     |              | solidified   |              |
|              |              | mastered    | <b>Q</b>     | solved       |              |
|              | <b>H</b>     | monitored   | questioned   | spearheaded  |              |
|              | handled      |             |              |              |              |
|              | headed       |             |              |              |              |

Adapted from *Job Transition Manual*. Deerfield Ill.: Baxter Healthcare Corporation Institute for Training and Development, 1994.

## Sample Questions for Prospective Employers

**Why is this position open?**

**What are some of the objectives you would like accomplished in this job?**

**What kind of support does this position receive in terms of people, finances, etc.?**

**What are some of the more difficult problems that one would have to face in this position?**

**How do you think these could be handled best?**

**What freedom would I have in determining my work objectives, deadlines, and methods of measurement?**

**Where could a person go who is successful in this position and within what time frame?**

**In what ways has this agency/organization been most successful in terms of products or services over the years, particularly more recently?**

**What significant changes do you foresee in the near future?**

**How would you describe your management style?**

**What do you see as my strengths, shortcomings, and chances for this position?**

Source: *You Can Do It!* Deerfield, Ill.: Baxter Healthcare Corporation Institute for Training and Development, 1990.

# SAMPLE

## Thank you letter— informational Interview



1492 Columbus Circle  
Ft. Worth, Texas 77542  
May 5, 1997

Mr. Scott Dobbs, President  
Food for the World, Inc.  
6160 Rice Avenue  
Dallas, Texas 76530

Dear Mr. Dobbs,

Jan Winkle was right when she said you would be most helpful in advising me on a career in nutrition.

I appreciate your taking time from a busy schedule to meet with me. Your advice was most helpful, and I have incorporated your suggestions into my resume. I will send you a copy next week.

Again, thank you so much for your assistance. As you suggested, I will contact Mr. Robert Russell next week regarding career options.

Sincerely,

Camille Marks

Source: *Career Resources Manual for Returning Peace Corps Volunteers*. Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps Office of Returned Volunteer Career Services, 1995.

# SAMPLE

## Thank you letter- employment interview



1066 Hastings Court  
Syracuse, New York 72205  
November 16, 1996

Dr. Marvene Johnson  
Personnel Department  
Myrtle Corporation  
17 Hatfield Drive  
Syracuse, New York 12291

Dear Dr. Johnson,

Thank you for the opportunity to interview with you yesterday for the Management Trainee position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning about Myrtle Corporation. I was especially impressed with your progressive stance regarding personnel issues.

Your organization appears to be moving in a direction that parallels my interest and career goals. The interview confirmed my initial positive impressions of Myrtle Corporation, and I want to reiterate my strong interest in working for you. My experience in managing a small-business cooperative, plus my training in communication, will enable me to progress steadily through your training program and become a productive member of your management team.

Again, thank you for your consideration. If you need any additional information from me, please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

James Harris

## Phase Five: Readjustment or New Transition

Sometimes job seekers get stuck in a search and need to readjust their strategies or begin the process again, both of which can be disheartening. If this happens to you, it may mean that you need to put more attention into the self-assessment and research phases of the job search process. Do them again if you didn't spend much time on those two phases. After doing so, if you remain stuck, talk to a professional career counselor, who may be able to help you get "unstuck" more quickly than you can on your own.

After a successful job search, you may enjoy your new job for quite a while. Eventually, however, most people decide to look for another job either within or outside the organizations in which they currently work. They begin new job searches and enter new transitions.

Sometimes, forces beyond their personal control thrust job-holders—even those content with their jobs—into another job search. For example, one spouse is transferred to another city, but both want the family to live in one place. Or someone's job is eliminated because of budget cuts or a merger. Such forces, which are pretty much beyond their control, can put people back into the job search process.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS FOR AN UNSUCCESSFUL JOB SEARCH:

- What steps did you skip or not pay attention to?

- What is keeping you from being successful as a job seeker?

- Who can help you figure out what went wrong and how to correct it?

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS FOR A NEW TRANSITION

- How do you feel about this new transition?

- What can you do to get control of this situation (if the transition was imposed, not chosen)?

- What is different from your previous job search? (For example, you may have developed some new skills that you want to use in your next job.)

- What is the same as in your previous job search? (For example, your values or priorities may not have changed.)

- What was satisfying and not satisfying at your most recent job?

### TASK TO COMPLETE:

- Begin the self-directed job search cycle all over again!

## Being Smart at Your New Job

If you find yourself at phase six, you have fulfilled your goal of finding employment. Now, having found it, you are ready to think about making your new job a success.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- What do you want to get out of your new job?

- What steps can you take to be sure your new job is a success?

- How can you make the best of opportunities that exist at your new workplace?

### TASKS TO COMPLETE:

- Understand and operate successfully within the culture of the new workplace.

- Understand and make use of learning and training opportunities.

- Find and benefit from a mentor.

- Be realistic about your aspirations.

- Deal with any conflicts at the new workplace.

- Enjoy the new workplace.

### NEW-JOB "JITTERS"

If you have enjoyed your AmeriCorps experience, you may find it hard to leave. This has been a setting in which you've been successful, challenged, and supported, and in which you've probably had fun. Starting all over again may have limited appeal, to say the least. Moreover, AmeriCorps members often have earned some status in their communities. Giving that up to become a new person in another organization can be hard.

As anyone who has started a new job knows, entering a new and unknown workplace can be tough. New responsibilities, new co-workers, a new supervisor—all these can be daunting at first. Combining a great deal of challenge and little perceived support (it may be there but may go unrecognized), a new job can be the source of considerable anxiety for a while.

### UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

As you begin a new job, try to guard against unrealistic expectations. Sometimes, new employees assume that their skills and knowledge qualify them for work beyond their capabilities and experience. In other words, their reach is somewhat beyond their immediate grasp. Be realistic about what you offer, and work from there.

No magic strategies exist to move you from entry-level clerk to president of an organization in two years. However, it's true that hard work, continual learning and upgrading of skills, and a good attitude can help you move up. But moving up is a mostly gradual process in today's market. Creating a life with economic benefits—a home, car, education for your children, etc.—is a difficult task, and one that doesn't happen overnight or without a great deal of commitment and hard work.

Try to be realistic. If you are not, you will be disappointed and probably unsuccessful in the workplace. Take one step at a time.

## SKILLS YOU WILL NEED

According to a U.S. Department of Labor study, the attributes adults need if they are to be successful at work fall into three areas—basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities (Report of the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. *What Work Requires of Schools*. U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

### Basic Skills

- ☑ Reading
- ☑ Writing
- ☑ Listening
- ☑ Speaking
- ☑ Arithmetic and mathematics

### Thinking Skills

- ☑ Creative thinking
- ☑ Decisionmaking
- ☑ Problemsolving
- ☑ Ability to learn
- ☑ Reasoning

### Personal Qualities

- ☑ Responsibility
- ☑ Self-esteem
- ☑ Sociability
- ☑ Self-management
- ☑ Integrity/Honesty

A second study summarized four basic areas that employers consider when evaluating job performance (Jane Goodman and Judith Hoppin, cited in J. Hoppin and H. Splete, (Eds.), *Curriculum for Career Development Facilitators*, Rochester, Mich.: Oakland University, 1996, pp. 4-40).

**Dependability/Reliability.** Employers want employees to come to work as scheduled unless a strong, legitimate explanation is given. Further, employees must have the ability to follow through on a task without continual supervision.

**Punctuality.** To be successful, employees must report to work on time and ready to work. This expectation applies as well to meetings, breaks, and lunch times.

**Quality of Work.** Company and job survival both depend upon employee ability to produce a product or service of quality.

**Quantity of Work.** Productivity is also an important element of success on the job.

A third study of employer expectations identified these basic skills as critical to job performance (“Workplace Basics.” American Society for Training and Development, 1988):

- ☑ Knowing how to learn
- ☑ Reading, writing, and computation
- ☑ Listening and oral communication
- ☑ Adaptability
- ☑ Personal management (ability to set goals, motivate yourself, and build self-esteem)
- ☑ Group effectiveness
- ☑ Influence (understanding the organiza-

tion and informal networks, establishing influence so as to contribute ideas)

In reviewing these lists of skills, you may find that you’ve developed or enhanced many of them during your AmeriCorps service and

training. Answer the following questions and share the second list with your supervisor and/or mentor at your new workplace as soon as you feel ready to do so. He or she will be able to help you identify ways to develop and/or enhance the skills you’ll need to be successful at your new workplace.

### What skills and qualities have you developed and used so far?

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### What skills and qualities do you need to work on in your new job?

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## GETTING POSITIVE EXPOSURE AT YOUR NEW WORKPLACE

While you may have had a lot of flexibility and autonomy during your AmeriCorps service, you may find your new employer keeping a tight rein on you as a new employee. Don't despair. Such circumstances are common for the first few months until new employees prove themselves. There are several ways you can work to become accepted, to take on responsibility, and to become a valued member of your new workplace quickly.

Use the self-management skills you've learned throughout your life. Be friendly, meet deadlines, take initiative, pull your weight, go the extra mile, and be enthusiastic.

Learn the organizational culture and work within it. During your AmeriCorps service, you have experienced training and firsthand exposure to many cultures. And you have learned that diversity means more than race or ethnicity or regional differences; diversity is also evident in the cultures of organizations.

How would you describe the culture of your workplace? How do people dress, interact with one another, communicate, and treat customers and clients? Do things seem formal or informal? How do people in the organization operate? Don't always trust first impressions; it's safer to observe and ask questions. Learn what works and what does not. As you begin to gain confidence, use the accepted ways of presenting and/or communicating information and of leading.

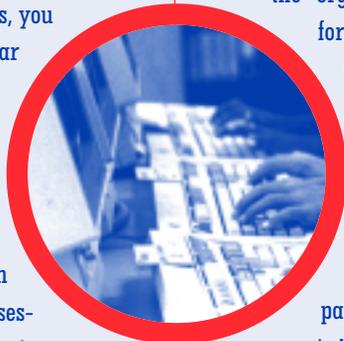
(Note: As you begin to learn the culture of your new workplace, you may discover certain

norms that make you uncomfortable. This could mean that your personal values conflict with those of the organization; if this is the case, you may find it difficult to work there. For long-term satisfaction, it is important to find an organization with values similar to yours.)

**Volunteer for projects.** Treat your new workplace as a new community, because it is. Become active within this new community. If you move outside your sphere of work, you will become visible and a part of the informal network more quickly. Making and keeping commitments is always a good work strategy.

**Demonstrate a team player attitude.** In the workplaces of the future, team players with many skills will be critical. Work cooperatively with others. Show your spirit, commitment, and versatility.

**Be willing and eager to learn new skills and experience different situations.** Although your AmeriCorps service has exposed you to many training opportunities, you may find such opportunities far less common (and less formal, as well) in your next workplace. In some organizations, the training is informal and has to be sought out. For example, rather than attending a formal training session on the computer system at your new workplace, you may have to acquire knowledge and skills on your own through trial and error and/or by asking co-workers. Stay on the lookout for ways to increase and improve your skills.



**Find and learn from a mentor.** A mentor is "any person with useful experience, knowledge, skills or wisdom" who "offers advice, information, guidance, support or intervention to another for that individual's personal and professional development" (Heiser, L., *Final Proposal for a Career Information and Mentoring Network*, Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Career Management Program, 1997, p. 4). You may have had one or more mentors as an AmeriCorps member. Now it is time to find another at your new worksite. A mentor can orient you and assist you with career development opportunities and ongoing professional development needs (p. 7). Although some workplaces have formal mentoring programs, most do not. After you've been on the job for a while, you may identify someone who can serve as an adviser, supporter, and coach for you within the organization. Ask that person for help. Be clear about your expectations.

A mentor can help you better understand the way the organization functions, give you a history of past practices, encourage your participation in new projects, introduce you to influential people in the organization, and generally guide you along your way in the new workplace.

**Learn from your mistakes.** Accept the fact that you will mess up occasionally. Employees who don't make mistakes may never try new

ideas. However, try not to make the same mistake more than once.

**Resolve conflicts maturely and with good will.** Conflicts are inevitable at the workplace. When they arise, use the conflict mediation skills you've learned through your AmeriCorps service. Don't let conflicts escalate until they are too big to handle.

**Use your sense of humor to your best advantage.** A good sense of humor will take you a long way in the world of work. It can reduce conflicts, make the workplace more enjoyable, and help you to make friends and allies.

**Exercise the essential ingredients of innovative, successful leadership** (described by Bennis and Namus in *Leadership: Strategies for Taking Charge*):

- ☛ a clear sense of purpose;
- ☛ staying on track through tenacity and commitment; and
- ☛ viewing mistakes and setbacks as learning opportunities.

**Work smart.** In today's workplace, everyone has too much to do. Your best bet is to set priorities for yourself. Spend time on the most important projects first, and then get to the others as you can. Your priorities may be different from those of your supervisor. Resolve that difference together.

be friendly, meet deadlines, take initiative, and be enthusiastic

# Option: Starting Your Own Community- Based Organization or Business

This section is designed to introduce you to the general attributes needed for entrepreneurial pursuits and to some sources of information. It is a beginning for the budding entrepreneur, not a comprehensive approach to the topics.

Do you want to be your own boss? Do you want to contribute further to the community in which you live or serve? Do you have a great idea for a new product or service, an improved version of an existing product or service, or a way to capitalize on a community's assets while working to solve its problems? Do you like managing your own time and making decisions and accepting their consequences—positive or negative? Do other people sometimes ask you to provide a product or service or new ideas or creative solutions to problems? Are you willing to work harder and longer than you ever have before? Can you imagine having the creativity, pragmatism, perseverance, commitment, and independence needed to be a successful entrepreneur or community organization founder?

**if you do decide to start your own business, you'll be in good company**

As an AmeriCorps member, you may have had a taste of the entrepreneurial spirit within a community-based organization as you've independently carved out a niche in your community; decided what needed to be done; considered and implemented creative options to deal with issues; located resources and allocated them as carefully as possible; raised money; found experts and evaluated their direction/advice; created and kept to a budget; managed your own time; and made your own decisions. If you've enjoyed those aspects of your AmeriCorps service, you might want to think about starting your own community-based organization or business.

If you do decide to start your own business, you'll be in good company. According to Richard Bolles, author of *What Color is Your Parachute?*, more than 10 million Americans (one in every twelve workers) work in their own businesses. (Richard Bolles. *What Color is Your Parachute?* Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 1995.) Women, who are starting businesses at twice the rate of men, make up over 30 percent of all small business owners. From 1989 to 1991, the fastest growing industries for U.S. small business were computers, software, and computer-related services; health care; oil and gas exploration; public golf courses; and business consulting (from the Small Business Administration and the Census Bureau, cited in *The Washington Post* in 1995).

## Does This Sound Like You?

If there is such a thing as an "entrepreneurial personality," do you have one? Successful new

business owners and founders of community-based organizations tend to be alike. Following are descriptions of those who tend to be successful and some advice that applies to both community-based organization and business start-ups.

- Successful founders of community-based organizations and new businesses go with what they know to be a certain market, asset or need, and learn what they need to know to be successful. They know how to focus. This means having an idea or product or a way to deal with an issue that is simultaneously realistic and creative. It also has to be needed and wanted by large numbers of people and/or organizations. Having a great idea for a new business isn't enough. You have to be able to sell it. And getting "buy-ins" from the community at the grassroots level, from informal and formal leaders, is critically important with a community-based organization, as you have learned through your AmeriCorps service. Listen carefully to what community members say. It is tough to find others who share your passion. Experts suggest that clarity about what needs to be done and support based on relationships with people and other organizations that have resources you need—such as money, expertise, and time—are critical. Further, who will be your "competition?" Sometimes with a community-based organization, there is no need to create a new organization. You can join or piggyback upon an existing one. Location is also critical for both nonprofits and businesses. For example, if a youth service

organization is not located near a school and is far away from public transportation, it will probably not be used.

- Successful founders of community-based organizations and new businesses meticulously prepare for, and put their whole hearts and all their energy into, their work. They also are able to achieve some balance in their lives. As important as running the new organization or business is planning for it and having the commitment to sustain yourself during the hard times. A clear, detailed business plan is essential. Make very clear commitments to very specific tasks. There are many books and other resources available on the elements of a business plan such as financing, marketing strategies, distribution techniques, and all the other elements required to make the business successful. A nonprofit or business start-up is not a good place for those who want to work only forty hours a week. New organizations and businesses require a lot of energy and, sometimes, blind faith. Expect craziness and disappointment at times. It can be emotionally tough and very hard to do, but also very rewarding. Try to balance an all-out commitment to a new nonprofit or business with time for yourself, family, and friends. Have some fun once in a while.
- Successful founders of community-based organizations and new businesses are willing to take risks. These risks are more than financial. Self-esteem, time with family and friends, psychological well-

being, time for leisure activities, and quality of life may also suffer. With a new organization or business there are no guarantees—failure is always a possibility.

Examine your motives for starting a community-based organization or business, and identify what you expect to gain from the adventure.

There are no right or wrong expectations; just be honest with yourself. List below the type of organization you dream about, why you want to start it, and what you expect to get out of it. Are you being both realistic and creative? .....

**TYPE OF ORGANIZATION/BUSINESS**

**Motivations**

**Expected Gains**

**What You Need To Learn**

Experts agree that starting a for-profit or non-profit enterprise requires similar knowledge. Whether you are considering a start-up nonprofit or business, there are several areas of expertise you need to have, acquire, or get from others with whom you are planning:

**there are no right or wrong expectations; just be honest with yourself**

- ☛ feasibility studies/community and/or market assessments
- ☛ motivation and self-esteem
- ☛ legal issues
- ☛ business promotion
- ☛ networking
- ☛ funding sources
- ☛ assessing personal financial strength
- ☛ identifying interests and skills
- ☛ assessing self-employment potential
- ☛ conducting market/community needs and assets surveys
- ☛ planning marketing strategies
- ☛ maintaining business records
- ☛ managing customer credit (for businesses)
- ☛ setting goals
- ☛ creating business plans, including identifying the people needed to make the venture a reality and determining the financial investment needed to launch and maintain the business through its first year

**Sources of Assistance**

If you are considering and/or preparing for a start-up, following are several sources of assistance you can call upon. Whether your organization will be for-profit or nonprofit, take advantage of what is available to you.

Although some sources of information are specific to nonprofit or for-profit enterprises, prospective entrepreneurs should consult all sources for assistance.

**GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

Local vocational schools, community colleges, economic development offices, and Small Business Administration centers offer various kinds of training for the prospective entrepreneur.

The Small Business Administration (SBA), an agency of the federal government, serves as an advocate for small business in the United States. The agency funds fifty-five Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) and 750 service locations across the country to educate current and prospective business owners. Those centers, often affiliated with universities, state and local governments, and private businesses, offer workshops and/or classes.

To get information on SBA services and/or to locate your local SBDC, call SBA's "answer desk" at 1-800-8-ASK-SBA, or retrieve information on-line at: [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)

## SCORE (SERVICE CORPS OF RETIRED EXECUTIVES)

SCORE is a national network of former business people with an average experience of thirty-five years. Available through the SBA, members offer counseling services to prospective and current business owners without charge.

## OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

### Businesses for Social Responsibility

**609 Mission Street, 2nd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94105-3506  
(415) 537-0888**

[www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org)

BSR is a membership organization for companies of all sizes and sectors. Its mission is to help its member companies achieve long-term commercial success by implementing policies and practices that honor high ethical standards. Eleven regions support members at local levels.

### Compass Point Nonprofit Services

**706 Mission Street, Fifth Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415) 541-9000**

[www.compasspoint.org](http://www.compasspoint.org)

Compass Point Nonprofit Services is the national parent organization for thirteen affiliate support centers nationwide. The affiliates are in Ann Arbor, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, New York, San Diego, Providence, San Francisco, Orlando, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Santa Barbara, and Washington, D.C. They provide professional development seminars in nonprofit management and technology as well

as consulting services and print relevant materials.

### Co-op America

**1612 K Street, NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20006  
(800) 58-GREEN  
(202) 872-5307**

[coopamerica.org](http://coopamerica.org)

Co-op America is a national nonprofit organization that provides economic strategies, organizational power, and practical tools for businesses and individuals to address social and environmental problems. It seeks to educate and empower U.S. citizens and businesses to make significant improvements through the economic system.

### Echoing Green Foundation

**198 Madison Avenue, 8th Floor  
New York, NY 10016  
(212) 689-1165**

**e-mail: [general@echoinggreen.org](mailto:general@echoinggreen.org)  
[www.echoinggreen.org](http://www.echoinggreen.org)**

Echoing Green is a nonprofit foundation that applies a venture capital approach to philanthropy. Through its fellowships, the foundation provides seed money and technical support to social entrepreneurs starting innovative public service organizations and projects that seek to catalyze positive social change. Individuals must apply through participating undergraduate or graduate programs or community-based organizations. Graduates of a limited number of schools are eligible to apply for funding. Check the website for information about which schools' graduates are eligible.

### Foundation Center

**79 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10003-3076  
(212) 620-4230**

[www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)

The Foundation Center provides seminars and comprehensive library/resources, including numerous in-house publications, about fundraising, nonprofit management and potential sources of funding. The Foundation Center in Washington, D.C., also provides comprehensive services at 1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 938, phone (202) 331-1400. Centers in San Francisco, Cleveland, and Atlanta offer regional information. Additionally, major libraries across the nation include Foundation Center collections. Call the New York or Washington, D.C., office to find the library resource collection nearest you.

### National Center for Nonprofit Law

**2001 S Street, N.W., Suite 410  
Washington, D.C. 20009-1125  
(202) 462-1000**

National Center for Nonprofit Law provides information, education and documents to lawyers, trustees, volunteers and staff on the legal, financial and organizational issues facing nonprofit institutions. This organization also operates a clearinghouse of legal documents successfully used by members for other members, conducts educational seminars, and publishes briefing papers in plain language.

### National Council of Nonprofit Associations

**1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
(202) 833-5740**

[www.ncna.org](http://www.ncna.org)

The affiliates of this group offer assistance to persons or groups in thirty states. They know the general requirements of nonprofit incorporation and also provide jurisdiction-specific information. Some affiliates offer workshops and management support to nonprofit organizations. For example, the Minnesota Council of Non-Profits has a web page on how to start a nonprofit in Minnesota: [www.mncn.org](http://www.mncn.org)

### National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship

**120 Wall Street, 29th Floor  
New York, NY 10005  
(212) 223-3333**

[www.nfte.com](http://www.nfte.com)

NFTE (pronounced "nifty") is an international nonprofit organization that introduces at-risk teens from inner cities and other low-income communities to the world of business and entrepreneurship by teaching them how to develop and operate their own legitimate small businesses through in-school, after-school, and camp experiences. To date, about 10,000 students have participated in the NFTE program.

### Net Impact

**660 Market Street, Suite 210  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
(415) 984-3300**

[www.netimpact.org](http://www.netimpact.org)

This is a professional network of emerging business leaders committed to using the power of business to create a better world. The website includes a Career Services Center for members and links to contacts at over 40 campuses nationwide.

**Social Venture Network**  
**P.O. Box 29221**  
**San Francisco, CA 94129-0221**  
**(415) 561-6501**

[www.svn.org](http://www.svn.org)

The Social Venture Network advances the movement for responsible business, including support of numerous member efforts to develop and evolve business and social ventures. The Social Venture Network provides interactive opportunities for entrepreneurs to focus on problems faced by CEOs who are attempting to run socially responsible businesses.

**(Amherst H.) Wilder Foundation**  
**919 Lafond Avenue**  
**St. Paul, MN 55104**  
**1-800-274-6024**

Through its publishing center, the Wilder Foundation provides information individuals might be able to use in the programming and/or management of their own social welfare organization. The foundation focuses on best practices and oriented to results.

**Youth Service America**  
**1101 15th Street, N.W., Suite 200**  
**Washington, D.C. 20005**  
**(202) 296-2992**  
**e-mail: [info@ysa.org](mailto:info@ysa.org)**  
**[www.servenet.org](http://www.servenet.org)**

Youth Service America sponsors community entrepreneurs through the Fund for Social Entrepreneurs. It also has a resource guide, *Answer the Call*, that profiles more than fifty youth service organizations and eighty national and community organizations.

## BUSINESS OWNERS AND FOUNDERS/DIRECTORS OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

An excellent source of information are people in your own community who are already operating businesses or have started businesses or nonprofits themselves. They have experienced the thrills and challenges of the first year, know the market for their product/service well; they may be familiar with funding sources and similar ventures; they probably have additional sources of information and assistance; and they most likely will be willing to offer advice and encouragement to a prospective member of the community. Many business owners and nonprofit directors are affiliated with professional groups such as the Chamber of Commerce or a group of nonprofit directors, which you might want to join or at least meet its members. Be prepared to ask hard questions. Be sure to ask what went well for them and what didn't. Learn from their mistakes.

Don't assume that only people in a nonprofit or business similar to the type you are considering will be helpful. Talk with as many people as you can to get their advice.

### MORE HELP AVAILABLE

There are numerous publications that can help you as you start your nonprofit or business. Start with the publications listed in this section and your local library. Also take

advantage of written or electronic assistance through your state, regional, local, and/or city government offices of economic development. Other resources are listed in the section called Starting a Community-Based Organization on page 75 and in Appendix D, page 96.

## Option:

## Doing

## Nothing?

This section is for people who are making no plans for their lives after AmeriCorps. This is a position that AmeriCorps members sometimes find themselves in; perhaps they lack the energy to pursue their next steps immediately, maybe they need more information, or maybe the cause is something else entirely. If this describes you, take a few minutes to review the following material.

It might be helpful to look at some of the reasons AmeriCorps members find themselves doing nothing. Here are seven of the most common:

- If they lack experience with transitions, AmeriCorps members may be intimidated by the planning and work needed to change.
- Members who lack support from family

and friends for their next steps may have too little confidence to move on. People need a lot of support during change; without it, the process becomes much harder.

- AmeriCorps members who had a great service experience may be sad about leaving and unable to think about next steps.
- Those who had a bad service experience may be avoiding the next step, fearing that another bad experience will follow.
- Members may have worked so hard that they cannot raise the energy and spirit needed to gather information and make decisions about next steps.
- Some members, believing themselves to have few skills, may feel hopeless about their prospects after AmeriCorps.
- AmeriCorps members may fear that what they want for the future and what they can actually achieve are very far apart. These members may be afraid of failing, have unrealistic expectations, or lack confidence in their ability to succeed.

Whatever their reasons, some AmeriCorps members will find themselves doing nothing for a while after their service ends. The important thing to remember is that doing nothing is a choice, just as seeking employment, starting a business, or going back to school are choices. Although doing nothing may be more passive than active, it is a choice nonetheless.



## Getting Out of the Rut

If any of this section relates to you, think about what might account for your lack of action toward a next step. To get some help with this, ask your AmeriCorps colleagues—other members, the AmeriCorps leader, supervisors, your program leader—as well as family and friends. (People you trust and who know you well have your best interests at heart.) They will probably be candid and have some pretty good ideas about why you're "stuck" where you are.

Next, determine whether you want to change your behavior. Is there something you want to pursue but can't, for some reason? Or are you content to continue doing nothing?

If you decide you really want to change your behavior, ask for help. In some cases, a gentle nudge in the right direction might get you going. Or maybe more attention, training, or support is needed. Some members who are content doing nothing may need time to "debrief" from or to mourn the loss of the AmeriCorps experience. Others may feel powerless and unable to move on. They may need to seek career and/or personal counseling.

Sometimes "helpers" find that it is hard to help themselves. AmeriCorps members who are in this position might try to step back and view themselves as they would a community member who needs help. What would you do for someone in a position like yours? Figure out your response to that question, and then follow your own advice.

If you are doing nothing and are unhappy with that fact and unable to get out of your rut,

be as good to yourself as you can. Exercise, eat and sleep well, spend time with people you love and enjoy, volunteer for something. Do whatever makes you feel good about yourself.

Finally, remember that there are no easy answers to getting out of a rut. However, there are two things you can do while you find your way—look for the help you need (or ask others to do it for you) and give yourself a break. In other words, be as good to yourself as you can.

# 7

## Moving on

**I**n moving through this workbook, you have begun to explore the transition from AmeriCorps service to your next step. Perhaps you're feeling a bit more clear about what your next step, or steps, might be—getting more education, seeking employment, starting your own business or community-based organization, re-enrolling for another year of AmeriCorps, doing nothing, or some combination of these.

Remember that any transition begins with an ending, followed by a time of uncertainty, and ending with a new beginning. Try not to fear the period of uncertainty. Instead, use it to your best advantage by accepting it and working through it.

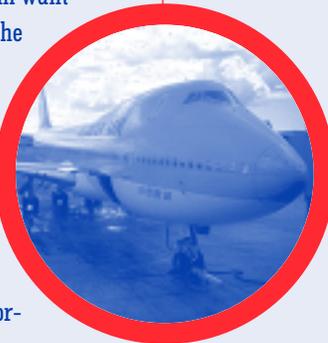
No matter what you eventually decide to do next, the self-assessment portion of the workbook can be helpful to you now. If you haven't worked through that section of Part 5, please do so before you make any decisions of a seri-

ous nature. Take stock of who you really are and what you have to offer.

Although you may be tempted to coast through decisionmaking about your next step, try to face the task head on. If you get stuck, ask those around you to help you get unstuck. Think long and hard about where you're heading with your life. Without such reflection, you may find yourself spinning your wheels or making impulsive choices that don't work for you. Take this opportunity to investigate who you are, where you are, and where you want to go.

You have seen that this workbook functions rather like a menu, allowing you to pick and choose the sections you wish to focus on. Don't move on without reading "AmeriCorps and You" and "Continuing to Serve," as those sections apply to all AmeriCorps members. You may even find yourself referring to sections from time to time as your future unfolds. And perhaps, at a later point, you will want to address other sections of the workbook that seem less important to you now.

Above all, be good to yourself by taking full advantage of opportunities to learn and serve at your next stop in life. Learning and serving are cornerstones of a satisfying life.



any transition begins with an ending, followed by a time of uncertainty, and ending with a new beginning



# APPENDIX A

## Education award information



Education awards are provided from a special account in the United States Treasury called the National Service Trust. This Trust is managed by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Education awards are subject to income taxes in the year they are used.

### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU COMPLETE YOUR SERVICE?

When you complete your term of AmeriCorps service, the director of your project (or for AmeriCorps\*VISTA members, the Corporation State Office) will notify the Trust that you have successfully completed service. The Corporation will send you a *Voucher and Payment Request* form and instructions for completing the voucher.

You may then present the voucher to your loan holder or the school you plan to attend.

The loan holder or school will complete a portion of the voucher and send it to the Corporation for payment. Payments will be made directly to the loan holder or school, not to you. The Corporation will notify you that a payment has been made and send you a new voucher showing any balance in your Trust account.

You should receive your voucher from the Corporation within 14 days of the Trust receiving notification from your project that you have completed your term of service. The voucher will be sent to the address that you furnish on your end-of-term paperwork. It is important that you keep the National Service Trust informed of any changes to that address during the seven years you are eligible to use the award.

### ABOUT YOUR EDUCATION AWARD

You can divide the amount of your education award and use it any way you want, as long as it is used for authorized expenditures. You could, for example, apply a portion of it to existing qualified student loans and save the remainder to pay for authorized college costs a few years down the road. The education award must be used within seven years of the completion of your service. You may apply for an extension if, during the seven-year period, you perform another term of service in an approved AmeriCorps position or if you were unavoidably prevented from using the award.

Participants in certain AmeriCorps programs may elect not to receive the education award but to take a post-service stipend

instead. AmeriCorps\*VISTA members may choose either a stipend check or an education award—but not both. All other AmeriCorps members are only eligible for an education award from the Trust. AmeriCorps\*VISTA members who have chosen a stipend will receive a prorated portion of that stipend based on their length of service, regardless of their reason for leaving.

### PAYMENT OF ACCRUED INTEREST

If you successfully complete your term of service and have obtained forbearance, the Trust will pay all (for full-time members) or a portion (for part-time members) of the interest that accrues on your loans while you are serving. Since these are benefits above and beyond your education award, interest payments will not be deducted from the amount of your award. The Trust cannot pay any interest accrued during the period if you do not successfully complete your term of service. However, although generally you cannot have any interest paid by the Trust if you don't complete a full term of service, it may be paid under other federal regulations. Your lender will be able to tell you whether your student loan qualifies for another type of deferment or forbearance.

You should request from your loan holder a bill or statement showing the total amount of interest that accrued during your postponement period (your service period). A form to request this information will be made available to you through your project or you can ask

your loan company for this information by calling on its toll-free line. The notice from the loan company should include the beginning and ending dates upon which this total was based. You may have this bill or statement sent directly to the National Service Trust or preferably mailed to yourself. If it is sent to you, you should make a photocopy for your records and mail the original to the Trust. The Trust will pay the interest when it has: 1) verification from your project that you have successfully completed your term of service; and 2) the bill or statement showing the total amount of interest that accrued during the term of service.

### COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

#### What do I need to do to get the education award?

You must successfully complete your term of service. Then, within 14 days of receiving the End-of-Term Form from your project, the Trust will send you a voucher and letter that you should take to the school or your lender. The payment will be sent directly to the school or lender; it does not go to you.

#### How many education awards can I receive?

Two. You may receive one award for your first and second terms of service. Both terms can be for full-time, part-time, or reduced part-time terms or they can be for two different types of terms.

### **How long do I have to use my education award?**

You must use the award within seven years of the date you complete your service. You may apply for an extension of this time period if you were performing another term of service in an approved AmeriCorps program or if you were unavoidably prevented from using the award during the period. You must apply for an extension before the end of the seven-year period.

### **What can I use my education award for?**

Awards can be used:

- ▶ to repay existing or future qualified educational loans; and
- ▶ to pay for the cost of attending a qualified institution of higher education or an approved School-to-Work program, as defined by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor.

The award isn't limited to one loan or one school. It can be used to help pay several qualified loans or to pay the costs of attendance at several educational institutions, or to pay for a combination of loans and schools.

### **What expenses are considered part of the "cost of attending" a qualified school?**

The U.S. Department of Education has defined the term "costs of attendance" to mean tuition, normal fees, and required material, equipment, and supplies. In addition, each educational institution establishes allowances for

room and board, books, supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous personal expenses. These expenses, too, are included in the cost of attendance. See your school's financial aid office for the expenses covered in the cost of attendance for your academic program.

### **If I have already paid for some of these expenses out of my own pocket, can the check be sent to me?**

By law, the Trust can send checks only to qualified schools and loan holders. Checks cannot be sent to others, such as landlords or mortgage companies. However, your school can reimburse you for expenses included in the "cost of attendance" that you paid for yourself. See your financial aid office for more information on how your school handles reimbursements and disbursements.

### **What kinds of schools can I attend using the awards?**

You may attend an institution of higher education (including certain vocational programs) as defined in section 481(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 USC 1088(a)). This includes most institutions of higher education (including graduate and professional programs), as well as some vocational schools. The school must have in effect a Title IV Program Participation Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education. If in doubt, you should check with the institution prior to making definite plans. The institution's financial aid office will know if they

meet this requirement. Ask the financial aid office if the school is a Title IV school.

### **What kinds of loans can I pay off using the awards?**

A qualified student loan means any loan made, insured, or guaranteed pursuant to Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 USC 1070 et seq.), other than a loan made to a parent of a student pursuant to section 428B of the Act; and any loan made pursuant to Title VII or VIII of the Public Service Health Act (42 USC 292a et seq.). Recent legislation includes loans made directly to members by the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education. These citations should be on your loan papers. Your lender will be able to tell you if the loan is covered. Some of the more common qualified students loans are Perkins, Stafford, William D. Ford, and federal consolidation loans.

If you are unsure whether the school or the loan qualifies, ask the school or lender. Get written confirmation if there is any question.

### **Is it true that some schools match education awards?**

Some colleges and universities may match your education award. Ask your school's financial aid office about this possibility. Go to [www.lifetimeofservice.org/?Education](http://www.lifetimeofservice.org/?Education) to get information about schools offering the education award match. Please note that this website information may not be comprehensive.

### **Can an education award be used to study outside the United States?**

You may use the education award to attend many schools outside the United States. Generally, if Stafford loans are available to attend the school, it is a school where you can use the education award. Also, many qualified U.S. postsecondary institutions offer educational opportunities abroad. Before you enroll in a school abroad, you should check to see if the school qualifies. The Trust office can provide you with additional information.

### **Will the education award affect my eligibility for other student financial aid?**

The education award will not be taken into account in determining eligibility for any federal student aid. The Corporation has no jurisdiction over whether state or private universities—or private scholarship funds—will take it into account in determining eligibility for institutional aid; however, the Corporation has requested that institutions not do so.

### **Can cash be taken instead of an education award?**

It depends upon the program in which you are participating. Members in AmeriCorps<sup>®</sup>VISTA must select either a post-service stipend or an education award. They are asked to indicate whether they want a check for the post-service stipend instead of the award. Other AmeriCorps members are eligible only for a cash payment if the option is provided by the local project with non-federal monies. If in

doubt, you should ask your project director if this applies to you.

### **What happens if I withdraw from the school or fail to complete my period of enrollment for which the award has been used?**

The school must have a fair and equitable refund policy that complies with the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended. If there is any refund owed and returned to the Corporation, the amount will be credited to your “account” in the Trust, and can be used by you, within seven years of your completion of service.

### **Will I have to pay taxes on my education award?**

According to the IRS, in most cases awards are subject to income taxes in the calendar year in which they are used. The Corporation will deduct no taxes, but it will send you a Form 1099 to be used in preparing your income tax return.

### **Is my award transferable? For example, if I am unable to use it, can I transfer the award to another individual?**

No. Only AmeriCorps members are eligible for education awards. You may not transfer it to a relative or any other individual under any circumstance.

### **What if I have other questions?**

General Questions: The National Service Trust has a toll-free number. Call 1-888-507-5962, or e-mail [edawardvoucher@cns.gov](mailto:edawardvoucher@cns.gov) to report an address change, request a duplicate voucher, or find out about policies and procedures regarding the education award or forbearance.

Specific Questions: If you have specific questions about your award, a payment, or your forbearance request, call (202) 606-5000, x347.

#### Address:

National Service Trust  
Corporation for National and Community Service  
1201 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20525



# APPENDIX B

## Higher education: going about it

### Choosing a Field of Study and a School



Often, people find both of these tasks so overwhelming that they hardly know where to start. If that describes you right now, here's something to remember: many college students change their majors at least once before graduation. So, even if you've yet to choose yours, it's not such a bad idea to enroll somewhere anyway. That way, you can begin to satisfy the required courses and, at the same time, consider possible options for your eventual major. In a college career-planning course or with a career counselor, you can explore fields of study, majors, and types of work—and how they relate.

If you know that you want to study in your current geographic area, contact the colleges and universities in that area by calling their admission offices. Ask for three documents, which they can send or you can pick up in person. These days many schools offer this information and forms on-line. Check the college or

university's website for more information.

■ **College catalogue.** This comprehensive document describes the school's mission, policies, faculty, services, tuition and fees, and general courses of study.

■ **Schedule of classes.** The schedule will give you a sense of what classes the school offers, as well as when and where. Sometimes schools with large adult-student populations offer classes outside the campus, in areas more convenient to workers.

"Distance learning" is available at many schools now. This means that students don't necessarily have to be on campus to attend classes. Students may be able to access a class through a computer network or closed-circuit television system in their area. Check out the possibilities if you are interested in this method of instruction.

■ **Application for admission.** By looking through this multi-page form, you'll see what you must do in order to apply to that particular school. One section of the form will no doubt call for you to write a Statement of Purpose. In Appendix B you'll find a section that deals with this. (The same advice applies to most narrative or autobiographical information requested at the undergraduate level.)

These documents will begin to give you an idea of what the university offers formally.

You should also check out the school informally in at least two ways. First, if you can, go to the campus you would be attending and get

a sense of the place. Hang out for a while. Sit in on a class if possible. Spend some time in the library, residence halls, student union, and the student activities center. Use the transportation system you would use to travel to school. Do you like what you see? Why? Why not?

Second, speak to professors and students in the area of study you are considering. Ask them about the classes they teach/attend and about how they spend their time on campus. If you will be working while you go to school, try to find out what kind of support the school has for adults. Is day care available, for example? Are late-afternoon or evening classes available? Do the library and career center remain open some evenings? This informal "inspection" of the campus will occur more formally if you apply to the school. Just try to get a sense of the campus.

Through these methods, identify no fewer than five and no more than ten schools that interest you. This is your "short list," a group of schools you need to investigate thoroughly by:

- Acquiring from each (and reading!) the three documents described earlier.
- Visiting the campuses formally and getting answers to any questions you have about each school and its programs.
- Talking with students such as yourself; for example, a conversation with an eighteen-year-old freshman who lives on campus may be considerably less helpful than one with a forty-five-year-old single mother who works full-time and attends—or will attend—classes part-time and only at night.

If you cannot visit far-away schools on your short list, ask about the availability of "home pages" for schools on the World Wide Web. You may be able to "visit" schools through their technology.

If you already know what you want to study but not where, you may want to begin your research with the *Peterson's Guides* series (see bibliography on page 87); the *Guides* series is available by subject area. If you are open to attending school in any location, you might want to use one of the career-planning software programs—DISCOVER or SIGIPLUS—to narrow down your choices. Such software is available at many high schools and community colleges, and at some public libraries.

### Applying for Admission

Every school has an admission office where you can inquire about fees, policies, programs of study, etc. You submit applications for admission to the school here. Even though these applications take a lot of time, avoid the temptation to hurry through. Be as thorough, concise, and neat as you can. If you have access to a computer, check to see whether the applications can be completed on computers. If so, you'll save time on revisions (which you will probably do several times before submitting the application).

Many colleges require completion of a standardized admission test as part of the admission process. Two standardized tests are common—the American College Testing exam (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).

ACT  
(319) 337-1000  
[www.act.org](http://www.act.org)

SAT  
(609) 771-7600  
[www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)

If you have already completed some college courses and want to return to the same school, you may have to go through the admission process again. Ask. If you left school because of poor grades and/or disciplinary problems, ask an admission officer what you have to do to re-enroll. Don't assume that previous problems mean you can never return to school. Almost all schools will give you at least one more chance. Try.

### Applying for Financial Aid

These days nearly everyone needs some financial assistance to attend school. Your AmeriCorps educational award will help. You have up to seven years from the time you complete your term of service to use the award. If you will not be using it right away, ask your AmeriCorps leader or supervisor who you'll need to contact to redeem the award in the future. Don't miss the opportunity to use your educational award!

If your AmeriCorps educational award is not enough to cover everything, check out additional financial aid possibilities by contacting the financial aid office of the college(s) you hope to attend. There are several types of financial aid: loans have to be paid back after you leave or complete school; grants do not.

Scholarships, which are awarded through a competitive process, also don't have to be paid back. Work-study arrangements allow qualified students to work while they attend school, and an increasing amount of that work is in service organizations in the community. Each school may offer a somewhat different financial aid "package" so be sure to learn about all of your options.

### Using Academic Advisors

Advisors help students select courses to fit their current knowledge, skills, and areas of interest. Yours, for example, could help you choose your major and then sort out which classes will satisfy the requirements for your major and for your degree.

You may be assigned an academic advisor as soon as you are admitted to a school. If not, ask for one. Then make a visit with your advisor a top priority. He or she can be the most important person at school for you. Ask for help whenever you need it, or even before you need it.

### Getting A Degree

To get a degree, students must do two things, the first of which is to earn enough academic credits to graduate. Each class you take will be worth a certain number of academic credits, usually three. An associate degree usually requires 60 semester credit hours of study, a bachelor's, 120 hours.

The second requirement is to complete specific courses of study. For example, most

schools require everyone to take certain courses ("basic requirements"). Additionally, each student must complete all courses required for a particular major. In other words, someone who has earned 130 semester credit hours might still be ineligible for graduation without enough credit in the right categories.

The requirement for a specific course of study is what makes academic advisors so important. They can guide you through the maze of courses in such a way that you gain the knowledge and skills you want and also satisfy the requirements for graduation.

### Obtaining Academic Credit

These days people gain credit in several ways. This section will discuss both "traditional" and "nontraditional" avenues for AmeriCorps members to explore.

✦ **Traditional Routes.** Today, as in the past, two principal ways people get academic credit are by attending and passing classes and by transferring academic credits from other schools. Try to transfer whatever credits you have earned over the years. (Your academic advisor or admission officer should be able to answer questions about the transfer process.) If your school refuses some of your credits, don't just give them up. See what you need to do to appeal, and then do it. You might gain back at least some of the rejected credit hours.

✦ **Nontraditional Routes.** You may be able to receive academic credit in nontradi-

tional, sometimes faster and less expensive, ways. Many colleges and universities offer programs that award credit for learning gained outside the formal classroom. Be careful not to equate learning gained outside the formal classroom with experience, however. Experience cannot translate to academic credit; only the *learning* acquired through experience can. Here are non-traditional methods in current use:

✦ **Credit-by-Exam.** If you have expertise in a certain subject area or areas that you acquired through means other than formal classroom settings, you may be able to take an exam in your subject area(s). If you pass the exam, you may be able to waive required courses and/or get credit for the knowledge you have. CLEP (College-Level Examination Program), ACT-PEP (American College Testing Proficiency Examination Program), and DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-traditional Educational Support) are common credit-by-examination programs.

✦ **Credit through Formal Recommendations.** Much of the formal adult education and training in the United States takes place in courses sponsored by the military, corporations and unions, and by government agencies. If you have taken such courses, your learning may be appropriate for college credit (L. Lamdin, *Earn College Credit for What You Know*, 2nd Edition, Chicago: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 1992, p. 78).

Some kinds of training have been pre-approved for academic credit by the New York State Regents National Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI) and the American Council on Education (ACE) College Recommendation Service. Nearly 900 cooperating colleges and universities award credit based on PONSI recommendations. Nearly 6,000 training courses are approved for credit by ACE. Most institutions of higher education belong to ACE and are, therefore, receptive to ACE's recommendations. Ask local colleges or universities to discuss the possibility of credit hours through PONSI or ACE recommendations.

The American Council on Education publishes directories of training and other programs recommended for college-level academic credit. The *National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs* and *A Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* are available from Oryx Press at 800-279-6799. The PONSI guide, published every other year, is *College Credit Recommendations: The Directory of the New York Regents National Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction*. To request the current guide, write to the University of the State of New York, PONSI, Cultural Education Center, Room 5A25, Albany, N.Y. 12230.

☛ **Prior-Learning Assessment.** A third common way to acquire academic credit for what you have learned outside for-

mal classroom instruction is through prior-learning assessment by a school. Many schools offer a course through which students write a portfolio or narrative about what they have learned outside of school, and provide appropriate documentation. That portfolio or narrative is then assessed by faculty members. If the learning is deemed appropriate at the college level, academic credit may be awarded.

Former AmeriCorps members may try to get academic credit for the learning acquired during AmeriCorps service. Undergraduate programs are likely to offer this opportunity, which is an excellent way for adults to get academic credit for learning. You may need to document your AmeriCorps training and experience. Work with your supervisors and program leaders to determine what documentation you might use.

A definitive guide to the nontraditional processes of earning academic credit was published in 1992 by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 243 South Wabash Avenue, Suite 800, Chicago, Ill. 60604. Telephone: 312-922-5909, [www.cael.org](http://www.cael.org). CAEL publications can be ordered by calling 800-228-0810. The guide, by Lois Lamdin, is titled *Earn College Credit for What You Know* (2nd edition).

### Getting the Most Out of School

Some students view school as a stage to be endured, something to finish quickly with as

little effort as possible. Adult students like you, however, tend to be more committed and practical. In choosing the subjects they will study, these students make sure they acquire the knowledge and/or potential for later employment. Adult students tend to be less intimidated by school in general.

Following are some hints to help you get the most out of your next foray into a higher-education setting.

☛ **Set goals and focus on them.** Know what you want to get out of school before you start, or at least explore the possibilities early on. Taking a career-exploration class in your first year of higher education is a good idea.

☛ **Go to class, do the suggested reading and research, listen to your professors.** Get involved with your school work. Your commitment to your work will reward you with good grades and an increasing confidence in your knowledge and abilities.

☛ **Get acquainted with your professors.** They can help you make sense of the material in class, choose an internship, and get into graduate school or find a job after you graduate. They are interested in your success as a student. Ask for their help when (or even before) you need it.

☛ **Make use of your academic advisor.** Every student in higher education is assigned an academic advisor. Ask for an advisor who knows your subject area well, one who can verify that you're on

the path you want to follow. Get your advisor's best advice about classes and teachers who will be most helpful to you. If you are not satisfied with your academic advisor, talk about your concerns. Ask for a new advisor if necessary.

☛ **Take advantage of the Career Center.** Most institutions of higher learning will have some sort of Career Center. Making sense of what is available there will require time and patience. These will be rewarded, however, because you should be able to find information about majors, employment prospects, types of employment, and ways to merge your skills, values, and interests with a course of study and/or a type of work.

☛ **Get experience.** Arrange for an internship or other work opportunity in your chosen field(s) of study. There is no better way to see how your studies relate to the world of work. If you are having trouble choosing between majors, arrange an internship in each area. Your academic advisor, as well as career counselors, professors, service-learning/volunteer office staff, and/or the cooperative education office may be able to help you find an internship. To a prospective employer, the combination of degree and work experience speaks much louder than a degree alone.

☛ **Enjoy social time (if you can).** For some, the demands of work, family, and school are too heavy to permit school-related socializing. If you can, however, do so, for hanging out with fellow stu-

dents can be a rewarding and learning experience. Sometimes people forge lifelong friendships with people they get to know in college. You'll be able to meet people from cultures and regions to which you have never been exposed. Moreover, the student "grapevine" offers new information (and gossip!) that may help you choose classes and professors. Also, you may be able to join a study group to get through a tough class.

(See Appendix D for more sources of information about higher education.)

If you go on to higher education after AmeriCorps, you'll have a chance to prepare yourself for a satisfying work life. You'll find that the more you put into your next learning experience, the more you'll gain from it. Put another way, "What goes around comes around." Good luck!

# APPENDIX C

Graduate

school:

a closer

look



By Thomas Q. Reeve, *Continuing Education Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps, 1994).

## Motivation

**R**emember that advanced education is usually not an end in itself. It is, instead, a means to an end because graduate and professional schools are career-development institutions. To begin or sustain certain careers, advanced training is a must. For example, to enter the practice of law, one must go to law school (and pass a state bar exam). Public health professionals usually need a Master's in Public Health degree to get their first job, and few university professors could get or keep a job without a doctorate. Some professionals—school teachers and federal government employees, for example—pursue specialized master's degrees to gain expertise, promotions, and salary increases.

One point is vital: If you attend graduate school, it is essential to choose one with a program suited to your career goals—which you

should be clear about before beginning a graduate program. Deciding to go to graduate or professional school is a big decision that can lead to quality education and entry into a profession or career of your choice. Made with too little thought, however, the same decision could lead you to drop out of school. In such an event, not only would you lack an advanced degree, but you would also have to pay off unnecessary educational debt.

Think carefully about your reasons for going to graduate and professional school. Graduate education and professional training can be a long haul, and sometimes the only thing that sustains you will be your long-term motivation. Thus, every hour you spend examining your intellectual interests, your skills, and your professional goals will pay off in the end.

There is a final reason to clarify career goals before applying to graduate or professional school. The graduate admission process itself is designed to probe and examine career motivations. Your chances of acceptance will be greater if you appear purposeful and likely to graduate and pursue a career for which the school prepares its students.

## Degrees and Certificates

Graduate and professional schools offer a bewildering array of degrees and certificates. You will probably also find a great variety in the career value of these differing degrees. Take time to thoroughly investigate the type of degree you wish to pursue. Specialized graduate programs offer specialized degrees for specific career paths. Thus, you need to know the "alphabet soup" of

higher education degrees to make the best informed decision about the type of degree to pursue and about the schools to which to apply.

What follows are commonly accepted generalizations about advanced degrees, but keep in mind that there are as many exceptions as there are graduate programs. Therefore, as you research graduate education options, research thoroughly the career impact of the specific degree.

## MASTER'S DEGREE

Many people considering graduate school are thinking of some type of master's degree. Normally, it takes about two years of full-time course work to achieve this degree. Two types of master's degrees are tied to the doctoral pathway—the Master of Arts (M.A.) and the Master of Science (M.S.). These often serve as transitional degrees that must be awarded before a graduate student can formally advance to the doctoral pathway. Such degrees are routinely awarded in academic disciplines—political science, literature, chemistry, biology, history, physics, anthropology, etc.

There are also master's degree programs outside the doctoral pathway that are designed to put the student on the path toward a successful career. About two-thirds of the 300,000 master's degrees awarded yearly are professional master's degrees. These are career degrees in their own right. For example, someone thinking of a career in local or county government would pursue a Master of Public Administration, focusing on a course of study in city government, criminal justice administration, or some other field.

In some cases, a specialized advanced degree is necessary before a person can take a licensing exam. The Master of Social Work (M.S.W.), for example, is often a requirement for someone wishing to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (L.C.S.W.). And it is virtually impossible to become a practicing librarian without at least a Master of Library Science (M.L.S) degree.

## PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATE

Often earned by four-year college graduates, professional certificates provide specific training in certain fields—such as information systems, publications, and financial management. Many legal assistants, for example, earn a professional certificate before entering the field. Professional certificate programs generally take one to two years to complete.

## DOCTORATE

Requiring about seven years to complete after the B.A., the doctorate often takes the form of the Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy). The most common type of doctoral degree, the Ph.D. is the degree of choice for people who wish to become professional teachers and/or researchers in higher education, industry, and government. The decision to pursue a doctorate is not one to take lightly, as the degree will take several years to complete and will cost a lot of money. (Check out the detailed information about the AmeriCorps education award in Appendix A.)

## Locating and Selecting the Best Programs

For help in finding a graduate school and/or professional program that fits your needs, you can look to a variety of resources. Friends, former professors, and knowledgeable professionals in your chosen field may have useful suggestions and recommendations. You can consult publications like Peterson's Annual Guides to Graduate Study, a comprehensive six-volume reference to graduate and professional schools, that contain useful descriptions of individual programs organized by field of study, degrees awarded, costs, size of faculty, entrance requirements, and application deadlines. In some cases, the percentage of applicants accepted is also published. You will also find phone numbers and addresses for the director, chairperson, dean, or program office. Look for this resource at well-stocked community libraries, career centers, and college/university libraries.

In addition to career information, occupational and professional associations sometimes publish information about graduate and professional schools in their particular fields. For example, the American Psychological Association publishes annually its own guide, *Graduate Study in Psychology and Related Field*. A telephone call or letter of inquiry to an occupational or professional association in a chosen career field will often get you a list of books and pamphlets available from the association. To identify phone numbers and addresses of such organizations, check the *Encyclopedia of Associations* (Detroit: Gale Research Co.).

Because the quality of a graduate program will reflect the quality of its faculty, you need to look carefully at the faculties of schools you're considering. Find out who these people are, and check their research interests and reputations. Having an idea of who you'd like to study with can strongly influence your decision of where to apply. Other factors to consider include the overall quality of students accepted to the program, library holdings in the field of study, laboratory facilities, and job-placement assistance. You will have criteria yourself, as well.

To maximize your chances for acceptance, it is wise to apply to a range of programs. In doing so, however, try not to underestimate yourself and your prospects by applying to programs and schools beneath your ability and qualifications. Generally speaking, the better the graduate or professional program, the better the career opportunities of its advanced-degree holders. Prestige of degree often counts when seeking that first entry-level position after leaving graduate or professional school. There is no substitute for excellence.

In some of the more popular fields, national rankings of graduate and professional schools and departments have been published in the popular or trade press. Be somewhat cautious when using these resources, however, because often only the very best and most competitive schools of national ranking are listed. Thus, you might exclude many outstanding local or regional universities from your consideration.

In the end, the task of ranking programs of interest will fall upon you. Seek out the opinions of knowledgeable professionals in the

field. Also, feel free to consult with the people who control admission to a specific program; ask them how they would rank other programs in their field. If at all possible, visit campuses and seek out program faculty and staff. Currently enrolled students can give useful advice as well. Ask to sit in on a class or two. If the school is too far away to visit, call program staff members and faculty to ask questions not addressed in the informational material the program sends out. Finally, resourceful applicants may wish to call program alumni to assess the value of their training and the impact of the degree in the job market.

## Applications, Deadlines, and Procrastination

Around Labor Day, most graduate and professional schools are ready to mail out applications and informational materials for the following (not upcoming) academic year. Therefore, request application materials in the late summer or early autumn of the year *before* you wish to enter a graduate program. Fill out the application carefully, typing it or completing it on a computer if at all possible. It

can take weeks for an application, collegiate transcripts, test scores, and letters of recommendation to trickle into a graduate admission office. So plan ahead!

For programs that begin in the following fall term, application deadlines will generally be between December and February. Admission letters (offers) usually go out in mid-March and later for programs with December to February application deadlines. April 15 is the generally recognized date after which graduate schools expect to receive replies to admission offers.

The most common mistake applicants make is failing to apply well ahead of the deadline. In fact, the majority of applications will arrive just before the deadline. What most people do not realize is that the deadline is not the preferred application date; rather, it is the last possible moment to apply. People who procrastinate can harm their chances for admission.

The best approach is to mail applications a month before the deadline. This allows time to resolve any last minute problems: late-arriving letters of recommendation, a form filled out incorrectly, a tardy transcript, and so on.

### Information/Sources/Graduate School Admission Exams

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)  
(609) 771-7670 (Princeton, N.J.)  
(510) 873-8100 (Oakland, Calif.)  
[www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org)

Law School Admission Test (LSAT)  
(215) 968-1001  
[www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)  
(202) 828-0690  
[www.acmc.org](http://www.acmc.org)

Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)  
[www.gmat.org](http://www.gmat.org)

Early applications receive more careful consideration than those arriving close to the deadline. By recognizing that admission and administrative staff are overworked close to application deadlines, wise applicants position their paperwork to arrive at a time when it will get the best consideration.

### Letters of Recommendation

Normally, graduate and professional schools will ask each applicant to arrange for letters of recommendation (usually three). Application packages sent by the graduate school usually contain recommendation forms and sometimes include self-addressed envelopes. The applicant fills out part of the form and then gives it to the person who is to write the recommendation. Because the letter writer is often expected to mail the letter directly to the graduate program, the applicant should provide the writer with a stamped envelope addressed to the graduate or professional school.

In cases where someone is applying to many graduate schools, recommenders may have to write several letters. Often, applicants hesitate to ask this, thinking that their request may seem burdensome to the letter writer. But it's really not as burdensome as one may think. Word processors have greatly facilitated the writing of letters and the production of personalized copies. It is helpful to give the letter-writer a copy of the final draft of the statement of purpose (see next section) you will send to the graduate school.

Letters of recommendation, which are read carefully by admission committees, are a critical component of an application dossier. So,

these letters should be written by people well acquainted with your intellectual abilities and skills. In the final analysis, it is better to request a letter from someone lower in the academic or work hierarchy, who knows you well, than to ask someone higher up who knows you only superficially.

### The Statement of Purpose

Application forms for most graduate schools require an applicant to write a statement of purpose several hundred words long. Typical instructions read as follows:

*Write a brief statement concerning both your past work in your intended field of study and allied fields, your plans for graduate study at this university, and your subsequent career plans.*

If thoughtfully organized and well written, the statement of purpose can do much to promote your admission to a competitive graduate program. It should be upbeat and positive, highlighting your qualifications for admission to graduate school. Through the requirement to write a statement of purpose, the admission committee members invite you to tell them whatever you think is important. Because so many students apply to graduate schools, only a few programs conduct personal interviews anymore. Instead, admission committees rely upon the statement of purpose to give them a sense of applicants' personal commitment to acquire an advanced degree or certificate.

Following are hints on writing a strong statement of purpose:

**Good writing is rewriting.** Think of the statement of purpose as a writing test:

misspelled words, typographical errors, and poor grammar will not suggest a strong potential for success in a graduate or professional school, where communication skills are so important. Edit and rewrite your statement several times for content, organization, and style.

**Don't tell the admission committee what you think they want to hear.** Successful applicants write about themselves in an authentic prose voice, telling what they think is important about their backgrounds and their achievements.

**Clearly explain your motivations for graduate study.** Name the advanced degree you seek. If your decision to go to graduate school comes from life experiences, explain these. Remember that insights gained from undergraduate education or your AmeriCorps experience may be relevant.

**Emphasize strengths and accomplishments.** The statement of purpose provides a chance to describe intellectual strengths and life accomplishments. This is an opportunity not to be wasted. Write about academic achievements—even if you've been out of college for several years. Inspirational courses that pointed the way to graduate or professional school are worth describing. Be sure to highlight a good grade point average (GPA), even if it is also listed on a transcript. Successful completion of a senior thesis or comprehensive examination in the undergraduate major

should be listed as well. Note any graduation accomplishments, such as honors—Magna or Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa membership, etc.

Life and work experience can also be important. Graduate and professional schools are looking for mature individuals; many seek applicants with extensive prior experience in areas related to the graduate field. It is important to understand the skills needed to succeed in the graduate field and to explain how you developed those you already have through volunteer and paid work experience, international travel, etc.

**Be specific and present evidence.** Too often, applicants write in glittering generalities. Wise applicants, however, present specific evidence. When explaining a particular strength or accomplishment, include the details. For example, if describing a work experience, explain it in some depth: Where did the work occur? What were its most challenging aspects? What did you learn that is relevant to the graduate school experience? Statements of purpose that present evidence and speak in the specific vocabulary of the real world will be well received.

**Write about your AmeriCorps experience.** If your choice of a specific degree or a particular program was influenced by your AmeriCorps experience, tell why. Graduate admission committees seek individuals who are in some way unique. AmeriCorps is a mark of uniqueness, and

elements of the assignment are worth highlighting. Remember that some people may know little about AmeriCorps, so be sure to describe the program and your experience as clearly as possible.

**Tell a story.** Be anecdotal. One of the best ways to be specific and present evidence is to tell a real-life story. Readers want to learn about the applicant as a person, and a paragraph describing a challenging life experience or an event that pointed you toward graduate education can humanize your statement of purpose. In many ways, the AmeriCorps experience is an anecdotal experience, one filled with memorable people, challenges, frustrations, and triumphs. Parts of this experience may be worth describing in a statement of purpose.

**Write with integrity.** Applicants worry needlessly about telling an admission committee what they really think about important, controversial issues, believing that opinions or stands on an issue will alienate readers. The fact is that admission committees seek thoughtful applicants who hold informed opinions developed through challenging life experiences.

**Explain career goals.** A means to an end, graduate education exists to prepare students for a career. Tell the admission committee about your career goals, both for the short and long term.

**Explain why you wish to enroll in the specific graduate program.** Admission committee members tend to be

impressed by people who can do this in a rational manner. Evidence of research about the program, its faculty, and its resources is worth presenting, as is reference to a campus visit and conversations with faculty and staff. Explain specifically how the graduate curriculum fits into your long-term career plans.

**Beware of the tyranny of time.** Many applicants assume, incorrectly, that they must account for every year of their life. Instead, your statement of purpose needs to be a selective document that emphasizes those parts of your past that are relevant to admission.

**Don't be intimidated by length limits.** A good statement of purpose can usually be written in 750 to 1,000 words. Such a length is not so short as to limit the ability to explain qualifications fully, yet not so long as to bore the reader. Don't be obsessed with squeezing the statement onto the form provided. If necessary, you can continue the statement on an extra sheet of paper. Single-space typed paragraphs separated by double spacing are particularly readable. The fact is that, if the statement of purpose is well-written, authentic, and eloquent, length becomes less and less a consideration in the mind of a reader.

## Financial Aid

The thought of costs can be needlessly intimidating to anyone thinking about applying to

graduate or professional school, even if an AmeriCorps educational award is available. Many people assume that most advanced education must be paid out of personal funds, and that they cannot apply until they have amassed a small fortune in a savings account. Others assume they must find money from some outside source before they can apply to graduate or professional school. Both groups misunderstand the major trends in the funding of an advanced education.

For one thing, many people work full time and go to graduate and professional school in the evenings and on weekends. These students pay as they go. This is a particularly notable pattern among those seeking a law degree or a Master's in Business Administration (MBA). Education taken in this manner usually requires at least a year longer than if the students attended school full time.

A variety of funding sources for graduate and professional school lie outside the realm of the university. For example, government agencies, private foundations, and some companies will provide direct grants and other support to individual applicants. In addition, special funding programs exist for members of minority groups that have traditionally been excluded from opportunities in higher education. However, there is not as much of this money available as many assume, and it is far from being the most common source of financial aid.

The fact is that the bulk of financial aid for an advanced education is funneled through the graduate and professional schools themselves, rather than through outside funding agencies. Graduate admission personnel know

that astute applicants apply to more than one school. They know, too, that they must offer competitive financial aid packages to attract good students.

Personal decisions about financing a graduate education can be made only after acceptance to graduate school and after the school has made a financial aid offer. Therefore, apply to good graduate or professional schools regardless of how much they cost. Second, the more schools to which you apply and are admitted, the more likely you are to receive multiple financial-aid offers. The best situation occurs when an applicant is happily comparing financial aid offers from several schools.

Financial aid eligibility is based upon merit or need. As a former AmeriCorps member, you could be an attractive candidate for merit-based financial aid in graduate school because of your record of excellence and ability to respond to challenging situations.

Because federal financial-aid requirements and guidelines change regularly, you'll need to get current information from graduate school financial aid offices. Pay attention to the financial aid procedures that operate at all schools to which you apply. You may need to submit supplemental financial aid application forms for each.

A typical graduate student financial aid package will combine grants, paid work, and loans. The proportion of these three elements in a total financial aid package will vary among graduate programs and from year to year in any given program. If financial aid is

particularly important to you, get hold of a publication like *Financing Graduate School*, by Patricia McWade (Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides, 1993). This book emphasizes long-range fiscal planning as the basis upon which to build a financial strategy for a graduate or professional school education.

## Final Considerations

If you are considering a graduate program, you are in the process of making a major life decision. If you decide to enroll, you'll be making a commitment to an academic program and a community, and you may be taking the definitive step in your professional career. Here are some questions (adapted from the Peace Corps for AmeriCorps) to consider when choosing a graduate program. Although appropriate for anyone making the graduate school decision, the questions will have differing relevance for each individual and for every academic program. It is important, however, to explore a wide range of options and to avoid eliminating possibilities prematurely when going through this process.

### ACADEMIC PROGRAM

- ☛ How strong is the department in which you will be studying?
- ☛ How long has the program been in existence?
- ☛ Is the department/program growing or shrinking?
- ☛ Does the program consider the time con-

straints of working students by providing flexible scheduling?

- ☛ Will you be able to handle the required course load?
- ☛ Does the faculty demonstrate knowledge and experience?
- ☛ Will the academic program train you to do what you want to do?
- ☛ Will you be able to get hands-on experience through the program?

### COSTS

- ☛ How much will tuition cost?
- ☛ What financial aid is available?
- ☛ What will be your overall income?
- ☛ How are living costs in the community?
- ☛ What will be the transportation costs to and from work, home, and school?
- ☛ What are the average housing costs in the area? Does the school offer student housing?
- ☛ What are your health insurance options?

### WORK COMPONENT

- ☛ What kind of help does the program offer with employment after the degree is completed?
- ☛ How have earlier program graduates fared in regard to employment?

### LOCATION

Because graduate programs exist just about everywhere, prospective students need to consider a number of factors: geography, climate, transportation, size of community—to name but a few.

- ☛ Could you survive the winters of Chicago or the summers of Mississippi?
- ☛ Can you afford living expenses in New York or San Francisco?
- ☛ How important is easy access to cultural and medical facilities?
- ☛ Will you need a car?
- ☛ Will public transportation get you around efficiently and safely?

### TYPE OF COMMUNITY

- ☛ Do you want to live in an urban or rural community?
- ☛ Do you want to live and/or work with a particular population or culture?
- ☛ Do you want to be able to use a second language?

Although the decision to go to graduate school is not one to make lightly, it is one that can lead to a fruitful experience for AmeriCorps graduates. During your deliberations, give the information and suggestions in this appendix some careful thought. Although the material was put together to help you gain an "edge" in the grad-school application process, you are

the one who ultimately determines whether admission committees consider your applications seriously. Do everything you can to make them sit up and take notice.



# APPENDIX D

## Resources

### Transitions in General

Bridges, W. *Making Sense of Life's Changes: Transitions*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1980.

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Bolles, R.N. *Job-Hunting on the Internet*. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 1997.

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Krannich, R. *High Impact Resumes and Letters*. Manassas, Va.: Impact Publications, 1990.

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*Annual Register of Grant Support*. New Providence, N.J.: Reed Reference Publishing.

*Answering the Call*. Youth Service America, 1101 15th Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C. 20005. (Also available on America On-Line: Key word is servenet.)

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## Using the Next Steps Workbook

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