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## 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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