

# TAKE ROOT:



# SERVICE TO CIVICS

# Guidebook





# TAKE ROOT: Service to Civics

Dear Colleagues,

As a training and technical assistance provider for grantees of the Corporation for National and Community Service, Hands On Network is delighted to share with you this guidebook on Service to Civics. Hands On Network has developed a new generation of volunteer engagement techniques—tailored to today’s community service organization. These techniques make the Hands On Network training curriculum dynamic, innovative, impact oriented, and easily applicable to your program.

This guidebook was developed to help national service programs teach volunteers about community issues and to encourage their volunteers’ involvement in greater civic roles in their communities. This guide does not prescribe how your programs should be structured; it does, however, provide resources you can adapt to meet your local program needs.

The goal of this guidebook is to provide information that will help your program take root, leverage volunteers, and grow. To that end, the guidebook contains action-oriented sections to help you understand how to encourage your volunteers to deepen their impact through greater civic involvement. In addition, each chapter includes an activities and templates section with tools to assist you in applying the guidebook content to your program.

If you are interested in further training or technical assistance, please contact us at [training@handsonnetwork.org](mailto:training@handsonnetwork.org). You can also access free eLearning courses and other valuable resources in the CNCS Resource Center at <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org>.

In Service,

Delores Druilhet Morton  
Director, Training and Leadership Development



# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Defining Civic Involvement</b>	5
The Service to Civics Model	6
Defining Civic Involvement	6
The Rules	7
Defining Reflection	7
Service to Civics and Reflection	7
Reflection Ideas	8
Activities and Templates	10
How Do You Define Civic Involvement?	11
<b>Chapter 2: Exploring the Dimensions of Civic Participation</b>	12
Understanding Root Causes	13
Creating a Plan for Civic Involvement	13
Activities and Templates	14
Root Causes and Pathways to Action	15
Spheres of Influence and Action	17
<b>Chapter 3: Applying Civic Skills</b>	18
Service Project Planning	19
8 Components to Creating Strong Community Service Projects	19
5 Additional Ideas for Deepening Civic Involvement	21
Service to Civics and Your National Service Program	22
Activities and Templates	23
Project Planning Worksheet	24
Task List	26
Service to Civics Program Plan	27
Take It With You	28
<b>Summary</b>	32
<b>Additional Resources</b>	33



# CHAPTER I

## Defining Civic Involvement

### OVERVIEW

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How do you define civic involvement? In this chapter we will spend time crafting personal definitions of civic involvement and discussing the implications of defining civic involvement. You'll be introduced to the concept of reflection and how intentionally combining reflection and meaningful service can deepen the civic commitment of your volunteers. We'll also explore a variety of reflection ideas that you will be able to apply to your volunteer program.

### GOALS

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- Define terms
- Review the rules
- Define reflection
- Explore reflection ideas

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- A Guide to Effective Citizenship through AmeriCorps



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### THE SERVICE TO CIVICS MODEL

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National service programs engage volunteers in a variety of service efforts. Whether your program works strictly with national service volunteers or reaches out to involve the broader community in service activities, think about what those volunteers actually do. When volunteers participate in a service project, do they make the connection between their service and a deeper community issue? Do they reflect on their activities to see the impact they've made? Most importantly, what else do they do to impact the issue?

We all have the ability to make positive social change in the world. There is no road map or blueprint for becoming more civically involved. We each have different styles, comforts, and methods for getting things done. Ultimately, a healthy democracy starts with each of us being engaged in meaningful endeavors for the public good. Volunteering is one way to be civically engaged. To that end, it is critical that each of us discovers the path to greater civic involvement that most suits our style, interests and talents.



In the following pages, we will explore the concepts of guiding volunteers on the path of volunteer service to greater civic involvement. For the purpose of this training, we will explore how meaningful volunteer service coupled with reflection can lead to further civic action. Along this journey you will explore your own path for deeper civic involvement, while you build your toolbox for creating deeper civic involvement with the volunteers in your national service program.

### DEFINING CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

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What does civic involvement mean to you? According to Center for Democracy and Citizenship, active citizenship is defined as “the act of contributing to public life and participating in solving public problems.” Although there is no universally agreed upon definition of what active civic involvement looks like, for the purpose of this training we going think about civic involvement in terms of this definition of engaging in public problem solving.



## THE RULES

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When representing a Corporation for National and Community Service program, don't forget that there are limits to the kinds of civic activities one can undertake while "on duty." Check the provisions governing your program to make sure that you're in compliance.

## DEFINING REFLECTION

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Webster's Dictionary defines reflection as "the fixing of the mind on some subject: serious thought; contemplation." As it relates to service activities, reflection is a structured time to think, write and/or talk to learn about the service volunteers provided. Reflection may include acknowledging and/or sharing of reactions, feelings, interpretations, observations and thoughts about the volunteer activity.

During reflection activities, participants:

- Examine what they learned from the service activity
- Discuss problems encountered and obstacles overcome
- Celebrate successes
- Place meaning on their participation

## SERVICE TO CIVICS AND REFLECTION

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Imagine that you're about to do dishes in your kitchen sink and you're filling the sink with water – you've got the stopper in the bottom of the sink. The phone rings, you stop what you're doing and pick up the phone. Your friend needs a ride. You run out the door, inadvertently leaving the water running and the sink plugged. When you come home, the kitchen is flooding. What's the first thing you're going to do? Grab a mop? No, turn off the faucet.

Often when we're volunteering we spend our time mopping up the water without addressing the fact that the faucet is still running. Reflection encourages volunteers to explore why the faucet is still running and is the primary avenue for connecting service with greater civic involvement. Through the process of reflection, volunteers will have the opportunity to create a larger social construct around the service they are providing. Reflection provides the structured time for volunteers to make the connection between the service they are providing and how it relates to larger social issues.



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### REFLECTION IDEAS

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As you design service activities for your volunteers, think about ways to integrate reflection into their service. Here are a few easy ways to add a reflection component into your volunteer activity.

#### Postcard home

Have volunteers write a note that will be mailed to them at a later date to remind them about what they learned from the volunteer activity, why it was important to them, or what they achieved. If time permits, allow people who want to an opportunity to share what they wrote. A couple of weeks after the service experience send the postcards back to the volunteers.

#### Group journal or “reflection wall”

Put out a notebook or hang a large piece of paper on the wall. Have volunteers share thoughts about their volunteer experience through words or pictures. Use the group journal or ideas provided by the volunteers as a starting point for your group reflection at the end of the service experience.

#### Group discussion with critical questions

Sometimes, one of the quickest ways to facilitate a group reflection process is through a discussion. The reflection discussion requires no materials and just 10-15 minutes of your time. One way to think about facilitating a reflection discussion is to make certain you focus on three types of questions that you are asking volunteers:

1. **What?** Ask volunteers to report out on what happened on the volunteer project and what was accomplished
2. **So what?** Ask volunteers to analyze the service experience, what they learned and why it matters.
3. **What’s next?** Ask volunteers how the volunteer experience will shape their future action and what the next steps are that they can take to further address the issues uncovered through their service.

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Here are some sample questions:

- What happened today?
- What was the effect of your service?
- What was your first impression when you arrived? How did that change over the course of your volunteer experience?
- What do you see as the biggest challenge facing this organization? Others working for change around this issue?
- How does your experience today relate to the rest of your life?
- Will you do anything or think anything differently because of your experience today?
- What have you learned about yourself as part of this experience?

Encourage informal discussion during the volunteer activity – Projects that involve everyone in a similar, “non thinking” tasks (like painting) are a great venue for this type of reflection because you can use questions and issue information to keep the conversation going while everyone is working.

Now that we’ve defined civic involvement and reflection and explored some ideas around how to increase the civic involvement of your volunteers, let’s spend some time exploring how we can apply these concepts.



## Activities and Templates

The training and implementation tools in this section will apply some of the civic involvement concepts we have discussed thus far in this training. This section includes:

- How Do You Define Civic Involvement?



## How Do You DEFINE CIVIC INVOLVEMENT?

### Brainstorm

Spend a couple of minutes thinking about civic involvement and active citizenship. What activities do civically engaged people undertake (e.g., voting)?

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How are civically engaged people different from non-civically engaged people?

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What characteristics does a civically active person have?

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Using the ideas you generated above, how do you define civic involvement?

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## CHAPTER 2

# Exploring the Dimensions of Civic Participation

### OVERVIEW

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We've created a framework for understanding civic involvement as it relates to volunteering. Now we're going to spend time examining some of the underlying issues that are shaping the needs in our community. Once we've come to a deeper understanding of these issues, we'll take some time to identify the unique ways that each of us can become more civically involved. The activities in this section will help you come to a greater understanding of how to deepen your own civic involvement and are easily adaptable to use with volunteers and national service participants.

### GOALS

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- Discuss root causes and pathways to action
- Create a plan for civic involvement
- Identify spheres of influence and action

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- Active Citizens 101
- A Facilitators Guide for *By the People*



## UNDERSTANDING ROOT CAUSES

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Spending time identifying the underlying issues that are facing our world help us to break down what at times seem to be insurmountable issues into more manageable pieces. Once we have a clearer understanding of what the issues are, we can identify potential solutions and small steps that each of us can take to address these issues.

What are ways that that you can work with the volunteers in your program to help them to explore the root causes underlying the community issues that your national service organization is working to address? The first step in this process is providing your volunteers and national service members with context for their service.

- Who are your clients and/or service recipients?
- What are the social and environmental issues your organization is working to address?
- What are the greatest challenges facing your organization?
- How will the work your volunteers are undertaking impact your organization's mission?
- What are the barriers to implementing lasting change around the social/ environmental issue your organization addresses?

## CREATING A PLAN FOR CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

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Taking the time to create civic involvement plans with your volunteers will help move them from reflection to action. A good way to do this is to ask volunteers to brainstorm a list of characteristics embodied by active citizens. Segueing off the list, ask volunteers to think about what characteristics from the list they would like to spend more time cultivating. Plans should list commitments that will occur over the next week, month, five years, decade and lifetime.

As we've discussed in this chapter, two of the primary ways to engage your volunteers on the service to civics continuum is by first helping them to connect with and explore the deeper issues impacting the work of your organization and then by engaging them in creating a plan for deeper civic involvement. What follows are two simple examples of activities that you can replicate with your volunteers to provide them with additional context for their service work.



## Activities and Templates

The training and implementation tools in this section will apply some of the civic involvement concepts we have discussed thus far in this training. The *Spheres of Influence and Action* activity is an example of an easy-to-facilitate activity that could be replicated to guide your volunteers in creating a civic involvement plan. This section includes:

- Root Causes and Pathways to Action
- Sphere's of Influence and Action



## ROOT CAUSES AND PATHWAYS TO ACTION

In this activity you will define and discuss underlying issues that are facing our nation (and world) and explore ways that you can begin to address them.

Reflect

1. What do you feel are the greatest challenges facing our country?

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2. What are the underlying causes of these challenges? (Try to do some serious exploring to uncover causes. For example if the challenge is homelessness, one of the causes might be affordable housing. Take it a step further and ask yourself why there is a lack of affordable housing?)

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3. What action steps could you take to address the causes of these challenges?

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4. Chose one of the challenges you identified in question 1. Now spend a few moments thinking about what the world look like if this challenge had been overcome. What had to happen for this to occur?

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Let's share:

- Did you have a difficult time identifying challenges? Why or why not?
- Were there common themes among root causes? If so, what were they?
- Did you have a hard time identifying action steps? Why or why not?
- Were the solutions you generated feasible? Why or why not?
- How did it feel to see yourself as part of the solution?
- Whose responsibility do you think it is to address these challenges?





## SPHERES OF INFLUENCE AND ACTION

In this activity you will identify at least four different areas in your life where you can define concrete steps to work toward positive community change.

**Step 1:** Choose four spheres of influence in your life (family, friends, state, solar system, you get the picture) and record one in each of the four circles underneath the words Sphere of Influence.

**Step 2:** Corresponding to each sphere of influence, identify at least one action step you can take in this sphere to become more civically engaged. Record your action steps in the circles. (For example, if your sphere of influence you choose is your neighborhood, then an action step might be to attend your next neighborhood association meeting.)

**Step 3:** Share

Sphere of Influence

Action Step





## CHAPTER 3

# Applying Civic Skills

### OVERVIEW

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In this chapter we will investigate ways to apply the civic skills and concepts we have explored in the previous chapters. We will begin by focusing on planning volunteer service projects as a way for volunteers to become more civically engaged. We will then explore additional ideas for volunteers and other national service participants to apply civic skills. And last but not least we'll spend some time reflecting on how to best integrate the service to civics continuum into our national service program.

### GOALS

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- Review best practices for service project planning
- Explore further activities for deepening civic engagement
- Create a service to civics program plan

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- A Guide to Working with the Media: Sharing Your National Service Story
- Service Reflection Toolkit
- Active Citizenship Today Field Guide
- By the People- Citizenship and National Service



## SERVICE PROJECT PLANNING

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Teaching your volunteers how to engage more deeply in their community through planning volunteer service projects can be a powerful step along their path to more intensive civic involvement. When projects are well planned and engage volunteers in meaningful service they have the power to:

- Serve as a catalyst for community change
- Unite diverse groups of people to address public problems
- Strengthen communities
- Promote civic involvement
- Teach community building skills

## 8 COMPONENTS TO CREATING STRONG COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS

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### 1. Research your project.

Devote a substantial amount of time to researching the community issue you have chosen to tackle with the project. Try to uncover multiple community perspectives surrounding the problem. You can use interviews, surveys, community forums, newspapers, private organizations, government agencies, field experts and/or the internet to locate information.

### 2. Clearly define goals and objectives.

Goals are what you hope to accomplish by the project. Objectives are the actual steps you will need to take to reach the project goals. Articulate the goals and objectives of the project to volunteers and project partners. People want to know why volunteering their time is important and how their efforts are going to make a difference in the community. Clearly defined goals and objectives are a road map to success.

### 3. Create partnerships.

Strong projects are supported and sustained through community partnerships. You may have already identified several partners for your project while doing your initial research.

Make certain project partners represent the diversity of your community in ages, cultures, gender, education and race.



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### 4. Carefully plan the project.

Planning ahead for the project is crucial to success. If working with a team or committee, you should plan project logistics, delegate duties and agree on a timeline for completing assigned tasks. Although it is impossible plan for everything, make an effort to.

Challenges the day of the project will be more easily overcome if you team had the foresight to plan ahead for potential obstacles.

### 5. Provide thorough volunteer orientation.

In addition to letting volunteers know what to expect from a service project, orientation is the time to help volunteers make the connection between their service and the community issue. Take time to discuss the issue that is being addressed. A brief history of the issue, current statistics, current events related to the issue area (e.g., legislation activity), and other civic engagement opportunities linked to this issue (advocacy training, future service projects) are all extremely helpful in educating volunteers.

### 6. Build a reflection component into the project.

Project participants need to have the opportunity to learn from the service they have provided. Organized reflection activities will give participants time to generate the key concepts that they learned as a result of participating in the project. Reflection activities should include time for participants to think about what they learned, how it impacted them, and what steps they can take in the future. Reflection also helps participants identify the value of participating in service activities.

### 7. Evaluate the project.

Evaluation leads to continuous improvement. Evaluations can be conducted formally and informally. Make certain to evaluate both what worked well and what you would change for the next project. Include all stakeholders – volunteers, community members, agency representatives – in your evaluation strategy.

### 8. Celebrate your success and share your story.

Make sure to celebrate what you have accomplished through the project. Share your story formally through the media and informally with people you know. Celebrate and let it be known that regular citizens can and do make a difference in their communities.



## 5 ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR DEEPENING CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

Challenge yourself to find new ways to deepen the connection between your volunteers' service activities and greater civic involvement. Here are 5 more ideas for your tool box!

### 1. Create a Bill of Responsibilities

Pass out copies of the Bill of Rights to your volunteers. Lead them in a discussion about the Bill of Rights by asking questions about its contents, promises, and significance. After you have discussed citizen rights generate a discussion about citizen responsibilities. Ask volunteers to draft either an individual or group Bill of Responsibilities. To debrief the activity ask volunteers what they learned from the activity, what is significant about what they learned, and how they can apply what they have learned.

### 2. Highlight Citizen Problem Solving Activities

Have volunteers scour media sources and report stories they find about creative ways citizens and communities are taking action to solve public problems. When your volunteers come together ask them to share stories they have found. Other sources members might pursue for this activity, in addition to local news outlets are Do Something and YES Magazine. Both of these magazines highlight organizations and individuals that are working to strengthen communities. Sharing these stories can give volunteers ideas, inspiration, and information about community resources.

### 3. Invite Guest Speakers

Inspire your volunteers to be inspired by the good works of others. Try locating speakers through local service clubs, volunteer centers and government offices.

### 4. Organize Study Circles

Compile a list of articles and books about civic involvement and facilitate a discussion group among your volunteers. Check out [www.studycircles.org](http://www.studycircles.org) for guidance on how to create a study circle.

### 5. Tell Civic Stories

Provide volunteers with an opportunity to tell the story of their civic involvement. This can be done through words, performance and visual arts. Find creative ways to display and share their stories. For example, create a documentary, display their work in a gallery, or compile a book.



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### SERVICE TO CIVICS AND YOUR NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM

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In the last two chapters we have created a foundation for understanding the connections between civic involvement and volunteerism and explored a variety of ways to increase the civic engagement of you and your volunteers. Make certain to take a few minutes to complete the Service to Civics Program Plan in the activities and templates section to explore practical applications of these materials.

You have had the opportunity to define civic involvement, further explore the issues and challenges facing your community, and learn about ways to apply these civic concepts to your role in national service. You are on your way to deepening the relationship between service and civics with your volunteers. Challenge yourself to continue to explore innovative ways to continue to deepen this connection.



## Activities and Templates

The training and implementation tools in this section will help you identify ways to apply the concepts from today's training to your position. This section includes:

- Project Planning Worksheet
- Task List
- Service to Civics Program Plan
- Take It With You



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## PROJECT PLANNING WORKSHEET

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Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Goals: \_\_\_\_\_

What will the project accomplish?

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

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

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

For example: Your volunteer program wants to help with the housing problem in your community. One project goal might be help create affordable housing for low income families in your community. An objective to reach this goal would be to assist your local Habitat for Humanity chapter with a building project.

Lead Contact for Project: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



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Logistics	Notes	Contact
Project Location		
Foul Weather Plan		
Volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit</li> <li>• Train</li> <li>• Supervise</li> <li>• Recognize</li> <li>• Feed</li> </ul>		
Project Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment</li> <li>• Donations Needed</li> </ul>		
Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press Releases</li> <li>• Media Contact Day of Event</li> </ul>		
Safety Issues		







## SERVICE TO CIVICS PROGRAM PLAN

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Think about your national service program. Then, answer the questions below.

How are you currently engaging volunteers in your national service program?

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What are the primary community issues addressed through the work of your organization's mission?

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Training and Orientation

What type of orientation and training do you provide for your volunteers?

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How do you incorporate information about the community issues into your volunteer training and orientation?

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Identify 2-3 ways that you could strengthen the community issues education in your volunteer orientation and training.

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

### Program Design

Outside of formal training, what other ways are you encourage volunteers in your program to become more civically engaged?

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Thinking creatively about your volunteer program, what 2-3 additional ways could you encourage your volunteers to become more civically engaged through their work with your program?

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



## TAKE IT WITH YOU

Here's your chance to take what you've learned in today's training with you. In this activity you will have the opportunity to explore practical applications of today's training concepts.

Choose ONE of the following activities:





## Activity One

Take a moment to reflect on the concepts we've covered in today's training. Think about the way you have defined civic participation, tangible steps you identified to become more civically engaged and the practical applications to increase the civic involvement of your volunteers. With this in mind, write yourself a letter outlining at least three ways you will apply the information from this training to your national service program. If applicable, give the letter to your facilitator and he or she will mail it to you at a later date to check in on your progress.

## Activity Two

Take a few minutes to reflect on the concepts we covered today.

- How does your experience today relate to the rest of your life?
  
- Will you do anything or think anything differently because of your experience today?
  
- What have you learned about yourself as part of this experience?

With these concepts in mind, take a few minutes to journal about today's session. Make certain to identify at least two tangible ways to apply what you learned to your national service program.





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## Activity Three

Draw a cartoon about today's session. Illustrate what you learned, new ideas you discovered, and/or practices you will adopt. If applicable, share with your group.



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## NOTES

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## Summary

As we continue to call people to meet the challenge of national and community service, let us persist in our quest to make their service meaningful – both to the communities we serve and to each and every participant. This will be accomplished, in part, by providing volunteers with opportunities to reflect on the meaning of their service and how it relates to civic involvement. Take the opportunity to deepen the connections between the service your volunteers are providing and how their work is impacting the community. Ask your volunteers questions and peak their curiosity about the issues that are facing our community. Give them tools and ideas that will help them to build their toolbox of civic skills. Lead them on the path of service to civics.



## Additional Resources

Listed below are several on-line resources on volunteerism and volunteer development.

- Civic Renewal Movement  
[www.cpn.org](http://www.cpn.org)
- Center for Democracy and Citizenship  
[www.publicwork.org](http://www.publicwork.org)
- Civic Reflection  
[www.civicreflection.org](http://www.civicreflection.org)
- Constitutional Rights Foundation  
[www.crf-usa.org](http://www.crf-usa.org)
- Energize Inc.  
[www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com)
- ePhilanthropyFoundation.org  
[www.ephilanthropyfoundation.org](http://www.ephilanthropyfoundation.org)
- e-volunteerism.com  
[www.e-volunteerism.com](http://www.e-volunteerism.com)
- Hands On Network  
[www.handsonnetwork.org](http://www.handsonnetwork.org)
- Idealist.org: Action Without Borders  
[www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org)
- Independent Sector  
[www.independentsector.org](http://www.independentsector.org)
- National & Global Youth Service Day  
<http://www.ysa.org/nysd/resource/planning.cfm>
- National Service Resource Center  
[www.nationalserviceresources.org](http://www.nationalserviceresources.org)
- Network for Good  
[www.networkforgood.org](http://www.networkforgood.org)



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- Raise Your Voice  
[www.actionforchange.org](http://www.actionforchange.org)
- Service Leader  
[www.serviceleader.org](http://www.serviceleader.org)
- ServeNet  
[www.servenet.org](http://www.servenet.org)
- Students in Service to America Guidebook  
<http://www.studentsinservicetoamerica.org/guidebook/index.html>



To learn more about Hands On training opportunities, please contact:  
[training@handsonnetwork.org](mailto:training@handsonnetwork.org)

Or visit us at [www.handsonnetwork.org](http://www.handsonnetwork.org)



The Corporation for National and Community Service works to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

The Corporation provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Together with the USA Freedom Corps, the Corporation is helping build a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in America.



Hands On Network brings people together to strengthen communities through meaningful volunteer action. Hands On Network is a growing network of 58 volunteer organizations and a half million volunteers changing communities in and outside the United States.

Hands On Network creates and manages nearly 50,000 projects a year — from building wheelchair ramps in San Francisco, to teaching reading in Atlanta, to rebuilding homes and lives in the Gulf Coast communities. The Hands On approach equips volunteers, creates leaders, and changes lives.