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## Recruitment and Retention: A Cross-Stream Challenge

By Carlos Pedraza, Training and Technical Assistance Officer, Corporation for National Service

Things are looking up for national service. Our 1999 congressional appropriation increased to support all the streams of service, particularly with regard to our cross-stream efforts in literacy, welfare-to-work, and expanding opportunities for seniors to serve in AmeriCorps.

The foundation of these successful efforts is the service given by those in our programs. Recruiting and retaining these volunteers, students, and members has always challenged the staff of national service programs, but the challenge has become more acute in the past year.

The currently robust U.S. economy may have been a two-edged sword. It helped relieve budgetary pressures against national service funding in Congress, but traditional recruiting methods may no longer be effective when national service programs have to compete for members with companies desperate for employees.

You may wonder: surely these pressures only affect AmeriCorps\*State/National, NCCC, and VISTA programs. Senior Corps and Learn

and Serve programs don't fall prey to employment pressures, do they? Seniors are retired and students are in class, right? That might be true for many, but economic pressures and the need for workers are keeping many seniors employed longer. And many students who participate in Learn and Serve are of working age. With rising college costs, Learn and Serve Higher Education programs have to compete with the workplace, too.

It's often very tempting to assume that each stream's problems are its own. I'm convinced, however, as I meet with program staff, members, and volunteers around the country that we and our programs are more alike than different. Fundamentally, we need engaged, active citizens serving in all our streams of service—this is as important to a teacher leading a Learn and Serve program as it is to an RSVP director in Senior Corps.

The second part of the recruitment issue is retention. How do you keep your members, volunteers, or students engaged in service, not only putting in their time, but satisfied that

*See Recruitment/Retention, page 3*

### Theme: Recruitment and Retention—Editor's Box

This year, the Corporation wisely extended T/TA services beyond AmeriCorps programs to all its streams of service. This issue of *The Resource Connection* elicits the expertise of T/TA providers to assist programs in AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, and the National Senior Service Corps to find, keep, inspire, and be inspired by, the students, members, and volunteers who form the foundation of our national service family.

In this issue there is a focus on how building a family can help national service programs retain their members by acknowledging each member's worth and paying attention to each one's struggles.

There are suggestions on how to develop a targeted and cohesive recruitment plan, which not only can help programs recruit successfully, but lay a foundation for how to manage members and volunteers once they come aboard.

Management issues of retention are examined, with an emphasis on the motivational component, and tips to help programs steer their course through the inevitably troubled waters of conflict.

Finally, there are some publications available through the NSRC lending library on recruitment and retention that you may find valuable.

### In this issue:

- Searching for Gold and Finding a Family: Building Retention Rates ..... Page 2
- Elements of a Successful Recruitment Process ..... Page 4
- Stepping up to the Challenge: Strategies for Motivating and Sustaining Members in National Service ..... Page 6
- Keeping Members Retained through Conflict Resolution ..... Page 7
- Library Spotlight: Recruiting and Retaining Members ..... Page 8

## Searching for Gold and Finding a Family: Building Retention Rates

By Harry Bruell, Director, National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC)

The members sat slumped in their chairs. It was a hot afternoon at an AmeriCorps program in the Southwest. We could tell summer was coming not only by the hot baking sun, but also by the mid-year slump in the faces of the members and by the absences of many of the members. I felt like I was entering one of those old gold rush towns two years after every speck of gold was already gleaned from each nook and cranny in town. The only folks left in town were those too discouraged to move on.

But this wasn't a gold rush; we know that few, if any, AmeriCorps members join for the financial rewards of the program. Why were the members at this site so unhappy? Why were so few still in the program? Why did the program have that dreaded problem of RETENTION?

The members and I discussed retention. We bantered around the common issues and causes. "This one left because his family moved." "This one got a job that paid more

money." "This one just never could get to work on time and fell so far behind on hours that she gave up trying to ever reach 1700." "Maybe the corps should pay us more." "It's hard to work outside when it's so hot."

These comments were all valid, but did not hit the real issue. Finally, one member, who had been silent until now, spoke quietly. He said, "Sometimes I have a hard night at home. When I come to the corps in the morning, I am tired and some days I put my head on the table while I wait for us to start the day. I wish that just one time the corps staff would ask me how I'm doing instead of saying, 'Get up—it's time to start serving.'"

Could it be this simple?

No, but it's close, and this member is on to something. We all know that members join AmeriCorps for a number of reasons—to serve, to get work experience, to earn an education award. While these are good methods of attracting an applicant to AmeriCorps, it is



**The Faces of Service** (from upper left, clockwise):

Civic Works, Baltimore, Milwaukee Community Service Corps, San Francisco Conservation Corps, Civic Works, Baltimore

Photos courtesy of NASCC

not enough to keep members in today's economy. Companies are fighting each other for recent college graduates. Nurses are being given signing bonuses to join hospitals. Nearly any member in any AmeriCorps program in America could earn more money somewhere else.

So, what keeps AmeriCorps members in your program? *They stay because they are valued either by the service beneficiary or the program staff.*

Ever ask a group of volunteers why they volunteer? I did recently at a conference in New Hampshire. Nearly every one said they stayed at their volunteer placement because they felt the staff valued them, they were part of something fun, and they had opportunities for personal growth. Those that left their volunteer placements did so because they had no support from staff, were bored (unvalued), or were not made to feel part of the group. A volunteer Sunday School teacher, responsible for an entire class, quit her assignment because she felt completely unsupported. A volunteer assistant to the assistant stage manager of a community theater group stayed because he felt part of a great group of people. The reasons whether this group of volunteers remained with their assignments or not were completely independent of the nature or importance of the assignment.

What matters most (more than the stipend, education award or service assignment) is the tone and atmosphere of the corps. Is your program a fun place to go every day? Do you wake up feeling excited and ready to serve? Are the other people in the program, staff and

members, happy to see you? Are they supportive when you are having a hard time?

### This is what matters with retention:

- Start each day with an official welcome and a morning ritual.
- Pay attention to each member. Show them that you care. Notice when they aren't doing well.
- Recognize the achievements of each member, both informally and formally. Give consistent feedback, both positive and negative. Help them grow.
- Make the program a family. Make it a fun place to be.
- Throw informal parties. Bring donuts to the office. Celebrate achievements. Have a corps "family" picnic or potluck.

Members stay because the corps is fun, because they are valued and because they look forward to showing up every day. Members leave when it is no longer fun, they are not valued, and they dread coming each day. It really is that simple. Create that family. There are very few of us, especially in the service field, that would trade a loving family for a pot of gold.

NASCC is available for training and technical assistance in member development and program sustainability as well as other program needs. Contact Michael Duplechain, email: [mduplechain@nascc.org](mailto:mduplechain@nascc.org), or Harry Bruell email: [hbruell@nascc.org](mailto:hbruell@nascc.org), phone: 800-666-2722, or visit their website at: [www.nascc.org](http://www.nascc.org) ■

## On Being a Team

What motivates you to remain committed to your year of service?

*"I guess what I really learned...was that the changes that took place during the course of the year were tough to deal with but it brought all the members of the corps even closer. When we were faced with adversity, we started to rely on each other a little more, and that was when the concept of us being a corps or a 'team' finally sank in. Another motivation for me to stay was the kids that I worked with. I developed some really strong bonds...and it was tough for me to say 'goodbye' to them when my year of service came to a close."*

*Former AmeriCorps member Prosenjeet Basu  
CAGMC AmeriCorps*

## Recruitment/Retention

*(continued from page 1)*

both their successes and struggles are recognized and appreciated by program staff and the broader community?

It may be too easy to pin recruiting and retention problems on a competitive economy. In fact, I fear we're not giving national service participants and staff enough credit for the things other than stipends and funding that they can offer. The rewards of service have always gone beyond things like education awards, living allowances, and potential work experience. The authors in this issue's articles offer concrete ways to highlight the strengths of the service experience and to better deal with its challenges.

One last note: You are not alone. A vast network of people and organizations stand ready to help you face the dual challenge of recruitment and retention. State Commissions, national direct parent organizations, and Corporation state offices are charged with learning and addressing your program's needs. The Corporation has cooperative agreements with 20 national T/TA providers to help you specifically. I encourage you to learn more about them and take advantage of their free services by visiting the National Service Resource Center (NSRC) website: [www.etr.org/NSRC](http://www.etr.org/NSRC)

You can also take advantage of the collective wisdom of your peers by joining one of the electronic mailing lists (listservs) that serve as a forum for discussion with each stream of service. Information about how to subscribe to these e-mail groups is available at the NSRC website. ■

## On Motivation

“...I try to continue looking for ways to do the job...the more stuff I have to do, the more I get motivated. I think when people don't know what to do...this is when they get frustrated and start thinking about other things. Also, how you are treated at the agency where you are placed has a lot to do with your motivation for staying there. The VISTA leaders on our project are available for assistance/complaining/chatting when you need it. They will recognize our achievements and help us recognize that we are doing some good.”

*AmeriCorps\*VISTA member Mary Rice Health Links Project*

# Elements of a Successful Recruitment Process

*By Emilio N. Williams, President, The Koi Group*

**R**ecruitment is not a magical process of having people sign up, but is one of the most critical aspects of operating your program. Recruitment should be a strategic process that connects candidates who need what you have to offer and who possess the skills and aptitude to accomplish your goals and objectives. The results of your recruitment process will directly impact several areas, including morale, motivation, respect, retention, quality of service projects, relationships with service partners and community members, funding, and your ability to focus on the program rather than spend the majority of your time addressing problems.

## Targeted vs. “Warm Body” Recruitment

What is known as “warm body” recruitment may only produce numbers, while actually increasing the labor of reviewing applications,

interviewing, screening, and working through many that may not fit requirements. This type of recruitment includes public service announcements, speaking to special groups, brochures, television, radio, ads, brochures, flyers, etc. Warm body recruitment should be used only with targeted recruitment strategies as a foundation. Targeted recruitment identifies the needs of the job, determines the skills and temperament required to fill the position, finds out who possesses these skills, and discusses matching the needs of the program with a potential member's interests and needs. Developing a pool from targeted leads will likely decrease problems, such as retention, in the future.

The following questions or ideas may be helpful to use in recruitment strategies. They serve as a starting point and are not all inclusive—there are many successful programs you can also consult.

## Clarifying what you need and what you offer:

- How clear is your vision, mission, strategy, and the culture of the organization?
- What type of person is most likely to succeed as opposed to a person most likely to experience problems?
- What cultures are you trying to create and do you have the ability to manage a diversity of cultures?
- Why would someone want to serve for a term—what's in it for them?
- If selected, what will the candidate receive?
- How will I determine their interests and core values?

## Developing leads:

- Use previous members to help generate leads.
- Think of who you have not asked for leads. Talk to family and friends of members, partners, and recipients of services.
- Analyze your list of graduates—which leads have resulted in the most recruits?
- Meet with local service clubs and community groups. Establish relationships with them so that they can help as well.
- Consider placing some responsibility of recruitment on the partner organization.

## Interviewing potential members

- Conduct group interviews of 10-15 candidates. Include members in this process and have a plan to discuss common situations and challenges.
- Use behavioral interviewing techniques. Prepare questions that cannot be practiced by the candidate the night before. For example, “This position requires a tremendous amount of patience and effective communication skills working with diverse populations. Tell me about a situation when you were successful in communicating and how it worked out. Tell me about a time where you needed to be patient and communicate and you were not successful. What happened?”
- Use scenario interviewing. People have learned in the past how to complete applications, resumes, interview, and provide references. Scenario interviews will help you develop situations that can quickly turn into role-play situations.
- Check references very carefully.
- Trust your judgment. If you have an uncomfortable feeling about an applicant, you are probably right. What you see is what you get. Don’t delude yourself into thinking that you will change them after the “marriage.”
- Consider having partners and/or site supervisors sit in on the interviews.
- Connect with and/or visit a program with strong leadership and high-quality members. Find out what they think they did well and what they would do differently.
- Include a number of requirements in the selection process, using common sense. For example, candidates come for an interview, visit a morning opening session, submit an application, take a test, meet with a member’s council, etc.
- Consider inviting more applicants to the orientation than you have slots. Some will not be interested.

## Hiring and ongoing screening and orientation

- Establish some type of probation period.
- Develop an adequate orientation process. This should not be rushed. Invest time to build a functioning team that communicates with one another.
- Give all members a fair dose of what a typical program year will look like so that they can make an educated choice.

## Closing Questions to Consider

- Will you be able to roll additional members into the program over the next 90 days? How will they be integrated into the team? How will they make up hours the other members have already completed?
- How will they receive the training the other members received? How will they catch the national service spirit and get the full picture?
- How will I help them get to where they want to go?

Don’t compromise. Remember, it takes much more effort in the long run to repair the damage of simply filling the numbers than it ever will to come up with a plan. Target! Know

what’s in it for you and what’s in it for them. Communicate that!

Emilio N. Williams, is a private consultant and may be contacted at 301-779-7391, fax: 301-779-0389, or email: koigroup@ix.netcom.com ■

## On Retention

“Even when things got difficult, we couldn’t pull out on our friends and the projects we were working together on. Member retention relies in large part on the ability of the program to instill in its members a sense of their importance, their rarity and uniqueness. I wouldn’t be surprised to hear that programs based on a tight team structure have lower member attrition than program without such a sense of group identity of common cause.”

*Former AmeriCorps member Zac Mutrux Northwest Service Academy*

What They're  
Saying from  
the Field

"The supervision training conducted by the National Crime Prevention Council was very helpful to me as an AmeriCorps program coordinator. What I needed was specific ways to retain members and I received information on strengthening my listening and feedback skills. We (the participants) did several role plays on problem-solving with individual members and with large groups. That was very helpful....The training and the *Becoming a Better Supervisor* guide has proven to be useful and I believe will continue to be useful."

Delthine Watson  
Warren Service Corps  
Warrenton, NC

Warren Service Corps is an educationally focused AmeriCorps program, with an emphasis on tutoring and literacy development.

# Stepping up to the Challenge: Strategies for Motivating and Sustaining Members in National Service

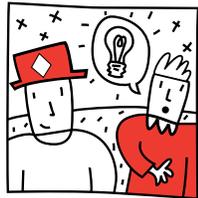
By Nicholas C. Zefran, Training Director, National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC)

One of the most difficult tasks confronting national service supervisors is helping members develop and sustain a commitment to service throughout a program year. At various trainings conducted over the past three years, the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) has learned that member motivation rises and falls at critical points within a program year. During these trainings, any discussion on motivation inevitably ends with

the question, "Can we realistically do anything about keeping members motivated?"

The answer is "yes," and NCPC has developed a list of strategies that supervisors may wish to consider when helping members build and sustain motivation. The points listed below are taken from *Becoming a Better Supervisor: A Resource Guide for National and Community Service Supervisors*.\*

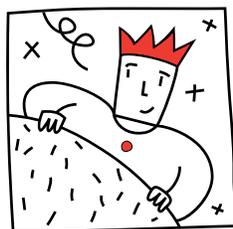
Members are likely to develop and sustain commitment to goals when:



**1** They are clear about the mission, values, and goals of national service and can see them in action. It is important that supervisors not only share information about national service, but also model the principles and values associated with the national service movement.

national service, but also model the principles and values associated with the national service movement.

**2** They feel appreciated for their contributions. Members and volunteers usually value a direct supervisor's approval more than that of any other person on staff. Letting them know that their diligence, contributions, service, and positive attitudes really matter, can go a long way in developing and sustaining motivation.



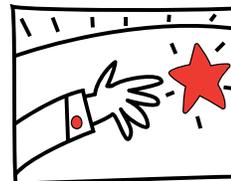
**3** They are competent and confident. Performance assessment, praise, and constructive feedback help identify problems early and build confidence and competence. Over time, members and volunteers begin to feel more and more empowered.

members and volunteers begin to feel more and more empowered.



**4** They have influence in developing their roles in the program. Influence creates ownership and ownership builds commitment. Allow members and volunteers to participate actively in the planning processes that determine their roles and responsibilities.

the planning processes that determine their roles and responsibilities.



**5** Their personal goals are met. Get to know your members as individuals and try to understand what motivates each one (e.g., self-esteem, team affiliation, social interaction, technical expertise, professional recognition). Use that information in assigning work so that both program and personal goals are met.

ation, social interaction, technical expertise, professional recognition). Use that information in assigning work so that both program and personal goals are met.

For more information on supervisory skills development, contact either Nicholas Zefran or Maria Candamil at NCPC, 800-355-1200, or email: [zefran@ncpc.org](mailto:zefran@ncpc.org), and [mcandamil@ncpc.org](mailto:mcandamil@ncpc.org) ■

\* May be ordered from NSRC; contact Jennifer Gartin at 800-860-2684, ext. 142, for more information.

# Keeping Members Retained through Conflict Resolution

By Joanne Hartman, Associate Director, National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM)

Conflict is a normal, inevitable part of life. People who work together are likely to encounter conflicts sooner or later, sparked by differences in personality, values, or perceptions. Conflicts may also seem more challenging when those involved come from different backgrounds or experiences.

Just as in any other work setting, national service members may encounter disagreements with their peers, supervisor, or people in community organizations with whom they are working. For most people, conflict takes the

enjoyment out of their work. For some, it may reach a point where they consider leaving the organization. Organizations and teams that often must deal with conflict situations tend to have lower morale, lower productivity, higher turnover, and more burn-out. Conflict that may have been easy to resolve at the outset can make us dread coming to work when it is an ongoing problem.

As preventive measures, it is important to note warning signs and behaviors that may create conflict so they may be addressed early.

## Warning signs that something may be wrong:

- Avoidance of issue, situation, or person
- Mistrust
- Violations of rules and working guidelines
- Not accepting responsibility
- Not doing one's job
- Not listening
- Lack of understanding
- Power or status-based communication

## Behaviors that may stir up conflict:

- Nonconstructive criticism
- Guilt trips
- Blaming, defensiveness
- Commands
- Unhealthy competitiveness
- Mistrust
- Pushing someone's "buttons"
- Using absolutes—"You never . . ." "He always . . ."
- Threats, dares

## What can be done?

- Establish working guidelines that the whole group agrees to and has helped create.
- Learn and practice effective communication skills—active listening, reframing, etc.
- Go through a self assessment—identify people's conflict styles: are they competitive, do they avoid conflicts, how well does the group employ collaborative conflict resolution, how do people cool off when they are angry?
- Model collaborative skills and encourage team members to practice.

Successful organizations create a climate in which people are invested and productive because they feel listened to and appreciated. This is the type of climate in which conflict is not a threat, but instead is an integral part of improving and growing in the organization. Supervisors can play a huge role in establishing this climate, with some key management principles in mind:

- Ethical leadership
- Empowerment—invest in others
- Listen—share differences of opinion while accepting the validity of other's views
- Environment:
  1. What are the vision and goals of the organization?
  2. Who are the people affected by the organization's work?
  3. How does the organization work?
  4. How do people interact?

See *Conflict Resolution*, page 8

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## Conflict Resolution

(continued from page 7)

Even when the goal is preventing conflict, collaborative conflict resolution is an essential tool. It is a model of resolving conflicts that respects and satisfies the concerns of each person involved in a conflict. In this model, those in the conflict take responsibility and ownership of the problem, then work together to solve it. They communicate with each other, try to understand each other's point of view, and come up with solutions that will produce a positive outcome for each person involved.

There are conflict resolution resources available—a local community mediation center or

a state mediation association has a lot of experience dealing with many kinds of conflict situations, and can be a good partner or mentor to you and your project. Services may include materials, training, consulting, mediation, or facilitation.

Resources such as *Getting Unstuck: Transforming Conflict from Crisis to Opportunity* and *A Manager's Guide to Conflict Resolution* (soon to be published) are available from ETR Associates (800-860-2684, ext. 142) and NAFCM. For further information on conflict resolution training, contact Joanne Hartman at 202-467-6226, or email: [jhartman@nafcm.org](mailto:jhartman@nafcm.org) ■

## Library Spotlight: Recruiting and Retaining Members

National Service programs may check out these and other items from our resource center by contacting Amanda Fargo. You may also check the database of library materials on our website: [www.etr.org/NSRC](http://www.etr.org/NSRC)

**Art of Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers, The**  
Bradner, Jeanne H.

Illinois Commission on Community Service,  
Chicago, 1995  
C0083, 22 pages

Covers basic information on who volunteers and why. Discusses the pre-recruitment preparation necessary for targeting recruitments.

**Becoming a Better Supervisor: A Resource Guide for Community Service Supervisors**  
National Crime Prevention Council, 1996  
C0096, 143 pages

Designed to strengthen supervising skills, illustrates the various roles of a supervisor, including communicator, team builder, planner/manager, and AmeriCorps representative. Includes readings, assessment tools, and checklists. Guide developed by three major sources: a comprehensive needs assessment; views of AmeriCorps supervisors who participated in Supervisory Skills Workshops; and literature in the fields of supervision, management, and community participation.

**Recruiting New Members**

ACTA Publications, Chicago, 1996  
V0096, 10 minutes

Training tape for organizations wishing to build their membership. Provides techniques and information on how to identify, contact, interview, develop relationships, and recruit new members.

**Secrets of Motivation: How to Get & Keep Volunteers & Paid Staff!**

Vineyard, Sue  
Heritage Arts Publishing, Downers Grove, IL  
R0617, 135 pages

Discusses the connection between motivation and volunteering, volunteer job retention and satisfaction, and matching people with appropriate work. Includes a list of creative ways to recognize people, and also lists types of assignments that may motivate volunteers of the 90s. ■