

Chapter 4

Evaluating Pre-Service Training

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If you don't know where you've been, does it matter where you're going?

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SCOPE

This chapter is designed to help you consider your PST evaluation needs, determine the kinds of feedback and evaluation methods you will use, and develop the processes and materials needed to obtain ongoing feedback and interim assessment during the PST and an overall evaluation after it is completed. The chapter also addresses the importance of evaluation as a tool for making decisions, assessing quality, and determining success in reaching AmeriCorps program objectives.

IMPORTANCE

Pre-service training is an important part of your AmeriCorps program, and -- if effective -- can help you meet your program goals and objectives. AmeriCorps programs are expected to produce direct and demonstrable results -- and successful pre-service training helps prepare your members to achieve those results at a local level.

Hint: Be sure your evaluation methods and tools are an integral part of your PST design, with evaluation forms included in member training notebooks and time allocated for evaluation and/or reflection as part of each unit and in the evenings. This manual provides a separate chapter on evaluation because it is such a critical component of PST design.

PST evaluation helps you:

- Monitor quality and progress by obtaining feedback during the session when you can still make adjustments.
- Determine whether PST training objectives are being met by measuring member learning and satisfaction.
- Determine whether desired outcomes were reached by the PST as a whole by evaluating the overall session.

FOCUS OF PST EVALUATION

This chapter assumes that your PST evaluation is *training-*focused rather than *member performance-*focused. **Your primary purpose is not to evaluate the members but to evaluate the training.**

Training evaluation must tell you both how members and trainers rate training quality and whether members are learning the material stated in the objectives. If this learning is not occurring, then the training itself needs to be modified so that members leave the PST with appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Evaluation helps you do better next time, by documenting which activities went particularly well and which units or presenters were not really effective. Whether you provide a three-day orientation or a two-week PST program, evaluation lays the groundwork for

members' project assignment, identifies the needs to be met through in-service training, and lays the groundwork for the next program cycle.

Evaluation of your PST should be a multi-stage feedback process that helps you refine the training as you go, and provides important information for next time -- what to change, keep, shorten, lengthen, etc. -- as well as "pats on the back"! Or it can be a rushed afterthought given to grumbling members who can't get out the door fast enough, providing little thoughtful feedback.

This chapter is important because it gives you practical, easy-to-use tools and ideas for evaluating your pre-service training.

TARGETED USERS

This chapter is designed for use by the staff responsible for planning the pre-service training, and especially the individuals responsible for developing and implementing the PST evaluation.

EXPECTED LEARNING

This chapter will provide the information, skills, and tools needed to design a PST evaluation plan that is grounded in solid theory and practice and can be implemented easily as an integral part of the PST effort.

RELATED CHAPTERS

This chapter relates closely to the other Design chapters. For additional information on objective setting and evaluation in the context of member project assignments, see *Chapter 13: Planning and Evaluation*, page 527, in the Training Topics & Activities section. Chapter 13 also addresses the use of member portfolios as an evaluation and reflection tool.

**OTHER THINGS
YOU SHOULD KNOW**

Just as different members have different learning styles, they respond best to different types of evaluations. Some members may have had negative educational experiences or limited educational opportunities and may respond better to performance-based or verbal assessments than to paper-and-pencil "tests" or evaluations. Others may be accustomed to and comfortable with written performance measures. A comprehensive evaluation should include tools and methods appropriate for all of them.

Steps in PST Evaluation Design

1. **Make sure there is agreement on evaluation parameters -- *what you want to learn from the evaluation and why*.** Consider how the results will be used, both the direct use of the results -- to make refinements during the PST session and improve future sessions -- and broader use -- to help assess progress towards your program objectives. Consider who will receive the results and the form in which they will need to be presented.

2. **Distinguish *outcome-focused evaluation*, which focuses on whether learning objectives were met and desired training outcomes achieved, from *quality assessment*, which focuses on the perceived quality of the PST design and delivery.** You will want to include both types of evaluation, but they require different tools and questions.
 - **To assess PST quality requires asking members, other participants, and trainers their perceptions of various aspects of the training experience.** This might include such factors as the appropriateness of training design, length, topics, and content; the quality of training and facilitation, opportunities for experiential learning, and group interaction; and the adequacy of training facilities.

 - **To measure whether learning objectives were met requires oral or written presentations or tests, demonstrations of skills, and other performance-based evaluation.** For example, to determine whether members understand AmeriCorps requirements, you can ask them to state major requirements or to answer multiple-choice questions about them. To assess skill development, you can observe members in situations requiring them to use these skills, such as group tasks or community activities. The primary purpose of such evaluation in the context of the PST is not to "grade" members, but to determine how successful the training has been in helping them develop needed knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

3. **Review program objectives, desired PST outcomes, and specific unit-by-unit PST learning objectives, making sure that objectives are stated in measurable terms.** (See the materials on objectives in *Preparing Each Component of a Pre-Service Training Package*, page 93, in Chapter 2.)
 - Review the overall objectives of your AmeriCorps program and identify those likely to be directly affected by the results of pre-service training.

- Review PST desired outcomes and revise them if necessary to make them measurable. (If you prepared a chart of desired PST outcomes and related training topics as part of *Part #4: Developing a PST Outline*, page 69, in Chapter 2, review it now to help focus your evaluation.)
- Bring together the learning objectives for each of your training units. Be sure that they are measurable.

4. Differentiate knowledge-, attitude-, and skill-related objectives. They will require different evaluation techniques; consider possible techniques for measuring success in meeting various types of objectives. For example:

- To determine whether knowledge-focused objectives have been met, you can use oral or written questions or tests. It helps to know the extent of members' knowledge before and after the training so you can assess what was learned during the PST, so pre- and post-tests are very helpful.

EXAMPLES OF THREE TYPES OF OBJECTIVES

Knowledge: To be able to list and explain five steps in group problem solving.

Skills: To demonstrate the ability to plan and deliver an oral presentation describing the project to which you are assigned.

Attitudes: To demonstrate a sense of identification with the AmeriCorps missions.

- To determine whether attitudes have changed, you will need to know members' pre-PST attitudes. You can ask about attitudes at the beginning of the PST or at the start of a particular session and then ask again after the PST or after the specific session. You can also observe behavior which reflects attitudes.
- To determine whether skills have been learned, you will need performance measures such as completion of community projects requiring these skills, ability to demonstrate the skills in a training situation, or ability to play a game or conduct a role play which requires these skills.

5. Review the CNS guidelines (see the shaded box on the following page). CNS urges the use of feedback as well as various evaluation methods, and inclusion of program, trainer, and member evaluations.

**CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL SERVICE
AMERICORPS MEMBER TRAINING GUIDELINES:
How Do I Know if Member Training is Going Well?**

Member training should include program, trainer and member evaluation so that feedback and evaluation become a **welcomed guide** to self and program improvement, not a feared criticism.

Evaluation can be conducted through:

- Post-session critiques - individualized or group discussions with or without the trainers present,
- Weekly training meetings - written or group discussions with or without the trainers present,
- Mid training and end of training evaluations,
- Individualized meetings with training staff, and
- Ad hoc feedback - verbal or written - "a suggestion box".

Feedback is most useful if it:

- Describes a recipient's behavior,
- Recognizes the needs of both the giver and the recipient,
- Is delivered in a timely manner, and
- Allows for clarification.

Participant training is going well when:

- Everyone is having fun while learning a lot!

Source: Corporation for National Service, *IV. Member Training and Supervision, Program Director's Manual for AmeriCorps*State and National*. Washington, D.C.: issued August 1995, revised November 1995.

6. **Consider the kinds of feedback you will need during the PST to know whether the agenda or training approaches need immediate revision.** This may include verbal or written feedback on content, training activities, trainer performance, group interaction, adequacy of facilities, or other factors. Be sure to develop a process for reviewing written evaluation forms, summarizing oral discussions, and identifying any broad-based negative feedback. Then ensure a regular process for using this information to revise PST approaches or content as needed, perhaps through discussions at daily staff meetings throughout the PST. Also identify and share broad-based positive feedback, using it to reinforce desired training styles. Be sure to include opportunities for both members and trainers to provide and receive feedback.

Hint: Effective PST evaluation benefits from multiple perspectives -- from members, trainers, host site supervisors, and other PST participants. In designing your evaluation, consider how best to get input from each group.

7. **Consider the range of learning- and quality-focused methods you might use during the training to assess the adequacy of particular training units or activities.** Consider a mix of approaches, verbal and written, member and trainer focused.
8. **Consider approaches to be used to evaluate the overall PST experience,** including interim and post-PST assessment methods (see the *Sample Interim and End-of-PST Evaluation Form*, page 229, in *Chapter 5: Supporting Materials*). In addition to unit feedback and evaluation time, you will probably want to schedule at least two evaluation sessions as part of PST lasting a week or more, one around the middle of the training, and the other at the end. For shorter training, one evaluation session at the end is probably sufficient.
9. **Consider methods which might be used to obtain longer-term evaluation of the practical value of the PST** after members have been in their project assignments for a few months. This information can help you plan activities for in-service training/service-learning, as part of the 20% time allotment for member development.
10. **Chart these various evaluation components and needs, and select methods which might be used for each.** (See the *PST Evaluation Design Format*, page 143; *Sample PST Evaluation Design Chart*, page 141; and *Developing and Using PST Evaluation Tools*, page 145, in this chapter and the sample evaluation forms, page 225, in *Chapter 5: Supporting Materials*. See *Chapter 13: Planning and Evaluation*, page 527, for more information on using portfolios for evaluation.)

11. Assign responsibility for preparing each type or level of evaluation, including forms or questions. For example:

- Each person responsible for a particular training unit might also be responsible for obtaining interim feedback on the quality of that training unit and post-session assessment of the extent to which learning objectives were met and skills learned.
- A core trainer or other design team member might be given responsibility for developing member-based interim and post-PST evaluation procedures for the overall PST and the follow-up evaluation as well as host supervisor- and trainer-based evaluation procedures.
- The person responsible for designing the community activities might be asked to specify how the success of these activities should be judged, in terms of demonstrating member skills and accomplishing community benefits.

METHODS OF PST EVALUATION

- Informal feedback and discussion
- Pre- and post-unit "tests" of knowledge, done verbally or in writing
- Unit, interim, and end-of-session written evaluations and oral discussions
- Trainer observations of individual and group performance and interaction
- Member presentations demonstrating knowledge and/or skills
- Role plays and games
- Community activities applying knowledge and skills
- Member focus groups
- Member self-assessments of group process and interaction
- Member reflection methods, such as keeping a journal or a portfolio
- Self-assessment checklists

12. Review and integrate these evaluation components into a comprehensive and usable PST evaluation plan. Be sure that every unit is evaluated in some form, by both members and trainers. To summarize the entire evaluation process, you can revise your *PST Evaluation Design Format*, page 143, to show each method and tool being used, and when it is to be used.

- 13. Integrate your evaluation methods and tools into your final training design, allocate time for them within the training day, and review them in the mock PST session.** Include evaluation mechanisms and forms in member notebooks -- or give them to members at the appropriate time if you do not want them available to the members until they are used. Assign responsibility for ensuring that the evaluation is conducted as planned.
- 14. Assign responsibility for reviewing and aggregating evaluation results, identifying situations requiring discussion or action, and making this information available to the trainers and other staff during as well as after the PST session.** Be sure that:
- The trainer or presenter or some other assigned individual summarizes the main points from each feedback session so they are not lost.
 - Every trainer or presenter is responsible for reporting *positive* and *negative* feedback from his/her sessions on a daily basis, and informing the senior trainer of any serious or potential problems immediately.
 - One individual on staff -- preferably not someone with a major training responsibility -- is responsible for reviewing written assessments and being sure that important information from them is used immediately for PST agenda or other training adjustments.
 - Information from the evaluations is fully tabulated and analyzed after the session, both to improve future sessions and to document progress towards objectives. If evaluations indicate a need for additional member training, arrange it or communicate this need to collaborating agencies and host sites.
- 15. Use daily or weekly staff meetings to review evaluation reports and monitor follow-up.** This not only encourages on-time preparation of written reports, but provides a forum for discussion about in-service training needs and how to use evaluation results to strengthen future PST sessions. Be sure to look at evaluation results with an eye to deciding which trainers and presenters to invite back, and which to consider replacing for the next PST.

Sample PST Evaluation Design Chart

Evaluation Component	Designed to Measure	Target Group	Methods	Timing
Feedback on satisfaction with PST process	Perceived adequacy of PST design and process; need for immediate revisions	Members Trainers	Information discussions with group Trainer meetings	End of afternoon session on first day; evening session if needed Meeting each evening or at lunch if needed
Unit-focused evaluation	Quality of specific units Whether learning objectives for the unit were met	Members; other participants involved in these units Trainers	Brief unit assessment forms or discussion of session Paper and pencil or oral tests of knowledge; demonstration of skills, as part of individual or group presentations or other activities in unit Written assessments Observation of groups and of community activities	At end of unit At end of unit (can use pre-test at beginning as well) At end of unit During presentations or group work as part of unit; during community activities
Interim PST evaluation	Progress towards PST overall objectives and desired outcomes; quality of session	Members Trainers	Written assessments; group discussion Summary of observations; written assessment; discussion	Halfway through the PST if it lasts a week or longer -- at end of session or as evening session Halfway through the PST

Evaluation Component	Designed to Measure	Target Group	Methods	Timing
Personal Responses to PST	How each member feels the PST is affecting him/her individually and as an AmeriCorps member	Members	Journal Portfolio -- art work, tapes, other forms of expression Self-assessment forms	Periodically throughout the session and afterwards
Evaluation of community benefits	Extent to which community activities benefited the targeted recipients (organizations or individuals)	Community organization or contacts	Brief written assessment form or interview guide for use in a telephone interview or meeting, to be conducted by members or by staff	Immediately following completion of the community project, or within one week after its completion
Overall PST evaluation	Extent to which PST overall objectives were met and desired outcomes reached; quality of session	Members; other PST participants	Written evaluations; group discussion	End of PST
		Trainers	Written evaluations; debriefing	Right after PST ends
Follow-up evaluation	Value of PST to members in their project assignments	Members Host site supervisors	Follow-up discussion or written evaluation Follow-up evaluation form	During training provided at project site - three months after PST ends Three months after PST ends

PST Evaluation Design Format

Evaluation Component	Designed to Measure	Target Group	Methods	Timing

Developing and Using PST Evaluation Tools

1. **Make sure that your pre-service training evaluation "fits" within your overall evaluation plan.** Be sure that it provides at least preliminary measures of progress towards program objectives. Differentiate evaluation related to member performance related to learning objectives and assessment of PST quality and member satisfaction.
2. **Consider using a pre-PST training needs and skills assessment as a baseline measure of member skills** (*A Member Training Needs and Skills Assessment* form, page 165, is included in *Chapter 5: Supporting Materials*).
3. **Use a mix of approaches.** PST evaluation can happen in informal and formal ways, and both are equally valid and important.
4. **For unit evaluations, try to use methods which can be implemented in 10-15 minutes at the end of the unit,** such as a short written assessment form or discussion based on several evaluation questions.
5. **Develop quick, easy-to-complete unit session assessment forms for members to complete.** In preparing them:
 - Use learning objectives for that unit as a basis for evaluating whether material was successfully transmitted and learned;
 - Make most of the questions closed-ended ("forced choice"), so it is quick to complete and results can be tabulated easily but always provide space for comments;
 - Focus on such content questions as:
 - ◆ Perceived value of the session to each individual as an AmeriCorps member;
 - ◆ Extent to which knowledge has been learned -- and knowledge-based objectives met;
 - ◆ Extent to which skills have been learned -- and skill-based objectives met;
 - ◆ Extent to which attitudes have changed -- and attitude-related objectives met;

- ◆ Plans for applying skills and changing behavior (an indication of what the member will do differently in the future because of the training);
- Include quality assessment questions as well, covering:
 - ◆ Assessment of trainer performance and skills, materials, facilities, group interaction, and other process aspects of the session;
 - ◆ Participant comments on the best and worst aspects of the session;
 - ◆ How this unit should be changed for future PST sessions; and
 - ◆ Any needed changes in the agenda or approach for this PST.

Keep the assessment form to no more than two pages, make the form anonymous or make name optional, and keep it simple! (See the *Sample Unit Assessment Form*, page 227, in *Chapter 5: Supporting Materials*.)

6. Prepare trainers to observe member behavior and assess learning. For example, when individuals or small groups are practicing or demonstrating skills, enacting a role play, or playing a game that requires application of knowledge or skills, observe individual or group behavior in a structured way. A trainer or even a special observer might prepare a form and record for each member observed:

- Level of mastery of the skill or knowledge -- perhaps on a scale of 5 to 1, where 5 is complete mastery and 1 is no mastery
- Aspects of the skill or knowledge which were best used or applied
- Aspects of the skill or knowledge which were least well used or applied
- Possible additional activities or information that might improve mastery of the skill or knowledge

7. Develop informal discussion or trainer feedback models for group discussions in both large and small groups. Include informal "around the campfire" evening sessions during residential training. Include discussion of how to give feedback in the mock training session. A session designed for members to give feedback to the trainers might include questions like the following:

- How useful was this session, in terms of preparing you for your project assignment? What were the most useful and least useful aspects of it?

- How valuable was Activity X in helping you learn [Y knowledge or Z skill]? Why?
- How well did the groups work together? What problems did you encounter?
- What could the trainers have done to make this session more useful?
- If you were designing next year's pre-service training session, would you include this unit again? What changes would you make?

**LESSONS LEARNED:
SELF-SELECTION**

PST evaluation emphasizes assessment of the training experience rather than the members. However, community projects, group activities involving both interaction and skill development, and self-reflection all give members an opportunity to understand the AmeriCorps and program philosophy and "culture" and their place within it.

The Director of an AmeriCorps program who has completed two PST cycles notes that:

Implicit in pre-service training is the idea that, for many members, this is the first intensive exposure to AmeriCorps they have received. In many ways it is a final opportunity to self-select out of the project before either the organization or the individual commits too many resources if the "fit" isn't right.

Trainers and other staff should make themselves available to members with personal concerns and be aware of the need to help identify members who may have difficulties. Staff should receive guidance in how to discuss and address these concerns and help resolve them in ways appropriate for both the member and the program.

8. **If you feel it is appropriate to review individual member progress or group interaction on a formal basis as part of the PST, arrange for feedback sessions initiated by trainers or other program personnel.** This may be done to determine whether something about your PST approach is not meeting the needs of a particular individual or group or to decide whether additional training or individual attention is needed. A feedback session designed for the trainers to give feedback to individual members or to a small group of members (such as a cooperative learning team) might include comments and questions like the following:
- My perception as a trainer during X unit was that you [your group] did a very good job of.....

- You seemed to have difficulty in doing/completing.....
- Do you think those perceptions are accurate?
- What do you think is causing the difficulties? Was it something about the training approach or content?
- [Z skills/Y knowledge or successful group interaction] is going to be important to you in your project assignment. We need to provide you some opportunities to strengthen your work [your group's interaction]. I suggest that we do the following....
- Does this approach seem like a good one to you?
- Then I think we have agreed that you will do... and I will do....

9. **Provide opportunities for individual member reflection; encourage members to maintain a portfolio and/or keep a journal.** In residential training, allow some free time in the evening for members to write in journals or prepare art work, audio tapes, or other materials for their portfolios. (See *Chapter 13: Planning and Evaluation*, page 527, for some ideas about the use of member portfolios.) Opportunities for individual member reflection also help to meet the goal of allocating 20% of service time for member development. You might suggest that members:

- Write down in their journal the most surprising experience of each day, the most important thing they learned about another member, or the most valuable lesson or skill they learned for use in their project assignment.
- Record important lessons or other information on an audio tape, emphasizing things they want to remember and be able to refer to once they are in their assignment.
- Illustrate how they are feeling or what they have learned through some form of art work.

10. **Prepare and use interim and end-of-PST evaluations including both written forms and group discussion.** The written forms for members might be organized in ways similar to the unit assessment forms, but should also include questions covering the following:

- Whether the member feels each specific desired PST outcome has been achieved;

- An overall assessment of the value of the training in preparing the individual for his/her AmeriCorps assignment, perhaps using a five-point scale from "excellent" to "poor";
 - What, if anything, the member expects to do differently because of the training;
 - Specific recommendations for how the member believes the PST should be changed in future years; and
 - What training the member feels should be continued through in-service training or regular reflection meetings.
11. **Review evaluation data at daily staff meetings throughout the PST, and agree upon any needed immediate re-design.** Be sure someone is responsible for reviewing all unit evaluations and sharing results. Ask trainers to report on oral evaluations. Use both positive and negative results to confirm whether training is going well and identify possible changes to be made in the agenda, types of activities, or trainer techniques.
 12. **Include evaluation by host site supervisors and other non-member training participants.** In addition to having them participate in feedback and oral evaluation sessions, ask them to complete forms which provide information on the perceived value of the PST to them and to the members who will be working with them. Topics should be similar to those listed above, with specific questions added about their level of satisfaction with the project planning unit and with community activities. You may also want to obtain follow-up information from host site supervisors several months after the PST to see whether the training prepared them appropriately for their project assignments.
 13. **Obtain written evaluations from trainers, including both core trainers and outside presenters.** Develop forms which provide their perspectives on the same aspects of the training as the members and host site supervisors, and their perceptions of the extent to which desired member outcomes were reached. There should be additional questions about the adequacy of various aspects of the training design. Questions for this aspect of trainer evaluation might be taken from the forms used in the mock training session (see the *Sample PST Package and Mock Session Assessment Form*, page 127, in Chapter 3).
 14. **After the PST is over, systematically review and reflect on evaluation results --** and their implications for both in-service training and future pre-service training. Hold a follow-up meeting including the training team and other program staff. Systematically incorporate feedback into future training, and show how it is being used to modify PST design or plan in-service training or other member development

sessions. Members, host site supervisors, presenters, and trainers all deserve credit for helping you modify the way you do training. Showing them their input was used will encourage careful and thorough feedback in the future.