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AmeriCorps and you

Examining Your AmeriCorps Experience



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

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

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

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

3. What do you wish had been different?

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

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

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

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

After you've answered these questions, ask your supervisor or a fellow AmeriCorps member or good friend to respond to the questions about you. This should be a person who knows you and your AmeriCorps experience well, and is thoughtful, honest, and caring. He or she should be willing to give you feedback, both positive and negative.

Perhaps the two of you will give different answers to some of the questions. Discuss these differences as well as your similar answers. It's possible your friend or colleague thinks you may be giving yourself too little credit, or too much. After all, many of us find it hard to be objective about ourselves.

Save the completed exercise. As you work through other exercises, you will refer back to it from time to time.

Skills and Accomplishments

In working through this section, you will focus on two things that everyone talks about these days—skills and accomplishments. For example, almost any interview for college admission or a job will include questions about both. People who can clearly describe their skills and accomplishments find themselves at an advantage in many situations. You may find that your next step after AmeriCorps hinges at least in part on this same ability.

Later chapters of the workbook focus on skills and accomplishments in considerable depth. For right now, just focus on what comes to mind immediately.

Skills. Think about the skills you learned or enhanced during your AmeriCorps service. Have you become better organized? patient? diplomatic? helpful? Are you punctual? less shy? a better public speaker? Did you learn how to write? how to understand and work with a budget? Did you learn a new computer program? about childhood illnesses? recycling methods? causes and effects of juvenile crime? nutrition needs of seniors? Did you learn about other cultures? how to organize around a community issue?

Make a quick list of some of the things you've learned and have been able to do. Start each entry with an action verb. Here are some examples:

- ✦ Wrote a community newsletter.
- ✦ Monitored program expenses. Kept program budget.
- ✦ Recycled trash.
- ✦ Organized and conducted community service projects.
- ✦ Tutored middle school students in reading.

Accomplishments. What did you complete and/or achieve during your AmeriCorps service? Things that you feel you did well and about which you are most proud are probably accomplishments. Use a verb first, and be specific. When you can, use numbers. Be accurate: Don't overstate or downplay what you've done. And don't forget to include all the training you've received (and used) as an AmeriCorps member.

Here are some examples that may help you describe your accomplishments:

- ✦ Wrote six community newsletters that were distributed to 500 community residents and organizations.
- ✦ Planned and managed budget for community program. Raised \$1,000 among local businesses for playground equipment.
- ✦ Participated in community trash recycling program that collected 1,000 pounds of materials for recycling.
- ✦ Completed 1,700 hours of community service at a neighborhood community center.

These are my accomplishments as an AmeriCorps member:

As an AmeriCorps member, I've learned to:

Things to Work On

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

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

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

People to Remember

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

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

Blank lines for writing skills and knowledge to work on for the future.

Name: _____
Title: _____
Organization: _____
Address: _____

Telephone: (_____) _____
Fax: (_____) _____
E-mail: _____

AmeriCorps and the Rest of Your Life

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

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

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

