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Continuing to serve

Service has been the defining feature of your experience as an AmeriCorps member. When you took the AmeriCorps pledge, you made a commitment to serve not only during your AmeriCorps term, but also beyond. For AmeriCorps "graduates," service is an ongoing commitment and responsibility. Many of your predecessors are meeting the challenge of service beyond AmeriCorps. In October 1997, 135 former members responded to a survey by AmeriCorps Alums, Inc. Among respondents, 79 percent had volunteered since the end of their AmeriCorps service. Of those, 72 percent had volunteered between six and thirty-one hours per month. This part of the workbook can help you think about ways to incorporate service into your next step.

Reflecting on Your AmeriCorps Service

Throughout your AmeriCorps experience, you

have prepared for and provided service while reflecting on the experience. Throughout your life, you will find that you will continue to reflect on this very special experience.

Understanding the full meaning of your AmeriCorps experience will take time—possibly a lifetime. If that seems farfetched, think back to a particular situation, something significant that took place during your first month or two of AmeriCorps service. Was there a clarifying moment? A crisis? A time when you questioned your decision to join AmeriCorps? A time when you first knew that you could and would be effective as a service provider? when you first realized that you were getting as much (or more) from your service as the community, agency, or community members were getting from you? Consider that moment. How did you make sense of the situation at the time? Since then, have you changed your view of the situation? How?

Very possibly, the way you view the situation now is somewhat different from the way you viewed it at the time. You are a more seasoned AmeriCorps member now; your perspective and attitudes, maybe even the way you act,

have changed. This type of reinterpretation of your AmeriCorps experience will continue, perhaps for the rest of your life.

As noted in Part 3, former participants of other service programs are often amazed at the staying power of the meaning of their service, and the way that it changes and expands over time.

Decades later, former Peace Corps volunteers' perceptions, actions, attitudes, and lifestyles remain affected by their service abroad. AmeriCorps*NCCC is modeled on the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a program started in the 1930s during the Depression, through which more than 10 million young

Americans participated in building and conservation work on important projects when jobs were rare. Veterans of the CCC remembered their service with pride. During the recent fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the end of World War II, former members of the U.S. military described their wartime experiences. Some began to articulate the meaning of those experiences for the first time publicly.

Although it's too early to tell, you too may experience a similar effect changing the framework of your AmeriCorps service over time.

I will get things done for America—to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier.
 I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities.
 Faced with apathy, I will take action.
 Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground.
 Faced with adversity, I will persevere.
 I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond.
 I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.
 —AmeriCorps Pledge

Throughout your life, your AmeriCorps experience will probably influence your choices about career, family, community, civic responsibilities, and lifestyle.

The questions and exercises in this section of the workbook are designed to help you assess the impact of your service up to this moment and to consider your service in the future. Both tasks are important as you consider what you will do after your AmeriCorps service.

What Motivated You Then; What Motivates You Now

AmeriCorps members have different motivations for joining. Most members have more than one motivation, including the opportunity to serve their communities and their nation, to develop skills and experiences for future work, and to take advantage of the educational benefits.

What motivated you to join AmeriCorps?

What motivates you to continue to serve after AmeriCorps service?

WORKSHEET

What you've learned



Through AmeriCorps service, you've gained a broader understanding of how to identify and address the needs of communities. Another part of what you've learned through your AmeriCorps service and will learn through the exercises in the workbook is how you fit into the needs of communities. What will you do with what you have learned through your AmeriCorps service? Respond to the following questions about what you have learned.

What specific skills, talents, and/or interests have you gained through your AmeriCorps service?

What lessons have you learned about yourself?

What lessons have you learned about working within a community and with different types of people?

How has the community benefited from your AmeriCorps service?

What specific skills, talents, and/or interests would you like to use in your next service opportunity?

What type of setting—e.g., school-based, community-based—are you considering for your next service opportunity? Why?

What issues—e.g., education, children, literacy, health, environment, public safety—are you considering for your next service opportunity? Why?

WORKSHEET

Rewards of service



Time and again you've been asked to think about or to describe the positive aspects of AmeriCorps service. Here's how some other AmeriCorps members view service.

INDIANA AMERICORPS

In the spring of 1996, Indiana AmeriCorps members described these aspects of their service as the most exciting and/or inspirational.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making a difference | <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing results |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being involved | <input type="checkbox"/> Starting a program from the ground up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Having an opportunity for input |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experiencing the rewards of service (reciprocity) | <input type="checkbox"/> Giving hope to others |

How does this list compare with what you found most exciting and/or inspirational during your AmeriCorps service? Place a checkmark next to the entries that you experienced, and add entries to the list if you have some others.

Your additions:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

VOLUNTEER MARYLAND!

Volunteer Maryland!, a program engaging AmeriCorps members, focuses on the attributes of servant leaders. Servant leaders take great care to ensure that "other people's highest priority needs are being served." The servant leader works to empower others to become "healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants." Servant leaders are in service first, then aspire to lead. A servant leader hopes to benefit, or at least not further deprive, the least privileged in society (R.K. Greenleaf. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. Mahway: Paulist Press, 1977).

Were you working toward becoming a servant leader during your AmeriCorps service? How do your skills and experience compare with servant leaders' attributes? Place a checkmark in the appropriate boxes to indicate which attributes you have fully developed; those you are working on; and those you don't possess and/or need to work on.

ATTRIBUTE	Possess/Use	Working on	Don't Have/ Need to Work on
Listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persuasion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foresight	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commitment to the growth of people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commitment to building community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Empathy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conceptualization	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stewardship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How might you work on the attributes you need to develop? Who might help you to do this? In what ways?

WORKSHEET

Challenges of service



Most experiences in life have positive and negative aspects. As your AmeriCorps experience comes to an end, you may feel burned out. It wouldn't be surprising if you have experienced many challenges during your service. Consider again the experiences of AmeriCorps members in Indiana and Maryland.

INDIANA AMERICORPS

Here is a list of frustrations and challenges to service that some AmeriCorps members in Indiana identified. Place a check next to the challenges in the following list that you have experienced as an AmeriCorps member.

- Too much administrative work
- Apathy/lack of initiative from community members
- Lack of continuity in programming and with community members
- Lack of understanding of AmeriCorps by others
- Lack of consistency among volunteers and other program persons
- Having to learn to deal with people where they are, not where they are "supposed" to be
- Limited resources

VOLUNTEER MARYLAND!

The Volunteer Maryland! program produced the following list of challenges to serving as a way of life. Place a check next to the challenges in this list that you have experienced as an AmeriCorps member.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking failures personally | <input type="checkbox"/> Personality conflicts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of money | <input type="checkbox"/> Not making a difference in agency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No end to the need | <input type="checkbox"/> Ignorance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Materialism | <input type="checkbox"/> Complacency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Isolation | <input type="checkbox"/> Cynicism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Powerlessness | <input type="checkbox"/> Impatience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exhaustion | <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lone voice | <input type="checkbox"/> "Know-it-all"-ism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apathy | <input type="checkbox"/> Polarization |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Negativism | <input type="checkbox"/> Insincerity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Autocracy | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bitterness | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrogance |

What challenges have you experienced that are not mentioned on either the Indiana or Maryland list?

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH CHALLENGES

Within every opportunity for service lies challenge. However, it is often true that lasting lessons are learned through coping with adversity. How have you coped in the past, and how will you cope with challenges in the future?

List below the actions you've taken to cope with the challenges of your AmeriCorps service. Have these methods been effective, counterproductive, or somewhere in between?

	Situation	Methods	Effectiveness
Sample:	Lack of books for tutoring sessions	Canvassed local businesses for assistance	Provided 1,000 books for sessions
NOW YOURS:			

Renewing Your Commitment

To sustain, nurture, and renew commitment to service as a way of life, Volunteer Maryland! compiled the following list of strategies. This list, written for those employed in a service capacity, was adapted for the use of AmeriCorps "grads." Consider it as you renew your commitment to serve and consider how to cope with future challenges.

- ✳ Stay in contact with other people in service; go where the action and good vibes are.
- ✳ Recognize the effects of your hard work and results.
- ✳ Emphasize your commitment to solving common problems.
- ✳ Set realistic goals and work toward meeting them.
- ✳ Take time off.
- ✳ Share.
- ✳ Access support networks; ask for support.
- ✳ Regroup—step back.
- ✳ Be tolerant/patient.
- ✳ Be assertive; say no to daily crises.
- ✳ Focus on the big picture.
- ✳ Pace yourself.
- ✳ Be honest.
- ✳ Look for balance.
- ✳ Take advantage of small perks.
- ✳ Seek allies.
- ✳ Move beyond the negative into the positive.
- ✳ Keep your social life alive.
- ✳ Stay involved.
- ✳ Find ways to be empowered.

What coping strategies have you used successfully during your AmeriCorps service? Why do you think they worked?

► **What coping strategies might you use in future service opportunities? Which of the suggestions in the list might be useful for you?**

"Generative" Community Members

AmeriCorps members are "generative" community members. As described by noted psychologist Erik Erikson, generative adults actively invest in their societies. Erikson suggests that adults need to be needed and need to teach. One of the tasks of adults is to find a way to direct those needs outward to create a society that sustains its members. The alternative attitude—stagnation—is rooted in self-absorption. Stagnated adults focus on their own needs rather than on caring for the welfare of others (C. Widick, C.A. Parker, and L. Knefelkamp. "Erik Erikson and Psychological Development." In *Applying New Developmental Findings*, edited by L. Knefelkamp, C. Widick, and C.A. Parker. San Francisco, Calif. Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1978, pp.1-17).

Erikson's concept of "generativity" is akin to the process of supervising children as they "come up"—helping them to grow and guiding them to become strong, positive contributors to society. A generative person helps society's members "come up"—they go the extra mile to ensure that the young and underserved have opportunities to grow. Whether focusing on a community as a whole or on its individual members, as an AmeriCorps member you had the chance to invest actively in society and were able to reach outward for the benefit of society. You were a generative community member. In fact, you probably helped other community members become generative as well. Empowering others was one of your goals.

Respond to the following questions about your experience with and potential for generativity.....

► **Who has been generative toward you in your life so far? In what ways?**

What generative behavior have you used in your life so far?

What part will generativity play in your next service opportunity?

Readiness for Your Next Service Opportunity

As an AmeriCorps member, you've been intensely involved in service over many months. Your next step after AmeriCorps service may involve a very focused pursuit of a goal that does not include a significant service element. Sometimes basic concerns, such as a salary to buy food and pay the rent, take precedence. It is normal to experience periods of intense involvement in service, and also times of less than all-out commitment. You may have already experienced ebbs and flows during your AmeriCorps service.

During what period of your AmeriCorps service have you experienced the greatest commitment, energy, and effectiveness? Why?

During what period of your AmeriCorps service have you experienced the least commitment, energy, and effectiveness? Why?

At some time in your life you will probably step out of service altogether, pulling away for a while to revitalize or perhaps to rethink your commitments. The key is to not stay away too long, for you will need the strength and spirit you get from service to sustain you through the next steps you will be pursuing. Because of your AmeriCorps service, the ethic of service will probably permeate your life. Ideally, you will never be far from it.

Please also consider a very practical part of continuing to serve as you leave AmeriCorps. Help AmeriCorps recruit dynamic, worthy, committed persons as new members. Be on the lookout. Talk about your service. Who better knows the pros and cons of AmeriCorps membership? Refer poten-

tial members to the AmeriCorps recruitment hotline at 1-800-942-2677. The TDD number is 1-800-833-3722. To find out how you can help recruit AmeriCorps members, call the AmeriCorps Recruitment Office at (202) 606-5000, x566. You can also access information from the AmeriCorps website: www.americorps.gov.

And if you or your fellow AmeriCorps members are looking for another full-time service opportunity, you may want to consider applying your skills overseas as a Peace Corps volunteer. Call 1-800-424-8580 or visit www.peacecorps.gov for information.

A way to stay directly involved with your fellow National AmeriCorps Association alumni is to join the National AmeriCorps Association. The National AmeriCorps Association is an independent nonprofit organization that is building a national network of former AmeriCorps members and friends who are ensuring that AmeriCorps is a year in a lifetime of service. It is an organization for alums run by alums. It can provide you with job leads, career advice, and national and local networking and service opportunities. Members of the National AmeriCorps Association receive a quarterly newsletter, have access to the National AmeriCorps Association listserv, and receive other service-related information. The National AmeriCorps Association keeps up-to-date records of former AmeriCorps members so they can be involved in helping local programs with recruitment, training, evaluation, and service opportunities. For information, contact:

AmeriCorps Alums
600 Means Street
Suite 110
Atlanta, GA 30318
(404) 979-2900
website: www.lifetimeofservice.org

For other information on volunteer and service opportunities, you may also want to visit www.servenet.org, www.pointsoflight.org, or www.americaspromise.org.

Your service commitment is ongoing. Go forth and continue to do good works. The next sections of this workbook can help you focus on your next steps.

