

# 6

## Looking at your options



After taking a close look at yourself and doing some research and goal setting, you may feel more ready to think about future options.

In October 1997, 135 former members responded to a survey by AmeriCorps Alums, Inc. Among respondents, 44 percent were going to school, 37 percent were working with nonprofit organizations, 17 percent were working in education, and 13 percent were working in governmental organizations. (Percentages add up to more than 100 percent because many respondents are doing more than one thing.) What option will you choose? To help you with your planning, this part of the workbook explores several possible options:

- ☛ another year with AmeriCorps;
- ☛ more education or training;

- ☛ employment;
- ☛ starting a community-based organization or business; and
- ☛ doing nothing.

Read the sections you believe most apply to you right now, but don't reject other possibilities too hastily.

### Option: Another year with AmeriCorps

One option is to enroll in a second term of service with AmeriCorps. Because policies concerning re-enrollment vary among programs, check with your program leader or supervisor or the state commission for current information.

**Returning to the same program.** Although second terms are possible, program directors have no obligation to re-enroll any AmeriCorps member. To be eligible for a second term, members must satisfactorily complete the first term of service (which will likely include a good performance review, among other program-specific expectations). If you are interested in a third term, be aware that

economics provide a good reason for returning to school

education awards are not available for more than two terms.

**Enrolling in another AmeriCorps program.** AmeriCorps members seeking to enroll in a different program will have to do the legwork to find that program. Your program director or the state commission may be able to help you find AmeriCorps positions for the next year.

The main differences among AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps\*VISTA, and AmeriCorps\*NCCC positions are outlined in a handout, *Summary of Programs*, available from the AmeriCorps recruiting office. The handout can be obtained at [www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov) or by calling 1-800-942-2677. The handout also indicates how to apply for each program.

### Your Motivation

Why are you considering a second term of service? Do you want to complete a project you started in your first term? Do you want a similar experience in a different community? Will you gain new knowledge or skills? Be clear about your motivation, both with yourself and with program directors.

If your reasons for wanting to re-enroll are not totally clear to you, review your self-assessment, which may help you decide what option is best for you—maybe it's another year of service, but maybe not.

The main differences among AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps\*VISTA, and AmeriCorps\*NCCC positions are outlined on the AmeriCorps website, [www.americorps.gov/for\\_individuals/ready](http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/ready), or by calling the AmeriCorps information hot-

line, 1-800-942-2677. Information on how to apply for each program is also available on the website, by e-mailing [recruitops@americorps.org](mailto:recruitops@americorps.org), or by calling the AmeriCorps information hotline.

### Option: More education or training

A key purpose of AmeriCorps is to further the education of AmeriCorps members. As you know, a major benefit of your service will be your education award—which you may use at any point within seven years of completing your AmeriCorps term of service. This section and Appendixes A and B contain information on a variety of topics for members who are thinking about finishing high school, entering a Job Corps program, or seeking postsecondary education or training.

As you consider how you will use your AmeriCorps award, please bear in mind that—in this country, at least—the more education workers have, the more they often make in salary. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, these were the weekly salaries by level of education for full-time wage and salary workers over twenty-five years of age. (These statistics refer to both sexes of all races in 1994.) Notice the regular increase of average salary as educational levels rise, particularly the change from high school graduate to college graduate.

Level of Education	Average Weekly Salary
Less than high school diploma	\$374
Under one year of high school	\$325
1-3 years of high school	\$382
4 years, no diploma	\$525
High school graduate or above	\$657
High school graduate, no college	\$488
Some college, no degree	\$571
Associate degree	\$587
Occupational program	\$577
Academic program	\$599
College graduate	\$937
Bachelor's degree	\$855
Master's degree	\$998
Professional degree	\$1,435
Doctoral degree	\$1,245

As you can see, economics provide a good reason for returning to school. There are other compelling reasons as well. Before making your decision, however, you will want to reflect upon at least three questions:

☛ What do you expect to get out of more education?

☛ Will going back to school get you where you want to be?

☛ Do you realize the commitment necessary to complete a degree?

These questions can be answered best if you conduct a thorough self-assessment and do lots of research. Refer to your self-assessment in Part 5 and to the research and information gathering section that follows the self-assessment. More education is almost always a good investment, particularly when you have your AmeriCorps education award to help finance it.

### Finish High School

In today's job market, a high school diploma is just about essential. If you have not yet completed the requirements for your diploma, there are two routes you can follow. Each requires time and energy.

**more education is almost always a good investment**

### RETURNING TO HIGH SCHOOL

One way to get a high school diploma is to return to a high school in your region. In many school districts, you can do this in one of three ways:

☛ You can attend classes just as any student of high school age does, spending

five days a week at school.

☛ You can enter a work-study or cooperative education program. As an adult who's been out in the world, you might prefer to go to school part-time, attending only the classes needed for graduation and working as well. Some schools even offer programs in which the school works with local employers to place selected students in work situations.

☛ You can enter a special high school program focusing on job training. In these programs, commonly called vocational education programs, students learn mechanics, barbering, electronics, plumbing, licensed practical nursing, carpentry, medical assisting, clerking, hairstyling, or other vocations in actual laboratory settings at a vocational high school.

To find out what your local options are, make an appointment with the principal or guidance counselor at your local high school. If the school doesn't offer the kind of program you want, ask if other schools in the district do. Generally, you will need to go through a special application process for work-study, cooperative education, and vocational education programs. Because school districts usually offer only one vocational school or cooperative education program, competition can be tough for the few slots available. You may find, however, that your AmeriCorps experience (and other

work) enhances your prospects for admission.

### GETTING YOUR GED

Another way to complete high school is to pass the General Educational Development (GED) test, a very common way for people over age eighteen to get a high school credential. Instead of attending classes, people only need to pass a high school equivalency test offered in both English and Spanish. Upon passing, test takers receive the GED credential, which is recognized nationwide. Generally, about 70 percent pass the test on the first try.

Although people are often nervous about taking the GED test, they can take classes that help prepare them. (These are often offered by local school districts.) GED preparation classes offer an introduction to the test and, sometimes, a chance to practice taking a test. In addition, most public libraries have guides to help you prepare. Even if you feel confident about passing the test, it would be wise to check out one of these guides. That way, you can familiarize yourself with the test format and get some helpful tips. If your local high school or public library has no information about GED testing and/or preparation, call your state's Department of Education for help.

If you lived in Madison, Wisconsin, for example, here's how you could go about finding GED information. First, you could contact the principal or guidance counselor at your neighborhood high school, or the career center or academic advisors at the Madison Area Technical College, or your neighborhood public library staff. If none of those avenues worked, you could call the Adult Education or

Basic Education Division of the Wisconsin Department of Education in Madison.

Currently, the GED test covers writing skills, social studies, science, literature and the arts, and mathematics. According to the American Council on Education, which develops and administers the test, the GED measures “broad concepts and general knowledge, not how well they [test takers] remember details, precise definitions, or historical facts. In that way the test can be more fair to those who lack academic or classroom experience or have gained their education informally.”

### Job Corps Training Programs

A program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Job Corps offers tuition-free training in more than 150 occupations to eligible U.S. citizens between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four. In addition to their job training, Job Corps participants can receive basic education, room and board, medical care, clothing, counseling, parenting education, recreation, placement services, and a monthly living allowance.

To be eligible for the Job Corps, you must be from a home considered low-income; be from an area that makes it hard for you to get an education or a job; and be able to complete and benefit from the training you would get at a Job Corps center. Following are just a few of the occupations in which Job Corps offers training:

- ☛ dental and medical assistant
- ☛ licensed practical nurse
- ☛ bookkeeper

- ☛ secretary
- ☛ word processor
- ☛ pre-apprentice for bricklaying, carpentry, electrician, plasterer, and plumber
- ☛ cosmetologist
- ☛ teacher aide
- ☛ surveyor and drafting assistant
- ☛ air conditioning and refrigerator mechanic
- ☛ heavy-equipment mechanic
- ☛ security guard
- ☛ baker
- ☛ cook
- ☛ meat cutter

Call 1-800-733-JOBS to locate the nearest Job Corps center.

### Postsecondary Education

The next level of education after high school requires attendance at one of three types of schools—postsecondary vocational school, community college, or four-year college.

### POSTSECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

Designed for high school graduates, postsec-

ondary vocational schools train students for specific vocations. Sometimes these schools are called technical schools. Although very similar to the high school vocational programs already described, post-high school training is more complete and/or complex.

Postsecondary vocational schools can be public or private: A public vocational school is a nonprofit institution; a private vocational school, sometimes called a proprietary school, is operated for profit. Generally, public vocational schools offer many courses of study, and private vocational schools offer just one. For example, barber colleges or computer schools, which teach only one specific skill, are usually privately owned.

Often, because they are supported by taxpayers, public vocational schools are less expensive than private vocational schools. If you qualify, however, financial aid is often available for either type of school. To check on your eligibility, call the financial aid office of the school you wish to attend.

This office will have information on eligibility requirements and on the application process for financial aid. In the unlikely event the school has no such office, contact the Registrar.

Depending upon the course, you may spend anywhere from a few months to two years in a postsecondary vocational program. Most schools offer classes at night and/or on weekends to accommodate adult students who work. Instructors tend to be people with lots of hands-on experience in the field. This type of

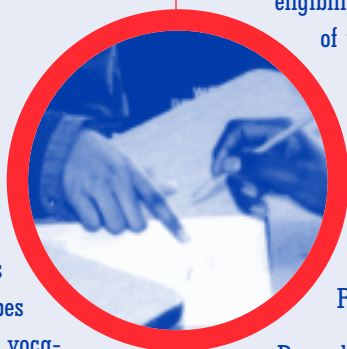
instructor (and school) can be particularly helpful to students who learn better by doing than by reading or by hearing lectures. Upon completion of their courses of study, graduates of postsecondary vocational schools earn a certificate of completion or an Associate degree.

Sometimes students are preparing for careers that require certification or licensing by the government. For example, in most states electricians and licensed practical nurses must pass written exams if they are to practice their vocations there. If you decide to enroll in a program that requires government licensing, be sure to find out what material the course covers and how well the school’s graduates have done in past testing. That will give you an idea of how well the school prepares its students.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Public schools offering an Associate two-year degree, community colleges provide academic programs such as English, psychology, and math. Because classes are usually taught by professors rather than by teaching assistants, students may find the instruction at community colleges better than that available for first- and second-year students at some universities. Sometimes community colleges also offer vocational programs. Like vocational schools, community colleges welcome working adults as students, scheduling classes in the late afternoon, at night, and on weekends.

Often, a community college serves as a path to public four-year schools in the same state. Thus, many credits earned at the community college will transfer to public four-year col-



leges. This is not true for all courses, however. So if you plan to attend a community college for two years and then go to a four-year school, check about transferability of credits before signing up for classes.

In most states, you will find a community college within commuting distance. The quality of the instruction, the relatively short drive, and the ability to live at home and/or keep a local job while studying leads many people to attend these schools. Moreover, a community college may cost less overall than a four-year school.

#### FOUR-YEAR SCHOOLS

A four-year college graduate earns either a Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.) or a Bachelor of Science degree (B.S.). If you major in French literature, say, or Latin American studies, you would earn a B.A. History, political science, and African-American studies are other examples of a major that would yield a Bachelor of Arts degree. If your primary emphasis is biology or chemistry, your degree would be a B.S. The same would hold true for mathematics and engineering.

Within the four-year category are both colleges and universities, with the difference relating to size, mission, and/or funding source.

**Colleges.** These schools tend to be smaller than universities and often emphasize quality teaching. Many of these schools are private and rely upon tuition, fees, and fundraising for their budgets.

**Universities.** Generally schools with large enrollments, universities often place considerable emphasis on research (sometimes more so than on teaching). If they are public institutions, as universities often are, they can charge less tuition because of state subsidization. The larger the school, the wider the possibilities for study. Some small liberal arts colleges, for example, can't offer such specialized programs as engineering, forestry, or nursing.

Most states have a comprehensive state university system into which community colleges feed students. In California, for example, there are three branches of higher education—the community college system; the University of California (which has several other campuses besides the more commonly known Berkeley and Los Angeles); and California State University (also with several campuses). Students can attend four-year colleges for the entire four years or begin at a community college and then transfer at some point. Not all state university systems are required to accept community college graduates for admission, however.

If you decide to pursue a four-year degree in your home state, you will need to know the components of its system of higher education. For example, is there a community college system feeding into the four-year colleges? What is the closest college or university to you? Is it public or private? Does it offer a degree pro-

gram that closely matches your career interests? Find out what's available.

#### MORE HELP AVAILABLE

For information on the world of higher education in general, see Appendix B, which covers a number of topics in some depth. Whether you need help in choosing a course of study or in figuring out how to apply for admission and/or financial aid, the discussions in Appendix B can provide you with the information you need or give you tips on finding it. A bibliography relating to higher education is included in the Higher Education section of Appendix D, page 97.

deciding to go to graduate or professional school is a big decision that can lead to quality education and entry into a profession or career of your choice

#### Graduate School

At the next educational level are graduate schools where students pursue specialized, professional-level knowledge and skills. A college degree is a prerequisite to entering graduate school. If such a path interests you, read through Appendix C. Also check the Higher Education section of Appendix D, page 97.

#### Option: Employment

Will you seek work as your next step after AmeriCorps? If so, what type of work and

where? In what type of organization? How will you look for work? Do you have marketable skills and experience? This section focuses on employment and job searching. In working your way through the material, you will be referring to the self-assessment you completed at the beginning of Part 5 and to the sections on research and information gathering and on goal setting in Part 5.

#### Current Employment Trends

**Job Opportunities.** You've probably heard the term "downsizing," which refers to decreasing the number of employees in a company or organization through layoffs. According to *People Trends* (published by the Strategy Group in Dublin, Ohio), from 1992 to 1995, IBM laid off 122,000 employees; AT&T, 83,000; General Motors, 74,000; the U.S. Postal Service, 55,000; and Sears, Roebuck and Co., 50,000. Most new jobs are being created in small and medium-sized companies.

In projections for U.S. employment through 2005, the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics expects the largest increases in job opportunities in services, retail trades, health, and education. Twenty occupations will make up half of all employment growth—cashiers, janitors, waiters, home health aides, guards, nurses' aides, retail salespersons, teachers' aides, child care workers, registered nurses, managers, systems analysts, secondary and elementary school teachers, marketing and sales supervisors, receptionists, secretaries (except legal and

medical), clerical supervisors and managers, and maintenance repairers.

Occupations that will have the highest percentage growth, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, are personal aides, home health aides, systems analysts, computer engineers, electronic-pagination systems workers, occupational therapists and assistants, physical therapists and aides, residential counselors, human service workers, manicurists, medical records technicians, amusement and recreation attendants, corrections officers, operations research analysts, and guards. (Note: To get information about what people in these occupations do, ask at the local public library for the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, both published by the U.S. Department of Labor. More about these two books appears in the self-assessment section of Part 5.)

### Contractual Employment.

In a recent survey of its membership, the American Management Association (which includes 8,000 of the nation's largest companies) found that employees who survive layoffs work longer hours to make up for the absence of those who have been laid off. Further, hiring of temporary and/or contractual workers after the downsizing is common. Hiring these employees tends to be less expensive because they accrue no benefits and they work for a limited time only, with no further expectations.

According to some business authors, contractual and temporary employees are the

wave of the future. For some, "traditional" employment already seems to be on its way out; increasingly, the forty-hour week for twelve months a year (and a salary that includes benefits) is giving way to part-time and temporary and contractual work.

Some futurists predict that employment success in the next century will require each worker to create a "portfolio" career, with one or two very specific knowledge and skill areas and several employers. Basically, such workers will be their own employers, marketing and hiring themselves out to various organizations and companies for certain projects.

For example, in the new scheme, a technical writer might have an editing contract that requires one week a month for a year; a three-month contract to write a manual at home, with an agreed-upon compensation package no matter how many hours go toward the manual; and a third contract to teach two technical writing classes per semester at the local community college. A writer and teacher, this worker markets herself as both. Because she is not a "full-time" employee at any of the three locations, she must pick up her own health, life, and disability insurance; her Social Security contributions; and any savings for her retirement. She earns no vacation or sick-leave time with this employment pattern.

If the trend toward contractual employment intensifies, individuals will have much more responsibility for their work lives in the near future. For example, they will have to:

- know and articulate regularly their knowledge areas and skills;
- market themselves all the time;
- stay very current in their fields; and
- remain flexible and be skilled at time management and financial planning.

For those who get bored easily, want to be challenged regularly, and/or like change, the new work dynamic will be easy. It will be harder for people who like stability, dislike change, and/or seek supervision.

**A Technical Trend.** Another major employment trend is toward technical training and jobs. By the year 2000, eight of every ten jobs will not require a bachelor's degree, according to several national job surveys. The new jobs will be technical—such as film and video production, dental lab work, laboratory research support, and microcomputer repair. Of Florida's top thirty future jobs recently described in the *Miami Herald*, none required a bachelor's degree. (J. Barry. "Career paths going technical," October 29, 1995). Most required a two-year associate degree or training certificate. Among the thirty top prospects were dental hygienist, licensed practical nurse, automotive technician, truck driver, graphic and commercial artist, electrician, police officer, firefighter, legal and/or medical secretary, and paralegal.

## The U.S. Economy: Three Sectors

Throughout this chapter there are references to three sectors of the U.S. economy—public, non-profit, and private.

**Public Sector.** The public sector encompasses the government—federal, state, county, regional, and local. Into this sector fall AmeriCorps members who worked with or through state universities, the Environmental Protection Agency (national or state level), the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state or city departments of parks and recreation, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, and so on.

**Nonprofit Sector.** Here we find organizations whose intent is to break even rather than make a profit. Often, such organizations are service organizations—the Red Cross, agencies, hospitals and clinics, homeless shelters, food banks, professional associations, public policy groups, advocacy groups, and counseling centers. Also falling within the nonprofit sector are such organizations as Habitat for Humanity, United Way, Teach for America, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, I Have a Dream Foundation, and YWCAs/YMCAs. All of these are examples of nonprofit organizations that host AmeriCorps members.

**Private Sector.** Organizations and companies in the private sector are created to make money for their owners and/or shareholders. Some examples of large organizations in the private sector include IBM, AT&T, General Motors, and Sears. Smaller private sector organizations include restaurants, accounting firms, welding companies, grocery stores,

attorneys, small manufacturers, and private medical and dental practices.

If your next step after AmeriCorps is employment, which sector of the economy do you think might offer the best employment possibilities for someone with your skills, knowledge, goals, and interests? The material that follows will help you look at that question in some depth.

### Career Development Theory

As you consider an employment plan, it might be useful to look at the way some experts believe careers progress. The following model presents four stages, the first of which is exploration—where you may find yourself today. (This model was developed by Donald Super in *The Psychology of Careers*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.)

**Exploration.** People in this stage are exploring career possibilities,

making decisions about which career field to enter, and beginning to pursue that field.

**Establishment.** At this step, people are working hard to establish themselves, to become secure, and to advance in their chosen careers.

**Maintenance.** Here, people are seeking to maintain higher levels of responsibility and to stay abreast of new developments in their fields. At this stage, employees may face challenges created by age, family issues, health, and/or increased competition.

**Disengagement.** In this stage, people begin to reduce workload, delegate certain responsibilities, and plan for post-employment life.

Progression through the career development stages was originally thought to be linear—that is, moving from one stage to the next over a lifetime. The past pattern of career development is depicted by the first graphic below. Over the past decades, however, career “recycling” and career adaptability have become widespread. For example, contemporary workers may go through several cycles of the four stages in a lifetime as depicted in the second graphic below. New cycles begin as workers’ values, interests, abilities, and needs change—or as their employers downsize or change their orientation. In the second graphic below, each circle represents a cycle of experience, establishment, maintenance,

and disengagement (D.E. Super, A.S. Thompson, and R.H. Lindeman. *Adult Career Concerns Inventory: Manual*

*for Research and Exploratory Use in Counseling*. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, p. 88).

individuals will have much more responsibility for their work lives in the near future



AmeriCorps service may have opened a possible new path of employment to you, turned you on to some new ways of thinking about work, helped you to eliminate certain possibilities, and/or made you even more confused about your employment future! If you are in a confused state, don't worry. Help is on the way in the upcoming sections.

### Conducting a Self-Directed Job Search: Five Phases

The most effective job searches require several phases—self-assessment, research, decision-making, action, and, quite often, readjustment. Although the first of these phases—self-assessment, or taking stock—is often ignored, it is really the foundation upon which all others depend. The importance of self-assessment cannot be overemphasized.

You will notice that taking action appears as the fourth phase in the search. Usually, however, this is the first thing novice job seekers do—writing a resume, applying for vacant positions, and so on. But if you skip the first three phases, you may find yourself conducting a longer job search and one that yields disappointing results.

Part 5 guides you through these first three vital phases; perhaps you have done them already. If not, work through them thoroughly. Then move ahead to the fourth and fifth phases. Although it doesn't relate directly to your job search, the section “Being Smart at Your

New Job” on page 72 can help you keep the job you find. Be sure to work through that material as well.

### Phase One of the Job Search: Self-Assessment

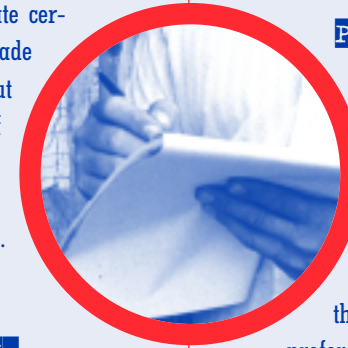
In this phase, job seekers begin to sort out what they want in a job. One way they can do this is by examining their values, interests, skills, and preferences. Perhaps you did this already in the self-assessment portion of Part 5. If not, work through it now because it will help you discover who/where you are at this moment.

### Phase Two: Research and Gathering Information

You may have done much—or possibly all—of this work already in Part 5. If you did not, refer back to pages 38–41 now, as that material will help you research, identify, and explore work options. In this phase, you are looking for the types of work and/or employers that share the values, interests, skills, and personal considerations you identified in your self-assessment.

### Phase Three: Decisionmaking and Goal Setting

When you have thoroughly researched your career and employment options, you are ready for the tasks of the third phase. You will decide



which career fields or types of jobs or occupations you are going to seek. Then you will be ready to set some goals for the job search process. To get some help with this phase, refer to Part 5, which deals with making decisions and setting goals.

### Phase Four: Taking Action

In this phase, job seekers begin their active search for a job. You will note that some tasks of this phase are those most job seekers do first, such as writing a resume and applying for jobs. However, the process usually is shorter, with better results, when the job seeker first takes the time and thought to go through the first three phases—self-assessment; research and information gathering; and decisionmaking and goal setting.

Please don't take shortcuts, because you may sabotage yourself. After all, if you don't know where you are going, how will you get there? Follow the road map through every step of the job search cycle.

#### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- ☛ How can you best represent yourself to prospective employers?
- ☛ What strategies are most effective for your job search?
- ☛ Who will help you with your job search?

#### TASKS TO COMPLETE:

- ☛ Develop an action plan.
- ☛ Write a basic resume.

- ☛ Network, network, network!
- ☛ Target employers who hire people who do what you want to do.
- ☛ Apply for work formally and informally.
- ☛ Practice interviewing.
- ☛ Interview.

#### JOB SEARCH ACTION PLAN

When you reach this point, you may find it useful to create both a long-term plan and a

short-term plan. For example, use your long-term plan as a way to plot out what you will do for the next several weeks or months. For your short-term plan, determine a specific plan for action every week. Following is an example of a weekly plan. You can copy it or design your own plan for each week.

Besides keeping you focused on the matter at hand—seeking work—a weekly plan will help you keep track of what you've done (and what you haven't). Sometimes job seekers fool

themselves into thinking they've done much more than they actually have. So check your expectations. Make them reasonable, yet challenging. The more time you spend on the job search, the better. In fact, try to treat job searching as a full-time job; spend up to forty hours a week on the various elements of your search. But also be reasonable. Take time to enjoy family, friends, and community and leisure activities.....

#### Job Search Action Plan for Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

What I'll Do	What Resources I'll Use	By When	What Happened	Follow-Up
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

## YOUR RESUME

One way to get your foot in the door of a prospective employer is by developing a resume that summarizes your skills, accomplishments, and experience. Even for information interviews, you will need a resume. Think of this document as a form of advertisement for you—one that helps you get interviews. (See the end of the fourth phase for a sample cover letter to accompany resumes you send out.)

Although several types of resume formats exist, the two most common are chronological and functional.

**Chronological.** In the chronological resume, job seekers describe their skills, accomplishments, and experience. They list these by job, starting with the most recent and working backward. (See page 62.) You probably should use the chronological resume unless you have a compelling reason not to.

**Functional.** Not all employers like this form of resume, though it helps career-changers or generalists show what they can do for a new employer. The functional resume lists skills and accomplishments by skill area, rather than by job. Actual job titles, organizations, and years of employment appear in a separate section. (See page 63.) Even if you decide that a functional resume is best for you, you should create a chronological resume as well. Some prospective employers will ask for the chronological type eventually, even if they accept the functional at first.

think of your resume  
as a form of  
advertisement for you

## RESUME ELEMENTS

Here are the general elements of a resume, listed in order:

**Contact Information.** In this section, put your name, address, and telephone number (one with an answering machine). Also include a fax number and e-mail address if you have them.

**Objective.** List an objective here, if you have one and it is specific. For example, a job title such as "After-School Program Aide" could be used as an objective. If your objective is not specific, don't put it in your resume.

**Summary of Qualifications.** For this section, write a brief summary highlighting your skills, experience, and accomplishments that apply to the job you are seeking.

**Employment Experience.** For chronological resumes, list employment by position, noting job titles, names of organizations, locations, and dates by year. For a functional resume, list employment by skill areas, focusing on skills and accomplishments rather than duties and responsibilities.

Be as specific as you can about your skills and accomplishments. Begin each description of your work with an action verb in the past tense. You will find a list of action verbs at the end of the fourth phase. Choose from that list, or use other action verbs. Also, use numbers as much as possible if they are impressive. For example, instead of writing "supervised staff members," write "supervised three clerks and two interns."

**Education and Training.** If you have a degree, list it, along with institution and date granted. Do not list courses, majors, and college activities unless they are clearly relevant. Be sure to include all the training you have received as an AmeriCorps member. There's no need to list your high school; if you haven't attended college but are a high school graduate, concentrate on training only—create a section called "Training," as shown in the sample of a chronological resume

**Special Skills.** If these will be needed in the job for which you are applying, list them. Consider listing computer and language skills also.

Note: Your resume should not include a reference list or personal information such as birthdate, health status, or family information.

## GETTING STARTED ON YOUR RESUME

The process of drafting a resume—particularly describing your experience in the language of action and accomplishments—can be intimidating. If you're unable to get started, follow these steps:

1. Complete all the easy resume elements from the previous list, using the sample resumes on pages 61 to 63. Make room for the summary of qualifications and descriptions of your experience even if you're not ready to do those.

2. Start with your AmeriCorps experience. If you have a description of your service assignment, review it and divide your responsibilities into general categories—such as direct ser-

vice, administration, community development, budgeting, program design, evaluation, and needs assessment. Begin by writing down what you did today as an AmeriCorps member. Then place each of those activities or tasks into one of the responsibility categories you've created. At this point, don't worry about language; just match activities and tasks with categories.

If there are things you do often as an AmeriCorps member but didn't do today, add these to your activity/task list. Categorize them by responsibility.

Next, decide which of your responsibility categories you think your resume should emphasize. Of these, choose the two or three that are most important. Then reword each activity or task in those responsibility categories. One way to do this is to have your description incorporate an action verb from the list on page 69. Use numbers whenever you can to describe your accomplishments. (Review the resume samples to get an idea of how you might use numbers in your own resume.)

3. Using the process described above for responsibilities, follow these steps:

- Describe each entry in the experience block of your resume.
- Look for common themes among your experiences. If you find them, use these for your summary of qualifications. (Review the resume samples again for reference.) If you see no common themes, ask others to help you identify them.
- Continue to refine your resume, seeking feedback from the people who know you best.



Here are a few general trends to keep in mind as you put your resume together:

☛ Because the use of personal computers and word processing have become so commonplace for resumes, it is expected that resumes submitted for a specific job vacancy will be tailored to that vacancy. So create a comprehensive “generic” resume on your computer. Then, use only those parts of it that directly relate to the job you seek.

☛ A summary of qualifications is increasingly used as the first entry on resumes.

☛ Quantifiable accomplishments are becoming the name of the game. So as much as you can, use numbers to describe your work. For example, cite the size of the budget you created, the number of employees you supervised, the amount of savings your management resulted in—or how many trees you planted or schools you helped repair. When the numbers are impressive, use them.

☛ Some careerists predict that resumes will become obsolete in the near future. To apply for jobs, people will instead use letters that highlight accomplishments, skills, and experience. Furthermore, this letter will be “broadcast” via e-mail rather than hand-delivered or sent through a mail-delivery system.

follow the road map through every step of the job search cycle

☛ With the widespread use of the Internet, many job seekers will need to design an electronic version of their resume. That version must look very different than a hard copy so that it transmits well. Richard Bolles has recommended several websites to consult for advice about this process. Check out the section on resumes in *Job Hunting on the Internet*, Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 1997.

#### Some Final Words of Advice

☛ Refer to the skills exercises and self-assessment summary sheet you completed in Part 5. Both contain excellent information to use on your resume.

☛ Keep your resume to one page if possible. If you have worked for more than ten years, go to two pages, but remember that the second page will get little attention. A study in the late 1980s found that each resume received an average of eleven seconds of attention during initial screenings. Put all important information about yourself on the first page.

☛ Get feedback on your resume from supervisors, peers, and anyone whose opinion you value. But also remember that if you ask ten resume “experts” about your own resume, you’ll probably get ten different suggestions about how to revise it. As you finish up, you might want to ask yourself these questions:

- Is the resume accurate? Don’t embellish, but also don’t be humble.
- Is the resume easy to read? Does it have enough white space?
- Does the resume highlight your experience that’s relevant to the job you are seeking? (For example, you don’t want to use a lot of space describing your experience with computers if you are applying to become a counselor.)
- Are you pleased with your resume? If you think your resume represents you well, go with it. If you are not so sure, keep working.
- Critique your resume using a method described by one expert who suggests seven areas to evaluate in a resume (Ronald Krannich. *High Impact Resumes and Letters*. Manassas, Va.: Impact Publications, 1990).

- ☛ Overall appearance
- ☛ Contact information
- ☛ Objective
- ☛ Organization
- ☛ Content
- ☛ Language
- ☛ Length



If you would like more help with resume writing, look through some of the many guides available. They include *Resumes* (2nd Edition) by the National Business Employment Weekly, *Through the Brick Wall: Resume Builder* by Kate Wendleton, and *The Damn Good Resume Guide* and *The Resume Catalog: 200 Damn Good Examples*, both by Yana Parker. These and other resources should be available at your public library, career center, or bookstores.

**SAMPLE**

**AmeriCorps \*NCCC**

**Resume**

**JAMES B. WHITMORE**  
888 Green Valley Drive  
Piney Fork, KY 12345  
(555) 666-7777  
jbw456@compu.com

**SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS**

- 3 years of community service experience
- Excellent communication skills
- Energetic, committed, self-starter
- Computer literate

**COMMUNITY SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

**AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps**

Member, Denver, Colorado

1997-98

- Selected to participate in a one-year, residential, national service program.
- Worked on community projects as part of a team in Rocky Mountain region of U.S. with emphasis on environment, education, public safety and human needs.
- Completed 1,700 hours of community service.
- Built a nature preserve and hiking trail in the Snake River Park, Idaho.
- Sampled water from rivers and tributaries and conducted lab analysis of samples with EPA, Denver, for 6 months.
- Tutored 15-3rd and 4th graders in reading and arithmetic at Williams School, Denver, three times per week for 6 months.

**Madison University Community Initiatives Program**

Community Service Volunteer, Charlottesville, VA

1995-97

- Tutored 3 adults in neighborhood literacy program, twice a week for 2 years.
- Sorted and distributed food to service agencies and families once a week for a year.
- Served as a Big Brother to a 12 year old community resident for 3 years.

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**Bachelor of Science (Biology)**

Madison University, Charlottesville, VA

1997

**AmeriCorps \*NCCC Training**

Certified in American Red Cross First Aid, Disaster Relief, CPR and Child CPR.  
Completed training in Diversity, Trailbuilding, Tutoring and Community Development.

1997-98

# SAMPLE

## Chronological

## Resume

### **JUAN SANCHEZ**

123 Main Street  
St. Louis, MO 44444  
(555) 222-3333

**OBJECTIVE:** After-School Program Aide

### **QUALIFICATIONS**

- Four years of experience as pre-school aide
  - Bilingual in English and Spanish
- Resourceful, reliable team-worker with sense of humor

### **EXPERIENCE**

#### **Preschool Aide (AmeriCorps Member)**

ABC Preschool, St. Louis, MO

1995-96

- Supervised group of 10 three-year-olds, four hours a day.
- Created language and math readiness activities.
- Taught Spanish to English-speaking children and English to Spanish-speaking children daily.
- Wrote 35-page orientation manual for new aides.

#### **Kindergarten Aide**

St. Mark's Elementary School, St. Louis, MO

1992-95

- Assisted teacher with activities for 25 children.
- Monitored individual reading levels; tutored individuals.
- Supervised children during recess.
- Planned field trips outside neighborhood three times a year.

### **EDUCATION AND RELATED TRAINING**

#### **Bachelor of Arts**

Wallace James College, Adena, MO  
Major: English

1994

#### **AmeriCorps Training, St. Louis, MO**

Cross-Cultural Communication, Time and Stress Management, Community Development, Needs Assessment

1995-96

#### **Diocese of St. Louis Training, St. Louis, MO**

Creative Play, Reading Readiness

1992-95

# SAMPLE

## Functional Resume

### SHANTEL WHITE

Route 2, Box 888

Everytown, Texas 33333

Tel: 444-666-7777

e-mail: shanteltext@bol.com

**OBJECTIVE:** Police Dispatcher

### EMERGENCY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT SKILLS

- Police aide for two years
- Member of rural volunteer fire department for six years
- Certified EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) in Texas

### CLERICAL SKILLS

- Excellent typing skills: 75 words per minute with 100 percent accuracy
- Computer literate: Word Perfect and DBase III software
- Extensive record-keeping, filing, and office machinery experience

### EXPERIENCE

#### Police Aide (AmeriCorps Member)

Jefferson County, Texas

1994-1996

#### Volunteer Firefighter

Smithfield Township, Jefferson County, Texas

1990-1996

#### Co-op Student/Office Clerk

XYZ Oil Refinery, Port Arthur, Texas

1992-1994

### TRAINING

#### Police Aide Training:

80 hours of law enforcement training

Jefferson County, Texas

1994

#### AmeriCorps Training:

Cross-cultural communication; community project development; time management

Jefferson County, Texas

1994-96

## Job Search Strategies

As you carry out your search, you will discover many ways to find a job—classified ads, state and private employment agencies, direct application, placement services, union hiring halls, information from friends and family about openings where they work, electronic job searching through the Internet. Don't rely upon any one method—use as many methods as you can.

Two search methods, networking and direct targeting of employers, are particularly effective because they tap into the hidden job market. The "hidden" job market refers to jobs that are vacant but not advertised publicly. It is estimated that as many as 75 percent of jobs are unadvertised (J. Hoppin, editor. *Workforce in Transition: A Blueprint for Adult Career Development and Job Search Training*. Stillwater, Okla.: NOICC Training Support Center, 1994, p. C-39). Work smart in your job search. Spend the bulk of your time in the most effective job search activities. Use other methods as well, but spend less time on them.

**Networking.** A network is an informal group of people (and all the people they know) who can help a job seeker. As you look for employment, try to expand your network to gather in as many people as possible who can give you information.

Who is in your network right now? People who influence your decisionmaking to some

degree are definitely members of your network. Family members, co-workers, former co-workers, fellow AmeriCorps members, current and past supervisors and teachers, members of your church, people who granted you information interviews, community group members, social friends, sports team members, parents of your friends and neighbors—all the people you know are potential members of your network.

Use the same methods for networking that you use for information interviewing. Make contact, ask for help, follow up on suggestions, stay in touch, and always write thank you notes. Keep the network alive by constantly working it. Keep the people in your network informed about where you are in your job search and whether their suggestions have worked. Expand your network by getting together with new people you've met through people in your existing network.

Think of this process as a spider's web, with each connection (each person in the network) leading you to several others who lead you to more connections. The larger the web, the stronger it becomes, until you have a solid network of job information and leads. The worksheet on page 68 may help you visualize the networking function. Begin by listing at least twenty people you know right now who will be willing to help you with your job search.

**Cold Contacts (or Direct Targeting of Employers).** As you were conducting information interviews, you may have identified employers that hire people who do the things

you hope to do. After you've clarified your job search goals, contact those employers again and let them know you are interested in working in their organizations. Even if there are no vacancies, ask for job interviews. Talk about how you, your experience, and your goals fit into the organization. Stay in contact. You never know when a vacancy will occur. When one does, you want to be in the hiring person's mind.

Make a list of employers that you would like to work for and that offer jobs like the one you are seeking.

Expand your list of desirable employers by working your network. Ask people to help you identify employers who offer the kind of work you want to do. Follow up on each suggestion. And keep networking and targeting specific employers even when it appears that you have saturated the market. Remember that 70 percent of jobs are found through these two methods.

**Job Search Correspondence.** The best job search methods use personal, one-on-one contacts. Sometimes, however, job seekers have to use conventional methods. One of these is the cover letter. (See sample letter on page 69.)



Places I Would Like to Work	My Contact There
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

When applying for jobs without personal contact, cover letters are critically important—whether they go out through the mail or electronically. Such letters, which take the place of personal contact, must make a compelling connection between the enclosed resume and the job.

Your cover letter needs to make three points, concisely:

- ☛ why you're writing;
- ☛ how your background matches what the employer is seeking; and
- ☛ when you will contact the employer again.

For additional tips on writing cover letters, you may want to refer to *The Perfect Cover Letter*, by Richard H. Beatty, and *Dynamic Cover Letters*, by Katherine Hansen.

## Interviewing

At this stage, the purpose of an interview generally is to get a job offer if you want it. At a minimum, however, you will be gaining practice in interviewing.

**Before the Interview.** You need to do some important work before you ever set foot in the door for your interview. In fact, what you do before the interview can be as important as what you say during the interview itself. Here are some steps that will help you prepare yourself:

you need to do some important work before you ever set foot in the door for your interview

☛ Identify at least three of your strengths, and practice describing them.

☛ Think about the three most important or difficult problems you've solved as an AmeriCorps member or at another work setting. Employers like people who can solve problems.

Describe the actions you took to solve the problems and the results of your actions.

☛ Choose four or five questions about the job or organization to ask the interviewer. The questions you ask are almost as important as those you answer. Your questions indicate to the interviewer understanding of, preparation for, and interest in the job. Use the list of sample questions for prospective employers on page 65 to develop questions specific to your situation.

☛ Anticipate questions you may be asked. Think about what an interviewer would want to know; then put together a response and practice it. For example, what do you like best/least? Discuss a problem you have had at a previous job and how you resolved it. What is your greatest strength/weakness?

☛ Have a written list that includes the employer's name and location, the date and time of the interview, the interviewer's name, and direc-

tions to the location. Make an initial "dry run," so you won't get lost or underestimate the time it takes to get there. If you will be driving, locate a parking lot nearby. (Plan to arrive about fifteen minutes early. This gives you time to freshen up and displays your punctuality.)

☛ Gather materials you have written or produced that are relevant to the job you are seeking. Take these with you to the interview.

☛ Compile a reference list. Type it in a neat form, with your name at the top (e.g., References for John Doe). Take this list with you, just in case you are asked for it.

☛ Try to find out who will be interviewing you and how long the process will take. You want to minimize the number of surprises you encounter.

☛ Prepare a "cheat sheet" with two lists to take into the interview. The first list should contain the questions you want to ask. The second list should contain the four or five most important things you want the interviewer to know about your qualifications for the job.

☛ Practice answering tough questions. Videotape yourself if you can. You will be amazed at how well you do with some parts of the interview and will also realize what you need to work on. Ask someone you trust to review the videotape with you.

☛ Plan how you want to look and what you will wear for the interview. This task is not a frivolous one. The image you project to prospective employers may be as important to the selection process as are your skills, experience, and references.

The general rule is to be very clean and neat. You may need to get your hair cut, send your dress or suit to the dry cleaners, or polish your shoes. Your clothing, jewelry, make-up, and general appearance should be downplayed and not distracting. In some settings, for example, an open neckline, short skirt, or sleeveless shirt may be unacceptable. Consider wearing subdued colors, and don't wear flashy, noisy, or large jewelry. It's a good idea to avoid fragrances, whether cologne or aftershave.

If you have questions about how you should look for an interview, ask employed acquaintances about dress codes in their workplaces. It is always better to be overdressed for an interview—wearing a suit and tie to an office where most men work in sport shirts, for example—than it is to find yourself looking very informal in a formal environment.

**During the Interview.** Here are some guidelines you may find useful to remember when you arrive at the interview:

☛ Shake the hand of the interviewer(s) firmly at the start and end of the interview.

☛ Make eye contact with all interviewers.

☛ Maintain a positive attitude, and speak with enthusiasm.

- ✦ If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- ✦ Discuss only job-related information. Don't philosophize, tell stories, or bring up unrelated personal information.
- ✦ Respond to each question as fully as you can. Keep responses to a minute or two, then offer to talk more about the topic if the interviewer wants you to.
- ✦ Make only positive or neutral remarks about past employers.
- ✦ Be prepared to discuss your career plans for the next five years.
- ✦ Before you leave, check your "cheat sheet." Ask the questions you have prepared, if they haven't been answered, and be sure that you have covered the basic points you identified about your qualifications.
- ✦ Ask what the next steps in the process will be and how long they will take.
- ✦ If true, state your strong interest in the job.
- ✦ Thank the interviewer(s).

**After the Interview.** Even after your interview, you are not "home free." There are still some tasks for you to carry out—tasks that can affect the ultimate success of your employment goal.

- ✦ As soon as possible, review the interview. Make a written list of what you want to work on for the next interview. On your list, note which questions gave

you problems and why. Also note which questions you answered easily and how you answered them.

- ✦ Write the interviewer(s) a brief thank you letter. Include an expression of strong interest in the job, if you have it. If you decide you don't want to be considered further for the job, call the interviewer with this information and then send a thank you letter. (See page 71 for a sample thank you letter.)

- ✦ Once the process deadline (which you should have asked about during the interview) has passed, follow up with the employer. However, don't call too often; you don't want them to find you a nuisance. No response may mean that you were not selected, as many employers find it difficult to give applicants this information; it may also mean that the process is taking longer than expected.

(All of this interviewing advice is adapted from "Interview Preparation Checklist for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers," by Mona Melanson. The checklist is a handout from Returned Volunteer Career Services, Peace Corps, Washington, D.C. 20526.)

**Interviewing Resources.** Just as there are resources to help people with their resumes, there are also resources that focus on interviews. For example, community career centers often offer interview practice; some of them

videotape the practice interviews and then provide feedback to the person who's practicing. If you have a career center in your area, check to see if it offers assistance in preparing for interviews.

Your public library may lend videotapes on interviewing to community members. There are many excellent videotapes available. Your library will certainly offer written material on interview techniques; two resources are *101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions*, by Ron Fry, and *Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed*, by H. Anthony Medley.



### Decisionmaking and Negotiations

Review Part 5, "Making Decisions That Work for You," and use your decision matrix on page 45 to help you decide whether to accept a job offer. In addition, ask for the advice of people who know you and your work well. Talking over a decision is often a good way to see how the decision feels and "fits" you.

If you believe you can influence the amount of the salary offered in the proposed job, you may want to read *Negotiating Your Salary: How To Make \$1,000 A Minute*, by Jack Chapman. Salary negotiation used to be an expected part of private sector hiring and at times was possible as well in the nonprofit and public sectors. These days, however, salary setting is often less flexible. If that is true with

your job offer, you might try to negotiate for other benefits such as disability insurance or more vacation time.

### Barriers to Employment

When looking for a job, you may find your efforts hindered from time to time. Not having enough information is a major barrier, but there are others that can slow you down as well. Read quickly through the list on the following page, and put a check next to barriers you believe exist for you. (For now, ignore the part of the chart that asks how you'll overcome your barriers. It's important to do the work quickly.)

### MORE HELP AVAILABLE

There are scores of resources available to help you with your job search. See Appendix D, page 96, for a listing of job search resources. Community colleges, colleges and universities, government job services, and one-stop career centers in your area may sponsor job search workshops. Check out the job search resources in your local libraries and local career centers.

POSSIBLE BARRIER	Now Present?	How I'll Overcome It
<b>Focus:</b> None, too narrow, or too broad		
<b>Discrimination</b> Type:		
<b>Stress</b>		
<b>Poor time management</b>		
<b>Hate or fear of networking</b>		
<b>Shyness</b>		
<b>Low self-esteem/ lack of confidence</b>		

POSSIBLE BARRIER	Now Present?	How I'll Overcome It
<b>Difficulty in requesting help</b>		
<b>Lack of desire for a job</b>		
<b>Competing demands</b> (e.g., family, school)		
<b>No experience with job searching</b>		

Now look carefully at the possible barriers to employment you identified. Think about how you'll deal with these barriers; then jot down how you plan to overcome them. The idea behind this list is to anticipate roadblocks you may face in your job search. If you realize that some problems will arise, you remove the element of surprise and can begin to consider ways of coping.



# NETWORKING WORKSHEET



Persons to Contact	Contact Information	Who Referred Me?	Data & Results of Contact	Additional Contacts Gained
<b>SAMPLE ENTRY</b>				
Shirley Freeman	Red Cross, 51 N. High St., # 700 Columbus, OH 43215 614-555-1212	James Rodriguez, Catholic Social Services	7/2/97 Info Interview -see notes  7/2/97 Sent Thank you letter	1. John Coe, Dir. of Dev., United Way, 614-555-6666  2. Kathy Kaminski, Fundraiser, Am. Environmental Congress, 614-555-8888

Persons to Contact and Why	Contact Information	Who Referred Me?	Data & Results of Contact	Additional Contacts Gained

# SAMPLE

## Cover Letter



Your Street Address  
Your City, State, Zip Code  
Today's Date

Name of Manager or Human Resources Director  
Job Title of That Person  
Organization's Name  
Street Address or Post Office Box  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to apply for the position of "X" that you advertised in the Sunday "Good Jobs R-Us" newspaper. Having four years of experience as an "X," I think I may be a good match for your requirements.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume for your review. As you will see, my background includes "a, b, and c" (skills or experiences asked for in the ad). My strengths are in the "x, y, and z" areas you need (these are the "preferred" or "desired" items listed in their ad).

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to being able to meet with you so that I may explain how I think I could make a contribution to "Organization's Name" as an "X". I will call next week to arrange a time to meet with you.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Your Telephone Number

enclosure

Source: Career Resource Manual for Returning Peace Corps Volunteers. Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps Office of Returned Volunteer Career Services, 1995.

### Action Verbs for Effective Resumes

<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	helped	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	spoke
achieved	decided	hired	noted	recognized	streamlined
adapted	defined		negotiated	recommended	strengthened
addressed	delegated	<b>I</b>	nominated	recorded	structured
adjusted	demonstrated	identified		reduced	supervised
administered	designed	implemented	<b>O</b>	re-evaluated	supported
arranged	determined	improved	observed	referred	
assembled	developed	increased	obtained	refined	<b>T</b>
assessed	directed	informed	organized	regulated	trained
needs of	drafted	initiated	originated	reported	transferred
assigned		instructed		represented	transformed
authored	<b>E</b>	interpreted	<b>P</b>	reorganized	translated
	eliminated	introduced	participated	researched	treated
<b>B</b>	ensured		perfected	resolved	
built	entered	<b>J</b>	performed	responded	<b>U</b>
budgeted	established	judged	persuaded	restored	updated
	evaluated	justified	piloted	retrieved	upgraded
<b>C</b>	examined		pinpointed	revamped	used
calculated	expanded	<b>K</b>	planned	reviewed	
changed	expedited	kept	prepared	revised	<b>V</b>
checked			presented		validated
collaborated	<b>F</b>	<b>L</b>	prevented	<b>S</b>	verified
communicated	filed	launched	produced	saved	
compared	finalized	led	promoted	scheduled	<b>W</b>
completed	fixed	located	proposed	screened	won
conceived			proved	selected	wrote
conducted	<b>G</b>	<b>M</b>	provided	set up	
coordinated	generated	maintained	purchased	simplified	
created	guided	managed		solidified	
		mastered	<b>Q</b>	solved	
	<b>H</b>	monitored	questioned	spearheaded	
	handled				
	headed				

Adapted from *Job Transition Manual*. Deerfield Ill.: Baxter Healthcare Corporation Institute for Training and Development, 1994.

## Sample Questions for Prospective Employers

**Why is this position open?**

**What are some of the objectives you would like accomplished in this job?**

**What kind of support does this position receive in terms of people, finances, etc.?**

**What are some of the more difficult problems that one would have to face in this position?**

**How do you think these could be handled best?**

**What freedom would I have in determining my work objectives, deadlines, and methods of measurement?**

**Where could a person go who is successful in this position and within what time frame?**

**In what ways has this agency/organization been most successful in terms of products or services over the years, particularly more recently?**

**What significant changes do you foresee in the near future?**

**How would you describe your management style?**

**What do you see as my strengths, shortcomings, and chances for this position?**

Source: *You Can Do It!* Deerfield, Ill.: Baxter Healthcare Corporation Institute for Training and Development, 1990.

# SAMPLE

## Thank you letter— informational Interview



1492 Columbus Circle  
Ft. Worth, Texas 77542  
May 5, 1997

Mr. Scott Dobbs, President  
Food for the World, Inc.  
6160 Rice Avenue  
Dallas, Texas 76530

Dear Mr. Dobbs,

Jan Winkle was right when she said you would be most helpful in advising me on a career in nutrition.

I appreciate your taking time from a busy schedule to meet with me. Your advice was most helpful, and I have incorporated your suggestions into my resume. I will send you a copy next week.

Again, thank you so much for your assistance. As you suggested, I will contact Mr. Robert Russell next week regarding career options.

Sincerely,

Camille Marks

Source: *Career Resources Manual for Returning Peace Corps Volunteers*. Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps Office of Returned Volunteer Career Services, 1995.

# SAMPLE

## Thank you letter- employment interview



1066 Hastings Court  
Syracuse, New York 72205  
November 16, 1996

Dr. Marvene Johnson  
Personnel Department  
Myrtle Corporation  
17 Hatfield Drive  
Syracuse, New York 12291

Dear Dr. Johnson,

Thank you for the opportunity to interview with you yesterday for the Management Trainee position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning about Myrtle Corporation. I was especially impressed with your progressive stance regarding personnel issues.

Your organization appears to be moving in a direction that parallels my interest and career goals. The interview confirmed my initial positive impressions of Myrtle Corporation, and I want to reiterate my strong interest in working for you. My experience in managing a small-business cooperative, plus my training in communication, will enable me to progress steadily through your training program and become a productive member of your management team.

Again, thank you for your consideration. If you need any additional information from me, please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

James Harris

## Phase Five: Readjustment or New Transition

Sometimes job seekers get stuck in a search and need to readjust their strategies or begin the process again, both of which can be disheartening. If this happens to you, it may mean that you need to put more attention into the self-assessment and research phases of the job search process. Do them again if you didn't spend much time on those two phases. After doing so, if you remain stuck, talk to a professional career counselor, who may be able to help you get "unstuck" more quickly than you can on your own.

After a successful job search, you may enjoy your new job for quite a while. Eventually, however, most people decide to look for another job either within or outside the organizations in which they currently work. They begin new job searches and enter new transitions.

Sometimes, forces beyond their personal control thrust job-holders—even those content with their jobs—into another job search. For example, one spouse is transferred to another city, but both want the family to live in one place. Or someone's job is eliminated because of budget cuts or a merger. Such forces, which are pretty much beyond their control, can put people back into the job search process.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS FOR AN UNSUCCESSFUL JOB SEARCH:

- What steps did you skip or not pay attention to?

- What is keeping you from being successful as a job seeker?

- Who can help you figure out what went wrong and how to correct it?

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS FOR A NEW TRANSITION

- How do you feel about this new transition?
- What can you do to get control of this situation (if the transition was imposed, not chosen)?
- What is different from your previous job search? (For example, you may have developed some new skills that you want to use in your next job.)
- What is the same as in your previous job search? (For example, your values or priorities may not have changed.)
- What was satisfying and not satisfying at your most recent job?

### TASK TO COMPLETE:

- Begin the self-directed job search cycle all over again!

## Being Smart at Your New Job

If you find yourself at phase six, you have fulfilled your goal of finding employment. Now, having found it, you are ready to think about making your new job a success.

### QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS:

- What do you want to get out of your new job?
- What steps can you take to be sure your new job is a success?
- How can you make the best of opportunities that exist at your new workplace?

### TASKS TO COMPLETE:

- Understand and operate successfully within the culture of the new workplace.
- Understand and make use of learning and training opportunities.
- Find and benefit from a mentor.
- Be realistic about your aspirations.
- Deal with any conflicts at the new workplace.
- Enjoy the new workplace.

### NEW-JOB "JITTERS"

If you have enjoyed your AmeriCorps experience, you may find it hard to leave. This has been a setting in which you've been successful, challenged, and supported, and in which you've probably had fun. Starting all over again may have limited appeal, to say the least. Moreover, AmeriCorps members often have earned some status in their communities. Giving that up to become a new person in another organization can be hard.

As anyone who has started a new job knows, entering a new and unknown workplace can be tough. New responsibilities, new co-workers, a new supervisor—all these can be daunting at first. Combining a great deal of challenge and little perceived support (it may be there but may go unrecognized), a new job can be the source of considerable anxiety for a while.

### UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

As you begin a new job, try to guard against unrealistic expectations. Sometimes, new employees assume that their skills and knowledge qualify them for work beyond their capabilities and experience. In other words, their reach is somewhat beyond their immediate grasp. Be realistic about what you offer, and work from there.

No magic strategies exist to move you from entry-level clerk to president of an organization in two years. However, it's true that hard work, continual learning and upgrading of skills, and a good attitude can help you move up. But moving up is a mostly gradual process in today's market. Creating a life with economic benefits—a home, car, education for your children, etc.—is a difficult task, and one that doesn't happen overnight or without a great deal of commitment and hard work.

Try to be realistic. If you are not, you will be disappointed and probably unsuccessful in the workplace. Take one step at a time.

## SKILLS YOU WILL NEED

According to a U.S. Department of Labor study, the attributes adults need if they are to be successful at work fall into three areas—basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities (Report of the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. *What Work Requires of Schools*. U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

### Basic Skills

- ☑ Reading
- ☑ Writing
- ☑ Listening
- ☑ Speaking
- ☑ Arithmetic and mathematics

### Thinking Skills

- ☑ Creative thinking
- ☑ Decisionmaking
- ☑ Problemsolving
- ☑ Ability to learn
- ☑ Reasoning

### Personal Qualities

- ☑ Responsibility
- ☑ Self-esteem
- ☑ Sociability
- ☑ Self-management
- ☑ Integrity/Honesty

A second study summarized four basic areas that employers consider when evaluating job performance (Jane Goodman and Judith Hoppin, cited in J. Hoppin and H. Splete, (Eds.), *Curriculum for Career Development Facilitators*, Rochester, Mich.: Oakland University, 1996, pp. 4-40).

**Dependability/Reliability.** Employers want employees to come to work as scheduled unless a strong, legitimate explanation is given. Further, employees must have the ability to follow through on a task without continual supervision.

**Punctuality.** To be successful, employees must report to work on time and ready to work. This expectation applies as well to meetings, breaks, and lunch times.

**Quality of Work.** Company and job survival both depend upon employee ability to produce a product or service of quality.

**Quantity of Work.** Productivity is also an important element of success on the job.

A third study of employer expectations identified these basic skills as critical to job performance (“Workplace Basics.” American Society for Training and Development, 1988):

- ☑ Knowing how to learn
- ☑ Reading, writing, and computation
- ☑ Listening and oral communication
- ☑ Adaptability
- ☑ Personal management (ability to set goals, motivate yourself, and build self-esteem)
- ☑ Group effectiveness
- ☑ Influence (understanding the organiza-

tion and informal networks, establishing influence so as to contribute ideas)

In reviewing these lists of skills, you may find that you’ve developed or enhanced many of them during your AmeriCorps service and

training. Answer the following questions and share the second list with your supervisor and/or mentor at your new workplace as soon as you feel ready to do so. He or she will be able to help you identify ways to develop and/or enhance the skills you’ll need to be successful at your new workplace.

### What skills and qualities have you developed and used so far?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### What skills and qualities do you need to work on in your new job?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GETTING POSITIVE EXPOSURE AT YOUR NEW WORKPLACE

While you may have had a lot of flexibility and autonomy during your AmeriCorps service, you may find your new employer keeping a tight rein on you as a new employee. Don't despair. Such circumstances are common for the first few months until new employees prove themselves. There are several ways you can work to become accepted, to take on responsibility, and to become a valued member of your new workplace quickly.

Use the self-management skills you've learned throughout your life. Be friendly, meet deadlines, take initiative, pull your weight, go the extra mile, and be enthusiastic.

Learn the organizational culture and work within it. During your AmeriCorps service, you have experienced training and firsthand exposure to many cultures. And you have learned that diversity means more than race or ethnicity or regional differences; diversity is also evident in the cultures of organizations.

How would you describe the culture of your workplace? How do people dress, interact with one another, communicate, and treat customers and clients? Do things seem formal or informal? How do people in the organization operate? Don't always trust first impressions; it's safer to observe and ask questions. Learn what works and what does not. As you begin to gain confidence, use the accepted ways of presenting and/or communicating information and of leading.

(Note: As you begin to learn the culture of your new workplace, you may discover certain

norms that make you uncomfortable. This could mean that your personal values conflict with those of the organization; if this is the case, you may find it difficult to work there. For long-term satisfaction, it is important to find an organization with values similar to yours.)

**Volunteer for projects.** Treat your new workplace as a new community, because it is. Become active within this new community. If you move outside your sphere of work, you will become visible and a part of the informal network more quickly. Making and keeping commitments is always a good work strategy.

**Demonstrate a team player attitude.** In the workplaces of the future, team players with many skills will be critical. Work cooperatively with others. Show your spirit, commitment, and versatility.

**Be willing and eager to learn new skills and experience different situations.** Although your AmeriCorps service has exposed you to many training opportunities, you may find such opportunities far less common (and less formal, as well) in your next workplace. In some organizations, the training is informal and has to be sought out. For example, rather than attending a formal training session on the computer system at your new workplace, you may have to acquire knowledge and skills on your own through trial and error and/or by asking co-workers. Stay on the lookout for ways to increase and improve your skills.



**Find and learn from a mentor.** A mentor is "any person with useful experience, knowledge, skills or wisdom" who "offers advice, information, guidance, support or intervention to another for that individual's personal and professional development" (Heiser, L., *Final Proposal for a Career Information and Mentoring Network*, Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Career Management Program, 1997, p. 4). You may have had one or more mentors as an AmeriCorps member. Now it is time to find another at your new worksite. A mentor can orient you and assist you with career development opportunities and ongoing professional development needs (p. 7). Although some workplaces have formal mentoring programs, most do not. After you've been on the job for a while, you may identify someone who can serve as an adviser, supporter, and coach for you within the organization. Ask that person for help. Be clear about your expectations.

A mentor can help you better understand the way the organization functions, give you a history of past practices, encourage your participation in new projects, introduce you to influential people in the organization, and generally guide you along your way in the new workplace.

**Learn from your mistakes.** Accept the fact that you will mess up occasionally. Employees who don't make mistakes may never try new

ideas. However, try not to make the same mistake more than once.

**Resolve conflicts maturely and with good will.** Conflicts are inevitable at the workplace. When they arise, use the conflict mediation skills you've learned through your AmeriCorps service. Don't let conflicts escalate until they are too big to handle.

**Use your sense of humor to your best advantage.** A good sense of humor will take you a long way in the world of work. It can reduce conflicts, make the workplace more enjoyable, and help you to make friends and allies.

**Exercise the essential ingredients of innovative, successful leadership** (described by Bennis and Nanus in *Leadership: Strategies for Taking Charge*):

- ☛ a clear sense of purpose;
- ☛ staying on track through tenacity and commitment; and
- ☛ viewing mistakes and setbacks as learning opportunities.

**Work smart.** In today's workplace, everyone has too much to do. Your best bet is to set priorities for yourself. Spend time on the most important projects first, and then get to the others as you can. Your priorities may be different from those of your supervisor. Resolve that difference together.

be friendly, meet deadlines, take initiative, and be enthusiastic

# Option: Starting Your Own Community- Based Organization or Business

This section is designed to introduce you to the general attributes needed for entrepreneurial pursuits and to some sources of information. It is a beginning for the budding entrepreneur, not a comprehensive approach to the topics.

Do you want to be your own boss? Do you want to contribute further to the community in which you live or serve? Do you have a great idea for a new product or service, an improved version of an existing product or service, or a way to capitalize on a community's assets while working to solve its problems? Do you like managing your own time and making decisions and accepting their consequences—positive or negative? Do other people sometimes ask you to provide a product or service or new ideas or creative solutions to problems? Are you willing to work harder and longer than you ever have before? Can you imagine having the creativity, pragmatism, perseverance, commitment, and independence needed to be a successful entrepreneur or community organization founder?

**if you do decide to start your own business, you'll be in good company**

As an AmeriCorps member, you may have had a taste of the entrepreneurial spirit within a community-based organization as you've independently carved out a niche in your community; decided what needed to be done; considered and implemented creative options to deal with issues; located resources and allocated them as carefully as possible; raised money; found experts and evaluated their direction/advice; created and kept to a budget; managed your own time; and made your own decisions. If you've enjoyed those aspects of your AmeriCorps service, you might want to think about starting your own community-based organization or business.

If you do decide to start your own business, you'll be in good company. According to Richard Bolles, author of *What Color is Your Parachute?*, more than 10 million Americans (one in every twelve workers) work in their own businesses. (Richard Bolles. *What Color is Your Parachute?* Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 1995.) Women, who are starting businesses at twice the rate of men, make up over 30 percent of all small business owners. From 1989 to 1991, the fastest growing industries for U.S. small business were computers, software, and computer-related services; health care; oil and gas exploration; public golf courses; and business consulting (from the Small Business Administration and the Census Bureau, cited in *The Washington Post* in 1995).

## Does This Sound Like You?

If there is such a thing as an "entrepreneurial personality," do you have one? Successful new

business owners and founders of community-based organizations tend to be alike. Following are descriptions of those who tend to be successful and some advice that applies to both community-based organization and business start-ups.

- Successful founders of community-based organizations and new businesses go with what they know to be a certain market, asset or need, and learn what they need to know to be successful. They know how to focus. This means having an idea or product or a way to deal with an issue that is simultaneously realistic and creative. It also has to be needed and wanted by large numbers of people and/or organizations. Having a great idea for a new business isn't enough. You have to be able to sell it. And getting "buy-ins" from the community at the grassroots level, from informal and formal leaders, is critically important with a community-based organization, as you have learned through your AmeriCorps service. Listen carefully to what community members say. It is tough to find others who share your passion. Experts suggest that clarity about what needs to be done and support based on relationships with people and other organizations that have resources you need—such as money, expertise, and time—are critical. Further, who will be your "competition?" Sometimes with a community-based organization, there is no need to create a new organization. You can join or piggyback upon an existing one. Location is also critical for both nonprofits and businesses. For example, if a youth service

organization is not located near a school and is far away from public transportation, it will probably not be used.

- Successful founders of community-based organizations and new businesses meticulously prepare for, and put their whole hearts and all their energy into, their work. They also are able to achieve some balance in their lives. As important as running the new organization or business is planning for it and having the commitment to sustain yourself during the hard times. A clear, detailed business plan is essential. Make very clear commitments to very specific tasks. There are many books and other resources available on the elements of a business plan such as financing, marketing strategies, distribution techniques, and all the other elements required to make the business successful. A nonprofit or business start-up is not a good place for those who want to work only forty hours a week. New organizations and businesses require a lot of energy and, sometimes, blind faith. Expect craziness and disappointment at times. It can be emotionally tough and very hard to do, but also very rewarding. Try to balance an all-out commitment to a new nonprofit or business with time for yourself, family, and friends. Have some fun once in a while.
- Successful founders of community-based organizations and new businesses are willing to take risks. These risks are more than financial. Self-esteem, time with family and friends, psychological well-





## **SCORE (SERVICE CORPS OF RETIRED EXECUTIVES)**

SCORE is a national network of former business people with an average experience of thirty-five years. Available through the SBA, members offer counseling services to prospective and current business owners without charge.

## **OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Businesses for Social Responsibility**

**609 Mission Street, 2nd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94105-3506  
(415) 537-0888**

[www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org)

BSR is a membership organization for companies of all sizes and sectors. Its mission is to help its member companies achieve long-term commercial success by implementing policies and practices that honor high ethical standards. Eleven regions support members at local levels.

### **Compass Point Nonprofit Services**

**706 Mission Street, Fifth Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415) 541-9000**

[www.compasspoint.org](http://www.compasspoint.org)

Compass Point Nonprofit Services is the national parent organization for thirteen affiliate support centers nationwide. The affiliates are in Ann Arbor, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, New York, San Diego, Providence, San Francisco, Orlando, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Santa Barbara, and Washington, D.C. They provide professional development seminars in nonprofit management and technology as well

as consulting services and print relevant materials.

### **Co-op America**

**1612 K Street, NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20006  
(800) 58-GREEN  
(202) 872-5307**

[coopamerica.org](http://coopamerica.org)

Co-op America is a national nonprofit organization that provides economic strategies, organizational power, and practical tools for businesses and individuals to address social and environmental problems. It seeks to educate and empower U.S. citizens and businesses to make significant improvements through the economic system.

### **Echoing Green Foundation**

**198 Madison Avenue, 8th Floor  
New York, NY 10016  
(212) 689-1165**

**e-mail: [general@echoinggreen.org](mailto:general@echoinggreen.org)  
[www.echoinggreen.org](http://www.echoinggreen.org)**

Echoing Green is a nonprofit foundation that applies a venture capital approach to philanthropy. Through its fellowships, the foundation provides seed money and technical support to social entrepreneurs starting innovative public service organizations and projects that seek to catalyze positive social change. Individuals must apply through participating undergraduate or graduate programs or community-based organizations. Graduates of a limited number of schools are eligible to apply for funding. Check the website for information about which schools' graduates are eligible.

### **Foundation Center**

**79 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10003-3076  
(212) 620-4230**

[www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)

The Foundation Center provides seminars and comprehensive library/resources, including numerous in-house publications, about fundraising, nonprofit management and potential sources of funding. The Foundation Center in Washington, D.C., also provides comprehensive services at 1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 938, phone (202) 331-1400. Centers in San Francisco, Cleveland, and Atlanta offer regional information. Additionally, major libraries across the nation include Foundation Center collections. Call the New York or Washington, D.C., office to find the library resource collection nearest you.

### **National Center for Nonprofit Law**

**2001 S Street, N.W., Suite 410  
Washington, D.C. 20009-1125  
(202) 462-1000**

National Center for Nonprofit Law provides information, education and documents to lawyers, trustees, volunteers and staff on the legal, financial and organizational issues facing nonprofit institutions. This organization also operates a clearinghouse of legal documents successfully used by members for other members, conducts educational seminars, and publishes briefing papers in plain language.

### **National Council of Nonprofit Associations**

**1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
(202) 833-5740**

[www.ncna.org](http://www.ncna.org)

The affiliates of this group offer assistance to persons or groups in thirty states. They know the general requirements of nonprofit incorporation and also provide jurisdiction-specific information. Some affiliates offer workshops and management support to nonprofit organizations. For example, the Minnesota Council of Non-Profits has a web page on how to start a nonprofit in Minnesota: [www.mncn.org](http://www.mncn.org)

### **National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship**

**120 Wall Street, 29th Floor  
New York, NY 10005  
(212) 223-3333**

[www.nfte.com](http://www.nfte.com)

NFTE (pronounced "nifty") is an international nonprofit organization that introduces at-risk teens from inner cities and other low-income communities to the world of business and entrepreneurship by teaching them how to develop and operate their own legitimate small businesses through in-school, after-school, and camp experiences. To date, about 10,000 students have participated in the NFTE program.

### **Net Impact**

**660 Market Street, Suite 210  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
(415) 984-3300**

[www.netimpact.org](http://www.netimpact.org)

This is a professional network of emerging business leaders committed to using the power of business to create a better world. The website includes a Career Services Center for members and links to contacts at over 40 campuses nationwide.

**Social Venture Network**  
**P.O. Box 29221**  
**San Francisco, CA 94129-0221**  
**(415) 561-6501**

[www.svn.org](http://www.svn.org)

The Social Venture Network advances the movement for responsible business, including support of numerous member efforts to develop and evolve business and social ventures. The Social Venture Network provides interactive opportunities for entrepreneurs to focus on problems faced by CEOs who are attempting to run socially responsible businesses.

**(Amherst H.) Wilder Foundation**  
**919 Lafond Avenue**  
**St. Paul, MN 55104**  
**1-800-274-6024**

Through its publishing center, the Wilder Foundation provides information individuals might be able to use in the programming and/or management of their own social welfare organization. The foundation focuses on best practices and oriented to results.

**Youth Service America**  
**1101 15th Street, N.W., Suite 200**  
**Washington, D.C. 20005**  
**(202) 296-2992**  
**e-mail: [info@ysa.org](mailto:info@ysa.org)**  
**[www.servenet.org](http://www.servenet.org)**

Youth Service America sponsors community entrepreneurs through the Fund for Social Entrepreneurs. It also has a resource guide, *Answer the Call*, that profiles more than fifty youth service organizations and eighty national and community organizations.

## BUSINESS OWNERS AND FOUNDERS/DIRECTORS OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

An excellent source of information are people in your own community who are already operating businesses or have started businesses or nonprofits themselves. They have experienced the thrills and challenges of the first year, know the market for their product/service well; they may be familiar with funding sources and similar ventures; they probably have additional sources of information and assistance; and they most likely will be willing to offer advice and encouragement to a prospective member of the community. Many business owners and nonprofit directors are affiliated with professional groups such as the Chamber of Commerce or a group of nonprofit directors, which you might want to join or at least meet its members. Be prepared to ask hard questions. Be sure to ask what went well for them and what didn't. Learn from their mistakes.

Don't assume that only people in a nonprofit or business similar to the type you are considering will be helpful. Talk with as many people as you can to get their advice.

### MORE HELP AVAILABLE

There are numerous publications that can help you as you start your nonprofit or business. Start with the publications listed in this section and your local library. Also take

advantage of written or electronic assistance through your state, regional, local, and/or city government offices of economic development. Other resources are listed in the section called Starting a Community-Based Organization on page 75 and in Appendix D, page 96.

## Option:

## Doing

## Nothing?

This section is for people who are making no plans for their lives after AmeriCorps. This is a position that AmeriCorps members sometimes find themselves in; perhaps they lack the energy to pursue their next steps immediately, maybe they need more information, or maybe the cause is something else entirely. If this describes you, take a few minutes to review the following material.

It might be helpful to look at some of the reasons AmeriCorps members find themselves doing nothing. Here are seven of the most common:

- If they lack experience with transitions, AmeriCorps members may be intimidated by the planning and work needed to change.
- Members who lack support from family

and friends for their next steps may have too little confidence to move on. People need a lot of support during change; without it, the process becomes much harder.

- AmeriCorps members who had a great service experience may be sad about leaving and unable to think about next steps.
- Those who had a bad service experience may be avoiding the next step, fearing that another bad experience will follow.
- Members may have worked so hard that they cannot raise the energy and spirit needed to gather information and make decisions about next steps.
- Some members, believing themselves to have few skills, may feel hopeless about their prospects after AmeriCorps.
- AmeriCorps members may fear that what they want for the future and what they can actually achieve are very far apart. These members may be afraid of failing, have unrealistic expectations, or lack confidence in their ability to succeed.

Whatever their reasons, some AmeriCorps members will find themselves doing nothing for a while after their service ends. The important thing to remember is that doing nothing is a choice, just as seeking employment, starting a business, or going back to school are choices. Although doing nothing may be more passive than active, it is a choice nonetheless.



## Getting Out of the Rut

If any of this section relates to you, think about what might account for your lack of action toward a next step. To get some help with this, ask your AmeriCorps colleagues—other members, the AmeriCorps leader, supervisors, your program leader—as well as family and friends. (People you trust and who know you well have your best interests at heart.) They will probably be candid and have some pretty good ideas about why you're "stuck" where you are.

Next, determine whether you want to change your behavior. Is there something you want to pursue but can't, for some reason? Or are you content to continue doing nothing?

If you decide you really want to change your behavior, ask for help. In some cases, a gentle nudge in the right direction might get you going. Or maybe more attention, training, or support is needed. Some members who are content doing nothing may need time to "debrief" from or to mourn the loss of the AmeriCorps experience. Others may feel powerless and unable to move on. They may need to seek career and/or personal counseling.

Sometimes "helpers" find that it is hard to help themselves. AmeriCorps members who are in this position might try to step back and view themselves as they would a community member who needs help. What would you do for someone in a position like yours? Figure out your response to that question, and then follow your own advice.

If you are doing nothing and are unhappy with that fact and unable to get out of your rut,

be as good to yourself as you can. Exercise, eat and sleep well, spend time with people you love and enjoy, volunteer for something. Do whatever makes you feel good about yourself.

Finally, remember that there are no easy answers to getting out of a rut. However, there are two things you can do while you find your way—look for the help you need (or ask others to do it for you) and give yourself a break. In other words, be as good to yourself as you can.