

Life After Americorps Starts Now!

Facilitation Guide

Welcome to the Life After AmeriCorps Workshop Facilitation Guide!

The first page is a general overview of the entire workshop. And then in the following pages you will find each section described in more detail. In each detailed section, you will find the following information:

- Purpose: this is for your information. And does not need to be read to the audience.
- Supplies: a list of the materials that you will be using during this section
- Introduction: This is the introduction that I have used when I delivered the workshop. Feel free to use it as is or make changes that you feel will work best for your audience.
- Activity: These sections include a mini introduction to the activities, directions and a closing/wrap up piece.
- Wrap Up: This is the closing comments to the workshop. Feel free to use it or make changes that you feel are needed.

I have delivered this workshop several times to various groups of AmeriCorps members and have received great feedback! The AmeriCorps members have really appreciated not only learning about different professional development strategies but also having the opportunity to practice them and apply them to their own lives. I hope you find the workshop and facilitation guide helpful!

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Life After Americorps Starts Now!

Overview: AmeriCorps members are often told that their year of service offers countless opportunities for professional development, and are encouraged to be proactive about achieving the goals they have set for themselves. Sometimes that is easier said than done- especially once they understand how quickly their year of service flies by.

During this workshop AmeriCorps members will have the opportunity to reflect on successes and challenges as well as create action steps pertaining to their personal and professional development goals during their year of service.

When to deliver this workshop:

This workshop is ideal for AmeriCorps members as a mid-year reflection/action planning opportunity. The mid year point is when AmeriCorps members are feeling comfortable with the projects and their site- and are ready to hear about how to plan for “life after AmeriCorps.”

Materials needed:

Life After AmeriCorps Booklet
Dimensions of Success Worksheet
Scenarios & Discussion Questions
Creating Opportunities Discussion Questions
Action Planning Worksheet

Agenda: (recommended time for the entire workshop: 2 - 2.5 hrs)

Welcome (15 mins)

Introduction
Energizer/Ice Breaker

Dimensions of Success (30 mins)

Introduction
Activity
Debrief

Recognizing and Creating Opportunities (40 mins)

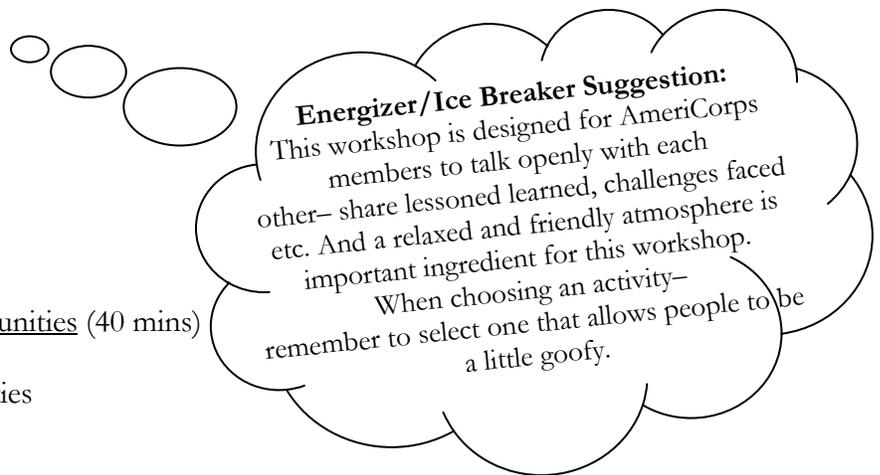
Introduction
Activity- Recognizing Opportunities
Activity- Creating Opportunities
Debrief

Action Planning (30 Mins)

Introduction
Activity
Debrief

Wrap Up (5 mins)

Closing Remarks
+ / Δ (as a group or individually)



Welcome and Introduction

Introduction:

Organizations use evaluation tools as a part of their strategic planning process. And they do this for several reasons:

- Set program and development goals
- Measure their progress towards those goals
 - (revisit goals and makes changes if needed)
- Where does the program need more support or resources?
- What is going well? Why is it working?
- Talk about their programs
 - What do they do?
 - What results are they seeing?
 - What makes their programs a success?

Evaluation tools should not be used just for organizations and programs. Individuals should be using evaluations tools to help them in their professional development. In fact— successful individuals DO incorporate reflection and self evaluation tools into their professional life.

As AmeriCorps members we are in a really great and unique situation because unlike many people's first year at an organization (example: an entry level position) we are given a lot of responsibilities and large projects. We are also given a network of resources and support to help us complete a successful year of service. When I say a successful year of service— mean two things: a) as an AmeriCorps member contributing to the organization and b) working towards your own professional development goals.

So how do we do that? How do incorporate individual reflection and self evaluation into our year of service? As we know by now, a year goes by very quickly— and taking time to think about our own professional development does not always seem like a priority. But it needs to be a priority. Part of being an AmeriCorps member is being aware of your own professional development goals and creating a plan to achieve those goals.

Today, we are going to talk about several evaluation tools and strategies that you can use during your year of service. By now you are half way (or more) through your year of service. You are familiar with your organization, the staff and your projects— and this is a great time to reflect on your year so far, create or reevaluate your professional development goals and set up a plan for the rest of your year!

Here is the general agenda for the next two hours:

- Dimensions of Success
 - An evaluation tool
- Recognizing and Creating Opportunities
 - Getting the experience you want and need to set yourself up for life After AmeriCorps
- Action Planning
 - Planning tool

Dimensions of Success

Purpose:

The purpose of this section is to introduce Dimensions of Success as an evaluation tool and to provide VISTAs an opportunity to reflect on past projects using model.

Supplies:

For this section of the workshop VISTAs will need:

- Life After AmeriCorps booklet
- Dimensions of Success worksheet

Introduction

One of the great things about this model is that it challenges us to evaluate projects and see more than just the final result. It challenges us to look at the planning process and the relationships that were impacted or cultivated during the project.

Breaking down projects into smaller pieces is important for a few reasons:

- You can see why certain aspects worked well or why they didn't go well. This model makes you be specific in your evaluation process. This is helpful if you are going to do the project again in the future or if you are passing the project on to another person- you are able to give them helpful, specific feedback and details.
- Helps you to assess goals and then set new goals for the future (both professional and personally)
- Helps you talk about the specific skills you gained, practiced and showcased during the project. This is important when you are at interviews- meaningful experiences, challenges, strengths, weaknesses etc. Also allows you to identify learning experiences- how did you grow from this project? What did you learn- what would you like to continue learning about?
- Helps you to identify "big wins" what are you proud of from this experience?

Using the Dimensions of Success– Real Life Examples

Example #1: Volunteer Recognition Event

Scenario:

Last winter I coordinated a volunteer recognition breakfast at the elementary school where I served as a literacy program coordinator. For the breakfast, I invited all of my volunteers to come as well as students, teachers, and parents of the students in our program. My volunteers love meeting the parents of their students and also speaking with their teachers– so I was very excited to hear from many parents and teachers and even the principal– that they would be coming to the breakfast. The night before the event there was a horrible ice storm and I awoke to find that everything was covered in at least an inch of ice! I attempted to trek out to my car and I saw for myself just how dangerous it was outside. There was no way I could ask my volunteers to come in for regular programming– let alone the volunteer recognition breakfast. It was far too dangerous. In the end, I canceled the event. I was really upset that all of our hard work was wasted. I felt that I had let down my volunteers, as well as the teachers and parents.

Evaluation:

Now, if I evaluate the event by only looking at the end results– my event is a failure. Viewing the event this way– leaves me with very little to talk about in terms of professional development opportunities, lessons learned, or suggestions and goals for next time.

However, if I use the Dimensions of Success approach, I am able to see that even though the event did not take place— there were a lot of victories and lessons learned from the event. Here are a few examples:

Process:

-During the planning process I was able to practice my communication skills in various capacities:

Creating invitations (for the volunteers, for the teachers, and families)

Collecting In-Kind donations from local business— talking about the literacy program, the amazing work the volunteers do with in the school and about the event itself.

Communicating with: the building staff about the space and prep needed for the event and my fellow AmeriCorps members about the kind of man power I would need the day of the event.

-During the planning process I learned a lot about time management:

Creating the agenda for the event

Created Thank You cards that the students decorated at home for the volunteers (the time line for creating the cards, sending them home, collecting them and doing an other round of sending out cards that were missing.)

Relationships:

- During the planning and preparation process I was able to connect with and have some great conversations with the school principal and also with several teachers that I had yet to connect with that year. It was a great opportunity to learn more about what they feel their students need and also to talk about the literacy program.

Example #2: St Patrick's Day event

Scenario:

Later that year I was asked to coordinate the St Patrick's Day party for the entire after-school program. I was really excited to take on this challenge— and I was also really nervous. I basically needed to plan a variety of activities for over a 100 students who ranged from kindergartener to middle school! In the end— the event was a huge success! The kids all had a great time, the volunteers and staff really enjoyed themselves as well! It was definitely one of my biggest accomplishments during my year of service.

Evaluation:

Unlike my first example, if I evaluate the event and only look at the end result— it was a huge success. Done and done. Move on to the next project. However, once again this evaluation strategy leaves me with very little to talk about in terms of professional development, lessons learned and suggestions and goals for the future. It's a missed opportunity for me to really learn why this event was a success— what worked well, what didn't work well? Why?

If I use the Dimensions of Success model I am able to do that even though the event was a success— there were a lot of challenges that we worked through and also opportunities to showcase some of my skills.

Here are a few examples:

Process:

-Learned about time management:

How much time is needed to plan an event of that magnitude

Balancing the planning and event preparation with my day to day program responsibilities.

Creating the day's schedule– activity time, transition time, as well as event preparation and clean up.

Relationships:

- Communication Skills

Recruited, trained and supported fellow AmeriCorps team members to help run each of the activities.

Communicated with after school staff about the event, their role, the schedule

Activity: Dimensions of Success Worksheet

Introduction:

Now that we have talked about the Dimensions of Success model and how it is a really great tool for AmeriCorps members– let's give it try. From my experience, it's great to talk about strategies and tools at a workshop– but having the opportunity to practice it makes it more meaningful– and we're more likely to use it in the future.

Directions:

Each AmeriCorps member will have the opportunity to use the Dimensions of Success model and apply it to a project, event or experience from their own life.

On their own, AmeriCorps members will take 5-7 minutes to reflect on a past project, event or experience and use the Triangle of Success work sheet.

After they complete the worksheet, AmeriCorps members will pair up and share what they wrote.

The last 5-10 minutes the group will come back together in a large group to debrief.

What are their thoughts on the Dimensions of Success model?

How did the evaluation process go?

What did they like or not like about the evaluation model?

Do you see yourself using this evaluation model in the future?

Wrap Up:

So as we wrap up this first section, I like to share a quote that I found that I think does a great job summarizing the larger take-away message. (the quote is in the booklet page 3)

“Aim for success, not perfection. Never give up your right to be wrong, because then you will lose the ability to learn new things and move forward with your life.” Dr. David M. Burns

Each of us have a lot of great skills that we bring to our position. And we are accomplishing some really great things during our year of service– but let's not forget that we are not expected to come into our year as experts. And we are in a unique position because we are committing to a year of service– which means we might not have opportunities to repeat events and projects (ex a Halloween event, holiday fundraiser) but if we break down projects into skills and lessons learned– we can see the transferable skills more clearly and use them in the future.

Recognizing and Creating Opportunities

Purpose:

The purpose of this section is to remind AmeriCorps member that they are surrounded by opportunities for professional development during their year of service and to empower them to recognize and/or seek out these opportunities.

Supplies:

For this section of the workshop VISTAs will need:

- Life After AmeriCorps booklet
- Scenarios and Discussion Prompts for Activity #1
- Reflection and Discussion Prompts for Activity #2

Introduction:

In the first part of the workshop we talked about an evaluation tool— and in this next section we are going to move forward and talk about things we can be doing now -in the present moment -to make sure we are getting the most out of the opportunities surrounding us doing out year of service.

Opportunities for professional development are everywhere during our year of service. We just need to know how to recognize them. And how to create them. That can be easier said than done. How can we make sure we are saying yes to opportunities and challenging ourselves? Over the next half hour we are going to talk about strategies we can use to help us be more proactive about accomplishing our professional development goals.

Let's start with recognizing opportunities.

I like to start off this discussion with two real life examples— one about recognizing opportunities and another about creating opportunities. During my first year in AmeriCorps I served at an after-school program where I was their literacy program coordinator. I worked closely with the director of the after school program on projects such as event planning, family and teacher out reach efforts and student progress tracking. The director and I had very different communication styles. We both struggled and were often frustrated with each other because we weren't able to communicate with each other effectively. I would often leave meetings feeling upset, really frustrated and confused. I could have just thought "well this is awful." And viewed it as a part of my year that I would just have to "get through." But instead I realized that this was a great opportunity for me to work on my communication skills! Because honestly, this wasn't the first time I had to work with some one who had a different communication style than me and it certainly wouldn't be the last time. This was a great opportunity if I was able to view it as such.

So how did I turn this difficult situation into an opportunity for professional development? I met with my supervisor and told her about my situation and the goal that I had set for myself.

Together we found resources on communication styles and planned out different opportunities for me to practice some of the new strategies. For example, before my meetings with the Director I spoke with her about what topics she wanted to discuss and asked if there was anything in particular that she would like me to bring. And I share with her the topics I needed to discuss with her.

Over the course of my year I checked in with my supervisor about the strategies I was using, and the progress I felt that I was making towards my goal. In the end, I knew that I had acquired some really effective communication skills and learned about different styles. And it was not because some one made me attend a workshop or because some one else wanted me to develop these skills. It was because I made the decision to grow from the challenging situation rather than “just get through it.”

On the other hand, there are some opportunities that you have to ask for, or create for yourself. For example, one of my fellow AmeriCorps members –Katie- really wants to develop stronger public speaking skills. Unfortunately, her position description doesn't offer many opportunities for her to practice. Earlier this year Katie met with her supervisor to talk about her professional development goals. Together Katie and her supervisor created a plan to help her gain the experience she wanted. Part of the plan included Katie reaching out to staff members in the office and explaining her professional development goals– and to so to speak “keep her on their radar” when public speaking opportunities arose. Since then, Katie has collaborated with several staff members to create and deliver several presentations. In addition, Katie asks a staff member or a fellow AmeriCorps member who is attending the presentations and take notes and offer feedback. This way, with each presentation she is able to focus on specific skills and measure her development. This is a great example of creating professional development opportunities and taking advantage of the support with in your network.

Activities

Introduction:

As I said before during the last activity, there are two goals of this workshop: to introduce evaluation strategies to help you work towards your professional development goals and to provide a space for you all to practice the strategies today.

The first activity is about recognizing opportunities that present themselves as challenges. We will divide into three small groups– each group will receive a scenario and discussion questions. As a group you need to read through the scenario, come up with a solution and then go one step further and list the professional development opportunities that present themselves. After a few minutes, we will come back together in a large group and share our results.

The second activity is about creating opportunities. These could be opportunities to challenge yourself and to grow from that or opportunities to showcase a strength you possess. Why is this important? A) as AmeriCorps members we are connected to a large network of resources. And not taking advantage of the resources is a huge missed opportunity. If there is a skill you want to develop, there are people and resources available to help you succeed. B) Thinking ahead to interviews– employers love to see some one who is self aware, confident in their skills and know takes initiative. Being self aware is a skill and it comes naturally to some of us and not so much for others. But it is definitely a skill that can be learned. And the second activity is an opportunity for us to start thinking about where our strengths are and how we can challenge ourselves.

Directions

Activity #1– Recognizing Opportunities

The AmeriCorps members will break up into small groups. Each group will receive a “challenging scenario” and also discussion questions– they will take about 3 or 4 minutes to talk in their groups.

The large group comes back together and each small group takes a minute to share their challenges and the conclusions they came to.

Activity #2– Creating Opportunities

In pairs AmeriCorps members will take a few minutes to think about what they consider to be their strengths, and also what projects or events are going really well/smoothly so far this year. Each pair will receive a small sheet of guiding questions for the activity.

Wrap Up:

As we wrap up our second section of the workshop I’d like to share another quote with you. And like the previous quote, I think this quote really summarizes the over all message of what we just talked about (quote is on page 5 of the booklet.)

“Learn everything you can, anytime you can, from anyone you can– there will always come a time when you will be glad you did.” –Sarah Caldwell.

When we began our year of service– we came in with a desire to contribute something meaningful to the communities we serve. And as the year progresses, we start to see that as much as we are giving– we are also receiving. We are learning important life lessons and professional skills that we can carry with us into the future. The opportunities that surround us are numerous– and it’s up to us to recognize them and say yes to them.

Action Planning

Purpose: The purpose of this section is to empower AmeriCorps members to think strategically about the goals they have set for themselves. What would they like the rest of their year to look like, what experiences do they need in order to set themselves up for their next step after AmeriCorps? Using the Action Planning worksheet, AmeriCorps members will begin the process of setting a S.M.A.R.T. goal.

Supplies:

For this section of the workshop AmeriCorps members will need:

- Life After AmeriCorps booklet
- Action Planning worksheet

Introduction:

Being able to set achievable goals is a skill— and there are a variety of ways to go about setting achievable goals. One strategy that we are going to talk about and practice today is called S.M.A.R.T. Goals. S.M.A.R.T. stands for:

S- Specific

M- Measurable

A- Attainable

R- Realistic

T—Timely

Note to the Facilitator Depending upon how familiar your group is with this goal setting strategy, you can chose to do a quick review or go into further detail.

Looking at the Action Planning worksheet, you can see that the worksheet asks us to get pretty specific about how our goal will be achieved. And while some of the questions may be to have obvious answers, and perhaps the worksheet seems boring— it's really important to take the time to thoroughly think through what needs to be done to reach your goal. And here are a few reasons why:

A) Being able to answer the questions on this worksheet will help you make sure that you are setting realistic and achievable goals. For example, if it is the end of March and you suddenly decide to apply to several graduate school programs with out doing some research and action planning— you may find yourself scrambling to meet upcoming deadlines and haphazardly completing applications. That's not an ideal situation— and it could have been avoided if you took the time to do some research and think about the how realistic your goal was to begin with.

B) Being able to communicate your goals with your supervisor and peers is very important. Supervisors are there to support you and are a great resource— if you can communicate your goals and needs. For example, being able to communicate important deadlines helps your supervisor understand how urgent the goal is, and being to communicate foreseeable challenges allows your supervisor to assist you through from (or even avoid the challenges all together!)

Activity:**Directions**

For this last activity, we are going to spend some time on our own thinking through a goal of our own. You will each think about the next few months– what do you want to achieve? Choose one goal to think about and answer the questions on the worksheet. Afterwards, find a partner and share your Action Plan with them. After everyone has had a few minutes to share with a partner we will come back as a large group. I'll ask everyone to share their goal– it will be great hear what the next few months look like for everyone!

Wrap up:

As I have done for the other two sections of this workshop– I want to share a quote with you all (quote can be found on page 6 in your booklet.)

“Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.” Will Rogers

Our year of service flies by very quickly, and one of the best things we can do for ourselves is to set goals, communicate our needs and take advantage of all the resources and opportunities available to us. Setting S.M.A.R.T. goals is an important first step in that process.

Wrap Up

Wrap Up:

Today we talked about evaluation, creating and recognizing opportunities and finally goal setting. All things that we can be doing now– during our year of service– so that when our year of service is completed we have had a variety of meaningful experiences. These experiences are both beneficial to the organization and the community but also to our own professional development. Whatever our next step may be– graduate school, another year of service, or a job– it's important for each of us to be able to articulate what exactly we did during our year of service. Hopefully, after today's workshop you're seeing your year of service from another perspective. A perspective that empowers you to connect your year of service with what comes next. Today you have added a few more tools to your professional development tool box– and it's up to you to bring them back to your organization and incorporate them into your year of service.

Closing Discussion: (Optional)

If there is time, I often open up the floor and ask what they enjoyed about the workshop; what parts of the workshop do they see themselves really using; what parts were new or challenging...etc. This part is not always needed– but so far the AmeriCorps members have really enjoyed sharing their thoughts on the tools we talked about during the workshop.