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By the People: Citizenship and National Service

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship

Harry C. Boyt

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WE HERE HIGHLY RESOLVE
THAT THESE DEAD SHALL
NOT HAVE DIED IN VAIN—
By the People
THAT THIS NATION, UNDER
GOD, SHALL HAVE A NEW
BIRTH OF FREEDOM—AND
THAT GOVERNMENT OF
THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE,
FOR THE PEOPLE, SHALL NOT
PERISH FROM THE EARTH.

CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONAL SERVICE

NSLC
c/o ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

By the People

We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

— Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg, 1863

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship was established in 1987 at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. The mission of the Center is to renew American democracy as a commonwealth created and sustained by the public work of its citizens. The Center serves to encourage and foster people's public talents, spirit, and energy to do public work. To these ends, the Center provides technical assistance, training, staff development, action research, and networking opportunities.

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship

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Upon request, this material will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities.

Foreword

By the People was edited by Harry C. Boyte, Co-Director, Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship (CDC) at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs thanks the Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service and the Minnesota Extension Service, whose support in the early stages of work made this guide possible.

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship wants to highlight and express appreciation for the work, training, and thoughtful commentary of colleagues who have tested and refined this curriculum with AmeriCorps members in five states, in association with the Corporation for National Service.

By the People is based on the citizenship and public work framework developed by the CDC. It draws upon and incorporates texts from the following publications:

Building Worlds, Transforming Lives, Making History, edited by Bridget Erlanson and Robert Hildreth, 1997.

Making the Rules, edited by Melissa Bass, 1994.

The Civic Declaration, edited by Harry Boyte et al., 1994.

Reinventing Citizenship, edited by Harry Boyte and Nan Skelton, 1994.

Building Ownership, edited by Rebecca Breuer and Fraser Nelson, 1992.

The Book: The Political Educator's Guide to Citizen Politics, edited by Kathryn Stoff Hogg, 1992.

For information on these and other publications, contact the Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

This work also benefits from materials written and distributed by the Corporation for National Service.

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Preface

As an AmeriCorps member, you are part of a national effort, a national movement, to address some of America's most pressing problems — from education to violence, health care to the environment. AmeriCorps members demonstrate that citizens can be serious players in public life and can build the foundations for a healthy and flourishing society in the 21st century. AmeriCorps broadens our understanding of democracy and citizenship, returning us to our nation's wellsprings.

The work of AmeriCorps recalls American citizenship and democracy in their richest meanings. The nation was founded on the spirit and practice of citizenship with a strong flavor of public work, and "democracy in America" once meant far more than voting.

Public work is work, whether paid or unpaid, that is visible, that involves a mix of people, and that leaves a lasting public legacy. Public work builds "the commonwealth" — those common things, tangible and intangible, that we all depend on. Citizenship as public work, and democracy as involving multiple acts of public creation — these are at the heart of the American dream.

Public work for the commonwealth stretches far back in time. One story of public work that many inner-city communities have found relevant in recent years is from the Book of Nehemiah in the Bible. Nehemiah was the Old Testament leader who came back to Jerusalem in 446 B.C. to lead the Jews in the rebuilding of the walls of their city, following their captivity.

"You see the trouble we are in; Jerusalem is in ruins; its gates have been burned down. Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and suffer this indignity no longer!" Nehemiah declared. "Let us start!" the people exclaimed. "Let us build!" And with willing hands they set about the good work.

The people had willing hands. But they faced many obstacles. They divided into factions — different tribes, occupations, outlooks, ages, men and women. The Bible lists thirty different groups. Outside lurked enemies who did not want them to succeed. The people had to post guards at the corners of the city. At one point, nobles tried to take advantage of the poorest people. Nehemiah called a great assembly to hold them to account:

*They were silent and could find nothing to say. ...
"What you are doing is wrong," [said Nehemiah.]
They replied, "We will make restitution."*

When a number of African-American congregations and other groups in East Brooklyn first thought of using the term "Nehemiah homes" in the early 1980s to describe the houses they were building with and for poor people, the idea came as a revelation. "The story connected our work to something real, not something bogus," explained one participant. "It got it out of the 'housing' field and made it something more than housing." There were many parallels between the Old Testament story and their own. People saw themselves as undertaking hard, serious work, and having to overcome many obstacles. Like the Hebrews, East Brooklyn citizens also saw their task as rebuilding themselves as a people and as a community.

Again and again Americans have taken up public tasks similar to those in East Brooklyn. We are a country of immigrants, all of us, including the earliest native peoples who came many thousands of years ago. Immigrants arrived with strong traditions of creating their communities and the nation through making "the commons," public things that all depended on. In fact, many came to America to escape practices of "engrossing," through which gentry or the king took away the commons that generations had owned and taken care of.

In America, footpaths and meeting houses, fields and forests and dams, libraries and voluntary fire departments and schools — most of our public legacy — have been built through the energy and spirit of ordinary people. Equally important has been the legacy of civic attitudes and practices that people develop through such work. As people helped create the commonwealth, they became the commonwealth. They gained ownership and a stake in their communities and the country. They became responsible citizens.

In the 1930s and 1940s during the Great Depression, the traditions and practices of public work came to life on an enormous scale in government-sponsored efforts like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This public service movement forms one of the powerful traditions for AmeriCorps in our time. Millions of

young men and women made parks, created public murals and statues, constructed libraries and community centers, landscaped farms, and built roads and bridges. Work was hard. Tools consisted of brushes, shovels, sledgehammers, and axes. Their works remain as a vital legacy in every corner of the country — public monuments to the craft and energy of citizens. “We have a park; it was wilderness before and now it’s a nice place to go,” said Robert Ritchie, a CCC participant from Hansell, Iowa. “You feel that you were part of the country and of history. I was part of an important event.”

AmeriCorps members today are reviving the legacy of public work that builds the commons, as well as other important forms of service. Whether immunizing children, building houses, creating block watch programs, or doing environmental restoration, you are doing work that has potential for lasting impact on the community and the country. “It’s like you’re writing your signature on the face of the neighborhood,” said Leatrice Hardwick, who, as an AmeriCorps member with the Milwaukee Community Service Corps, helped to build the “Victory Over Violence” park.

Today’s challenges are daunting. The American mosaic is made up of the outlooks, cultures, races, and faiths of the entire world, but we have lost much of the “civic muscle” that comes from knowing how to work well together on public tasks across lines of difference. Many people doubt that they can make any difference even on neighborhood problems, let alone the national challenges of our time. Feelings of powerlessness are widespread. Many feel estranged from government.

Hard as it may be, America really has no alternative for democracy. As Abraham Lincoln knew, no elite will keep democracy alive. Government is only democratic when it is “of the people, by the people,” as well as doing things for the people. To have a government of the people means that the people help to create the public things on which we all depend; it also means that those in government are partners in the tasks. Active democracy stresses the “civil” in “civil service.”

Thus, through your efforts you are helping to revive America’s most basic idea: Democracy is more than voting, or writing your members of congress, or paying taxes. It depends on widespread public work of the people. You are taking up the unfinished work

of democracy for this generation, just as earlier generations had to create their own new birth of freedom.

Through the legacy you leave, through the ways you involve other citizens in this work, through the authority that you derive from creating things that benefit everyone, you help to create a commonwealth of freedom in our time. Only in this way will we be able to build a nation in the 21st century worthy of our country’s finest ideals. Only in this way can we honor the work of the generations before us.

Introduction

This guidebook is designed to introduce AmeriCorps members and staff to a set of civic concepts that give a broader context to your service, and also to a set of civic skills to help you serve more effectively.

This guidebook begins with a chapter on the fundamental principles of American civic life — democracy, citizenship, politics, public work, and service. From these ideas follow the core civic concepts and skills discussed in chapters 2 through 5. These chapters also include exercises to challenge your thinking and approach to your service.

The organizing principle of this guide is the AmeriCorps ethic — Getting things done, strengthening communities, encouraging responsibility, and expanding opportunity.

We highlight the *civic* nature of the AmeriCorps mission. In AmeriCorps materials, the four components of the ethic are presented in order of importance. In this guide, we present them as steps in a process: Encouraging responsibility and strengthening communities are necessary in order to get things done and solve our public problems. As a result, opportunities are expanded.

This guide can be integrated into staff development training, discussed informally among members, or used as a reference by individuals as they carry out their service. It is meant to be used, changed, added to, and argued with. You need to put its ideas into action, weigh its value against your experience, integrate your own perspectives, and make it your own to give it meaning. Good luck!

Prohibited Activities

Your role as an AmeriCorps member is to stimulate civic involvement and serve as a model for civic, democratic renewal beyond formal politics. An active network of AmeriCorps alumni keeps former members connected to the national service movement and is always looking for former members. This guidebook is filled with what you can and should do while serving your community and country. It also gives guidance about activities from which AmeriCorps members should refrain during their term of service.

The following is a list of prohibited activities from the Corporation for National Service. These are strict rules as to what you are able and unable to do while serving your AmeriCorps hours or while wearing your AmeriCorps uniform.

While charging time to an AmeriCorps program, accumulating service/training hours, or otherwise engaging in activities with the AmeriCorps program or the Corporation for National Service, staff and members may not engage in the following activities:

- Any effort to influence legislation.
- Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes.
- Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing.
- Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements.
- Engaging in partisan political activities or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office.
- Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities which are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials.
- Engaging in religious instruction; conducting worship services; providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship; constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or

worship; maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship; or engaging in any form of religious proselytizing.

- Providing a direct benefit to:
 - a for-profit entity;
 - a labor union;
 - a partisan political organization; or
 - an organization engaged in the religious activities described in the preceding subclause, unless grant funds are not used to support the religious activities.
 - a nonprofit entity that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of Title 26, except that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent members or participants from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative.
- Voter registration drives by AmeriCorps members.
- Other activities as the Corporation determines will be prohibited, upon notice to the grantee.

Individuals may exercise their rights as private citizens and may participate in the above activities on their own initiative, on non-Corporation time, and using non-Corporation funds. The AmeriCorps logo should not be worn while doing so.

(From AmeriCorps Provisions, August 1, 1997)

Chapter One

The Framework

Sometimes, when asked the what-do-you-do question, it occurs to me to say that I work for the government. I have a government job, essential to national security. I am a citizen. Like the Supreme Court judges, my job is for life, and the well-being of my country depends on me. It seems fair to think that I should be accountable for my record in office in the same way I expect accountability from those who seek elected office. I would like to be able to say that I can stand on my record and am proud of it.

— Robert Fulghum, 1988

Democracy, Citizenship, Politics, Public Work, and Service

Democracy is that form of government in which not only politicians and public employees but all citizens bring life to liberty. It is the practice of self-governance in which ordinary people develop the skills, powers, capacities, and imagination for addressing our common problems. It is the system of decision making and action in which rights carry with them a larger sense of social responsibility and engagement.

The Civic Forum Declaration, 1994

Public Skills List

We use these public skills in public work. Refer to the list as you do the exercises in the book. See how many you use as an AmeriCorps member.

This list is not exhaustive. Add to it.

- Recruiting people around public work
- Inspiring others to do public work
- Connecting problems to larger issues
- Public speaking
- Running meetings
- Helping to define a problem
- Publicly listening to others' points of view
- Agenda-building
- Strategic planning
- Organizing public recognition and celebrations
- Negotiating
- Evaluating and reflecting
- Engaging in public argument
- Mapping a community for power, self-interests, different cultures
- Interviewing
- Writing
- Keeping a chronicle or history of your work
- Holding others accountable
- Making rules
- Working with many different kinds of people

Democracy

America has a long, proud tradition of democracy: We have fought for it, we believe in it, it is a part of who we are. Around the world, thousands of people have struggled and lost their lives to attain it, and millions more celebrate as it becomes a reality.

In spite of this commitment, or perhaps because of it, democracy is a hotly debated idea with many definitions. Most people would argue that democracy means having the right to vote and the other liberties guaranteed by our Constitution. But because elections are held only every few years, and because only about half the people who can vote actually do, it can't just be voting — or maybe it's not voting at all — that makes people identify with democratic ideals.

Democracy comes from the Greek words *demos*, meaning people, and *kratein*, meaning rule or power. In other words, power resides with the people.

Democracy means that we *all* have a say about how we will govern and be governed, how we will solve our nation's problems, how we will make our communities places where we want to live, how we will build the common things that all depend on. Understood as a commonwealth, democracy means that we, the people, have the freedom to create our world.

Citizenship

Just as democracy has many meanings, there are also many ways to think about being a citizen. Often, people think of citizenship in narrow, legal terms: Citizens are people who have certain guaranteed rights as a consequence of being born or naturalized in the United States. In this case, a good citizen would vote, pay taxes, and obey the law. Others think of citizenship as being a volunteer, or being a responsible member of the community.

Citizenship raises particular questions and conflicts born out of the historical, political, and legal experience of people of color in America. For Native Americans, it may symbolize a status imposed on them by force. For Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans, it brings up questions of legality and documentation. For African Americans, citizenship became imaginable after slavery was abolished, but became possible only after their own self-determination and resolve transformed aspirations into action through the sweeping movements for freedom, civil rights, and black power that culminated in the 1950s and 1960s. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, "This growing self-respect has inspired the [African American] with new determination to struggle and sacrifice until first-class citizenship becomes a reality."

For communities of color, citizenship can offer either a conceptual stumbling block or an entry into the American dream for full participation in government and society. Stripped of its legal trappings, citizenship means full participation in the productive life of a community, an institution, or a nation. Citizenship crosses lines of racial, cultural, economic, and ideological division because it is based on practical need — what people need to do *together*, whatever their often sharp differences. Thus citizenship is the basis for collaborative work around the issues of greatest concern. People practice citizenship with others around common tasks, even if they don't like or agree with one another.

Broadly, it is useful to compare and contrast three understandings of citizenship (see chart on page 13). None is wrong but our understanding of citizenship is limited unless we keep all in mind.

1) Civics. The first is what we learn in "civics," where the focus is largely on government and the services it delivers — how a bill becomes law, the branches of government, the role of elections, and legal rights. Here, the model citizen is the informed,

knowledgeable voter. Between elections, the main role of the citizen is to interact with legislators and government agencies. Examples include letter-writing campaigns, citizen lobbying on issues, and public forums to discuss issues or voice opinions. Defined this way, anyone can be a citizen, but it is not a status automatically conferred. Citizenship means engaging in public work, and public work takes practice.

2) Community member. The second form of citizenship stresses membership in community. The citizen is not only someone with rights, but also someone with responsibilities. The model citizen is the volunteer. Citizenship education in this sense aims at teaching values, such as caring about others, responsibility, and appreciation for diversity. Citizenship takes place not only in government, but especially in settings such as neighborhoods, religious congregations, and voluntary groups.

3) Civic producer. The third form of citizenship emphasizes the citizen as a "producer" of public things, who leaves a lasting legacy for the commonwealth. As people helped to create the commonwealth, they "became" a commonwealth — people whose public work, or work for public purposes and commonwealth, helped to balance pursuit of private wealth and private ends. This understanding of citizenship was once widely seen as the main form of citizenship by people of many different viewpoints. "The true friend of property, the true conservative, is he who insists that property shall be the servant and not the master of the commonwealth," declared Theodore Roosevelt, in his famous 1908 speech on "the New Nationalism."

The citizen as a civic producer, someone who does public work for the commonwealth, came alive on a large scale in earlier national service initiatives such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration of the Great Depression. AmeriCorps is its latest revival.

Politics

Many are skeptical when they hear the word "politics," but it comes from the Greek, *polis*, "of the citizen" — by ordinary people. Politics means the way people make decisions together.

"Everyday politics" are everywhere — in the community, the office, school, voluntary group or agency, as well as in government. Engaging in politics, understood as the way people make decisions, gives ordinary people the chance to make a difference. People can understand that politics as shared decision-making is something they need to do, as important as working and raising their families, and something they need to learn, like reading or playing a sport or an instrument.

Public Work

Public work is the visible effort by a mix of people who cooperatively create and sustain things of lasting importance to our community, nation, or world. Public work addresses common problems in ways that have ongoing impact. It is the action of producing and taking responsibility for the common world in which we all live.

Public work can be paid or unpaid; it can take place in communities, workplaces, or government. It is not just about finished products; it is also about the process of working with others on tasks of importance. In the glare of the public eye, your actions, accomplishments, and creations are visible for all to see and to evaluate. You are held accountable for your actions. You also come to realize how public actions have consequences that stretch beyond your immediate surroundings. It is in the public world that your creations have lasting significance for many others. You can help make history.

Service

Today, people of all ages and backgrounds, in AmeriCorps and a myriad of other organizations, are working at the grassroots level to address many of our nation's most intractable problems — improving schools; protecting the environment; and fighting poverty, homelessness, and other social ills.

They have begun to demonstrate that all citizens possess the wisdom and imagination needed to solve major problems. They have become engaged citizens who not only are a part of our democracy, but also help create it.

Through their service, people have learned important lessons and shared key insights that frame their work in larger terms:

Self-interest: Everyone has his or her own stories, values, dreams, concerns, and interests. These make

up who you are, your *self*, and the things you care about. They are the things that matter so much to you that they become the reason you take action and step into public life.

Diversity and public life: As you enter the public life of a community, you see how it is different from private life. In public, you find people who are not like you, people of different backgrounds, cultures, histories, religions, races, regions, skills, and perspectives. You remain the same person, but as you encounter diversity, your understanding of how you fit in changes and grows. You learn the different things that you and others have to offer. Understanding and making use of diversity is a key to solving serious problems. By entering the diverse world of public life, you learn and practice the work of citizenship.

Power: Power is having the ability to act and solve problems. Learning to work with others, even if they are quite different from you, is essential to building and using power.

Taking action: Doing the work of citizenship is like learning to run a computer, or master a sport. It takes thought and practice. Only by experimenting and by putting ideas into action can you get things done.

These are the key ideas of this guide. They can help you think about your service as the work of citizenship, work that will continue long after your AmeriCorps service is complete.

AmeriCorps, Community Capacity-Building, and Citizenship

	CIVICS	COMMUNITY	COMMONWEALTH
Goals of Democracy	Distribution of goods and services	A spirit of community	Work to sustain and create common things (e.g., public parks, forest restoration, educational programs, public arts)
Definition of Citizenship	Voter, taxpayer, consumer	Community member, volunteer	Civic producer
Community Building	Improves such outcomes as disease prevention, higher income levels, more police	Identifies and strengthens community assets such as voluntary and informal networks	Deepens appreciation for public things; develops individual and group capacities for public work; involves diverse groups in public work
AmeriCorps Members' Role	To support service delivery, provide help	To promote volunteerism and community	To help identify public tasks, catalyze civic energy, develop people's skills for public work

These are three views of community capacity-building and the role of AmeriCorps, based on different views of citizenship and democracy. All have insights to contribute. The community view expands beyond the civics approach, where democracy means mainly electing leaders who make decisions and "deliver the goods"; community stresses the relationships and responsibilities that create a sense of connection, a "spirit of community"; the commonwealth view develops a view of democracy and productive talents through the focus on public creation.

Chapter Two

Encouraging Civic Responsibility

What citizenship really means is that you have the right to contribute to creating the world and helping solve problems.

– Phala Hoeun, sixth-grade student, Washington Technology Magnet School, St. Paul, Minnesota

Through your work in AmeriCorps, you'll show the country that young people — and the young in spirit — know about their responsibilities in addition to their rights; that they're problem-solvers, not problems; and that they can become strong leaders, not just quiet followers.

– AmeriCorps Member Handbook

Before you can start tackling the serious problems confronting your communities and the country, you have to see yourself as part of the solution. Developing a strong sense of civic responsibility goes beyond a simple idea of duty or charity. It means understanding who you are, what you have to contribute, your relationship to others, and your stake in an issue.

Core Concept: Self-Interest

Uncovering Your Identity

Who are you? What is important to you? Why did you choose to become an AmeriCorps member? Understanding who you are, what you want, and how you are connected to others is called self-interest. You can't develop a deep sense of civic responsibility without it.

You probably think this idea is counter-intuitive. Most people think that self-interest is selfish and private, doing only what is good for you, which is the exact *opposite* of what you need to do to be a responsible citizen. Civic responsibility is associated with being *selfless* — doing something *only* for others. But what self-interest really means is doing what is good for you and for others at the same time.

In fact, the word “interest” comes from the Latin phrase meaning “to be among.” Making the distinction between self-interest and selfishness allows people to tie their specific interests to the needs of the larger community and to larger problems and issues. The work of citizenship, service, and the underlying ideal of civic responsibility calls for people to work for what they care about with passion and intensity, in concert with others who also have their own self-interest. But first, each person has to figure out what that is.

Knowing who you are and what is important to you will take a lifetime of discovery. Like a tree, self-interest grows, changes, and is constantly transformed by the outside world. Discovering who you are and how you relate to others can be exciting, joyful, painful, and difficult. We all have stories about ourselves that help to explain why we are who we are. Learning and telling your own story is a powerful way to understand what motivates you and what's most important to you. You enter public life on the basis of what you care about; learning your own story is a way to find out what you care about most.

Civic Skill: Telling Your Story

You may not think of yourself as a storyteller. You may think telling stories is only for children, and even if you wanted to tell one, you might not believe you have enough creativity or imagination, or you're too shy, or you lead an unexciting life. Unfortunately, movies and television reinforce these beliefs by showing us people whose stories are action-packed and well-rehearsed.

On the other hand, storytelling may be an intrinsic part of your culture and history. In this case, telling your story is a way to continue and build upon a centuries-old tradition. Storytelling will not only help you explain who you are, but is a *part* of who you are.

Regardless of your personal history, you already tell important stories in your daily conversations. By storytelling, we mean describing scenes in our lives that can give others clues as to who we are. The process of telling others about what you've done and what you know is critical because through your experience you come to understand yourself.

Some people may have stories that are similar to yours in some ways. By listening to their stories you encounter images, memories, and experiences that can remind you about who you are. When you hear stories that are different from yours, you learn about different memories and different pasts, and come to understand yourself in part by knowing who you are not. Chapter 3 discusses the importance of discovering other people's self-interest through their stories.

Although you can and do tell stories every day, there are some skills that can make your personal stories more meaningful to other people. Here are some tips for telling stories in a group setting.

Follow the Three Fs

Find a Story

Coming up with a "kernel" — an idea for a story — is the hardest part for people who feel that nothing happens in their lives. Often the beginnings of a story can be just a fragment or situation you remember. Listen to the stories of others; sometimes their stories remind you of a story you have. It helps if the group selects a particular topic to tell stories about. Here are a few ideas for story topics:

- the most frightening thing that ever happened to you
- the most unusual person you ever met
- your greatest learning experience
- the person you will *never* forgive
- the time you were most angry
- your first memory
- the most influential person in your life

Form the Story

Shape the different parts of the story so they make sense. Give your story a beginning (give a little background), a middle (usually where you describe a kind of challenge or conflict), and an end (where you say how the challenge and conflict got handled).

Fight Fear

Nervousness is good. It shows that what you're doing is important. But being too nervous to speak out is self-defeating. Concentrate on the story that wants to come out, not on yourself telling it. Remember that when you're drawing on your own life, there is no wrong answer, and there are no bad stories.

Have People Listen

It's good for your story to have people listen to you tell it not just once, but through a few versions. Listeners notice things that will help you communicate more through your story.

Listen to Others

You can learn a lot about what makes a story interesting by listening to other people tell theirs. The infinite variety of stories you hear should reassure you that the richest stories are drawn from people's own experience.

Exercise Worksheet

Your Timeline

This exercise asks you:

To create a framework in which to place your personal stories. A timeline lets you put your experiences in a context that highlights the self-interest that makes you who you are.

It helps to encourage civic responsibility because:

Self-interest helps determine how we understand and experience public problems and motivates us to get involved in solving them. We must understand our self-interest before we can act on it.

Instructions

Mark important events in your life on a timeline. Start anywhere you want to and use your own rules to decide what kinds of things to include. Time limit: 30 minutes.

Questions About Your Timeline

- ☐ How does knowing your family's history help you know yourself?
- ☐ Did you go back twenty years? ten? two? How would your timeline change if you changed how much time it covered?
- ☐ Is your timeline empty or full? Explain why. Are there spaces you want filled in?
- ☐ Is there a place on the timeline when private events cross into public experience?
- ☐ Was doing the timeline useful? Did it show you anything new?

Follow-Up

When you have time, find out more about your identity by asking your parents, grandparents, and longtime neighbors and friends for details about your past. What questions will you ask them? How have their lives influenced yours? Bring your timeline and get them to help you fill in the blanks.

Exercise Worksheet

A New Dictionary

This exercise asks you:

To think about what some important words mean to you, words that you might use to tell your story or explain your AmeriCorps service, based on your background and experience. Most dictionaries try to give words meanings that everyone can accept, without any personal interpretations. This is an exercise in putting self-interest back into the words you use.

It helps to encourage civic responsibility because:

You get clues as to what is important to you when you examine how your experience influences your understanding of certain words. Knowing this helps you see what problems you will be willing to work on and how you will define these problems.

Instructions

Individually or with another person: Without looking at a dictionary, define some or all of the words listed below. Also, think about how these words relate to your AmeriCorps service. Time limit: 15 minutes.

As a group: Discuss your definitions. Time limit: 25 minutes.

Words:

Anger	Negotiation
Citizenship	Politics
Commonwealth	Problem
Community	Public
Conflict	Public Work
Democracy	Private
Diversity	Racism
Education	Self-Interest
Family	Service
Imagination	Sexism
Judgment	Voluntarism
Listening	Wisdom
Maturity	Work

Are there other words you think need new definitions?
See Resource A, page 42, for definitions to supplement your own.

Civic Skill: Taking a Self-Inventory

Knowing your history and its impact on you is the first step to figuring out just who you are. But to translate this understanding to your service requires that you glean the lessons from your stories, your timeline, even your vocabulary. One way to do this is to take a self-inventory, a survey of your personal characteristics and abilities.

Self-inventories give you the opportunity to tie your self-interests to your capacities. Knowing what you can do and what you have to contribute helps develop your sense of civic responsibility by increasing your feelings of efficacy. It changes the idea of civic responsibility from something you *should* do to something you *can* do.

Sample Self-Inventory Questions

- ☐ What values are most important to you?
- ☐ What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- ☐ What kind of things do you enjoy doing? What things do you dislike?
- ☐ When have you felt most successful? most powerful?
- ☐ What did you enjoy the most about your favorite job? What did you learn from that job?
- ☐ What has been your greatest learning experience? What thing do you most want to learn?
- ☐ Do you work best alone, or with others? How do you interact with other people?
- ☐ How would other people describe you? What would they say you bring to a group?

Once you have a handle on the interests and capacities you bring to the work of citizenship and service, you are ready to look at what others bring to the work.

Exercise Worksheet

Creating a Self-Inventory Matrix

This exercise asks you:

To examine your interests and capacities in relation to your citizenship and service work.

It helps to encourage civic responsibility because:

Understanding your interests and abilities gives you a basis upon which to act. In addition, knowing your limitations — what you don't like or don't know — will give you clues as to what you need from your colleagues in order to accomplish your goals.

Instructions

Fill in the following matrix in relation to your AmeriCorps service. Highlight the things you don't do well, but would like to, or need to learn to do better. Time limit: 15 minutes.

In a group, discuss what you've found. Do the matrices suggest new ways to work and learn together? Time limit: 20 minutes.

Self-Inventory Matrix

	Things I like to do	Things I don't like to do
Things I do well		
Things I don't do well		

Chapter Three

Strengthening Community Capacity

Citizenship doesn't only mean getting things done for others. It means working with others — people who may be very different from yourself. Beyond meeting unmet needs, AmeriCorps will strengthen America's communities. That means connecting the civic groups, schools, and religious organizations that make America's neighborhoods so vibrant. It also means bringing Americans together from all different backgrounds in the common work of service.

AmeriCorps Member Handbook

Strengthening communities means more than bringing people and neighborhoods together; it is about what people can accomplish by working together. It involves recognizing that even the most troubled communities have strengths to build on, not merely problems to solve. In the poorest communities, mediating institutions — schools, churches, and the like — often play an important role in developing and maintaining social networks and generating hope and capacity for change. Outside service providers and community residents alike need to recognize these strengths and think of their work as public, collaborative, interactive, and relational.

To understand the strengths and resources of a community is often difficult (even for the people who live there!) because people, especially professionals and service providers, are taught to think in terms of what communities *lack*, what they *need*, or what is *missing*, that they can then provide. Coming to understand the strengths of a community takes time. It means finding community “informants” — people who can tell you about the elderly woman who gives people solid advice, the newspaper boy who checks on the shut-ins, or the preacher whom kids look to for moral guidance. It means taking an inventory, or making a “map,” of community assets. Finally, it requires a particular mindset — learning to see a community as “half full,” not as “half empty.”

So while AmeriCorps members can help meet communities' immediate needs, the real test of any service initiative is what it builds on, and what it leaves behind.

The fact that civic work cannot be done alone, no matter how strong your individual sense of civic responsibility, makes the work of citizenship and service bigger than any one of us; it is what makes

your work challenging, even difficult, but also exciting. Working *with* others, rather than just doing things *for* them, builds community capacity.

To do this effectively, you need to understand the concepts of diversity and public life and learn how to use these ideas to strengthen your service.

Core Concepts: Diversity and Public Life

When was the first time you noticed you were different? Or when was the first time you remember seeing people different from yourself? How did it feel to be different? Often such experiences are frightening, awkward, or at the very least difficult, which can lead you to shy away from them.

However, when you try to solve problems by working only with people who are like you, it is similar to starting a band with four drummers; it limits your repertoire. Working with differences lets you create an entire orchestra that is versatile enough to play pop, jazz, classical, or rap.

To strengthen community capacity you need to seek out differences — different people, viewpoints, and ideas and use these differences to solve problems. It is like finding all of the string players, wind instrumentalists, and percussionists it takes to make great music. It takes time and effort, but in the end it is worth it. Uncovering the many differences that exist within and among communities will reveal a kind of collective wisdom and public power that can be tapped as you strive to solve complex problems and create things of lasting value.

Involvement in public life is a crucial element of service and public work. Three meanings of public are especially relevant to service.

First, public refers to a diverse group of people. It is in public that you encounter people who are different from you. The public world is sometimes characterized by debate, argument, and conflict. Second, public is a quality of space that is open and visible to all. Your actions are visible there for others to see. Finally, public suggests a broad public good that is widely accessible and beneficial. Parks, libraries, community-wide learning projects, or community centers are all examples.

Since the 1970s, many effective community efforts have found it very helpful to enliven the concept of a *public arena* that goes beyond personal or even community boundaries. The public world is an open, diverse, challenging arena beyond community itself, in which effective action depends on recognition and negotiation of difference. In public life, citizens develop the power, skills, and organizational means to act. This allows a larger repertoire of roles, activities, functions, and aims.

Public life, or public space, is a realm of difference, public work, accountability, respect, recognition, negotiation, and bargaining; private life is a more protected space of intimacy, spontaneity, similarity, and loyalty. Public space is the terrain of task orientation; private space is the arena of personal sustenance. There is nothing completely either-or about such distinctions. Private life always has public dimensions (and many of the "skills of public action" are highly useful in personal relations); public life in turn has personal elements. Moreover, an intermediate terrain of community life exists where relations are a complex mix of both.

While people often enter public life through private concerns, they act with greater effectiveness if they recognize the various dynamics at work in public and private domains.

Beatrice Cortez, former president of San Antonio Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), one of the largest and most powerful low-income citizen groups in the country, found that in training for Catholic Mexican congregations in other parts of Texas, the distinction between public and private domains proved invaluable.

"In these towns, politics had come to be equated with family ties," she said. "People don't want to challenge close ties."

Discussing a public world where bonds of personal loyalty were not dominant did not consign family

concerns to the private realm. But it placed them in a way that allowed work with people *beyond* family ties.

Public life is never completely either or. Public settings have private aspects; private life involves some public, or shared, visible tasks. But recognizing which is "more" one or the other is useful.

On the eve of the March on Washington, August 28, 1963, where Martin Luther King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, civil rights leaders explained in the program handed out to everyone why it was important for the marchers to remain nonviolent, even if there were troublemakers who sought to incite them:

In a neighborhood dispute there may be stunts, rough words, and even hot insults. But when a whole people speaks to its government, the dialogue and the action must be on a level reflecting the worth of that people and the responsibility of that government.

The civil rights leaders were reminding people that they were in a public arena — larger than even the neighborhood or local community.

	Public Life	Private Life
Where you are	school, work, meetings	home, circle of friends
Purpose	problem-solving, agency building power	support, friendship, intimacy
Quality of space	open, diverse	closed, similar
Motives to keep in mind	public interests	supporting friends, family, narrow interests
What you give	accountability	loyalty, intimacy
What you get	public creation, respect, power	love, belonging
Skills you use	negotiation, judgment	accommodation

Exercise Worksheet**Five Things You Are****This exercise helps you:**

Identify the diversity within yourself and imagine what others see when they look at you.

It helps to strengthen community capacity because:

Most likely, you rarely think of *yourself* as being the one who is different. This change of perspective is necessary if you plan to work with others.

Instructions**Individuals**

Complete the activity and questions below. Time limit: 10 minutes.

Whole group

In a group, share your individual answers. Discuss the ways in which the answers vary and what they tell you about diversity. Time limit: 20 minutes.

Activity

List five nouns that describe who you are (i.e. "I am a(n)_____"). Use single words only. (Examples: "soprano," "Korean American," "athlete," "Republican," "brother.")

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

How many of the things you listed above would be visible to someone who was meeting you for the first time?

What does that tell you about getting to know somebody? Can you judge a book by its cover?

Civic Skill:**Interviewing for Others' Self-Interest**

In a diverse society, the ones who can listen learn the most. Since thinking of other people's perspectives does not happen automatically, the skills of active listening and interviewing to discover diverse self-interests are important.

People who listen well are seldom appreciated in this society. Television, a one-way medium, is a strong force in the United States, where value is placed on talking, waiting to talk, and passive listening. The office secretary who takes the minutes at a meeting is often not valued, yet whatever he or she reports afterward will be the official account of the proceedings. What you discover about listening is that no one can have a monopoly over it. Anyone can listen well.

As you think about the community in which you work and your relationship to it, think about how your work would be different if you could take more time to explore the perspectives of the community members. What could you learn?

Tips for Interviewing for Others' Self-Interest

Ask direct questions: This way the talker will tell you what is important to him or her.

Avoid asking simple "yes or no" questions: They are too quick and you don't learn much. If you do ask them, follow up with "why?"

Listen: Build on what your interviewee has already said. An interviewee who feels listened to is likely to talk more than someone who feels ignored.

Ask questions: Don't allow too much empty time. Ask questions to keep the conversation flowing. Look for connections in experience between yourself and your interviewee but resist launching into long stories about yourself. The other person should do most of the talking.

Make sure you understand: Clarify what the talker is saying by restating what you've heard and asking if you got it right.

Keep it public: Interviewing to discover self-interest is a good exercise in finding out where public information ends and private information begins. Of course, it's different for everybody. If you ask a question that is too personal, your interviewee will probably tell you. Don't push it.

Exercise Worksheet**The Un-Common Denominator**

This exercise asks you:

To practice interviewing in order to find differences.

It helps strengthen community capacity because:

Interviewing is a great way to make sure you are listening. That's the key to identifying and using the diversity at the heart of community capacity. It is an essential skill for finding out how and why someone's self-interest has led them into public life.

Instructions

Small groups: Pair up in a way that matches people who are as different as possible. If there are age or racial differences in the group, or differences in academic interest or political leaning, take advantage of them by mixing people around.

Interview each other and find as many differences as you can in how you view things. After all, it is only in relation to someone else that you can see how different *you* are. What music do you like? What makes you angry? What places would you like to visit? How do you spend your time? Where were you born? What was or is your favorite or least favorite subject at school?

Remember, these are *public* interviews. You want to find out what is important to them and how they are different from you, but don't dig for private secrets.

Time limit: 20 minutes (10 minutes per person)

Whole group: After you have each been interviewed, introduce one another to the whole group. Comment on what differences you've discovered. Time limit: 2 minutes per person.

Whole group: Discuss the follow-up questions. Time limit: 10 minutes.

Follow-up questions:

- ☐ How did it feel to be interviewed?
- ☐ What did you learn? Is there more diversity in your group than you thought?
- ☐ How can you use what you've learned to do your work better?

Civic Skill: Interviewing for Information

In order for you to get things done, you need to know what resources are available to you. Resources, in the form of people and relationships, as well as money, space, knowledge, and the like, constitute a community's civic capacities. The process of fact-finding often starts by talking to the people you have already interviewed for self-interest. The difference between the two types of interviews is in focus: Self-interest interviews probe for diverse perspectives and experiences; informational interviews target specific community capacities.

Interviewing for information is helpful for a number of reasons:

- It shows you what you know, and what you don't.
- It can get you the information that you need.
- It lets you know what other people think about what you are doing and often leads to other resources for finding information.

Tips for Informational Interviewing

Identify your needs

Whom do you need to talk to? What do you need to know?

Don't make demands

Don't approach an interview with the idea of solving any particular problem. Just ask for the information you need.

Prepare

Before you meet with someone, plan ahead and practice. What questions do you think he or she will have?

Evaluate

After the meeting, ask yourself what went well. What didn't? What do you need to do next?

Civic Skill: Taking Civic Inventories

Closely connected to the process of interviewing is the idea of conducting a civic inventory, a survey of the diverse characteristics and capacities of a community. Civic inventories enable you to learn what a community is bringing to the problem-solving process and give you a base upon which to build your work.

Sample Civic Inventory Questions

- ☐ Who are the local leaders? To whom do people turn to get things done? How can you work with them?
- ☐ What roles do religious congregations, schools, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses play in the community?
- ☐ What relationships exist among community members? between this community and others?
- ☐ What are the community's social and cultural attitudes toward the problem you are addressing, and the specific work that you are doing?
- ☐ What other service work has been done in the community? What lessons were learned?

Having this base of knowledge will connect you to the community and add new perspectives to your work. It may even lead you to change the way you define your work.

Exercise Worksheet**What To Build On****This exercise asks you:**

To document the strengths and capacities of the community in which you are working, recognizing that you are not starting from scratch.

It helps to strengthen community capacity because:

It is important to recognize the power that already exists in a community's resources, especially in a community recognized more for its problems than its potential. In addition, you have to know what a community's resources are before you can build on them and use them to get things done.

Instructions

After interviewing your colleagues and other members of the community in which you are working, complete the following survey, keeping your AmeriCorps service in mind. List as many resources as you can, continuing on another sheet. If you believe the list is too short, you may want to conduct more interviews or re-interview those to whom you have already spoken, then re-do the exercise.

Time limit: 20 minutes..

Once you have finished, share your work with others. Do they agree with your assessment? What do they have to add? Time limit: 30 minutes.

Survey:

Community Resource:

What does this resource contribute?

How can this resource be tapped?

Exercise Worksheet

Uncovering History

This exercise asks you to:

Chronicle and make known past service movements in your community. Bring to life this rich civic history with names, stories, and events that may be unknown or forgotten.

It helps strengthen community capacity because:

You are given the opportunity to explore the connection between the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of the 1930s, with the service movement of today. Creating public recognition of the public service performed by former corps will bring renewed appreciation for your own contributions to the community.

The CCC was established by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933 to reduce unemployment by putting people to work caring for the country's roads, bridges, and natural resources. The CCC enrolled 2.5 million people from 1933 to 1942. The WPA also produced a number of public institutions such as parks, roads, and school buildings, some of which still serve today as the basis for educational, recreational, and commercial activities.

Suggestions

An individual member or a whole corps could do a variety of things to learn more about the WPA or CCC members, projects, and work. Here is a list to get you thinking of the possibilities:

- Contact the National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni Journal (NACCCA), P.O. Box 16429, St. Louis, MO 63125-0429; phone: 314-487-8666; fax: 314-487-9488.
- Look in your library for information published by the National Park Service, which oversees and manages many CCC-era projects.
- Research and display the work of the CCC that occurred in your region. This display could be a photo exhibit mounted in public locations like schools, city hall, museums, and libraries. Or produce a play or skit that documents the experiences of the CCC and WPA, and life in the United States during the 1930s.
- Visit your local library and ask for help to research the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration. Find out where in your

community projects are located and see if you can find out who worked on them. Are there any former CCC or WPA members still living in your area? See if they are available to be interviewed about their experiences.

- Contact and interview former CCC and WPA members as resources to compile an oral history of their work and experiences.
- Compare the projects that you have worked on in your corps to those of the CCC or WPA. This can be done individually or as a group project.
- Attend an annual event hosted by surviving CCC members. Contact NACCCA to learn where one might be held near you.
- Create a public work project that sustains and rejuvenates the work of the CCC. For example, if a CCC-built park or riverway needs repair or maintenance, perhaps your AmeriCorps program could make the cleanup and restoration a project. This could be done on an ongoing basis from year to year, to preserve the projects in your community for generations to come.

Follow-Up

The key in any public work is making the project visible and sustainable.

Look outside of your corps for resources and make civic connections. The research itself will lead to new ideas for your service work, and make public your presence in the community.

Reflect on what lessons you learned about public service.

Examine in depth the community contributions of those who served before you. How is your work similar? How is it different? Have you learned anything different about your region or state after having gone through this exercise?

Civic Skill: Defining a Problem

Public problem-solving is a primary goal of citizenship and service. People get involved in public life only when they see something important they want to change and believe they can help. Depending on who you are, where you come from, and what you have experienced, you may see different problems or look at problems from a different perspective than people who are unlike you.

While it is important to recognize your own self-interest in a problem, it is equally important to recognize others'. This is why problem definition is placed in this chapter: Problems can be defined only in relation to the community in which they are found, the resources the community brings to solve them, and the input of diverse perspectives that can contribute.

The first step in solving any problem is to define it clearly. While this may seem obvious, problem definition is a step most groups ignore; they simply assume a shared understanding and move on to developing solutions. The result can be an unhealthy level of tension and conflict due to a lack of mutual agreement on the exact nature of the problem at hand. Only after a group has wrestled with the difficult task of specifically defining the problem can members identify their own interests around it and move toward solutions.

Tips for Defining Public Problems

Focus

Groups often form around large-scale issues, such as the environment or crime. To move from the motivating issues to a manageable, problem on which you can take action, ask yourselves several questions: "Why is this important to us?" "Where is this a problem?" "How does it affect us?" "Whom does it affect?"

Tie your problem to a larger public issue

If you start with a workable, narrow problem, relate it to a larger public problem. This is key to recognizing the complexity of a problem and understanding how your issue affects others.

For instance, if you have noticed that children in your community do not have anywhere to go after school, you can tie that to bigger issues, such as the lack of safe alternatives to hanging out in the streets, joining gangs, etc. You will still work on solving your local

problem, but you'll see how it fits into the big picture. This will prompt you to develop strategies that tie you and your group to other people with different interests and power.

Know the difference between problems and solutions

Be sure you are defining a *problem*, not articulating a *solution*. For example, a group of people may decide that there ought to be increased security in their local schools. However, this is not a *problem*, it's a *solution*. The problem in this case is likely to be the incidence of violence in schools. Once this is made clear, the group can look at a variety of potential solutions, including teaching conflict resolution strategies, providing more student counseling, or increasing security. This will give them more power to negotiate and a better chance for success.

This point is especially important for AmeriCorps members. You may be assigned a particular task — to tutor a child or organize a soup kitchen, for instance — designed to solve a problem that has never been clearly defined. Moving back to this first step, in partnership with the people with whom you serve, will give you a better understanding of how your service fits into a larger picture and the incentive to modify your tasks should that be necessary. Remember, the *goal* is not, for example, to tutor children; the goal is to help children earn better grades, increase the likelihood they will finish high school, or whatever specific problem people see relating to children's success in school. If a tutoring program does not accomplish this, something else might.

Mission-Building

Once your group has agreed on a problem it wants to solve, you can create a mission statement. Writing a mission statement is useful for a number of reasons. First, it helps you lay out your purpose. Does everyone really understand and agree upon what your goals are? Building a mission statement will show you yet again how diverse interests can work together to solve a common problem. Second, a mission statement creates public accountability: A statement of what the group is about can be shown to others to get their feedback, and can be used to gauge accomplishments.

Taking the time to put in writing what you intend to accomplish will not only provide your AmeriCorps program with the documentation it needs, but also

ensures that everyone involved understands what is going to be done and what is expected of each person involved. It will also help connect you as an AmeriCorps member to the community you serve and clearly show the relationships among your AmeriCorps program, the community, the bigger issue, the specific problem being solved, the tasks to be completed, and you.

While there is no set formula for creating a mission statement, it is important to include a clear statement of:

- What problem you want to solve.
- Why you are interested in the problem (i.e., why do you care?).
- Where the problem exists and how it fits into a larger public concern.
- What you want to accomplish, and how that will help solve the problem?

Citizenship and service allow you to take action on public problems, but before you can act on a problem you have to know *what* you want to act on. Mission statements put your problem, and plan, into writing to help guide your work. Investing the time to get things started on the right foot will make it easier to actually get things done.

Exercise Worksheet**Building a Mission****This exercise asks you to:**

Write a mission statement for your citizenship and service.

It helps to strengthen community capacity because:

Once you put your goals and plans in writing you can ask not only, "How well will we solve the problem at hand?" but also, "How well does this mission build the capacity of the *community* to address this and other problems it may want to tackle?" Depending on your answers and the response of community members to this written mission statement, you may choose to modify your plans.

Instructions

In a group, complete the following paragraph. You may want to alter the language or format to better suit your needs. Time limit: 30 minutes.

When you have finished, present your work to others with whom you work, especially to involved members of the community, for their feedback. Does your statement need to be modified?

Mission Statement

We, the _____, believe that _____
_____ is a serious problem in this community, contributing
to _____
_____.

We propose to: _____
_____.

We believe that this will help solve the problem by: _____
_____.

In order to implement this solution, we intend to: _____
_____.

Chapter Four

Getting Things Done

Above all, AmeriCorps is about getting things done. There is so much that we must do today — to make our schools better, our streets safer, our families healthier, and our environment cleaner. AmeriCorps members are committed to meeting the needs of America.

AmeriCorps Member Handbook

As an AmeriCorps member you are no doubt eager to “just do it”; this is one of the many strengths of AmeriCorps. In this rush of enthusiasm, it is important to remember your role and your connection to the community in which you are working. The key to making a difference in the short *and* long term is to understand the relationship between power and action.

Core Concept: Power

When you think of power, you probably think of the authority others have over you. Or you may think of power as force, being able to make others do something they don’t want to do. You may also think of power as a finite resource: The more someone else has, the less there is available for you.

Power is the ability to affect the things around you, to get things done. The word “power” comes from the Latin word *poter*, which means “to be able.” Power is the set of relationships between you and other people that allows you to act on things important to you. And *that* means a lot of things. For example, it means:

- You have power only in relation to others.
- Strong emotions are associated with power.
- Power is a two-way street. You have control over part of it and that part can be changed.
- Other people also control part of your relationship with them, and they may not agree with your ideas for change. Confrontation is always a possibility when you’re trying to change something.
- There is no fixed amount of power, nor is there only one kind of power.

Power relationships among people generate strong emotions. But not all emotions are useful for getting what you need out of a relationship, and some are very damaging. For example, there is a difference between anger and rage. Both are strong ways to express your desire to change a relationship, but with

anger you can channel your emotion, while with rage you lose control. Losing control is one way of giving up your share of the power in a relationship.

Another way to give up your share of the power is to wait for permission to do something that you believe in. You may never get permission, and it could be a long time before you get what you want by politely waiting. It’s when you *stop* waiting that you risk conflict. This potential for conflict is why it is important to really believe in the changes you want to make. It is also important to understand how conflict can be beneficial, and when it needs to be resolved in order to move forward.

Using power does not necessarily produce conflict and confrontation, however. There is great power in identifying win-win situations in which both sides get something important from the relationship.

You’ve heard the expression “there is strength in numbers.” You’ve also heard that “knowledge is power.” There is also power in moral authority, position, recognition, money, and support from others. If you can figure out what types of power you have, and what types others have, you can use it to accomplish your goals. You can create a common agenda and pool your skills and resources with others’ to get things done.

Civic Skill: Mapping Interests and Power

One way to lay out concretely the assets, relationships, interests, and power with which you have to work is to create a map. Mapping your environment means learning how to look carefully at the political and cultural resources around an issue. It is essential to developing strategies to get things done. And unlike a road map, these maps will change as you talk to new people, get more information, and implement your plans. This means that you will be able to re-draw your map as your work progresses.

Tips for Mapping Your Environment

Write a few words about the problem or goal in the middle of a big piece of paper. Then identify who is a part of this environment. Where do these people fit in? Where are you and your colleagues in relation to the problem and these other people?

As you are creating your map, keep the following three themes in mind.

Power

Who is hurt by your problem? Who has power over it? Who makes the decisions? What kinds of power do they have? What kinds do you have? Think not only about formal power, but informal power as well. What relationships are there, or might there be, between you and these other people and groups? Your civic inventory can help answer these questions.

Interests

Your map will show any number of potential allies you can work with to address a problem. As you put people, potential allies or not, on your map, make a note of their interests. What is important to *them*, both in general and specifically related to your problem? Remember, citizenship is about breaking down stereotypes, rigid boundaries, and the unwillingness to understand others' points of view.

Rules

Finally, your map needs a *key*. On a regular map, keys tell you what symbols stand for so that the map makes sense. On your map, the key is the set of general rules for the environment. Knowing the rules will make your map useful as you take action

For example, one rule might be: *In order to be taken seriously, people need to be well organized*. Then you can take this into consideration.

Another general rule might be: *People don't like to go to meetings*. When you know this rule, you can work to change it. What can you do to make people want to come to your meetings and work with you?

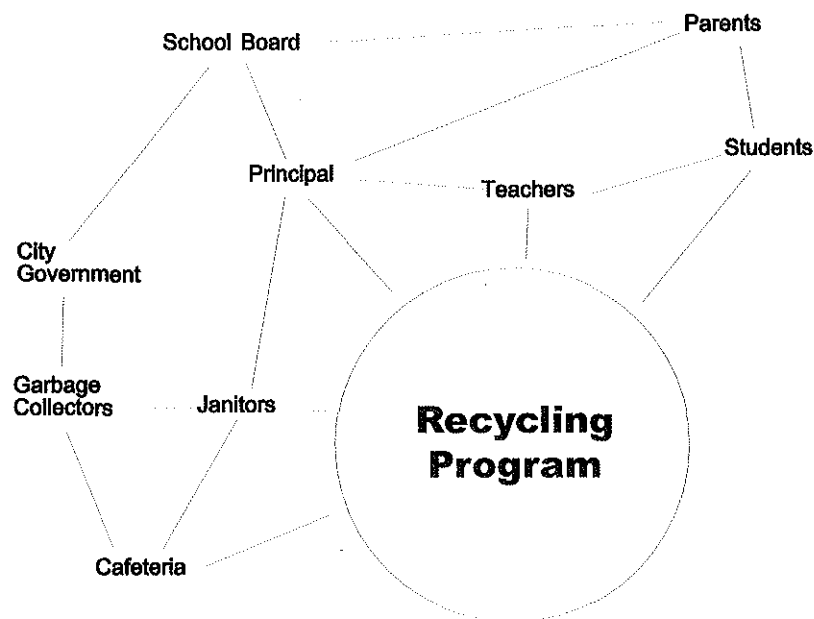
An *interest map* is changed into a *power map* when simple categories become real people with names, work, interests, and relationships to others.

Exercise Worksheet**Mapping Your Environment**

adapted from *Building Worlds, Transforming Lives, Making History*

In their Public Achievement class, a team of students made the following map on the basis of who they thought would be stakeholders in the efforts to start a recycling program at their school.

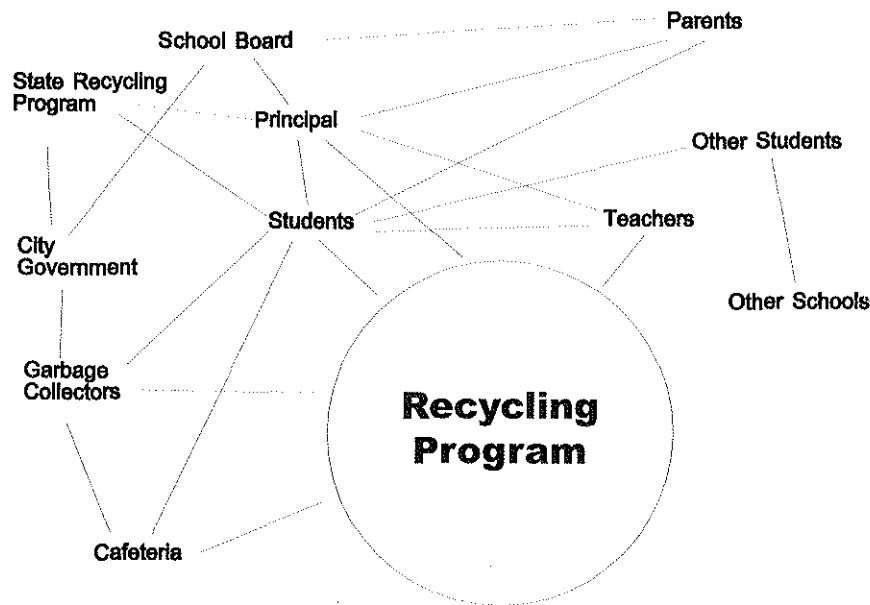
Figure 1: Recycling Pre-Mapping

**What happened when the team did research**

When the Public Achievement Environment Team started talking to stakeholders who appeared on their map, they had a surprise.

- Their principal supported the idea of a recycling program, but she said she did not have the resources to supply special bins, and did not know whether the custodial staff or teachers would participate.
- The head custodian informed the team that because of cutbacks, the custodians did not want to be responsible for recycling.
- The cafeteria workers offered support.
- After talking to a friend who attended another school, one team member found out that other schools recycle.
- A call to the principal of his friend's school uncovered the fact that the state had a program to pay for the bins. The principal gave the students the phone number for the state agency. A call to the state recycling agency revealed the school would have to arrange for pick-up before it could apply.
- By contacting the city sanitation department, the team found out that the city would pick up recycling; the principal only had to submit a special request.

Figure 2: Recycling Re-Mapping



Group exercise

This exercise asks you to:

Draw a map of the ways in which people have influence in the organization or group where you now serve or that you need to work with. It also asks you to relate this structure to the problem you are addressing.

It relates to getting things done because:

Understanding who holds what power where and what type of power they have will help determine the type of action you can take. Understanding where people's power lie is useful in figuring out how to bring them into your service.

Instructions

Small groups: In pairs, on a piece of newsprint, draw a diagram of how you think people in your organization or an organization that is important to your service have power. What kinds of power do they have? How can they influence your issue?

When you are finished, hang it on the wall and be ready to discuss the different drawings with the entire group. Think carefully about all the ways people might influence one another, and you, both formally and informally. Time limit: 20 minutes.

Whole group: Discuss the maps and the follow-up questions. Time limit: 20 minutes.

Follow-up questions

- ☐ What type of power do the people you want to work with have?
- ☐ How can you work with them?
- ☐ Does the organization work well the way the power is structured?
- ☐ What do you notice about the *informal* power relationships?

Civic Skill: Managing Conflict

In recent years, conflict has gotten a very bad name. It is associated with levels of misunderstanding and intolerance that can, and often do, lead to violence. But like anger, conflict can be channeled to improve the process and outcome of problem-solving.

Conflict arises only when people feel deeply about their points of view, so it is clearly connected to both the ideas of self-interest and diversity. Conflict becomes harmful when a person fails to recognize the interests of another, and fails to see how a diversity of perspectives will make solutions stronger.

To make conflict productive, it is important to acknowledge it and deal with it. Pretending a particular conflict does not exist will not make it go away, and rushing to smooth over rough waters will only prevent the healthy tension that can lead to innovative solutions. But when conflict gets out of hand and starts impeding, rather than contributing, to your work, you need to take steps to resolve it. One way to do this is through the process of negotiation.

Tips for Negotiating Conflict

Separate the people from the problem.

When people become mad on a personal level, it is very difficult to reach any kind of solution even though everyone would benefit.

Articulate your interests.

Clearly explain why you believe your idea has merit.

Listen to the other person's point of view carefully.

In fact, after listening you should be able to explain his or her perspective as well as your own. Recognize that not all people share your experiences and background, so they will likely perceive situations and solutions differently.

Find common ground.

People generally disagree on the means to an end, not on the end itself. Remind yourself of what you are trying to accomplish.

Strive to compromise.

When one person must lose in order for another to win, conflict is just temporarily put aside, not resolved.

Exercise Worksheet

Working It Out

This exercise asks you to:

Systematically examine a conflict in order to see what it adds to your service and decrease its negative effects.

This helps to get things done because:

If examined, conflict can bring innovative ideas to light, which can help you accomplish your goals more effectively. On the other hand, too-high levels of conflict can impede or even bring efforts to a halt; resolving the unhealthy tension will enable you to go forward.

Instructions

Individually, complete the following chart and questions. Time limit: 10 minutes.

In a group, discuss your findings. What did you learn? Is there a way to benefit from the disagreement? Can you now see a solution? Time limit: 20 minutes.

Chart and Questions:

What are you trying to accomplish?

Option A:

Option B:

Explain:

What are its benefits?

Why are these important?

What are its drawbacks?

Why are these important?

How might the perspectives be combined?

What are some alternative approaches?

Core Concept: Taking Action

Chances are good that when you were a kid, you were told not to touch stovetops because they're hot. Chances are just as good that you understood the message a lot better after you got burned. There's just no substitute for firsthand learning. Wisdom comes in learning from those who've already gotten burned.

When you learn from experience, you learn both about the outside world and about who you are. Going back to the stovetop example, not only did you learn that stoves can be dangerous, but you learned under what circumstances you *in particular* react to pain.

Engaging in citizenship and service can be compared to playing a game of soccer. You may feel pressure because a lot depends on what you do. Also, it is only with practice that you can become good at setting up strategies with your teammates, even as the game is going on all around you; there's no substitute for the real thing. In an intense game, you also come to appreciate how much power there is in coordinating your actions with the rest of the team's. You get used to it, and you get better at predicting what your actions will accomplish.

After a game, a team usually analyzes its own actions and those of its opponents, either formally or informally. It is a way to translate the experience of the past hours into future games, and it is the reason a team that has played together before doesn't start from scratch each game. The same is true of active citizenship: Evaluating strategies and action — both your own and others' — is active remembering with a purpose. It takes the mystery out of the power that other people have and boils it back down to interests and relationships.

You learned in Chapter 2 how knowledge of what you believe leads you to public life. In Chapter 3, you read about how much you learn when you encounter other people and what they believe, and how they have ideas that are often either in conflict or agreement with yours. Earlier in this chapter you learned that power is not a static force, but grows when you start acting on what you want, managing your relationships with others, and figuring out how to work effectively with a diversity of ideas, values, and people to get the job done.

One concrete way to use these ideas to get things done is to create a work plan to guide your actions.

Civic Skill: Creating Work plans

Once you have identified the powers that influence or are impacted by the problem you are working to solve, the next step is to develop a strategy for action. Your plan should take into account:

- Your group's overarching goals and mission statement
- The other stakeholders, their interests, and their power
- The information you need to meet your goals
- The potential barriers to meeting your goals
- Specific tasks you need to do to build relationships and meet your goals
- Job assignments and schedule
- The amount of time you have to work together
- The manner in which you want to publicly present your work when you are done

Look back on your mission statement and your power/interest map. What do you need to do? Who do you need to talk to? work with? influence? What strategies will work best with each person or group? What do they care about? Remember to keep focused on your goal and be realistic at the same time.

Exercise Worksheet**Put It In Writing****This exercise asks you to:**

Create a detailed plan for your service.

It relates to getting things done because:

It creates an accountability structure. By the time you are finished you and your colleagues should know what they need to do, why they need to do it, and when it needs to be done.

Instructions

In a group, fill in the following chart. Continue additional tasks on the back or on another sheet. Time limit: 30 minutes.

Work PlanMission Statement:

(see *Building a Mission*, p. 29)

Task:

Completing this task helps
us reach our goal by:

_____ agree(s) to
complete this by _____.
(date)

Task:

Completing this task helps
us reach our goal by:

_____ agree(s) to
complete this by _____.
(date)

Chapter Five

Expanding Opportunity

Citizenship and Service as a Lifelong Learning Process

AmeriCorps reflects the basic American idea of reciprocity: When you give something great to your country, you ought to get something back in return. . . . [The] experience of AmeriCorps can expand your options in many ways, providing priceless life and job skills. You can emerge from AmeriCorps knowing how to teach or to build — and carry these skills through the rest of your life.

— AmeriCorps Member Handbook

While getting things done is a prime value of AmeriCorps, solving particular problems is only part of a much larger picture. Expanding opportunity is a process of education that allows you to actualize your potential. Of perhaps greatest importance is what you, and the members of the community in which you work, learn through doing the work of citizenship — what you learn about yourselves, your capacities, and the potential of ordinary citizens to change the world. This will be the true legacy of AmeriCorps.

Two important ways to make active citizenship a process of individual and collective education include *evaluation* and *civic storytelling*.

Civic Skill: Evaluation

Evaluation is a critical component of expanding opportunity. It requires that you think about what you've done, about what you've learned, and about what you need to do next. Most of the time, people think of evaluating only at the very *end* of a project. However, for evaluation to be most useful, you need to do it every step of the way—as you are exploring your interests, building relationships, defining problems, devising solutions, creating strategies, and taking action.

Such a focus on ongoing evaluation is often dismissed as a waste of time, time that could better be used to just get things done. Actually, evaluation can help you save time and increase your opportunity to accomplish your goals more effectively and efficiently.

Evaluation will help you:

- Avoid misunderstandings and resolve conflict.
- Encourage everyone to participate.
- Clarify roles and create accountability.
- Verbalize what is working and what is not.
- Gain a sense of what you are accomplishing and learning.
- Know what you need to do differently and what you need to do next.

Much of the preparatory work for service projects takes place in meetings. Evaluating these meetings is a good way to begin to build evaluation into your work.

Sample Questions for Evaluating Meetings

- What did we set out to accomplish during our time together? What *did* we accomplish? What decisions did we make? What roles did people take?
- What did we do well today? What didn't go well? What should we do differently next time?
- What did we learn about self-interest? public? diversity? power? How can we use what we have learned?
- What is our next step? What decisions do we need to make? What roles do people need to take?
- What items do we need to put on our next meeting agenda? What did we not finish today? What new issues will we need to address?

Exercise Worksheet

As you and your colleagues begin to implement your strategies for addressing community problems, evaluation will help you gauge your effectiveness and learn from your experience.

Sample Questions for Evaluating Strategies and Action

- What did we set out to accomplish? What *did* we accomplish?
- What parts of our strategy or action worked well? What went as planned? Were there any pleasant surprises? How can we build on our successes?
- What parts of our strategy or action didn't work well? What went wrong? What do we need to change to meet these challenges?
- What did we learn by taking this action? How can we use this information in the future?

What We've Done, What We've Learned**This exercise asks you to:**

Evaluate a particular aspect of your own citizenship and service.

It helps to expand opportunity because:

Evaluation is a key to learning from your experiences and enables you to translate what you've done in one situation to fit another. When you are able to transfer skills and understandings you can take advantage of, and create, diverse opportunities for yourself and others.

Instructions

In a group, answer the following questions after you have finished a meeting or completed a task. Time limit: 10 minutes.

Evaluation

- What were we trying to accomplish?
- What did we accomplish?
- What did we do well?
- What did we not do well?
- What do we need to do differently next time?
- What do we need to do next, or next time?

The Long-Range Impact: Evaluation Questions

Evaluation also involves periodic reflection about the “big picture” of what difference our work makes. The Center for Democracy and Citizenship has found four sets of questions that are especially helpful for evaluating the big picture of public work. Every several months, your group might think through these questions:

1. Public work draws attention to *product* as well as *process* — what it is that is actually created through this work. Products can include tangible things (e.g., parks, buildings) or less tangible things (e.g., community learning programs). But they raise the question of lasting impact.
 - ◆ What valuable things are we creating for the community or the country?
 - ◆ How widely available are the things we are creating? Will these things be used or valued by the community for years to come? Why or why not?
2. Public work can bring to the surface a variety of civic and community talents and resources that might otherwise go overlooked — senior citizens who have knowledge and time, for instance, or local businesses.
 - ◆ What civic and other resources did you tap? Who worked with you on this project?
3. Public work teaches new skills of working with different kinds of people on public tasks, and also develops people’s capacity for thinking about the larger meaning of their work.
 - ◆ What new skills have you or the group developed in the past few months? Do these skills help make you a better citizen? Why or why not?
4. Public work often creates many lessons about civic renewal and the commonwealth that have the potential to educate the larger community and produce healthy change.
 - ◆ What important lessons have you or the group learned because of this service? Are you passing lessons on to others in the community?

Civic Skill: Civic Storytelling

Evaluation is one way for individuals and working groups to learn from their experiences, but it is not the only way. And what about communities, future AmeriCorps members, future generations? How will they learn from your work?

In part, your citizenship and service work will speak for itself through its lasting effects. On the other hand, America can be a radically forgetful society. In the past, communities and cultures passed on their values and sustained themselves by telling stories, personal stories like those discussed in Chapter 2, as well as civic stories. The loss of civic stories, or stories about how people work together, dilutes of the idea of civic work and narrows the opportunities it brings. Recovering the art of civic storytelling can create a collective, active history that informs the future.

Civic storytelling can take many forms — written documents, oral narratives, drama, videos, murals, or songs and rap.

Tips for Civic Storytelling

- Find past civic stories connected to your work or institution. What have others done to address public problems? Recovering lost stories is as important as creating new ones.
- Keep a journal of your work. You can even think of it as an ongoing story. Who are the main characters? What is the setting? What are people doing and why? What lessons are they learning?
- Work together. Combining your insights with others’ will yield a richer collective story.
- Pass it on. To prevent your story from getting lost, put it on paper or tape. Then be sure to share and explain it before you leave.
- Think about the best audience for your story and how to reach it.

Exercise Worksheet

Creating History

This exercise asks you to:

Work with others to create a civic story about your AmeriCorps service.

It helps to expand opportunity because:

Explaining the lessons of your work reinforces them for you and passes them on to others. It is an integral part of the learning process.

Instructions

In a group, answer the following questions (Time limit: 15 minutes). Then use this information to create a civic story in the format of your choice (Time limit: 30 minutes). When you are finished, share your stories with others.

Questions

- If you were to look at your AmeriCorps work as an ongoing story, who are the main characters?

- What is the setting?

- What have been the major plot points?

- What have been the points of conflict?

- How have these conflicts been resolved?

- What is the “moral” of the story? What lessons have you learned?

Resources

A. Glossary

B. Bibliography

Resource A**Glossary**

The language you use is important: It serves as a map and guide for effective public action. Below is a list of the ideas and skills central to this guide. Compare these definitions to what you came up with earlier in this book.

citizenship

The act of contributing to public life and participating in solving public problems.

civic concepts

The ideas that define the way you work.

democracy

The idea that everyone has an active role to play governing our public world.

diversity

The differences of ideas, opinions, histories, and cultures that exist among any people. Using these differences to solve problems is essential to citizenship and service.

politics

"Of the citizen." The art and practice of governing and making decisions with diverse people.

power

"To be able." The set of relationships and resources you have that allows you to create things, make changes, and solve problems. Examples include knowledge, resources, moral persuasion, and numbers.

public work

The sustained and visible efforts by a mix of people that create things of lasting value to the whole community. Examples include public art, parks, playgrounds, forest restoration, block watch programs, and community-wide education programs.

self-interest

What is important to you and motivates you to become involved in public life — passions, particular culture and background, primary relationships, and core values. Self-interest determines what you're willing to act on.

Resource B**A Short Bibliography on Related Topics**

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