

Service to Citizenship:
Engaging AmeriCorps Members as Active Citizens

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1. FORWARD

Welcome to *Service to Citizenship: Engaging AmeriCorps Members as Active Citizens*. This project is the result of my two years of experience as an AmeriCorps member and AmeriCorps Leader. While serving as a corps member, I realized that many of my fellow corps members viewed their service as a stepping stone to somewhere else and did not spend time reflecting on the meaning of their national service. *Service to Citizenship* is my response to this observation. It is my hope that through the use of this training AmeriCorps members will be moved to a greater understanding about the meaning of their service and active citizenship. The *Service to Citizenship* guide was created through a project of the National Service Fellows Program. The following is an overview of my National Service Fellowship project and the resulting *Service to Citizenship* guide.

2. FOCUS OF PROJECT

How many AmeriCorps members graduate from the program each year believing that their service as an AmeriCorps member was just another job? It was this question and my field experience as an AmeriCorps member and Leader that inspired the start-up of the National Service Fellowship project, *Service to Citizenship*. In the March/April 1998 issue of *Who Cares* magazine, Kevin Mattson, research director of the Walt Whitman Center for Culture and Politics of Democracy, speaks about AmeriCorps members reflecting on the meaning of their service. He recounts an experience with a group of AmeriCorps members at the end of their service year.

Our meeting was held at the end of the participants year of service, and they had no problem recounting their activities - telling us about the kids they tutored or programs they worked on. But when we asked them what their experience had taught them about civic responsibility or the demands of democratic citizenship, they shot us blank stares and sunk deep into their chairs. They had been too busy getting things done over the last year to ponder what the purpose of their work really was.

Participating in national service is more than just a job. Harris Wofford, CEO of the Corporation for National Service, reports to the *CQ Researcher* published by Congressional Quarterly that, "National service can be a kind of research and development operation into what works and what doesn't. It can be a school for volunteerism, citizenship and teamwork" (1996). As part of this school, participants in national service need structured and systematic opportunities to reflect on the meaning of their service.

The Corporation for National Service was launched on the premise of bringing a diverse group of citizens together to collectively address public problems. It came into being when President Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Included in Congress's statement of purpose was the expectation that the Corporation would "Renew the ethic of civic responsibility and spirit of community throughout the United States" (42 U.S.C. ~ 12501). National service is in an ideal position to play a critical role in bringing people together to solve public problems, then helping them make deeper connections with concepts of active citizenship. The *Service to Citizenship* project focuses on facilitating connections between service and citizenship. When these valuable connections are made, the Corporation will be closer to reaching its vision of a nation where "Active and informed citizenship is widespread - and service helps each American feel greater responsibility toward others" (CNS Strategic Plan 1997-2002).

The Final Report of the National Commission on Civic Renewal makes the

somewhat alarming statement that, “In a time that cries out for civic action, we are in danger of becoming a nation of spectators” (1998). The statistics that illustrate citizen participation in our country, or lack thereof, are staggering and plentiful. In *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work*, Henry Boyte and Nancy Kari explain that in the United States, “Our real crisis is the disengagement of ordinary people from productive involvement in public affairs” (1996). AmeriCorps is in the position to bring ordinary people together to do meaningful work for the public good. Since its inception, AmeriCorps has provided over 100,000 AmeriCorps members with the opportunity to address critical issues in education, public safety, the environment, and unmet human needs.

There is no universally agreed upon definition for active citizenship. It is not mandated by the federal government, and certainly not dictated by national service. We are all free to decide how, when and where we will be involved in working toward the common good. Therefore, *Service to Citizenship* provides members the opportunity to develop their own definitions for active citizenship and how it applies to their public and private life.

This National Service Fellowship project was undertaken in the fall of 1998 with the purpose of creating a training module and complementary resources. The module was designed to assist AmeriCorps program staff and state service commissions in conducting citizenship training for AmeriCorps members. The training provides a time for members to think, define, discuss, and develop ideas about active citizenship. It provides participants with a structured opportunity to reflect on their AmeriCorps experience and how, as active citizens, they can apply practical skills that they have learned from their experience with national service.

3. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The *Service to Citizenship* project began with an informal survey of 38 AmeriCorps programs. The survey was designed to locate current practices and identify gaps in resources for strengthening civic participation in AmeriCorps members. Survey results suggested that AmeriCorps program directors thought that it was important to train in active citizenship, but few programs actually did any training on the subject. AmeriCorps program directors indicated that finding time to train on the topic, along with not knowing what materials to use, inhibited their ability to conduct training in active citizenship. Considering the suggestions from programs directors, the *Service to Citizenship* training was created to be conducted in a five to six hour training session. Supplemental activities and resources are included in the guide for programs having additional time to train members in active citizenship.

The initial training was developed and ready for field-testing in February 1999. I facilitated five field-tests of the training with Idaho and Montana AmeriCorps programs. AmeriCorps members from Montana Campus Corps, Idaho TRIO AmeriCorps, Idaho State Parks in Education AmeriCorps, and AmeriCorps*VISTA participated in the test-training. David Morton, Director of Rhode Island Reads and National Service Fellow Alumni, facilitated additional field-tests in Rhode Island with City Year and AmeriCorps*VISTA members in April and May of 1999. Feedback provided by AmeriCorps members and program directors drastically shaped each subsequent field-test. All draft training materials were modified and enhanced based directly on the feedback given from *Service to Citizenship* review team. The review team consisted of AmeriCorps program directors, state commission and Corporation state office staff, members of the National Service Fellows team, an AmeriCorps Leader, and Corporation technical and training assistance providers. The final version of *Service to Citizenship* represents the collaborative efforts and valuable expertise of national service participants, staff and partners.

4. RESULTS

The result with the greatest impact from my National Service Fellowship project is this *Service to Citizenship* training and resource guide. This guide includes the basic training module, additional training activities, further resources for AmeriCorps members and resources for AmeriCorps programs, trainers and state service commissions. The basic training is divided into three sections: Defining Terms, Exploring the Dimensions of Citizenship, and Applying Civic Skills. The training is balanced between participatory activities and content learning. The desired outcomes of the training are for members to:

- ✦ Explore definitions of citizenship
- ✦ Review their perceived responsibilities as citizens
- ✦ Reflect on their citizen service with AmeriCorps
- ✦ Identify ways to be more engaged as citizens

- ✦ Learn skills to plan service projects that can be used to create community change

Additional training activities include a role-play and civic story telling exercise. Included with the resources for AmeriCorps members is information on informed voting, citizenship links on the Internet, AmeriCorps Alums, Inc., national days of service, and additional service and civic opportunities. Resources for program directors, state service commissions and trainers includes information about field practices, suggested reading, additional ideas to expand the training, and information on other citizenship resource guides funded by the Corporation for National Service.

There were other perceived, yet immeasurable, results from the project. These results include:

- ✦ Increased awareness of resources for training on civic participation among AmeriCorps programs and state commissions
- ✦ Additional opportunities for discussion about active citizenship and its link to national service
- ✦ Increased civic participation in participants of the training field-test

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The results of the *Service to Citizenship* project have implications for the Corporation for National Service and AmeriCorps field practitioners.

Recommendations to field practitioners, including AmeriCorps program directors, state service commissions, as well as trainers who want to increase active citizenship in members through training are:

- ✦ Train members in active citizenship early in their service year to help them develop the habit of reflecting on the meaning of their service on a regular basis.
- ✦ If time constraints preclude you from doing a day long training on active citizenship, integrate opportunities to discuss active citizenship into other training sessions. For example, if you are training members in public presentation use active citizenship as a speaking topic.
- ✦ Use the training to suit the needs of your program and members. The *Service to Citizenship* guide was created to be replicated, manipulated, and adjusted. After assessing the needs of your individual program and members, mold the training materials to suit your needs.
- ✦ If your program or state does not have a comprehensive training plan, take time to assess your training needs. After evaluating your assessment, create a plan to determine what topics you will train members in and when the trainings will be conducted. Planning ahead will help ensure that you are consistently meeting the training needs of your members and program.

Recommendations to the Corporation for National Service for increasing active citizenship in AmeriCorps members through training are:

- ✦ Use a national training and technical assistance provider to assist AmeriCorps programs in designing and conducting civic participation trainings.
- ✦ Persistently publicize training resources that are available to AmeriCorps programs from the Internet, National Service Resource Center, and other Corporation publications.
- ✦ Continue to make citizenship training resources available to field practitioners through the National Service Resource Center's lending library and website.

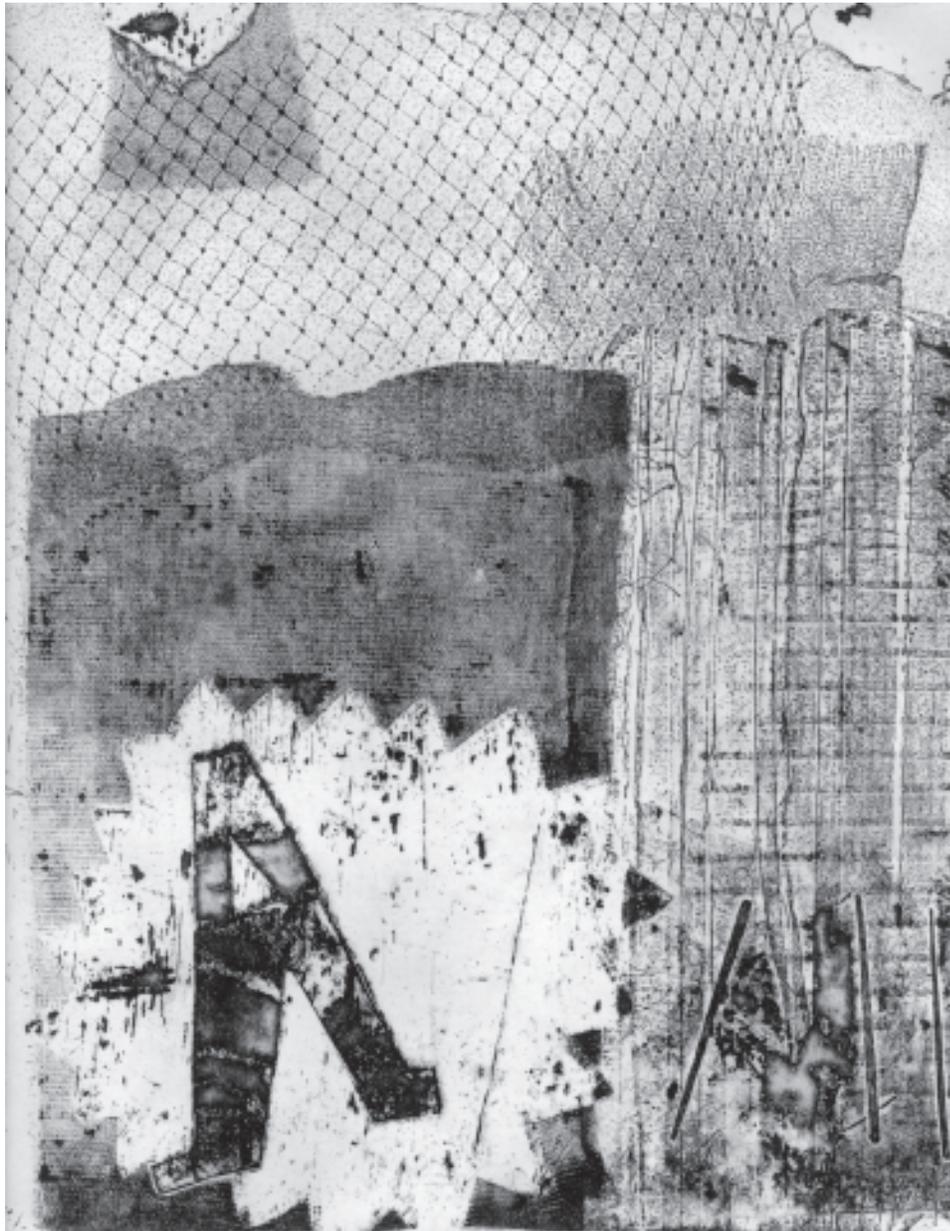
6. *CONCLUSION:*

The *Service to Citizenship* core training is one of the many resources for helping members make valuable connections between service and citizenship. Consult the resource section of the training module for an extended list of civic participation resources available to AmeriCorps members, programs, state service commissions, and other national service partners. As AmeriCorps continues to call citizens to meet the challenge of national service, let us persevere in our quest to make their service meaningful – both to the communities they serve and to each individual member. This will be accomplished, in part, by providing members with opportunities to reflect on the meaning of their service and how it relates to active citizenship.

Introduction to *Service to Citizenship* Guide

Contents:

- User's Introduction to the *Service to Citizenship* Guide
- Tips for the Facilitator



INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE TO CITIZENSHIP RESOURCE GUIDE

We all have the ability to make positive social change in the world. There is no road map or blue print for becoming a better citizen. We have different styles, comforts, and methods for getting things done. Participating in national service is one way to participate as active citizens. Ultimately, a healthy democracy starts with each of us being engaged in meaningful endeavors for the public good. The materials in this manual were created to assist AmeriCorps program staff, state service commissions and other trainers in engaging AmeriCorps members as active citizens and community problem solvers.

The *Service to Citizenship* guide is divided into three sections:

- ★ Service to Citizenship Training Module
- ★ Active Citizenship Resources for AmeriCorps Members
- ★ Additional Active Citizenship Training Resources for AmeriCorps Program Directors, State Service Commissions, and Trainers

The *Service to Citizenship Training Module* is a basic 5–6 hour training to be conducted with AmeriCorps members. The *Active Citizenship Resources for AmeriCorps Members* section should be copied and distributed to members after the training. The *Additional Active Citizenship Training Resources for AmeriCorps Program Directors, State Service Commissions, and Trainers* were compiled to augment the basic citizenship training.

The *Service to Citizenship Training Module* is a starting point to launch a discussion with AmeriCorps members about active citizenship. The module was intentionally designed to be conducted in a full day or afternoon training session. For those programs with more time and/or opportunities to bring members together for training on active citizenship, the additional materials can be used to enhance your training design. The manual is malleable. First, assess the needs of your AmeriCorps members and program. Second, replicate what works for you; and finally adjust, manipulate and augment the basic design to suit your identified needs. Enjoy the training. It is likely that it will prompt lively and thought provoking discussion among your corps.

Democracy is always a beckoning goal, not a safe harbor. For freedom is an unremitting endeavor, never a final achievement.
- Felix Frankfurter

TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR

Training Tips

As many of you know, training is an exercise in flexibility and creativity. Different groups will take the same material and process it in a myriad of fashions. Alas, the fun and frustration of training. Try to remain flexible to the needs of your group and where they need the training to go. This training is merely a starting point to get your group discussing the critical issues that revolve around service and citizenship. Manipulate, enhance, lengthen, shorten and/or expand the training agenda to meet the needs of your members. In the following materials you will find other ideas and suggestions to consider when planning for your training. The *Additional Active Citizenship Training Resources for AmeriCorps Program Directors, State Service Commissions, and Trainers* section also offers additional information to supplement your training.

BEFORE YOUR TRAINING:

- ✓ Organize the training session to include no more than 30-35 participants. The training is based on dialogue, sharing and group interaction. If you must have a large group, designate as many facilitators as needed to break the large group into smaller sub-groups.
- ✓ Keep in mind when you are designing your training that the time it takes to get through the material will vary depending on group size, length of discussions and time spent sharing. Predicted times are given in the heading of each section. They are provided as a minimum time needed to complete the section of the training.
- ✓ Copy and prepare all handouts needed for the training. Each section of the training indicates which materials and handouts are needed. Always make a few extra handouts.
- ✓ Make copies of *Active Citizenship Resources for AmeriCorps Members* handouts to distribute to members after the training.
- ✓ Prepare training newsprint or posters. In the training materials, a box around the text designates posters.
- ✓ Provide participants with an agenda so they will know what to expect prior to the training.
- ✓ Set-up the room you will be conducting the training in before participants arrive. Organize the seating in a manner conducive to sharing. Depending on the size of your group, it would be ideal for everyone to be able to sit at the same table. Creating a circle or a semi-circle of tables and chairs will create an atmosphere that encourages discussion and active participation. Due to the participatory and interactive nature of this training, auditorium style seating will be least effective.
- ✓ Involve members in the training by asking them to facilitate activities or portions of the training. Ask members to lead ice breaker and energizer activities.

GETTING STARTED:

- ✓ Allow members to discuss business, ask questions or air concerns not directly related to the training before you begin. This will help members give their full attention to the training topic.
- ✓ Announce to the group where they can find bathrooms, refreshments, etc. before you begin training in order to minimize disruptions.
- ✓ Set ground rules with your group. Due to the nature of the training there is a chance for open disagreement. If your group or team already has a set of ground rules or group norms, this may be unnecessary. If not, ask your group to brainstorm a list of ground rules. After you have completed your list, clarify the ground rules with the group and ask for group agreement. If a ground rule is violated during the training refer the group back to the ground rules to keep the group on task.
- ✓ Clearly explain to your group that as the facilitator, you, are not there to provide the right answers, since there are no right answers. Rather, you will guide the group through the discussion.
- ✓ Review the agenda and continue to refer back to it after you have finished each section of the training. This will let the group know where they are in the process.
- ✓ Explain to the group that the purpose of the training is not for every participant to agree on the points being discussed. During some of the training discussions, participants may need to “agree to disagree” and then move forward with the discussion.
- ✓ Remind participants that they each have different points of view about active citizenship. The purpose of this training is to share multiple perspectives, not judge others’ ideas.

DURING & AFTER THE TRAINING:

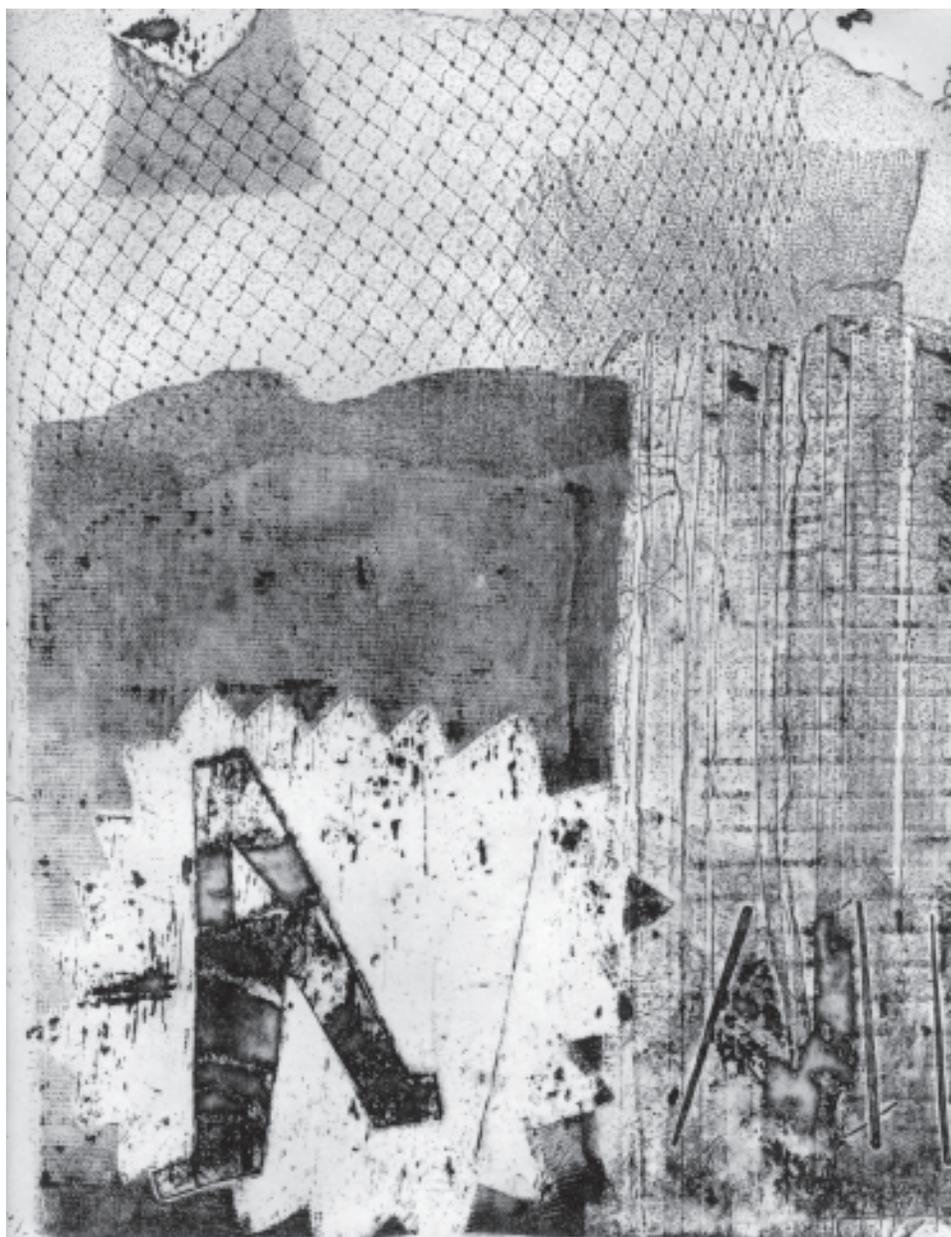
- ✓ Stay aware of the collective mood and energy level of the group. If the energy level is slipping, use a group energizer to invigorate members. Likewise, if your group is rolling with a topic or conversation, let the discussion continue to flourish.
- ✓ Encourage reluctant members to contribute to group conversations and monitor members who have a tendency to dominate conversations. One way to encourage equal participation is to pose questions to the group and then ask members to share their thoughts in a round-robin fashion.
- ✓ Evaluate the training. Evaluation leads to continuous improvement and will assist in improving future trainings.
- ✓ Encourage participants to follow through with the civic commitments they make during the training. Our collective power will be unleashed when we move from talk to action.

Service to Citizenship Training Module

Contents:

- Getting Started
- Part 1: Defining Civic Participation and Active Citizenship
- Part 2: Exploring the Dimensions of Citizenship
- Part 3: Applying Civic Skills
- Part 4: Additional Training Activities

Training
Module



SAMPLE AGENDA FOR SERVICE TO CITIZENSHIP TRAINING

Agenda

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Total Time</u>
<i>Pre-Training</i>		
1. Getting Started Overview	25 minutes	25 minutes
2. Wrap-up	5 minutes	30 minutes
<i>Part I: Defining Civic Participation and Active Citizenship</i>		
1. Defining Terms	20 minutes	50 minutes
2. Reflection Activity	30 minutes	1 hour 20 minutes
3. The Rules	5 minutes	1 hour 25 minutes
4. Wrap-up	5 minutes	1 hour 30 minutes
<i>Part II: Exploring the Dimensions of Citizenship</i>		
1. Group Discussion: Root Causes	45 minutes	2 hours 15 minutes
2. Spheres of Influence Activity	1 hour 10 minutes	3 hours 25 minutes
3. Wrap-up	5 minutes	3 hours 30 minutes
<i>Part III: Applying Civic Skills</i>		
1. Service Project Planning	1 hour	4 hours 30 minutes
2. Processing, Closing & Evaluation	30 minutes	5 hours

Getting Started

Minimum Time Needed: 30 minutes

1. TRAINING OVERVIEW

During this session you will do group introductions, set ground rules, review the agenda, share desired outcomes, and review parameters of the training.

STEP 1: GROUP INTRODUCTIONS

Introduce yourself as the training facilitator. If your participants are unfamiliar with each other, have each of them introduce themselves.

STEP 2: CREATE GROUND RULES

Brainstorm ground rules for the group to abide by during the training. After you have completed your list, clarify the ground rules with the group and ask for group agreement. Post the list where it is visible to participants throughout the training. If ground rules are broken during the training, refer participants back to ground rules.

STEP 3: PROVIDE OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING

Review the following posters with the group. Providing an overview will give participants

Agenda

DEFINING TERMS

- ✦ Defining Terms
- ✦ Personal Reflection
- ✦ The Rules

EXPLORING THE DIMENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

- ✦ Root Causes and Pathways to Action
- ✦ Spheres of Influence and Action

APPLYING CIVIC SKILLS

- ✦ Planning Community Service Projects
- ✦ Brainstorming Training Applications
- ✦ Next Steps
- ✦ Closing
- ✦ Training Evaluation

POSTER #1

Desired Outcomes

- ✦ To explore definitions of citizenship
- ✦ To review our perceived responsibilities as citizens
- ✦ To reflect on our citizen service experiences with AmeriCorps
- ✦ To identify ways to be more engaged as citizens
- ✦ To learn service project planning skills you can use to create community change

POSTER #2

Getting Started



Look Here!

Materials Needed

Blank Poster Paper

Markers

Posters 1, 2 & 3

This training is:

- ✦ A forum to define what citizenship means to you and how you can apply this definition to your life
- ✦ An avenue to explore the dimensions of citizenship
- ✦ An opportunity to learn specific skills that you can use to stay actively involved after you leave AmeriCorps
- ✦ A time to acknowledge accomplishments you have made through your service as an AmeriCorps member

This training is not:

- ✦ A time for the facilitator(s) to tell how and why participants should be more engaged as active citizens
- ✦ A forum for right answers
- ✦ A detailed road map for active citizenship

POSTER #3

STEP 4: CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

After reviewing the posters, ask the group if they have questions or need clarification about the information provided.

2. WRAP-UP GETTING STARTED

- ✓ Answer any lingering questions.
- ✓ Introduce next agenda item,

NOTES

Part 1: Defining Civic Participation and Active Citizenship

Minimum Time Needed: 1 hour

1. DEFINING TERMS

During this session training participants will create personal definitions for active citizenship, review a definition for citizenship from the Center for Democracy and Citizenship and discuss the implications of defining active citizenship.

STEP 1: DEFINE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Ask members, “*What is your definition of active citizenship?*” Give members a few minutes to write down their answer to the question.

STEP 2: SHARE DEFINITIONS

Have each member share their definition with the group. If you have more than 25 participants, divide into smaller groups to share definitions.

STEP 3: DISCUSSION

Bring the group back together and ask the group to discuss the following questions:

- ✦ How were the definitions you generated similar? How were they different?
- ✦ Does it matter that you define citizenship in different ways? Why or why not?
- ✦ What characteristics define active citizens?
- ✦ How do these characteristics represent the array of definitions you developed for citizenship?

STEP 4: DEBRIEF DISCUSSION

Acknowledge that there is no universally agreed upon definition of citizenship. It is our decision how we want to be involved in our neighborhoods, communities, states, nation, and world. Explain that today’s training was designed using the definition of citizenship created by Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

STEP 5: CITIZENSHIP POSTER

Citizenship Definition

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

*By the People, Center for
Democracy and Citizenship, 1995*

POSTER #4

Share the definition with the group.

Explain to participants that the rest of the training will build on the idea that everyone has a role to play solving public problems.

STEP 6: WRAP-UP OF DEFINING TERMS DISCUSSION

Ask participants the following questions. After the discussion, field any lingering questions and transition out of the defining terms discussion.

- ✦ Raise your hand if you feel like the majority of people in our country are actively engaged citizens. How are they actively engaged? Why are they engaged?
- ✦ Raise your hand if you feel like the majority of people in our country are disengaged and not participating as citizens? Why are they disengaged?

Part 1



Look Here!

Materials Needed

Blank Poster Paper
Markers
Poster 4
Pens & Pencils
Paper