

Tips on Member Development and Management

Good members are key to a successful AEAP and getting good members starts with recruitment. The process of recruiting, training and supervising your members is referred to as member development and management. Your AmeriCorps staff and site supervisors will also need management and development throughout your service program. Here are 10 ideas for getting a strong start on the basics of recruiting, training and managing your AmeriCorps members.

(1) Establish Member Service Description

Develop a member service description that describes the duties associated with the position and states the skills needed. Review the AmeriCorps Ed Awards Program Application Guidelines so that your service description reflects the basic AmeriCorps membership requirements. Write a service description that describes the position in rewarding and interesting terms. Once you have established a service description, review it with your staff to solicit staff input in improving the descriptions and to ensure that there is a clear understanding throughout the agency of what is expected of members.

(2) Develop a Recruitment Strategy

Decide who your best potential members are by thinking about who would want the job. Consider factors such as who would be interested in the mission of your program; who is likely to have time available during the hours that the service is performed and who can fulfill the time commitment of the service requirement over the course of the service term. It is important to know how many hours per week are needed to meet the service requirement and to make this clear to potential members. Involve everyone on your staff in the recruitment effort by seeking their input on finding members. Identify agencies, organizations, churches and schools where you can target potential members.

(3) Create Recruitment Materials

Design appealing and attention-grabbing recruitment materials such as flyers, brochures and print or radio ads. You may be able to enlist graphic designers or ad agencies to donate help designing and or printing materials. Newspapers and radio stations may be willing to provide you with free or low-cost ad space, as well. Think about your audience when designing your recruitment materials. Be sure to state clearly the benefits of being an AmeriCorps member in your program!

(4) Set Recruitment Goals

Decide the who, what, when, and how of your recruitment. Set a target date for having the necessary number of members recruited, screened, and ready to serve. Work backwards from there. What do you have to do, who you have to call or visit, and how many places you will send recruitment information? Figure out who can help you meet your recruitment goals--chances are that supporters of your organization such as Board Members, volunteers and donors have some great ideas and resources for recruitment and would be willing to assist you.

(5) Screening Potential Members

Establish the criteria that you will use to accept or reject your AmeriCorps applicants. When considering potential members, determine whether or not the skills required by the service position match those of the applicant. Be cautious about rejecting applicants based only on what you see on paper. Some of your applicants may not be able to describe themselves well in writing, while others may not convey all of their talents in an interview. It is helpful to have a variety of ways to assess skills the applicant may have developed in previous life and work experiences. You don't want to pass over a gem in the rough! Often the simple question: "Tell me about yourself" provides you with a great deal of information about the applicant's traits. An applicant's references may provide further insight on their abilities. Motivation for service, perseverance, ability to handle stress and willingness to learn are key traits you will want to know about.

At the interview, tell the applicant how soon they will know about their acceptance and the start date for your program. When you deny membership to an applicant, try to maintain them as a "friend" of your program. You may encourage them to apply for another AmeriCorps program in your community or to re-apply to your program when you have more sites developed, if appropriate. Keep a record of all correspondence and actions related to your recruitment efforts.

(6) Consider A Group Interview Process

Many times a group interview is more effective than a one-on-one; it gives you a broader picture. An interview process that includes others in addition to yourself can be a great way to involve staff from your organization in your AmeriCorps program. Remember, the questions you ask each applicant should be the same. You need to be sure that the questions are not biased against race, age, religion, sexual orientation, etc. These questions are prohibited by federal law. If in doubt about a question that you are considering asking, confer with your human resources staff for information on fair interview practices.

(7) Placing Members

Assigning members to the service activities that compliment their current skills, in addition to those that they want to develop, is the best retention insurance you have after effective screening. Get your site supervisors involved in assisting you with the placement. Consider personality fit or match as a subtle, yet significant, factor in making an appropriate placement. Get feedback from the members about their reaction to their first site visit. If there are negative interactions at the start, they will continue unless you find a way to resolve the problem immediately. Do everything possible to assure the placement is the right one for both the member and the site.

(8) Orientation

An effective orientation program is a must to get everyone off to a solid start. The word orientation means to provide a lasting direction of thought or interest. Get your staff involved in assisting with parts of the orientation related to their areas of expertise. Don't just orient your members, include your site supervisors in their own orientation and have a joint one for both members and site supervisors. The Corporation has excellent materials available to assist you with developing a thorough orientation program through technical assistance providers such as Mosaica and the National Service Resource Center*; use them! Mosaica can be found on-line at <http://www.mosaica.org/natl.htm> or by telephone at (202) 887-0620. The NSRC website address is: <http://www.etr.org/NSRC>. The telephone number is 1-800-860-2684.

(9) Training Members, Staff, and Site Supervisors

On-going training and professional development is essential to the success of your program. Once again, it is not only the members who need to be developed. Begin by assessing the training needs of your members and staff, given the requirements of your service program and the training requirements for members stated in your AmeriCorps guidelines. Establish a training and development plan to assure that your staff, your site supervisors, members, and you yourself continue to develop the skills necessary to make your service program a success. Again, the Corporation for National Service has excellent materials available to assist you with member and staff training and development. Please see the recommended resource list that follows for examples. Mosaica, the training and technical assistance (T/TA) provider that specializes in training materials development is an excellent resource for your member and staff training needs. Mosaica T/TA providers can be reached at by e-mail at mosaica@ix.netcom.com

Consider the resources that are available to you locally when looking for trainers for the various sessions that you are planning. There are probably many people in your community who will voluntarily, or for a minimal stipend, assist you in

providing specialized training in topics such as CPR, conflict resolution, listening skills, and career development. Consider alternative forms of member and staff development such as video and audio training tapes, mentoring by community volunteers, and occasional shadowing of people on the job. Tap into the network of T/TA providers the Corporation offers to your program. Get to know what is available and how to utilize these resources.

Think of recruitment and retention as a seamless robe. The more effectively you recruit, screen, place, orient, and develop your members, the more assurance you have of retaining them!

(10) Developing Additional Funding Sources

Are you surprised to see this as part of member development and management? Because the Education Award comes after the AmeriCorps service, finding additional funding in order to offer incentives such as stipends, child care, bus fare and housing allowances to your recruits can make your program more attractive to potential members and help ensure member retention. Offering this type of assistance can increase the diversity of your members. Potential sources of additional funding include grants, donations and fundraising events. Once again, community members, as well as staff and Board Members of your organization may be great sources for creative approaches to fundraising.

Here are some creative ways that other programs have developed the infrastructure to assure that applicants from diverse backgrounds can be recruited and retained.

1. Develop cooperative arrangements with Work-Study programs at the two and four year colleges in your area.
2. Seek corporate partnerships to provide scholarships, grants, and/or part-time jobs for your recruits while they are AmeriCorps members.
3. Create liaisons with other federal, state, and local programs that offer stipends or financial incentives such as Welfare to Work programs.
4. Collaborate with other not-for-profit organizations in your area who may have sources of funding to offer members in return for work or service.
5. Work with other Corporation programs (Vista, Learn and Serve, Senior Corps) in your area to create child care cooperatives where members assist other members in caring for children and grandchildren.

6. Conduct a variety of fundraising events to create emergency funds that can be used for bus fare, housing allowances, gas, and food purchases, or other financial hardships your members may encounter. Some ideas are bake sales, raffles, tournaments, dances, music fests. (You will also have to develop criteria for how these funds are to be distributed to avoid abuse and mismanagement.)

7. Be creative. Don't let lack of funds prevent you from recruiting a potential member!!! There are many intangible benefits to AmeriCorps membership that can attract members!

Member Development and Management Resources

The following resources can provide further insight and information on the member development and management components of launching your AmeriCorps program. The materials are available on loan through the AmeriCorps training and technical assistance (T/TA) provider, the National Service Resource Center. The NSRC catalogue number for the materials follows each description. The NSRC can be reached at 1-800-860-2684. The NSRC can be reached on line at www.etr.org/NSCR or by e-mail at susan@etr-associates.org

AEAP Member and Site Supervisor Handbooks are attached for your convenience. These handbooks are excellent reference materials for the day-to-day requirements of managing AmeriCorps members and site supervisors. The handbooks provide information on issues such as regulations regarding member service and benefits, as well as site supervisor and host agency obligations.

101 Ideas for Volunteer Programs. McCurley, Steve and Sue Vineyard. Heritage Arts Publishing, Baltimore, MD 1986. Lists and checklists to consider for volunteer programs. Included are planning a volunteer program, recruiting volunteers and screening and training them, leadership characteristics, volunteer/staff relations, and marketing and public relations. # R0261.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action. Epstein, Joyce Levy, et al. Corwin Press, Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA 1997. 229 pages. Covers the process of planning, implementing, and maintaining a successful partnership between school, student's families, and the community. Describes six different types of involvement for partnership programs, including the challenges and likely results. # R0599

Secrets of Successful Grantsmanship: A Guerrilla Guide to Raising Money. Golden, Susan L. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco 1997. 165 pages. Step-by-step process of grantseeking, from preparation work through the advocacy that follows proposal submissions. Describes tasks such as conducting prospective donor research, preparing a preliminary document and meeting, and completing a proposal. # R0556

Starting Strong: A Self-Help Guide to Effective AmeriCorps Pre-Service Training. McKay, Emily Gantz, Diane Cabrales, et. al. Mosaica, Washington D.C. 1995 Provides information on the type of formal pre-service training is appropriate for a specific program. Written for AmeriCorps programs and Corporation for National Service staff, it reflects program member input regarding training methods. # R0135.

Trainer Training: How to Conduct Effective AmeriCorps Pre-Service Training. McKay, Emily Gantz, Diane Cabrales, et al. Mosaica, Washington D.C. 1995. Provides a one-day sample agenda for training. Contains experiential learning exercises such as trainer self-assessment, brainstorming for successful training, using small groups, trouble shooting and the different roles of the trainer/facilitator. # C0060

Volunteer Development Toolbox, The. MacKenzie, Marilyn and Gail Moore. Heritage Arts Publishing, Baltimore, MD 1993. Exercises to assist staff and leadership volunteers in developing volunteer and staff effectiveness. Designed to promote active learning, exercise range from theoretical discussions of volunteer retention to one-on-one development of volunteer job descriptions. Provides sample worksheets and readings. # M0043

Volunteer Recruitment Book, The. Ellis, Susan J. ENERGIZE, Inc., Philadelphia, PA 1994. Information on how and where to recruit volunteers. Details techniques of recruiting and focuses on recruiting for diversity and appealing to special target audiences. # M0044