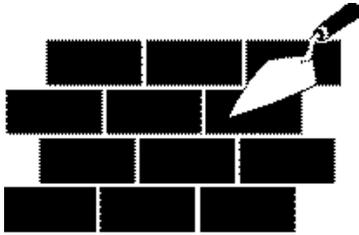


Ten Tips for Successful Pre-Service Training

by Mosaica



A successful pre-service training or orientation is the key to starting the program year off strong. This is the first opportunity for members to see the program in action; set realistic expectations; form partnerships with other members, program staff, and site supervisors; and begin building a strong sense of team (or *esprit de corps*).

AmeriCorps members need to develop a foundation, a functional level of general and project specific knowledge and skills, in order to feel comfortable and confident in their new roles, and effectively serve their community. A strong foundation laid during pre-service training can help ensure a smooth year (effective and happy members) and be built upon during in-service sessions throughout the year. If the foundation is not strong, it will need reinforcing. Ineffective pre-service training will create challenges and leave program staff, and members, playing catch-up for the rest of the year. Investing in effective training up front pays off later. The following tips will help AmeriCorps programs prepare for member pre-service training or orientation.

- 1. Plan.** The better organized you are, the better the orientation will be -- even if you make lots of changes during the session. The more you systematically consider possible situations and needs, methods and potential problems, the more confident and flexible you will be.
- 2. Make your orientation outcome-based.** Instead of designing your orientation based on topics to include, decide what outcomes you want to accomplish. Then pick topics and methods that will generate these outcomes. Often, one activity can contribute to several outcomes.
- 3. Make your pre-service training truly interactive and experiential.** That means more than time for question and answer. Use every component of the experiential learning model -- and keep in mind the learning pyramid. The greater the active participation of the members, the greater the retention.
- 4. Carefully choose and thoroughly prepare your facilitators and presenters.** Select them for their training skills, not just their content knowledge. Be sure they know what you expect, and review materials and methods before the training. For experts who aren't trainers, use them as "resources," and facilitate the session yourself.
- 5. Emphasize teamwork.** Most participants will be working in teams. Use icebreakers, well-designed small-group activities, special teambuilding activities, and community projects to build team spirit and mutual trust.
- 6. Model the service ethic.** Bring in role models, build on individual eagerness to serve, and have the staff, site supervisors, and other presenters reflect the benefits of service. Talk about service directly and honestly, and communicate realistic expectations.

7. Use participants as resources. Assess their skills as well as their training needs. Give them opportunities to teach each other, through cooperative learning groups and other specific peer teaching activities. Use them as co-facilitators in areas in which they have special expertise.

8. Link training with the service assignment. Train the supervisors as well as the members. Have supervisors work with members to plan their service activities. Provide or plan community projects. The more relevant the orientation to the actual assignment, the more interesting and useful it will be for members.

9. Monitor, assess, and evaluate. Throughout the session, ask members for feedback, and make immediate refinements. Assess specific activities and the overall session as a basis for change next year. Follow up to see if skills learned are retained and used. Use varied evaluation techniques.

10. Make pre-service training the first step in ongoing learning. Link it to in-service sessions, site-based training, and other knowledge and skill development opportunities.

