

# Recruitment and Retention: What? How? Who?

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Successful recruitment for community service must focus on the task of the service assignments and the environment within which the tasks are to be accomplished. Position descriptions set the foundation necessary to determine WHAT tasks have to be completed, provide some guidelines on HOW to perform the tasks (methodology, resources, and support available), and WHO (the optimal skills, education, life experience, attitudes, and personal characteristics) would be best to engage in this service.

## Meeting Needs

Successful recruitment occurs when: (a) the position description and the agreed-upon term of service is satisfied with measurable results attained; and (b) when the individual in service *with* the local community attains a "sense of accomplishment". Accomplishment in this case includes a heightened sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition, increased self-esteem, and a mutually understood and shared responsibility for the achievements.

Retention of AmeriCorps members becomes a non-issue when other human needs are met as well. The members will likely remain committed throughout the full term of service (and perhaps even consider a service extension), provided there is continuing attention to their basic needs (safety and security), and the psychological, emotional and practical needs (food, water, shelter, etc.) are assured.

## Planning AmeriCorps Member Positions

Each year, as AmeriCorps programs mature, their ability to assess the needs of local communities and to translate them into AmeriCorps programs will improve. This will result in detailed position descriptions and appropriate levels of program preparation (resource analysis, managerial and local community planning). These initial levels of planning will pave the way for successful member placement and retention.

The environment within which an AmeriCorps assignment is to be conducted completes the framework necessary to select individuals who can successfully satisfy the demands of service. The program staff and participating community agencies must consider the regional setting, proximity to resources, and the breakdown of responsibilities between other existing community social services, organizations, churches and local government. This awareness by AmeriCorps staff will enable them to assure that AmeriCorps members will plug into areas, skills, and situations where they will be most appropriate.

## Position Descriptions

Service assignments must be meaningful to the AmeriCorps member (a function of the placement and recruit matching system) and the community in which the service is performed. The goals of each position must be achievable. Members must be connected with people in the local community so ownership of the experience will be shared, ultimately assumed by the local community, and consequently, long lasting. Everyone must have true involvement (input and

control) in the work. Projects must be possible within the time available (project duration, resources, terms of service, etc.).

Position descriptions should include all professional elements necessary to define the service assignment and the qualifications necessary to achieve it. Typically, position descriptions are too short, non-existent, unfamiliar to the AmeriCorps member, or filed away and never used once a project is begun. These documents should be revisited regularly to encourage member feedback, measure success and find areas which need enhancement. They should be modified to reflect changing needs as they develop and are useful in evaluating members' performance.

### **AmeriCorps Projects and Community Readiness**

If community service members do not feel welcomed, they will not bond with the effort. Introductions, orientation, and on-going team building activities are indispensable. Something as simple as inadequate workspace, tools, supplies, and other resources necessary to perform the position duties can set-up enthusiastic members for failure.

Periodic review of basic materials can keep the members, staff, and community focused on common goals. These materials include training sessions, goals and objectives, action plans, policies and procedures, member handbook, organizational charts, local community resources, risk management, and record keeping. Members must be assigned appropriate levels of supervision and the supervisor must be accessible and employ balanced leadership skills.

### **Recruitment Details**

The primary focus in the design of a recruitment campaign is to utilize position descriptions to determine characteristics best suited to meet the demands of the tasks. Working with other community based non-profit organizations and existing volunteer programs will help determine where potential candidates can be located. The recruitment must connect the motivational needs of recruits to the service assignments. The programs must then continue to address these motivations (satisfaction, recognition, ability to make a difference, learning, etc.) once a person joins.

Selection panels can help review applications, conduct interviews, determine potential placement match, and make final selection decisions. Recognizing that program planning and structural elements affect the process of recruitment will maximize the potential for member retention.

### **The Big Picture of Recruitment**

Everyone who applies to an AmeriCorps program will not match the positions to be filled. You may decide however, to commit to the development of your members toward the ideal candidate for the position. In which case, you must decide on the required minimum skills and attitudes. You must also think through the resources needed to move your members toward the desired goal

If candidates don't meet your minimum requirements, be assured that a program exists somewhere for everyone offering their skills and time. Raising people's consciousness through advertisement about community needs imparts an obligation to help steer applicants failing to meet your selection criteria toward other appropriate community programs which can use their talents. Successful recruitment is about linking people with people - a most rewarding challenge!