

# **Service Corps** **to Social Impact Career**

A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers

*by*

**Amy Potthast**

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## Table of Contents

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The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealists.org/servicecompanion).



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# INTRODUCTION

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## Getting started

### A quick introduction to this book

#### Introduction Overview

The Introduction contains brief discussions of the following topics:

- What makes a corps member's transition unique? (page 2)
- Whom is this *Companion* for? (pages 2-3)
- How is this *Companion* structured? (page 3)
- Archetypal corps members (pages 4-5)
- How this *Companion* relates to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*, including the table of contents for these free books (pages 5-6)
- About the *Companion's* author and organization (page 7)

Your participation in national or international service gives you an incredible starting point for a career and life with social impact. This is true whether you are a recent high school or college graduate, or an encore professional. For people early in their careers, service also offers an opportunity to build hands-on experience before applying to college or graduate school.

The beauty of many service corps is that they effectively introduce you and other participants to public service roles while also providing you with the skills you need to succeed:

- With very little full-time work experience, recent college graduates may accept positions during their service term with nonprofit organizations, schools, or government agencies that offer a great deal of responsibility, autonomy, challenges, and opportunities for training and professional growth.
- People with years of professional experience can take on new positions in nonprofit and government agencies that immediately utilize their skill sets while allowing them to gain experience from a different perspective.



No matter what stage of life you were in as you started your term of service, this book aims to help you parlay your service experience into a social impact career.

Pathways to public service careers are often unclear. Because you are responding to a calling that comes from within you—that commits you to strengthening your community and the world—your career path isn't easy to predict or even to plan:

- People you meet may inspire you to new heights.
- You may discover your own solution to an intractable social ill, start a new program or organization, and never look for a job again.
- Opportunities may arise that impel you to act in innovative and unplanned ways.

Because your career path is a journey of discovery—and as unique in the world as your own thumbprint—the advice in *Service Corps to Social Impact Career – A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* aims to prepare you for opportunities to make a tangible, positive impact in the world. This *Companion* also aims to position you to engage the people who will support and inspire you as you grow.

## What makes a corps member's transition unique?

As a service corps participant, your transition to a career or school is unique for several reasons.

Right now you have an awesome opportunity to become part of the next wave of public service leaders. Projections indicate that from 2006 to 2016, U.S. nonprofits will need to attract and develop 640,000 new senior managers, or 2.4 times 2006 levels.<sup>1</sup> By learning career transition skills during your term of service, you can plan your professional growth and prepare to assume leadership roles throughout your career.

Moreover, the relatively short-term nature of your experience means that you can spend the entire term engaged in the transition to your post-service career. As you develop new skill sets and networks, you'll also need to learn how to leverage these quickly for the job or school search.

A term of service may be brief, but it's *incredibly powerful*. Learning how to explain the difference between a service corps experience and any other one- or two-year role is crucial in some settings, as is telling the story of your experience.

## Whom is this *Companion* for?

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career* has been written for prospective, current, and former participants of a wide range of service corps like Peace Corps, AmeriCorps,



Right now you have an awesome opportunity to become part of the next wave of public service leaders.”



<sup>1</sup> The Bridgespan Group (Thomas J. Tierney) “The Nonprofit Sector’s Leadership Deficit” March 2006. Available at: <http://www.bridgespan.org/nonprofit-leadership-deficit.aspx>

Teach For America, City Year, Avodah, Jesuit Volunteers, HealthCorps, Mississippi Teacher Corps, Volunteer Service Organisation, Atlas Corps, IndicoCorps, and many more. It's meant for people who want to use their service experience as a building block to their next steps, whether that's a social impact career or a related academic pursuit.

This *Companion* does not offer preparation for other options you may have when you leave your term. For example, it's not intended to help with retirement issues, staying home to raise a family, or taking time off to travel abroad—although some of the insights contained may be useful in these pursuits, too.

Also, this *Companion* primarily focuses on the experience of U.S. residents serving domestically or internationally. Some of the advice may be useful to service corps participants from other countries.

Different programs choose different terms to refer to their participants, such as “volunteer,” “corps member,” “member,” “coordinator,” “fellow,” or “teacher.” This book usually uses the terms “participant” and “corps member” to refer to the people who have committed to a term of service.

## How is this *Companion* structured?

Besides this introduction and a conclusion, this *Companion* has three main parts:

**Part One:** What you can do during the term of service to better position yourself for next steps. Next steps can include transitions to a career (searching for a salaried job) or educational setting (going on to school for an associates, bachelors, or graduate degree). Part One discusses discerning your professional calling, networking, building skills, and documenting achievements—all within the context of a term of service.

**Part Two:** Help for making the transition. This part covers the emotional and logistical challenges of your transitions and ways to overcome them. It also helps you effectively translate your service experience for prospective employers and admissions counselors, as well as provides tips for how to present your service experience on paper. If you have only just found this *Companion* and you are finished with your term, you'll find tips for getting yourself up to speed in this part as well. Part Two spells out alternatives to the nonprofit sector as a career choice, including government and business sector careers, as well as starting your own organization and going to school.

**Part Three:** Professional development after your transition, and staying in the loop as an alumnus. This part outlines some of the adjustments you'll make in a new job, as well as opportunities for lifelong career development.



## Archetypal corps members

We've found a few (fictional!) people to take this journey with you. We hope that the archetypal corps members outlined below help to illustrate some of the successes, challenges, and opportunities you will encounter throughout your own transitions.



### ACE'S STORY

Ace, 19, is the proud father of a pre-schooler and recently earned his GED in a program that supports formerly incarcerated and other court-involved youth. In high school he was involved in drugs and was considered a nonviolent juvenile offender. He's started a term of service with a conservation corps near his home in New Orleans, LA, greening buildings and homes. Ace is considering college, but is also interested in other opportunities that don't require a college education for the immediate future. Participating in his service corps makes him feel proud to be identified with something really positive for the community.



### BEA'S STORY

Bea, 22, just graduated from college in Western North Carolina and has moved an hour away to do a term of indirect service, connecting public schools with local organic farmers in Asheville. She is not sure what her plans are after her term is up, but she knows that sustainable agriculture and education are the issues she cares about most. In college, Bea majored in public health and led a student organization that procured an acre of campus to build a new community garden for students, faculty, and town residents to use. She has spent several spring breaks volunteering for Habitat for Humanity as well.



### CESAR'S STORY

Cesar, 33, participates in a faith-based direct-service program, teaching English, life skills, and U.S. citizenship test content to immigrants in a community center in a small city in Massachusetts, far from where he grew up near Tampa, FL. He is considering staying in his new city post-service. Before his term of service, he sold cell phones at a kiosk in a Florida mall, volunteered for a political campaign, and occasionally helped out at a community radio station. He majored in communications in college.

### DIRECT AND INDIRECT SERVICE

Direct service means working directly with an organization's constituents or clients, or doing physical labor as part of one's service. For example, tutoring children; helping low-income people access community services; hanging dry wall in a new house; or building trails.

Indirect service means working on an organization's programs to strengthen its capacity. Examples include developing a volunteer program that recruits and trains school-based tutors; writing grant proposals to fund a community center for low-income adults; soliciting in-kind donations of building materials for a new house; or coordinating the work of trail-building crews.





### DEENA'S STORY

Deena, 47, is in her second year of international service in Ecuador, helping women apply for micro-loans and start up small businesses. She spends most of her time traveling to rural villages without much access to telephones, the internet, or news from outside the local community. She plans to stay abroad once she's ended her term. Before leaving the United States, Deena ran her own bakery for over a decade and volunteered for a local Girl Scouts troop. She graduated from college with a degree in nursing.



### ED'S STORY

Ed, 70 and retired, also serves internationally, teaching English in a middle school in a small city in Southwestern China. A lifelong resident of Pittsburgh, Ed will move to Portland, OR for the first time when he returns to the United States, to be near his adult daughter. Before volunteering abroad, Ed taught high school English for most of his adult life, where he also coached the school's basketball team. He is a Vietnam veteran and after leaving the Service, he studied education and literature in college.

## How this Companion relates to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career* is designed to serve as a targeted supplemental companion to either of the free career guides published by Idealist.org in 2008:

*The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for First-time Job Seekers* by Meg Busse is primarily geared toward emerging professionals seeking their first position in the sector; the intended audience includes college students, recent graduates, and people entering the workforce for the first time. Little or no prior paid work experience is assumed. ([www.idealists.org/beginacareer](http://www.idealists.org/beginacareer))

*The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers* by Steven Joiner is conceived for transitioning professionals pursuing new career options in the non-profit sector; the intended audience includes mid-career professionals (from the for-profit or public sectors), encore careerists, and anyone else who has several years of experience under their belt. ([www.idealists.org/sectorswitcher](http://www.idealists.org/sectorswitcher))

While this *Companion* presents career transition advice within the specific frame of the service corps experience and stands on its own as a book, it frequently makes



reference to relevant discussions and applicable activities contained in the aforementioned *Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*. These references point you toward additional guidance, insights, and resources that can enhance your understanding of various aspects of the career transition. Each reference to content in the *Idealist Guides* is accompanied by the chapter and/or page number for both versions, enabling you to access only the sections of an *Idealist Guide* that you need.

When you want to read a part of an *Idealist Guide* referenced in this *Companion*, you don't have to read both *Idealist Guides*—just choose the version you identify with more closely and download the relevant chapters as PDFs (they're all completely free). If you prefer, you can also download the complete version of either *Idealist Guide* as a PDF (also free).

Although they contain uniquely calibrated information for their intended audiences, both of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* follow the same basic structure, detailed in the table of contents below.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Throughout this book,

you'll see these tie-ins to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*. By following the links, you'll be taken to a page on the Idealist.org website where you can download the chapter as a free PDF.

**Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for First-time Job Seekers**

[www.idealist.org/beginacareer](http://www.idealist.org/beginacareer)

**Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers**

[www.idealist.org/sectorswitcher](http://www.idealist.org/sectorswitcher)

## Table of contents for The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers

<b>Introduction</b>	Opening thoughts: Why do you want to work in the nonprofit sector anyway?
<b>Chapter One</b>	What exactly is a nonprofit? (The answer will surprise you)
<b>Chapter Two</b>	Balancing act: The psychology of the job search
<b>Chapter Three</b>	Self and career assessment: The foundation of a successful job search and career
<b>Chapter Four</b>	Networking: Is it really all about who you know? Yes.
<b>Chapter Five</b>	Become a stronger candidate: Nine ways to get out and involved
<b>Chapter Six</b>	Tools for the job search: Researching <i>all</i> the opportunities in your chosen location
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	Does your work work for you? Evaluating organizational culture
<b>Chapter Eight</b>	Presenting yourself on paper: Resumes and cover letters
<b>Chapter Nine</b>	Presenting yourself in person: Interviews and first impressions
<b>Chapter Ten</b>	Closing the deal: Understanding benefits and the art of negotiation
<b>Chapter Eleven</b>	Staying ready: A career search doesn't end when you get a job
<b>Chapter Twelve</b>	Nonprofit hiring practices: The challenges of the job market
<b>Chapter Thirteen</b>	It's not what you think: Dispelling some misconceptions about the nonprofit world
<b>Chapter Fourteen</b>	Starting your own nonprofit: Five tips, one warning, and eleven first steps
<b>Conclusion</b>	Closing thoughts: Know yourself, the sector, and the points of synergy
<b>Appendix One</b>	Nonprofitspeak 101: A primer on the nonprofit sector's vocabulary



## **Amy Potthast, author of *Service Corps to Social Impact Career***

Amy Potthast, Director of Idealist's Service Initiatives, has served as a Peace Corps volunteer and trainer, an AmeriCorps member, and an AmeriCorps VISTA team leader. At Idealist, Amy has spearheaded the development of new resources, trainings, and events to promote public service careers and graduate education.

Amy has also helped develop and implement the Institute on Public Service Careers (IPSC), recipient of the 2006 National Association of Colleges and Employers/Chevron Award for innovative programming for undergraduate career service professionals. Also in 2006, she developed content for *What's Next: Life After Your Service Year*, the career transitions website for AmeriCorps VISTA (<http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/whatsnext/index.shtml>). In 2007, she earned the Building Bridges Award from the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals for developing the Idealist.org Graduate Degree Fairs for the Public Good. In 2008, she founded The New Service blog ([www.idealistservice.com](http://www.idealistservice.com)). Her work has increasingly focused on highlighting pathways to service corps participation as preparation for school and social impact careers.

### **Idealist.org, the organization behind this book**

[Idealist.org](http://www.idealistservice.com) is an interactive website where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, locate opportunities and supporters, and take steps to turn their good intentions into action. Run by the nonprofit Action Without Borders, Idealist creates opportunities for collaboration among individuals and organizations around the world, receiving over 60,000 unique visitors every day. It is one of the leading resources for nonprofit and public service-oriented people, with thousands of job openings, volunteer opportunities, internships, and events posted by more than 86,000 organizations worldwide.

Beyond the web, Idealist also runs face-to-face events and trainings. Idealist workshops build the capacity of nonprofit human resource professionals, volunteer resource managers, career counselors, job seekers, and others. Since 2004, Idealist has also organized over 120 Nonprofit Career Fairs, 60 Graduate Degree Fairs for the Public Good, and four Global Volunteering Fairs—attracting more than 10,000 organizations and 100,000 individuals from around the world.

Idealist is positioned to play an increasingly crucial role in connecting people to the vast number of diverse citizen service opportunities like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps. Idealist helps people find service opportunities that will strengthen their professional skills while giving them experience contributing to high-need communities throughout the world. Once established in a corps, corps members find career transitions support on Idealist, to help them move on to further education and careers.



## Credits

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Editor and Production Manager: **Eric Fichtl**

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Thanks to **Pam Rechel** of **Brave Heart Consulting** ([www.braveheartconsulting.com](http://www.braveheartconsulting.com)) for contributing the “Translating your experience into job speak” exercise in Part Two.

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This book incorporates elements of the design work of **Kerstin Vogdes** of **kvdesign** ([www.kvdesign.net](http://www.kvdesign.net)), who created the original templates for *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

## Author’s acknowledgments

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## SUMMARY

At the end of each part of this book, you'll find a **summary** of the main points in that part. You'll also find handy **page number cues** to point you to the precise pages where you can read more about a particular topic.

### Disclaimer

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### You are here

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- This is the **Introduction**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealistservice.companion](http://www.idealistservice.companion).

#### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

**Action Without Borders** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. **Idealist.org**, a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career—A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* by Amy Potthast is a product of Action Without Borders' Careers and Service Team based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and domestic and global volunteer opportunities. Published in 2009 by Action Without Borders.



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# PART ONE



## Before your transition

### Setting yourself up for success during your term

#### Part One Overview

Part One is particularly valuable for readers who are still in their service corps. It discusses the following topics:

- **Section one: Discerning your professional calling** (pages 11-17)
  - \* Includes discussions of why discernment matters to service corps participants (page 12), “careering” toward your future (pages 12-13), and tools for discernment (pages 13-15)
- **Section two: Building skills** (pages 18-31)
  - \* Includes discussions of identifying the skills you need (page 18), practicing basic work skills (pages 19-21), keeping track of the skills you need to acquire (pages 22-23), ways to learn new skills (pages 23-27), alternative avenues for training (pages 27-28), and making the most of a bad workshop (pages 28-29)
- **Section three: Building relationships** (pages 31-43)
  - \* Includes discussions of building a network of community partners (pages 32-36), more ways to bolster your professional network (page 37), and alternative and long-distance networking (pages 38-43)
- **Section four: Documenting your successes** (pages 43-47)
  - \* Includes discussions of documenting the facts of your service with statistics (pages 44-45), documenting the artifacts of your service in a portfolio (pages 45-46), and hanging on to your documentation (pages 46-47)

Some corps members prefer to wait until the end of their term to turn their attention to career transitions. Other corps members spend a good part of their service term positioning themselves for their next steps—applying for school, or looking for jobs. Finally, other corps members have a hard time thinking of their service experience and their career path in the same category at all—for them, service is a spiritual calling or an act of social justice—not something to use for their personal advantage.

However you feel about the relationship between your corps experience and your



career, you can take steps that not only help you engage your community more effectively during your term, but also prepare you for a positive and successful transition down the road regardless of the path you take—continuing in a service experience, pursuing higher education, or finding a job.

Part One of this book highlights several of these opportunities—taking time to discern what you'd like to do next; building relationships with people who can influence, support, and guide your choices; building skills you need to succeed now and later; and documenting your achievements.

When most service corps talk about “life after” the corps, the focus is on career search skills, like writing a strong and relevant resume and preparing for an interview. While these skills are crucial, you can afford to wait a bit longer to focus on those—these topics are covered in [Part Two](#) of this *Companion* as relates specifically to corps members, and throughout *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* for a more thorough treatment of these topics.

## Section one: Discerning your professional calling

This section focuses on the many ways you can figure out what you want to do next, given that you are meeting people who move you to rethink your priorities, exposing yourself to so many new career options, learning new skill sets that open the door to new professional roles you can play, and becoming deeply involved with new issue areas that concern you.

Before committing to this term of service, you may have already done some focused thinking about the type of work you want to do in the long term, and the impact you want to have in the world. But if you're like most people, you may still have questions to answer before you can connect your present self to that promising future.

One of the most frustrating and most exhilarating questions of a person's life may be: what should I *do* with it? This is what discernment is all about.

Discernment is the process of figuring out where your passions and values are leading you in your career and life. It may take any of these forms (later you'll find further discussion of each of these tools):

- First-hand experience
- Evaluation
- Observation
- Conversation



- Research
- Reflection, meditation, and/or prayer
- Self assessment

If done correctly, at the end of the process you should feel confident making decisions that influence your career and education. You should also be able to articulate the direction you are headed in, and why.

## Why does discernment matter to a service corps participant?

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Participating in your corps enhances your discernment process by exposing you to all-new experiences, giving you time and a forum to reflect on these experiences, and putting you in touch with new networks of people whom you can learn from, observe, and talk with about their lives and choices.

Discernment during your term of service can help your career because the process will narrow down your many choices, allow you to prioritize your opportunities, and make your search for work or school more efficient. Once you have a sense of the direction you're moving in, you'll know better which networks to join, what questions to ask, which skills to build.

## Careering towards your future

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You may have come into your service term with an unwavering sense of what you'll do when the term ends, and all you want now is some help getting there. On the opposite extreme, you may have no idea at all of what to do next, period, and hoped the term of service would offer you either a refuge from thinking about it for a while or a laboratory of self-reflection and discovery. You may also be somewhere in the middle.

It's probably best not to feel that you have to find one career choice that fits the rest of your life; that's old-school thinking. You may get pressure from others to find a single career path and stick to it but most people acknowledge that the traditional notion of 30-year career is long gone.

If you are participating in a service term at mid-career, you already know that career changes are almost inevitable in the United States today! People change jobs more frequently now than ever before, and the concept of "career" itself is ever-changing.

Steven Joiner, author of *The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers*, likes to point out that an old variant of the word *to careen* is *to career*, as in:

### A PERSONAL STORY

My experience was that often (myself included), folks left their service experience feeling *less* focused on what they wanted to do. Many returned to whatever they were experiencing before their service, but many were confused at all the new roads their lives could take. For example, in college, I studied Peace, War, and Defense, and was sure that I wanted to work for the State Department or the Department of Defense. In hindsight, I was significantly less interested in the peace aspect than the war and defense aspect. I knew a lot about the history of warfare and about the modern threats to international security.

A year working with extremely poor people in the middle of nowhere, far from the constant media bombardment of security concerns in the post-9/11 world, left me confused about what path I should take. On the one hand, I'd been very good at the whole war and defense thing. On the other, I had come to focus on new priorities, realizing that I felt more meaning when I looked at what I could do on a micro level rather than what a defense analyst could theorize about on a macro level, removed from human touch and concern. With this new energy and motivation, though, I had no idea what to do with myself!

— Stacie, a former member of a faith-based service corps



**Career**, (verb): move swiftly and in an uncontrolled way in a specified direction  
(*The car careered across the road and through the hedge.*)

**Career**, (Archaic phrase): “in full career” meaning “at full speed.”

He adds that his own career can be described similarly—moving swiftly and in an uncontrolled way in a specified direction.

Indeed, how swiftly you move on to a new *job*—within the same *career* path you’ve been on, or a new one—may be pretty closely tied to your generation. Increasingly, people are staying in a job for a shorter amount of time than their parents and grandparents. While you may be more prone to move from job to job throughout your career than your grandparents were, that doesn’t necessarily mean you will constantly be launching yourself in new directions.

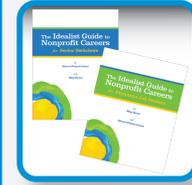
Beyond the discussion of changing *jobs* and *careers*, new fields of employment are emerging all the time—the career path you were born to lead may not even exist right now, even if you are mid-career or beyond.

Recognize that once you have invested in specialized education, started making a salary, and taken on expenses such as a mortgage and/or family, backing out of one path and embarking on another can be quite a challenge. For people at mid-career who’ve chosen to commit to a term of service as a way to switch to public service work from another career, you’re living that challenge. For corps members just starting out, the more you can do now to think through your options and personal compatibility with career choices, the better.

## Tools for discernment

What else can you do during your term to help you discern what’s next for you?

**First-hand experience** includes what you have done in the past and what you are doing during this service term. The more varied experiences you make for yourself, the more information you have to go on. Challenge yourself to try things you never thought you would enjoy, and volunteer in new roles or on new issue areas. If you receive email alerts about volunteer opportunities from Idealist, for example, set wide parameters, so that you find out about a range of organizations, volunteer roles, and social concerns. Be proactive about taking on varied roles during your term. Many programs offer opportunities to participate in corps recruitment, development, or research and evaluation, or to learn more about the history of the community you’re working in (especially if it’s new to you).



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

For an interesting discussion of nonlinear careers, see the **Introduction** to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealist.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/introduction.html](http://www.idealist.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/introduction.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealist.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/introduction.html](http://www.idealist.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/introduction.html)

### FAMOUS 20TH CENTURY CAREER CHANGERS

**Shirley Chisholm** was a teacher and educational consultant before entering elected office at the state, then federal, levels. In her mid-forties, she became the first black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

**Dorothy Day** was a journalist until her thirties when she helped found the first Catholic Worker House, a hospitality house that offers food, clothing, and shelter to people in need.

**Mohandas K. Gandhi** was a practicing lawyer in his mid-twenties when he began to dedicate his life and efforts to social activism. He went on to play a leading role in India’s independence from British colonial rule.

**Sargent Shriver**, first Peace Corps director, switched career directions many times and brought lessons learned from each stage of his career into the next. A law school graduate and World War II veteran, Shriver became a journalist, then managed an office building, led several government agencies, was appointed ambassador to France, and even ran for vice-president.



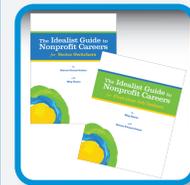
**Evaluation** is key to discernment. What kinds of activities, people, and environments give you more energy? Which activities, people, or environments leave you feeling depleted and empty? Also consider all the aspects of an experience. You may like the perks of a given job—for example, teachers may have summers off. But do you like working with kids, in a school, meeting testing standards, and not being able to vacation at the time of your choosing? Traveling with a job may sound fun, but if you are on the road a lot during your term of service, consider whether it's a compatible lifestyle for you. Do you like sustained contact with friends, family, pets? Do you recharge by spending time at home? Is tending your garden important to you?

**Observation** gives you a chance to see for yourself what different opportunities involve, and to see if they're for you—without participating first-hand. Occasionally, throughout your service term, take a morning or a day to shadow other people on the job to get a stronger idea of what their work actually entails. You may never have had a chance to work on an organic farm, but if you could spend a day or two seeing farmers in action, maybe even working alongside them and asking questions about their work, you'd get a more vivid understanding of farm work. Public interest law may sound good to you, but it's not something you can practice without a huge commitment of time, finances, and studies. But shadowing a lawyer or observing in a firm are ways to give yourself a clearer sense of what you'd be doing as a lawyer.

**Conversation** with professionals in your target field gives you a chance to introduce yourself to potential colleagues and employers, listen to advice, and ask questions of people who are already engaged in the types of careers you are considering. Informational interviewing is one format for these conversations (see sidebar). Informally, you can chat with people about their work and education at parties, community events, family reunions, online, and other settings.

**Research** is the way to find out what jobs, organizations, and/or degrees exist, what benefits you can expect from different career paths, where your skill set is most valued on the job market, and much more. The Career Tracks Exercise (see below) is one form of research.

**Reflection, meditation, and/or prayer** can play important roles for some people when making major life decisions. Consider using vacation time away from your service site to take part in a retreat or solo exploration if that would help you gather your thoughts. Or consult with leaders of your faith community about resources and traditions you can tap into that will help you. Faith-based service corps often organize gatherings that focus on how corps members can live out their faith beyond the service term.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Observation is an important part of evaluating organizational culture, a topic discussed at length in **Chapter Seven** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch7.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch7.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch7.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch7.html)

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS 101

Informational interviews are a way to learn about your career options by interviewing the people who are already following a path that looks compelling to you. An informational interview is usually a very brief (about a half hour) exploratory chat with a person who has insights into a position, educational field, career path, organization, field of expertise, or issue area. It is not a job interview, nor is it ever an appropriate time to ask for a job. In an informational interview, your objective is to gather as much information and advice as possible, and to make contacts in the occupational areas and/or organizations that most interest you. You can do them in person, over email, online through video chat like Skype, or on the phone.

Read more about initiating and conducting an informational interview in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.



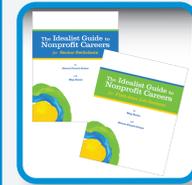
**Self assessment.** Finally, Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers* provides a number of self-assessment strategies and exercises that can help you frame your thinking about your future work.

**The Four Lens Framework** approach, developed by The Office of Career Services of New York University’s Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, aims to help you think more clearly about your career prospects by narrowing down what exactly you mean when you say “I want to work in education,” or “I want to work for the environment.” The four lenses refer to the primary frame you look through when viewing your career path: *organization*, *role*, *system*, and *issue*. If you come to this work through the *issue* lens, for example, you’re likely to be committed to a cause you care about—anything from women’s health to urban education to organic farming. You can start there and explore: what *organizations* are effecting change on this issue? What *role* can I best play in furthering this cause? What *system* do I see myself working within—a small, informal grassroots organization in start-up mode? A large, national nonprofit with a strict hierarchy and a significant budget? A university? A hospital? Read more about The Four Lenses Framework in Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

**The Career Tracks Exercise**, also developed by the Office of Career Services at NYU Wagner, gives you a way to explore job openings that inspire you—either because of the position description or the organization. The idea behind the exercise is to collect around 50 job descriptions that appeal to you because of either the kind of organization that’s hiring, or the type of job itself. Do not limit yourself to any of the following criteria: job location, salary, or whether you are qualified to do the work. This exercise is more about what resonates with you than what you can actually do now, so cast a wide net! After collecting the job descriptions, analyze them to find commonalities—career tracks—and construct one to five such tracks that help you decide and prioritize your next steps. Career tracks can include issues, roles, organizations, or systems—and connect directly with one (or all) of the four lenses (see above). The exercise also emphasizes skills and networks you may need to enhance. You can find the full description of the exercise in Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

**The personal mission statement** activity by Cathy Wasserman also may help you. She encourages you to write your own mission statement to clarify your big-picture vision of your life’s work, so that you avoid “mission drift”—taking on jobs and responsibilities not consistent with your true values.

During your service term, take advantage of these self-assessment exercises as you discern your career calling.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

To access the three self-

assessment exercises described here, as well as useful tips on researching salary ranges, see **Chapter Three** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html)

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## LISTEN TO A PODCAST

Check out the Idealist.org Careers podcast interview with David Schachter of NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service:

[http://idealists.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=323295](http://idealists.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=323295)





### ACE'S STORY: DISCERNMENT

Ace is spending his term weatherizing old buildings and learning what makes new construction projects eligible for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

As he carries out his service, he finds himself happier than he's ever been before—he loves the physical nature of the work. He really feels like a junior expert in his field, and that he has the potential to become a leader.

He is also meeting professionals from all around New Orleans who have seen his leadership potential in action. They regard him differently than anyone has ever looked at him before. It changes his own feelings about what he's capable of. He works side by side with these experts, observing them and capitalizing on their years of practice.

Ace has cultivated a mentor—an established contractor who has been willing to share the ups and downs of a career in green building. Through conversations with his mentor, and his own family, Ace is moving towards a career in **roles** that affect greening **issues**—weatherizing buildings or installing green technology. Because the field of green building is still young, and on the cusp of exploding, Ace is confident that he has a satisfying future career. He is optimistic about working within a **system** that straddles profit and the public good.

Ace's process of discernment has included **first-hand experience, evaluation, observation, and conversation**. He also realizes he's entering work through three of the four lenses: **role, issue, and system**.



### CESAR'S STORY: DISCERNMENT

Cesar teaches English in a community center for immigrants in Massachusetts through a faith-based service corps. Before he joined the corps, he appreciated the creativity he could employ in his old job selling mobile phones, and the amount of money he was able to earn. But he has found that the intangible rewards of helping recent immigrants find their way in the United States satisfies a higher calling.

Looking to his future, Cesar faces an obstacle. He's reluctant to consider his service term as a stepping stone to a career. In heeding the call to serve, he's primarily wanted to explore a deeper connection to his faith—not to add new skill sets to his resume. He feels uncomfortable capitalizing on his experiences this year to move himself up a career ladder.



## CESAR'S STORY (CONTINUED)

At a mid-year retreat for his corps, Cesar's spiritual advisor points out that although the motivation for service may be altruistic, the skills a person builds are authentic, and can open the door to a lifelong career in service to humanity.

Through prayer and reflection, Cesar comes to share this outlook. He eventually becomes certain that his next steps will involve working to improve life conditions for all people, and possibly earning a graduate degree in a related field.

He starts the Career Tracks Exercise, collecting job postings that appeal to him based on **type of organization** or **role within the organization**. When he's collected dozens of job postings, he realizes that the **system** that most appeals to him is a small, grassroots organization, because it would allow him to be creative and entrepreneurial—qualities he liked in his old job.

What he likes about his teaching role this year is that he has a direct connection with his students, and that his days have a lot of variety. But he doesn't see himself as a teacher for the long term, because he dislikes having a narrow focus on the classroom, and would rather have an impact on the organization as a whole. Working in a smaller organization would allow him to build its capacity, and would guarantee his contact with constituents, as well as his ability to wear many hats.

Cesar's process of discernment involved **first-hand experience**, **evaluation**, **prayer**, **talking with a spiritual mentor**, and **research**. By using the Career Tracks Exercise, he discovered the **kind of organization (system)** he would prefer to work within, as well as the **kind of job description (role)** and impact he'd like to have.

Discernment during your term of service strengthens your service experience by sharpening your senses and encouraging you to take on new opportunities and responsibilities. The process can bring direction to your work, and strengthen confidence in your response to those nagging "What will you do next year?" questions. Giving your career path direction also helps you to prioritize which additional skills you need to develop, as well as which additional relationships are important to nurture.



Discernment strengthens your confidence in responding to those nagging "What will you do next year?" questions."



## Section two: Building skills

This section explores moving closer to your career goals by building skills that you can use during your term and beyond. After you identify the skills you need, you can practice general job-readiness and new technical skills during the regular course of your service. You can also seek out training by joining workshops in your community or online, taking on a volunteer position, or enrolling in a class. Finally, there's a discussion of constructive steps you can take if you find yourself in a lousy workshop.

Your term of service is an ideal time to build new skills because:

- You need skills to perform well
- Your service corps program likely offers skills training for you
- You have time to practice the new skills you learn
- You can discover new aptitudes

Because you aren't a permanent staff member at your site, you may even find your colleagues are more willing to give you room to make mistakes as you build new skills—an essential element to your learning process.

Building skills can also be part of discernment—offering you new, first-hand experiences that you may love or hate, that you may feel adept in or miserable at. Ask yourself, do some skills come more naturally than others? Do you enjoy exercising some of your new skill sets?

Give yourself time to improve—and pay attention to how much you enjoy practicing the different skills.

Skill building can also help you move closer to achieving professional goals you've identified through the process of discernment. If you decide you'd like to become a social worker, for example, you can find ways throughout your term to build skills useful for a career in social work, like community organizing and counseling.

### Identifying the skills you need

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Consider which skills you want to build: skills you need to carry out your service (you should get ample training during your term), and skills you may need for your future career. The two skill sets may or may not directly overlap. If they are very different, you have more of a challenge in getting the skills you need—but service is all about being resourceful!

To find out which new skills would be helpful to you *now*, think about the tasks



ahead of you that seem the most daunting. Look through your position description and work plan to see what lies ahead.

- Are you overwhelmed that you have to spread the word about an event coming up? Learning some approaches to marketing could help you.
- Have you always dreaded having to speak in public? You may benefit from a speech workshop.
- Does the thought of fundraising make you queasy? Cultivating a mentor who has development experience may make all the difference in your level of confidence.

## Practicing basic work skills

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In addition to the technical skills you need to do your job well, other areas in which to seek support and training may address your ability to be happy and productive in a work environment, as well as your ability to successfully look and apply for jobs at the end of your term.

Especially if you are new to the workforce, use your service term to practice basic work skills that will be helpful to you for the rest of your professional life.<sup>1</sup>

### Locus of control and responsibility

Developed in the 1950s and 1960s by psychologist Julian Rotter, the term *locus of control* refers to your sense of what causes good and bad outcomes in your life.<sup>2</sup>

If you have a high *internal* locus of control, you feel confident that the actions you take contribute to your successes and failures. People who believe they have control over their own lives tend to be in better command of their own behavior, and to be more civically and politically engaged. They are motivated to make an effort because they feel their effort will succeed. People with high internal locus of control can also be plagued by anxiety when confronted by everyday situations that are truly out of their hands, such as getting stuck in traffic.

If you have a high *external* locus of control, you feel that your fate is in the hands or circumstance of others. People who believe they have little or no control over their lives tend to cope better with terminal illness because they don't blame themselves for getting sick in the first place. But a high external locus of control can also lead to

#### LOCUS OF CONTROL

The Serenity Prayer, most commonly attributed to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous, illustrates a balanced locus of control:

God grant me the serenity

To accept the things I cannot change;

Courage to change the things I can;

And wisdom to know the difference.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the following skill sets are part of the career transitions curriculum of the Heart of Oregon AmeriCorps ([www.heartoforegon.org](http://www.heartoforegon.org)), a Civic Justice Corps program in which the AmeriCorps members are previously court-involved youth who earn their GED and prepare to enter the workforce during their service term.

<sup>2</sup> Rotter, J.B. *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1954



frustration and anti-social behavior. You feel that no matter what you do, your needs won't be met, so you may resort to desperate measures.

During your term of service you can start to build a realistic sense of how your own actions contribute to your successes and failures. Taking fair responsibility for the positive and negative outcomes of your efforts can build your confidence, decrease your anxiety, and allow you to identify and grow from your own deeds—whether they were carried out well or poorly.

## **Accepting criticism**

As a person develops a stronger belief that their actions do influence their outcomes, accepting constructive criticism will become easier. Rather than feeling your supervisor unfairly picked on you and blamed you for a situation you had no control over, you can start to evaluate for yourself what you can do to improve your outcomes.

Hearing that someone disagrees with you or your actions usually stings at least a bit—more so if the person offering you feedback adopts a harsh tone. During your term, practice listening calmly to critiques of your performance. Rather than defending yourself right away, take time to think about what you've heard (take notes if that will help you). Where is the truth in what you've heard? What might be a misunderstanding that you can clear up? Where can you improve? What help do you need in order to improve?

When you are ready, go back to the person who provided the criticism, and be ready to apologize, accept responsibility, ask clarifying questions, and/or explain your side of things if it's necessary.

## **Keeping the job**

During your service term, you will have a chance to adopt professional habits and skills that can help you hold on to your position—allowing you to participate in the corps till the scheduled end of the term, and also preparing you for a job once your term ends.

Habits that will help you in the long term include:

- arriving to work on time
- communicating with your supervisor when you'll be late or absent
- respecting that your supervisor has authority
- asking for help when you need it
- prioritizing your tasks
- sticking to deadlines

Skills that will help you keep your job include understanding how to resolve conflicts with your supervisor and peers, and how to communicate your needs clearly.



## Resolving conflicts

Understanding what causes conflict and how to work through it (rather than avoid it) can be a particularly useful topic to explore during your term—one that can lead to a more successful work life later on. Practicing conflict resolution for your own conflicts, or to help mediate others, is also a useful skill.

Personal conflict occurs when something or someone is interfering with having your needs met, or vice versa. Needs can range from eating lunch to feeling confident in a leadership role. A famous theory about needs is Maslow's hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> Usually represented as a pyramid, his model illustrates that people need many things, not just food and shelter. As you meet your most basic needs, you can start fulfilling higher-order needs such as that for love and belonging, esteem, and living out your potential in life.

When your needs aren't being met, some understandable reactions are:

- ignoring the conflict, but silently seething about the person or situation you think is responsible for causing it, which can cause the conflict to grow.
- suggesting a way to solve the problem and then arguing with others who have come up with their own solution. The various solutions are called *positions*.

The trick is to address the conflict, directly with people you think can help you, and listen to each other's *needs*—rather than emphasize each of your *positions*. By having a conversation about your needs, you can brainstorm a longer list of possible solutions that satisfy everyone's needs.



### ACE'S STORY: RESOLVING CONFLICTS

Ace arrives at his service site daily at 8:15. His team leader Zoe has made it clear that the start time for everyone is 8:00. Otherwise, Ace is a stellar corps member and everyone looks up to him. Ace's *position* is that he can't arrive earlier, period, and he feels he's being singled out for something trivial. He works hard and doesn't deserve to be treated like a sixth-grader. Zoe's *position* is that Ace shouldn't get special treatment. The rule is to arrive at 8:00a.m.

They could go back and forth all day arguing about what time Ace arrives. Instead, Ace explains that because he has to drop his daughter off at school at 7:45, he simply can't make it to the service site till 8:15. He has no control over the bus schedule. He needs to be able to drop his daughter off at a time she'll be supervised and safe, and he has no control over what time the school's breakfast starts. No one else in his family can take her, and she's too young to take the bus herself. His hands are tied.

<sup>3</sup> Maslow, A.H. "A Theory of Human Motivation" *Psychological Review* Vol 50, No 4, 1943



## ACE'S STORY (CONTINUED)

Zoe explains that if Ace, one of the strongest on the team, shows up late daily without consequence, the rest of the team wonders why they can't also arrive late—and in fact more corps members have been tardy lately, probably as a result of her leniency with Ace. Zoe also points out that this corps experience is something of a job-training program. Ace would have to arrive on time to any other job, or he'd lose it. It's unrealistic to think he can hold down a job where he's always late. His tardiness also means the team has to wait for him every morning to go over the day's assignment, and that delay means they are late loading into the van that takes them to the day's green building site. And *that* delay means they have less time to carry out their service. Ace's daily tardiness impacts the whole team, and reflects badly on Zoe as the leader.

Once Ace and Zoe hear each other out, they understand the problems better. They can think of a range of solutions such as:

- Zoe could help Ace find a ride from the school to the site every morning instead of his depending on the bus.
- Zoe could shift the day's schedule back by 15 minutes for all corps members since others have struggled to arrive on time—so the day would officially start and end 15 minutes later.

In the end, Ace finds a ride with a corps member who lives near his daughter's school. Resolving the conflict wasn't too difficult—but if they hadn't listened to what each other really needed, the tension would have mounted and morale among the team members would have begun to erode. The team would have lost productivity as well as respect for Ace and for Zoe.

## Keeping track of the skills you need to acquire

To come up with a list of skills you'd like to develop for your future career ambitions, do The Career Tracks Exercise described on page 15 of this *Companion* and examine the job descriptions you've collected. What qualifications and skills are required of the jobs you might like to hold in the future? As you draw up your list of required skills, you'll likely see strengths you don't yet possess. If that list of new skills is long, you may feel overwhelmed—but don't lose hope. Figure out which competencies you have a chance to gain this year, and go for it.

If you work best with charts and graphs, you may want to create a skills calendar for yourself that takes into consideration both short- and long-term career goals. Using your work plan or job description, you can figure out which skills you'll develop during your service term. You may have some of these skills already, or you may need

## LEARNING LOGISTICS THE HARD WAY

During my first City Year, I had the opportunity to co-organize a service project for about 50 people. The project was cleaning a church basement which had been neglected for years, and was needed as a community space and day-care center. My co-organizer and I worked for many hours planning every detail of the project, based on what we'd witnessed during our corps year so far. We planned a team-building activity to start the day; we divided the work into discrete tasks and estimated the amount of time and people needed to complete each of them; we solicited in-kind donations for lunch; we made sure we had lots of water; we even identified the nearest hospital in case of an emergency. We thought we were ready!

The day of the service project arrived, and everything was off to a good start. People were in good spirits, and the pastor of the church was thrilled with the progress we were making. At the end of the day, though, we had filled about 45 trash bags, which were overflowing into the church's neighbors' backyards! We hadn't arranged for a dumpster or a trash pick-up, so we were in trouble. My co-organizer and I felt terrible that we hadn't foreseen this abundance of trash. It was a logistical lesson I haven't forgotten. Now, garbage and recycling collection is one of the first things I think of when planning a project!

—Hannah Kane, former City Year corps member and Senior Project Manager, Website and Multimedia Production, Idealist.org



more training. If you have a sense of what professional development skills you need in order to accomplish your future career goals, you can use a skills calendar to figure out if there are any additional roles you can volunteer for to garner these experiences.

### Skills calendar

Timeframe	Task	Skill sets I'll use	Do I have this skill?	Training I need	Additional skills I could seek via this project
This week	Compose newsletter article	Writing	Some-what	Find out how to write a compelling opening paragraph	Help proofread newsletter, learn layout software
Next month	Parents Night	Event planning, marketing	Event planning	Need marketing know-how	Asking local businesses for in-kind donations of refreshments

## Ways to learn new skills

The next several pages offer some suggestions for inexpensive ways to get the training you need.

### On-the-job training

Look for new opportunities within your service assignment to build skills. Consider projects that enable you to better serve your constituents, and that let you add your target skills to your resume.

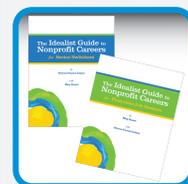
Here are some examples of ways you can find opportunities to practice new skill sets during your term:

- become a better facilitator by leading a meeting
- gain development skills by organizing a fundraising campaign (if your program permits you to fundraise)
- hone your networking skills by representing your organization at a community event
- develop volunteer management skills by becoming a volunteer leader at a community service project
- develop your writing and editing skills by starting a blog; invite other corps members, colleagues, or organizational constituents to contribute.

The key to on-the-job training is finding mentors who will guide you, help you process successes and failures, and teach you about effective practices so that you can do your best work.

### ABOUT MENTORS

Seek out a mentor to help you get started developing new areas of expertise you need for your service assignment. Your mentor can be a counterpart at your own, or another, organization. Find mentors through local and national professional associations for your field, or by asking the people responsible for training you. For example, if you're recruiting and managing volunteers, seek a mentor who is the volunteer resource manager at another nonprofit in your area and/or who is available to help you over email (if you are serving remotely).



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

You can read more about cultivating mentors as well as gaining skills through volunteering and interning in **Chapter Five** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

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## Attending workshops and trainings

Many service corps and host sites are supportive of professional development and getting you the training you need to do your best work. Your service corps may offer mandatory or optional trainings. You may also locate training opportunities in your community and online.

Professional development has manifold benefits. Participation in professional development workshops demonstrates your interest in and commitment to building necessary skills. Having relevant training in your dossier will inform prospective employers about your commitment to learning the skills you need to succeed.

Skill building allows you to excel in implementing your project, and can help you learn some skills faster than you would simply through on-the-job training. Later in your career you may not have as frequent and cost-free access to professional development as you do now, so it literally pays to take advantage of training when it comes along.

Attending workshops takes little time compared to enrolling in a course, certification program, or graduate degree program, because workshops typically meet once for a few hours, and any homework you walk away with is yours to create and complete. Even service corps that prohibit corps members from going to school part-time often support member efforts to seek out community-based workshops.

The following discussion takes a look at places to find training—online, in your community, and through your service corps. The information here may also prove useful for people who have already made the transition to a new job following a term of service.

### Who offers professional development workshops?

When looking for training during your term of service, you should start in two places: your service corps program staff and/or your host site supervisor.

Chances are good that if you have a service corps program director or team leader who organizes your group's trainings, they want to know what skills you need. Speak up! Even if they don't ask, be proactive about requesting specific skills training, and brainstorm with them about free and alternative ways to find the professional development you need.

Some service corps participants have the luxury of accessing training in their local host community. You should also feel free asking your host site supervisor for help—they may have put some training funds in the budget when they applied to host you. Even if there's no additional money to help you access training, your

### COMMUNICATE YOUR TRAINING NEEDS

Different people have different attitudes about professional development during their service term. Some people love the opportunity to come together with other corps members or professionals to learn new skills in a workshop setting, or to learn online at their own pace. Others dislike the disruption from their service, or find gatherings a waste of time. Especially if you find yourself resisting mandatory in-service training, note that the abundant training opportunities will likely slow down once you've transitioned to a job. Many recent service corps alumni find that, for better or for worse, it's hard to access as many professional development options once their term is over.

If you're unhappy about your program's workshop offerings, or if you need training that you aren't getting, please speak up! Talk to the people responsible for training you: a program officer, team leader, site supervisor, or host country counterpart. Asking for help can be challenging. So can pinpointing what training you need, especially when you are new to a skill or field. As you build relationships with people during your term, share the challenges you face and learn from them which methods, skill sets, and solutions you might try.



supervisor is more likely to be well connected to your community and to know where you can look for free training.

For corps members serving remotely (internationally or domestically), you may not find formal training in your town. Look to people you know in your community who have the skills your project requires. Reach out to request assistance and mentoring from them. You may know a fellow corps member in another region who can come work on your project for a while, in exchange for your offering help on their project another time.

Outside of your service networks, you may find professional development workshops offered by technical assistance providers, foundations, and community groups (keep reading for a full discussion). Look for online trainings if you are serving in a remote location and/or overseas.

**Management support or technical assistance organizations** focus on supporting nonprofit professionals through workshops on a range of topics—from administering budgets and using new technology to being a more effective manager of staff and volunteers. To find a support organization near you, see the sidebar at right.

Similarly, **local foundations** often organize professional development workshops. To find out about these workshops, you could start by finding local foundations in your area and searching their websites, and talking with people already established in the field.

The local chapter of **your field's professional association** might offer conferences or regular meetings with guest speakers on relevant topics. Regional and national associations typically have annual meetings with workshops as well. Be sure to ask whether event fees can be discounted or waived; also find out if student chapters exist in your area (where costs may be more affordable). Your professional association may offer certification that helps you stand out in your field.

When looking for professional associations, don't limit yourself to those that operate solely within your sector or use the language you are used to. Note that many job functions are equivalent in nonprofit, business, and government sectors—often just the names change. For example, what's commonly known as “marketing” at a company is thought of as “outreach” for many nonprofits, and “public affairs” for government agencies. Terms will differ across languages and cultures as well.

Another place to find professional development gatherings is with **community**

## FINDING WORKSHOPS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Besides the specific organizations listed in the main discussion here, many others all over the world post their events, including workshops, on **Idealist.org**. If you don't already get email alerts from Idealist about events coming up in your city, go to your control panel and edit your email alert options. If you are not a member of Idealist yet, go to our homepage to join (it's free!).

Idealist's **Nonprofit FAQ** ([www.idealists.org/it/i/en/faq/166-227/85-56](http://www.idealists.org/it/i/en/faq/166-227/85-56)) lists nonprofit support organizations throughout the United States and around the world.

Most areas have some kind of listserv these days to keep the nonprofit community in touch. The Young Nonprofit Professionals Network is an association with 25 local chapters across the United States that often host an active listserv. Many states and provinces have an association of nonprofits with websites and/or e-newsletters that can keep you updated about relevant opportunities. Similarly, weekly or daily newspapers often feature community calendars. If you don't know where workshops are advertised in your community, ask for leads at your local nonprofit association, in your program director's office, at your service site, or during a volunteer activity. Someone will know.

Don't forget to ask your fellow service corps participants and leaders in your community who they know and what skills they have—you may have a lot to learn from each other.



**groups** that meet regularly, like foreign language conversation groups in your community, groups of former Peace Corps Volunteers or AmeriCorps members, and Toastmasters (an association that helps people develop public speaking and leadership skills). Often a public library will offer lunchtime speaker series and other community events, which you can inquire about at an information desk. Finally, natural food markets and other community-minded businesses that have space may offer workshops on a variety of topics including professional development.

### **What to look for in workshops**

The workshops designed by your service program should have your needs in mind, including restrictions you may face in implementing your project. Ideally, they should also be targeted to your level of experience and be realistic about your timeframe. If they are not, let your program director know what you need.

Here are some things to look and ask for in a workshop:

- **Community-specific, practical information.** For example, if the workshop is about marketing, get ideas for marketing your programs in the local media, leads on local graphic designers with whom you could work to design materials, and so on.
- **A hands-on practice component,** which allows you to try out a new skill under the guidance of your instructor before having to perfect the skill on the job. For example, a workshop on conflict resolution might involve role-playing a mediation in which you could practice getting two conflicting parties to come to some kind of solution.
- **Time for networking.** Because you are likely in the room with corps members or local professionals who are looking for the same type of information or skills as you, you'll meet people you can learn from and who can learn from you. Meeting only once for a few hours does not give you the extended time, however, to build relationships with workshop classmates. You'll have to be intentional about following up with new contacts. Try to get the email addresses of two to three new people that you meet at training events. Every gathering is an opportunity to network.
- **Highly relevant, practical information, including “takeaways”**—new tools, resources, or ways of doing things that you can implement as soon as you get back to your service site. The workshop format typically does not lend itself to the exploration of theory, but if that is important to you, ask the facilitator to recommend books you can find later at the library.

### **Online or distance training**

Advancing technology expands training options. You can learn a lot by reading online, and you can also take part in actual training sessions offered from a distance.



Professional associations, foundations, and other groups that offer professional development opportunities may hold workshops the old-fashioned way—in a room where you meet people face-to-face, converse, and even enjoy refreshments! Other times these groups may hold the workshops via a web connection and conference call as a “webinar.” Webinars are often easier to access (you don’t have to leave your home or office), and typically feature a speaker who narrates a Powerpoint presentation and may invite participation from workshop attendees over the phone or by instant messaging. You may learn to prefer one type of workshop over the others. Because of the costs of hosting “webinars,” a fee may be attached to participate. But many nonprofit providers offer their workshops for free or at a low-cost. Here are two examples:

- **The Resource Center** ([www.nationalserviceresources.org](http://www.nationalserviceresources.org)), a federally-owned website and repository of national service resources and effective practices, offers free online training and recorded webinars on a range of topics. Anyone can access the resources for free. Designed especially for domestic service corps program staff and participants, international volunteers may also find several of their web-based sessions to be useful. The technical assistance providers and trainers who submit tools and effective practices to The Resource Center work hard to make sure the offerings posted there are accessible to people of all abilities.
- **Techsoup** ([www.techsoup.org/hsc/webinars/](http://www.techsoup.org/hsc/webinars/)) offers nonprofit professionals free webinars on a range of topics related to using technology and social media to meet organizational fundraising, marketing, volunteer recruitment, and general operational needs.

## **Alternative avenues for training**

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Besides formal professional development training, other avenues for building skills include:

- **Volunteering (to bolster and gain new experience).** Outside of your service hours, sharing your time and talents with a nonprofit or school expands your networks, lets you explore new skill areas, and gives you a chance to work on issues unrelated to your service project (if you want). Some service corps allow you to count occasional volunteer hours toward your service commitment.
- **Going to school part-time, or taking one class at a time.** Most people think of going back to school as an all-or-nothing proposition. But going to school part-time (or full-time) while you continue to work, or serve in a corps, has advantages for your school, your employer or service corps, and you—such as giving you a theoretical framework for understanding your service experience; increasing the level of skill you offer your host organization; and sharing your networks and real-world insights with others in the classroom. Some corps,

### **LISTEN TO A PODCAST**

Check out The New Service podcast from Idealist.org about The Resource Center:

<http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2009/04/17/theresourcecenterpodcast/>



such as AmeriCorps VISTA, do not allow current corps members to enroll in school. Other programs, such as Mississippi Teacher Corps, are designed to allow participants to pursue graduate school during their term of service. Read more about graduate education on the Idealist.org Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center, [www.idealists.org/gradschool](http://www.idealists.org/gradschool).

## **On making the most of a lousy workshop**

Sometimes workshop facilitators, bless their hearts, fail. Experts they may be, but their ability to convey their knowledge can fall flat if they aren't aware of their audience's particular needs, or if they appear arrogant or uncomfortable in front of a crowd. In an attempt to be humorous—or to make a complex topic easier to understand—they may even offend you.

Likewise, it sometimes happens that corps members—mandated to attend workshops, taking time out of their busy schedule at the service site—show up to required trainings with a negative attitude. Or it may be that the topic covered in a mandated workshop is not something a corps member thinks they need to learn about.

Lest you walk into any of the above scenarios, here are some words of encouragement and caution.

Keep an open mind; unless you are participating in a corps after years of relevant experience, you may have a lot to learn—listen closely, follow up on references and resources mentioned during the workshop, and ask questions that help the facilitator make the workshops more relevant to you (but don't monopolize the time!). Even if the workshop is a “failure” or a “waste of time”, there should be plenty of follow-up—resources, contacts, etc.—to make your time worthwhile over the long run.

Workshop presenters usually try their best to transfer relevant information to you, and they are probably not responsible for the rule that forces you to be at the workshop. So cut them some slack. That said, you will inevitably run into a workshop that you'd prefer to run out of. In this case, it's time to take action. (Keep a copy of the list below in your wallet; you may want to refer to it when you are in a lousy workshop.)



## Tactics to survive a lousy workshop

If you find yourself in a workshop that really does need some improvement, be proactive:

- If you notice that the rest of the crowd has also lost interest, or is about to start throwing tomatoes, attempt to be a good sport by raising your hand when invited to offer ideas, or to ask questions. Challenge yourself to participate—it will keep you occupied.
- Learn from negative examples. If certain workshop conventions bug you—say, the use of icebreakers—make a point never to employ those conventions during workshops you lead. If your facilitator is making wild assumptions about who is in the room, note the importance of researching the audience prior to your next speaking engagement.
- Maintain your professionalism as much as you are able; resist the urge to write notes to your peers sitting near you. They may actually be getting something out of the workshop. (After the event ends, feel free to explore this very question with them.)
- Make a list of what you had hoped to get from the workshop so that you know what to look for elsewhere once you leave.
- When you've reached the end of your rope, take a deep breath and try drawing a perfect circle. Really, try it.
- Offer constructive feedback on evaluation forms; it really doesn't help to adopt a nasty tone on these.
- Approach workshop organizers about your concerns, after the event is over. Be kind.
- Volunteer to share your knowledge by facilitating your own workshop at the next event, or to organize an Open Space session (see sidebar).
- Remember to use the event for networking, including chatting with acquaintances and people you've never met, gathering contact information, and following up with them later on.

Many recent alumni of service corps are shocked when they start their first post-corps position, because regular occurrences of free, mandated, in-service professional development opportunities are no longer available. When you have graduated from your program and are busy in a new job, you may sorely miss the emphasis on training and skills development that you've grown accustomed to as a corps member. Take time now to bask in opportunities for new knowledge and networking with others in your program.

## OPEN SPACE

Open Space, or Open Space Technology, is a kind of conference structure where participants establish and run their own working sessions around themes important to them, such as “conflict resolution at the service site,” or “effective practices for running focus groups.” After the topics are proposed, participants choose the session they'd like to be part of—and can leave whenever they'd like to check out a different session. A participant facilitates each session, while another member of the group takes notes to share with the larger conference. While the idea of conference participants breaking off to talk about their own topics seems chaotic at first, it's actually an efficient way for many people to get what they need out of a conference session. Usually only one or two time slots are given to Open Space, while the rest of the day is structured more traditionally.

To learn more about the model, check out [OpenSpaceWorld.org](http://OpenSpaceWorld.org).





### BEA'S STORY: BUILDING SKILLS

Bea has started her term of service with a better-than-average grasp of sustainable agriculture and public health concepts—some of the central issue areas she is tackling during her term.

But she soon realizes that her role this year—connecting public school cafeterias with local farms—requires skill sets beyond her experiences. For example, getting cafeteria workers to consent to change their menus to provide healthier options requires creating and working with budgets. Negotiating an agreement between local organic farmers and the school board requires mediation and even some background in putting together basic contracts.

She emails Jim, her service corps' team leader (a corps member serving a second year, whose role is to support Bea and others on the team), to find out if negotiation, mediation, or budgeting will be covered in upcoming workshops. Jim writes back that budgeting will be covered in the context of personal financial management, but nothing more than that. He also says they will soon offer a conflict mediation workshop but that it wouldn't go into contracts at all. He recommends contacting a local nonprofit that provides "technical assistance" training, to see if anything like that is offered there. He also isn't sure she should be taking on the responsibility of contract negotiation herself.

In the end Bea does get the support she needs in budgeting, and in addition to the training, the workshop presenter offers resources Bea can check out on her own at the library. She also begins to understand the essential elements in mediating an agreement with two sides. However, her efforts to build skills around basic contracts stall. Her host site is reluctant to pay the costly fee for her to attend a class in contract development, and she doesn't make it very far reading a book on the topic on her own. However, her site supervisor agrees to recruit a pro bono attorney to help Bea with that piece of her service project.

As Bea connects with skills training, she learns that her passion for the **issue** of sustainable agriculture isn't in itself enough to build a career. She also needs to figure out what **role** she is suited to play. She finds that she really likes educating cafeteria workers and the kids about nutritious ways of eating. She also likes working with the local farmers to develop a subscription model for the school district to buy their produce throughout the year, and to increase their access to new consumers. She feels that consumers are the key to succeeding for small organic farms. But Bea dislikes what she's observed of the legal nitty-gritty of contract work. She resolves not to become a lawyer. She also dislikes working within the bureaucracy of the public school **system**, where so many layers exist for decision making.



**Building skills throughout the term is a great way to work on the career transition."**

Building skills throughout the term is a great way to work on your career transition. Building skills helps you be more effective in your service role, and prepares you for



taking on leadership roles when it's time to move on. It also helps you further narrow down your next steps because you can draw from an abundance of first-hand experience. You may be surprised at how naturally some skills come to you, or how much joy you derive from employing them. You can also learn which areas are a struggle for you—and either accept your limitations or work harder to overcome them if it's critical to your future. Your term of service is an opportune time to focus on skill building because you can put your skills and training to immediate use, boosting the impact of your service.

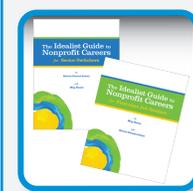
## Section three: Building relationships

This section explains why building relationships is important for the success of your service term and how those relationships can sustain your career development as well. Resources in this section include how to get started creating collaborative partnerships from scratch in case that's something you'll do during your term. Other topics here include making contact, etiquette, finding places to meet new people, and bolstering your existing networks. For corps members serving in remote areas overseas or in the United States, where connecting with professionals in your field may be a bit difficult, this section also includes a discussion about alternative ways to network.

During your term of service, you will likely have *many reasons* to engage people, support them, and receive support in return. Many service corps participants bring community leaders and groups together in order to offer high-quality service to clients, improve schools and towns, and share and conserve resources. Meeting former participants of your service corps gives you a chance to ask for advice or get insights into the ways things work. Getting to know local business owners opens the door to cross-sector partnerships and understanding what these community stakeholders envision for their neighborhood or town. Building partnerships with like-minded nonprofits and government agencies allows each to multiply its impact and reach.

To some, the word “networking” has a negative connotation as something potentially smarmy. The word often invokes mental images of people in slick suits looking to get ahead at the expense of others. In the wrong hands, networking can look like that, but that isn't always the case.

In the context of social impact work, networking is very much about engaging your community, pooling knowledge and resources, making connections with others to build a better world, and giving *at least* as much as you get. Just like you would jump at the chance to connect two friends who are each looking for a roommate, other people will eagerly assist you in your search for collaboration or career advice.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Building relationships

is a form of networking. Beyond the discussion here, **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) explores networking as a key part of your career search.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)

### LISTEN TO A PODCAST

Check out the Idealist.org Careers podcast interview about networking with *The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for First-time Job Seekers* author Meg Busse:

<http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2008/12/05/networkingpodcast>



Finally, being a resource to other people can be a cornerstone of your life's work from now on. Look to build relationships not just with people who are more established in their careers than you are, but also with people at all stages of their lives and careers—you'll provide each other with immeasurable support as you move forward on your goals.

The discussion in the text box on the following pages offers a blueprint for thinking about building a network from scratch and cultivating new partners. Community partnerships are valuable for a variety of reasons, including sharing resources, getting up to speed on what your community is already doing, and ensuring that your project isn't replicating services already offered by others. If you are new to the community, or new to this work, you may have to start building your network from the ground up. Once you have established a network of community partners for your current service objectives, you'll be able to turn to the same network for career guidance and support as your term comes to an end, and onward as you progress in your career.

For people who may feel more isolated in their service—international volunteers serving independently, or service participants in very small communities—this discussion also offers some ideas for networking in the face of challenges.

### **Building a network of community partners**

Possibly the single most important professional development step you can take during your term of service—beyond working hard and doing a good job—is building relationships with community partners, mentors, individuals at your host site, and other people you come into contact with through your work.

If you are in a corps that enables you to build partnerships with outside organizations, creating those relationships can be important for the success of your service project. Oftentimes organizational staff are too busy with the day-to-day duties of their organization to explore ways of working together with other groups. As a corps member, you can play a valuable role in pulling your organization out of its silo. Be careful to let your supervisor know what partnerships you're building and make sure they sign off on any agreement that involves another organization.

Working together with other groups in your community:

- Saves each group time and money by sharing responsibility and resources. Sharing costs with other organizations makes you a good steward of donations, and builds donors' faith in you. Sharing resources and know-how, your partnership has more to offer your constituent base than you can offer them on your own.
- Builds buy-in and brings credibility to your work. If you are working in a

### **A NOTE ABOUT BUILDING NETWORKS OF PARTNERS**

Note that some service corps do not offer members the chance to establish new, formal community partnerships. If this is the case for you, the section below may not apply as much, but it's still an important part of your term to get to know people in your community.

Further, in some circumstances, corps members may need to build career networks from a distance—for example, for people planning to move elsewhere when the term has ended. Starting on page 60 in [Part Two](#) of this *Companion*, read more about the long distance job search for international volunteers, corps members serving in remote locations, and people planning to transition to a job somewhere else.



### **TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES**

**Chapter Four**  
of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) details networking for career purposes and explains informational interviews—a crucial tool. These interviews can also enhance your prospects of creating durable community partnerships during your term of service. The chapter also offers sage advice about networking etiquette (among the most important rules: don't ask for a job and always write thank you notes.)

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)



## Building a network of community partners (continued)

field where other organizations may perceive you as a threat, ask them to help you and guide you so that your work is successful and they can take part of the credit. Partnering with more established organizations and community leaders lets the public and funders know that you are legitimate and can be trusted.

- Expands everyone's networks and reach to co-brand your efforts so your constituents will learn about your partners, and their constituents will learn about you.
- Limits competition and increases specialization so that you can focus on a specific gap in services or resources rather than duplicating programs and events that already exist elsewhere in the community.

Community partnerships can take many shapes. This discussion will help you identify community partners through a series of questions to ask yourself. Included are some basic tools for managing the relationships, and a list of different partnership models to draw from as needed.

### Identifying community partners

As you shape your partnerships during the year, these are some guiding questions. Keep in mind that it will take time, research, conversations, and other methods to answer all of them.

#### 1. What's the project?

Be as specific as possible about the project you have in mind—though it may be just a concept, your project should have clear goals, and you should have a sense of key stakeholders, constituents, and others you seek to involve. Ask yourself:

- Whom does the project aim to serve?
- Who is already involved?
- How do I fit in? (Am I brand new to an existing project? Am I starting a new project from scratch?)
- How does the project fit in with this work in my region? (Are many nonprofits or agencies already working on some aspect of the problem?)

#### 2. Who is already working in this area?

Through informational interviews—starting with people you know such as current staff and former corps members at your host organization—see if you can get a clear picture of the playing field. You'll want to figure out:

- Who are the big and small fish in this pond (other individuals, organizations, funders, networking groups)?
- Who will see the project as a threat, if anyone? (How is the project unique enough that it's not really a threat?)
- Who will be excited about the project?
- How can I meet these people? (Do I know someone who knows someone...?)

#### 3. What are the project's needs and my needs?

Beyond what your organization can do on its own, take stock of what your project requires. You've probably given this some thought so try to be as specific and realistic as possible.

- Project's needs: resources (equipment, food, transportation, etc), legal obligations (permits, insurance), skills, talent, time, paid and/or unpaid staffing, structure, meeting and/or event venues, public relations and marketing.
- My needs: training, mentors, orientation to broader issue area, introductions to key stakeholders, encouragement, realistic expectations.

#### 4. Who can help meet my needs and those of the project? What do they need?

Through the networking you have done so far, you should have a pretty good sense of who can help you, who is willing to help you, and who can't be bothered.



## Building a network of community partners (continued)

- Including people you have already listed in response to the questions above, who would best champion the project and help move it forward? Who has the resources and would be willing to share?
- For partners to make the effort worth their time, or justifiable to their organizations, what do they each need in return? Similar goals? Expansion to a key network? Influence in the decision-making process? A mention in the project's promotional materials or webpages? A formal thank you? Inclusion on an advisory board? What can my organization realistically offer them?
- For people who may perceive this project as a threat, how can I reach out and include them?

### What shapes can partnerships take?

Below are some community partnership models that may be useful. Some are ways to invite organizations to work with you, while others offer opportunities for individuals to contribute to your project.

#### *Ways to work with organizations*

- Coordinating partnerships: Stopping short of working together, coordinating ensures that your timing and efforts work around what another organization is doing, rather than conflict or compete with it. For example if you share a similar donor base with another organization or project, you might stagger your fundraising campaigns so that you aren't both reaching out to the same people at the same time.
- Collaborating partnerships: Going further, collaborating means pooling resources and efforts. If you and another group both aim to organize a service day at a local elementary school, you could build a coalition and organize one larger, more successful service day.
- Event or project co-sponsors: In order to help you with marketing your event or project, you might enlist organizations who are in touch with the audience you'd like to reach. In exchange for shared branding, they may be willing to tell their constituents or partners about your work. For example, if you are organizing a health fair, a local hospital may advertise the event among its network of practitioners, patients, and visitors, in exchange for the hospital logo on signs for the event.
- Sponsors, donors, and other funders: Building relationships with potential funders can have a lasting impact on your work by helping to make it financially sustainable.

#### *Ways to engage community leaders and constituents*

- Advisory board(s): An advisory board is a team of people you handpick for their helpfulness to you, their experience, and their voice in the community. If you put together an advisory board for your work, take into consideration the range of experience you'd like to have on the board as you draft your invitation list. Consider also the specific participation agreement for board members, and what will happen to the board after your term ends. Be careful to invite both the established players who have a substantial stake in your field as well as people who represent other fields in which you need guidance (like mentoring youth and volunteer resource management).
- Constituent or youth council: To help ensure your organization's constituents have a say in programmatic activities and decisions, you can ask a few to serve on an advisory board, or create a board just for them that will give you feedback in terms of their needs and ideas for what could work better. If your project works primarily with youth, for example, you might create a board specifically for young people.
- Steering committee or working group: For short-term projects and events, you can build a loose coalition of partners who come together for a specific purpose and then disband once the project or event is over and evaluated.
- Speakers bureau: Community partners can serve as speakers representing the field or your collaboration, as needed.
- Contest judges or readers: Does your program need readers for proposals or award nominations, or judges for a contest? Consider asking community leaders to play these roles, both for their acumen and to offer them a stake in seeing your project succeed.



## Building a network of community partners (continued)

- Key volunteers: Invite partners to play a special or one-time role in your project. Does your event need keynote speakers or volunteer captains? Does your tutoring program need someone to train tutors on a specific math or literacy issue? Professionals often lend their skills for free, as pro-bono consultants.
- “The loop”: Sometimes you meet someone who gets what you are doing and who is a fan, but who doesn’t fit any category of partnership that you need right now. Or you may be a fan of someone you met, maybe a board member of your organization, a current or former corps member of your program, or a speaker at a dinner you attended. How can you stay in touch with these contacts? Keep them in the loop. If you have an e-newsletter, ask permission to add them to the mailing list. If you are having an event, invite them. Send them an email when you see something of interest to them. If appropriate, befriend them on a social networking site like Twitter or LinkedIn, or even Facebook or a book-sharing social network. If they have a blog, add it to your blogroll (a list of blogs you like).

### Making the ask

Once you have selected people you think it would be wise to work with, it’s time to make “the ask.” Depending on your vision for the partnership, you can invite them to work with you in writing (over email), over the phone, or in person. If you are asking them to serve on a board or to take on another more formal partnership role, you might present guidelines or even a partnership agreement in writing. If you have expectations of them, it’s important to be clear about them up front, both for the success of the partnership and because it’s also good etiquette.

If you want to work with a prominent community leader you don’t know very well personally, it may be a good idea to work through an intermediary, someone they know well, who can champion your cause before you make the ask.

### Maintaining the relationship

The key to any strong relationship is to *spend time together*—that’s why it’s easier to make friends in college or a service corps than almost any other time in your life. In terms of your community partnerships, face time is important, either formally through scheduled meetings or informally over coffee or meals.

*Be considerate and offer your partners as much help as you can, while working within the bounds of your organization’s policies. Remember that your partners also feel the scarcity of resources, money, and time. Also keep in mind the social obligations that come with partnership in your host community or culture. Rely on someone who is local and will be frank with you to help guide your steps as you build these relationships.*

## PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

A partnership agreement can be a formal or informal document that details what each partner will contribute to a relationship. Agreements are often helpful to show both what partners are contributing and what they’re getting in return (which may encourage upper level management to sign on). Agreements also allow partners to hold each other accountable. Written agreements are useful especially if the collaboration involves some kind of financial expenditure (for example, if the partner is renting a van for an event, and your organization is purchasing lunch). Your agreement should also include effective dates, and the name and contact information for a person at each organization who is overseeing the agreement.

Finally, if the agreement is a formal one, it can include a clause about what happens if either side fails to meet any tenet of the agreement, disclaimers, and the signatures of representatives from both organizations. Formal agreements can also be called memoranda of understanding (MOU) or contracts. Before entering into any agreement, you should make sure that the appropriate permanent staff at your organization backs the agreement and signs off on it.



**For your own benefit as well as for that of your work, stay organized.”**



## Building a network of community partners (continued)

For your own benefit as well as for that of your work, *stay organized*.

- Have copies of typed agendas ready for meetings you facilitate (email them out ahead of time if you can).
- Use an action plan to keep track of which partner will take the lead on which activities and what the deadlines are for tasks.
- Take notes at meetings and share them with the group.
- Follow up with volunteers and partners after events, sharing key facts and numbers so that everyone can partake in the sense of accomplishment.

### Action plans

Action plans are similar to a shared to-do list and are useful when you are working with a team of community partners. Organized as a table, the column headings are: Task, Point Person, Deadline, and Notes. Each row lists a different task, and includes details about which partner has volunteered to handle that task, by what date. If anything else needs to be remembered, it can be included as a “note”—for example the address of a meeting, or the phone number of a donor. You can create an action plan as a Word document or Excel spreadsheet, updating it in meetings. Or you can share it online with your partners through a Google document or spreadsheet, which enables everyone to update it as needed from their own computer.

### Global Youth Service Day – Action Plan (March and April)

Task	Point person	Deadline	Notes
Speak at the Rotary Club, ask business owners for in-kind and cash donations for the community service awards	Perry	Meeting takes place March 15th; deadline for collecting donations is April 1st	March 15th, 12 noon – Hiawatha Hotel Conference Room B (2nd Fl.) – 1280 Greystop Road; bring talking points Fiona emailed on 2/25
Select books from the library for the literacy project; we’ll need at least 30 books	Johanna (St. Johns branch) and Ed (Central branch)	Within three weeks of Global Youth Service Day	Looking for books targeting kids ages 5-10; themes of volunteering, community leaders, and kids doing good for their neighborhoods

### Turning community partners into your career network

Through initiating and maintaining partnerships during your term of service, you’ll establish relationships that will not only benefit your project’s mission but help you successfully move on in your career when your term ends.

As you begin to explore your professional next steps, tap your community partners for advice. Go back to them for more informational interviewing. Again, do not ask for a job, but rather ask questions about their career path, their educational history, and any advice they may have for you. Turn to your advisory board members individually for career guidance. Through all of these conversations, keep an eye out for potential mentors.

If you have done a good job during your term, you should have a lot of people you can call on for references—people who have seen you in action, who have faith in you, and who might hire you if they could.

If you are planning to stay in the area, community partners will have their ear to the ground when it comes to new job openings—so make your career goals known to them. If you plan to move away, ask whom they know elsewhere.



## More ways to bolster your professional network

In addition to the community partnerships you'll develop during your term, you'll encounter and seek out other relationships.

Developing relationships with students, organizational clients, and other community members will open your eyes to contributions you can make during your term and beyond. Listen to the voices of the people you are engaged in service with, learn their stories. If your hope is to give something of yourself to them, allow them to guide you—what is it that they need? How can you best offer your energy and support? Their answers may inform your decisions about your next steps, but also the education and long-term vision you have for yourself.

Additionally, each of your peers in the service corps are emerging leaders. Grow together—lean on each other now, online or in person, as time permits. As your term ends, you'll have a true web of mutual support to give to and take from as needed throughout your life. Likewise, look to connect more deeply to your host site colleagues and service corps staff as an active contributor and team member. Actively participating in your service corps-affiliated networks allows you to learn and share news and resources. It can also introduce you to new people in other networks, exponentially expanding the community web you're a part of.

Sometimes, you may need to reach out to other people specifically for your career exploration and development, in order to get a better understanding of your field and its job prospects.

Following the advice in Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*, consider your professional goals and seek out networks that will educate you about trends, lingo, and leaders in your field. Professional associations and civic organizations are some of the obvious places to find practicing professionals in any given field.

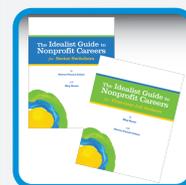
If you aim to go into a field that doesn't seem to have an association to join, try calling a local, relevant graduate school and ask to be put in touch with some local alumni. The alumni may be willing to meet you for an informational interview, and may be connected with informal networking groups for your field.

Finally, ask for help from people you know through other community groups—such as your place of worship, recreational sports club, or coop grocery.

### IF YOUR REFERENCES ARE ABROAD...

Keep in mind that if you are serving in another country, you might have a few extra things to think about when asking people to serve as a reference. Once you have left your host country after your service term, you may encounter communication challenges. It may be difficult to connect with former colleagues and ask for letters of recommendation, for example. Consider asking for recommendation letters from host country nationals while you are still in-country.

Also be aware that the custom around recommendation letters in your host country may differ significantly from what employers (or others) in your home country are used to reading. For example, your supervisor might include factual information about your service dates and responsibilities, but not shower you with (deserved) praise. In order to secure the best possible reference, it's a good idea to provide an example of the kind of letter you are hoping for; or else ask permission to look over the letter before passing it along to a graduate admissions committee or potential employer.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Chapter Four  
of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF)  
covers the ins and outs of networking.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)



## Alternative and long-distance networking

At any given time, thousands of service corps participants are serving in foreign countries or very isolated parts of their own country. Thousands more plan to move away from their service site once they have finished their term. If you fit either of these descriptions, building community partnerships with a wide array of relevant professional mentors may not be a realistic part of your service. You may need different tactics to network successfully during your term.

This is not to imply that the only reason to get to know people is to strategize for your next career steps. *Of course* you want to make strong friendships in your community for a wide range of reasons, least of which is career exploration. This discussion aims to expand on ways to build professionally advantageous relationships when you are in special circumstances.

If you are in a situation where relevant professional contacts are more difficult to come by, here are some suggestions for ways to build valuable relationships to benefit your career development. You may need to be more creative and curious than usual.

### Exhaust local connections first

Especially if you plan to leave town once your term ends, locals may not help you land that first job as a former corps member. That said, you'll stay more engaged in your host community if you find out what's going on there in your field, as opposed to spending a lot of time online, detached from human interaction. Your "host community" may mean your town, your county, your state or province, or even your whole host country. Investigating the local news and trends in your field also better educates you about your host community, and you'll carry that expertise with you during your service and beyond.

Also connect with other people who are not native to the area. Discuss your career aspirations with other volunteers or corps members, your service program's staff, foreign service officers stationed in the regional or national capital of your host country, other expats—professionals, students—who live in the region, and travelers and other newcomers to your area who may carry insights from elsewhere.

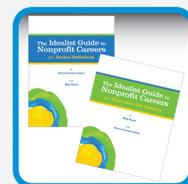
Here are some ideas:

- Speak with practitioners in your field, or the closest equivalent, if you can. For example, if you are interested in careers in public health, spend time with local clinic workers, or NGO and government health workers. If you hope to work in business development, spend time with small business owners—even food cart owners have to manage supply chains, market themselves, and turn a profit. Be

### THE BROADER VIEW OF NETWORKING

As you get creative about how you network professionally in a remote location, it may be helpful to keep the end goals of networking in mind. Don't limit yourself to chatting with people who know where to find jobs in your field, or who can give you advice about your resume or grad school options. Think about the broader view of networking, which can help you:

- Open up a mutually beneficial dialogue, sharing news and opportunities as often as gleaning them.
- Learn more about a field that interests you—what is it really like, what are the day-to-day tasks of the job, what are the advantages and challenges, what kind of person excels in that environment?
- Hear advice from professionals in your target field.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Chapter Six  
of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) examines long-distance job search strategies and the importance of using online tools to expand your offline networking.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch6.html)



creative when you look for counterparts in your town or village. Ask questions about the tasks and challenges involved in their work, as well as the career paths that led them to it. You might gain wisdom from a new perspective.

- To get connected with local practitioners, start with networks you are already part of, like faculty at the school where you teach, farmers at the market where you buy produce, or people in your local faith community.
- Use vacation time wisely. Make a point to meet with university faculty or NGO staff in your field when you travel through regional hub cities during vacation.
- Chat with other service corps members about their knowledge of the field, post-service opportunities, well-regarded graduate schools, and other topics of interest or relevance.
- If you are abroad, chat with foreign service officers at the consulate or embassy nearest you for contacts, and find out if any expat experts are working in your region with whom you could connect.



### DEENA'S STORY: NETWORKING

Deena has been helping women in rural areas of Ecuador to develop business plans for home-based initiatives and to seek micro-loans to get these start-ups off the ground.

Though a former small business owner herself, she is brand new to the field of micro-enterprise development. She feels very committed to using her knowledge to help lift families out of poverty in sustainable ways. She loves what she does and wants to find a way to stay in Ecuador or another developing country where she can continue to support micro-enterprises. She wants to learn more about her field and to network with other practitioners. Given that she's limited by a lack of access to internet and telephone, she plans to do most of her networking in person and by writing letters.

She starts by talking with her counterpart Patricia, an Ecuadoran woman who is on the staff of Deena's host agency, an NGO that prepares local businesses for the micro-loan application process. Patricia is familiar with the agencies and loan officers that offer micro-loans in Ecuador. She is also familiar with an NGO in another part of the country that does similar work to her own. Over the course of her second year in-country, Deena makes a point to meet the people Patricia has connected her with.

Most of Deena's time is spent with families in rural villages who are interested in starting up or expanding small businesses. During her travels in the region, she's heard of at least a dozen women who've already successfully launched small businesses. Deena makes a point to spend time with these women, to learn more about their challenges and successes. She also realizes that some of the women worked with associations and organizations Deena hasn't heard of,



## DEENA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

so she makes sure to follow up with these other groups to find out how they work and to meet key people there.

Additionally, Deena remembers that during her pre-service training, she met Veronica, a U.S. foreign service officer at the embassy in Quito who had been essential in creating the agreement with the Ecuadoran government for Deena's service corps to operate there. Veronica is about to return to the United States, but before she does, she makes the trip to Deena's service site to see how the program is running and to meet some of Deena's clients. While Veronica is there, Deena asks for recommended NGO and government contacts. Veronica knows most of the micro-enterprise agencies working in Quito, the capital city, and is glad to pass on the information to Deena. Deena also asks her about serving with the U.S. government. After Veronica returns to the United States, Deena keeps up correspondence with her and sends updates about her work—through letters and occasionally through email when she can get online. Deena also follows up with Veronica's leads the next time she travels to Quito.

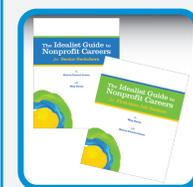
Deena is an effective networker both for her service site and its clients, as well as her future career prospects, by seeking out people locally to learn from, following up with the people she's met and their contacts, and asking a broad range of questions that go beyond what she thinks are her current career goals.

## Connect online

As with any networking effort, connect over email starting with people you know and groups you are already a part of. Ask for help connecting to people who can answer your questions about your target field. If you are heading to a new city, you can also survey your friends, relatives, professors, and former employers for people they may know in your destination. For more ideas about whom to connect with, refer to Chapters Four and Six of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

Very often, the **alumni of your service program** will be open to hearing from you. If you aren't aware of your program's alumni networks, be sure to ask program staff for your corps, or other corps members serving in your area. Don't be shy about tapping into a different group's alumni networks either. For example, if you are overseas with Jesuit Volunteers International, feel free to reach out to a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer group through the National Peace Corps Association, as well as your own former JVI—RPCVs will likely welcome the chance to support you. Alumni of your college, fraternity or sorority, and other groups may also be helpful to you.

If you are a person of faith, tap into **networks that faith communities offer**, such



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

For networking tips, see

**Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)

**Chapter Six** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) can help you with a long-distance job search.

**First-time Job Seekers version**

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html)

**Sector Switchers version**

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## ALUMNI GROUPS FOR SERVICE CORPS

Access a list of service corps alumni groups on Idealist.org at [www.idealists.org/service](http://www.idealists.org/service).



as people you know from your places of worship back home or at college, and faith groups you want to join after your term ends. Let people know what you are doing by writing letters, or contributing an article to a monthly newsletter, the community's blog, or the weekly bulletin that is given out at services. Stay in touch generally, and when you have a clear sense of what your next steps will be, ask to be put in touch with the right mentors.

Research what you can through **professional associations** in your field, and reach out to people where you feel that you can. For example, some associations have a mentor-match program. Even if you can't participate (for example, if you are not a member of the association), the person in charge of making matches may be open to helping you connect with interested contacts. Remember to mention that you are in a service corps, which may earn you extra good will.

Next, try finding people through general **social networking sites** online. Do-gooder social networking sites like Idealist.org, as well as broader sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and blogs, all connect people across shared interests. The people you meet in this realm may just become intermediaries for you and you'll be extending your network, perhaps getting referrals to people who you want to know but who might not be so active online. As always, be generous with your own connections and resources, and offer leads as often as you take them.



### ED'S STORY: NETWORKING

Ed is teaching in a Chinese community college during his term of service. At 70, his next steps will involve moving to Portland, OR to live in semi-retirement near his daughter and her family. He has saved enough money through the years that he thinks he'll do fine financially without taking a job—but he aims to get a part-time job or volunteer stint nonetheless to stay involved. As he enters his second and final year of service, he starts to wonder what opportunities might await him in Portland. Unlike Deena, Ed has a laptop and an internet connection in his apartment. He also has a phone and can use it to call the United States.

He starts by emailing his daughter and asking her to find out how people learn about nonprofit jobs and volunteer opportunities in Portland. In addition to Idealist, she sends him a few other websites and email listservs to join. She suggests he join LinkedIn and Facebook, just for fun.

Before Ed left for China, blogging was becoming more mainstream. He had assigned his students in Pittsburgh to start their own blogs, and through that experience, he learned that blogs can become lightning rods for community

## ED'S STORY (CONTINUED)

building. Therefore, from his apartment in China, he searches for blogs in Portland that can shed light on the civically engaged community there. As he finds these blogs, he subscribes to them in Google Reader (the way he kept up with his students' blogs in Pittsburgh), and comments on blog posts that inspire his input. He also searches for online communities of military veterans, and the alumni groups of his current service corps. In this way he begins to make allies in Portland—people who are willing to share information with him. As he makes these friends, he adds them to Facebook and LinkedIn.

He notices that some of his new friends update their Facebook status through Twitter, the micro-blogging website that allows people to send updates about their work and meet others with similar interests. With a little research he figures out that Twitter is another way to connect with new people who share his interests in Portland and elsewhere. He searches Twitter posts for keywords that are meaningful to him, like “education,” “China,” and the name of his service corps. Gradually (it takes a few months) he finds people throughout the world who offer ideas and insights for what he can do to occupy his time in retirement, including volunteering for Free Geek, an NGO that refurbishes computers, and exploring the microbrew scene in Portland.

Operating completely online, Ed creates a network for himself in his new hometown, even before he arrives there. By taking advantage of his knowledge of how to connect with people through blogs, Twitter, and other social networking websites, Ed is able to orient himself to a city he's never lived in before, in order to smooth his transition home.

## Make contact

After canvassing your own network and new social networking contacts, use email, online chat (such as Skype, Google Voice and Video Chat, or AOL Instant Messaging), or old-fashioned mail to attempt to connect with people in your field and/or in your destination city.

Some people may be unresponsive. The most effective approach is to mention a personal referral or mutual connection, as in, “[Your former colleague] Jenny Houser suggested I connect with you,” or to mention which group you have in common, “I am also an alum of Appalachian State.” It's hard to emphasize enough just how far a shared acquaintance or group will go towards greasing the wheels of long-distance relationship building.

After clarifying your personal connection, you should be able to transition into your “elevator pitch” quite seamlessly (see sidebar).

## ELEVATOR PITCHES

If you were in an elevator actually talking with a potential employer, your normally quick elevator ride would seem even shorter as you tried to convey why you are the perfect candidate for a job. If, however, you have prepared and practiced a concise, persuasive statement conveying your best attributes in approximately 30 seconds, then that short ride would be more than enough time to articulate your value.

When you first meet a person you'd like to remember you, it's handy to have a few talking points ready to share—so you remember to say what's important, and so you sound focused. These talking points are also called your elevator pitch.

You will use your elevator pitch for informational interviews, networking events, or chance meetings. No matter where you are, you will want to be able to succinctly state who you are, what you are looking for, and how the person you're speaking with could help you. If done well, 30-45 seconds is plenty of time to convey your need without losing your audience's attention. Always try to be brief. This will leave more time for a conversation with your new contact around ways that you can help one another out.

Read more about the elevator pitch in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.



## Etiquette

When you first reach out to people via email, blogs, or social networking sites, be polite and brief. Show that you respect their busy lives. Leave only thoughtful, professional comments on blog posts. Keep your questions few and fairly narrow—busy professionals may not have time to write essays in response to broad questions. Use these contacts strategically to get information you couldn't get through web searches, and plan to follow up with them in person when you are in their area. Keep them in the loop as you begin new opportunities. You never know when you might be a resource for them.

As with a face-to-face informational interview, do not ask for a job. Do not attach your resume and ask for feedback or for them to let you know if they see anything for you. You may be able to do that *after* you have a relationship with them, *after* they ask to see your resume. If you don't hear back from someone within a couple weeks (via email) or months (via regular mail), politely follow up.

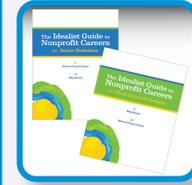
## Relationships really make a difference

Building relationships can be the key to success in both your corps experience and your career transition. Becoming well-connected within your community or field can strengthen your marketing and outreach efforts, because of the strength of word-of-mouth advertising. It increases the credibility of your work and your job applications when you have community leaders or experts in the field who are willing to back you up to their peers. Knowing the right people can give you a leg up in a range of ways—learning about new sources of funding, getting connected to other people relevant to your project, hearing about the training you need, and finding out where the jobs are posted. The time you invest in your network now can benefit you—and them—for the rest of your career, even if you're planning to move away. And with social networking sites online like Idealist, Facebook, and LinkedIn, staying connected with people after your service has ended is easier than ever.

## Section four: Documenting your successes

Another vital part of your service experience is to keep records of your accomplishments *now* to share *later*, during job and admissions applications. This section discusses what you can track and collect during your term that will be valuable to share with your supervisors and funders now, as well as with potential employers later on.

“Records” refers to everything from statistics on your achievements, to writing samples, to screenshots of websites you helped design or photographs of you or your constituents in action.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Eleven of *The*

*Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) has useful advice about maintaining contacts and staying ready for future transitions.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html)



**Building relationships can be the key to success in both your corps experience and your career transition.”**



Remember, it is always much easier to keep track of your accomplishments as they are happening and fresh in your mind rather than trying to recall them a year or two later.

Finally, your motivation for committing to a term of service likely did not include keeping score of all of your good deeds. In case the discussion of documenting your service feels self-aggrandizing, keep in mind that it's not about competing with other corps members, or boasting about your accomplishments. It's one way to keep moving in the direction of making positive contributions to the world, by showing what you are capable of.

## Documenting the facts of your service with statistics

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At the very least, keep track of your statistics and numbers. What numbers you track will depend on your type of service. For example, the number of hours of training you've received is a common statistic.

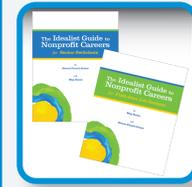
If you are a teacher, tutor, after-school coordinator, or trainer, keep track of figures such as numbers of students or participants, the increase in grades and test scores from baseline assessments at the start of year, the number of classroom volunteers you recruited and managed, etc. If you are a project developer, keep track of dollars you raised, community partnerships you developed, clients your program served, meetings you facilitated, volunteers you recruited and managed, and so on.

A great way to measure the impact of your service is not only to count your direct constituents, but also the indirect beneficiaries of your service.

Two examples:

- A person like Ed who teaches English to college students should consider both the assistance he's offered to the students, as well as the benefit of the students' strengthened language skills to their careers, future children, and the community.
- Someone like Bea who is increasing the nutritional value of the food in public school cafeterias can count the direct benefits to the farmers (in income), schools (in pounds of produce throughout the season and in financial savings), and the children (hours of instruction time saved because the kids aren't out sick as often).

When you are ready to transition, use at least some of the statistics you track in your resume and in anecdotes about the outcomes of your service. Numbers help a hiring



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

When they're relevant to a position you're pursuing, the facts and artifacts of your service should be reflected in your resume and cover letter. **Chapter Eight** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers guidance on writing resumes and cover letters.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)

Similarly, when you go for a job interview you can use facts and statistics to help demonstrate your aptitude for the position. **Chapter Nine** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) is all about preparing for the interview.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html)

**Chapter Eleven** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers tips on continually tracking your successes so that you're prepared for the next opportunity.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html)

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[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html)



manager or admissions committee put your resume into context and understand the impact of your work.

## Documenting the artifacts of your service in a portfolio

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One way to present the artifacts of your service is to create a portfolio—similar to a professional scrapbook—of your service term, with sections for each skill set you have built or employed. Portfolios aren't just for artists, models, and designers!

The portfolio can start off with your position description and/or work plan, your resume, your Description of Service (for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers), constructive performance evaluations, letters of recommendation, workshop evaluations, and thank you notes or emails that describe the impact of your service from colleagues, community partners, and others.

Skill sets to include may be anything from trail and house building to grantwriting, event planning, curricula development and teaching, program development, volunteer management, and more. Be sure to connect the dots between your experiences and transferable skill sets. For example, digging wells in the Dominican Republic may not look all that useful for work in an urban homeless shelter, but team management, project coordination, meeting deadlines, and coming in under budget are all skills that any employer looks for.

### Mini-portfolios to leave behind

Rather than taking the whole portfolio to interviews with you, you can reproduce relevant sections and leave them behind at the interview, for the hiring manager or admissions counselor to look at on their own time. It's best to offer only a few samples of your work, and wait till you are prompted to offer recommendation letters or reference contacts.

### Online portfolios

Alternately, you can create an online portfolio like Beth Kanter—a guru of social media for nonprofits—has done: <http://bethkanter.wikispaces.com>. Whether on your own website, a personal blog, or through a tool like Wikispaces (public spaces are free), it's affordable and easy to build an online portfolio. Include the link to the portfolio on your resume and cover letters with the rest of your contact information.

Online portfolios are especially impressive if you've used multimedia to document your service. Linking to your audio or video podcast on iTunes or YouTube is easier if your portfolio is already online. Visit [www.idealists.org/service](http://www.idealists.org/service) to view sample portfolios.

### SHOWING ONLINE CONTENT IN YOUR PORTFOLIO

A warning: Keep in mind that if you have designed webpages or developed web content as part of your service project, capturing an image of the webpage through a screenshot is still the best route for documentation. Linking to the webpages directly is risky because once you've left your service site, you won't know if your webpages will be updated, if links have broken, or if your pages will have been removed altogether. Because you have no control over the pages after you are gone, it's best to preserve them visually through a screenshot rather than linking to them.

Take a screenshot on a PC by pressing PrtScn (print screen), which copies an image of your active screen to your clipboard; then open a document in Word or any graphics application and paste it. You will likely want to crop it to make it the size you'd like, or to focus on a specific part of the screen. On a Mac, Shift+Command+4 will allow you to select any portion of your screen and save it as a JPG file that you can later import to a document or even a blog post.

If the *functionality* of your web design is important for prospective employers to see, you may want to keep a working version of the site on your computer, a flash drive, or a CD-ROM. This way, upon request, you can share the site with all its bells and whistles preserved. It is important to be aware of the host site's policy about such copying, and you should be careful not to copy confidential intranet content or sensitive client data.

Finally, check out the **Wayback Machine** ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) which allows you to look at webpages on specific dates going back as far as 1996.



## Writing samples

Writing samples are great to include in your portfolio, and they're also useful in sharing with potential employers and graduate admissions staff. Depending on your position, you should have a chance to collect a variety of samples. Anything professional you've written should work—grant proposals (with permission from your host organization), brochures and newsletters, formal emails or letters, project descriptions, focus group or survey summary reports, web content, press releases, and so on.

If you are in a direct service role with few opportunities to write, try to create a reason to write tied to your service, like a narrative summary of your service or a specific service project, letters home to parents, reports you submit that track your accomplishments, an essay you submitted to a contest, or a guest blog post you authored.

## **Hanging on to your documentation**

A problem many service corps alumni face is that they've saved all these documents on the computer at their old service site, and now that they are finished, they can't access them easily to share during the job or school search. Save yourself this potential heartache by emailing documents and photographs to your personal email account, or backing them up on a thumb drive or CD-ROM—if you have permission to do so from your host agency. If you've posted documents and photos using online tools like Google Docs and Flickr, you can also access these later on.

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers can request a photocopy of their Document of Service from Peace Corps, to be sent to them directly or to their hiring manager or graduate admissions office. (Peace Corps keeps your DOS for 60 years.) Other service corps may offer similar support—it's worth checking with your program.

Documenting your service is not just useful for your next steps. Keeping good records during your term can help inform grantwriting, monthly reporting, communicating with your supervisor and funders, preparing for your mid-term or end-of-service performance evaluations, and creating public relations materials for your program.

Furthermore, when you are looking back on your service term several months or years after it ends, the documentation you've squirreled away will serve as templates for handling future projects. In coming years, your documentation can also serve as a reminder, triggering realizations like how much your constituents and team mates meant to you, and how much you were able to accomplish in a relatively short term of service.



## The records they saved

In order to document their service, each of our archetypal characters held on to artifacts and statistics. Below is a sampling:

### Ace:

- The impact, in numbers, of the weatherizing projects he worked on. How much money and energy he helped his clients save, for example. One of the homeowners Ace worked with even volunteered to let him copy some energy bills from before and after the weatherization, as long as Ace blacked out his name and address.
- An article from the neighborhood newspaper featuring him and his work
- Letters of recommendation from his mentor and a client

### Bea:

- Sample budgets and menus she helped the cafeteria workers create
- Photographs of the buffet before and after she connected the school with local farmers
- Thank you notes and drawings from the fourth graders who visited a farm on a field trip

### Cesar:

- Anthology of his students' short stories (fiction and non-fiction), bound and distributed to the local community
- Grant reports he wrote, including narrative and numerical updates about his work and his class's achievements
- Screenshots of a website he developed to quiz his students about citizenship topics they'd need to master for the citizenship test
- Photographs of him leading his adult students on different projects, both one-on-one and in front of the classroom

### Deena:

- Copy of the agenda of a typical meeting Deena held when she arrived in a new village, to educate women about starting their own small businesses
- Descriptions and photographs of each woman she helped, their business model, their initial loan amount, and length of time to repay (either estimates or actual)
- Thank you letter from a woman who conceived of and implemented her new business with Deena's assistance

### Ed:

- Photographs of his class at work, and of him leading discussions
- All lesson plans and completed homework assignments from a unit on autobiography he taught in a reading class
- A guest column he wrote for his hometown newspaper about his experience in China



# Conclusion

Your term of service will offer your host community so many gifts, including that of your time, passion, and energy. The term will also bring valuable gifts to you—opportunities to meet new people, good reasons to practice new skills, and time to think about the direction you'd like your life to go in. Taking advantage of these opportunities and documenting your achievements are some of the best ways to prepare for your next steps, whatever they may be.



## SUMMARY

It's critical to take steps during your term of service that will strengthen and simplify your future transition to a social impact career or related pursuit.

First, carve out time to **discern your professional calling** (pages 11-17). Doing so will help you not only to focus your work during your service but also to prioritize the multitude of potential paths and opportunities that await you post-service. You can use a range of tools, from research and evaluation to self-assessment exercises and reflection, meditation, or prayer.

As you sharpen your focus through discernment, you'll be able to ascertain which skills you need to build to move toward your professional calling. The time you spend in your service corps is a valuable chance to **build skills** (pages 18-31). These may range from developing basic work skills (if this is your first professional experience) to obtaining specific knowledge and capacities required to work in your intended field. Look for opportunities to build skills while on the job, but also seek out other sources of knowledge, such as attending workshops or online webinars.

Your service corps will bring you into contact with a range of people in your community and beyond. **Building relationships** (pages 31-43) with these people through partnerships and other forms of networking affords you an opportunity to enhance your service project *and* to lay the groundwork for your future transition. There are many ways to cultivate relationships with people who can help you succeed—just remember that networking is a two-way street!

As you accomplish objectives during your service term, take time to **document your successes** (pages 43-47). Track your accomplishments and save examples of your work—these will be invaluable resources for you in the future when you seek to demonstrate your experience and transferable skills to potential employers or admissions staff at colleges and universities.

## You are here

- This is **Part One**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealists.org/servicecompanion).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

**Action Without Borders** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. **Idealist.org**, a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career – A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* by Amy Potthast is a product of Action Without Borders' Careers and Service Team based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and domestic and global volunteer opportunities. Published in 2009 by Action Without Borders.



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## During your transition

### Making the switch from service to social impact work

#### Part Two Overview

Part Two is useful both for people nearing the end of their service corps as well as those who have already completed their term (if you already finished your term and just found this book, see the box on page 88). Part Two discusses the following topics:

- **Section one: Motivation and courage in the transition** (pages 51-52)
  - \* Includes a pep talk (page 51) and advice on how to activate your network to help your transition (pages 51-52)
- **Section two: The challenges of your transition** (pages 53-67)
  - \* Includes discussions of a range of challenges you may face during your transition, such as “selling” yourself to hiring managers (pages 53-54), choosing which jobs to apply for (page 54), embracing opportunities that may seem daunting (page 54), timing your job search (page 55), deciding whether to stay in your service program if opportunities arise before it’s over (pages 56-59), looking for jobs from a distance (page 60), living on less income during the transition (pages 61-65), and keeping your health insured (page 67)
- **Section three: Translating your experience** (pages 68-82)
  - \* Includes discussions of introducing your service corps to potential employers (pages 68-69), creating a resume and cover letter (pages 69-70), putting your experience across in an interview (pages 70-71), helpful frameworks to organize your experience (pages 72-75), a list of assumptions employers may make about your service background (pages 75-77), discussing your service work if you’re mid-career or beyond (pages 77-78), discussing an early termination of your service term (pages 79-81), and tying your experience to your salary negotiations (pages 81-82)
- **Section four: Other options for your next steps** (pages 83-87)
  - \* Includes discussions of committing to a second service term (pages 83-84), finding work in government (pages 84-86) or business (pages 86-87), furthering your education (page 87), and starting your own organization (page 87)

Part Two of this *Companion* supports currently serving and recently finished corps members who are transitioning from corps to career. It’s focused on the time leading up to, as well as the months following, the end of your service.

Part Two starts out with a pep talk that we encourage you to return to throughout your



transition if you find it helpful. Then it addresses the many challenges you may face, providing a series of action steps to help you overcome them. It offers you a framework for translating your service experience on paper (on your resume and in your cover letter) as well as in person (in interviewing, negotiating your salary, and networking).

Throughout, Part Two refers to resources on Idealist.org that can help you with your career transition, and also presents new resources designed specifically for you.

## Section one: Motivation and courage in the transition

### Pep talk: Read early and often

This section is for people who, deep down inside, fear that they will not be able to get the job they want. It's for people who might feel terrified when they think about applying for grad school. For people who doubt they will ever find a career that allows them to pursue their life's calling while earning a living wage. It's for people who dread the questions, "What are you going to do when your term of service ends?" and "Are you going to get a real job next year?" and "What do you want to do with your life?" If you have a hard time answering any or all of the above questions, this section is for you.

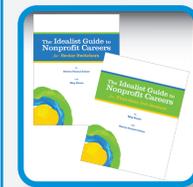
Here are some important things you should know about yourself:

- You deserve to take the next steps necessary to live out your thoughtful vision of your life.
- You deserve to find a place to go to school, to work, or to serve where your professors, employers, classmates, and colleagues appreciate your professional strengths and your personality.
- You deserve to have confidence in yourself.
- You deserve to succeed.

Your term of service has offered you opportunities to grow, learn, and give back. These opportunities, as well as the experiences you brought with you when you joined, will all play a role in helping you with your next steps.

### Kicking your network into high gear during the transition

You have likely spent some time and effort building a network of people to work with during your term of service. You may have connected with some of these people locally, while you connected with others online, through email, letters, or telephone. While your intentions may have been more focused on getting your service project done well, you can now look to your professional



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Some of the psychological

ups and downs of the job search are explored in **Chapter Two** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealist.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch2.html](http://www.idealist.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch2.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealist.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch2.html](http://www.idealist.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch2.html)

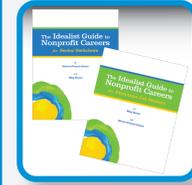


## Kicking your network into high gear... (continued)

partners to help guide or support your next steps. Here are some ways to call on your network to help you in your transition:

- Let the people in your network know what you hope to do next. Since they will ask you, prepare an “elevator pitch”—a short but compelling story about your plans post-service (see the discussion in [Part One](#) of this *Companion*, page 42). Also feel free to email people (individually is best) to thank them for their partnership during your term, concluding with your vision for your life after the corps
- Ask for an informational interview. You may have already sat down with them to chat. This time, explore their career paths. Let them know what you plan for your next steps, and get their advice. Discuss the experiences and skills you’ve developed and hope to use, and ask if they have other ideas for how to proceed. Find out what education you might need to achieve your goals—you might have an idea about this, based on your own research. What do they think? Ask what the job market is like in your field, and where jobs are posted. See Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* where you’ll find suggested questions—never ask for a job—as well as ways of approaching people for informational interviews, and everything else you need to know for networking.
- Ask your allies to put you in touch with other people you may want to chat with for informational interviews. Remember to mention your ally when introducing yourself to their contacts.
- Ask them to keep you in mind if they see an opportunity appropriate for you.
- Approach three to five people for their permission to be listed as references; make sure they have a copy of your resume. It may even be helpful for them to see your cover letters, so they have an idea of the positions you’re applying for, and why you are a good fit (see sidebar).
- Always send a thank you note when someone does something nice for you.
- With each outcome (a job, admission to school, rejection from either) your supporters will appreciate an update letting them know how things turned out. Don’t make them beg for news; this makes people feel like you don’t value them and instead were just using them to get ahead. Also, letting them know how and what you’re doing expands their network. With an update, they now have a new contact to refer people to, ask advice from, and contact for people in your new network.

The partners you cultivated during your term may be your greatest champions during your transition because they see your potential, enjoy helping people in their network, and ultimately, want to see you succeed.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Informational interviews

are discussed in detail in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)

## CHOOSING REFERENCES

Ask people who know your work well to serve as references. A common mistake is to choose someone with a lofty title who knows you a little, but not well enough to speak in detail about your accomplishments and strengths. Hiring managers and admissions professionals value hearing from someone who can share specific details about your work ethic and your goals for the future. From their point of view, a specific reference from a colleague who knows you well is much more valuable than generic information from someone with an impressive title. A caveat is that you *should*, however, ask someone to serve as a reference if they know the hiring manager and can go to bat for you in an authentic way.

To learn more about how to approach people to write letters of reference for grad school admissions (or fellowships), go to the Idealist.org **Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center**:  
[www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/application2.html#letters](http://www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/application2.html#letters)



# Section two: The challenges of your transition

Warning: the discussion below may be disturbing to some readers.

Some of the questions and difficult tasks you face during your transition are outlined in this section and discussed further in the coming pages. While the opportunities awaiting you are exciting and real, so are some of the trials you'll undergo. The goal is not to scare you, but to address concerns you might have. Feel free to skip ahead if a point of concern does not resonate with you.

## Issues you may be facing during your transition

---

Because you've recently been participating in a term of service, this transition is different from other career transitions you have made or will make in your life.

Some challenges of your current transition may be include:

- “Selling” yourself to a potential employer
- Choosing jobs wisely
- Embracing opportunities rather than shying away from them
- Timing your job search
- Hanging in there in your service program as the job search beckons
- Looking for a job from a distance
- Living on even less money (until the new job starts)
- Finding (or keeping) affordable health insurance

### Selling yourself long

Everyone you've been serving with already knows your talent, your work ethic, and your intelligence. You've grown as a leader during your term, developed and solidified your skill sets. But you may be put off by the idea of “selling” the hiring manager on your leadership skills in high-pressure and competitive settings. It's also natural to feel awkward advocating for yourself in your resume, interviews, and salary negotiations—after all, your motivations to serve may not have included self-promotion. Finally, you may question whether a hiring manager will take your application seriously, since you've not been a permanent member of staff at your host organization.

#### Action steps

- Beginning on page 68 you can read about how to translate your service experience during a job or school search. Many corps members relax once they know they can talk about their accomplishments.



While the opportunities awaiting you are exciting and real, so are some of the trials you'll undergo.”



- Corps members who are motivated by their moral convictions and faith often have a particularly hard time using their service as a stepping stone to a salaried job. If you feel this way, know that you are not dishonoring the service by seeking to move into employment that allows you to also work for a greater purpose.
- For more tips on crafting your resume and preparing for the interview, check out Chapters Eight and Nine of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.
- Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*, on networking, will help you start any conversation off right through a prepared elevator pitch.

## Choosing jobs wisely

Whether this transition is your first targeted or professional job search, or you've held many professional jobs in the past, it's possible that through your service you've sharpened your sense of what you'd like to do with the rest of your life.

### Action steps

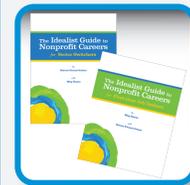
- Use your focus to your advantage by carefully choosing jobs to apply for.
- Emphasize quality applications—a relevant cover letter and resume for each opening you apply for—over quantity, sending out identical resumes to every organization that's hiring.
- Don't cave in to pressure to meet a minimum quota of resumes to send out weekly as a strategy for landing a job. Again, quality over quantity.
- Read more about discerning your career path from page 11 in [Part One](#) of this *Companion*. You must take the time to discover what you want to do, search out opportunities to do it, and find jobs that are the right fit. Only then can you convince a hiring manager that you really want the job.

## Running toward opportunities, not away from them

Always make decisions based on the merits of each opportunity, rather than to avoid a tougher challenge. Given the pressure you may feel right now, and the open-ended nature of a job search, alternatives may appeal to you for the wrong reasons. Enlisting in another term of service or applying to college or grad school, for example, can seem easier because the application processes are more straightforward and the start dates more definite than a job search. Both are legitimate options, just make sure you are clear about your aims in pursuing them, as well as their potential drawbacks.

### Action steps

- On page 83 in Part Two of this *Companion* is a discussion about committing to a second term of service for the right reasons (there are plenty).
- Read good and bad reasons to go to graduate school in Idealist's Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealistservice.org/gradschool](http://www.idealistservice.org/gradschool)).
- As for college—it's always a good time to get your undergraduate degree.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

### Chapter Eight of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*

(free PDF) is all about writing strong resumes and effective cover letters.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)

#### Chapter Nine of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*

(free PDF) will help you make the right impression at your interview.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html)

Learn how to craft your “elevator pitch” in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)



## Timing your job search

Your term probably has a definite end date. The upside is that you know when you will be available for your next opportunity, and you can plan accordingly. The downside is that lining up a job can pose tricky questions, such as when do you start applying for jobs? When during the application process do you let the hiring team know your availability? If you are offered a job early, do you consider quitting your term before completion?

When to start your active job search—sending in applications—is a little fuzzy. The typical job search takes about six months. But if you get a job offer two months before the end of your term, you may put yourself and the hiring organization in a bind. Do they wait for you? Do you sever ties with your program, service site, and clients by ending your term early? That said, if you wait too long, you may still be looking for a job months after your term ends, raising logistical problems like paying your rent.

### Action steps

- Start applying within about six to eight weeks of your final day with the service corps. That way if you are offered a position, the hiring organization won't have to wait too long for you to start—and you won't have to wait too long post-term to collect a new paycheck.
- Include your available start date in your cover letter or share the information during the (first) interview. Mentioning it earlier in the process may be perceived as presumptuous; but mentioning it later can be seen as hiding info from the hiring team, especially if your term doesn't end for a while.
- Read about the decision to terminate your service early on the next page of this *Companion*.
- Starting on page 61 you'll find some suggestions for staying afloat financially in case of a protracted post-term job search.



**Start applying for jobs about six to eight weeks from the last day of your service term.”**



### BEA'S STORY: TIMING THE JOB SEARCH

Bea, who has been connecting local organic farmers with public schools, is looking for opportunities to continue working on sustainability and food issues after her term of service ends.

Two months before she is due to leave the school district, her mentor Julia tells her about a job that would draw on many of the skills and networks Bea's developed this past year. A nonprofit called Farm Adventure has been piloting a summer camp and after-school trips that have brought a small number of children to tour the farm fields, listen to farmers talk about their work, and



## BEA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

cook with vegetables. Farm Adventure has received funding to expand their program called Kids2Farm. The expansion will include more farms, serve more children, and even start daytime visits to farms through field trips and working with home-schooling groups.

At this stage in her career, coordinating these projects truly represents Bea's dream job. She would be able to leverage all of her relationships with the farmers she's met this year—which she hopes will increase her chances of getting the job. She knows people at most of the elementary schools in the district, and the right people at the district offices, to enable students to participate in the program. And she would still get to help kids access more nutritious food.

The tricky part is that Bea learns of the job two months before her term ends, so she is worried that they might not hire her. She puts together a relevant cover letter and resume, shows it to Julia and her team leader Jim, and sends it in. She mentions her time constraint in the cover letter. To be on the safe side Bea asks Julia—who knows Farm Adventure's executive director—to put in a good word for her and to find out what the time frame is for bringing on the new hire.

Several weeks later, word comes from Julia that Farm Adventure will start scheduling interviews in the coming weeks. By the time they ask Bea for an interview, a month has passed since the application deadline. After a first and second round of interviews, a couple weeks more pass. Two weeks before her terms ends, Farm Adventure has checked her references and offers Bea the job. They agree that she's the ideal candidate, and don't mind waiting two more weeks for her to start.

She ends her service term on a Friday and starts her Farm Adventure position the following Monday. Although she'd been hoping to go home for a long weekend at least to see her family and to take a bit of a break, she is grateful for the short period between paychecks.

Bea **activated her service-related networks** to find her new position and **negotiated the timing** of her transition to her new job.

## TRANSPARENCY IN YOUR JOB SEARCH

If you were in a permanent job right now, you might choose to be secretive about your job search. Since your service term is ending on a specified date, however, you have no reason to hide your career transition from your host site supervisor or service corps program staff. In fact, they may be able to approve your time away from site for job interviews, help you network, and give feedback on your resume.

## Hanging in there till the end

Problems may arise if you find your dream job—or even just a next job—too early. You have good reasons to apply and you have nothing to lose, though the hiring team may not want to wait for you. If they can't wait, you will have to decide whether to quit your service program, or pass up the job offer.

If you are offered a job that is scheduled to begin before the end of your term, here



are just a few of the ways the situation could play out:

- You could ask to start your new job later than scheduled.
- Depending on your circumstances and the rules of the service corps, you may be able to work part-time in the new position until your term of service ends. Bear in mind that some corps forbid working outside the corps—if you're not sure, ask.
- Your host organization and/or service corps may be thrilled that you have found something already, and may be willing to let you go a bit early without damaging your relationship with them.

Reasons for staying in your program through the end of your term are many; maintaining the integrity of the relationships you've built is primary among them. Though you may not have signed a contract, your organization or school is counting on you. They may not be able to replace you with another corps member until next year—thus leaving your projects and constituents in limbo. Some people would say that fulfilling your commitment is simply the right thing to do—you made a promise, and now you are seeing it through.

Finishing your term also allows you to connect to your alumni group with your head held high; you also may have scholarship or other benefits coming to you that will be compromised if you leave early. (Except in very special circumstances, for example, the AmeriCorps Education Award is not prorated; if you leave early, you forfeit the entire award. See the box entitled “A VISTA asks ...” on page 58.)

Reasons to leave early may be financial, to accept a job or school opportunity simply too good to pass up, or to escape serving at a host organization that turns out to be an awful fit for you.

### Action steps

- If your issues are with your host organization or location, first explore the possibility of transferring elsewhere. Some corps are more accommodating than others.
- Before making a decision, find out the ramifications of quitting for yourself, your host organization, your projects, and your community. Note that in some service corps, bringing up the conversation is, in itself, grounds for dismissal (the idea being that you'd bring down morale for everyone).
- If you choose to exit early, be sure to make your departure as meaningful as it would be if you stayed till the end. For example, say goodbye to students, write thank you notes to colleagues, and make personal phone calls to people who supported you, to let them know of your decision. If you don't have time to do this before you leave, make an effort to do so as soon as possible afterwards.

### LEAVING EARLY: A PERSONAL STORY

I agreed to a year of service with my faith-based program (there were no contracts involved, though), and was offered a position as a campus minister after my term of service was over. In order to be on campus at least a week prior to the start of classes, I had to end my term of service a month early. I was very torn and upset with this decision. To my surprise, my program was not. They were sad to see me leave, but harbored no resentment about leaving early; they were thrilled with my job opportunity, which I really felt called to. I have since returned for a week or two at a time to do short-term work; one time I brought a group of college students with me. I joke that I am working off my last month. Depending on the program, I think it's helpful to discuss options about leaving. My program was quite flexible about when people came and left.

—Stacie, a former member of a faith-based service corps



- Collect documentation of your service effort, including statistics, writing samples, photos, and other evidence of your accomplishments (see the discussion of documenting your service in [Part One](#)). Your experience still counts, even if it was shorter than the full term.

If you've already quit your term early, you may be concerned about how to talk about your service experience since it was relatively short; you also may wonder how to request a letter of recommendation from people involved with your term of service. Those topics are addressed in the discussion on translating your experience, and on presenting yourself on paper, a little bit later on in this *Companion* on page 79.

### **A VISTA asks about accepting a job offer from her host organization before her term ends**

*Hi Amy,*

*The site where I perform my AmeriCorps VISTA service has offered me a full-time job. I am trying to decide whether I want to quit my service program now and take the job, or ask my host site to wait until my term is up in three months before hiring me. One dilemma, of course, is my educational award. Do you know if the National Service Trust ever prorates the educational award? Are there any options that you might know of?*

*Also could I just take the job now, but remain an AmeriCorps VISTA member?*

*Of course, it might also be more profitable to take the job now, because I could probably make the amount of the educational award in a few months.*

*Thanks so much!*

*Torn Up*

Dear Torn Up,

Congratulations! I am really glad that your host organization recognizes your hard work and talent.

Yikes, this is a tough question. One important thing to note is, you have little chance of collecting any part of your educational award if you leave on the terms you describe.

To be perfectly clear, you can't remain an AmeriCorps VISTA member and take on the identical duties of the open position. You're not allowed to displace staff of the organization where you're serving. Because technically you are simi-



## A VISTA asks... (continued)

lar to a human resource grant to your host organization, your activities must align with what your supervisor described in the grant proposal they wrote to fund your VISTA position.

It would reflect very negatively on your hosting organization if they were to hire a service program participant who isn't finished with her term yet. Your organization would jeopardize getting new participants by hiring you on. I was hired by my boss at Idealist.org about three months before my AmeriCorps VISTA Leader term ended—and he waited for me! I took his willingness to wait as a sign of respect for me and for AmeriCorps VISTA.

I think asking your host organization to wait is the best option. In the long run you'll feel more of a sense of accomplishment, and you won't let down community partners who are expecting you to serve out your term. If you ever need to apply to have AmeriCorps members yourself, you and definitely your organization would be at a disadvantage were you to leave early now. You might feel awkward, too, if you one day wanted to participate in the activities of your alumni group.

If you decide to wait and your organization agrees, maybe you can change your work plan enough to tackle some of the new job tasks, as long as they are related to the grant proposal originally submitted to fund your current service position. If you want to attempt this, it's best to bring in the counsel of your VISTA program director, or someone at the appropriate state office for the Corporation for National and Community Service. (For contact information for the office responsible for your state, see [www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/directory.asp](http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/directory.asp).)

On the other hand, if you are facing more than just the typical economic hardship (i.e., if you are ruining your credit record or running up irreparable debt), the choice is also clear that you should accept the job offer. Also, if your organization isn't willing to wait for you, that might be another reason to seriously consider leaving your service year early—though again, it won't reflect well on the organization.

If you started a salaried job tomorrow, you'd have little chance of saving the full value of an educational award in three months. Most likely, once you start earning a regular salary you won't feel like you missed out by waiting.

Regardless of what you decide, you can interpret the early job offer as a clear sign that your hard work is recognized!

Good luck whatever you decide. Let me know how it works out,  
Amy



## Looking for a job from a distance

If you want to set up a job in another state or country from where you are serving, you are fortunate in that you will soon join a network of other former service corps members throughout the country—and world—who can support your move. The network of former corps members can help you overcome at least some of the long-distance job search challenges. Many wonder whether to wait before applying for jobs. If you don't line up a job right away, how will you support yourself in the intervening weeks or months?

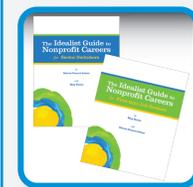
For most professionals, the long-distance job search poses challenges such as timing trips to your destination city to maximize meetings and job interviews. But as a service corps member, you may not have the money to visit your destination(s) in order to network and participate in job interviews. That limitation may result in a hiring organization taking your application less seriously.

### Action steps

- Chapter Six of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* offers great resources for your long-distance job search. [Part One](#) of this *Companion* also deals with alternative and long-distance networking which may be helpful to you during your transition.
- If possible, save your vacation days so you still have some time to travel near the end of your term when you'll be looking for a job. Be sure to check if this is okay with your service program and host site.
- Seek frequent-flyer-mile donations from friends and family. Some airlines allow people to transfer their miles to others. Your friends and family may have accrued some miles on an airline they no longer use, or have a lot of miles from an overseas flight, but not nearly enough to buy a plane ticket. Ask around and see if anyone is in a position to help you.
- If your service corps or alma mater has an alumni group in your destination city, connect with them for advice about where locals look for job postings in the nonprofit sector. Email-based listservs are popular among nonprofits and are cheap places to post jobs, but they tend to fly under the radar—the only way to find out about many of them is word-of-mouth.
- If a university in your destination city has a nonprofit management program, check with that office for information about local nonprofit job boards.
- Finally, sign up for free email alerts from [Idealist.org](#) if you haven't already—we'll send you listings for any region you're interested in as they get added to the site.



**If you don't line up a job right away, how will you support yourself?"**



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Six of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) examines long-distance job searches and strategies for networking at a distance.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch6.html)

### MORE JOB SITES

In addition to the job listings on [Idealist.org](#), the Idealist **Career Center** contains links to a wide range of nonprofit and public service job sites.

[www.idealists.org/career](http://www.idealists.org/career)

