



### ED'S STORY: LONG-DISTANCE JOB SEARCHING

Ed, the retiree who's been teaching with a service corps in the interior of China, has been networking online with people in Portland, OR for the past six months.

Through his networks he's learned about CNRG (pronounced "synergy"), the Community Nonprofit Resource Group, and their website and listserv that lets nonprofits in the area post opportunities and events for free. He also learns that Portland State University's Institute on Nonprofit Management has a listserv with announcements for its students that anyone can join by request. He signs up to receive their daily digests—one email with all the announcements from the day, rather than many separate email messages with individual announcements.

One day he sees that a nonprofit computer lab for job-seeking adults is looking to hire several part-time assistants to help students with computer skills. The positions begin a month after Ed is scheduled to return home, when the summer classes start at the organization. He applies for the position, explaining in his cover letter that he's in China and would have a hard time returning for a job interview. The hiring manager at the computer lab schedules a conversation with him over Skype, a computer program that allows people to chat and even see each other, using their internet connections.

By the time Ed starts to pack his bags for his trip home, he has happily accepted the job offer. He plans to live with his daughter during the first month home, while he gets settled and looks for an apartment. His service program will provide him with an allowance to settle back in the States. He plans to live off the allowance and some savings until he starts accepting his Social Security benefits and gets on his feet with the new position.

Long before packing his bags to fly home from China, Ed started **looking online to build relevant professional networks** across the world in Portland, OR. **Using online social networking sites** and **communicating with people** who are friends with his daughter in Portland, Ed has positioned himself to hear about opportunities as they arise.

## Living on even less during your transition

As a corps member you've likely been earning a very basic allowance—possibly in a foreign currency that has even less value back in the United States. While it's a good idea to save money before a career transition, chances are you haven't had much to save. What's a person to do if a new job doesn't present itself immediately?



## Spending your readjustment allowance wisely

If you are exiting a corps that offers you a lump sum of money at the end of your term, use it wisely. Before you spend anything, work out a budget taking into consideration your housing, food, transportation, clothing, and other needs.

Peace Corps Volunteers, for example, take home about \$6,000—broken into two payments. You may travel with that money, and take an around-the-world flight path home. You earned the money and you deserve to have fun with it if you want.

But if you are coming straight back to the United States, haven't got a job lined up, and want to use the money more strategically, consider:

- **The cost of an apartment** in the place where you'd like to live. Triple the monthly rent to estimate how much you'll have to plunk down for deposit, plus first and last months' rent, when you sign the lease. If you don't have a car (to save money, don't buy one unless you need it), remember that rents tend to be higher on bus and subway lines.
- Also consider **monthly utilities**—which will depend partly on your tastes and the time of year—and basic **furniture**. Something resembling a bed, a table, and a chair are helpful to start. Use your closets and suitcase to hold clothes for now; keep an eye out for decent used furniture at thrift stores and garage sales. Friends and family may have furniture collecting dust in the attic that they'd be willing to lend or give you.
- **Haircut and new clothes**. Your hair may benefit from a trip to the barber or salon. Save money by visiting a beauty school that offers student haircuts for a reduced price. The clothes you took with you into Peace Corps may be pretty threadbare by now or you may have abandoned them overseas. As such, they likely are not suitable for job interviewing. If you disagree, ask a trusted friend to give their opinion—sometimes a person can wear an item too long to notice the holes and nubs themselves. Invest in some good interview outfits (think plain, accessorizable, interchangeable, and conservative so you can wear them in a variety of settings). You may feel rich with your readjustment allowance, but it's best not to overspend.
- **Groceries and transportation costs** for the duration of your job search. How much do you spend each month on groceries? Eating out? (You may need to do it once or twice to remember.) If you have a car waiting for you back home, how much will you spend for a tune up and gas? If you don't have a car, how much will you spend on mass transit?
- **Health insurance**? Corps Care—the insurance plan you have access to as a recently Returned Peace Corps Volunteer—is free the first month, but \$140 per month thereafter (for your first 18 months home).
- Finally, think about the things you need to make your job search possible: A **cell phone**? A **computer**? If you need to buy these things, include them in your budget.

## MORE TIPS ON BUDGETS AND FINANCE

**Making a Difference: A Guide to Personal Profit in a Nonprofit World** is a free PDF booklet available at [www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html).

The booklet, developed by the National Endowment for Financial Education and Idealist.org, introduces a range of money-smart topics for people thinking about a nonprofit career—from handling student loan debt to thinking about salaries and benefits, credit and savings basics, and investing.



## Spending your readjustment allowance wisely (continued)

### Expenses for your first month home from Peace Corps

Typical expenses	Your estimates	Example – Portland, OR
Rent		$\$700 \times 3 = \$2,100$
Utilities and furniture		\$300
Clothes and a haircut		\$200
Groceries and transportation		\$500
Health insurance		Free for first month (Corps Care)
Cell phone, computer, phone and internet charges		$\$1,000 + \$100/\text{month} = \$1,100$
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$4,200</b>

Taken together, you've spent thousands of dollars, just for your first month home and a few essentials. After you've taken care of the priorities, save as much as you can—you just don't know how long the job search may last. As you can tell, you don't have a lot of room for shopping sprees, but at least you won't have to go into debt.



Before your term ends, consider taking a part-time job (if it's allowed)."

### Action steps

- Before your term of service ends, consider taking a part-time job if you can (and it's allowed), and save the extra income for the transition. Once your term ends, you can hang on to the job for the length of your job search. If you are in a program that forbids moonlighting, or if your schedule makes it impossible, consider the ideas below.
- Create a budget for yourself (like the one above) so you have a sense of how much money you'll need for essentials. This will help you know how much money you'll need to have saved, or that you'll want to earn now, as well as how much money you have left over to spend on extras like entertainment and fancy coffee drinks.
- Once your term has ended, look for ways to cut costs and bring in some money. For example, some people have the option of living at home or with friends. Establish early in your stay how much rent they'd like you to contribute, and a timeframe for moving on—and tread lightly. It can be hard to gauge the disruption your moving in causes to the lives of your hosts.
- If you were receiving public benefits during your term, or living in low-income housing, you should be able to continue until you've found a job that increases your income significantly. For some low-income housing,



your income can increase without affecting your lease. Check with your housing manager or case worker if you aren't sure. *Note that most service corps positions do not count as "employment" and so you should not count on unemployment benefits to kick in once your term has ended.*

Whether you have the ability to couch surf at home or among friends, you should still consider temporary employment, or "temping." With temporary employment, you'll be able to afford to put food on the table; it may even provide some other benefits. The key is to find a short-term source of income that also lets you take time to pursue job interviews as you are invited to them.

Here are some options for temporary employment:

- Let your network know you are looking for something temporary to tide you over until you find something more permanent. They may have ideas.
- You can find temporary work through a "temp agency"—an employment agency that helps connect people with organizations that have short-term gaps in staffing. Larger nonprofits use temp agencies to hire short-term workers to fill in for people on vacation, maternity leave, sick leave, or those who've left the organization permanently. The pay isn't super, but it's often better than minimum wage. Further, you can use the experience strategically. Let's say you are interested in working on issues of food security. Find out where the relief organizations or larger food banks in your region get their temporary staff. You can do this with a phone call to the main phone number of the nonprofit. Sign up with the same temp agency that the nonprofit uses. When you do, let the temp agency know you are interested in working with that nonprofit—and ask what other nonprofits use the agency. Benefits of this kind of arrangement include networking at your target nonprofit and showcasing your work ethic. Temp agencies sometimes offer health insurance options for temps who have worked through the agency for a set minimum amount of time.
- Search [Idealist.org](http://Idealist.org)—under "job type" you'll see "Temporary." As you are searching for permanent jobs, also tick the box for temporary jobs.
- Consider skills you've built that may allow you to freelance or seek contracts, such as technical writing, grantwriting, event planning, photography, or even volunteer management for special events. Find out where these jobs are posted, and also check [Idealist](http://Idealist.org) and [Craigslist](http://Craigslist). Also, consider tutoring students in academic subjects, musical instruments, or athletic skills that you are particularly adept at. This may require a lot of work on the front end as you research how and where to market yourself, but once you get a client or two, word of mouth may be all you need to promote and build your client base.



- If you've garnered some teaching experience during your service term, you may be able to work as a substitute teacher. Some school districts don't require a teaching license for subs, so if you don't have a license, ask what the policies are.
- Some industries—like retail, hospitality, and food service—expect regular staff turnover. Consider accepting a job with a company or coop so you can pay your rent. If your schedule is less regular than 9-to-5, your job search can continue as normal.
- Similarly, seasonal work means that the job will end after a month or so. Some companies, stores, and farms need more workers during certain times of the year. (For example, a retail store might need more help in December; a fireworks stand might need more help in June and July; summer camps need counselors.) If you are ending your term of service during a time with seasonal employment needs, consider taking advantage. Again, seasonal positions are often available for weekends and evenings so you can use daytime hours for the job search.
- Ranches, international travel programs for youth, national park concessionaires, and summer camps all offer summer jobs. The benefit of these types of positions is that you can avoid paying rent and grocery costs a bit longer. The downside is that you may have limited time off, and you may be far from home, so it could be difficult to access job interviews. If you plan to head to school in the fall, though, lining up these types of summer jobs is ideal.



**Beyond putting food on the table and paying the rent, temporary jobs can benefit you as you apply for new jobs.”**

Beyond putting food on the table and paying the rent, temporary jobs can also benefit you as you apply for new jobs. Because you don't need the new job as desperately as you would if you were completely out of work, you will be more confident and relaxed in interviews. You can also be more particular in choosing which positions to apply to, and which job offers to accept.

Further, if you are staying with friends or family, you won't be as much of a financial burden to them if you have income and can contribute to rent, utilities, and food expenses. Plus, they'll see you are making an effort to regain independence, which they may appreciate.

Another advantage of temporary employment is that you will be less likely to go into debt or damage your credit rating during your transition. If you have a credit card, use it carefully, pay it off monthly (or at the very least pay more than the minimum amount required), and pay on time.





## CESAR'S STORY: STAYING AFLOAT

Cesar's term of service as a teacher in a community center for immigrants is winding down. He's applied to several organizations with a variety of missions, which work on different issues, and with a range of roles to play. One organization had an opening for an administrative assistant. Another had a marketing specialist opening. A third was looking for a program assistant. He hasn't heard back from any of them. He's not too discouraged yet, though, because he knows the local job market isn't great and he has faith that he'll be led where his gifts are most needed.

Cesar knows he wants to work in a grassroots organization where he can wear many hats, but isn't concerned as much about what the organization does, as long as it is in service to people in need. He is pretty sure he doesn't want to be a teacher. He has enjoyed his work with immigrants but hasn't seen any job openings related to that kind of work.

As his last month at the host site draws near, he starts to fear that finding a job will be harder than he imagined. He has spent much of his savings from his cell phone job to make car payments this year. His last two paychecks from his service program will only cover one-and-a-half pay periods, so he starts to worry about his next rent payment, health insurance, car payments, food...

He's tempted to try to stay on at his service site another year, though he knows it would be for the wrong reasons. The main issues preventing him from committing to a second year are that he's eager to try something new, and also he's not crazy about committing to another year of full-time teaching.

He looks for a part-time job that he can take on as a corps member and eventually finds a job at the registration desk of the local YMCA. The pay isn't bad, and the hours are mainly evening and weekend, which is enough to tide him over. The schedule leaves him the daytime hours to finish his service term, and once that's over, to look for work. And finally, it's still a nonprofit where he can learn a lot and meet people in positions he aspires to.

The job won't include health insurance, so he also explores the Massachusetts health plan. He's lucky that he lives in a state with universal health coverage but it still takes some effort and time to get himself enrolled.

A month before his term ends, Cesar is offered the part-time YMCA job, and gets to work right away, evenings and weekends. He vows to keep it until he finds something more related to his interests. For now it supplements his service corps income.



## Staying insured

Because health insurance is so often tied to employment, losing it can be another challenge for the newly graduated corps member. It may be tempting to go without insurance—whether they like it or not, millions of people in the United States lack health care coverage. If you can continue your health insurance in some form, you should seriously consider it. The benefits of having medical insurance can range from paying less for prescription medication and doctor’s visits, to protecting yourself against accruing serious debt in case of an accident. With health insurance, you may be more likely to see a doctor for regular checkups and in the earlier stages of an illness, thereby catching problems when they are small and possibly more responsive to treatment.

### Action steps

- If you have a health need that requires prescription medicine, you may want to stockpile what you can before you leave your term. Ask the pharmacist or insurance company how soon you can fill your prescription again—it may be every two weeks, for example—and then go back to refill.
- If you are young enough, or still in college part-time, you may be able to seek coverage under your parents’ plan.
- Your program may let you pay your own insurance premium through a program called Cobra and thus keep your same or similar insurance after your term ends; look carefully, because you might find cheaper rates on your own if you shop around.
- Another option is to try to get on your state’s health plan, if your state offers one, and if you are eligible. Getting enrolled may take a while, so if you have a more immediate health concern, this option may not be ideal. If you are currently living where you’d like to have state health coverage, find out if you can start the enrollment process while you are still in your service program. Your low income probably qualifies you. Other eligibility criteria usually include your age and mental or physical condition. To find out if your state has a public health plan, do an internet search or call your local hospital.
- You may also be able to find health coverage through your college alumni association or professional associations in your field.

## Surpassing these challenges

While you are facing a lot of challenges right now, the greatest of these may be that you are forced to focus so much on yourself. For many service corps participants, advocating for other people comes so much more naturally than planning for their own futures. Keep in mind that to help others you need to attend to yourself and that you have achieved great things during your term, stretched your limits, and risen to so many new and unfamiliar occasions with grace and aplomb. If you can learn new skills to benefit your organization’s constituents or the students in your school, surely you can master the job search skills you need for, and overcome the complications inherent in, a career transition of this magnitude.

### MORE ABOUT HEALTH INSURANCE

To read a brief overview of insurance terms and options, check out this Wikipedia article on “health insurance”:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health\\_insurance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_insurance)

If you can’t access health insurance, consider researching low-cost health clinics in your area, in case you get sick. To find listings of free or low-cost medical clinics, see <http://freemedicalcamps.com>. Some of these serve only certain populations (HIV patients, for example) so call ahead.



## Section three: Translating your experience

For any job search or school admissions process, you've got to learn how to explain your skills and experiences. This discussion focuses first on describing your service corps to hiring managers—people who may have a lot of background knowledge about your specific corps, or very little. Knowing how to succinctly explain the type of service can benefit you in conversation and writing. This section discusses ways to translate your service experience and transferable skills on paper and in person. It goes on to prepare you to handle the unspoken assumptions hiring managers may make about you, assist corps members at mid-career to explain their reasons for participating in the corps, and help corps members who terminated their service early to overcome some of the associated challenges. Finally, the section discusses ways all corps members can successfully negotiate salary and benefits after a job offer.

As a graduating service corps participant, you have an extra challenge: How do you explain your term of service to your network and prospective employers who might not be familiar with the inner workings of your program? No matter how well known your program is, you should never assume that the people you speak with have any specific prior knowledge of it, or even of the concept of long-term, full-time service.

### Introducing your service corps

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Most nonprofit hiring managers may have heard of Teach For America, Peace Corps, City Year, and some other service corps. They may even have children, family, or friends participating in a program, or they may be alums themselves. They may be confident that they know enough about the program you participated in that they don't need to ask about it. But the truth is, they may not understand the differences between, say, Public Allies and City Year. Or they may not truly understand how and why VSO volunteers serve abroad—or that assignments vary greatly from country to country. Other hiring managers may have no connection to, or background knowledge about, service corps opportunities *at all*. In all of these instances, preparing to translate your term of service is essential. Learn to focus on the transferable skills you built during your term. (See the discussion of frameworks for organizing your skills beginning on page 72.)

When useful, provide a simple explanation of your service corps program, including its mission and method of service. Doing so, you enable your hiring manager to clearly understand the specific strengths of your experience. In addition you'll show that you can speak eloquently about an organization you've been involved with—a trait any employer would relish. If you don't already know how to describe your corps, look at the language used on its website, search for news articles, or ask your program director.



Be prepared to talk about your goals for the future. If you went through the process of discerning your career path—evaluating and reflecting on your experiences, researching opportunities, and talking to people who were doing what you would like to do—you have probably arrived at clear goals for yourself, and a way of describing what you hope to do with the next stage of your life.

You may worry that a hiring manager will be turned off by your affiliation with a service corps. After all, you haven't been a staff member of your host site, but a full-time corps member or stipended volunteer. *Keep in mind that the skills you built during your term are what your prospective employer is really after.* Emphasizing your service affiliation may also serve as a shorthand for letting your employer know that you aren't job-hopping by looking for a new job right now. Finally, your participation in the service program may garner you “network love” if the hiring manager is also an alum, or is a fan of your program.

## Translating for the resume and cover letter (or school admissions essay)

How to craft your resume may raise questions for you. Service programs are often considered a form of volunteering, and even if you earned a stipend, you may have been called a “volunteer” throughout your term. You may wonder, will employers take a service term seriously as professional experience? Should you include the name of your service program in your title?

For the resume, it's a good idea to include both your title or role within your host organization as well as your title as a participant in the service corps. For example: “Instructor of College English – Peace Corps Volunteer,” or “Volunteer Coordinator – AmeriCorps Member.”

In the first bullet point, include a brief explanation of your program:

- Designed and launched a volunteer program during a one-year term with a national corps of conservation volunteers.

Likewise, in your cover letter or school admissions essay, include a phrase or brief explanation of your service. For example: “During my time with City Year—a ten-month, urban youth corps that serves children—I developed tutoring, event planning, and cross-cultural communication skills.”

Mentioning your affiliation with your service program, you will help the hiring team understand why your stint in your last “job” was relatively short, you'll help them understand your program, and you may even connect with them as an insider if they are also a service corps alum.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

The elevator pitch and

other aspects of networking are detailed in **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 Eight of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) can help you effectively market your distinct skills.

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This *Companion* doesn't go into detail about all there is to learn about crafting resumes and cover letters, and preparing for your interviews. See Chapters Eight and Nine of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* for these career search details.

## Translating your experience for the interview

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When it comes time to interview for a position, regardless of how service-savvy the hiring team appears to be, you'll do yourself a favor by proactively describing your service program and experience. You can bring the topic up when you're talking about something you accomplished during the term.

Chapter Nine of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* explains thoroughly how to prepare for the interview. The discussion here addresses only issues of special concern to a transitioning corps member.

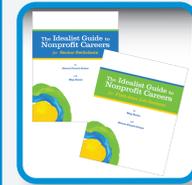
For the interview, adapt your elevator pitch—the brief, oral introduction to your service experience introduced in [Part One](#) of this *Companion*—that you've grown accustomed to using during your term. The short explanation should include:

- Your program's mission or vision
- The length of the term
- The primary method(s) of your service
- Any numerical indicators of success while you were on the job
- Any leadership roles you took on during your term
- Your reasons for serving, and one or two ways your experience has meaningfully changed you
- How the service experience has led to your applying for this job, now.

This could sound like:

"I am just ending a term with Habitat for Humanity's AmeriCorps VISTA program—a year-long opportunity that allowed me to help people buy their own homes. I chose to serve in AmeriCorps because I wanted more than an entry-level job during my first year out of college, and I wanted a team to consult with during that year. After a few months I was selected to join the board of a partner organization. The experience I had training new volunteers—doubling participation in our projects—is the reason I'm so excited to apply for this volunteer manager position."

In *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* you can read about preparing talking points for your interview. Talking points are key ideas you'd like to communicate during the interview, either through the questions you ask, or the information you include in your responses. Clearly explaining your service program can be one category of your



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talking points. Even if your interviewers do not ask you to talk about your term (after all, they might think they know enough about it), make the effort to introduce the topic and clearly identify several specific skills, experiences, or benefits that you have gained from the program.

With regard to talking about the skills you gained during your term of service, Pam Rechel has created a valuable exercise called “Translating your experience into job speak.” Found on pages 73-74 of this *Companion*, the exercise will prepare you for effectively answering almost any question a hiring manager can think to ask you about your past experience. The key is to share concrete anecdotes about your achievements, rather than listing them superficially:

“As the volunteer manager for my organization, I recruited and trained over 700 new volunteers. When I started the program we had few volunteers show up. We didn’t have a marketing plan, or a database for collecting contact information about our new volunteers. I identified the problems and researched ways to overcome them. Within a few months we started to see more volunteer interest, and had systems in place to put them to work. Those volunteers went on to build housing for ten families, and many are still helping us out.”



### ACE’S STORY: TRANSLATING EXPERIENCES

Thanks to a scholarship that all participants in his service corps receive, Ace is able to put some money aside for college. It’s a good amount, but it’s not enough to get through an associates degree program, which Ace and his mentor have decided on as a first step for his education. So for now, Ace plans to apprentice with Solar NOLA, a nonprofit that partners with the city of New Orleans to make solar panel installation affordable. Ace knows Rod, the technician who heads the installation team, but his first interview at the organization is with Gail, the human resources manager.

Ace isn’t sure what Gail knows about his service program, which is pretty new. Rod may have explained it to her in detail, or not at all. Ace also doesn’t know if Gail has any background knowledge about national service corps, though many corps have been involved with rebuilding the region in the aftermath of the hurricanes in 2005. Finally, he knows he needs to address his criminal record—and he’s prepared to do so.

He decides to briefly introduce his service corps, and then talk about the skills he’s built. In the interview he offers the salient and unique aspects of his corps: They served full-time for 10 months, he was among 50 corps members, they took classes each Friday on a range of topics related to green construction and

### WHAT ARE TRANSFERABLE SKILLS?

The term “transferable skills” is not just jargon. Having developed a skill set in one setting, you can then adapt those skills to a new setting. That’s why, in the nonprofit sector at least, volunteer experience can be as valuable as paid work experience. Ultimately, hiring managers are more interested in the skills you’ve developed, and less so in the setting where you acquired them.

For example, managing volunteers for community service projects helps prepare you to manage event volunteers. Planning and running an awards event during your term of service helps prepare you to coordinate a fundraising event in your next position.

Packing your skills and moving on to a new situation, you will have some new things to learn and challenges to overcome. But have confidence that the skills you gained during your service term are as authentic and valuable as if you’d been paid a salary to develop them. The key to unlocking their value is in how you communicate their transferability to the hiring manager.



## ACE'S STORY (CONTINUED)

renovation, and they served Monday through Thursday at sites throughout the city, doing a variety of different tasks.

Ace's new skills include his ability to identify different types of weather damage, familiarity with the range of techniques to thwart their spread, and experience grappling with work atop the variety of roof pitches and styles in New Orleans. This knowledge has allowed him to assess which strategies are most appropriate and cost-effective for different scenarios. By the end of his term, Ace had realized he wanted to learn more about solar installation after working on projects with Rod.

He acknowledges that he was a nonviolent offender in the past, and explains that he didn't understand what his alternatives were at the time. He now has a much clearer sense of how to make a life for himself and his family, and understands better how education can be a powerful influence in a person's life. He knows what happened to his city in 2005, and he wants to be part of rebuilding it.

As he clearly spells out the scope of his skills, experiences, and involvement with his corps, Gail realizes the depth of Ace's knowledge. She likes that his experience in the corps has affirmed his passion for contributing to the community, and that he knows how he wants to continue his personal and professional development.

## Some frameworks to help you organize your experiences

The next few pages highlight two frameworks that may prove helpful as you prepare to translate your term. The first is an exercise created by Pam Rechel of Brave Heart Consulting, included on the next two pages of this *Companion*. The idea is to identify your top strengths then prepare an anecdote that illustrates a specific time you employed each strength, including the positive outcomes of your efforts. The exercise prepares you to articulately answer questions during a job or school interview, and to share concrete examples of your past accomplishments.

Practice telling each story ahead of time, if it helps you—but be careful about sounding too rehearsed in an interview. To jog your memory during an interview, bring a typed list of your strengths and a word or phrase that reminds you of the anecdote you'd planned to share, along with information that helps you drive home the impact of your actions.

## WORKING WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD

Career transitions with a criminal record bring up special challenges and scenarios. Use your term to work with your service corps program staff and other supporters to practice writing and speaking about your past in a way that is honest and helps you focus on what you have learned from your mistakes. Employers will want to know whether you've accepted responsibility for your actions and changed.

On job application forms that directly ask about your past, always be honest. When the application involves sending in a cover letter and resume, you don't have to use those to explain your history, but it is a good idea to disclose your past before you are offered a job.

Depending on your past offenses, you may find certain lines of employment off-limits. Learn what the limits are so that you don't go through all the hoops of a job application process only to be turned down on technicalities.



# Translating your experience into job speak

by Pam Rechel, Brave Heart Consulting, [www.braveheartconsulting.com](http://www.braveheartconsulting.com)

## General competencies – life and work skills

There are many competencies that apply to ALL jobs. These are the competencies that you've been developing through your whole life. You take those skills with you to any job. Sometimes people get "hired for their technical skills... but fired for their general work skills".

To translate your experience into a language that an employer can understand, it is very important to:

- Name the competency or skill
- Give an example of a time when you used or learned the skill
- Identify ways the skill applies to the job you want and to clearly tell the potential employer how you think your skills match with the job requirements. It's up to you to help them connect the dots for them.

### Exercise

1. On the competency list (next page), select your top 15 skills. Mark the first ones that jump out at you. Go over the list again to see if you've missed any.
2. Go over the list again and **put a star or two by the top 5 skills**—the ones you think are *the strongest or becoming stronger*. Pick skills you are proud of and want to strengthen even if you're not fabulous yet. By focusing on them, you soon will be fabulous!
3. Begin writing the list of "technical skills", those specific skills that apply to your job. It doesn't mean just computer skills. Examples are: teaching children to prepare for earthquakes; using knowledge of how to apply for college to mentor high school kids; teaching reading to children who don't speak English.
4. For each of the top skills, write down an example of a time when you used the skill. Write about what you did, what you learned, and the impact it had on you and the situation.
5. For each of your skills or competencies, develop at least one example of a specific time when you used the skill. For example, "There was a time last fall when I helped two students resolve a conflict. I did this by...".
6. For every job you want, review the list of competencies and imagine which competencies are required for that job. Think of a time when you displayed that competency. Describe the examples in interviews or in your cover letter.

Good luck!

Idealist.org gratefully acknowledges Pam Rechel of Brave Heart Consulting for allowing us to reprint her "Translating your experience into job speak" exercise, which was originally designed for Life After AmeriCorps Training, June 2006. For more of Pam Rechel's work, please visit [www.braveheartconsulting.com](http://www.braveheartconsulting.com)



# Translating your experience into job speak (page 2)

by Pam Rechel, Brave Heart Consulting, [www.braveheartconsulting.com](http://www.braveheartconsulting.com)

## Competencies

### Thinking skills

1. \_\_\_\_ Analyze and solve problems
2. \_\_\_\_ Make sound decisions
3. \_\_\_\_ Make sound recommendations
4. \_\_\_\_ Innovate (create new solutions)

### Administration

5. \_\_\_\_ Write project plans
6. \_\_\_\_ Work efficiently
7. \_\_\_\_ Manage programs
8. \_\_\_\_ Manage projects
9. \_\_\_\_ Manage volunteers
10. \_\_\_\_ Recruit volunteers

### Leadership

11. \_\_\_\_ Lead a team
12. \_\_\_\_ Demonstrate leadership as a mentor
13. \_\_\_\_ Motivate and inspire others
14. \_\_\_\_ Coach others
15. \_\_\_\_ Adapt to change
16. \_\_\_\_ Lead change

### Interpersonal skills

17. \_\_\_\_ Build relationships
18. \_\_\_\_ Manage disagreements and conflict

19. \_\_\_\_ Be a strong team member
20. \_\_\_\_ Create partnerships
21. \_\_\_\_ Engage diverse groups to participate
22. \_\_\_\_ Lead meetings effectively

### Communication

23. \_\_\_\_ Speak effectively
24. \_\_\_\_ Listen openly
25. \_\_\_\_ Prepare written communication
26. \_\_\_\_ Make presentations

### Motivation

27. \_\_\_\_ Demonstrate drive and commitment

### Personal management

28. \_\_\_\_ Act with integrity (take responsibility for personal actions)
29. \_\_\_\_ Demonstrate flexibility
30. \_\_\_\_ Develop yourself (learn new things)
31. \_\_\_\_ Strong sense of self-worth and capabilities
32. \_\_\_\_ Commit to quality (strive to meet a new standard of excellence)
33. \_\_\_\_ Anticipate, recognize, and meet customer needs
34. \_\_\_\_ Overcome difficult challenges
35. \_\_\_\_ Manage crises
36. \_\_\_\_ Maintain a positive attitude in the midst of chaos

### Technical competencies that apply to your specific work.

For example: teach children about safety, disaster relief, etc.

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

**ASSIGNMENT:** Select your top 15 competencies—your best skills. Then put stars (\*\*) by the top 5.



In addition to Pam Rechel’s exercise, consider using the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) framework that federal government job applications often include. A KSA statement is an opportunity for you to write about your knowledge, skills, and abilities related to a specific job function. Whether or not you’re applying for a federal job, using the KSA framework to inventory your qualifications can help you share them with a hiring manager or school. First, find a job announcement that appeals to you—or use one you’ve saved from the Career Tracks Exercise described in [Part One](#). (For school applications, consider the qualities the school says it’s looking for in a candidate.) Identify each skill, requirement, or other required credential mentioned in the announcement. Then, brainstorm the knowledge, skills, and abilities you have related to each qualification you’ve highlighted. In brainstorming your KSA list, include any and all experiences—don’t limit yourself to paid experiences. Research you did in school, summer jobs and internships, volunteer and service corps experiences, hobbies, student clubs, family responsibilities, etc.

### Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) framework

Qualification	Knowledge	Skill	Ability

See a guide to writing an effective KSA statement from the Partnership for Public Service: [www.ourpublicservice.org/OPS/programs/calltoserve/toolkit/KSAs.pdf](http://www.ourpublicservice.org/OPS/programs/calltoserve/toolkit/KSAs.pdf).

## What an employer may assume about you as a service corps alum

While you can never be sure what a potential employer’s views of your service program might be, you may encounter some or all of these preconceptions. Some are positive, others are negative. Some of them may in fact be true for you, and others completely false:

- That you were **unsure what you wanted to do** with your life, or you **couldn’t find a “real job”** so you chose a service program to “buy time.” You must be able to explain what drew you to national or international service.
- That you may be **rootless**, and that you **long to get back on the road** as soon as possible—particularly if you’re just getting home from an international service experience. If you are looking for a job in the United States after serving abroad, be clear in the interview why you are ready to be at home, and how you hope to implement new skill sets here.
- That you have developed **skills that may or may not transfer**. For example, some people may think you’ve spent your entire term doing manual labor and

### FROM THE FRONT LINES TO A MANAGEMENT POSITION

Idealist.org offers resources that can help you translate your direct service into a career in program or organizational management. Focusing on your transferable skills can move the conversation from your job duties as an educator, construction worker, counselor, etc. to the skills you have that will contribute to your success in a management role. For starters, the article “Sharing your story with the admissions team” ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/sharingyourstory.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/sharingyourstory.html)) helps prepare you to talk about the transferable skills you developed as a corps member with graduate admissions or with a hiring manager. *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* also offer support for taking stock of your transferable skills—see **Chapter Three** ([www.idealists.org/careerguide](http://www.idealists.org/careerguide)).

If required or recommended, more education may be in order. Check out grad schools that offer management degrees—many business schools focus on nonprofit management and corporate social responsibility; specific nonprofit management degree programs exist across the country; and public administration degrees are also very well received in the nonprofit world. Learn more about your grad school options at [www.idealists.org/gradschool](http://www.idealists.org/gradschool), or stop by an Idealist **Graduate Degree Fair for the Public Good** in your area ([www.idealists.org/gradfairs](http://www.idealists.org/gradfairs)). Many alternatives to grad school also exist and could be beneficial in your transition, including certification and other types of professional development (see [www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/alternatives.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/alternatives.html)).



fail to see that you had to manage projects, liaise with local partners, and promote your project to local media—in addition to being handy with a hammer and nails. Explain which relevant skills you already have for each position you apply for—in your resume, cover letter, and interview.

- That you are **not on-trend** with your field, or that your **career goals aren't focused**. Especially if your service assignment was not related to the position you are currently applying for, you may find that employers miss the larger value that your service experience has brought you. Be vigilant about translating your experience, and communicating your familiarity with the field as well.
- That you are a **hard worker** and are more **driven by mission than by money**. Your hiring manager may have a very idealized, even unrealistic, image of people who have participated in national or international service. To the extent that the assumption is true, do everything you can to support it with your actions. Passion and enthusiasm go a long way in the hiring process—especially at nonprofit organizations. A downside of this view is that they may expect that you're accustomed to working long hours.
- That you are an **ineffectual dreamer**. Your hiring manager may assume you're a romantic who doesn't know how to actually get anything done. Show that passion and pragmatism aren't mutually exclusive by sharing creative and practical methods you employed to succeed during your term.
- That you are **resourceful** and can **do exceptional things with a small budget**. Most people recognize that service corps members haven't been working with huge budgets. If you have built programs from scratch, or improvised with few resources, be sure to share these stories and skills during the interview.
- That you are **naive, happy, and friendly**. For people who have never participated in a term of service, it may be hard to imagine what you have gone through in the term. You've likely seen and experienced issues—poverty, discrimination, pollution, addiction, natural disasters, etc.—that have forced you to confront your most basic assumptions in life, and to grow tougher and stronger. You may not have turned into a cynic, but you likely have a firmer grasp on reality. It's important to show your hiring manager your astute, grounded self.
- That you are **liberal politically**, or that you **share the same political views as your country of service** (if not the United States). While you should avoid talking about politics during your interview—you do not know and cannot assume the politics of the person hiring you—recognize that you may be seen as a liberal. Although national service enjoys bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress, legislation for Peace Corps, VISTA, and AmeriCorps all were initiated during Democratic presidential administrations. Your best bet in response to these assumptions—regardless of your personal political views—is to remain staunchly neutral and professional.
- That you are **religious**, or share a similar practice. The interview may or may not be the best time to discuss your faith, depending on the work you're hoping to do. If information about your faith isn't important for the job interview,

## DISABILITY AND DISCLOSURES

While some federal laws govern disability accommodations, regulations really vary state by state. If you need accommodations in your workplace, you should make sure you know your state's regulations about what employers are required to provide. Also, be sure to read up on if, when, and how to disclose your disability. For more information on disabilities and accommodations in the workplace, here are some resources that may be useful:

### Definition of a disability

[www.jobaccess.org/ada\\_definition.htm](http://www.jobaccess.org/ada_definition.htm)

### Americans with Disabilities Act

[www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/)

### Handbook of your employment-related rights under the ADA

[www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html)

### Job Accommodation Network

offers articles and resources on a variety of ADA-related topics, searchable by federal, state, local regulations; by disability; by specific legislation; and other criteria. Resources include “Pre-Employment Testing and the ADA”, “Health Benefits Plans and the ADA”, and many others.

[www.jan.wvu.edu/links/](http://www.jan.wvu.edu/links/)

For additional resources on disability accommodations, visit the resource page for Chapter Ten of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*:

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/ch10resources.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/ch10resources.html)



it's probably best to not mention it, whether or not you share the faith of the program you took part in. Note that you are free to disclose personal information during the interview, but it's difficult to gauge the response—positive or negative—such a disclosure will elicit; also, because of anti-discrimination legislation, it is illegal for the interviewers to initiate the discussion of this topic. Thus, disclosing personal information prior to the job offer can put your hiring manager in an awkward position.

- That you **will accept a lower starting salary** than someone coming from a staff position at another organization. You must do your research to learn what the average salaries are for people in the position you're vying for. If you're offered the job, be prepared to negotiate. Keep reading for insights about negotiating your salary during this transition.

The purpose for listing these is not to frighten you but to make it clear that it's your job to respond to any misconceptions the hiring team may have about what you've been up to during your term of service. Without knowing their assumptions, your best bet is to be proactive in explaining—in writing and in the interview—what your service experience was all about, and how you can transfer the skills you built to help their organization achieve its mission.

## **Justifying your service participation at mid-career and beyond**

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If you are at a mid-career point as you end your term of service, you have an extra task. Service corps are definitely pegged as something young people do, so you've got to effectively explain how and why you chose to take a break from a career to do a term of service. Hiring managers will likely assume that you didn't do it for the money.

Help hiring managers understand what led you to your term—whether it was a way to make a transition to public service, because you were drawn by the position description and wanted the support of a cohort during the transition, or because it was an opportunity to work on an issue area you care deeply about. For example:

“I had been volunteering at the organization for several years, so when the funding came through for the AmeriCorps VISTA position, my supervisor encouraged me to apply for it. And I'm glad I did, because I've gained volunteer recruitment and management skills, and I know now that I can develop a program from scratch.”

A truthful explanation will help hiring managers overcome any suspicion they might have about you—especially if you explain how your service has led to applying for the current position.



**Service corps are pegged as something young people do, so mid-career participants must explain how and why they chose to take a break from a career.”**



Avoid telling negative stories during the interview about what you left behind in your old career by joining the corps. For example, don't kvetch about the corporate grind, or working in a bureaucracy. Instead, talk about what drew you to service in a nonprofit, school, or government agency—for example, a social issue you hoped to tackle, a population you wanted to help, or a new way you wanted to apply the skills you honed in a previous career.



### DEENA'S STORY: JUSTIFYING SERVICE

Deena has joined her service corps working on microenterprise development in Ecuador at mid-career, after having run a successful bakery at home in the United States. She has joined the corps because of her interest in micro-lending and because she wants to put her business skills to work helping bring families out of poverty. She wants some field experience before going to graduate school or deciding to leave the baking industry for good.

Deena thinks that her logic will be easy to explain in any job interview, but she wants to make sure she could really tell the story of the passion that inspired her move to Ecuador and that propels her forward in her career.

She writes down all the moments she can think of that have led to her decision:

1. While a nursing student, she made a trip to a developing country to volunteer in a refugee camp which first exposed her to extreme poverty and what she considered “wretched inequality.”
2. More recently, as a Girl Scout Troop leader, she and the troop had a chance to do a service project with Heifer Project International, where they learned that increasing the income of a woman increases the chances for success of her entire family.
3. Finally, as her bakery began to thrive over the years, the initial, exciting challenges of building a business began to wane. She began to question her life's purpose and accomplishments.

All of these impulses ultimately have driven her to research job opportunities and fellowships in micro-lending.

In order to prepare for post-service corps job interviews she chooses to emphasize the story of working with the Girl Scouts. She writes the story out, including the moment one of the girls, Megan, made a comment along the lines of “I never wanted to be a businessperson, but now that I see how business education can help poor families, it makes me want to open a bakery, too, so I can learn the skills to go out and make people's lives better.”

Megan's comment had a profound effect on Deena. It really opened the door to her imagination, to think of her bakery as a means to something much more



### DEENA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

meaningful than pastries, bread, and coffee. It inspired in her an impatience to dive in and find a way to test the waters of a career in micro-lending, which led her to discover her service corps.

Once Deena is able to write down the story of her mid-career progression from business owner to international volunteer, she is clear that she can share the story effectively with any hiring manager who asks.



**Be proud of what you accomplished during your shortened term. Six months of service is six months of service!”**

## Translating your early termination during an interview

If you terminated your service commitment early, you may have special concerns about how to talk about your experiences. Keep in mind that your hiring manager may not know how long your service term was intended to be, since terms can range from a few weeks to a few years. As a result, you shouldn't feel overly self-conscious about how or when your term ended. This does not mean you should keep your premature departure a secret from the hiring manager—just that you shouldn't expect a barrage of questions about it.

Among other reasons, if you aren't fully upfront that you terminated your service early, and you do get the job, the truth will probably come out—through conversation with you, or during a reference check with your former supervisor. This will cause mistrust and make people wonder what else you've lied about, and possibly cost you a job.

Here are some ideas on how to discuss your early departure during the application process:

- First and foremost, be proud of what you accomplished during your shortened term of service. Six months of service is six months of service!
- On your resume, accurately represent the start and end dates of your service term, in addition to your job duties and accomplishments relevant to the job you're applying for.
- For the interview, be prepared with a logical, sympathetic explanation of why you left early.
- If you left due to personal reasons, be honest but don't go into detail—"I had to take care of a sick family member," or "My family (or financial) obligations made finishing the term impossible."
- If you left for your own health reasons, laws protect you from having to disclose that. "Personal obligations prevented me from completing the term."
- If the reason you exited early was because you clashed with program or host



agency staff, it will not help your chances for employment to bad-mouth them. It's best to move on. Stick to something honest but tastefully ambiguous like, "I wasn't getting the support I needed to do my best work." You may have to come up with a few examples of support you'd like in the new job—so have those ready, too.

- If you are asked to elaborate further about the reasons you left early, state that you'd much rather share what you learned from your service experience itself, rather than how it ended. Be prepared to talk about what you gained from your shortened term.

Depending on the intensely personal circumstances surrounding your departure, you may feel a sense of regret or you may be perfectly content with your decision. You may still resent people—service corps program staff, or host organization supervisors—who were involved with your service. Whatever your lingering feelings are, the interview is not the place to come to terms with them. Focus on the positive.

### **If you've left your site early, how do you salvage a good reference?**

People who left their service commitment early may be nervous about approaching service corps program staff, team leaders, host agency staff, or community partners to request a reference. Your feelings will naturally depend on the circumstances surrounding your departure.

If you left on fairly good terms, because of something beyond your control—medical issues, family illness, natural disaster—your potential references will probably be sympathetic and willing to offer you a positive reference. See below for ideas on how to ask for one.

If you left on poor terms, you may be right to avoid approaching some or all of the people you worked with during your term. Perhaps you had an unresolved conflict with your direct supervisor, or your supervisor asked you to leave for poor performance. In these cases, you may have still developed a strong relationship with someone else—a team leader or service corps program staff person, or a community partner, for example—who would be able to speak honestly about your good qualities.

Schedule a chat with the people you have in mind, and offer them a copy of your resume, cover letter, and job description. Directly address the issue of your early termination, and offer a quick, benign explanation if the person wasn't privy to that information previously. "I left Peace Corps nine months early because I didn't feel I was doing my best work," or "I ended my term with AmeriCorps before I could complete my 1,700 hours of service because of a medical-related family matter."



## Salvaging a reference if you left early... (continued)

Explain your current career objective. Then ask, “Can you give me a good reference?” Hopefully they will be honest with you at this point. If you think they can’t give you a good reference, ask someone else. Employers and school admissions staff are so accustomed to positive recommendations that a sour letter of reference may kill your chances. A reference letter can have some honest discussion of a weakness—you just want to avoid submitting a negative letter.

See page 143 in Chapter Eight of the *Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers* ([www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)) for tips about dealing with “burned bridges” in your job application process. That discussion offers advice on how to talk about past professional experiences that ended poorly.

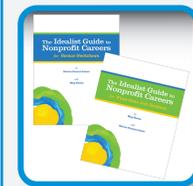
## Translating your experience as part of the salary negotiation

Negotiating your salary may bring up so much anxiety that you feel like skipping it for now. But that would be a mistake. This discussion touches on the challenges you may face negotiating your starting salary in a new—and possibly first—professional position. It also offers encouragement to go ahead and ask for what you are worth. Before reading this section, you will benefit from reading Chapter Ten of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

In your position as a recent service participant, you may feel especially defenseless in negotiating a salary. People often point to their previous salary as way to ask a new employer for a salary they deserve. Because your “previous salary” was a basic living stipend, you may feel at a disadvantage in salary talks.

The remedy is to find out what your skills are worth. While you may not be able to use your immediate previous salary as leverage in negotiations, you can still find out what the market rate is for your many skill sets. (And you can point to past accomplishments that prove you will be an asset to the team you are about to join—have this list handy so that you don’t have to memorize the points to make.)

It’s important to negotiate a salary that will work for you in the long run—not just one that seems impressive now because it’s \$10,000 or \$15,000 more than what you’ve been earning as a corps member. You will know the offer is fair by making sure that the salary is competitive with those for similar positions in your region.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Ten of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) discusses negotiating your compensation package and explores benefits. If you have little or no paid work experience, it’s recommended to read the First-time Job Seekers version.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch10.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch10.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch10.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch10.html)



Be realistic about nonprofit and government salaries in your area. If you entered your service corps at mid-career or beyond, and you are used to working in the business world, you may need to recalibrate salary ranges if you're now aiming to work in the nonprofit sector.

Chapter Ten of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* includes suggested language you can use when asking for more money. It also reminds you that while salary is important, you should also consider the entirety of the compensation package, including the benefits, vacation time, options for flexible schedules, and so on.

### **It's what you deserve, never what you need**

Employers don't care about your car payment or how much you have to pay in rent. It doesn't matter how little your stipend was or how high your student loans are—salaries aren't determined by what you need. Instead, be prepared to speak to why you deserve and are worth a better offer based on your specific skills, qualifications, commitment to the issue, or experience. These factors are what will allow an employer to recognize the value you'll bring to their organization or company, and why you're worth a higher salary.

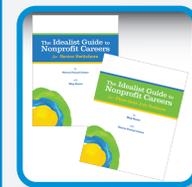
A good resource for figuring out your financial health if you're earlier in your career is the free PDF booklet by the National Endowment for Financial Education and Idealist.org called *Making a Difference: A Guide to Personal Profit in a Nonprofit World* ([www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html)).

Your starting salary is the basis for future raises, so it's worth it to view your long-term financial health when you are negotiating it. Your current expenses may be low because you've had to live simply. But now it may be time to consider financial goals like investing in a house and starting a family—even retirement, no matter your age.

### **BEFORE YOU ACCEPT OR DECLINE AN OFFER...**

Before you accept or decline an offer, here are a few things to take into account:

- Don't get caught up in the moment
- Be sure to consider organizational fit
- Recognize that salary is only one component of the compensation package
- Make sure you understand all of the details of the job offer... including benefits
- Don't forget to negotiate—carefully



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

For advice on research-

ing salaries, 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)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html)

Read **Chapter Ten** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) for tips on negotiating your compensation package.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch10.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch10.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch10.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch10.html)



## Section four: Other options for your next steps

*The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* and this *Companion* have both primarily focused on helping you move from your term of service into a nonprofit staff position. As you know, other options may be on the table; a few of these are spelled out below, including committing to a second term of service, considering careers in government or business, furthering your education, and starting your own nonprofit or social enterprise.

### Committing to a second term of service

Doing a second (or third) term of service is a great idea for some people. Before committing, examine your reasons—what are you hoping to achieve in another term?

#### Reasons to consider a second term

You shouldn't commit to second term of service lightly (for example, to avoid undertaking a job search). That said, many corps members who serve a second term do offer solid justifications for their decision. Here are some:

- **Ditto.** You sign on for a second term for all the intentional reasons you signed on for the first one.
- **Continued learning and leadership.** Your second term may give you a chance to deepen your knowledge and serve as a leader among your fellow corps members.
- **Ties to your community.** You've built meaningful relationships in your community this year and you want to continue investing in them.
- **Responsibility for your project.** You want to build on, or finish, what you've started. If you started a new program during your first year, you may want to spend more time establishing it, especially if your organization has no funding to pay a salaried staff person to take over your work.
- **Acting on your new knowledge.** Doing a second term gives you a chance to apply all the lessons you learned during your first term.
- **Curiosity.** Trying a new service corps, or serving in a new place, can teach you about new places, people, roles, systems, organizations, and issues.
- **Good, clean fun.** You may have had so much fun in your first term that you want to do it all again.
- **First-hand experience.** You participated in one service corps, learned a lot about the way things really work and about yourself, and now you want to want to try another service corps.



Many corps members who serve a second term have solid justifications for their decision.”

#### ON SERVING AGAIN

I decided to serve a second term in City Year because I was excited about the opportunity to help launch a new site in a new city. It took a lot of soul-searching because I didn't want to have a repeat of the year I'd just had. In the end, though, I decided serving in a different location, with different people and in a leadership role, would be a great experience. And it was—serving in a new city made the experience unique, and I didn't regret my decision to do a second term at all.

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



Most programs allow you to serve a second (and even a third, or seventh) term of service. Your options may include:

- Signing on with your same service corps, to serve again at your same organization, school, or agency.
- Signing on with your same corps, to serve as a team leader.
- Signing on with your same service corps but serving at a new organization, or even in a new city or country.
- Joining a completely different service corps (while serving in the same or a new city or country).

To discover new corps to explore, take a look at the Corps and Coalition sidebar on The New Service blog ([www.idealists.org/thenewservice](http://www.idealists.org/thenewservice)). Coming soon you'll find a directory of service corps on Idealist.org ([www.idealists.org/service](http://www.idealists.org/service)).

If you are considering committing to another term with your own corps, find out the specific rules of eligibility from your program director.

Also be aware that if further education is on the horizon for you—if you plan to serve with a program like AmeriCorps VISTA, where you can't be enrolled in school during your term of service—make sure start dates for your target academic programs do not overlap with your service term. Other service corps may not have an explicit prohibition against being in school during the service term, but your schedule and your location during your service term may prevent you from enrolling. Look ahead to these potential conflicts before signing on a second time.

Note that you can only earn two Education Awards from AmeriCorps (no matter the amount of either award), so that if you have already participated in a summer program and earned one Education Award of \$1,000, and then served in a year-long program where you earned a second full Education Award, you are not eligible for further Awards.

## **Finding a position in the government sector**

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Some things you may not have known about working for the government: Almost every job that exists in the private sector (nonprofit or for-profit) also exists in the public sector. And three times more people work for local and state governments than for the federal government. Also, more federal jobs exist outside of Washington, DC than within it.

People interested in social impact careers are often motivated more by mission and



**Almost every job that exists in the private sector exists in the public sector.”**



issue than by sector, and at the same time, public-private partnerships continue to blur the lines that traditionally distinguished sectors. Because of this you may want to explore job openings in the government sector in addition to the nonprofit sector.

During the first year after finishing their service term, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and former AmeriCorps VISTA have “noncompetitive eligibility” for one year when applying for jobs in the federal government. Noncompetitive eligibility status means you can apply for federal jobs posted with a special status (“noncompetitive appointment eligibility”) in addition to federal jobs that are open to the public. If you were hired, you’d also be able to use your year or two of volunteer service toward calculating your benefits like retirement and vacation time.

## Differences between public and nonprofit sectors

The nonprofit sector taken as a whole lacks an overarching, unifying hierarchy—there is no map of leadership that incorporates the entire sector from the top down. In terms of organizational variety and issue areas, the nonprofit sector is nearly infinite.

Governments, however, are often chartable and full of hierarchies. An elected leader appoints the head of a department; the department oversees that agency; and so on. You can see all the offices of a government in a list. Although sometimes sprawling, a government often operates like a single organism.

Nonprofits are independent and can rise up to fill in the gaps left by corporations and governments. Nonprofits also don’t have to make programmatic or financial decisions based on majority rule, although many nonprofits must comply with regulations that stipulate that their work serves some public benefit.

Governments, however, provide services according to the rules established by city councils and legislatures, and spend money in ways determined by politicians and taxpayers. On a related financial note, nonprofits don’t necessarily have pay grades; governments commonly do.

To begin exploring a public sector career, look at the structure of the government system you’re interested in joining. For example, if you aim to work in your city’s government, find a listing of its structure and agencies online. What bureaus, councils, offices, and boards does it have? What do all of these terms mean for your locale?

Pay attention to the titles people have—what’s comparable to the role you have been playing or have the skills to tackle? Consider the issue areas the agencies focus on—what issues overlap with your professional mission?

Brainstorm people you know who work for local government—or anyone they

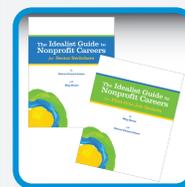
## GETTING STARTED LOOKING FOR A FEDERAL JOB

The **Partnership for Public Service** is an organization that inspires new generations to work in the federal government. They publish guides to entry- and senior-level government careers; sponsor events and regional speakers bureaus; and connect college campuses to federal agencies. Learn more about federal government careers at their website.

[www.ourpublicservice.org](http://www.ourpublicservice.org)

Also the official job-posting website of the federal government is **USAJOBS.gov**:

[www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov)



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

For a deeper discussion

of the differences between the nonprofit, for-profit, and government sectors, see **Chapter One** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch1.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch1.html)

### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch1.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch1.html)



might know who does. Start building your professional network through informational interviewing.

As you chat with people who work in government, notice the language they use. What terms seem new to you, what acronyms are bandied about, and where do they suggest you look for more information? Websites such as [www.acronymfinder.com](http://www.acronymfinder.com) can help you decode acronyms that you come across.

## Finding a position in the business sector

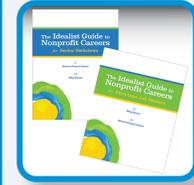
Much of the advice in this *Companion* as well as in *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* is applicable to finding a job in the business sector, too. For instance, building relationships, understanding what role you'd like to play and what type of enterprise you'd like to work for, learning the lingo of the sector, and building the skills and credentials to be taken seriously by a hiring manager are all relevant.

Differences also exist. While many businesses articulate their mission statements, their missions may or may not be centered on creating change on social or environmental issues.

Traditionally, the bottom line of a business is to make a profit, which is another difference from the nonprofit and government sectors. Increasingly businesses talk about other bottom lines, like their company's environmental impact and social responsibility. If you were drawn to service because of the positive impact you could have in your community, businesses that emphasize more than profit may be up your alley. For example, social enterprises—businesses where the core activities aim to enhance the public good—use profits to fuel the growth of public services or spread problem-solving technologies, in addition to accumulating personal wealth.

Responding to demand among customers and employees, more corporations are developing community involvement programs. As a former corps member, you may stand out particularly well in competition for some corporate jobs such as connecting staff with volunteer opportunities, working in the corporation's foundation, or developing a company's efforts to green its business practices.

Other business sector opportunities might appeal to you simply because of the impressive salary and comprehensive benefits—things you have been missing as a corps member. If you take a corporate position that allows it, find ways to incorporate sustainability or a triple bottom line approach into your daily work. With the limited number of business positions that are specifically geared toward sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), community relations, or other socially beneficial



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

You can learn more about

how nonprofit hiring practices differ from those of the for-profit and government sectors by reading **Chapter Twelve** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch12.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch12.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch12.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch12.html)

**Chapter Thirteen** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) deals with some of the common misconceptions about nonprofit work—including some that you (or your potential employer) may hold.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch13.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch13.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch13.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch13.html)



outlets, finding a way to incorporate these values into your daily work will highlight you as innovative, committed to a cause, and self-starting.

If you land a corporate job that does not offer you an outlet for contributing to your community, other ways to stay civically engaged outside the office include volunteering for a nonprofit, serving on the committee of a nonprofit board, or serving on the board itself. Many companies encourage their employees to sit on local nonprofit boards, because it's a positive form of community involvement as well as a good business strategy. Before agreeing to join a board, research the financial, legal, and time commitments of board service.

## Further education

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As your term ends you might be enthusiastic about the doors that would open if you had higher credentials—your GED, certification, an undergraduate or graduate degree. Chapter Five of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* offers an overview of various educational options. Idealist.org's Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealism.org/gradschool](http://www.idealism.org/gradschool)) also offers support for people considering graduate school.

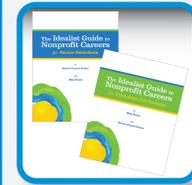
In case you are tempted to explore grad school as a way to avoid the job search, check out these articles on both bad ([www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/badreasons.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/badreasons.html)) and good ([www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/goodreasons.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/goodreasons.html)) reasons for going to grad school.

## Starting your own nonprofit or social enterprise

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Based on your service corps and other experiences, you might be inspired to tackle social problems in a way that requires starting a whole new organization or business. For resources (and warnings) around starting a new nonprofit, take a look at Chapter Fourteen of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

Learn more about starting your own social enterprise—a nonprofit or a business with equal emphasis on both transformative societal change and financial sustainability—through resources like the Skoll Foundation ([www.skollfoundation.org](http://www.skollfoundation.org)), Echoing Green ([www.echoinggreen.org](http://www.echoinggreen.org)), and the Ashoka Changemakers community ([www.changemakers.com](http://www.changemakers.com)).



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Five of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) contains discussions of both board service and further education (among other topics) as ways to strengthen your candidacy for your chosen career.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html)

If you're considering founding your own nonprofit organization, **Chapter Fourteen** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) is a must-read. It contains advice while also explaining the major first steps in the process.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch14.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch14.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch14.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch14.html)

### MORE WAYS TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

For many more ideas on how to make a positive impact in your community, check out **The Idealist.org Handbook to Building a Better World**, from Idealist.org and Stephanie Land, published by Penguin Books.

[www.idealism.org/handbook](http://www.idealism.org/handbook)



## Playing catch-up: Networking, building skills, and documenting your service post-service

What if you have found this book after your term of service? What if you are already making the transition, but you weren't very conscientious about building your network or skills during your term, and you didn't document your service accomplishments?

**Shore up your network:** Even if you didn't go out of your way to meet community members during your term of service, you likely came into contact with community leaders regularly, through collaborating with other groups to make your project a success, meeting with visitors at your office, or participating in community events. Take stock of these people and set up informational interviews with them (see Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*), reminding them of who you are and how you met.

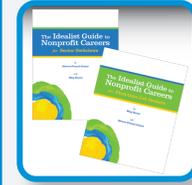
**Inventory your skills:** Unless you entered your term of service with all the experience you needed for it, you probably learned how to do things you had never done before. Brainstorm your skills and prepare to talk about them. See these resources:

- *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*
  - \* Chapter Eight, "Resume Worksheet" activity (p. 142 of First-time Job Seekers version and p. 146 of Sector Switchers version)
  - \* Chapter Three, "Clarifying Your Greatest Skills" activity (pp. 43-44 of First-time Job Seekers version and pp. 47-48 of Sector Switchers version)
- "Sharing your story" article in the Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/sharingyourstory.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/sharingyourstory.html))
- "Translating your experience into job speak" activity by Pam Rechel (see pages 73-74 of this Part of this *Companion*)

**Document service that's already completed:** Your biggest challenge may be accessing the computer you used during your service term, if you didn't otherwise save copies of writing samples, photographs, emails, grant proposals or reports, statistics, and other artifacts that could be useful documentation of your term. If possible, ask your service site if you can stop by to pull some documents off the hard drive, or if you have moved far away, if someone can email you specific files.

If part of your service was to make a project sustainable, you may have created a binder or guidebook for the staff, or the next corps member after you. Ask if you can borrow that resource and photocopy it. (In itself, that would serve as a great work sample.)

Finally, connect with fellow corps members or community partners who may have documented projects that you worked on jointly. Websites like Flickr make it easy to share photographs that work well in a professional portfolio.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Four of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) covers many aspects of professional networking—including informational interviewing.

#### 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)

The "Resume Worksheet" activity referred to in the "Playing catch-up" text box is in **Chapter Eight** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

#### 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)

The "Clarifying Your Greatest Skills" activity is in **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)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html)



## Conclusion

Your career transition poses great challenges—but you’ve overcome challenges before. Can you muster the same passion to advocate for yourself the way you’ve advocated for the people or causes you’ve been serving? Have you created a network that would go to bat for you, if you asked? Have you learned the lessons of living with little money? Can you sell your service corps experience well? The answer is yes!

Your career transition presents many uncertainties, but what’s perfectly clear is that you have risen to meet all the same struggles during your term, and you’ve succeeded. As you move on to your next steps, you take with you the experiences accumulated during your service term. The skills and relationships you’ve built will stay with you and continue to support your work.



## SUMMARY

As your term of service comes to an end and you begin to transition to your next steps, bear in mind that the experience you've gained during your term will be invaluable and enduring.

If the thought of shifting to a new stage of your life is daunting, **draw motivation and courage** (pages 51-52) from the fact that you've already been successful at dealing with a range of experiences during your term. Activate the network you've assembled and dive in—you can do this.

Given the unique experience you've had in your service corps, you may also face some **unique challenges in your transition** (pages 53-67). These can range from insecurity about the best way to market yourself to hiring managers or the right jobs to pursue, to complicated decisions about whether to complete your term or leave early to take up an offer, to worries about staying afloat financially or maintaining access to health care. But don't fret: there's tailored advice to help you navigate any of these concerns right here in these pages.

A major aspect of the transition from service corps to career (or other options) is **translating your experience** (pages 68-82). It's crucial to spend time refining how you go about conveying the value of your term of service—what you've learned and accomplished, how you've made an impact and developed skills. Since you can't assume that other people will immediately grasp the complexity or nuances of your service corps experience by name alone, be prepared to emphasize the transferable skills you've obtained when you interact with potential employers, university admissions staff, and other people who can connect you with your next steps.

While much of this book emphasizes transitions to nonprofit work, we recognize that there are **other options** (pages 83-87) you may choose to pursue, whether that's enrolling in another term of service, exploring work in the government or for-profit sectors, looking to further your education, or perhaps starting your own organization to tackle a cause that matters to you.

## You are here

- This is **Part Two**. 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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## After your transition

### Adjusting to your new work and staying ready for the future

#### Part Three Overview

Part Three is beneficial both for former service corps members who are settling into a new job or those who've been working a while and want to reinvigorate their career. It discusses the following topics:

- **Section one: The shock of the new (starting a new job)** (pages 92-102)
  - \* Includes discussions of being a “rookie” at your new job (pages 92-93), getting accustomed to your new coworkers and workplace (pages 93-94), adjusting to the idea of an open-ended time commitment (page 94), taking ownership of the work you do (pages 96-97), adjusting to increased income levels (pages 97-99), and evaluating your feelings after three months on the job (pages 99-100)
- **Section two: Career growth beyond your service term** (pages 102-112)
  - \* Includes discussions continuing to self-assess and evaluate your career (pages 102-103), networking after your service program (pages 104-106), keeping your knowledge and skills current (pages 107-109), and ways to continue building your skills (pages 110-111)

Congratulations on completing your term of service! Your reading these words likely means that you've arrived in a new place in your life and career. As you move beyond your term, it's important to continue the good habits you started as a corps member in order to continue advancing your career—namely, building relationships and developing new professional skill sets. As a corps member you spent a lot of time discerning your career path; as a new professional, you'll want to reflect on your experiences to confirm that you've made choices in line with your short- and long-term professional goals. Although this is a time for celebration for you, you may also feel a sense of loss as you adjust to a new life without your service community to support you.

Part Three offers concrete suggestions for transitioning to a new job, including basics like putting together an affordable professional starter wardrobe, the more complicated adventure of figuring out if your new position is a good fit, and taking ownership of

your work. You'll read about ways to adjust to increased income as well as to stay on top of trends in your field by connecting with people, reading industry publications, building your skills, and attending relevant professional gatherings.

## Section one: The shock of the new (starting a new job)

**Warning:** this section is not for the faint-hearted (but read it anyway!).

This section outlines some of the challenges of starting your new, post-corps job. Depending on your experiences in the corps, you won't experience all of the situations described here. Feel free to skip past the points of concern that don't resonate with your experience.

The challenges covered in this section include losing your unique status and possibly autonomy now that you're no longer a corps member, adjusting to your colleagues and the office culture, the open-ended job commitment, taking ownership of your work, adjusting to increased income, and evaluating your first three months. This section also offers very basic tips around professional dress.

### Just a rookie on a new team

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As a corps member, you were unique. Even if your service site hosted a few corps members, you were a shorter-term contributor to the place and the role you filled was special. Depending on your program, you may have had a clearly negotiated work plan or position description that guided your duties towards your core mission. Although you didn't earn much money, you may have been the recipient of special attention and leadership opportunities expressly because you were in a corps. You may have had a designated orientation, a team of other corps members to learn with, and service corps program staff to connect you with the resources you needed. You may have also enjoyed latitude to wear more casual garb than staff (AmeriCorps T-shirts, for example) or set your own hours (if you lived in a remote village where you kept pace with local routines rather than conform to the 9-to-5 schedule typical of a U.S. nonprofit). By the end of your term you likely mastered your assignment and felt very established on your team, or among your network of community partners.

Now, you are just a rookie on a new team. As you've transitioned to a staff role, you'll likely find you won't warrant any exceptional treatment. As a staff member, you may find *less* hand-holding and *higher* performance expectations, a less exhaustive orientation, and less access to professional development. Unless you have joined the staff

### STARTING SCHOOL

Part Three of this *Companion* primarily focuses on completing the transition to a job, rather than the transition to college or graduate school.

For suggestions about making the most out of college, check out the article "Setting yourself up for success as an undergraduate" in Idealist's **Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center** ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/settingyourselfup.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/settingyourselfup.html)). The emphasis is on preparing for grad school, but the suggestions work for career preparation as well.

If you're starting graduate studies, check out "Are you ready for the lifestyle changes?" which is also in our grad school resource center ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/lifestylechangesgeneral.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/lifestylechangesgeneral.html)). The article focuses on adjusting to the grad school experience.



of the host site where you served during your term, you are probably starting from scratch on new projects that will take a while to master. Most nonprofits expect staff to wear multiple hats and take on tasks that aren't in their job description—something that may be exhilarating to you, or stymieing, depending on your disposition and the amount of work on your plate. If adjusting to these shifts is unnerving, rest assured you are obviously capable of handling such challenges—you've responded to tough situations before as a corps member.

### Action steps

- Give yourself time to learn the ropes, just as you did during your service term.
- Don't be afraid to communicate your needs with your supervisor so that you get the support and training you need to do your job well.
- If you struggle with this move, reach out to the corps members you served alongside to see how they are faring with their transition. Getting together after work or chatting with them on the phone might get you through this experience the way it got you through tough times when you were in the corps.
- Seek out other professional networks in your community. Local chapters of the associations of people in your field are a good place to start, for example. Networking groups like Young Nonprofit Professionals Networks and Green Drinks exist in cities throughout the United States.
- Depending on your preference, reach out to your new colleagues. A single trustworthy confidante can help you overcome self-doubt and guide you through awkward moments of your new job.

Chances are, you will stay in your job a year or longer, and you'll see that in no time your confidence in your new role will begin to match your feelings about the service project you've just left.

## Adjusting to your new colleagues and the office

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You may also need time to adjust to your new colleagues and the office environment. While such adjustments aren't unique to former corps members, your recent service experience may be quite distinct from the backgrounds or recent activities of your new coworkers. Your term likely brought you into close contact with people and problems that can seem a world away from the confines of your new office, and you may feel that your colleagues' attitudes and sense of purpose don't match your own. But while your corps experience is one avenue to a career in public service, it's far from the only one.

### SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Situational, or contingency, leadership theory says that no single leadership style is appropriate under all circumstances, and that your leadership style can and should change as needed. Thinking about your term of service, you probably needed more support from your supervisor earlier in your term, and more independence from your supervisor later in your term. The same is likely to be true as you start out in a new role.

The problem is that not every manager adapts their leadership style according to the needs of their staff. The key to getting the support you need from your current boss is to ask for it directly and nicely, and to be persistent. This may mean asking for more meeting time with them in the beginning, more clarification of your tasks, more feedback on your performance, and more help with prioritizing your responsibilities. As you grow more comfortable in your position, asking for what you need may mean asking for more leeway and freedom to make your own decisions (within reason).

Your boss, although your superior in the organization, does not have super powers—they are human and as such the only way for them to “read your thoughts” is if you write them down in an email or communicate them in a meeting.

The more you and your manager and team communicate clearly in the beginning of your tenure at the organization, the better you'll be able to understand their expectations. Soon you'll be able to anticipate their style and needs, which will pay off over the long term.



### Action steps

- Give yourself some time to adjust, and proceed with an open mind. Your new colleagues likely have their own strong reasons for working in this field, and they simply may not be in a position to share their motivations amid the whirl of keeping their programs operational.
- As the new person in the office, do your best to professionally engage your new colleagues in the office—working on projects together and getting to know one another, you will move beyond this awkward initial stage.
- Invite them to take a coffee or lunch break outside of the office and create the opportunity to learn more about their background, passions, and personalities (as comfortable and appropriate as this feels for you). You can probably learn a lot from your colleagues' experiences, and you also have unique insights to share with them.

Ultimately, you may not agree with all your workmates on everything, but then, that's life—*vive la différence!*

## **The open-ended job commitment**

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During your service experience, you knew when your term was scheduled to end. Depending on your current position, you may be in an open-ended commitment with no specific deadline for moving on. Chances are, *you'll* decide when and how (and even if) you leave this position. That means you have the power and the freedom to leave, but also that you'll have to find new motivations for staying, and for improving your performance. There's nothing like an AmeriCorps Education Award or Peace Corps Readjustment Allowance awaiting you if you can stick it out for a few more months.

### Action steps

- You really do have to create your own intrinsic motivations, but the rewards are usually worth it: solving critical problems, growing professionally, emerging as a leader in your field, getting promoted to new roles, and determining your own path.
- Some of the steps you took during your discernment process (see pages 11-17 of [Part One](#) of this *Companion*) can help you now. Evaluating your experiences, for example, keeps you aware of how you're progressing, what you like and don't like. Prayer and meditation help some people understand their priorities better, and as a result the less important (but annoying) aspects of life can dissolve away.
- Also keep reading—pages 99-100 of this *Companion* cover the three-month review you should plan to take part in.



**Chances are,  
you'll decide  
when and how  
you leave this  
position.”**



## Fashion tips for the post-service professional

While many service corps participants must dress very professionally throughout their term of service, others adopt clothing styles appropriate for life in their sub-Saharan village (where different cultural norms may inform local dress), or for the type of work they'll be doing—keeping up with kids, maintaining trails, or rebuilding cities after a natural disaster. Whether you've been wearing the same clothes for a couple of years as an international volunteer, or surviving in your City Year uniform or AmeriCorps T-shirt, you might want to take a little time to revamp your wardrobe.

During your job search, you might have gotten away with having one good, professional outfit for interviewing. Or, if you entered your service corps from a corporate background, you may have a closet chock full of business suits, which may or may not be useful in your new nonprofit role.

As you settle into a new job, you will want to feel and look your best in your new role. Therefore, it's wise to pull together a small wardrobe—enough for the first week—that will help you look professional (see sidebar).

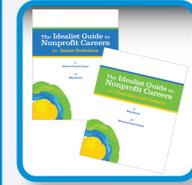
Before starting your first day, ask what the dress code is. Even if you have visited the office to interview and noticed how the staff dressed, save time and money by clarifying the dress code after you've gotten the job offer. In some situations, you may need to prioritize your professional image above your own self-expression, and/or follow safety guidelines, such as wearing closed-toe shoes and avoiding dangling jewelry. It's wise to ask before you purchase anything. If your organization is large enough, the human resources office might have guidelines prepared. Otherwise, ask your manager. Here are some basic tips and guidelines:

- Regardless of dress code, your clothes should be clean at the start of the day. Especially if you are in an office or indoor setting, your shoes also should be clean, and your clothes wrinkle-free.
- Avoid clothes with words printed on them, T-shirts, and clothes that reveal too much skin (i.e., plunging necklines, short skirts, sandals, inappropriately high heels, muscle T-shirts, anything see-through worn on a part of the body that shouldn't be seen publicly, etc.).

Invest in a few good, professional outfits according to the dress code of your organization. You don't have to buy expensive clothes, but know what you are looking for before you go shopping, or take a fashion-savvy friend with you. Always try an item on before you purchase it—a little time in the dressing room will save you money and hassle in the long run.

Sources of free or inexpensive clothes:

- Borrow from and/or exchange with friends (be sure to ask whether you need to return them, and by what date).
- Comb through consignment and thrift shops for professional clothes in good condition.
- Find discounted or inexpensive clothes at chain stores.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

### Chapter Nine of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers tips on making a good impression at your interview, but clothing and grooming can make a difference after you land a job, too.

**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)

## NERVOUS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DRESS?

If you are starting your new job in an office setting, and you are unsure about what goes into a basic professional wardrobe, here are some general guidelines.

Aim to have a minimum of these items in your closet to make it through the first week without having to do laundry:

- Two pairs of dark-colored pants plus one dark-colored skirt for women
- Five shirts/blouses: collared, solid colors
- One suit jacket in case you need to dress up
- One pair of clean shoes

**Business casual:** Usually means slacks/skirt and a collared shirt or blouse, but interpretations vary, so play it conservatively at first until you get a clear sense of what to wear.

**Formal business attire:** Suit jacket, with matching pants or skirt. Dress shirt or blouse. Stockings or socks, dress shoes.



## Taking ownership of your work

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If you're like many corps members, at the end your term of service you felt on top of the world—you had mastered your projects and felt ready for anything. Embarking on a new career path, you may find yourself feeling low—looking up a steep learning curve or sitting at the bottom of the totem pole in the new organization. In your race to take the reins of your new work—to restore your place at the top of your game—you may face some resistance: colleagues who've been tackling a piece of the work that's now yours, a boss who has really firm ideas of the way things ought to be done, and/or an organizational culture that impedes change or embraces it slowly.

It's important for you to feel ownership over your new responsibilities, while at the same time figuring out how to balance the way things have been done with the way you'd like to do them.

### Action steps

- Be proactive, not passive. Make sure you know what is expected of you, and which aspects of your project you are personally responsible for. If it's helpful, create an action plan for yourself and share it with your supervisor and others with whom you share project assignments. Read about action plans on page 36 of [Part One](#) of this *Companion*.
- Give yourself time to get up to speed. Recognize that it will take time to feel knowledgeable in a new job, and that once you do, you'll likely feel more ownership over your work.
- Ask for reading and organizing days if you are learning a completely new field, e.g., you were working in public health policy previously but are now in economic development. Immerse yourself in the major publications, articles, and reports that can give you a better foundation for understanding and owning your work. Read on your own time, too.
- Take some time to organize your work space and files, especially if you've inherited documents and work from a current colleague or former employee.
- Ask questions, respectfully. Find out what's been done, and what the history is behind policies, as well as how things get carried out. Find out where there is room to make changes. Exploring these topics acknowledges that your organization and role have a story that predates you, and shows respect for what's happened before. As you learn where there is room for change, you can make suggestions or implement your ideas. Try not to sound disdainful of current policies—you won't win popularity points by disparaging the work of people around you, who likely created the policies (and who probably have solid reasons for them).
- Create a vision for your work. What possibilities can you imagine; what



do your colleagues and boss see happening in the future? What image can you connect with that inspires you to do your best work?

- Make a plan and achieve your goals. Keeping in mind the vision, set goals and assign priorities. People will accept that you're the owner of your work when they see you thinking ahead, making steady progress toward your goals, and succeeding on deadline.
- Find ways to do what you do best given your job priorities. If you are passionate about managing other people, ask about recruiting volunteers and interns. If you love to bake, set yourself up as the baker for staff celebrations.
- Report back. Let your boss and key colleagues know about your progress and difficulties. Especially at the beginning, more communication is better than less. If your boss seems anxious to relinquish control, offer them your daily and/or weekly priorities so that they can see what you are up to, as well as the logic behind your approach.
- Ask for help. If you are struggling with any aspect of your work, or having trouble taking ownership, ask for help. Unless you are in a job-training program, your biggest priority is your productivity. If you can't do it all on your own, your team would likely rather chip in than have you fail.
- Delegate when necessary. It's better to realize that you need help, rather than find out too late that you're not getting your work done, or missing deadlines. If you can, ask others—like volunteers, interns, colleagues, or even your boss—to take on specific tasks. Offer them clear and manageable guidance and deadlines.

If you find yourself struggling, remember that you were hired because several people in the organization were confident that you could do the work and that you were the best candidate for the job.

## **Adjusting to increased income**

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If your new hourly wage or salary is significantly more than what you earned during your service term, you may face a period of adjustment. Sometimes the most stressful experiences can come from removing restrictions. You've been living in financial confinement, and now you have more wiggle room in your budget. The result can create unanticipated stress.

You may feel guilty about bringing in so much more money overnight, while many of the people you grew close to during your term of service are still struggling with poverty. You may have trouble recalibrating your budget when it has doubled or tripled from the levels you had while in the corps. Finally, you may at last be able to take care of expenditures you weren't able to before—repay student loans, invest in a computer or car, or buy a new pair of glasses.

### **CROSS-CULTURAL RE-ENTRY**

Some time in the months following the end of your service term, the emotional impact of your service experiences might start to catch up with you. If you've returned home after working in another culture (either overseas or within the United States), you may have been, up until now, busy reuniting with old friends, looking for a job, and catching up on things you used to love to do. As you start to settle in to the new normal, you might feel more acutely the loss of the communities you've left behind.

Cross-cultural re-entry means facing previously familiar surroundings after living in a different environment for a while. During your term, you were immersed in new perspectives—you adjusted slowly, and learned more every day. Now that you are home, you have to reconcile all that you have learned, all that you have become, with your old life (and how it, too, has changed in the interim).

If you are like many people returning home, you may struggle to stay true to the values, attitudes, and insights you gained during your service.

Give yourself time to overcome this "reverse culture shock", and to integrate the insights of your service into your current life and work.

Learn more about the challenges of coming home in the **Idealist International Volunteerism Resource Center**, [www.idealists.org/en/ivrc/return.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/ivrc/return.html).

More advice on coping with re-entry is available in **Psychosocial**, at [www.idealists.org/en/psychosocial/reentry\\_index.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psychosocial/reentry_index.html).



## Action steps

- Open checking and savings accounts at a federally insured bank or credit union, if you don't already have them. People without checking and savings accounts pay higher transaction fees for cashing their paychecks, taking out small loans, and remitting money to family members in other countries. Also without an account to deposit money in, cash can be more easily stolen, lost (as in a house fire), and spent. Read more: <http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2009/05/01/unbanked>.
- Create a budget for yourself. As you may have during your term, figure out how much of your money is going to expenses like rent, utilities, transportation, student loans, and food. At the end of the month, how much money is left over for savings, entertainment, and larger purchases?
- Pay yourself first. Save for long-term goals and larger purchases. If you'd like to invest in a computer but don't need it immediately, set aside a few hundred dollars a month until you've got enough. If you'd like to buy a home in the next few years, it's never too soon to save for your down payment. Set up a retirement account and responsible investments through your new job or an independent financial advisor (but it's best to avoid investing in things you don't understand—it's your money and no one has worked as hard to earn it, or cares about its future as much as you do). For all of these goals, living on a budget during the corps was great practice for becoming a wise steward of your financial resources now.
- Separately, brainstorm your wish list of one-time expenses—and then prioritize the items on it. For example, you may want to make a donation to an organization that's meant a lot to you, purchase a bicycle, and buy a new watch. Make decisions on what you can afford to take care of first based on how much it costs and how soon you need it. If you need a bike to get around, for example, that might be the top priority among the examples above.
- Remember to enjoy your new income. Decide on a reasonable monthly allowance for yourself, that you can spend on eating out, movies, gifts, and other casual expenditures that come up more often. An allowance will let you spend money guilt-free, but also keep your spending within limits that make sense given your overall budget.
- Educate yourself. Learn how to build a good credit history—including the careful use of credit cards. Talk with family and friends about how they manage their money, and for ideas about financial planners you can trust. Often community-based banks or credit unions offer free, basic financial literacy workshops. Also look for home-buying workshops that can take you through the steps of buying a home, starting with learning more about your credit score and saving for the down payment.

## FINANCIAL EDUCATION AND PLANNING RESOURCES

Check out **Making a Difference: A Guide to Personal Profit in a Nonprofit World**, a free PDF book from from Idealist.org and the National Endowment for Financial Education.

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

The **Financial Planning Association** has great resources for the general public.

[www.fpaforfinancialplanning.org](http://www.fpaforfinancialplanning.org)

**Money Smart Adult Financial Education Curriculum** is a free tool from the FDIC you can use by yourself and with people in your community.

[www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/overview.html](http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/overview.html)

**MyMoney.gov** is the website of the U.S. Financial Literacy and Education Commission.

[www.mymoney.gov](http://www.mymoney.gov)

**Get Rich Slowly** is a blog that covers topics like planning well and living simply.

[www.getrichslowly.org/blog/](http://www.getrichslowly.org/blog/)

**Mint.com** is a free online financial budgeting tool that can also keep track of all your financials in one place.

[www.mint.com](http://www.mint.com)

It's a good idea to check your credit history once a year. The website **Annual Credit Report** is the official site that offers you free reports from the three credit reporting agencies. You don't get your FICO score (the three-digit number that tells a lending institution how credit-worthy you are), but you do get to review your credit history, and check for errors or acts of fraud against you.

[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)



- Just because you have more money doesn't mean you have to spend it. From your service term and maybe other life experiences, you know that you can live successfully on little money, borrowing books and DVDs from the library rather than buying them, and enjoying free community events. Use that sense of thrift to your advantage as your income grows throughout your life. One famous example of living modestly is Warren Buffet—one of the wealthiest businessmen in the world—who still lives in the modest house in Omaha, NE that he bought for \$31,500 in 1957.

## Evaluating the first three months

Many people quit their jobs during the first three months. In the initial months in a new position, a new hire has more time to fully grasp the job description, working conditions, organizational culture, colleagues, and manager—more than they could have during a few interviews, even if they were proactive about researching the organization's culture during the interview process (See Chapter Seven of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* for more on evaluating organizational culture). Beyond those factors, it's also safe to say that a new hire—fresh from the throes of a major job search—may be offered a job at another organization that was slower in making their decision.

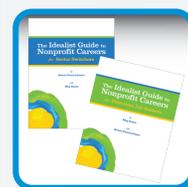
### Action steps

- Time flies. If all is going well, you shouldn't be asking yourself if you want to stick around. With any luck, you'll be diving right into your tasks, getting along with your colleagues, and feeling challenged by the opportunities you have in front of you.
- Evaluation. Just as you relied on first-hand experiences during your term of service, be aware of how you feel when you are on the job now: Excited? Annoyed? Energized? Depleted? Do you have the chance each day to do what you're best at? Are you learning what you hoped to learn? Is your job what you thought it would be? Are the number of hours expected of you per week sustainable? Keeping tabs on yourself and your new activities can help you discern what you love and don't love to do as part of your job.
- Three month review. Many organizations offer new employees a three month review—a time to check in formally with their managers, receive an initial performance evaluation, and find out if any improvements can be made in communication or execution of job tasks. If your organization doesn't offer a standard review to all new employees, take the initiative to request one. Use the three-month mark as a time to take stock in your experiences so far and to see if the job is heading in the direction you had hoped it would, to find out how your supervisor rates your progress and

### AWKWARD TO HAVE MORE INCOME? IT CAN BE

It was a huge transition for me to have an income after two years of VISTA and realizing that I didn't have to count pennies to make it through the month—I had private college loans to pay and other bills to worry about. Related to the workplace, during the initial period of getting to know coworkers and adjusting my relationship to money, I felt the competing pressure of socializing with coworkers (eating or going out) to get to know them and to “belong”, with that of not yet feeling comfortable with the spending of money that often comes with hanging out. Other ways this affected me was in gift-giving, buying accessories for the new job such as a wardrobe and luggage since travel is involved...

—Jung Fitzpatrick, AmeriCorps VISTA alumna and Graduate Education Communications Coordinator, Idealist.org



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Seven of *The*

*Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers insights on how to determine if your workplace suits your personality and preferences.

**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)



accomplishments, and to set goals for the rest of the year. The three-month review is also a good time to formally track and share skill development, accomplishments, and tasks you've been working on.

- **Manager madness.** Most people leave their bosses, not their jobs or their organizations. If you aren't getting what you need from your boss, make sure to ask for it clearly. Keep reading for self-assessment questions that may help you gauge where your relationship with your boss may need improvement.

## Time to move on?

Always take seriously the decision to quit a job very soon after you've started. Give the new job a chance to prove itself to you. But what are some red flags that suggest this may not be the right job for you? *First Break All the Rules*, a book that summarizes results of a survey conducted with millions of employees at organizations and companies around the world, lists the 12 keys to staff satisfaction that managers have some power to control.<sup>1</sup> According to authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, people who offer a no, or a lukewarm yes, to the following questions are the ones most motivated to leave their jobs:

- Do I know what is expected of me at work?
- Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
- At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
- In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
- Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
- Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
- At work, do my opinions seem to count?
- Does the mission of my [organization] make me feel my job is important?
- Are my coworkers committed to doing quality work?
- Do I have a best friend at work?
- In the last six months, has someone talked with me about my progress?
- This last year, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?

The first few months at a new job are rarely the smoothest of times. The learning curve is steep, you're meeting new people with whom you'll spend a good part of your day, and you're adjusting to the new requirements of your position. This is a period when it pays to persevere. Take more time to understand your role, gain ownership over your projects, understand the organizational culture, and bond with others on staff.

<sup>1</sup> Buckingham, Marcus and Curt Coffman. *First Break All the Rules: What the World's Great Managers Do Differently* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999

## THE FIRST 100 DAYS: TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL START

- Don't be unprepared for your first day; go back and review all of the research you did on the organization during the application process.
- 90 percent listen, 10 percent talk is a good initial rule of thumb.
- Ask which of your new colleagues will be particularly beneficial to speak with early on—people who know your work area well or have specific institutional knowledge to share—then make a point to chat with them.
- Seek out a mentor within the organization.
- Have a frank discussion with your manager about any unwritten rules or expectations. Let them know you're open to revisiting the topic as new situations crop up. Also feel free to seek clarification of performance metrics and expectations.
- Be aware of (but avoid getting caught up in) the always-present office politics. Again, listen much more than you speak.
- Don't go in thinking you'll "fix" everything. If you want to change the way something's always been done, be modest, patient, and polite with your ideas.
- (In the beginning), it's okay to not know where the bathroom is. Or the kitchen. Or the fax machine. Or...
- Pay attention to office conventions and abide by them, at least until you understand the environment. Even relatively informal offices may still have some taboos about dress codes or the manner in which staff address one another—give yourself a chance to learn these often unwritten "rules."
- Taking vacation during your first few months may not be allowed, and is probably not a good idea if you can avoid it.
- Be conscious of potentially annoying habits like gum-chewing, mobile phone ring tones, long or loud phone calls, humming, singing, and pen-tapping.





## BEA'S STORY: THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

Bea has been hired by the nonprofit Farm Adventure to implement the expansion of its Kids2Farm program, introducing children to local organic farms through summer camps and field trip tours and cooking classes. Bea has felt very lucky in finding her dream job before her term of service ended. She's been excited to leverage her relationships with organic farmers in the region to teach kids and create a new generation of consumers for the organic food movement.

However, until recently she has had no idea how many serious adjustments she would need to make in her new role. For starters, she didn't realize that while farmers are ecstatic to sell their produce to public schools (to them, it means a reliable source of income), it is much harder for them to commit the money and time to opening up their farms to an after-school program and the responsibility of supervising the kids. The "pilot" program that Bea read about was somewhat successful, but Farm Adventure only partnered with a single farm, and that farm recently decided to stop hosting the project.

She learns very fast that the fundamental business model of Kids2Farm is flawed. It offers too little to the farms. Worse, Bea doesn't have the clout at her organization to change the way the system is supposed to work.

Her manager, Sophie, tells her, "We've hired you because we have confidence that you can get this done." On the surface it sounds like a vote of confidence, but underneath—and against her better judgment—Bea hears a threat: "If you cannot get this done, we shouldn't have hired you to begin with." Bea is almost certain she's going to lose her job.

Another troubling aspect of her new role is Bea no longer has a team leader to coach her through the difficult times. Jim, her team leader from her service corps, is very busy with his own new job in an academic library; he's been uncharacteristically formal on their recent phone calls.

Bea's mentor, Julia, encourages Bea to call some farmers she knows well to see if they have some insights.

Bea decides to call Lianne, a farmer who was a mentor to Bea during her term of service last year. Together they come up with a plan. If it is successful, Lianne will spread the word to other farmers herself. The idea is to initially focus on developing an internship program for a limited number of high schoolers. They could learn how to *run* a farm—how to build structures the farm needs to grow crops year-round; how to propagate, plant, and harvest the crops; how to work in a greenhouse. Then the high schoolers would be *contributing* to the farm, and this eventually would free up some time for the farm workers who would be able to



## BEA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

guide them and coordinate other aspects of the program. If successful, the high schoolers could become volunteer leaders during the second semester of the program, and with support, they could lead elementary-aged kids on the tours.

Bea still would have to figure out the liability issues, but she knows a lawyer from her term of service who might be able to help her. And at least she now has a farm willing to try the partnership. With some convincing, Sophie signs on to the idea.

Bea's first months on the job have been rocky but in the end, validating. She is glad she wasn't fired and didn't have to quit. She is pleased **she has been able to persevere**. And although she needed to adjust to life without a team leader and other close supporters, she is really glad **she has the relationships from her service year** with Julia, Lianne, and others.

## Section two: Career growth beyond your service term

As you start your new career, you'll want to stay on top of trends and job opportunities in your field, and to continue building skills and networks. Chapter Eleven of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* offers strategies for staying "job-search-ready," including:

- Updating your "master" resume (the resume that is multiple pages in length, listing everything you've done, which you tailor to one or two pages each time you apply for a job)
- Documenting your accomplishments (see [Part One](#) of this *Companion*)
- Keeping your options open
- Continuing to assess yourself

In addition, other ways to keep yourself in shape professionally include ongoing self assessment and evaluation, networking, keeping your skills current, and building your skills. All of these are discussed below.

### Ongoing self assessment and evaluation

As you get settled in a new career, take the time to reflect on your satisfaction with your work, and whether the role you're playing, the organization you've joined, and the issue you are tackling all still move you in the direction you want to go.



Stay on top of trends and job opportunities in your field, and continue building skills and networks."



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Chapter Eleven of *The*

*Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) focuses on simple ways to keep yourself primed for the possibility of 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)

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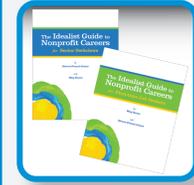


Beyond evaluating your current job and organization, think about the field you are working in, the role you are playing. Are you excited about the key tasks in your position description, or do you procrastinate on them by tackling minor activities? Are you curious to learn more and improve your skills? Does recapping your day with friends usually make you happy—or do you find yourself avoiding mention of your work life as much as possible?

As part of ongoing self assessment and evaluation, it's wise to continue to look at job openings from time to time—what else is out there, who is hiring, and how much money are people with your skills making? Do other jobs seem like a better fit? What strategic networks, new skills, and trends should you be adopting to keep up with current demands in the market?

If you completed the Career Tracks Exercise—described in [Part One](#) of this *Companion* and in more detail in Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*—you came up with a few career tracks for yourself. Choosing several career tracks helps you focus your job search and articulate your career goals. As you consider your options moving forward, you can keep in mind the career tracks you created, and add new ones as you develop new passions and skill sets.

Evaluating your experience, continuing to make your qualifications relevant, and keeping an eye on the job market will help you determine when the next move might be necessary.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

You can find the complete

Career Tracks Exercise in **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)

### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html)



### CESAR'S STORY: ONGOING SELF ASSESSMENT

Cesar ends his service at the community center for immigrants and continues the part-time job he started during his term, working the front desk at the YMCA. All of his savings have gone to make car payments and he worries that without a financial safety net he might have to sell his car. Fortunately, he has been able to enroll in the Massachusetts health plan.

Within a few weeks, his former supervisor Karen calls him. Karen explains that the community center where Cesar has recently ended his service has funding for a new corps member who wouldn't be a classroom teacher. Cesar asks if she can email him more information about the opportunity.

Cesar looks at the information she sends. The new position focuses on building the capacity of the host site, to increase the community center's ability to offer GED test preparation support to refugees with limited English skills. His role would be to help establish a new adult basic education program, and to find funding to help launch the program the following year.

The more Cesar reads, the more he feels that another term of service would give



## CESAR'S STORY (CONTINUED)

him the training he needs to continue serving immigrants and refugees—his few weeks away from this community has helped him realize how important they've been to him. The new role would also help him make the switch from direct service to program management—definitely the direction he wants to go in his career.

Cesar is happy at the thought that he wouldn't have to teach in the classroom, but could still be involved in the lives and education of the people he's come to care about at the center. He considers the possibility over a long weekend, praying to make the right decision. Monday, he applies for the non-teaching corps member position. Karen hires him.

While the position suits him, there are a few downsides: the health plan for the service corps is very limited, and the pay is such that he can no longer afford his monthly car payments. Cesar decides to stick with his state health plan and sell his car, putting the money into his savings account in case he needs it this year. He resigns himself to using public transportation for most trips, and to carpool if he needs to, especially when it's crucial to be on time.

As his second term of service progresses, Cesar finds himself continuing to engage in the discernment process he began last year. Because so much of his work involves building community partnerships and meeting new people who can help him build his program, he finds that networking is both easier and more valuable to him this year in his non-teaching role. He develops deeper relationships with a few of the community center's students, because they're serving on his advisory board—helping him shape the new program. The new term also gives him the chance to ask a wide array of people about their career paths, thereby getting advice about his own next steps.

He learns a great deal about the field of adult basic education, and about grant-writing. He realizes that his skills as a salesman can actually come in handy for “selling” his program to potential partners and funders. He is excited about his new role and relieved as the disparate experiences he's had all come together to help him serve the community better. He had faith that things would come together, and he is thankful that they have.



**Giving back to your network is one form of service that can carry you through the rest of your life.”**

## **Networking after your service program**

Giving back to your networks—by sharing time, resources, and energy—is one form of service that can carry you through the rest of your life, no matter what you choose to do for a career. Likewise, networks are naturally helpful to you as you advance your career. Just as you collaborated with organizations and leaders as a corps member, as a professional you can draw on the strength of your networks to meet new people,



learn about news and trends in your field, and work together to build a better future for your community.

## Existing relationships

Before you lose track of all of the people who helped you get to the starting line of your new job, take time to update everyone with your current contact information, and thank the people who helped you reach your new position. For the most part, it's okay to send a mass email to update people with your new contact information. Similarly, a Facebook update or a Twitter message is a wonderful way for your casual connections to learn your news. You might, however, seriously consider writing individual thank you notes or emails to people who were key to your job search. Don't be stingy about thanking people—even if someone's job lead didn't work out for you, they tried and will want to know that you landed on your feet.

As you start in your new role, also consider reaching out to people in your existing networks to brainstorm ways to continue working together in meaningful collaborations—especially if you are in the same community where you served in the corps.

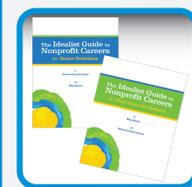
## Building new relationships

When you were a corps member, you may have had to start from scratch establishing an entirely new network of partners, mentors, and allies in your community. Look back on what helped you succeed in building those ties as you move on in your new role. Are there any specific people, groups, or networking events that got you started? Anything that can help you now, again, as you rebuild? Take some time to look back to page 32 in [Part One](#) of this *Companion* at the discussion about building new community partners.

## How your service corps network is unique

Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* covers a wide range of groups you should consider as part of your network, including social clubs, alumni of your school, and people in your faith community. As an alum of a service corps, you have additional networks—allies from the service corps community, people who may be more willing to open their door to you. These allies may include:

**Alumni of your own service program**—people who shared your term, who came along before or after you, and people who served in your city, state, or host country, as well as people who served in other places. If it exists, your service corps staff probably bragged about its alumni group from the moment you expressed an interest in applying for the corps. If one doesn't exist—or is not active locally—consider being part of the movement to create an alumni group for your corps. Your service network may extend far and wide, and can help you take the ongoing pulse of national and international trends in public service.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Learn more about groups

you can network with in **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)



**Alumni of other service corps**—related to yours or not. Service corps participation is humbling—little pay, long hours, giant learning curve, cross-cultural challenges. You may find you have a lot in common with former participants of other service corps, and appreciate the diverse experience others bring to projects on which you partner. Find out if there is an alumni group in your community and learn how to get involved. See a list of alumni groups at [www.idealists.org/service](http://www.idealists.org/service).

**Host site staff and other community members you worked with as a corps member**—stay in touch with the people you worked with during your term of service. The staff of your host site and other organizations will find you a valuable member of their network as you progress in your career, and you should feel comfortable to call on them for assistance, connections, and advice. They will want to hear from you. You can keep them in the loop with your new job by sending emails occasionally, asking for an insight here or there, or remembering them on their birthday.

**Your service corps program staff and currently serving corps members**—alone or with other alumni, you can be a source of support for your program as an advocate, donor, and mentor for current members. If you live nearby, volunteer to speak on a panel discussion, join the board of directors or ambassadors, or host a potluck for the incoming group. Join a service project that current corps members organize. Volunteer to recruit new corps members, and serve as a community reader for host site proposals. If your corps has no formal alumni group, listserv, or Facebook page, consider organizing one, starting with your peers, and gradually reaching out to current and past corps members. Stay in touch with your own team.

Finally, as you embark on a new job in public service, you may not have to try hard to stay in touch with some former corps members. Among your colleagues in your new job may be many graduates of service corps. A recent study has shown that eight years out, two-thirds of AmeriCorps alums are still engaged in nonprofit and government careers.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, two-thirds of Teach For America corps members stay in the education field after their term ends; in other teaching corps whose express mission is to create new teachers, the statistics are often even higher.

If you are living in a new place now, don't forget to build a personal network, too. It's easy to feel lonely in a new place at first, even if you have a handful of friends there. But after the first few months you'll start to feel more adjusted. Take the time to pursue your hobbies and talk to people you meet. Volunteering is a good way to contribute to your new town, meet interesting and smart people who are volunteering alongside you, and learn what's happening in your area.

<sup>2</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service and Abt Associates Inc., "Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni" May 2008. Available at: [www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/08\\_0513\\_longstudy\\_report.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/08_0513_longstudy_report.pdf)

## ADVOCATING FOR YOUR SERVICE CORPS

If you are eager to advocate for national and international service now that you are an alum, here are some places to get started:

**AmeriCorps Alums**, the independent group of former AmeriCorps members, includes in its mission national service advocacy. [www.americorpsalums.org](http://www.americorpsalums.org)

**National Peace Corps Association**, the independent organization of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, offers support to returning volunteers and also advocates for Peace Corps. [www.peacecorpsconnect.org](http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org)

**Service Nation**, a campaign of Be the Change, Inc., is a coalition of hundreds of nonprofits that has worked to expand service opportunities and increase volunteerism and citizenship in the United States. [www.servicenation.org](http://www.servicenation.org)

**Voices For National Service** works to advocate for the growth and strengthening of national service, while educating the public and elected leaders about the impact of national service. It links to legislation summaries and texts, and sponsors an annual Capitol Hill Day to bring service corps alumni to meet their elected officials and talk about their service experiences. [www.voicesforservice.org](http://www.voicesforservice.org)

## LISTEN TO A PODCAST

Check out the Idealist.org Careers podcast interview with Bob Grimm from The Corporation for National and Community Service, about the what former AmeriCorps members are doing eight years out:

<http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2008/08/15/eightyearsoutpodcast/>





### ACE'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Ace apprentices at Solar NOLA, installing solar panels to increase the energy efficiency of recently rebuilt homes in New Orleans. He gets along with his mentor Rod and enjoys making a decent pay check. But he's not sure that installing solar panels will be his life's work. Once he learns the fundamentals and moves beyond his apprenticeship, he finds the work repetitive. He loves the others on his crew, though, and he respects Rod's leadership and the opportunity to learn a trade.

He has remained friends with his old teammates from his service corps. One day his friends Mike and Todd approach him about a business idea they have. They want to start a company that deconstructs old buildings and houses and resells the salvageable materials in a retail store. Mike and Todd anticipate needing deconstruction specialists and a business manager to run the store and market the business. Because they all took apart buildings when they were in the corps together, they hope that Ace could lead the deconstruction team.

Ace loves the idea. He acknowledges that he still has a lot to learn, but he looks forward to taking apart buildings in a way that preserves their component parts, and learning to tell the difference between materials that will go for resale and the materials that will have to be recycled or trashed. He accepts the job offer, though he stays on part-time with Solar NOLA until the new business picks up speed and offers him a steady income so he can support himself and his daughter.

## Keeping your knowledge and skills current

You can stay up to date with your field by following industry journals, online newsletters, and blogs.

To find out what the journals are in your field, look online, or ask a librarian, colleagues, or counterparts at other organizations. If you can't afford your own subscription to journals, try finding these publications at a library. Many professional associations have their own journals with the latest trends and research affecting the field.

Blogs are a good source of free, current information with links to other relevant news sources. One way to search for relevant journals and blogs is to type keywords into a web search window. Alternately, you can create a Google Alert ([www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) using your keywords. Anytime new content appears on the web using your

### THE NEW SERVICE: A BLOG FOR SERVICE FOLKS

The *New Service* blog from Idealist.org and partners covers career and education topics for service corps members, staff, and alumni. Amy Potthast, the author of this *Companion*, is the editor of The New Service.

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



same keywords, you'll get an email about it. Google Alerts saves you time by sending search results to you regularly. Reading through these search results and following their links can help you identify the leading people and organizations in your field, learn the vocabulary useful for talking about your work, and understand the controversies and opportunities of the day.

As you find blogs that you want to read regularly, subscribe to them using a blog reader like Google Reader or Netvibes. A blog reader is similar to an extra email inbox just for new blog posts; they allow you to subscribe to any RSS feed. (Look for the RSS icon in your web browser's window—the icon is a blue or orange square with three diagonal stripes. After you've created an account in a blog reader and have logged in to it, click on the RSS icon to subscribe. You can also copy and paste the blog's URL into the reader.) Blog readers also allow you to share posts with others, and to email blog posts to friends.

Leaving blog comments is also a great networking tool to get to know the big players in the field and to get your name on their radar. Most bloggers—even the big ones—read comments and notice when someone is an active and ongoing participant on their sites. If you plan to leave a comment on a blog post, maintain a professional tone (you don't know who will read the comment); be thoughtful—assume your comment will remain visible to everyone forever; make sure you've read the blog post thoroughly; and offer your further thoughts and insights. It's fine to disagree and to offer counter-arguments. If you have questions for the blog post's author, be sure to leave your email address in case they want to follow up with you directly.

You might find you'd like to join the conversation and start your own blog. Writing regularly for your own blog (or sharing one with friends) is a big commitment to make, but it can inspire you to stay up-to-date on what is going on in your field more than reading blogs regularly does. Blogging about professional topics opens the door to new networks—people who are passionate about the same things you are, and who find you through your blog. Blogging also gives your prospective employers a chance to glimpse your writing style and your familiarity with the field.

Likewise, Twitter is a way to find and connect with people who care about issues you do, or play similar roles within their organizations. To hone in on these people, search keywords through Twitter's "Find People" function, or through the search tool on your preferred Twitter client. On some clients, such as Tweet Deck, you can keep several searches running all the time in their own window. See what people are talking about, what trends they point to, and how you can keep your organization's practices current.



Also stay current through regular conversations with your network (see above) and by attending events and relevant meetings and conferences for your field, when possible. Finally, if a local university offers classes or training in your field, request reading suggestions or a copy of course syllabi from professors or department administrators.



### DEENA'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Deena, the former bakery owner who came to volunteer in small business development in Ecuador, has prepared very well for her career transition during the last year of her term. Beyond building solid relationships with people who were well informed about opportunities, Deena has accomplished a great deal, helped elevate the incomes of dozens of families, and documented her work in numbers, writing, and photos. But as her service comes to a close, she senses she hasn't done enough for her own career transition—or perhaps, that more is out of her control than she'd previously thought.

She's applied for many jobs throughout the developing world that would build on her skills, and very few people have gotten back to her. Over beer with Lloyd, a fellow international volunteer, he suggests she isn't using her networks enough *now* to actually secure interviews with these organizations and catch their attention. He suggests she drop names more.

“So-and-so let me know about this opening,” Lloyd says. “Put yourself in their shoes. You are thousands of miles away from the office where your cover letter's being read. The farther you are, the more anonymous and possibly irrelevant you'll seem—unless they have programs on the ground in Ecuador. But even then, they'll want to know if their staff in Ecuador is acquainted with you and your work. Don't make them *ask*. Just *tell* them who you know.”

Taking Lloyd's advice, Deena starts to include the names of mutual contacts in her cover letters, and even asks people she knows to reach out to hiring organizations, and to vouch for her early in the application process—before hiring managers make decisions about whom to interview.

As part of this effort, Deena gets in touch with many of the people in her network again, including Veronica. Veronica works for the U.S. State Department and used to be stationed at the embassy in Quito, Ecuador. Before she left, Veronica was very helpful to Deena.

Veronica emails Deena right back. She tells Deena about a new micro-credit organization getting off the ground in Phoenix. “I know you want to work abroad, but this place might be a good fit for you right now.”

The organization, [NativeEntrepreneurs.org](http://NativeEntrepreneurs.org), aims to use the internet to start



## DEENA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

connecting micro-philanthropists with start-up businesses on American Indian reservations. Veronica describes it as “a Kiva.org for Native American entrepreneurs.” And it needs people like Deena, trained in cultivating and training new entrepreneurs, and helping them through the micro-loan process.

Deena reads the position description on Idealist.org. She doesn't have the education background in business administration that the organization is looking for, but she agrees it's worth a shot. Before Deena has even sent in her resume and cover letter, Veronica sends a note to the founder of the new organization, letting him know to expect to hear from a winning candidate soon.

In the end, the hiring manager at NativeEntrepreneurs.org is willing to wait until Deena's term is up and to interview her in person. Within a month of the first interview, Deena accepts her new position and relocates to Phoenix—a city she's barely visited. But she had been willing to move anywhere for the right fit.

She really enjoys her new position, but begins to realize why a Masters in Business Administration would be helpful. One of her new colleagues is a recent graduate of an international business school in Glendale, not too far away. Deena starts doing her research on the school and discovers that it would be a great place for her to study because it has both an international perspective and a part-time MBA program for professionals.



Whatever the barriers, it's worth it to seek out professional development and education.”

## Continuing to build your skills

One challenge many recent corps members face is the sudden dearth of training. Those free, mandatory, in-service trainings you may have taken for granted last year may be starting to look awfully good to you in hindsight. Scholarships that flowed freely to you as a service corps participant may not be as easy to come by now that you are a permanent staff member of an organization. Whatever the barriers, it's still worth it to seek out professional development and education.

[Part One](#) of this *Companion* offers many suggestions for locating training opportunities in your community. If you're living someplace new, you may need to start researching professional development opportunities from scratch. Otherwise, you can seek support from the organizations you learned about as a service corps participant.

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

**Volunteering, including board service.** Contributing your time to a nonprofit or school can offer you a chance to give back to your local community, build new



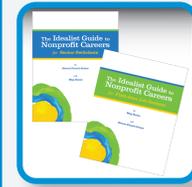
skills, and even receive (free!) training. You may have a chance to take leadership on a project, and raise your profile within the organization you're serving. By doing your best job—as you did during your term of service—you'll develop fans and build relationships that may be key to getting your “day job” done well. Board service comes with some strings attached—often a minimum financial commitment, regular meetings, and legal responsibilities.

**Going to school part-time, or taking one class at a time.** Going back to school is often perceived as an all-encompassing proposition, but increasingly it's possible to balance both work and study. Part-time programs, single classes, courses on evenings and weekends, and distance/online learning are all alternatives to the traditional full-time approach. Weigh the many advantages to you, such as the ability to continue earning an income while in school, against disadvantages like having little time for personal pursuits, friends, and family. And though it is possible, balancing study with work and family can also be exhausting—read more on Idealist's Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealists.org/gradschool](http://www.idealists.org/gradschool)).

Programs and individual courses geared towards working professionals are increasingly available at community colleges, universities, and grad schools. Schools may offer evening and weekend classes, online discussions, and other formats that facilitate student participation at a time and place convenient for them.

Individual courses can help you prepare for college or grad school, master material better and faster than simply reading, brush up on a subject you used to know well, and understand principles in a field more clearly. Courses may be offered by the relevant department, or through a department called Continuing Education or Community Education. Private, for-profit schools exist that can also help you. For example, Berlitz is a well known franchise of language schools.

**Certification.** A certification program is a set of courses in a particular field that leads to certificate status or a license to practice. Whether you need the skills to improve your current work or need a license to start practicing in your field, certification demonstrates to you and to potential employers that you have attained certain knowledge of and experience in your field. Field requirements often dictate both what certifications exist, and the means to obtain them. Therefore, prerequisites for certification can include any combination of the following: completing coursework, earning a degree, passing examinations, and/or successfully completing an internship or other experiential component. Sometimes certification is part of a degree program, while other times it's independent.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

### Chapter Five of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) contains short discussions of volunteering, board service, further education, and other ways to strengthen your skills and enhance your knowledge.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html)





### ED'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Ed relocates to Portland, OR after serving two years as a volunteer English teacher at a college in China. He moves in with his daughter's family, with the plan to move out and find his own apartment after a month. But since he's such a help around the house, his daughter and her husband invite him to stay indefinitely, which also helps him save on rent.

He divides his time between taking care of his grandkids and the part-time job tutoring adult job seekers at a nonprofit computer lab that he secured before he left China. Very soon after starting his new job, another instructor who teaches basic accounting and spreadsheet skills announces she is quitting. Ed isn't looking for more hours, but he is willing to step up to help out in a pinch. Fortunately, the computer lab finds a permanent replacement after three weeks, but Ed realizes that he would be a stronger teacher if he knew the accounting and spreadsheet software better.

He begins looking for his own classes to take and finds a community college that offers a certification program in accounting software; the price is manageable so he enrolls. After many decades as a teacher, he is tickled to be on the other side of the classroom again. He finds that being a computer student really improves his ability to be an effective computer teacher, because it puts him in the position of beginner, and he is reminded of how foreign a new concept can seem.

After two terms at the community college, Ed earns his certification. He uses it to ask for a pay raise at the lab. His boss offers him a modest raise, but also invites him to take over the accounting class, because the "permanent replacement" has already moved on. Ed accepts, and enjoys practicing his new skills with the students. He feels proud of what he's accomplished. Not bad for an old coot, he thinks.

## Conclusion

If you took advantage of your term of service opportunity to its fullest potential—by engaging with others in your community and field, collaborating, exercising new skill sets, and figuring out how well it all suited you—then you already know best practices for furthering your career as a new professional.

Starting out as a new professional has some great perks—a salary, for starters. But you may at first find yourself missing some of the advantages of the old corps, like the training and support you probably took for granted. With time you'll adjust and learn to lean on your manager, colleagues, and network for continued learning and growth.



## SUMMARY

Even after successfully transitioning into your post-service position, you may still have some adjusting to do. Getting the job isn't so much the end of the transition, as a new beginning.

**New employees often experience a few shocks** (pages 92-102) as they get settled into their new job. Sometimes it takes time to get acclimated to the office culture or feel comfortable interacting with your coworkers. Even seemingly mundane matters like new norms for clothing can impact your adjustment. Other issues have to do with the new levels of responsibility in your role, the open-ended nature of many jobs (they don't have a pre-determined end date like many service corps), and—yes—even the question of how to handle the income that accompanies your work. You may also wonder if you've made the right decision in accepting this job. Continuing self assessment and patience can go a long way toward smoothing out these potential bumps in the road.

Now that you've got a job, you may also be tempted to abandon (or at least pack away) some of the good habits that got you through your transition—that would be a mistake! In order to stay ready for the opportunities and challenges that await you, **continue to focus on your career growth** (pages 102-112). Ways to do this include regular self assessment and evaluation of your present situation and goals, continuing to nurture and contribute to your network, and maintaining the skills and knowledge you already have while also seeking opportunities to acquire new skills and abilities.

## You are here

- This is **Part Three**. 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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# CONCLUSION

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## Final thoughts

### Conclusion Overview

This brief Conclusion contains:

- A quick reminder of the value of your experience and a recap of this *Companion* (pages 114-115)
- A final check-in with the characters who've accompanied you throughout the book (pages 115-116)
- Some advice about connecting your passions to your career trajectory, while keeping it all in perspective (page 117)
- A personal perspective from the author (page 117)

The experience you've gained during your service year will be invaluable to you for the rest of your life—providing a unique perspective and understanding of the world. Your volunteer experience may even help you determine and find the type of work that's meaningful in the future.

Practices like being an active and generous participant within your own network, documenting your accomplishments, and finding creative ways to learn and refine new skills can all help you sustain your career development for a lifetime.

- The same practices that have established you as a leader in the corps will help you develop into a leader at school or in any organization.
- Likewise, what you've learned about the job search during your transition from corps to career will likely inform all of your future job searches.

[Part One](#) of this *Companion* outlined things to do during your term of service—or during any organizational tenure—to prepare you for your next steps: discerning your professional calling, building relevant skills for short- and long-term goals, building community partnerships and other key relationships, and gathering evidence of your accomplishments.



**Part Two** focused on the job search skills you need during the transition, as they specifically relate to leveraging your service corps experience (while *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* focus more comprehensively on all the job search skills you or anyone needs to succeed). Part Two emphasized strategies for overcoming some of the unique challenges of transitioning from corps to career, translating your service experience during the job search and application process, and some options you have outside the nonprofit sector (the nonprofit sector is contrasted with other sectors in Chapter One of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*).

**Part Three** focused on starting a new job and overcoming the tricky aspects of post-corps life, like getting a new wardrobe and adjusting to a significantly higher income. Part Three also highlighted the importance of ongoing career growth beyond your service term.

And along the way you've gotten to know a few of archetypal corps members created to illustrate the key messages of this *Companion*. Below you can read where they are now.



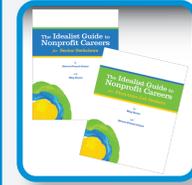
#### ACE'S STORY: EPILOGUE

Ace, the 19-year-old who served in a green energy corps, spends his first post-corps years helping to develop a new business that deconstructs buildings and resells component parts in New Orleans. As the company grows, Ace accepts fewer hours from Solar NOLA, the solar-installation organization where he apprenticed during his transition. He uses his service corps scholarship to go back to school part-time to earn an associates degree in business management.



#### BEA'S STORY: EPILOGUE

Bea, the 22-year-old who connected farms with public school cafeterias during her term, realizes that her first post-corps job at Farm Adventure isn't her dream job after all. She learns through research and informational interviews that to do what she wants to do, she needs further education. After attending an Idealist.org Graduate Degree Fair for the Public Good in North Carolina, she applies to several schools and is fully funded by one of them, where she matriculates in the fall after completing a year at Farm Adventure.



#### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

##### Chapter One of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) can help you explore the differences between the nonprofit, for-profit, and government sectors.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch1.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch1.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch1.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch1.html)

#### GRAD SCHOOL RESOURCES FROM IDEALIST

If you are trying to see how a graduate education can help you connect to your next career steps, Idealist.org offers two free resources of interest.

##### The **Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center**

contains a wealth of knowledge about graduate study (as well as alternatives to it).

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

**Idealist Graduate Degree Fairs for the Public Good** take place in cities across the United States and Canada. These free events bring together a range of graduate education programs that aim to help their students make a difference.

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





### **CESAR'S STORY: EPILOGUE**

Cesar, the 33-year-old who has done two terms of service with a community center for immigrants in a faith-based service corps, moves on to a program associate role at a small, grassroots nonprofit that provides human services to new immigrants. The organization has only three full-time staff members, so Cesar gets his wish to wear many, many hats. Ironically, he realizes that he really misses teaching, his car, Florida—feelings he did not anticipate—so he moves back to Tampa, buys an affordable used car, and goes to work in a development role for the faith-based community radio station where he used to volunteer. To fulfill his teaching yen, he volunteers nights teaching English classes for immigrants through his church.



### **DEENA'S STORY: EPILOGUE**

Deena, the 47-year-old who served in Ecuador connecting new small businesses with expertise and micro-loans, has moved to Phoenix. She now teaches Native American entrepreneurs about business development and helps them access micro-loans through a new social networking website that makes it possible for anyone to lend money to small Native businesses. She also spends a few years working toward her degree through a global executive MBA program. Through her service corps's affinity group for Lesbian and Gay returned volunteers, she meets Shane, who works for a micro-financing institution in Ghana. The two stay in touch and eventually, when Deena completes her degree, Shane invites her to Accra to work in micro-finance there.



### **ED'S STORY: EPILOGUE**

Ed, the 70-year-old college English instructor who served in China and now lives in Portland, OR, spends his first post-corps years taking care of his grandkids and working part-time teaching adult job seekers computer literacy skills. He starts a blog about using social media in the classroom. As his readership increases, a nonprofit approaches Ed about sponsoring his blog. The organization creates resources for teachers throughout the world and offers him enough income that he cuts back his teaching hours so that he has more time to blog and to be with his family. Over time he receives invitations to speak at technology and education conferences and enjoys the chance to keep traveling.



## Look inwards, then look out!

Look to your internal compass for guidance. Reading job descriptions (as you may have done for the Career Tracks Exercise—discussed in [Part One](#) of this *Companion*, as well as in *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*) can help you determine some directions to move toward in your career. While valuable, don't forget to imagine new possible paths to walk down, regardless of whether those paths yet exist. Articulating your own boundless vision of your future is a first step to making it happen, and can help you recognize the opportunities the universe presents you.

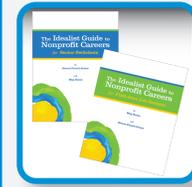
In fact, a major takeaway message of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* is that to be happy in your career, you must first know yourself and your own diverse needs, then know your sector and the people in it, and finally, to find the synergy between what you want and what the opportunities are.

## Beyond your career

The focus of this *Companion* has been on your career development. For many people, though, career isn't the driving force in their lives—and it may not be in yours. Having fun outdoors, relishing time with family, and engaging in philanthropy and hobbies outside the 9-to-5 work day may be the activities that propel you. While this *Companion* is meant to infuse you with ideas for moving on with your career, its intention is not to assume that career holds crucial importance for you, or even that it should. To the extent that you are thinking about your next steps, the suggestions detailed here are to assist your planning.

## A personal perspective from the author

My advice to think seriously about signing on for a second or third term of service comes from the heart. I committed to three terms (Peace Corps, 1998-2000; AmeriCorps National, 2000-2001; and AmeriCorps VISTA, 2004-2005) for reasons ranging from the issues I'd get to work on, to the population I'd get to work with, to the roles I'd get to play in my host organization. I loved all three terms and gained far more than I'd be able to give back in a lifetime of service. Completing three terms also meant transitioning from corps to career three different times, and I made new choices during each transition that have informed my perspective throughout this *Companion*. The best career advice I've ever received has been from my parents, who have always said that I can be *anything* I want to be. Through their words and actions, both have emphasized that since I will spend so much of my life at work, that I should always do what I love. So far that advice hasn't let me down.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Read about knowing your-

self, the sector you want to work in, and the synergy between the two in the **Conclusion** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

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

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

### PUTTING YOUR GOOD INTENTIONS INTO ACTION

Look for **The Idealist.org Handbook to Building a Better World** at your local library. The book outlines a huge variety of ways you can make a positive impact in your community and the world, regardless of your career choices.

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

### FOR ONGOING CAREER SUPPORT

For ongoing career support, check out **Idealist's Career Center** ([www.idealists.org/career](http://www.idealists.org/career)), your own undergraduate career development center (whether you're in school now, or an alum), the career resources of your corps (find links at [www.idealists.org/service](http://www.idealists.org/service)), and **The New Service** blog from Idealist.org, ([www.idealists.org/thenewservice](http://www.idealists.org/thenewservice)).



## SUMMARY

As you encounter new opportunities and challenges, remember that **your service experience is a valuable source of knowledge and skills** (pages 114-115) that will remain with you for the rest of your life. Use the ideas in this book to continually evaluate your career trajectory and **stay true to your life's ambitions** (page 117). Thanks for reading—we wish you all the best in realizing your goals and potential in the future!

## You are here

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- This is the **Conclusion**. 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.

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