Creating a Transition Timeline: Advice from the Field

When addressing transition issues, how do you know what needs to come first? Stacey Rapp, a program officer for New York-based Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), shares her experiences:

“My first step is to do an assessment of the members’ skill sets and their needs: almost a mini-gap analysis. What skills are they bringing to the table? What skills do we, as program officers, need for them to be successful at their placement sites? Those two things don’t necessarily correlate,” she says.

Rapp also looks at where her members will likely end up. “For example, our cohorts in Bay Area, Michigan, are 21–25-year-olds with a college degree,” she says. “They need to know how to use their ed awards and pick a grad school that meets their career needs. If they’re going to be looking for a job, they need to know how to sell themselves and market their services in a positive way.” Rapp points out that training on the ed award and picking the right school needs to happen far in advance of the usual college application deadline in January. Also, she says it’s helpful to include mini-modules on “life after” issues each month—rather than trying to cram all the information into the end of service.

One thing that Rapp has recently started doing is asking members to do a self-assessment at the six-month point. The program manager also assesses the member at that time and they compare notes, highlighting things that the member might want to work on (for example, showing initiative). At the end of service, members do a reflection piece and—in some LISC programs—give a short speech at their “graduation” luncheon.

Beth Meyer of Community Youth Services (CYS) in Olympia, Washington, starts working on transition issues even before members sign up for service! “During the recruitment interview process we ask people how AmeriCorps fits in with their future plans,” she says. “We want to make sure that service is a good fit for them, in terms of what they ultimately want to do, and we also want to be able to provide them with the member development they’ll need to get there.”

The transition planning continues from pre-service orientation and on throughout the service year: “We always build in reflection pieces in all of our trainings, asking members to look at how [the training] helps in their current service and in their future options. When we have one-on-one meetings, supervisors will ask members about their future plans as another way of getting them to think ahead. In late winter, we start planning our big Life After AmeriCorps training, which is held in mid-May. (Members typically end their service in July). We surveyed members to see what topics they were interested in.”

As the service year comes to an end, CYS allows members to use personal time to make calls and prepare for job interviews. During the year, the program also allows members to take time off to visit colleges if they’re planning to attend after service. “We try to be flexible because we want to support them through the transition process,” says Meyer.