

# MODULE SIX

In the content session, members discuss rights that Americans have. In the action session, members decide on an action project to do in the community.

## **CONTENT SESSION: RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS**

Americans have many precious rights and Constitutional protections. This session requires members to think about the importance of the Bill of Rights. First, members read about a conquering “visitor from outer space” who will allow Americans to keep only five rights. Then in small groups, members choose five rights and then with the whole group make a final, unanimous decision.

### **Facilitator Checklist**

- Chalkboard or chart paper
- Pens and paper for members
- Copies of Handout 6A for members

### **Learning Objectives**

Members will be able to:

1. Identify basic constitutional rights of Americans.
2. Express an opinion on which rights are the most important.
3. Develop arguments supporting why these are the most important.
4. Work with a group to achieve consensus on the five most important rights.

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## **Notes**

## Rights and Freedoms

### Introduction

As a U.S. citizen, you have individual freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights. What would life be like if somebody took away your rights? Are some rights more valuable than others? How would you decide which rights were the most important? Think about these questions while you read the following story.

### I. A Visitor from Outer Space

It is the year 2050 and you are watching your wall-sized television monitor when a special news bulletin comes on. A strange robot-like creature appears on the screen and informs you that he has taken over America. You rapidly flick through 500 channels, but find he is on every one.

"ATTENTION," he begins, "I am Sthgir from planet Noitutitsnoc. Just as I have taken over television, I will take over your lives. But I come in peace. I realize that individual freedom means a great deal to American citizens. Consequently, I will not take away all your rights. You have a choice. From a list of fundamental rights, you may pick five to keep. Think carefully before you vote, as all your rights as citizens will terminate except for the ones you select. You must decide as a group on your interactive televisions, and your decision must be **unanimous**. Failure to make a unanimous decision will result in the termination of all rights. The list of choices will now appear on screen."

#### Choose Five Only:

1. Right to have a state militia and bear arms
2. Right to freedom of speech
3. Right to a lawyer
4. Right to protection from cruel and unusual punishment
5. Right to freedom of the press
6. Right to a jury trial
7. Right to freedom of religion
8. Right to peacefully assemble
9. Right to privacy
10. Protection from self-incrimination
11. Right to equal protection of the laws

### II. Activity

In small groups, **unanimously** decide on the five most important rights. Keep in mind:

- Rights affect our lives on both a personal and societal level.
- Some rights have a broader scope than others. Think about which rights might include other rights.

### III. For Discussion

1. Was it difficult to reach a unanimous decision? What are the pros and cons of coming to a unanimous decision instead of taking a majority vote?
2. Which rights, if any, did you find encompass other rights?
3. Would our society be different if we were limited to the five rights you chose? If so, how?
4. How can AmeriCorps members help others develop an understanding of their basic rights as citizens?

## Conducting the Session

1. Ask members: "Can you name a few rights that Americans have?" (Accept various answers.) Tell them that today they are going to evaluate which rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights are most important.
2. Distribute **Handout 6A**. Ask members to read the **Introduction** and **Section I: A Visitor From Outer Space**. When they finish, briefly answer any questions. (Note: The name of the "visitor" is Sthgir from planet Noitutitsnoc. These two words, difficult to pronounce, are Rights and Constitution spelled backwards.)
3. Divide members into groups of five or six. Tell them to read **Section II: Activity**. Make sure they understand that (1) their decision must be **unanimous** and (2) they must select the **five** most important rights.
4. Give the groups a set amount of time. Tell them they must come to a unanimous decision within that time or they will lose all their rights.
5. List the 11 rights on the board. Give members periodic warnings of how much time is left.
6. Call time. Ask the groups to come together and share their decisions.
7. Hold a discussion using the questions in **Section III: For Discussion**.

## **ACTION SESSION: DECIDING ON AN ACTION PROJECT**

In this session, members decide what project they are going to do. First, they review their research on a problem. Then they read about different projects. Finally, they decide on a project.

### **Facilitator Checklist**

- Chalkboard or chart paper
- Pens and paper for members
- Copies of Handout 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E, 6F, 6G, 6H, 6I, and 6J for members
- Members bring their research findings.

### **Learning Objectives**

Members will be able to:

1. Generate project ideas.
2. Evaluate project ideas.
3. Select a project.

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## **Notes**

## Deciding on an Action Project

### Introduction

Your next step is to decide on a project to do in the community. You've probably gotten ideas for projects from your research. You should place great importance on all the input you've received from the community, because serving the community is the purpose of the project. To help you further develop ideas for projects, you will receive eight handouts of sample project plans. Use the handouts as springboards to help you think of more project ideas.

### I. Eight Projects

Read the sample projects on Handouts 6C to 6J. Although some may not apply to the problem you've selected, use them to generate ideas for your project.

### II. For Discussion

1. Which of the eight sample projects were most interesting?
2. Are any of these eight sample projects already operating in your community?
3. What other project ideas do you have?

### III. Activity

Divide into project teams. List the project ideas you want to consider. As a team, decide on the top three project ideas. Think about the pros and cons of these three project ideas. Evaluate each in terms of your available time, materials, and resources. Select the most suitable one.

## Conducting the Session

1. Inform members that in this session they are going to choose projects to work on that address their problem area.
2. Distribute **Handout 6B**. Briefly discuss the **Introduction** and **Section I: Eight Projects**. Answer any questions they may have.
3. Distribute **Handouts 6C to 6J** to each member. Ask members to read all eight handouts.
4. Hold a discussion using the questions in **Section II: For Discussion** (on **Handout 6B**). List additional project ideas on the board.
5. Have members divide into project teams of from three to seven members. Ask each team to decide on a project following the instructions in **Section III: Activity** (on **Handout 6B**).
6. After team members decide on projects, inform them that they will plan their projects at the next action session. Tell them to think about how they might do the project and who might help them. Stress the necessity of getting input from community members.

Handout 6C

Handout 6J

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# Sample Project 1

## Stay in School (Issue area: Education)

**Description:** Organize a campaign to encourage students to stay in school.

**Goal:** To lower dropout rates in local schools.

**Facts and Figures:** In the 1990s, roughly one student in 10 dropped out of school before graduation. In some areas, that figure increased to one student in three. Twenty-five percent of dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 are unemployed. Over their lifetime, high school dropouts earn 25 percent less money than high school graduates and less than 50 percent of what college graduates are likely to earn. In any given year, high school dropouts are three times more likely to slip below the poverty level.

As America moves into the 21st century, most meaningful jobs will require advanced skills and technical knowledge. The economic gap between those with a high school diploma and those who drop out is likely to grow.

### Project Resources:

- Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Washington, DC
- State and federal departments of education
- The local board of education

**Action Steps:** To organize a Stay in School campaign, you need to . . .

- **Discuss your goals and methods.** What do you want to accomplish with your campaign? How can you raise awareness about the importance of staying in school?
- **Conduct a survey.** What do students and teachers at schools in your community think about the value of education? Are students willing to participate in a Stay in School campaign? What new club or activity would make school more fun, rewarding?
- **Gather more information.** Information is a good tool to motivate people to action. Ask your librarian to help you find information on career opportunities and the value of education.
- **Talk to the media.** Local newspapers, radio, and TV stations may have done stories on education in your community. The media can also help you publicize your Stay in School campaign. Ask them how to prepare a public service announcement (PSA).
- **Plan your campaign and do it!**

**Evaluation:** After you have completed your Stay in School campaign, meet with other AmeriCorps members to ask . . .

- How many students did you influence?
- How effective did these students think your message was?
- How many AmeriCorps members were involved? How many hours did you work?
- Would you organize another Stay in School Campaign? What would you do differently?

# Sample Project 2

## Book Drive (Issue area: Education)

**Description:** Organize a book drive to collect books and make them available to young people through a school or community library.

**Goal:** To increase awareness about the value of reading and to make books available to students and other community members.

**Facts and Figures:** Television, computers, and the Internet have created an information revolution, but books continue to occupy an important place in our culture. Books contain almost all of our knowledge—our history, philosophy, science, religions, and oldest stories and myths. Studies show that people develop reading skills best at an early age. But today, young people are reading less. As a result, many young people grow up with poor reading skills. An estimated 40–44 million adult Americans cannot fill out an employment application, follow written instructions, or read a newspaper. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education revealed that the presence of books, newspapers, and magazines in the home contribute greatly to a young person’s ability to read.

### Project Resources:

- The reference librarian at your local library
- American Library Association, Chicago, IL
- “Building a Nation of Readers,” Library of Congress, Center for the Book

**Action Steps:** To organize a book drive, you need to . . .

- **Measure interest.** Teachers, students, and parents will be vital to your book drive. How will you raise their interest?
- **Look for allies.** In addition to teachers and schools, other individuals and community groups may be concerned with reading levels.
- Your **local library** may want to support your efforts.
- **Newspapers** across the nation are losing readership. Your local paper may be interested in participating in your book drive.
- **Bookstores** may donate books, magazines, or other publications to your project.
- **Colleges and universities** have a high stake in raising students’ reading ability.
- The **business community** needs people who can read to get the job done. Ask local businesses to support your book drive.
- **Plan your event and do it!**
- **Follow up.** Organize a reading fair for an elementary school. Include booths with reading games and contests and with free books to loan. Help children write and illustrate their own storybooks.

### Evaluation:

- How many books and magazines did you collect?
- How many students, teachers, parents, and other community members participated in your book drive? How many AmeriCorps members?
- What efforts would you suggest to continue to encourage young people to read?
- Did your group work well as a team? Why or why not?

# Sample Project 3

## Exploring Local Government (Issue area: Education)

**Description:** Organize a tour of local government institutions for school children.

**Goal:** To educate school children about people, places, and processes that make up local government.

**Facts and Figures:** In contrast to the 50 state governments and one federal government, there are almost 90,000 separate local governments in the United States. The maze of different structures of local government makes it difficult to teach. But the subject is included as part of school social studies curriculum at all levels. Moreover, it's important that citizens learn about local government because citizens are far more likely to interact with it than with any other level of government.

### Project Resources:

- Elected officials and government department heads
- Government web sites
- Reference librarian at your library
- A written guide to your local government

**Action Steps:** To organize a local government tour, you need to . . .

- **Measure interest.** Visit local schools to find out if students, parents, teachers, and administrators are interested.
- **Explore government.** Use the resources listed above to help you gather information about government officials, departments, and services.
- **Ask permission.** Call government offices, describe your project to the people in charge, and ask them if they would allow young people to visit their work places.
- **Record your findings.** Keep a record of the people you contact. You will need to keep in touch.
- **Pick and choose.** What government departments would be most interesting for young people?
- **Prepare a tour guide.** Prepare a talk or a written guide about the people and places students will be visiting.
- **Draw a tour map.** Where will you go? How will you get there? How long will it take?
- **Arrange transportation.** Talk with teachers and administrators about the safest, easiest way to transport students. How many students, teachers, parents, and AmeriCorps members will participate?

### Evaluation:

- Prepare a pre- and post-test on local government for students to take.
- How many officials, departments, and services did you visit? Did you visit a variety of people and places?
- How many children, parents, teachers, and school administrators took the tour?

# Sample Project 4

## Neighborhood Watch (Issue area: Public Safety)

**Description:** Organize a Neighborhood Watch program in your community.

**Goal:** To increase community safety and security.

**Facts and Figures:** Although America's crime rate dropped during the last decade, it has still remained high compared to other developed nations. In opinion polls, Americans continue to list crime among the top five problems facing America. Research has shown that Neighborhood Watch programs can help reduce crime. For example, several years ago, a Richmond, Virginia, neighborhood experienced three murders, two rapes, and 134 burglaries. Community members organized a Neighborhood Watch program that organized and educated residents on crime prevention. Two years later there were no murders, no rapes, and only 20 burglaries in that same neighborhood.

### Project Resources:

- The national and your state's Crime Prevention Council
- The crime prevention officer of your police department

**Action Steps:** To begin your Neighborhood Watch program, you need to . . .

- **Measure interest.** Talk to your neighbors. You will need their help. Explain that a Neighborhood Watch does not take a lot of time, and no one will have to take any personal risks.
- **Arrange a date, time, and place for the first meeting.** Notify neighbors with a flier. A few interested neighbors can get the ball rolling.
- **Invite a crime prevention officer.** Many police precincts have a crime prevention officer who can help you get started. Ask him or her to attend your first meeting. Ask the officer to explain Neighborhood Watch, talk about crime problems in your area, and teach crime prevention techniques.
- **Select a block captain.** This task can rotate. A block captain acts as a liaison between police and your group, organizes block meetings, and keeps a list of members.
- **Share information.** Exchange phone numbers, names of family members, planned vacation times, and any other information that will help you protect each other.
- **Share the tasks.** Some job assignments could be recruiting new members, teaching home security techniques, watching the homes of people on vacation, or being block parents for home-alone kids.

### Evaluation:

- Find out crime rates for your neighborhood. See if they improve once your watch begins.
- Keep track of membership. Does it increase over time?
- Ask for comments from neighbors. Is the program working? Do they feel safer?

# Sample Project 5

## AmeriCorps Resource Guide (Issue area: Citizenship)

**Description:** Create a guide of government, non-profit, business, and media organizations that address the needs of your community.

**Goal:** To gather information that will help AmeriCorps members and others find information, concerned citizens, community groups, and materials to support civic participation projects.

**Facts and Figures:** In America, not just government (federal, state, county, municipal, and special district) agencies are interested in community problems. A wide range of non-government agencies are interested as well. These range from businesses and business associations (retail stores, corporations, Chambers of Commerce) to media organizations (newspapers, radio stations, and television stations and cable companies) to non-profits (neighborhood associations, unions, political organizations, environmental groups, service and volunteer organizations, and educational organizations).

**Project Resources:** Here are some places to look for local resources . . .

- The local library
- The Internet
- Government, non-profit, business, and media organizations. See **Handout 4C**.

**Action Steps:** To create a resource guide, you need to . . .

- **Discuss your goals.** Focus your search on issues that are important to your community. Do you want your resource guide to address problems of education, public safety, the environment, or other human needs? What problems concern you?
- **Design your guide.** How will you distribute your information? Will you print a booklet, create a web site, or keep a loose-leaf notebook full of resources? How will you make it available to others?
- **Visit the library.** Ask the reference librarian for lists of community organizations.
- **Search on the Internet.** Use a search engine and collect links to community organizations.
- **Talk to local government officials.** They may be able to direct you toward city programs that work with citizens in the community. Ask officials for any booklets describing local civic resources.
- **Talk to local businesses.** Talk to the Chamber of Commerce about businesses that work in your community.
- **Look for non-profits.** Many of these groups are organized specially to help people.
- **Talk to the local media.** Newspapers, radio, and television stations usually know about local resources.
- **Ask for referrals.** Ask everyone you talk with if they know of other people who can help you.
- **Don't stop.** Keep adding new information to your resource guide.

**Evaluation:**

- How many resources are in your guide?
- How many community members did you involve? AmeriCorps members?
- Who is using your guide? Is it helpful to them?

# Sample Project 6

## A Newsletter or Web Site (Issue area: Citizenship)

**Description:** Create a clear, interesting, and informative AmeriCorps newsletter or web site.

**Goal:** To inform AmeriCorps members and other interested people about AmeriCorps goals, projects, and other activities.

**Facts and Figures:** With the rise of computer technology and the Internet, it has become relatively easy to publish newsletters and create a web site. As a result, most organizations in America publish a newsletter or maintain a web site. They recognize the importance of letting others know what they do, how to reach them, and other important information.

### Project Resources:

- Producing a First-Class Newsletter (Self Counsel Press) by Barbara A. Fanson.
- Newsletter Design (Self Counsel Press) by Edward A. Hamilton.
- Creating a Successful Web Site <http://successful.pagehere.com>
- Great Website Design Tips <http://www.unplug.com/great>
- Top Ten Mistakes in Web Design <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9605.html>

**Action Steps:** To create a successful AmeriCorps newsletter or web site, you need to . . .

- **Plan what you want to say.** What issues do you want to write about? You can print articles, a calendar of events, reports on AmeriCorps projects, letters from supporters, surveys, petitions, cartoons, or anything else.
- **Think about your audience.** Who is going to read your newsletter or visit your web site? How will you reach them?
- **How big will it be?** A newsletter will cost more depending on the number of pages and the print run. This is the advantage of a web site, which will not cost you more if you add more pages.
- **What are your resources?** You'll need access to a computer, printer, and copy machine.
- **Make it look good.** Your newsletter or web site should have a catchy title and graphics.
- **Assign jobs.** Who's good at writing? Who's good at drawing cartoons? Somebody should check spelling and punctuation. Someone else should do layout.
- **Set deadlines.** Set the date you want your newsletter or web site published. Make sure people get their jobs done on time. Try to publish your newsletter or add to your web site on a regular basis.
- **Use it to get help.** Be sure to tell people how they can help with your AmeriCorps projects. Let people know how to contact you. Make sure you do not include fundraising appeals. Asking for volunteers and other assistance is O.K., though.

### Evaluation:

- Ask a stranger to read it and evaluate it.
- Include a comments section. Give an address where people can reach you.
- How many AmeriCorps members work on the newsletter or web site? How much time do they spend?
- How many copies of the newsletter have you printed? How many hits has your web site gotten? How many people have you reached?

# Sample Project 7

## Keeping Fit (Issue area: Other Human Needs)

**Description:** Create a physical fitness program for community members

**Goals:** To raise awareness of the importance of physical fitness and to improve the physical fitness of young people, the aged, or other community members.

**Facts and Figures:** More than half of all Americans in all age groups do not get enough exercise. This results in increased obesity (a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study reported a 49 percent rise obesity in the seven years from 1991 to 1998). It also puts people at risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, and diabetes. People of all ages can benefit from regular physical exercise. In addition to health benefits, it makes people more alert and energetic.

### Project Resources:

- Public Health Service, Washington, DC
- President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Washington, DC
- National Youth Sport Coaches Association, West Palm Beach, FL
- Your local YMCA and YWCA
- Local park directors

**Action Steps:** To create a physical fitness program, you need to . . .

- **Discuss your goals and methods.** Who do you want to reach with your Keeping Fit program? Where will you exercise? How will you interest others in your project?
- **Look for support.** Can you get support from young people, teachers, parents, and older community members? Can you get help from local business?
- **Find a physical fitness expert.** Teaching physical fitness can be fun but it takes information to make exercise fun, safe, and effective. Park and recreation directors or school athletic directors often have this information.
- **Establish a physical fitness Bill of Rights.** All people have the right to have a healthy body, to participate in sports, to have qualified sports leadership, to exercise in a safe, healthy environment, to be treated fairly, and to have a good time staying fit.
- **Identify fitness activities.** Everyday activities such as walking, biking, gardening, and hiking encourage physical fitness.
- **Plan your program and do it!**
- **Follow up.** Keeping fit takes time and continuity. How will you keep your program going?

### Evaluation:

- How did participants perform before and after participating in your Keeping Fit program?
- Ask an athlete, coach or physician to evaluate your program.
- How many AmeriCorps members worked on Keeping Fit? How many AmeriCorps members participated? How many community members?

# Sample Project 8

## Planting Trees (Issue area: Environment)

**Description:** Organize a tree planting event in a local school, park, or other public place.

**Goals:** To improve the environment, and beautify the community, and raise public awareness about the importance of trees.

**Facts and Figures:** Trees convert carbon dioxide into oxygen. One acre of trees can convert 10 tons of carbon dioxide into oxygen every year. In a 50-year life span, one tree can clean up \$65,000 worth of polluted air, generate \$32,000 worth of oxygen, recycle \$40,000 worth of water, and prevent \$32,000 worth of soil erosion. Trees that surround a building can cut heating and air conditioning bills by 10 to 50 percent. Trees provide a habitat and food for birds and small animals. Trees create a more pleasing environment and help beautify the community.

### Project Resources:

- U.S. Department of Forestry, Washington, DC
- State forest services
- Local park and recreation departments

**Action Steps:** To organize a tree planting, you need to . . .

- **Discuss your goals and methods.** What do you want to accomplish with your event? How can you raise awareness about trees and the environment? How can you get others to join you in a tree-planting project?
- **Collect information.** Information is a good tool to motivate people to action. Ask a librarian for gardening books and a list of organizations that can help you. Search the Internet for information.
- **Talk to local government, business, and non-profits.** Your community may already have programs that address “green” issues such as tree planting. Local businesses are often interested in supporting a community project.
- **Ask for donations.** Local nurseries may be willing to donate seedlings or sell them at reduced prices to a community-improvement project.
- **Talk to the media.** Local newspapers, radio, and TV stations can help you publicize your event. Ask them how to prepare a public-service announcement (PSA).
- **Plan your event and do it!**
- **Follow up.** Newly planted trees need care.

### Evaluation:

- How many trees did you plant?
- How many people did you involve? Did you get support from local government, business, non-profits, and the media?
- What effects did your project produce? Will the trees be cared for in the future?