

# Introduction to Reflection

**R**eflection is a guided process that leads members through a careful examination of their service experience to help them realize the deeper and broader meaning and impact of their community service activities. While reflection activities can and should take place throughout the service year, they are particularly appropriate at the end of service as a way for members to take stock of their experience and use it as a springboard for next steps.

Methods to facilitate effective reflection should be as creative and varied as possible. They can take the form of journal writing, discussion groups, skits, arts and crafts projects, and other activities. Researcher and author Catherine Rolzinski compares the components of reflection to an exercise session:

- **Warm-up:** Recalling events, identifying successes and failures
- **Work-out:** Analysis—identifying motives, cause and effects; comprehension and understanding; evaluation—forming judgments and solutions; applications—using information to improve your program’s services
- **Stretching:** Summarizing the discussion and plans; examining group and individual actions and responsibilities

The process can be translated into three basic questions:

- **What?** (Examining facts in the context of local needs)
- **So what?** (Examining the personal meanings and implications)
- **Now what?** (Examining solutions and applications)

## Giving reflection meaning

For reflection to have meaning, it must be related to actual experiences. Also, programs should give as much care to the reflection activities as they do to the service activities themselves. The best reflective activities:

- Help people make a real contribution to the people they’re serving.
- Meet genuine needs.
- Challenge members to stretch—performing at higher levels than before.
- Encourage members to actively participate in their own learning, rather than as passive listeners.
- Relate theory to practice.
- Develop a sense of community.
- Demonstrate a partnership between members and the community they serve.
- Are both structured and flexible with a clear sense of direction but responsive to new situations.
- Promote genuine maturity in what is reflected on and roles the participants assume.
- Involve decision making on what will be considered and how.
- Have real consequences with outcomes that make a difference to someone.