

Incorporating Transition Planning Into the Service Term

Planning for life after VISTA won't seem so daunting if you help members do it a little at a time. Nedra Klee Hartzell, the author of *Next Steps: Life After AmeriCorps*, has created a calendar that incorporates a guide into month-by-month activities.

MONTH 1: Ask members to **set general goals** for post-service; if members plan to go to undergrad or grad school, make sure they're aware of deadlines for financial aid and admissions. Direct them to information about the education award and applying to schools.

MONTH 2: **Begin the self-assessment** process by looking at what skills members already have, what skills they're gaining during service, and what they'll need to meet their future goals.

MONTH 3: Help members **continue to explore interests**. A helpful tool is defining your "personality type."

MONTH 4: Have members **look at values and personal considerations**. Continue doing self-assessment exercises and using "personality type" tools.

MONTH 5: Ask members to **summarize the self-assessment** process in writing. Have members share their assessments with each other in guided discussions. Because members will know each other well by this point, they should be able to offer constructive comments about the assessments.

MONTHS 6 and 7: Promote **information-gathering** activities that match self-assessment needs. According to Hartzell, "this step is a formidable task with which members need much guidance." Program staff should schedule trainings with career counselors, human resource specialists and others. Consider organizing a Life After AmeriCorps training that will offer "one-stop" resources on many different post-service options. Provide time for members to do research by computer or at your local library's career center. Meet at least weekly with members to see how they're doing and keep them on task.

MONTH 8: Facilitate **decision-making and goal-setting**. Have members examine the information they've gathered during the previous months and focus on goals. Remind them that they don't need to figure out the rest of their lives—it's easier to set a series of short term goals.

MONTHS 9–12: Help members **pursue individual options**. Because everyone may be going in a different direction, this may be the most difficult part of the process to manage. Give members development time to conduct job searches, apply to schools, consider signing up for another term of service, or research other steps. Provide resources as needed. In staff meetings, ask members to individually report on their progress.

MONTH 10: Lead a frank discussion on **managing transition**. Ask members to talk about how they've managed change at other points in their lives—for example, when they transitioned into service. Could they use the same coping mechanisms now that they did then?

MONTH 11: Have members look at what they've gained from their service experience and consider how they'll **continue to serve**. Talk about signing up for additional VISTA or AmeriCorps service and/or other ways to volunteer in their community.

MONTH 12: Encourage **reflection, review, and closure**. Use the surveys and evaluations to help members reflect on their service and how it will help them in the future. Design end-of-service ceremonies to focus on where members are heading, rather than where they've been.