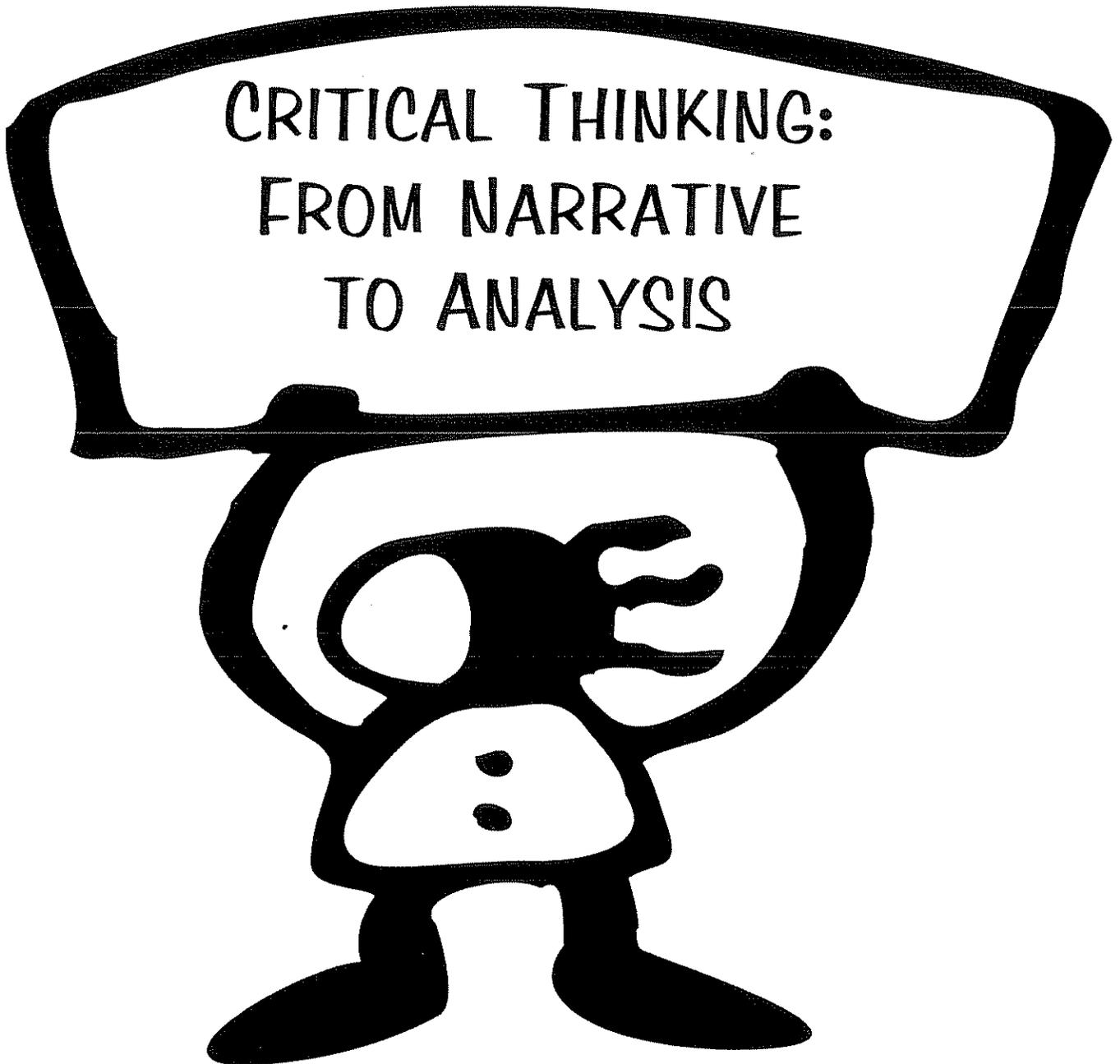


# PART TWO

CRITICAL THINKING:  
FROM NARRATIVE  
TO ANALYSIS





## INTRODUCTION:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN  
TO MOVE FROM  
NARRATIVE TO ANALYSIS?

---



**P**art One: “From Me to We” focused on developing a strong group dynamic as the foundation for community service participants’ ongoing work together. At the same time, the skills that were introduced and practiced were meant to help group members begin to articulate ideas and thoughts that relate to their service. Participants also had the opportunity to practice civic skills. Through this process they learned to listen to one another, to share information effectively, to articulate ideas, to make clear arguments and to debate different points of view. Also, it is likely that through this process group members have come to acknowledge and respect one another’s differences, talents and strengths.



Part Two: From Narrative to Analysis builds on that foundation by providing structured exercises and suggestions for examining group members’ experiences in community and public service.

By thinking critically about service, participants will be better able to set goals, evaluate their efforts and articulate the meaning and significance of their service. Furthermore, this sets the stage for discussing community and public service within a broader social, political and historical context.

Like so many aspects of our lives, our experiences in service are rich with stories — the places we’ve been, the people we’ve met, the things we’ve seen, the deeds we’ve done. Often, the scenes and stories of our service experiences are complex and multifaceted. Contradictions and complications exist. After all, service often invites us into settings where resources are scarce, problems abound and people have many reasons to be frustrated.

Getting involved often means interacting with strangers and getting acclimated to unfamiliar environments. It also means learning to work with people who may be very different from ourselves — with different opinions, world views and priorities. It quickly becomes clear that our interpretation of our service can be very different from others’ views of our efforts.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN...?



“Learning to examine one’s experience and to think about it from different perspectives takes the kind of thoughtfulness, imagination and commitment that marks an involved citizen.”

Take for instance the college student who was actively involved in an innovative weekend program at an elementary school near the university he attended. His activities at the school were important to him, and it seemed that he was a useful and welcome presence within the program. In a casual conversation with roommates, he realized that his friends thought his work was “a waste of time and something you should get paid to do.” In a discussion with his history professor, he was challenged with the alarming question, “So, why do you spend all this time just to please the public relations office at the university? Do you know how much mileage they get out of students like you? But is it really helping those kids?” When he told his supervisor at the school about these conversations, she mentioned that within the program, there was an ongoing debate about whether to allow students to volunteer with the program at all. She said that some teachers felt that they were often too unreliable, unfocused and unfamiliar with the kids’ lives to be of use. While this might seem an extreme case, it is a true one and it illustrates how different members of a community have different opinions about service. It also emphasizes that while service might seem at first to be an undeniably good thing, it is in fact debated and contested.

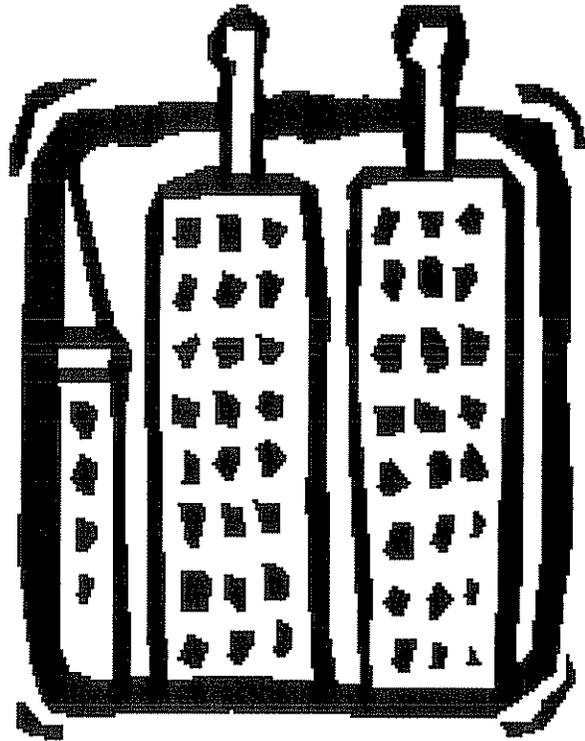
Taking stock and making sense of service takes critical thinking. Questions are raised that have no easy answers. Furthermore, these questions invariably lead to controversial arguments and conflictual ideas. But without working to understand service in this wider context of history and society, we risk losing a rare opportunity to become active participants in public life. Learning to examine one’s experience and to think about it from different perspectives takes the kind of thoughtfulness, imagination and commitment that marks an involved citizen.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN...?



## From Narrative to Analysis

Moving from narrative to analysis is essentially that — taking the step from telling stories about service to delving into the heart of these stories in order to understand their many meanings and interpretations, and to develop new meanings together. It requires that we notice patterns and see how different stories relate to one another. It demands that we do not stop at the mere *description* of events and situations but actually *explain* why and how something occurred. Taking this step is crucial for your service and for democratic life. Through discussion, group members can examine their experiences in order to find solutions to common problems, evaluate their ongoing work, and think creatively about ways to have the most individual and collective impact. From a civic perspective, this active, collaborative learning process reflects democratic deliberation at its best. Reflective service and discussion create opportunities for citizens to come together, and through their different experiences, perspectives and strengths, find effective solutions to the problems that confront them. This is not a painful or boring process. Rather, it accentuates the excitement and vitality of democratic life at its best. While it requires effort and commitment, it offers in return a new way to work together as citizens and to make changes that improve our common lives together.



Part Two begins with notes and suggestions for facilitating useful, collaborative and interesting group discussions. The information provided has been culled from a wide array of sources — facilitation guides, testimonies from experienced group facilitators and the writings of educators, psychologists and coaches. These notes make explicit many of the things that we often notice and do in the context of group discussions, but that we don't usually analyze. We provide an outline of attributes of a good facilitator and a list of suggestions for solving common problems in group discussion. We include a discussion of the different roles that people take on in groups (the person who starts arguments, the one who gets consensus, the clown, etc.). We also discuss the verbal tools used to enhance discussions and the tendencies that are counterproductive to democratic discussion.

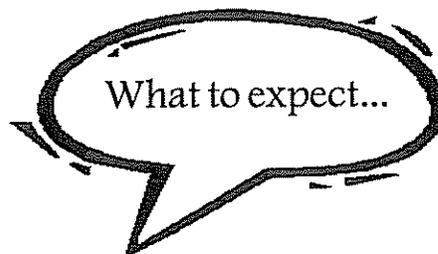
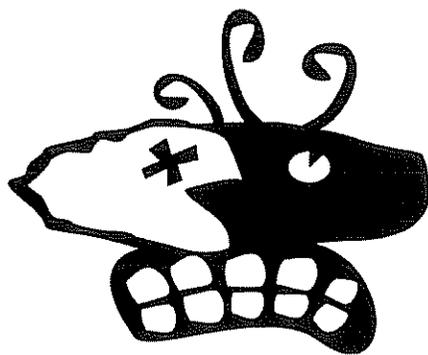


Following that, we present ideas and suggestions for developing discussion guidelines within community service groups. This section examines the purposes of discussion for service participants and shows how to bring out the democratic elements of group discussions. In particular, we offer ways for group members to move away from talking about personal experiences in highly specific and often limiting terms, stressing instead ways to insure that others can learn important lessons from one's discussion and reflection. We also offer sample guidelines for discussions that were developed by community service groups.

Part Two continues with a deeper look at group reflection from the perspective of democratic and experiential learning. This section is designed to orient readers to experience-based education and to draw clear connections between community service and critical reflection. *It also makes the argument that community and public service opens doors to a learning process that is important not just for individuals but for improving the status of American democracy.* In addition, a brief synopsis of some ideas that have built the foundation for experiential learning in American society sets the context for the exercises and discussions which follow.

Next, we provide a series of structured exercises similar to those found in Part One. In these, however, the objective is to turn to one another within the group to learn more about a situation, an issue or an idea. Again, while they are fun and interesting, these games also strengthen group members' abilities to work well together, and to build upon one another's ideas and experiences. They are intended to make connections that will enable members to begin analyzing service experiences more thoroughly.

Next, a series of critical incidents are introduced. Stories describing events that not only occurred to community service participants, but that are fairly commonplace, are explained in detail. Questions and activities accompany each incident, so that group members have the chance to analyze these situations and to consider the complex factors that contribute to each one. Then, members have the opportunity to write their own critical incident. They also learn to move from describing an event to analyzing it — a very crucial step in democratic learning. Through this exercise, they can analyze a situation that happened to them, and invite others to learn from the incident and to analyze it.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN...?



In the following section, we introduce community mapping, particularly community asset mapping, a concept that has been developed and advanced by John P. Kretzmann and John McKnight at Northwestern University. Mapping is introduced here as a way of learning about neighborhoods and communities, taking into account their strengths and assets and identifying different interests and sources of power that exist. By pushing participants to see different community institutions as resources, community mapping also encourages participants to look outside of their own group for places to learn and become effective citizens. Mapping has been a helpful tool for many community service groups and the information and exercises provided build from the elements which they have found most useful and successful.

The following section introduces participants to the history of service and to the different motivations that have directed community service in American society. It is important for service participants to think about what motivates them to serve and examine how different motivations have led to different structures and ways of serving. These differences have historically led to conflicts and contention. As citizens involved in public life, it is necessary to consider the intentions of service and their consequences. By learning about different traditions of service and engaging in an exercise to analyze motivations, group members have the opportunity to move beyond their personal experiences and examine service in a broad historical and social context. At the same time, they place themselves and their efforts within that context.

“...Consider structures and processes of service and measure them against democratic ideals. After all, how can we expect people to learn the tools of democratic life if the projects in which they are engaged do not reflect those aims?”

Next, an evaluation tool is presented to encourage group members to take what they have learned about service, democracy and public life to evaluate their own service projects and involvement. *‘Is Your Service Democratic?’* enables group members to consider structures and processes of their service and measure them against democratic ideals. After all, how can we expect people to learn the tools of democratic life if the projects in which they are engaged do not reflect those aims? We believe that the recent emphasis people put on “evaluation” of programs is a good step. We just think that the participants themselves shouldn’t be studied like objects, but should play an active role in evaluating their own experiences. This exercise also emphasizes the step taken here from narrative to analysis and prepares participants for a deeper theoretical discussion of service and society in Part Three: Complex Thinking.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN...?



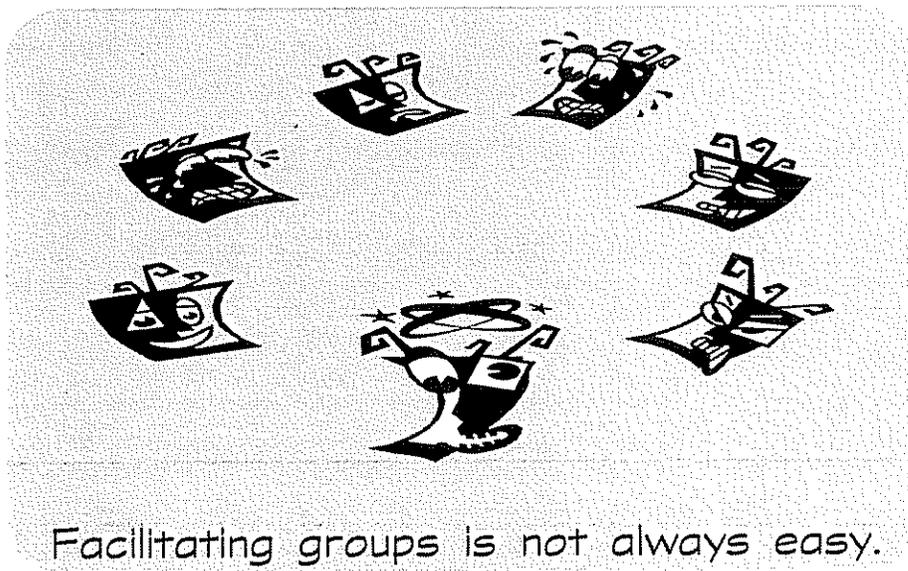
# SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATION

In Section Two, the challenge is to give your group opportunities and incentives to analyze what they do at their service sites and to draw connections between their efforts and broader social, political, cultural and economic issues.

This way, they can:

- ⊙ learn lessons from their work
- ⊙ share with one another what works well
- ⊙ find creative solutions to problems that come up
- ⊙ figure out ways to address the challenges they face in creative and effective ways

At the same time, they can begin to learn more about the communities they are working in and how the community service they are doing fits into wider community life and community issues. To support and encourage this process, thoughtful facilitation is necessary. Before you begin facilitating discussions, there are some issues to consider. The following facilitation guide is designed to help you.



The facilitation guide that follows offers many practical tools and suggestions for leading group discussion.

**We introduce:**

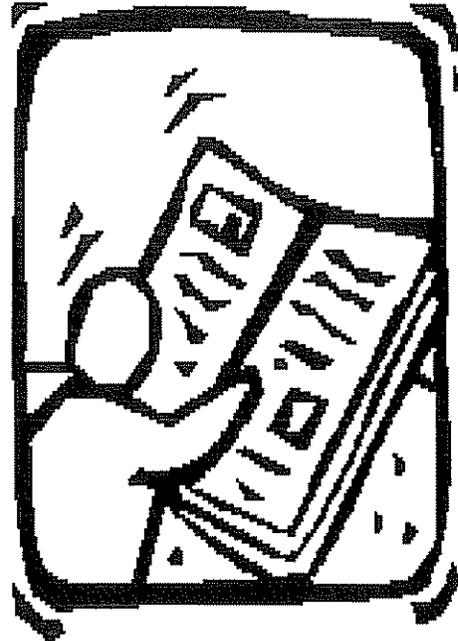
- ⊙ basic ideas about facilitation
- ⊙ responsibilities of the facilitator
- ⊙ tips for good discussions
- ⊙ descriptions of different roles people play (positive and negative) in conversations
- ⊙ solutions to common problems groups have in discussions



# GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FACILITATOR

Facilitators are the standard - setters for the discussion.

Particularly in Sections Two and Three of this guide, setting the standard for participatory and learning-focused discussions is crucial. At this point, you are moving away from structured games and exercises and into an opened-ended and unpredictable process. Facilitators have to be alert and focused, interested in the discussion and the process of learning and respectful of all members of the group. They create the communication standards, by glancing around the room, listening closely and encouraging all group members to be a part of the discussion. If a facilitator is not engaged in the discussion and interested in what participants contribute, no one else can be expected to take the process seriously.



Facilitators make the meeting environment a priority.

Space can make or break group discussions. Needless to say, dark, windowless, cramped space is a difficult setting for lively discussions. Make it a priority to locate a place for group meetings where you can be in a bright and comfortable environment. If your program does not have access to a good meeting room, check with your community service sites, cultural centers, local churches or libraries.

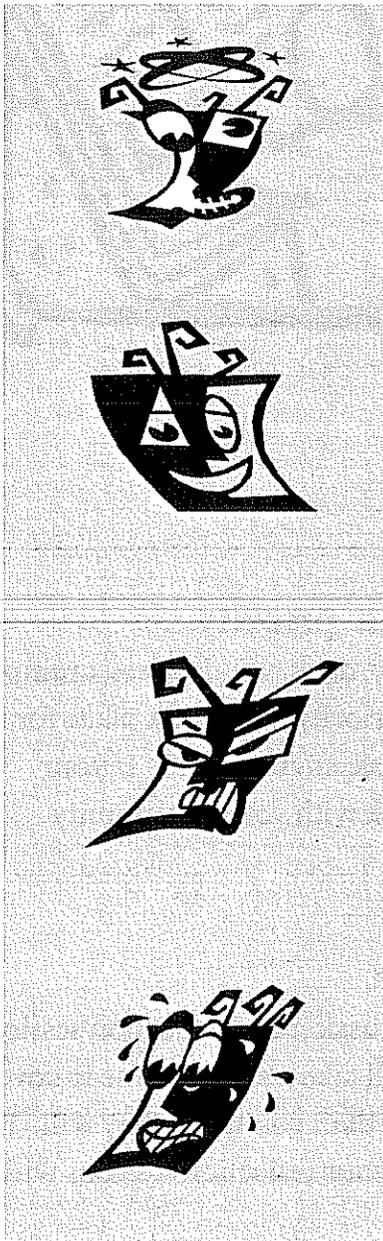
Facilitators are mindful of timing issues.

Often it is difficult to figure out how to schedule group discussion and reflection sessions. It is easy to over-schedule a session, assuming that issues will take a shorter time to cover than they actually do. Always plan for things to take longer than you think they will. It is also important to think about coordinating the structure of your reflection sessions with the priorities that have emerged over the week, etc.



For example, you may want to provide time for:

- ⊙ “check-ins”
- ⊙ logistical issues
- ⊙ quiet time for members to think and reflect
- ⊙ learning / discussion exercises
- ⊙ discussion of a problem/ issue facing the whole group
- ⊙ general discussion
- ⊙ enough time for wrap-up



The problem of timing in discussions is often exacerbated by the fact that group discussions and meetings tend to start late. It is important to enforce punctuality and to begin sessions as close to schedule as you can. It is more respectful to those who came on time, and it shows the latecomers that discussions will move on without them.

Facilitators are responsible for articulating the purpose of discussion and its significance to the group.

It is important to remember at the beginning of regular discussions to remind the group of its main purposes and functions. It is equally important to begin group discussions by articulating the objective, or purpose of the discussion. If the objective is not obvious, or somehow multifaceted, start things off with a group conversation about what members want to address, etc. This sets the stage for discussion and also serves as a good barometer of progress throughout the meeting.

Facilitators make use of different tools to keep the discussion moving along.

There are many different ways to encourage learning discussions. There are also many ways discussions can be sidetracked or deteriorate. Facilitators sometimes find themselves in positions where they are walking a fine line — they must control discussions enough to keep them from veering off into banality, but they must allow enough flexibility for the unpredictable and often exciting things that come up in discussions.



The following tools can help make every comment in a discussion a useful comment and can enable a facilitator to guide and direct the discussion without controlling it:



### ④ Turning questions back

Many times in group discussions, participants will ask questions directly to the facilitator, i.e., “Can you tell us what you know about...?”. While it is difficult *not* to respond directly to the question posed, turning the question back to the person who asked it or to the whole group, is a good way to assist group members in formulating their ideas and to encourage discussion. For example, a good facilitator will respond with, “Well, what do you all know about it? Does someone want to respond?”



### ④ Supporting and valuing what is said

Sometimes the facilitator has to fight the urge to correct comments that are presented by group members. Finding ways to support contributions, even when they appear to be factually incorrect or not well thought out, is difficult. Rejecting or correcting the first contribution a participant makes can discourage them for a whole discussion. There are ways to correct or challenge participants’ comments in a way that supports and values their engagement in the discussion, i.e.,

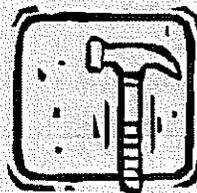
- ④ “Is that really so?”
- ④ “Let’s look at that a little more carefully.”
- ④ “How does that comment relate to what you said before?”
- ④ “Does anyone else want to comment on what was just

said?”



### ④ Checking

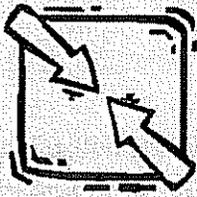
Ask questions to clarify what a participant is saying. This is also an opportunity to paraphrase a group member’s contribution for clarity or coherence. Even by showing that you are listening, you show support.



### ④ Building

A facilitator can strengthen the discussion and create a fuller picture of the topic being discussed by bringing emerging themes together. Help group members to see the connections, so that they can do the building themselves.





## ⊙ Redirecting

Sometimes a facilitator needs to call a 'time out' and redirect a conversation that has gone astray. It is necessary to ask group members how they want to redirect the discussion. "Have we discussed this long enough?" might be a good way to check if participants are ready to move forward. More direct approaches also work, i.e., "Let's turn our attention to..."



## ⊙ Using testing questions

Testing questions generally check participants' knowledge or understanding of the topic at hand, i.e., "What did Saul Alinsky prioritize in community organizing?" "How did he justify that to...?" "How does this relate to ...?" They are especially good to use when the group is discussing factual information or a series of concepts. Testing for their understanding of the information, or their ability to apply what they have learned, can assist facilitators in directing the discussion.



## ⊙ Using clarifying or elaborating questions

Group members may make unclear comments. Again, instead of correcting them or disregarding their contributions, facilitators can ask for clarification or elaboration, i.e., "Can you rephrase that?" "What do you mean by that?" "Can you tell us more?" can help participants articulate their thoughts in a way that will be meaningful for the whole group.

## Facilitators are responsible for encouraging participation.

It is the role of the facilitator to encourage everyone in the group to get involved. While this seems obvious, it is easy to forget about quieter, more reticent group members and rely on extroverted, talkative types to carry the discussion. If you find that the same people are always participating and the same people are always silent, change your tactics. Some suggestions for increasing participation: tell members in advance the topic of the discussion so people have time to think about it; instead of group discussions, have individuals make presentations or lead games/exercises that stress communication.



Facilitators can make discussion a democratic process.

If encouraging thought and reflection on democracy and citizenship is a goal for your service participants, it is necessary to model those ideals in the process of group discussion and collaboration. By encouraging listening, debating and compromising, the facilitator can breathe life into stale notions of democracy and civic involvement. They allow group members to be full participants in a democratic community.

Facilitators are responsible for paying attention to group behaviors.

As facilitator, it is your job to be observant and aware of the way individual members of the group and the group as a whole behave and react in different situations. You can encourage people to explain their behavior with “check-ins” or other general information-sharing strategies. Pay attention to what grabs their attention, what divides the group, what unifies them, what challenges and what bores them. Pay attention to the way they treat one another and how that changes over time. Look for non-verbal signals during the discussion, like looks of frustration, snorts of disgust, etc. All of these things will make it easier for you to work with group members and have useful and interesting discussions. Take into account group behaviors when you and your group establish guidelines for discussion. By stating from the start that rude, disrespectful behavior is not acceptable, it will make it easier to address these behaviors as time goes on.



*the big picture*



Facilitators are responsible for ensuring continuity from session to session.

The way a facilitator begins and concludes discussions is a crucial component of linking the group reflection and discussion process over time. By simply summarizing the last week’s session and articulating the purpose for the ensuing conversation at the beginning of a session, and then summarizing the talk and laying out some ideas for the next talk at the end of a session, it is easy to help group members see the connections.

Facilitators should relax and have a sense of humor, making sure that the discussions are enjoyable as well as educational.

Group discussions can get too serious and intense if facilitators aren’t comfortable or having a good time. It is important to remember that we don’t have to be dour, uptight or constantly fired up in order to have good discussions. Laughter and a relaxed attitude can be the greatest ingredients for good learning discussions.



# VERBAL TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE DISCUSSIONS



Good discussions are kept on track with certain types of comments and statements. In general, you will find that people are naturally inclined towards certain communication techniques described below. Facilitators do not personally have to do all of the following things, but they should make sure that group members are contributing to the discussion by using these verbal tools. It might be helpful to have a discussion about the following tools, to allow group members to assess their own skills:

## ☉ Orienting Statements.

Orienting statements set the stage for the discussion, by laying out the goal, problem, objective or task that will be dealt with during that conversation. An example of an orienting statement is, "Today's critical reflection topic is problem solving in tutoring sessions. The tutor aides, who coach high school kids who are tutoring middle school kids, will be leading the discussion."

## ☉ Summary Statements.

Summary statements help group members synthesize what they have heard. An example of this kind of statement might be, "We learned that eight year olds have approximately a fifteen minute attention span before they get bogged down by straight information. Then we brainstormed the following short games to play with eight year olds to give them a break before moving on - guessing games, 'I Spy', puzzle games, rhyming, etc."

## ☉ Procedural Statements.

Procedural statements keep groups on track. An example of this kind of statement is, "We have been talking about obstacles in tutoring for an hour. We have a half hour more to go — Do you think we should move on to methods for overcoming obstacles now, or do you want to rework the agenda and continue this discussion next week?"



### ④ Process Checks.

Process checks keep the group honest, by bringing attention to things that are working and things that aren't working in the discussion. An example of a process check might be, "For the past twenty minutes, Aisha and Arnold have been debating the legitimacy of phonics as a teaching pedagogy. Is it time for the group to move on?"

### ④ Debriefing.

Debriefing is simply asking members of the group for input about the process of the discussion and encouraging them to contribute their thoughts and observations about the group. Asking, "How did that session go and what might have made it better?" is an easy way to show that the facilitator values every participants' perspective and is anxious to make the sessions as useful as possible.

### ④ Paraphrasing.

Paraphrasing, or repeating what another group member said using different words, can help to clarify a point, or make the connection between a concrete individual experience and a broader issue. For example, in a discussion about what we mean by mentors, role models and community responsibility for raising young citizens, a participant might state the following, "Kids I work with have, like, no chance of, like, making it, 'cause, nobody pays attention to them and they just roam and have, like, no goals. They just keep messing up." An effective way to paraphrase that statement might be, "Jill just raised an interesting issue. She is calling into question the short term and long term effects of the lack of supervision of children. Without people in their lives to provide structure, they might have a hard time establishing goals and things to work toward. Sometimes this can result in them getting into trouble with the institutions they come into contact with — like school, or the police."

### ④ Describing Behaviors.

Describing behaviors is really a way of safeguarding against judging peoples' comments, behaviors and attitudes in a discussion, especially one which might be volatile, or where people are becoming sensitive. Often, for example, issues of race and class can make participants in group discussions uncomfortable. They might personalize the discussion and jump on one another's comments and the messages that may be implicit in them. In order to minimize defensiveness and keep the discussion concrete, it is important to describe behaviors without placing any value judgements, i.e., "That's the third time you interrupted," is better than, "You never listen to what I say and you never will!" Or, "Michael seems to be moving away from the table," is better than, "Michael thinks he's too good for this conversation so he's slowly heading out the door."



## ⑨ Feeling Definitions (“I” Statements).

Feeling definitions are ways for people to articulate their reactions to other people’s comments or actions. You might encourage a group member to say, “I felt disrespected when four people walked into my presentation twenty minutes late,” instead of, “The four people who walked in late are rude and disrespectful.” But remember: there is a difference between “I feel” and “I think” or “I believe.” Be careful not to let “I” statements replace critical discussion. “I” Statements are very difficult to debate or refute precisely because they *are* personal. Sticking to feelings and personal opinions sometimes thwarts critical discussion.

## ⑨ Impression Checking.

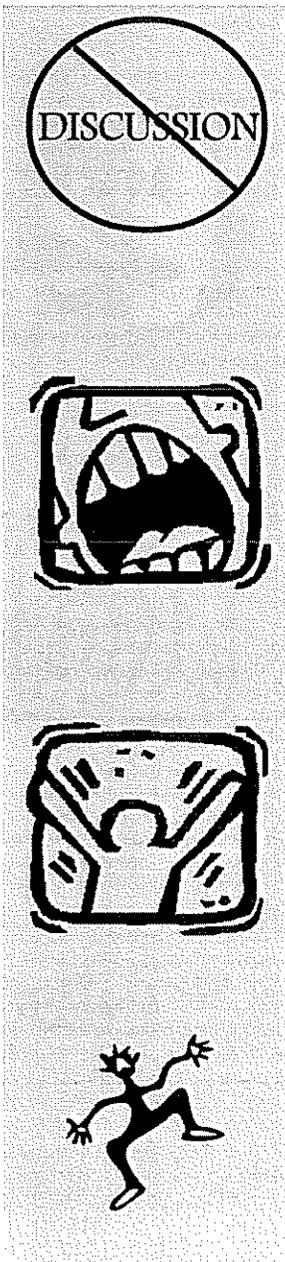
Impression checking helps to clarify what people are expressing nonverbally. For example, if all of your group members were slumped over the table with their heads in their coffee cups, it would be an impression checking statement to say, “Folks seem pretty tired this morning and not up for serious discussion.” By acknowledging the low energy in the room, you can turn the group’s attention to that as an issue, instead of trying to move forward as if things were going well.



# THE FLIP SIDE: VERBAL TENDENCIES THAT BLOCK GOOD DISCUSSIONS



Just as the verbal tools mentioned above can strengthen and improve group discussions, there are communication styles and patterns that can be detrimental to group discussions. It is important for facilitators to be aware of these tendencies and to use tools mentioned above to put a stop to them. You should discuss the following tendencies with your group and build guidelines for discussion that take these into account:



## ⊙ Blocking

Blocking can be anything that stops the group's discussion from moving forward. Going off on tangents, arguing over something that the rest of the group has already resolved and being belligerent are all examples of blocking.

## ⊙ Being Aggressive

Aggression comes out in different ways. Being hostile to one member of the group or to the group in general for no apparent reason, criticizing others' comments with no constructive alternatives, attacking others' motives, putting other group members down are all examples of aggression in discussions.

## ⊙ Seeking Recognition/Status -Seeking

Group members might consistently bring attention to their own successes or simply call attention to themselves at every opportunity.

## ⊙ Withdrawing

Group members who withdraw may do so by acting passive and indifferent, or bored. They may also become uncharacteristically formal or stop paying attention to the discussion.



### ⊙ Self-Confessing/ Seeking Sympathy.

Self-confessing or seeking sympathy is another way of getting attention within the group. Participants might complain excessively, act as though they are helpless to change their circumstances, or share inappropriate information with the group. They may talk about their own circumstances in a way that seems to others to be, “thinking out loud”, i.e., “Well, maybe I should have eaten before I went to my site, but I didn’t have time to grocery shop because my sister came to visit me and we went out to this new coffee place and then the next day, I didn’t have food, so I didn’t have breakfast and then when I got to my site I was so hungry that I just couldn’t get anything done and my supervisor yelled at me and told me I was lazy and I yelled back and said she didn’t understand that I was too overwhelmed...”



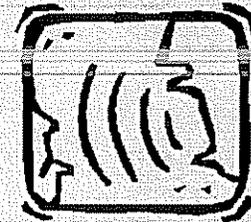
### ⊙ Special Interest Pleading.

Group members may constantly bring up ideas that relate to their personal interest or concern in a certain subject. They will bring it up regardless of its relevance to the topic at hand, or to the interest that other group members have in the topic. They tend to speak on behalf of, ‘the working man’, ‘the grassroots’, ‘women everywhere’, etc.



### ⊙ Dominating.

Dominating behavior comes out in different ways. Group members might assert that they know more about subjects, regardless of the relevance or truth to the assertion. They might interrupt others or act as if they are somehow above the group.

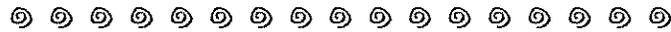


### ⊙ Playing Around.

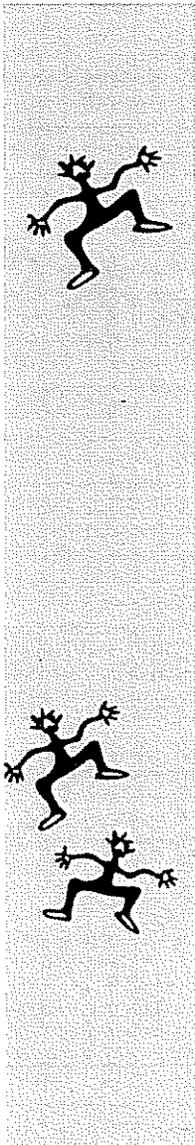
Sometimes breaking the tension and getting the group to laugh and loosen up is necessary and important. But it can go too far. Some members might make everything into a joke and make it difficult to continue the discussion.



# HOW TO SOLVE COMMON PROBLEMS IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS



All groups face problems and barriers to effective discussions. Differences between group members, time factors and wide variations in people's experiences are just some of the obstacles you might face. Obviously, there are some factors influencing your group that are beyond your control. However, some common problems can be solved. Below, we've outlined some common problems and discussed some solutions.



## ⊙ Group members do not feel comfortable together.

A group whose members have inconsistent attendance at meetings and who don't become familiar with one another tend to have awkward and boring discussions. It is necessary to take the time to build a good group dynamic before you start the work of Part Two. In order to have an environment that welcomes and supports free and open expression, people in the group need to know one another fairly well, well enough so that they can express different viewpoints without a lot of fall out. The exercises in Part One of this guidebook as well as the learning exercises in this section help to build a positive group dynamic. They focus on communicating ideas and they encourage group members to work as a team and to learn from one another.

## ⊙ Group members don't see the point of discussion.

Group members may not see the benefits of broader discussions about their service, and might feel that they are a waste of time. For some, service is an activity that doesn't require discussion. Others may not think they have anything to learn from discussion or from their peers. If you face this kind of opposition, focus on the things your group wants to accomplish in the long run. What will be the results of their service? How can discussions between group members and between staff and members help to reach those goals?

Explain to group members the importance of being articulate representatives of their service group in public settings and therefore the necessity of talking through the bigger issues. Broader conversations about service can have positive and practical impacts on your program. For example, discussions on the different motivations for service might help your program participants to come up with a strategy for getting others involved with their service efforts. Discussions about community asset mapping can help members find solutions to problems facing their organization.



## ☉ Group members like discussions, but they don't think of service as something they can learn from.

Discussions that are part of learning processes are unpredictable and very fluid. For those reasons, they can seem a little unfocused or meandering. It is important for the facilitator to set the tone for learning discussions by taking seriously the concerns, questions and contributions of group members, but at the same time presenting these concerns as opportunities for learning. If someone is making comments that seem extraneous, — off the subject, redundant, irrelevant, boring — the job of the facilitator is to find something useful about what the person is saying and “translate” it for the full group.

Setting general guidelines for all group discussion and specific learning goals for certain group discussions can reinforce the idea that learning takes place through discussions. It also reduces the likelihood that group members will stray far off the course of a useful and interesting discussion.

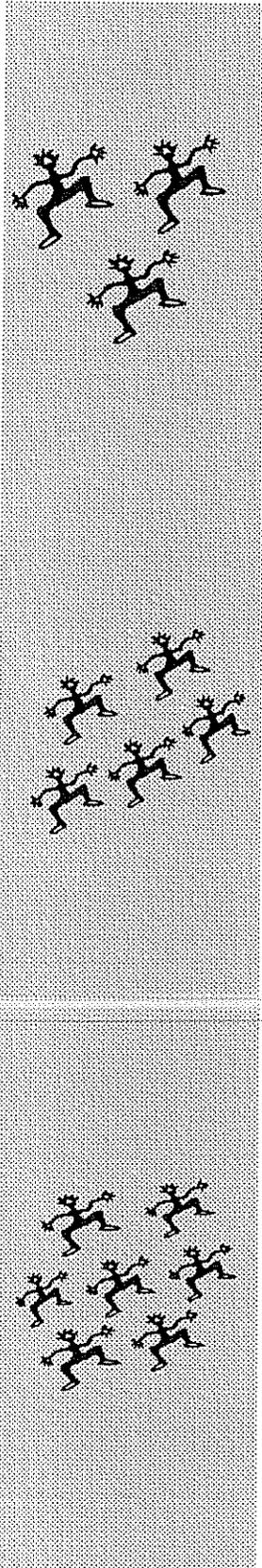
## ☉ Group members personalize everything.

Sometimes members of your group will use discussion time to talk about very specific personal problems. Other groups members get bored and resentful that discussion is being tied up with one person's issues. Again, setting guidelines for discussion can reduce this tendency by setting out what is appropriate and what is not. Good facilitation can also turn this around. Group members will need help moving from personal concerns to general issues and concepts.

For example, if a group member always has the same problem with his/her boss coming to work late and missing their weekly check-in talks, you can channel the comment away from the complaint (which everybody has heard over and over) and say something like, “Chris is raising an interesting issue related to...” and fill in the blank with something closer to a relevant topic, i.e., “working independently, communicating with supervisors, organizational structures, etc.”

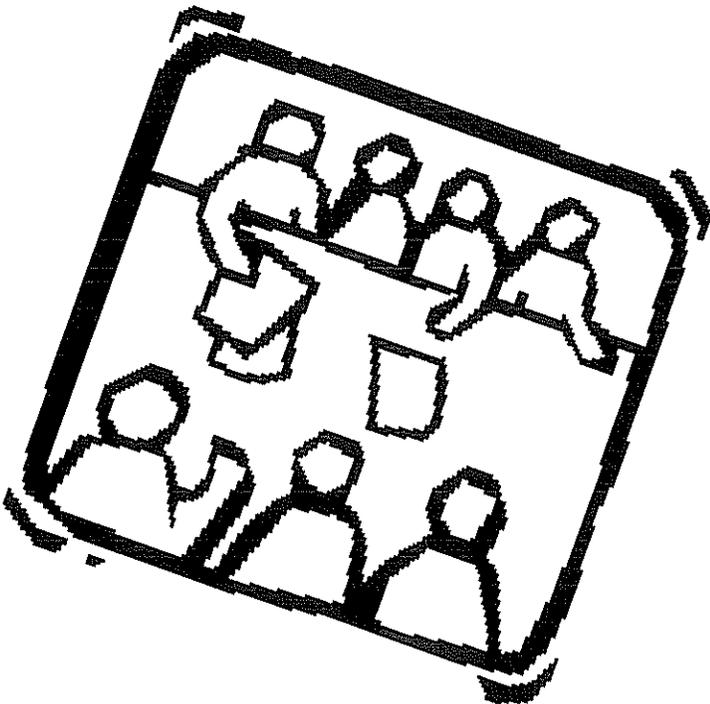
## ☉ Some members of the group are having great experiences at their service sites, while others are finding their placements to be very difficult.

It might be helpful to encourage participants to reflect individually about their experiences at their sites before group reflection. If people are having great experiences, encourage them to think about why things are working out well, and ask them to come to group meetings prepared to discuss that. If you know that individuals are having problems at their site, help them to bring those difficulties to the full group, instead of having lots of one-on-one discussions with staff. This way, you can help members of the group to move from personalizing their experiences too much, to making some useful observations and generalizations about the requisites for good service. It also reinforces the notion that service can and should always be a learning experience, regardless of specific circumstances.



# GUIDELINES:

## SETTING UP GUIDELINES FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS



# SETTING GUIDELINES FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

**B**efore your group starts to have discussions that link service to broader issues, it will be necessary to set up some guidelines, rules or group norms. It is important that all members of the group get the opportunity to participate in developing the guidelines. You should plan a full discussion on the *subject of discussion*. Make the establishment of your group's rules for discussion a significant group activity. This will help to reinforce the importance of not only the guidelines you come up with, but of discussions in general. It also makes clear that good discussions are the responsibility of the whole group, not just the facilitator, or one or two talkative group members.

**GOOD DISCUSSIONS ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WHOLE GROUP, NOT JUST THE FACILITATOR.**

Many times, groups will enthusiastically put together a list of discussion guides that are impossible to follow. i.e., "Everyone in the group should be allowed to talk for as long they want about whatever they want," or, "We need to make time in every discussion to trade culturally specific recipes." Within a week, everyone has forgotten their rules and the facilitator's job to maintain order and structure during discussions becomes very difficult. It is important to make the guidelines meaningful and integral to the way your group conducts itself.

Printing your group's list and making it visible at every group discussion is a good way to remind members that they have established this guide for themselves. As group members, they are always accountable for following the guidelines.



# BEFORE SETTING THE GUIDELINES



In the facilitation notes that precede this section, we talk about many different factors that affect group discussions. Before you go about setting down guidelines with group members, you'll want to think about the following:

- ⊙ Do members of your group vary greatly in terms of education level and life experience?
- ⊙ Do you have a lot of extroverted, confident and talkative people in the group? Or are there more quiet, reflective members?
- ⊙ Are members of the group excited about the prospect of getting together for reflection, or do they dread it as a necessary but uninteresting part of the program?
- ⊙ In general, do group members like to talk about different issues, or are most them interested in "just doing service"?

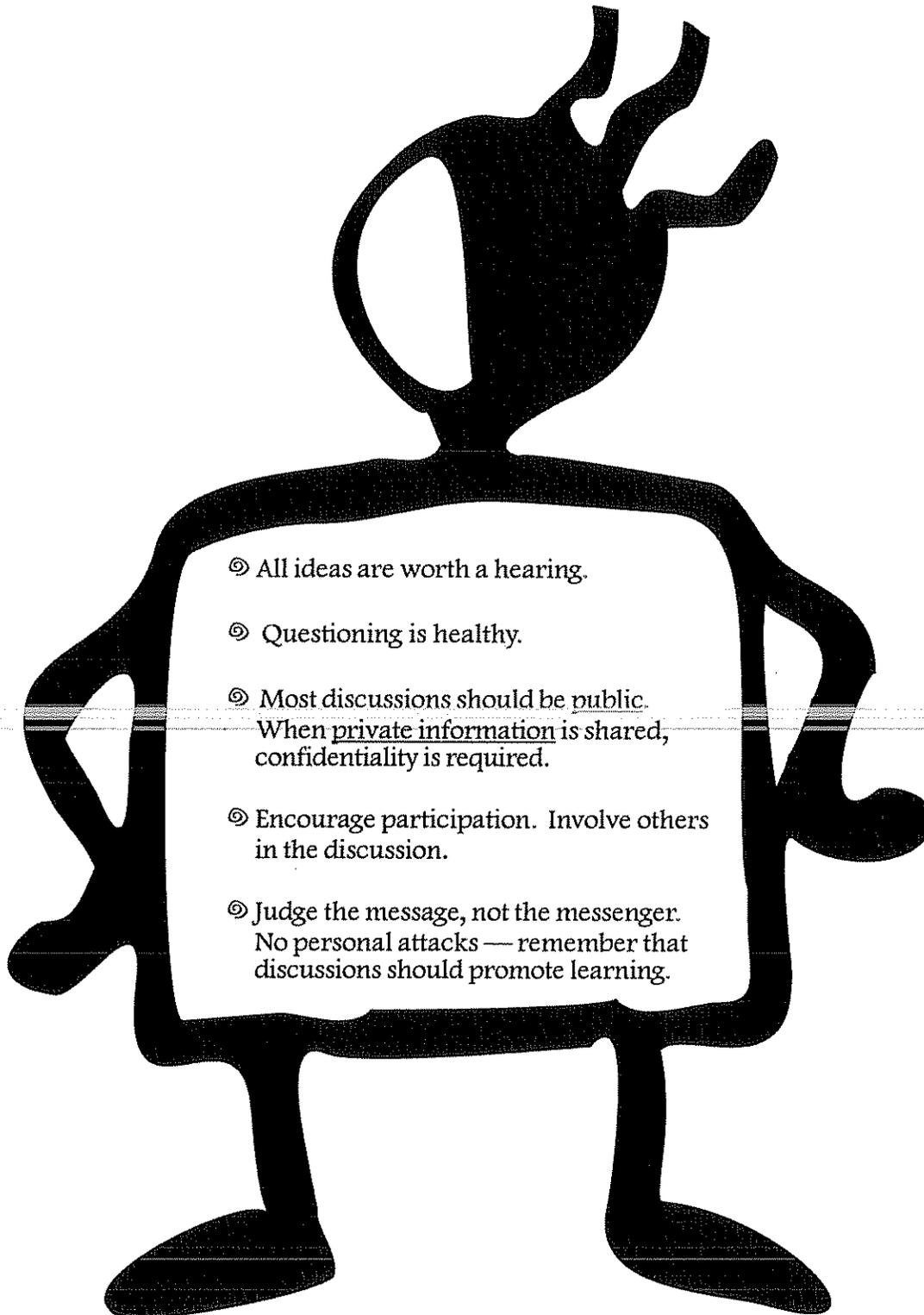
Differences between group members, as well as general attitudes the group has about their service and about group meetings, will greatly affect discussions. Facilitators can do a lot to reduce negative tendencies in the group by suggesting relevant discussion guides. For example, if a group seems to be really talkative but not all that interested in talking about *service*, it might be a good idea to have a rule that limits check-in conversations (where members go around the circle and tell how they are doing) to a very minimal amount of time to avoid chatting away discussion time. Or, if you know that certain members of your group are extremely quiet and withdrawn, you may want to suggest a guideline that somehow encourages all members' participation. For example, it could be a rule that the discussion topics are announced a week in advance, so more quiet and reflective people have a chance to think about the topic and to prepare some ideas and comments.

Groups are unpredictable and regardless of rules and guidelines, participants will always take discussions to unanticipated places. There will always be an element of fluidity to any group discussions. However, being thoughtful and deliberate about your goals for discussion and taking into consideration the experiences, strengths and weaknesses of your group members will improve your prospects for useful and enjoyable discussions. On the following pages, we present two sample sets of discussion guidelines. They represent the kinds of basic and clear rules that groups have used to structure their discussions. They are intended to help you think about rules that would make sense for your group.





# GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION





# GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION



- ⊙ Don't interrupt people while they are speaking. (If you don't understand the point someone is making, ask for clarification instead of dismissing their ideas.)
- ⊙ Show respect for the group learning process by avoiding side conversations.
- ⊙ Check periodically to see if the discussion is on the right track for most participants.
- ⊙ Be constructive. No put downs.
- ⊙ Make time for laughing.
- ⊙ Don't avoid conflict. Be open to learning through discussions even when it is not easy.
- ⊙ When discussing opinions and perceptions, use "I" statements, i.e., "I think Tom could have handled that better," instead of, "Tom could have handled that better than he did."

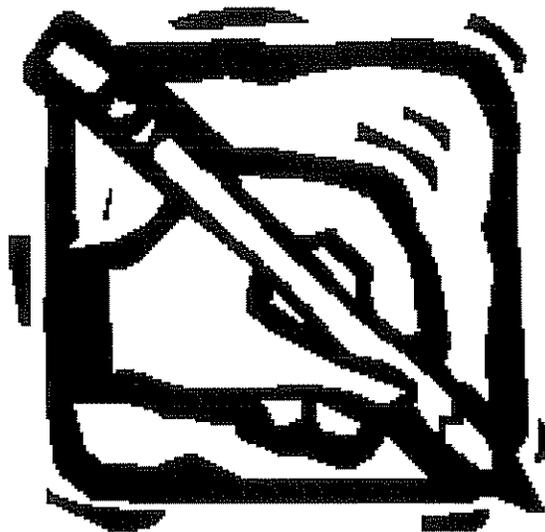




BUILDING A GROUP LEARNING PROCESS:

NOTES ON EXPERIENTIAL  
LEARNING AND  
COMMUNITY SERVICE

---





# LEARNING: WHERE, WHY AND HOW?



Many of us tend to think of learning as something that takes place only in schools. It is a process that traditionally ends in a paper document known as a degree. Learning is therefore “formal” and takes place in the classroom. And it always provides the basis of getting a job later on in life. That is the basis of American education today.

This is an important but still limited idea of learning, because when you think of it, education clearly takes place outside of formal learning institutions. We learn a great deal from our family, our friends, our neighbors, our fellow workers.

**LEARNING CLEARLY TAKES PLACE OUTSIDE OF FORMAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.**

In short, we can learn from the many different experiences we have if we reflect on them. We need to expand our definition of learning to include a wider variety of social experiences: *learning is a process of reflecting and discussing with others our common predicaments and better ways of understanding them.*

In certain ways, we are always learning. Unless we have become passive in the face of new events and happenings in our lives, we reflect and think about our experiences. Sometimes reflection is very practical. We might learn a new way of doing something. But we also learn something more than just practical lessons in our daily lives. For instance, a troubling problem in our life might help us learn about what sort of values we want to live by. We can also learn ways to work together with others to identify and solve our common problems.

But no matter what we learn, we need to make sure that there is a certain amount of progress and system in what we’re learning. We need to make sure that we are building upon our learning experiences and pushing ourselves to discover new things in the world. This takes effort, and it doesn’t come naturally all the time. That’s why school can be appealing — because there are systems to go by, and progress is determined through tests and grades. In formal educational environments there are clear-cut codes for learning.



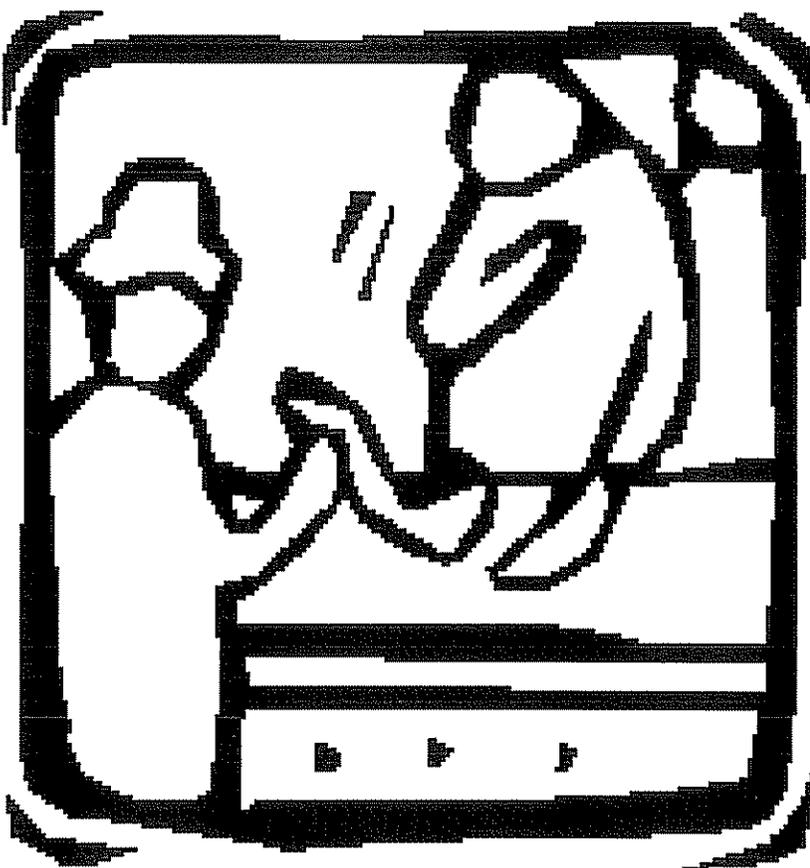


## Learning Through Community Service

Right now your service is not necessarily connected with school (although some of your fellow service members might be attending school at the time of doing service.) You're in a non-school based service program. You are probably coming across new and often challenging situations. In light of these new situations, you may find yourself thinking a lot about what they mean. Sometimes you discuss these things with other group members, but typically at an informal level and in passing. What we

want to offer you here is a chance to put in place a group learning process — one where you share your experiences in service with one another and think about them in a more structured way. It is a chance for you to design your own codes for learning. Instead of grades and exams, you and other members of your group have to decide for yourselves whether or not you are learning, and what kinds of results you want to see. What is success for you in the context of service and citizenship? What kinds of benchmarks can you set for yourselves? Are there the equivalent of 'tests'? How can discussions help you to learn?

The second section of this manual is designed to help you tackle these questions. Now that you have built up trust with the members of your service group, it's time to look upon them as fellow learners — as people who are having experiences from which they can learn and who might teach you about new things.





## Traditions of Informal Community Education

The idea that learning can also take place outside of schools is not new. During the nineteenth century in America, there was something known as a lyceum network. Lecturers traveled across America to speak to their fellow citizens about everything from literature to politics. Citizens gathered in large numbers to listen to these speakers and to talk about these issues themselves. None of these people were looking to obtain a degree or train for a job. They believed that knowledge improved their general standing in life. They thought learning could actually be entertaining and fun — not something that only took place in schools under the guidance of a teacher. Through this lyceum network, learning was seen as a social, communal exercise that brought people together and gave them tools for understanding an ever growing and complex world.

More recently, there was the Highlander Folk School. Based in Tennessee, this so-called “school” (which didn’t award any degrees and didn’t have any formal classrooms) was really a residence/retreat center where people could reflect on their lives and their challenges. Highlander provided them with space and guidance as they learned how to improve the quality of life in their communities. Highlander was based on a model of education from Denmark, where folk schools all over the country taught young people (who at the time faced a national crisis, questioning their role and purpose in a changing society) about their culture, including the music,



literature, crafts and social history of their nation. In the 1930s and 1940s, people who worked in the mines in Tennessee came to Highlander to learn about the mining business so they could negotiate with their bosses using the same language and knowledge that their superiors used.

They came together to plan coalitions and build unions, but learning was always the main focus. The founders of Highlander believed that learning was a communal process and it had to “come from the people.” Here citizens taught one another about various traditions of community organizing — how to get other people to join their cause and help improve communal life. Highlander hosted one of the first multi-racial retreats in United States history, where blacks and whites from all over the South came together to discuss their common concerns. Rosa Parks attended this “school” in the 1950s. She talked about the situation in the black community of the South and voiced her frustration. She learned about various traditions of changing things. Parks didn’t come away from Highlander with a degree but she did get encouragement to

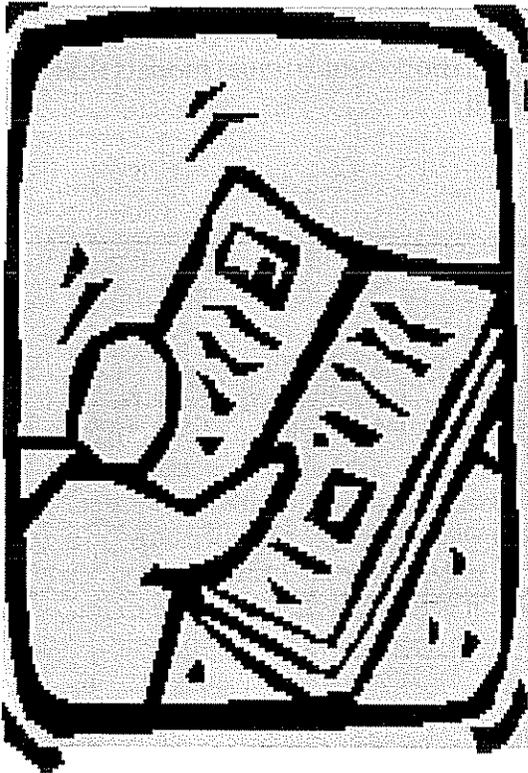




help start the civil rights movement.

Perhaps one of the best statements about education came from Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Folk School ( now called the Highlander Research and Education Center.) He explained,

“I knew that it was necessary to...draw out of people their experiences, and help them value group experiences and learn from them. It was essential that people learned to make decisions on the basis of analyzing and trusting their own experiences and learning from that what was good and what was bad. It also became clear that there had to be a place where people could learn how to make decisions by actually making decisions.”



There are many other examples of people learning about things outside of school that they could apply to improving their communities. Study circles, book clubs and discussion groups are popular, informal learning settings. Almost every town or city offers inexpensive evening courses in everything from rock climbing to vegetarian cooking to Beginner Serbo-Croatian. Citizens are learning together in informal environments, getting to know one another and deepening their community life. Community service is a good example of learning *by* improving one's community as well as learning ways to make it a better place. And it's discussing your knowledge, insights and experiences within a group, with the help of this manual and a facilitator, that will help you to learn more from your service, and in turn, have more to offer to the communities you care about.



# RELATING EXPERIENTIAL AND DEMOCRATIC LEARNING TO COMMUNITY SERVICE

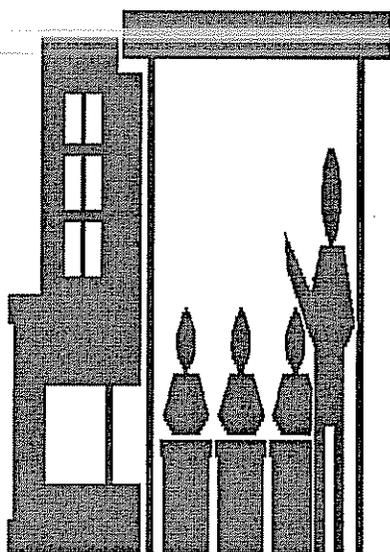


*Experiential education has a long, rich tradition around the world and in the United States. Learning about its history is a good way to get oriented to some of the theoretical ideas about the educational and democratic possibilities for reflection and community service. For those of you who don't want this in-depth explanation of our guiding ideas, please skip ahead to "Learning Exercises."*

## Experiential Learning as an Alternative to Traditional Education Models

---

Learning by experience and within a group with others is definitely something different from classroom education. Current interest in experience-based learning stems in part from critiques of traditional learning models. Philosophers, educators and activists have explored the learning process in order to build educational models that better reflect why people learn and the way they do it.



Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educator and activist who is well known and regarded among experiential educators, once criticized traditional classroom learning as 'the banking concept of education.' Basically, he meant that because students are responsible for mastering very specific skills, it is as if they are depositing and saving knowledge for some further use. Applying what they have learned and judging whether or not it actually makes any sense in the broader context of their lives does not usually occur. Students' understanding of what they study and their ability to use their knowledge to make their lives better isn't considered a priority. In this traditional model, Freire says, students play a passive role.



Classroom education models obviously vary tremendously, and not all of them adhere to Freire’s analysis. Nonetheless, there are big differences between learning in school and learning in life. As we mentioned earlier, there are differences in where we learn, how we learn and what we take away from the learning experience. When you are in school, learning for the sake of learning sometimes competes with the pressures of complying with the educational *system* — doing homework, taking notes, learning material by heart, getting through exams, etc. The process is competitive, so instead of helping one another and encouraging each other to learn, some school techniques stress competition and class rank. Sometimes, these processes and tasks can be too formal and they don’t relate to how we actually learn new things — how we come to new understandings, how we incorporate new skills into the repertoire of what we can do well, how we actually interact with the world around us and render it meaningful. They also do not reflect that we often learn best in groups.

Experiential learning developed as an alternative to traditional education in two important areas. First, it is an *active way of learning* where the learner is involved and engaged in the learning process, by doing, making, building, solving, etc. Because of its active nature, what one learns often has direct and immediate consequences. In essence, the person who is learning is, “directly in touch with the realities being studied.” This is different from some learning situations, where one only, “reads about, talks about, or writes about these realities but never comes in contact with them as part of the learning process.” For example, trying to get an initiative on a ballot teaches you about public policy and legislation in a much more active way than just reading about them in a textbook. Second, it is often a *communal way of learning*. People come together without a strict set of rules, without a teacher/expert who has all the answers. Instead of an independent experience or an isolated teacher/student exchange, learning becomes a communal process in which all participants participate equally to examine and analyze issues and experiences and find answers and solutions for themselves.

“...how we learn new things -- how we come to new understandings, how we incorporate new skills into the repertoire of what we can do well, how we actually interact with the world around us and render it meaningful...”



## John Dewey's Theories of Democracy and Experiential Learning

Some people talk about experiential education as if it is a new concept. That couldn't be further from the truth. Artists, farmers, professionals and many others have traditionally learned through apprenticeships and experimentation. Even our modern understanding of experiential learning has a long history. Many people credit John Dewey, an American philosopher and educator, with the original examinations of the way people learn through experience or as he called it, "learning by doing."

Interested in the connections between schools, communities and democracy and in the practical, social consequences of education, Dewey sought ways to create schools that were centers of community life and that engaged children in the dynamic processes of learning and growing. He had a critique of traditional schooling similar to Freire's. He criticized "old education" for, "its passivity of attitude, its mechanical massing of children, its uniformity of curriculum and method." He said that, "it may be summed up that the center of gravity is outside the child. It is in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere you please except in the immediate instinct and activities of the child."

Dewey was not just interested in better learning for its own sake. For him, the fate of democracy was intimately connected to education. He believed that democracy was much more than electing representatives. He saw it as a way of living and participating in shaping one's community. For Dewey, democracy was, "the idea of community life itself." Dewey believed that experience-based education was the most effective way to teach young people the values, beliefs and traditions of their community. In a rapidly changing society, education and democracy were intimately linked, since learning could provide, "(the) means for bringing people and their ideas and beliefs together, in such ways that lessen friction and instability and introduce deeper sympathy and wider understanding."

In the early twentieth century, Dewey ran an experimental (laboratory) school where students learned through what he called "problem-centered" models of education, where experiments and problems were the core learning tools. Dewey thought of his students as discoverers and treated them that way. For example, when they studied colonial New England, they recreated the reality of the first settlers, learning how to make candles, clothing and household utensils. They studied the geographic environment of New England and then went to look for the plants, flowers and vegetation of that part of the country. Through imagination, experimentation, construction and critical inquiry, they came to understand early American history.



Dewey's educational models were based on his earlier work, which were philosophical explorations into how we think. He then made practical connections between how we think and how we learn:

Thinking begins in what may fairly be called a *forked-road situation*, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives. As long as our activity glides smoothly along from one thing to another...there is no cause for reflection. Difficulty or obstruction in the way of reaching a belief, however, brings us to a pause...

Demand for a solution of a perplexity is the steady and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection...a question to be answered, an ambiguity to be resolved, thus sets up an end and holds the current ideas to a channel....

[In Summary]...*the origin of thinking is some perplexity, confusion or doubt. Thinking is not a case of spontaneous combustion; it does not occur just on "general principles."* (emphasis added) There is something specific which occasions and provokes it.

John Dewey ( How We Think, 1910)

Dewey set the stage for thinking about experiential education because he made it clear that learning takes place when we are confronted by real world situations and problems. If we cannot solve these problems based on what we already know, our situation demands that we learn. Dewey also made the connections between the kinds of educational models we create and the kinds of communities that we build in a democratic society. He was concerned that if we learned only in traditional classroom settings, Americans would not be prepared to take an active part in shaping our community or nation. Through this work, he built the foundation for experiential education as both active and communal democratic learning.

"The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined. On the active hand, experience is *trying* — a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term experiment. On the passive, it is undergoing. When we experience something, we act upon it, we do something to it; then we suffer or undergo the consequence. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return. Such is the peculiar combination."

John Dewey



## The Learning Cycle - How Experience Teaches Us

Recent scholars have taken up these ideas and have more clearly defined them. One educator, David Kolb, built on Dewey's ideas in order to create a theory of how we learn. He developed a cycle, in which experience gets translated into concepts, which in turn we use as guides to choose new and better ways of accomplishing our goals.

Kolb suggests that there are four steps to our learning cycle, and that we move from:

① a concrete experience

*("I saw three people get hit by cars at that intersection with no stoplight or sign.")*

② reflective observation on the experience

*("That intersection isn't safe and nobody is doing anything about it.")*

③ abstract conceptualizations about the experience

*("Intersections can be made safer. Action requires official policy changes.")*

④ active experimentation based on new understanding

*("Let's start a pressure group to get a light and a sign at that intersection.")*



Kolb's ideas are important to understand for a couple of different reasons. One, he illustrates that experiential learning is a bit more complex than "learning by doing." It is not just learning through experience, he claims, but experience plus learning that is significant. He broke the process down into more defined steps. Secondly, Kolb believes that people have different strengths in different parts of the learning cycle. For example, some people are better at reflecting on an experience, while others are better at coming up with theoretical reasons (abstract conceptualizations) for why things happened the way they did.

This makes a strong case that learning occurs more effectively in groups. It shows that active learning is a way to encourage members of a group to rely on one another's strengths for the benefit of the whole group. This not only achieves the group's goals, it helps to develop communities where people grow, learn and make decisions together — in much the same way that Dewey envisioned.

## Different Kinds of Intelligence

We all learn differently. A scholar in the field of education and cognitive psychology, Howard Gardner, came up with a theory of multiple intelligences to explain this. Gardner argues that each individual can process information and express his/her knowledge and ideas in a variety of ways. Each of us is particularly talented in one or in a number of ways. Gardner has identified seven domains of intelligence:

- ① Linguistic intelligence (good at words and symbols)
- ② Musical intelligence (good at melody and rhythm)
- ③ Logical-Mathematical intelligence (good at numbers and reasoning)
- ④ Spatial intelligence (good at locating yourself in space, reading maps, building things)
- ⑤ Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence (good at physical activity, movement)
- ⑥ Intrapersonal intelligence (good with individuals and groups of people)
- ⑦ Interpersonal intelligence (good at self-awareness)



In many traditional learning environments, the stress is placed on only one or two of these. Usually linguistic (verbal) intelligence and logical/mathematical intelligence are stressed. In most schools, students are tested based on reading, writing and math. Things like music, art and physical expression are considered less integral to learning and intellectual development. Gardner's research helped bolster the argument that intelligence is more complex than simply being able to read well and do math problems. His work recognizes the diverse skills and strengths that people have as well as the importance of incorporating music, movement and reflective exercises into teaching and learning processes.

The list of techniques on the next two pages was developed by the Maine Campus Compact and reprinted with permission. It can be used to help reflect on community service (or anything else, for that matter). They show how many different ways we can process and express experiences and how different intelligences might result in new and unique ways of understanding a situation.

Gardner helps us understand that providing flexibility and room for creativity in the way we learn can be a dynamic process for all people involved. He demonstrates how learning takes place through many mechanisms. Singing, thinking, listening, performing can all be learning situations. His views encourage group-based, communal learning through both creative and traditional vehicles.





# REFLECTION TECHNIQUES FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE...



## Linguistic

*Readings* ⊗ Stories ⊗ Myths ⊗ Plays

*Creative writing* ⊗ Puns/jokes ⊗ Limericks ⊗ Poetry

⊗ Letters ⊗ Stories ⊗ Crossword Puzzles ⊗ Word Jumbles

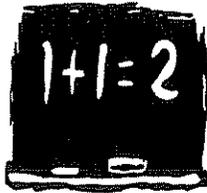
*Expository writing* ⊗ Logs ⊗ Journals ⊗ Papers ⊗ Diaries

⊗ Commentary ⊗ Email/Chat groups ⊗ Brochures

⊗ Newsletters

*Oral communication* ⊗ Speeches ⊗ Debate ⊗ Discussion

⊗ Impromptu speaking ⊗ Storytelling



## Logical / Mathematical

Analogies ⊗ Compare and Contrast ⊗ Time sequence/

calendars ⊗ Classification charts ⊗ Outlines ⊗ Encode/

decode ⊗ Rank order ⊗ Cause and effect relationships ⊗

Problem solving ⊗ Venn diagrams ⊗ Interpreting data ⊗

Calculation ⊗ Pattern games ⊗ Graphs



## Musical

*Creating music* ⊗ Song lyrics ⊗ Rap presentation with

appropriate accompaniment ⊗ Short musical ⊗ Musical

game ⊗ Drum circle ⊗ Set journal readings to music

*Collecting music* ⊗ Songs about... ⊗ Music of the people

encountered ⊗ Music collage to depict emotions ⊗ Record

the sounds of different places



## Bodily-Kinesthetic

*Performance* ⊗ Role Play ⊗ Perform dramas/pantomimes

⊗ Choreograph a dance to express an idea

*Other* ⊗ Create a playground game ⊗ Learn body language

of people ⊗ Build a model ⊗ Devise a scavenger hunt

⊗ Design and build a product



# ...EMPHASIZING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

## Spatial

*Working with Images* ⊗ Guided visualization ⊗ Imagine life in different places ⊗ Imagine life in the past or the future ⊗ Study the visual art of a people or a community ⊗ Study art related to issues being encountered

*Creating* ⊗ Painting/Drawing/Sculpting/ ⊗ Fabric Slide show/video/photo album ⊗ Scrap book of images ⊗ Costumes ⊗ Community murals ⊗ Posters/Bulletin boards ⊗ Collages ⊗ Quilt

*Mapping* ⊗ Concept mapping ⊗ Map different places ⊗ Map relationships ⊗ Power mapping ⊗ Flow charts



## Intrapersonal

*Practices* ⊗ Mindfulness ⊗ Centering ⊗ Unstructured quiet time

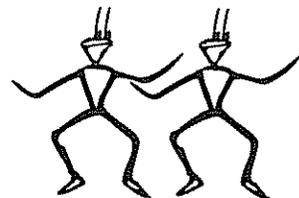
*Reflective Questions to Pose* ⊗ Describe qualities you possess ⊗ Create personal analogy for... ⊗ Describe how you feel about... ⊗ Explain the purpose in learning about ... ⊗ Explain intuitive hunches about... ⊗ Self-assess work in... ⊗ Mistakes to avoid next time ⊗ How would life be different if...

*Writing* ⊗ Journaling ⊗ A biography of someone at service site ⊗ Develop a homepage

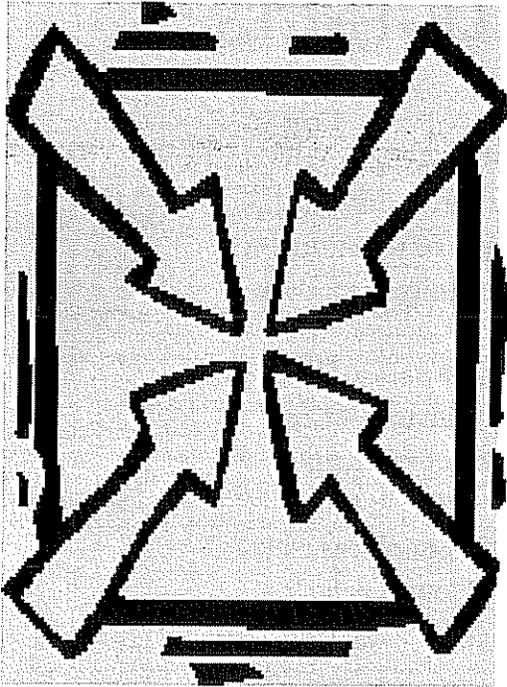
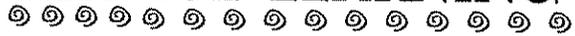


## Interpersonal

Role Plays ⊗ Fishbowl game ⊗ Discussions ⊗ Teaching something you have learned ⊗ Joint writing ⊗ Group projects ⊗ Brainstorms ⊗ Write from other people's perspectives



## SERVICE LEARNING



The information that we have presented here might seem purely theoretical. But it is important to see that your experiences in community service and the discussions you'll have about them can be genuinely educational. In fact, this idea of linking community problem solving with critical thinking has become popular as both a teaching technique and as an important element of higher education reform.

*Service-learning*, an emerging movement at schools, colleges and

universities, is changing the nature of higher education and reviving concepts of public life and civic commitments. It is also introducing experiential education as a significant and meaningful approach to learning. Whether they are helping to create farmer's markets in inner city neighborhoods as part of sustainable agriculture courses, or giving seminars in child development and nutrition to young mothers, students are becoming actively involved in their education through service-learning.

Educators and students at colleges and universities are using service-learning as a tool to criticize the idea that education is a stagnant transfer of knowledge rather than relevant and active learning. Service-learning is exciting because it makes connections between community life and education, and it breaks down the notion that we only need to read books and take tests in order to gain the knowledge needed to solve important public problems. When active learning takes place outside the confines of the university, students get the chance to see that education is an ongoing communal process that can have real effects. For example, students working with participants in an adult education program to develop a brochure about the dangers of lead poisoning in older housing units learn not only about specific health issues, but about the public impacts of learning and the responsibility of acting as citizens.



Those who practice service-learning have discovered that places where young people serve, when linked with spaces to draw lessons from their activities, invite them to become engaged in the unpredictable dynamics of experiencing and learning. Service-learning helps us to see the ways in which we learn through both intimate involvement and distanced reflection, and examines how differences between these processes enable us to better understand the complicated world in which we live.

The sort of public work that service groups get involved in can succeed in not only building stronger communities — it can become an important way to engage young people in serious thought and discussion about their society. Reflective service, whether it takes place as part of a college course or as part of a community service program, can be a vehicle for active learning. One of the goals of this module is to allow your community service, even though it is not school-based, to be reflective — truly a service-learning program.

## Incorporating Service-Learning Concepts into Your Community Service Program

Your service experiences can be rich and exciting opportunities for learning from other participants. In fact, this guide is designed to make it easier for you to develop your program as not simply a service program, but a service-learning program. By engaging in the activities and exercises that follow, group members will have the chance to examine and analyze their experiences and to challenge themselves to grow and learn new things through service. You'll have the opportunity to learn practical things from one another. You also have the chance to grapple with some very big questions, like:

- ⊙ Why is there so much need in our society for community service?
- ⊙ What is the real link between service and citizenship and how do we fit into that?
- ⊙ What kinds of things can we do to contribute to improving communities for the long term?
- ⊙ What vision do we have for our society?
- ⊙ What motivates us to be involved in our communities?
- ⊙ How does this current social/economic situation connect to times that have come before? How does it relate to the future?



These are serious and important questions, just as community service is serious and important work. In order to learn from it, your group has to be ready to make an effort to participate in an educational process.

Some ways that groups do that are by:

- ⊙ taking risks with ideas/ generating new ideas
- ⊙ arguing about conflicting ideas
- ⊙ establishing a common vision that takes into account the different experiences and perspectives of members of the group
- ⊙ establishing common goals
- ⊙ designing ways to evaluate whether or not the group has met common goals
- ⊙ moving beyond one's own experience and perspective
- ⊙ making the connections between perspectives and experiences
- ⊙ putting forth what you want to learn — taking responsibility for learning
- ⊙ suggesting improvements for specific situations
- ⊙ giving people a chance to share their experiences and expertise in ways that benefit the whole group (sharing what works)
- ⊙ giving people a chance to share anxieties/problems they are having
- ⊙ setting criteria for evaluating work of group members
- ⊙ finding commonalities in the work of group members

In the pages that follow, you'll find many different tools to help you have discussions that are lively, fun, interesting and educational. We have put them together for you in a logical format that builds as the group gets stronger and more ready to take on these exercises. Still, there is a lot of flexibility — you can tailor your group's discussions to match their own interests and experiences.



THINKING AND ACTING:

# LEARNING EXERCISES





# THINKING AND ACTING: LEARNING EXERCISES



In Part One: From Me to We, we provided games and exercises that encouraged group solidarity. The activities put emphasis on skills that improve participants' abilities to work well with others. The following games have a stronger focus on learning through discussion and reflection. They encourage members to view their time for discussion and reflection as an opportunity to consider seriously important community and public issues. They provide structured opportunities for participants to analyze the concerns and questions that service inevitably raises.

The exercises enable members to see themselves and their peers as learners and as teachers, and the experiences of community service as vehicles for a valuable educational process. They also stress that young people have much to gain by learning about their own history and the history of their communities. By engaging in this process together and learning about different American realities — political and cultural traditions and perspectives on democracy and public life — group members can examine our collective history as a nation. This process is important because it sets in motion civic skills and attributes that draw vivid connections between community service and public life: developing curiosity and imagination about experiences and perspectives in public life, balancing different ideas and opinions, considering the differences between long term and short term problems and solutions and negotiating and working with others to solve problems and meet goals.

The following games provide the opportunity to start the experiential learning process. They encourage participants to think of service and group reflection as a serious and engaging learning process. They bring people more deeply into the process by showing them ways participants learn and grow from one another. Then, they invite group members to look beyond the group and to learn from their communities and their neighbors and fellow citizens — by learning from elders and from events, photos and stories that come from outside of the community service group.

These games and exercises set the ground work for critical reflection and analysis in a way that stresses the democratic and civic promise for community service. They encourage members to place their community involvement within a broader context of public life and to look to themselves and the people they encounter to learn how to make the most significant impact on their communities and in society.



# GROUP INTERVIEWING

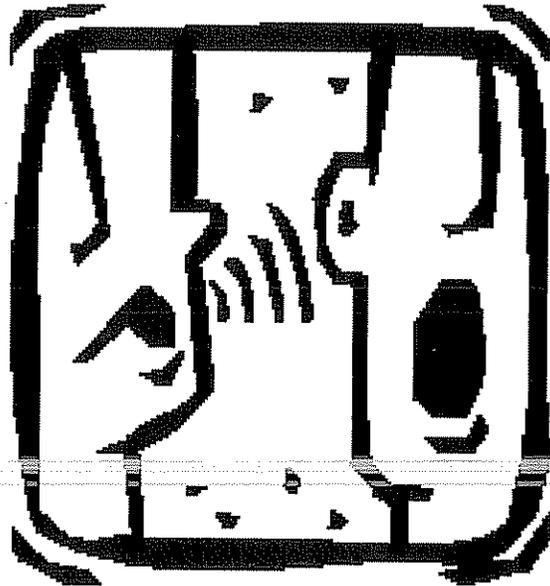
What size group?  
Aim of the game?

Special Instructions?  
Time?

For groups up to 30  
Strengthens listening skills,  
stresses public talk  
No special instructions  
1 hour

Divide participants into pairs. Make sure the pairs are comprised of people who do not know one another very well.

Interview one other with the aim to find as many differences as you can *on the way that they view things*. What music do you like? What was/is your favorite subject in school? Why are you doing service and what does it mean to you? What makes you angry? What are you good at? What do you think about politics? Where were you born? Did you vote in the last election? For whom? Why? Allow ten minutes per person. It is the job of the interviewer to ask questions continuously with the aim to find differences.



When you have both interviewed the other, introduce one another to the whole group. Comment on the differences you discovered between each other. Allow two minutes per person. Follow up with a group conversation — How did it feel to be interviewed? Were there more differences than you thought there would be in your pair? In your group? What did you learn? How can you use what you learned to better do your work?

*This exercise enables individuals to get to know one another. At the same time, it illustrates the differences in opinions and ideas in the group in a way that allows participants to see that these can be strengths for the group.*



# STAND AND DECLARE

What size group?  
Aim of the game?

Special Instructions?  
Time?

For any size group  
Strengthens discussion skills /  
learning how to develop arguments  
No special instructions  
At least one hour

Write a statement on the board, such as, "Education policy is the biggest domestic issue facing our society."

Then write:

- ⊙ Agree wholeheartedly
- ⊙ Agree strongly
- ⊙ Somewhat agree
- ⊙ Somewhat disagree
- ⊙ Strongly disagree

Ask participants to organize into groups depending on the way they would answer the question. In groups, members spend fifteen minutes developing three arguments that support their response to the statement (explaining why they chose their position.) Encourage each member within the smaller group to participate actively. Encourage participants to develop sound arguments based on facts and concepts, not opinions and emotions. (For example, "A good education policy will be more effective in the long run than other

areas of concern because every child in the nation is affected by education decisions, while not everyone is affected by job training, public housing, etc," is a better justification than, "Education is the most important thing because everyone has to go to school."

Each group prepares a presentation and explains to the others why they chose the position that they did, using their arguments as justification. After each group presents, the group then has the opportunity to break down again and if they have changed their mind, to go to a new group. Then, each smaller new group discusses what others said, which arguments were persuasive, which were not. Members discuss the differences in one another's perspectives and the reasons why the justifications made as arguments for their claim make the most sense to them.

*This exercise allows a group to examine an issue about which there are conflicting opinions in a way that focuses on exploration of the topic and on learning about other perspectives. It allows individuals to subject beliefs to debate. It also frees people to change their mind, fostering a collaborative learning environment.*



# WHO KNOWS...?

What size group?	Any size group
Aim of the game?	To illustrate the diversity of experience and skill in the group
Special Instructions?	Requires advance planning
Time?	Thirty minutes

Develop a worksheet that lists skills, attributes and experiences that individuals in your group might have:

## Someone who...

- ⊙ has spoken before an audience or crowd
- ⊙ can build a bookcase
- ⊙ has been overseas
- ⊙ can tell why you would choose oil paints or acrylics for a project
- ⊙ speaks another language fluently
- ⊙ can identify three bugs that destroy garden vegetation
- ⊙ has coached a sport
- ⊙ can tell you how to respectfully quiet a room full of noisy eight year olds
- ⊙ has been involved in a demonstration or protest
- ⊙ can tell you why the Taj Mahal was built and by whom

Pass this worksheet out to your group. Explain to them that they have to ask other group members specific questions to find individuals who match the categories. Ask them to get the signature of the person who matches the category or knows the answer. If an answer is required, have them write the answer down as well.

After the group has settled down, lead them in a discussion. Get group members to answer the questions, sharing information (Which sports have people coached, which languages do people speak?) How many of the things they discovered would be apparent to them by looking at or meeting them the first time? What does it tell about diversity? What was surprising or predictable about this process?

*(The more specific you make this to your group, the clearer connection to learning. For example, if your group is doing environmental service, ask questions that get to knowledge and experience that is useful for doing environmental work — organizing clean-ups, identifying plants and trees, etc.)*

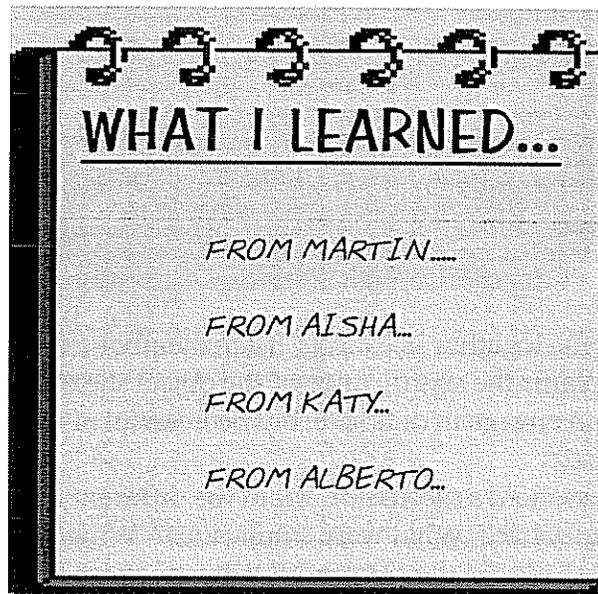


# LEARNING SCROLLS

What size group?	Any size, as long as group members know one another
Aim of the game?	Introduce the idea of learning as a flexible, informal process
Special Instructions?	Requires pens and large sheets of paper
Time?	Depending on the size of the group, 1-1 1/2 hours

Place pieces of paper with each group member's name around the room. Everyone is given a chance to wander around the room and write on the pieces of paper something that the group member taught them, reminded them of, ..showed them, illuminated, etc. Focus should be on those things which help to make the group stronger, or which help members at the volunteer site and the emphasis might be very specific - (i.e. stay away from, Terence is really cool and I like him. Move toward, "When Terence told how he coached a soccer team at the junior high where he is volunteering, it gave me the idea to play more active games with the children at the women's shelter where I am volunteering.")

When this is over and everyone has gotten their scroll back and has had time to read comments, lead a discussion based on the process of thinking about what other members had taught participants and about the realization that participants had been responsible for teaching others. What was surprising about the comments? Did people realize that they were teaching? Did people realize they were learning from one another? Were there more specific skills shared, or were the things that were learned more general?



Was it hard to think of positive things to say? What were the circumstances in which participants seemed to teach and learn the most?

*This game is good when group dynamics seem stagnant. It reminds group members that they have a lot to learn from one another, and that they have to constantly be on the lookout for resources and skills within themselves and others. It also serves to remind participants that we are always learning.*



# CULTURAL -SHARING

What size group?	For up to 20 people
Aim of the game?	To learn about the culture and history of participants
Special Instructions?	Need to give directions in advance
Time?	Depends on the number of participants

Instruct group members to bring in an object, photo, short story, poem or other item that communicates something that is important about their community. Allow them to define community as broadly or as narrowly as they see fit. Ask them to consider the following questions when they are choosing an item:

- ① What does this express about my community?
- ② Why is this important to me?
- ③ Why is it important for other people to learn about it?
- ④ In what ways do I participate in this aspect of my community?
- ⑤ Does this express something that many communities share, or is it unique?

Come together in a circle. Each member explains how they defined community and explains the significance of the object she or he brought in. People can ask questions and engage in dialogue, but be mindful of time. Be sure everyone has a chance to participate.

Next, hold a discussion about the different things that were presented. What did they symbolize? What were similarities? What were differences? What concepts, values, ideals did they express? Why are these significant to us? What do they say about the similarities and differences throughout communities? Is the significance of these things ever disrespected by others? How can we show respect for these things when we encounter them?

*This exercise enables group participants to express values that are important to them as individuals and as members of communities. It often illuminates skills, strengths and commitments of group members. It also enables groups to determine the values they share and to determine ways to respect the different opinions, histories and cultures that exist in the group.*



# VISUALIZATION EXERCISE

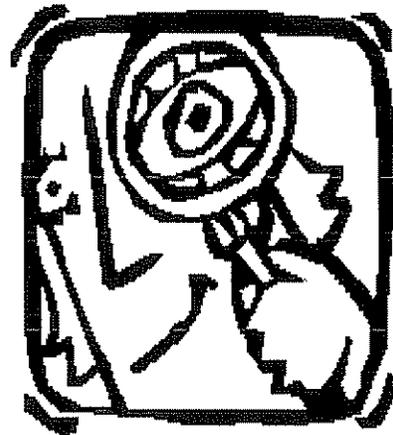
What size group?	For groups up to 15
Aim of the game?	Strengthens observation/perception skills
Special Instructions?	No special instructions
Time?	Forty-five minutes

Provide a photograph for analysis ( possibilities include Robert Frank, Roy DeCarava, Jake Dykinga — provocative images of disasters, riots, immigration/ border photos, public violence, domestic violence, urban redevelopment, police brutality, etc. are recommended.)

One person leaves the room. One member of the group volunteers to look at the photo and describe what he/she sees. Group members ask the observer what he/she is seeing in the photo and what assumptions can be made from the photo.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

- ⊙ Where was the picture taken?
- ⊙ When was the picture taken?
- ⊙ What is going on in the picture?
- ⊙ Do you think those in the photograph knew they were being watched?
- ⊙ What are initial reactions to the image?
- ⊙ Does it evoke thoughts/emotions?



A notetaker keeps track of the comments and observations of Observer One.

That person (Observer One) leaves the room. Observer Two comes back into the room and answers the same sets of questions about the same photograph as Observer One. Observer One reenters the room and the notetaker explains what each observer said. The group discusses similarities and differences in interpretation. If possible, an essay that describes what the photographer saw when taking the photograph is read or summarized.

*This exercise helps participants to understand how scenarios can be interpreted in many different ways. It also shows that sometimes our assumptions shape what we see.*



# INTERVIEWING AN ELDER

What size group?

Aim of the game?

Special Instructions?

Time?

For any size group

Learning history, making connections

Requires previous instructions

A few hours

Ask participants to interview an elder member of their family (over 60) or their community.

Before group members go to conduct the interview, have them test themselves to see how well they can answer these questions before they conduct the interview. What do they think will be different from the way that they would answer the questions for themselves? What do they think has changed in society from the time that the elder was a young person? Encourage participants to think of specific questions.

Sample questions might be:

- ⊙ Where were they born?
- ⊙ Where did they live? In a house, apartment, etc?
- ⊙ How did neighbors treat each other?
- ⊙ Did they attend school? Until when? What was it like? Why did they leave?
- ⊙ Did they attend church? Where and why or why not?
- ⊙ What was it like for them as teenagers? - Did they have jobs? What kind? Why or why not? What did they do for fun?
- ⊙ What was it like for them as young adults?
- ⊙ Did they live in parents' home or did they leave home? Why or why not?
- ⊙ Did they vote as young adults? Why or why not? What were obstacles for voting?
- ⊙ What important things were happening in their community and the nation, when they were your age?
- ⊙ What was their definition of Public? What was public?
- ⊙ How did people come together to think and talk about these public issues?
- ⊙ What do they see as problems/issues in their community and the nation today?



## INTERVIEWING AN ELDER contd.

When members come back to the group after their interview, have each person give a ten minute summary of their interview. People can ask questions of clarification. Encourage them to explain not only the things that they learned but about how these things differ from what they thought they were going to learn. Encourage participants to take notes, to be used during later discussion.

Then, hold a discussion about the interviewing process. How were the experiences different? How were they similar? How were the interviewees affected by larger forces — migration, immigration, changes in the work world, suburbanization? What were the major influences in the interviewees' lives? How are they different from the things that influence participants?

You may want to do a follow-up interview to give participants a chance to ask different questions or follow-up on important topics of conversation.



*This exercise encourages young people to develop a sense of their own history as well as the history of their community through the stories of someone who lived through different experiences.*



# WANT-ADS

What size group?  
Aim of the game?  
Special Instructions?  
Time?

For any size group  
To consider expectations of service  
Two part exercise - before/after  
1-2 hours, depending on discussion

## First Time: Before Service

Have the participants write two want ads. Limit each want ad to 50 words. The first should describe the type of service experience they hope and expect to have. The second should describe what they imagine their site institution/organization would hope and expect from a volunteer.

Break into small groups to discuss the ads and their differences.

Emphasize reflection and discussion about expectations, assumptions and strengths vs. needs.

Is it easy to summarize expectations/anticipation? How do the ads differ? Why do the ads differ? Is there a difference between the way a volunteer views him/her self and the way an agency might view the same volunteer? Are their certain assumptions about volunteers that might affect the way an agency might write a want ad? Were there any assumptions on the part of the volunteer that might affect the way he/she wrote the want ad?

Report thought and ideas back to the larger group.

## Second Time: After Service

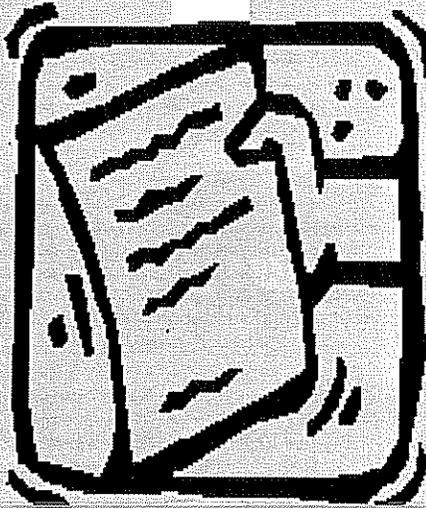
Have the participants write two want ads. The first one should, once again, describe the service experience they are having. The second one should describe what the service site sees as their roles and responsibilities at the site, based on the experiences they have had so far.

Break into small groups to discuss the ads. Was it easier to think about expectations

now that you had some concrete experience? How have perspectives changed since the first time you did this exercise?

Why do members think the ads are different between volunteer and site? Are the participants thinking about the same things as the site organizers/directors? Are their priorities the same? If not, how do they differ? Why do they differ? What is promising in the similarities / parallels between the volunteer's and the agency's perspectives? What is challenging about the differences?

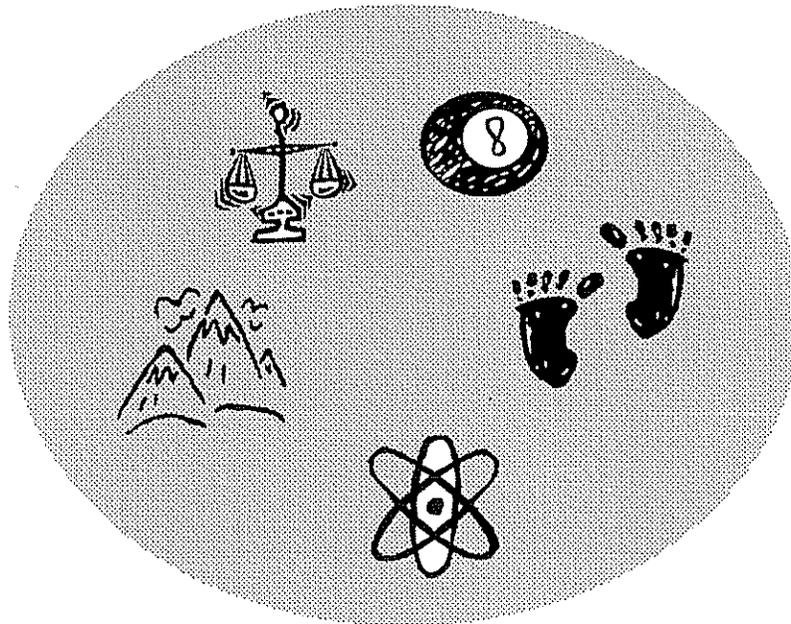
Report thoughts and ideas back to the larger group.



# GROUP COLLAGE

What size group?  
Aim of the game?  
Special Instructions?  
Time?

For any size group  
To involve group in creative work  
Requires posterboard, markers, scissors, rubber  
cement, magazines, newspapers, etc.  
1 -2 hours



Break a larger group into working groups of four or six. Ask each group to create a collage that expresses the way they are thinking and feeling about the the impact and significance of your service (Some issues might include: What do we need to do to improve our program, what can our group do to address the root causes of the problems we face, what does citizenship mean to us, how do we define “public”?)

After groups are finished, have each group talk about the finished collage and explain its significance. Then, lead a discussion on the similarities in the collages. What are themes that resound throughout all? What is unique about each group’s collage? What was it like to work creatively together?



