

CRITICAL INCIDENTS



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INTRODUCTION: WHY USE CRITICAL INCIDENTS?

Places where people are involved in community service are dynamic and changing. Decisions are made, conflicts occur and problems and sometimes their solutions arise on a daily basis. For people engaged in service, it can be a challenge to understand the complicated scenarios that are taking place all the time at sites. It is also hard to figure out *why* things are happening. Are issues personal, organizational, political, conceptual or all the above? Who is causing problems? Who is responsible for addressing problems and issues that come up? How can you tell if a situation is a 'one-in-a-million' occurrence or if it is how an organization always approaches its tasks? The fact is that the dynamics at a site deeply affect the ability of volunteers to be effective and to feel like they are being useful and getting something accomplished.



Problems and issues can creep up, and it is hard to take notice and figure out and then confront their underlying causes. That's why we've put together a series of critical incidents that may be similar to situations at the organization where you are placed. Many different things happen in these critical incidents. Sometimes, problems arise between volunteers; sometimes service participants have conflicts with staff members. In some scenarios, situations arise that could have been avoided. In others, volunteers just have to make the best of bad situations. In all of them, participants in service programs are confronted with problems and have to make serious decisions that involve other people and important ideas and beliefs.

These incidents illustrate that solutions to problems, either small or large, are not reached in vacuums. Many factors contribute to the problems faced in our society and to the things we might encounter at service sites. Thus, the solutions to such problems must also be multifacteted and reached through collaboration.

Democracy is in some ways engaging citizens in this collaborative problem-solving. This can happen from the local level to the national level, because thoughtful and constructive problem solving is a key feature of citizenship and should be learned in the context of community service groups where problems are constantly faced.



The critical incidents that follow demonstrate that volunteers, service sites and the people we encounter through service do not adhere to any hard and fast definitions. There is no such thing as “the volunteer” or “the community.” However, the following scenarios reflect some common problems that affect collaborative problem-solving and community service involvement. Problems generally center around roles, voice, power and the tension between addressing short term and long term goals. For instance, community service participants might have high expectations for their involvement — they may want to “improve education” or “end homelessness,” which are very long term goals. Thinking they know what needs to be done, volunteers may in turn conduct their service in ways that are incompatible with the service site’s immediate concerns and needs. If not addressed, such situations can exacerbate problems and lead to poor communication and no collaboration. On the other hand, if service participants cannot talk clearly about their own visions and motivations for involvement in service, it can be easy for a community institution to use volunteers as unpaid labor, and frame their service as work rather than community collaboration.

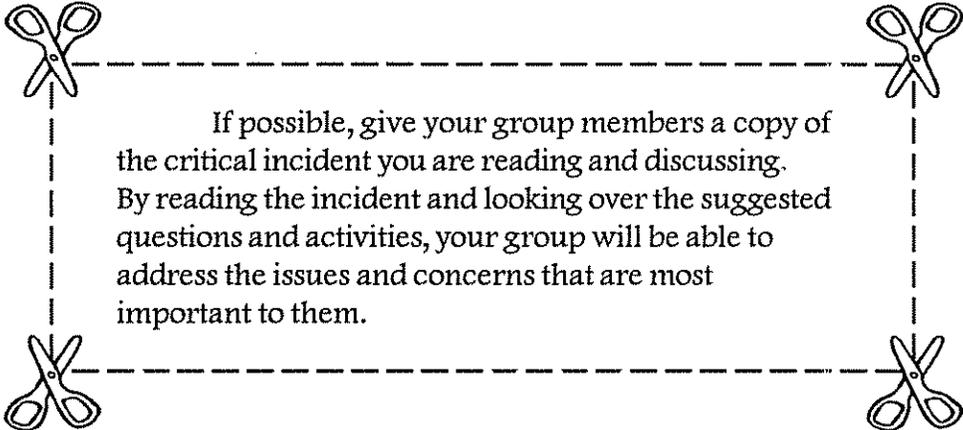
In addition to this, talking about service should include the following themes:

- ⊗ relationships with staff / other volunteers at site
- ⊗ relationships with the people your organization serves
- ⊗ how people outside the organization view it
- ⊗ the problems caused by lack of resources
- ⊗ relationships with other community organizations/ institutions
- ⊗ building trust and accountability
- ⊗ how volunteers can be utilized to their full potential
- ⊗ miscommunication/ communication strategies
- ⊗ mapping your organization to understand the power dynamics at play
- ⊗ how creativity and innovation are treated at site
- ⊗ how short term crises point to long term challenges
- ⊗ how to keep in mind the organization’s real mission amidst lots of stress



Service experiences can be filled with discomfort and with ambiguity. These moments usually go away quickly, once participants become familiar with a situation and a new environment. But those moments hold much potential for creativity and thoughtful collaboration. We suggest that you use the following critical incidents to examine such moments and situations. They help to prepare you for service and enable you to talk about some concerns that members of your group might have with their own service. The incidents that follow suggest a range of experiences that affect both individuals and whole groups. The issues grow increasingly complex as this section progresses. In some cases, we ask you to complete the story. In others, we tell you how one person or team handled a tough problem. At the end of each critical incident, there are discussion questions and activities. Finally, we provide tools for you to write and act out your own critical incidents.

◉ ◉ ◉ FACILITATION NOTE ◉ ◉ ◉



If possible, give your group members a copy of the critical incident you are reading and discussing. By reading the incident and looking over the suggested questions and activities, your group will be able to address the issues and concerns that are most important to them.





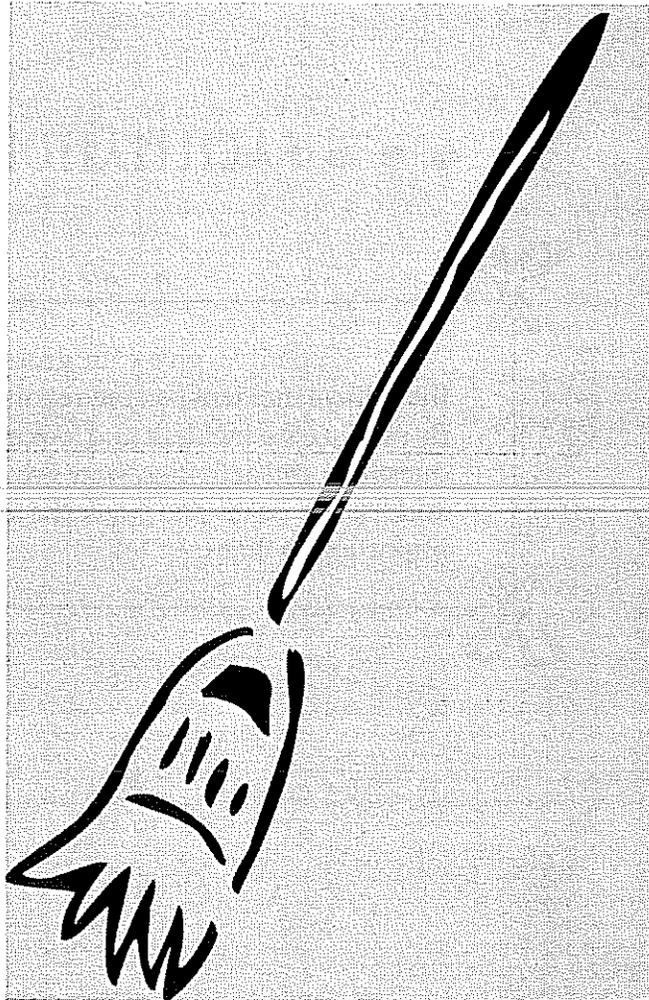
DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS

Andrea had been excited about the idea of volunteering for Urban Ecologies, Inc. It was a small, locally-based organization with a focus on environmental issues that affect people living in urban areas. She had gone to a public forum that they had sponsored on drinking water, and she thought that the staff had good ideas and that their work was creative and useful. They seemed enthusiastic when she called to ask if she could volunteer there for the summer.

So Andrea got a job busing tables at night and looked forward to working at the nonprofit organization during the day. She wanted to learn about local policy issues and get involved in public forums like the one she went to.

On her first day, a staff person showed her around the small, run down office. It took about five minutes. Then, he took her upstairs to a large closet, which was dusty, dark and piled high with boxes of stuff. He said, "What we really need you to do is clean this out — make piles, figure out what's what: supplies, files, equipment, garbage, whatever. Thanks." He left, checking in on her only twice the whole day.

Andrea left at the end of the day, not sure she wanted to go back. The first day had been tiring, boring and very isolating.





Different Expectations

Questions

1. What do you see as problems here?
2. How might the problem have been avoided? What could Andrea have done differently? What could Urban Ecologies have done differently?
3. What did Andrea hope to get out of the experience of being a volunteer?
4. What did the agency hope to get out of having a volunteer?

Activities

1. Role play a conversation between Andrea and a staff person at the agency the next day.
2. Role play a conversation between Andrea and an organization representative while Andrea was still deciding where to volunteer.

To Think About....

1. Who takes care of the crucial but boring tasks at your site? At your community service organization?
2. Is it justifiable for volunteers to assert their interests and preferences about the kinds of volunteer work they will be doing? Or should they gladly do what needs to be done?
3. Do you think that that doing necessary but uninteresting and unchallenging service work relates at all to democracy or citizenship? Why or why not? If yes, how come? If no, what kinds of community service work would contribute to democracy?





FIRST DAY IN A RESIDENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV AND AIDS

Rosie knew that her service site was going to be a hard place for her to be. Her best friend's dad had recently died from AIDS complications. Rosie knew how sick he had been and how tiring it was for his family to take care of his basic needs. But she also had the sense that feeling safe and cared for was really important to him, and that he seemed to appreciate the time she had spent with him, playing chess and reading aloud. It was one of the reasons she decided to get involved in the nonprofit residence for people with HIV/AIDS when she found out about it from her service-program coordinator.

Rosie went over to the residence around dinner time. She walked up the stairs and in the front entry way, past the wheelchair access ramp and the line of metal walkers by the door. When she rang the bell, a nurse's aide let her in, "You must be Rosie?" she asked. Rosie nodded, taking in the scene in the dining room, where six or seven residents were eating. No one acknowledged her presence. Anna, the nurse's aide said, "Our social worker wanted to be here to meet with you, but she had an emergency with a resident. That happens a lot around here. If you want to help out, you can help clear the table and supervise



kitchen clean up. The residents are encouraged to do chores when they feel up to it."

Rosie looked at the table. All of a sudden, she felt really nervous about touching things. She knew she couldn't contract HIV from any sort of casual contact with people who had the virus, but her logic was not as strong as her fear. She did not want to touch the dishes, but she also did not want to leave. She went into the kitchen and started wrapping up food and putting things away. A resident came up to her and said, "So, what reason you got for hanging 'round the leper colony, huh, Miss Goody-Goody?" Rosie didn't answer.

Another resident, Victor, came over and introduced himself. "Don't listen to Mike — he's got a lot of negativity these days," Victor said. Rosie, Victor and two female residents cleaned the kitchen, swept the floor and put out an evening snack. They went into the TV room and Rosie suggested that they all play cards. But everybody wanted to watch TV. She stayed for an hour and watched game shows, and then decided to leave. It hadn't been an easy first day.





First Day in An AIDS Residence

Questions:

1. What were some of the difficulties in the situation?
2. Do you think this is a good placement for Rosie? What is hard about it?
3. How could Rosie have been better prepared for her service?
4. What kinds of resources might be available to make Rosie's service more useful and beneficial for her and the residents?
5. What are some good ideas for Rosie's involvement at the residence? Think of activities, projects, etc.

Activities

1. Map the emotions of the different characters in the story.
2. Write up a possible action plan for volunteer efforts at the site.
3. Role play a conversation between the two residents. Imagine that it took place after Rosie left. What would Victor say to Mike? What might Mike's answers be?

To Think About...

1. Have you ever been treated rudely or felt unwelcome at your community service site? Why do you think people react to a new person's presence?
2. Where in our society do people from very different backgrounds come to spend time together? What do these places have in common? Why are these places important?
3. How do you prepare yourself for a challenging and unpredictable experience?



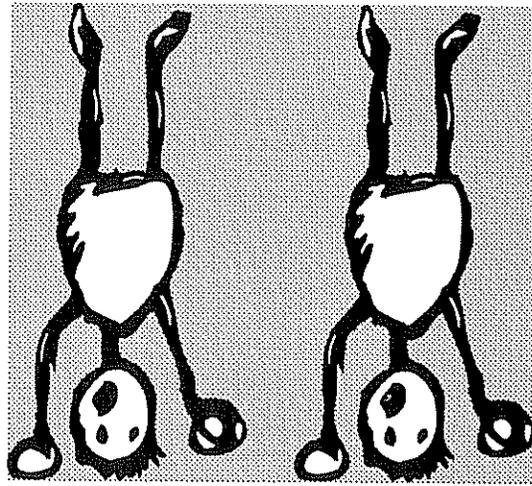


KEEPING THINGS UNDER CONTROL

Keisha and Nicole were volunteering at an after-school program for elementary school girls. They were both artists and had agreed to supervise the art room at the community center where the after-school program ran. From the start, they had a great time. Usually five or six girls would come. They all loved to draw and paint and they looked up to both Nicole and Keisha. They even cleaned up everything when they were finished.

Nicole and Keisha thought they were the perfect kids. They covered the walls with the girls' art work and started to plan serious projects — *papier mache*, beading and jewelry making and other complicated projects. They really felt like teachers and they took their involvement in the program seriously.

No one had told Keisha and Nicole that their after-school program was going to merge with another after-school program in the neighborhood that had lost its funding. One day, they walked into their classroom and found thirty boys and girls of all different ages. They were sitting at the desks and on the floor, climbing on the tables and digging through the cabinet with art supplies in it. Kids had crayons in their mouths and were throwing pieces of paper up in the air. It was chaos.



The new kids had a counselor with them, and she was trying to get the children to settle down. When Keisha and Nicole asked her why everything seemed so out of control, she said, "Well, I was told *not* to raise my voice at them and there is no other way to calm these kids down." She was trying hard to get the kids to be quiet, but they had already gotten too wound up to listen to anyone.

The girls who were used to coming every week were all on the verge of tears. This was not what they wanted or expected. One said, "Miss Keisha, what happened to art class?"





Keeping Things Under Control

Questions

1. How can Keisha, Nicole and the counselor calm the kids down?
2. Once the kids are calm, what should their next step be?
3. What should they do to make things better for the girls who regularly attend the class?
4. How could this situation have been avoided?

Activities

1. Act out the scene. Have parts for Keisha, Nicole, the counselor, the regular girls and the newcomers.
2. Act out a conversation between Keisha and Nicole after the session. Dialogue over what went wrong, possible reasons why, and how to avoid problems in the future.

To Think About...

1. How important are planning and communication in your own service work? How do you solve conflicts that arise? Is flexibility an important attribute for you at your site? Why is that so?
2. In other situations and in society at large, how do we balance out different peoples' interests and needs at any given time? How do we address the chaos and conflicts that arise?

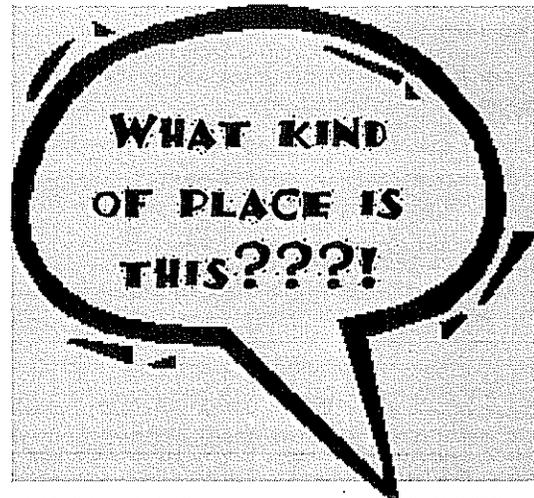




DISCOMFORT AT THE PLACEMENT SITE

Melissa was a full time summer volunteer at a girls'/women's organization, Stop the Violence. She had learned about the group when some members of the staff came to her school to do a workshop about violence against women and the different ways to think about and act on protecting yourself from violence. She was proud to be a part of the organization that had played a big part in helping her understand issues that were important to her. She wanted to work directly with other people who were strongly committed to women's issues and women's and girls' empowerment. She also wanted experience working in a nonprofit setting.

Melissa liked what she was doing, the staff was friendly and laid-back, and she got along well with other volunteers. She often felt, however, that there was not enough direction given to her. The staff was busy working on their own projects and did not really take the time to explain to volunteers how their efforts fit into the broader mission of the organization. However, she was glad to be involved with the organization and she tried to do the best job that she could.



In the lunch room one day, Brian, one of the men who worked in the office was talking in great detail about a pornographic movie he had seen at a party the previous weekend. As he described the sexually violent movie, he did not seem to recognize the fact that the topic was controversial or possibly offensive to women. Melissa could not believe that a person who earned his living through working to end violence against women was talking so casually about S & M. She got really upset when she asked him to stop talking and he said, "I'm almost done." It especially bothered her that no one else from the staff said anything. They did not seem to mind the discussion or to see a problem with Brian's depiction of women in the porn film. Two women staff members in their late twenties, Emma and Marilyn, were even laughing at his story.

Melissa left the room angry and upset.





Discomfort at the Placement Site

Questions

1. What could Melissa have done in this situation?
2. What would facilitate better communication in this office?
3. Should Brian have been confronted about his discussion? What are the critical things to consider in deciding this?
4. Should the full time staff women have said something?

Activities

1. Role play a confrontation between Melissa and Brian about Brian's story.
2. Role play a discussion between Melissa and the women staff workers that gets at the reasons Melissa is especially upset by their silence during the situation.

To Think About...

1. In professional jobs, are there gaps sometimes between what people preach and what they practice? In the nonprofit sector, do you think this happens? Why? Do you think this is a problem? Why or why not?
2. Why might it be frustrating for someone engaged in community and public service to be around people who don't feel as strongly about the cause they are working for as the volunteer?





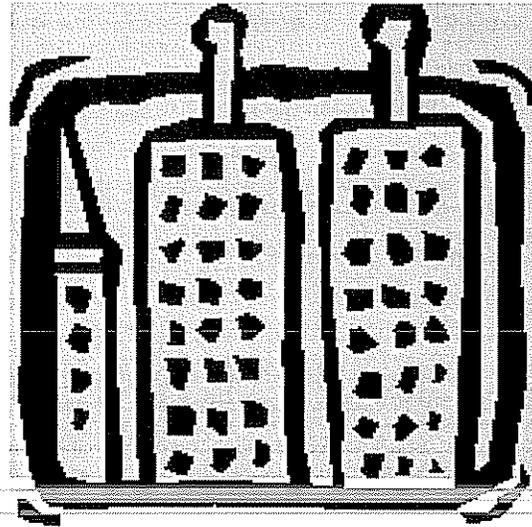
ACCOUNTABILITY: WHERE ARE THE OTHER VOLUNTEERS?

Daria was part of a full time service program in a large city in the northeast. The program broke service participants into teams and Daria's team was assigned to work in a housing development that was notorious in the city for crime and drugs. Although they had been told that their team would be responsible for completing "physical service," no one clarified in training exactly what that meant. The team's leader, James, did not seem to have a plan or a set of goals for the team. When they started their service, they had never discussed the work they would do at the housing project, the way they would interact with residents or staff at the complex, or the goals they wanted to set for the upcoming year.

Daria's team was made up of people from radically different backgrounds. They ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-six, and people had come to the service program with different motivations, expectations and skills. James, the leader, did not seem to recognize these differences and treated everyone in the group as if they were there only to do physical labor, not to think about community problem-solving, or get involved in an urban neighborhood. He would come in, give assignments and leave. He could not be found when problems arose on site. Even though he carried a beeper, he did not answer the team's calls.

Daria and her teammates often did not have clear assignments. In the morning, they were supposed to plant bulbs and paint the baseboards to a 400 family housing development. They were also told to build a playground. All of these tasks seemed overwhelming. The weather was cold; it rained often; the supplies for painting were not right for the job; no one in the complex wanted a new playground and no one showed them how to build one. Plus, this physical service was hard to do for five hours a day five days a week. The staff at the housing development did not have the time to deal with all of the team's problems — after all, weren't these volunteers there to help *them*? And the staff at the service program kept telling team members to talk to James. But James was never around.

The team members were getting increasingly frustrated. Their service was not rewarding and no one seemed to want to take responsibility for the constant problems that arose. Team members started to question one another, and to lose the sense of





common cause that had kept them working together for the first couple of months. Members started calling in sick and leaving early. Daria, who was committed to her service involvement, did not want to just give up. But things were falling apart.

Accountability: When Your Supervisor Never Shows Up

Questions

1. What are some of the main problems with this situation?
2. Who is responsible for making this a better situation?
3. How could things have been planned differently from the start?
4. What can be done to improve the team's situation at this point?

Activities

1. Design a work plan for the team. Make it as specific as possible — What is the strategy? Who should define the goals? How? Who should be involved in developing the plan? What kinds of things should be taken into account? Who is responsible for implementing the plan? Who is accountable?
2. Design a training for the group on setting goals. What do they need to ask themselves? How should they go about it?

To Think About...

1. When people doing community service go to unfamiliar neighborhoods, to whom do they have a responsibility? Who should they communicate and collaborate with before and during the time of their service? Why is this important? What kinds of problems occur when this communication is not established?
2. What important roles do team leaders/facilitators/coordinators play? What kind of dynamic gets established when they play their role well?
3. Do you believe that all service is good service? Why or why not?

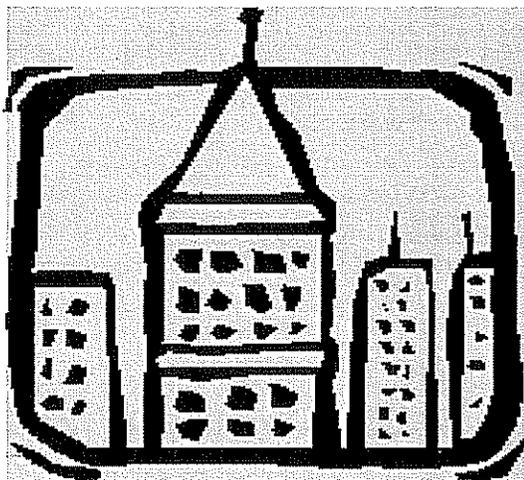




ACCOUNTABILITY'S FLIP SIDE: WHERE ARE THE OTHER VOLUNTEERS

Luis was in school, and thinking about the possibility of being a lawyer someday. He was especially interested in how laws were made and how they affected people's everyday lives. One of his teachers told him that students at the nearby law school had to meet a public service requirement in order to get their degrees and that they were starting up some interesting projects in the neighborhood. His teacher called the law school and arranged for Luis to meet some students to talk about their projects.

After talking to the law students, Luis decided that he would like to volunteer with the group that was going to be teaching legal education to eighth graders at the the local middle school. During their first meeting, they brainstormed ideas about legal issues that would be relevant to thirteen-year old students. Among the things they talked about were issues that related to the first ten amendments to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. Luis was sure that the kids would be interested in talking about freedom of speech, issues related to gun control, laws against unreasonable search and seizure and the things that go on in the courtroom. He also thought they might want to know about



some of the stories and history behind laws like Miranda's Law.

The law students said, "Come on, these kids don't care about that stuff. All they do is watch TV and play video games. Let's do really basic stuff — like talking about why we have laws and the need for an orderly society. We can have them imagine a pretend-planet and make up laws for it. Then, they can make posters about their laws, stuff like that." Since Luis figured that the law students knew more than he did, he went along with their ideas. On their first weekly visit to the middle school, the law students asked if any kids in the room had parents who were lawyers. No one raised their hand. Then they discussed laws on Planet X. One girl asked if that was the place where they sent outspoken Black Muslims.

During the next session, the law students brought a movie about the different jobs of people in the courtroom. The middle school students were bored. Luis thought that the exercises were not challenging enough and that was why the kids got so out of control. The class teacher, Mr. Grant, seemed frustrated by the process, but he did not say anything to the volunteers. Luis felt that the lessons did not relate to the students' lives. So he asked if he could plan a lesson — a debate about





the reasonableness of search and seizure of a student's locker at school. He spent the week researching cases and coming up with examples of scenarios that he could bring into the class. He wrote up the story of the case and ideas for tasks for the student-debaters. He called Lori, one of the law students, to tell her his plans and to ask her to design roles for Luis and the law students. With the four of them actively working, they would have an organized and lively debate. Luis was excited, and he thought, "If this goes well, it will give the law students inspiration to get more creative in the classroom."

He arrived at the middle school fifteen minutes early. Mr. Grant came over and asked what they would be doing during the legal education class. He seemed genuinely enthusiastic when Luis told him about the debate. Luis waited for the law students to show up. The class period started and they had not arrived. The kids were walking around, talking and Mr. Grant had to give them a writing assignment. Luis waited ten more minutes and then he decided to call Lori. She picked up the phone. When he asked her why she was not at the school and where the other law students were, she said, "Oh, I forgot to tell you. We have an exam tomorrow. There was no way we could go to the school."

By now the class period was half over. There was not nearly enough time to do a debate and he did not have the help he needed. Mr. Grant was annoyed. Luis needed a backup plan.

Accountability's Flip Side...

Questions

1. What are some of the problems with this situation?
2. What might Luis do now to save the class period for this day?
3. What are the different miscommunications that are happening?
4. What kinds of issues about accountability for volunteers are brought up here?

Activities

1. Plan and act out the rest of the class period.
2. Role play a telephone conversation the next afternoon between Lori and Luis. Who made the phone call? What are the most important things to discuss? How can the problems be resolved?
3. Do a role play between Mr. Grant, the law students and Luis. Remember in the role play to include discussion of how the classes have been going so far, what Mr. Grant wanted to see happen, what Luis thinks of the situation.

To Think About...

1. Why do problems sometimes arise when people from very different backgrounds meet through community service? How can race, class, geography, etc. affect relationships at community service sites?
2. Does the motivation to serve matter? Does it impact peoples' actual work at community service sites?
3. What can you do when other volunteers think poorly of the people at the site?



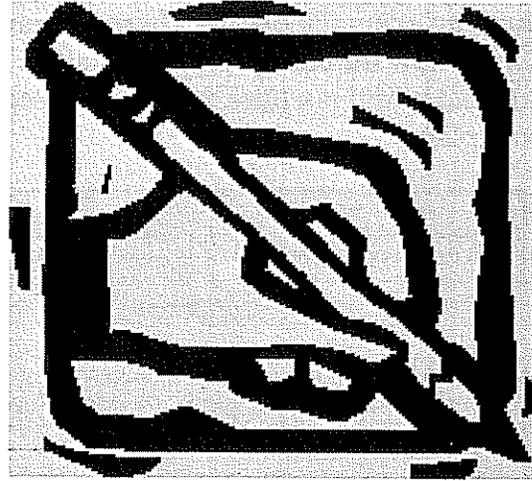


UNEXPECTED RESOURCES

Christina was volunteering at a battered women's shelter, working in the children's program twice a week. While the women were busy with classes, meetings or appointments, their children had a safe place to play, learn and spend time with other children. Christina liked the kids a lot, but after a while, she felt that she wanted to make a greater impact on the program.

After talking with some of the staff and with her friend, a social worker, Christina came up with an idea. The women at the shelter were working towards independence in all facets of their daily lives. One lifestyle issue that sometimes got overlooked was the importance of children's nutrition. Christina had studied health and nutrition, and she knew that for kids, the right foods could really make a difference in their energy level, ability to concentrate and overall health. She decided to do a series of workshops on nutrition and health: she would go over the basics, like the way vitamins and minerals affect different functions of the body, especially for children. The mothers really liked the workshops; Christina was funny and informative, and she liked to learn new things herself.

During one workshop, they made menus for a week, trying to see who could come up with healthy meals that kids would actually eat. As Christina was walking



around the tables, she noticed, Yvette, a young mom, was not writing. When Christina asked if she could help, Yvette responded, "This is stupid. I'm not doing it." Christina asked her why she stayed for all the sessions if she thought they were stupid — they were optional, after all. No one had to be there.

Christina walked away, but she saw from the corner of her eye that Yvette was writing. Walking back over, Christina looked at the menu in front of Yvette. Her handwriting was hard to read, and it looked like a lot of the words were misspelled. Christina stopped. "Yvette, are you dyslexic?" Yvette looked at her and nodded. "Me too," said Christina, "...and I know a lot about it. Can I look at your writing?"

In a short time, Christina figured out some of the basic attributes of Yvette's dyslexia, because the mistakes she made in spelling were so similar to her own. Yvette was really glad to have someone to talk to who understood her disability. Christina asked if she could talk with Yvette's case manager at the shelter. Between the two of them, they helped to get resources for Yvette — like a proofreader and a membership at the National Institute for the Blind, which has books on tape and other resources for people who have difficulty with visual reading.





Unexpected Resources

Questions

1. What are some of the main points of the story?
2. In what different ways was Christina a useful resource for the shelter?
3. Which of her talents, skills and experiences did she put to use?
4. How did she go beyond day-to-day helpfulness at her site to impact larger issues?
5. What are some skills and talents that you might put to use at a site?
6. What kinds of questions would you need to ask before doing that?

Activities

1. Have a discussion on some of the unpredictable needs that have arisen at your service sites.
2. Make a list of all the things you have experienced or learned that might be helpful or illustrative to other people.

To Think About...

1. Sometimes we perceive that people are being difficult because we do not understand why they are acting the way they are. Think about reasons why this might be particularly significant in community service situations.
2. Our own experiences and successes in overcoming difficulties are important. How do you think neighbors or citizens can use their own experiences and talents to make their communities better places? (For more on this, see the section on Community Asset Mapping.)



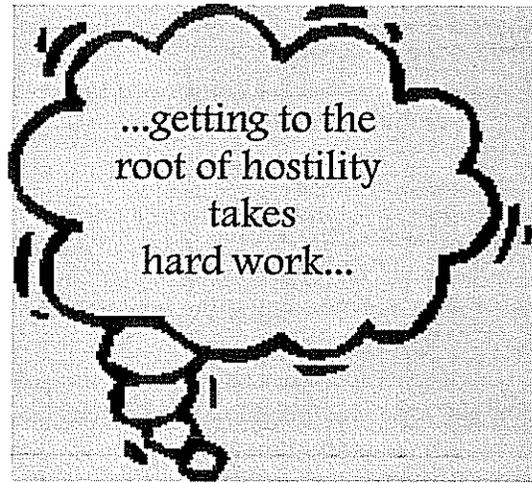


WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Members of a full time, one year service program were finished with training and they were excited to get to their site and start putting into practice all of the things they had learned about “rebuilding communities.” The group would be working at the James Walter Public Housing Complex — it was a new site for the service program, and this was the first collaboration. The team had broad goals to spend time with and develop activities for children living in the development.

There was a recreation center in the housing development that had a stage, office space, a kitchen and a library with four fairly new computers in it. The volunteers were excited about finding good uses for the space and developing a fun and interesting program for the kids. There were already two full time youth staff workers, both of whom had grown up at Walter, who were working on a plan to begin an after-school program for the kids at the rec center.

The youth workers had not been part of the decision making process that had taken place concerning whether or not to invite the service group to be involved at Walter for the year. To establish communication, the service group decided to ask for a meeting with the youth workers. They



wanted to explain why they had come to Walter and to plan for the program.

The meeting was strained. Members of the service group got the impression that the youth workers did not want them there. There was little enthusiasm for the ideas that the volunteers had; in fact, the service group members felt like their ideas were being shot down. The youth staff workers were not enthusiastic, they did not ask questions and they did not contribute ideas of their own. They just listened.

Since they didn't feel like they had gotten much support, the service group developed their own plan and moved forward without the support of the staff. They planned an information session about the after school program. No one came. They posted hours for the program and waited for kids. Only a few trickled in, and they never wanted to do the activities that the service group had planned. Meanwhile, the youth workers spent their time with teenagers from the complex, either in their office or outside. There was very little interaction between the two groups. The only time they ever seemed to talk was when one group wanted something that the other group was using — i.e. the computers, balls, etc. The situation did not seem to be successful and the volunteers felt alternately awkward, defensive and ineffective.





Who's In Charge?

Questions

1. What do you think caused the tension between the youth staff and the service group members?
2. What could the service group members have done differently to avoid or fix this problem?
3. What could the staff have done to avoid or fix this problem?
4. How did the program suffer because of the lack of dialogue?
5. What could the program be like if the two groups worked more closely together?

Activities

1. Role play the meeting between the service group members and the staff.
2. Act out an argument about the afterschool program.
3. Act out a resolution to the argument.

To Think About...

1. Are there ever good reasons for people to distrust or not welcome community service volunteers? Why do you think that tendency exists? What are ways to get beyond mistrust and miscommunication?
2. Some people argue that people without any connection to the place where they are volunteering can do more harm than good. They come into situations with their own ideas about what is right and what is needed for communities where they have never lived, for people who have lives very different from their own. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?





HOW DO PEOPLE SEE YOU AT THE SERVICE SITE?

Amy was pursuing a masters degree in social work. In order to gain the experience she needed in her area of interest, she worked for two years at a nonprofit organization running a program intended to prevent violence against women. She was completely committed to this issue, and she knew that once she had her MSW she wanted to continue her work with girls and women. The organization that she was involved with worked with many different people and groups within the community - with private schools, the Girl Scouts, a center for Latin American youth, battered women's shelters, and homes and schools for students with emotional problems. While they had different missions and constituents, each had to deal with the violence against women that is prevalent in our society.

It was easy for Amy to work with programs that catered to middle and upper-middle class girls. She felt like she understood where they were coming from and she knew how to deal with them when they acted up and got out of control. But she felt extremely uncomfortable the first few times she taught the students from the school for young people with emotional problems. It was also difficult for her because most of these students were African American, and Amy was Chinese American. She felt that she didn't know how to relate to them, and that they didn't respect her. She knew that many of these young women had had it tough and they had had to deal with things in life that she hadn't. This made it difficult for her, because she felt like she was coming in to tell them what to do.

The first day of class, she had no control whatsoever. People were up and out of their seats, talking, painting nails, reading magazines, etc. Hardly anybody was listening to her. When she tried to act like this was not fazing her, they resented her, and saw through her act to her nervousness. When she tried to bring about order through more discipline, she felt sensitive, thinking her actions might be perceived as racist. She knew that much of the problem was due to the simple fact that she did not know the girls and they did not know her. But she wasn't sure how to get to know them and to figure out what they wanted or expected from the time they spent with her.





How Do People See You at the Service Site?

Questions

1. What should Amy do in the immediate situation? (The class is out of control.)
2. What are the overriding issues that are contributing to this situation?
3. How could Amy and the group address those issues together?
4. In what other ways do race and class affect dynamics at service sites?

Activities

1. Role play a scenario where a student from the group decides to help Amy out. Make it clear what her self-interest is for making the situation better (she wants to learn something, she thinks the situation is too chaotic, she is concerned about people from different backgrounds understanding one another.)

To Think About...

1. Why is it so hard to be honest about our own lack of experience interacting and working together with people different from ourselves? Are there any situations where it has been easy? Why do you think that was?
2. Why is it important for people doing community service to explain their role to the people they are working with directly?
3. Do you think the amount of time spent and the level of consistency make a difference in the general respect and quality of relationships for people doing community service? Based on that, what kinds of community service experiences do you think would be best?





MUSEUM PIECE:

MEETING A COMMUNITY AND AN ORGANIZATION'S NEEDS

Horace Selvius worked for a community service program. His placement was at a museum in a low income neighborhood. He was excited by the prospect of a museum committing its staff time and energy to reviving community education processes. He thought, quite simply, that the museum could serve as a community resource for the kids living there.

When he started his placement, he quickly became frustrated. The administrators in the museum wanted him to be an administrative assistant. He was asked to make xeroxes and do some filing. Their biggest reward for him was to work on some exhibits. "Perhaps you could work with me to set up an exhibit on the history of the museum," the executive director told him one day. This wasn't what Horace wanted to do, and the project failed to excite the young man.

As Horace grew frustrated, he tried to talk to the museum staff about doing more. The staff reacted negatively — so he quickly pulled back. He realized that his vision of extending the museum's impact further into the community conflicted with the administrators' focus on making exhibitions more impressive. The administrators wanted to

"He tried to talk to the museum staff about doing more. The staff reacted negatively — so he quickly pulled back. He realized that his vision of extending the museum's impact further into the community conflicted with the administrators' focus on making exhibitions more impressive..."

improve the *internal* operations of the museum, not community-education. Many of them framed these concerns from the perspective of their schooling. Almost all of them had master's degrees in museum administration and they had been trained in curating exhibits, in handling antiquated objects (so they wouldn't fall apart) and in arranging items of an exhibition intelligently. They cared a lot about making the museum a nice place, but not necessarily for its surrounding community members.

Horace felt that his skills were going to waste at his site. He decided to work on community outreach. His first step was to go to the local schools and see what they wanted the museum to do. In meetings he had with principals and teachers, he heard animosity in their voices. They all felt the museum shunned kids coming to it and that the museum rarely did anything interesting. Horace listened patiently to the teachers and principals. But he also knew that there were certain exhibits about local history which might be of interest to young people living in the neighborhood. He decided to help organize a field trip to the museum.

This took a lot of work. He had to get the staff on board, and to plan a series of activities. But besides some kids messing around with the water fountain (they found a way for it to spray water three feet in the air), the trip came off well. The kids got





something out of seeing the history of their own local community. They learned about previous community leaders and about the newspapers their grandparents read. In essence, they learned about their past.

As Horace organized more of these trips, the museum administrators became slightly annoyed. The executive director called a meeting with Horace. Horace knew that he would have to make an important case for what he was doing.

In the meeting, the executive director argued that Horace was spending too much time organizing school field trips. Horace replied that through his efforts the museum was gaining a presence in the community. He argued that foundations often noted museums' involvement in civic education projects and that this could be a good tactic for fund raising. "What better cover photo for a brochure than some happy kid looking at an exhibit about local history?" Horace asked the director. The meeting ended here. Whether or not the director was sold on this wasn't clear. But a few things were.

Horace had led by example. He had a vision of the museum's role in its surrounding community. Clearly, this conflicted with the views of museum administrators. Horace placed stress on a community service model of the museum. Perhaps it was all those lessons he got in training about "rebuilding communities." Horace had found a way to appeal to the self-interest of the museum. He pitched his efforts in terms of future fund raising strategies without losing sight of the real reason the museum should be committed to a vision of community education. Certainly Horace learned something, and so did the kids. Perhaps most importantly of all, Horace had made clear how a volunteer could work with community institutions and try to rejuvenate local learning processes.

Museum Piece

Questions

1. What were some of the conflicts between Horace and the staff at the site?
2. What is the difference between Horace's role at the site and the role of the staff members? Did this affect the conflicts?
3. How did Horace get around the problems that he was having?
5. What did Horace learn about self-interest through this experience?

Activities

1. Make a list of other ways the community outreach programs would be useful for fundraising, other than for photo opportunities with the kids at the museum?
2. Brainstorm ways to do innovative, creative things at your site. How would you connect it to the interests and priorities of your site?

To Think About...

1. Why is it important that people who aren't so concerned about the narrow "survival-oriented" interests of an organization get involved in assisting an organization to fulfill its mission? Why might this sometimes cause conflict?
2. What do community service participants bring to organizations and institutions that staff can't bring? Why is this important?
3. How do volunteers/ non-staff people get heard within community organizations and institutions? What does this tell you about citizenship and democracy?

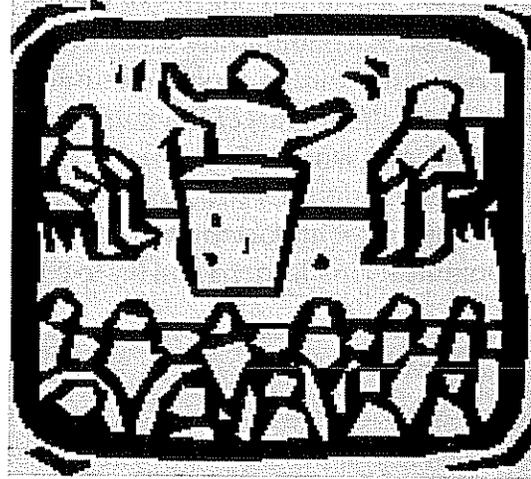




PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH

Martin was a full time volunteer at a multifaceted community organization, End Poverty. He had learned about the group when some members of the staff came to his school to do a workshop about drugs and violence in the city. When he realized he could volunteer there full time through a youth service program, he was psyched to become involved in what seemed to be a fine institution. Its mission statement was to work towards ending poverty by creating opportunities for homeless families. He was proud to be a part of the organization and wanted to work directly with other people who were strongly committed to urban issues and the empowerment of homeless families. He also wanted experience working in a nonprofit setting.

After a few weeks at End Poverty, Martin started to get a little concerned about the organization. He did not have a lot to do. He was told that he would be organizing after-school activities for the children in the client families. However, the program only had a few families in it, and few of them were around in the afternoon. If by chance he did spot a few kids, they only wanted to watch TV. None of the other program staff



at End Poverty seemed to be concerned

about the apparent lack of interest in what they had to offer. In fact, the direct line staff spent most of their time in the rec room reading the paper and drinking coffee.

Martin thought about talking to the executive director, but she never seemed to be around. Sometimes, while he was in the administrative office helping out, he would overhear the exasperated secretary saying to the director, "Well, are you coming in *at all* this week, or what? You know, somebody has to take care of all this work..." Martin could see that a few members of the staff worked really hard, but there was a lack of accountability in the organization. It made it easy to lose track of the needs of the people the organization served. He also could see, when he was filing and doing paperwork, that the organization was still receiving private donations and small grants for a program it was no longer operating. This lack of integrity and accountability really bothered him.





One day, as he was eating lunch in the rec room, Martin listened to the staff members as they talked about some clients. They were being insulting and negative, referring to them as lazy, good-for-nothing “addict types.” Someone said, “These people are pathetic.” Martin could not believe what he was hearing. This organization was known in the community for empowering homeless families, and staff and board members were constantly being quoted saying things like, “People need to respect the humanity and the potential of poor families, instead of discounting them and putting them down.” But here they were talking broadly about their deficiencies.

Martin knew that he could just leave the site and get a new placement. But this would not solve the problems facing End Poverty and it would not help the people served by the organization.

Practicing What You Preach

Questions

1. What are the main problems with this organization?
2. Is there any overlying issue contributing to all of these problems?

Activities

1. Use your knowledge of addressing organizational or societal problems (i.e. internal, external, top-down, bottom-up, adversarial, cooperative, etc.) to come up with four different approaches Martin can take to address the problems at Stop the Violence. Be ready to explain the strengths and weaknesses of each model.

To Think About...

1. What is a volunteer’s responsibility to “blow the whistle” on blatantly unethical or illegal practices at a service site? What steps should be taken before taking a problem out of the agency and into the public spotlight?
2. What is the difference between “private” criticism and “public” criticism? Do you think that the principle of, “I can say anything I want to about____, but if anybody else says anything negative about it, they’re in trouble....” holds true for community organizations? Should it?
3. Does Public Relations for an organization or “spin” conflict with higher ideals for democratic community building? Why or why not?





DIFFERENT NOTIONS OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Innovative Youth, Inc., a full time youth service organization, placed volunteers in community-based organizations in a small northeastern city. A number of the service program's participants were working with neighborhood groups who engaged in community organizing and direct action as well as social service activities like operating soup kitchens, shelters, adult education programs and sports leagues for kids. The volunteers, who under their contracts were not allowed to engage in partisan political activities, had to be cautious of their involvement in some of the activities sponsored by the organizations where they served. Fortunately, this had not been a big problem.

But eight months into the eleven-month program, an event took place that divided the city. Malik Jones, an African American, nineteen year-old college student with no arrest record, was shot to death by a white police officer when he was pulled over for a speeding violation late at night. According to the officer, Jones was backing into his squad car and did not appear to be stopping. Witnesses said that Jones was just trying to move further to the side of the road. After the shooting, the police officer was assigned to desk duty for two weeks and then put back on his regular beat until the review of his case.

"HERE WAS A SITUATION THAT SEEMED CLEAR. A SUCCESSFUL YOUNG MAN WITH NO POLICE RECORD HAD BEEN KILLED BY A POLICE OFFICER BECAUSE HE WAS SPEEDING."

Events like this had happened in the city before, and it was known that many police officers were afraid of young African American and Hispanic men. But this case became a focal point for many community organizations. They felt that racism on the police force and in other institutions in the city not only divided the city, it robbed African Americans and Hispanics of equal access to opportunities and of the freedom to live comfortably in the city. Here was a situation that seemed clear. A successful young man with no police record had been killed by a police officer because he was speeding. Race seemed the only answer to the question asked over and over, "Why?"

The community organizations where Innovative Youth participants were working became focused on the upcoming review of the police officer. They were writing pamphlets, organizing rallies, marching at City Hall and organizing night watches to observe the police as they walked their beat. They were calling city officials day and night, at the office and at home. They even staged a demonstration at the





home of the police commissioner. As the trial neared, the activities became more heated and more confrontational.

The situation was problematic for Innovative Youth. While they understood the anger and frustration of their community partner sites, they also had to consider the long term viability of their organization. By merely being affiliated with the organizations organizing the protests and demonstrations, they thought they might be jeopardizing Innovative Youth's good standing with the police and city officials. Many city officials had openly supported their work and had given them many resources. They had partnered with the police department and they often relied on the force for assistance, use of space, etc. They did not want to jeopardize relationships with groups that had contributed to the organization. And, because of the way the organization was funded, they were not allowed to be involved in political activities.

However, they could also see, based on their encounters with individuals and institutions on both sides of the divide, that something needed to be done to address the community's concerns, or there would be resentment, frustration, and quite possibly, violence.

Different Notions of Public Safety

Questions

1. Identify the issues at stake here. What are the main problems?
2. What are the things to consider when seeking solutions to these problems?

Activities

1. Develop an Action Plan for Innovative Youth members (*acting as members of Innovative Youth*) to address the short-term tension in the city over the shooting incident, and the broader problems of distrust and anger at police officers and public officials on the community organizations' side, and the distrust of young African American men on the part of police officers.

To Think About...

1. How might citizen review boards and community policing efforts improve strained relationships in cities and towns? What kinds of things would you think these efforts would have to take into consideration?
2. In what areas, other than public safety, do these same issues of disagreement and animosity come up? Are there patterns?



CREATING YOUR OWN CRITICAL INCIDENTS



For groups who are engaged in service, check-ins and group discussions at regular meetings provide participants with a chance to discuss things that take place at their service sites, to brainstorm solutions to problems they are having, to get advice from their colleagues who have had similar experiences, and to examine the larger social issues that are illuminated through service. Designing and discussing critical incidents from experiences that group members have had is another effective way to learn through service and initiate discussion and debate about issues that we face when we get involved in community service.

Sometimes it is easier to use fictional critical incidents, since presenting our personal stories can be hard. However, by following the tips on the next page, your group can gain a lot by making their own critical incidents. Most practically, you get the opportunity to clarify problems you may be having. Also, group members can gain valuable tools to deal with issues that relate directly to their own community service work. Just as important, critical incidents can help you to discuss your experiences in a way that illuminates broader issues. So, instead of having a very specific (and limited) discussion about working with a difficult child or trying to decipher the unclear messages of a harried and overworked supervisor, group members can begin to look more broadly at the role they play as volunteers in organizations. By examining and exploring different patterns that come up in the context of their work in a slightly more abstract way, it is possible for group members to strengthen organizations and to build resources that make their community service meaningful and worthwhile even long after they have left.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS





When designing critical incidents, think about the following:

- ④ What theme will you present?

Possibilities include:

- ④ relationships with staff / other volunteers at site
- ④ relationships with the people your organization serves
- ④ how people outside the organization view it
- ④ the problems caused by lack of resources
- ④ relationships with other community organizations/ institutions
- ④ building trust and accountability
- ④ how volunteers can be utilized to their full potential
- ④ miscommunication/ communication strategies
- ④ mapping your organization to understand the power dynamics at play
- ④ how creativity and innovation are treated at site
- ④ how short term crises point to long term challenges
- ④ how to keep in mind the organization's real mission amidst lots of stress

- ④ What structure will you use?

Suggest a writing or quiet reflection time after you have established the subject. Group members should have a basic structure to follow, i.e. what, who, how, why, the broader significance, initial assessment, i.e. ideas about solutions, strategies, etc.

- ④ What's the time limit for the telling of the critical incident?

Giving people a clear time frame cuts down on unnecessary details.

- ④ What are you learning?

Everyone in the group should be charged with finding connections between the different incidents. Make it clear that this exercise is as much about finding patterns and issues common to all participants and organizations as well as the uniqueness of each individual situation.

- ④ Ask Questions!

Making your own critical incidents is a way of letting other group members know that their thoughts and ideas about service are just as important and significant as the service they are completing. Critical incidents give a structure to the inquiry process. They help you to learn what members think and feel about their efforts.



OBSERVATION AND ACTION:

COMMUNITY MAPPING



COMMUNITY MAPPING



People engaged in community service want their work to be meaningful and to have an impact on the communities in which they are involved. Much needs to be done in order to ensure that service efforts are useful. As programs are built and projects get developed, it is easy to get bogged down by all of the immediate concerns, like getting volunteers, coordinating schedules, arranging transportation and publicizing your projects. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in the service projects themselves that we overlook the relationship between our efforts and the broader realities of the community in which we are involved. Or we get so involved at the particular site where we are involved that we don't see how its work connects to and builds on the efforts of other people and institutions within a neighborhood or community.

Understanding the place where you are involved and taking a broader look at how the different places, people, institutions and activities fit together can help you to improve your service. In turn, it can help you to make a more sustainable, effective and more democratic contribution to the communities in which you are working.

Community mapping is a tool that you can use to make this process easier. Particularly, asset mapping can assist you in orienting your service in a way that builds upon the strength, power, creativity and history of the community you work with.



Mapping

The idea of community mapping is simple. It is a process to encourage you to identify and become familiar with a community. Mapping can be verbal or physical (you can actually draw maps that contain different “data.”)

- ④ What are the physical boundaries of the community?
- ④ Who lives there? Do they own their homes or rent them? Where do they work? Where do they play? Where do they learn?
- ④ What are the important institutions and places where community residents gather? Where are the businesses? Churches? Parks? Community Organizations? Local, State, Federal Agencies? Gathering Places? Libraries?
- ④ Where are the institutions that are responsible for responding to important community needs located, like the fire department, police department, waste removal service and hospital?

It is also important to gather data about your community that you think is interesting or important. What’s the population? What’s the age distribution — are there lots of senior citizens and not as many young people or vice versa? How many violent crimes occur per year in this community? What is the average income? What about the average travel time to work?

Learning the history of a community is also important. By either speaking with an elder in the community or a local historian, or doing your own research at libraries, bookstores or historical societies, you can gain a much deeper understanding of how a community has come to be the way you see it now. How has the community changed over the years? Who has lived there? What kinds of businesses and industries have come and gone? How do others in the community perceive the changes?

Asking these questions and finding the answers are important if you want your service to play a role in fostering healthy, safe communities. This activity also ensures that your service is necessary — through mapping you can make sure that you are providing something important and not replicating an existing program or offering something no one really wants. Also, you have the opportunity to think beyond service to find other ways to meet the goals of a community — through things like community organizing, lobbying, housing rehabilitation or business development, to name a few.



For example, this kind of mapping exercise enabled one group of community service participants to greatly increase their impact in one urban neighborhood. After coaching soccer to elementary school students in an after-school program for two years, they started to think about the children who were moving up to the middle school level, where no sports were offered. By using the mapping concept, they first learned what middle school their students went to upon finishing fifth grade. They talked to the gym teacher there to find out about after-school sports programs in the neighborhood near the middle school. Then they asked around to determine if any programs offered soccer. Once they gathered this information, they could accomplish a set of things:

- ④ They put together a pamphlet for students finishing elementary school and their parents that listed the sports opportunities that were available for them as middle schoolers.
- ④ They arranged with the middle school gym teacher to work together to coach a section of physical education on soccer.
- ④ One volunteer arranged to get volunteers involved in the existing sports programs in the neighborhood.
- ④ Another decided to do a research project that compared the juvenile delinquency rates between a city that did have school-based sports at the middle school level and their city; he then submitted it to the school board for review.

By becoming aware of the individuals, institutions and ongoing initiatives that exist in any community, you have the opportunity to develop strong programs that work in genuine collaboration with others to improve communities and society.

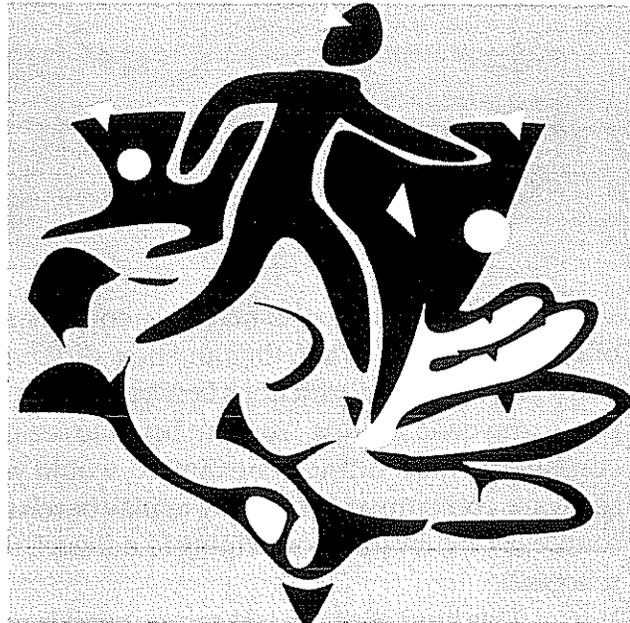


COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING



Community Asset Mapping grows out the kinds of questions raised above. It also reflects a philosophy of community and a critique of institutions that dictate social policy and provide social services. In their workbook, *Building Communities From the Inside Out*, John Kretzmann and John McKnight give a full explanation of community asset mapping. We will quote them a lot here, and we suggest that you purchase their book for your service group if you want to understand these issues more deeply.

To understand “community asset mapping,” it’s best to understand the meaning of asset — that is, something that has a positive feature to it, something that can help people get things done. Instead of focusing on a community’s “needs,” thinking about assets changes the way you think about service. In service, it is easy to think about a community’s needs or deficits — in fact, your service can often be defined by meeting needs in a community (making up for an educational deficiency by becoming a tutor in a school, helping with a drug program that helps people overcome addiction, etc.).



But if you think only in terms of needs, your service can wind up defining people as clients — people in need of your services and, at worst, people who become dependent upon your service for certain things. This can often make the problems you are addressing even worse than they already are, since people might lose sight of what *they* can do to overcome their problems. You might run the risk of providing things that already exist to people in a community or offering things through service that community residents have decided they don’t want or need. By thinking about a community’s assets in terms of getting a project done, you can really do *community service* — that is, have the entire community behind you when you are doing service.

For more information on community asset mapping, contact John Kretzmann and John McKnight at the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research / Neighborhood Innovations Network at Northwestern University © 2040 Sheridan Road © Evanston, Illinois 60208 © 708-491-3518



Then, the question becomes: what assets does a community possess? What do we mean by assets in relation to a community? Try to identify a strong leader in the community, or perhaps a civic association (a club or group of some sort) which has done good things for the community. How can you work with that individual or association in order to have stronger community-backing for your efforts? By asking this question, you can become more involved in the community in which your service takes place. You can learn what sorts of institutions and associations provide people with resources necessary to accomplish certain tasks (what some people call “networks”).

“ FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSTITUTIONS IS AN INVALUABLE SERVICE AND MAKES NEW THINGS POSSIBLE.”

Asset mapping also helps you to think creatively about ways that different aspects of community life fit together and how different people and institutions can collaborate. It helps you to draw distinctions between public institutions, the private sector and non-profit and civic groups. You can begin to see the roles that each can play to benefit the community most fully. (For example, would you rather have the managers from the software company volunteering to play baseball with kids, or would their skills and resources be better used for helping to network the computers in the three elementary schools?)

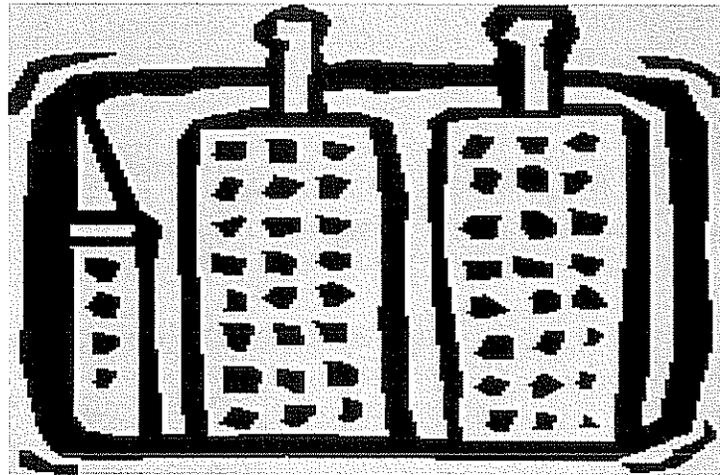
This kind of effort takes time, but it is worthwhile. Even facilitating discussions between different community members and institutions is an invaluable service and makes new things possible. What assets do public institutions have (hospitals, community colleges, libraries)? What about associations (community development corporations, churches, unions, clubs, ethnic associations, community organizations, arts groups)? How about the private sector (businesses, banks, corporations)? And individuals (young people, artists, individuals)? What about the local media? What do all these players have to offer one another? Working together, what might they accomplish? How might they build on one another’s strengths and capacities?

By thinking in these terms, you can become more effective at service. It might take you longer than just rushing ahead and accomplishing a task. This way of doing things requires you to pull back a bit and assess how to do something in cooperation with other citizens, instead of just on your own. It takes time, but in the end, it can be more effective. Most important of all, it shows that you are not alone out there — that there are other people committed to improving community life and involving citizens in this process.



Let's stop talking about this idea in general and provide an example. What if you're doing an after-school tutoring program? You have a lot of kids you're teaching how to read. But you're having a hard time making sure that all of the kids get the attention they need. So you scan the local surrounding community — this is what is meant by “mapping” (figuring out what associations and individuals are out there) — and notice, for instance, that there is a senior citizen's home. This home has a number of older people who are still active and some in search of volunteer opportunities. By having some senior citizens come help you out with your tutoring program, you wind up using a local

community asset — in this case, the senior citizen home — to help accomplish your task — tutoring young kids. Perhaps you could take it one step further. What if you had some seniors do a project in which they recounted for the young people you are tutoring the major events in their lives and thereby helped these young people understand local and national history?

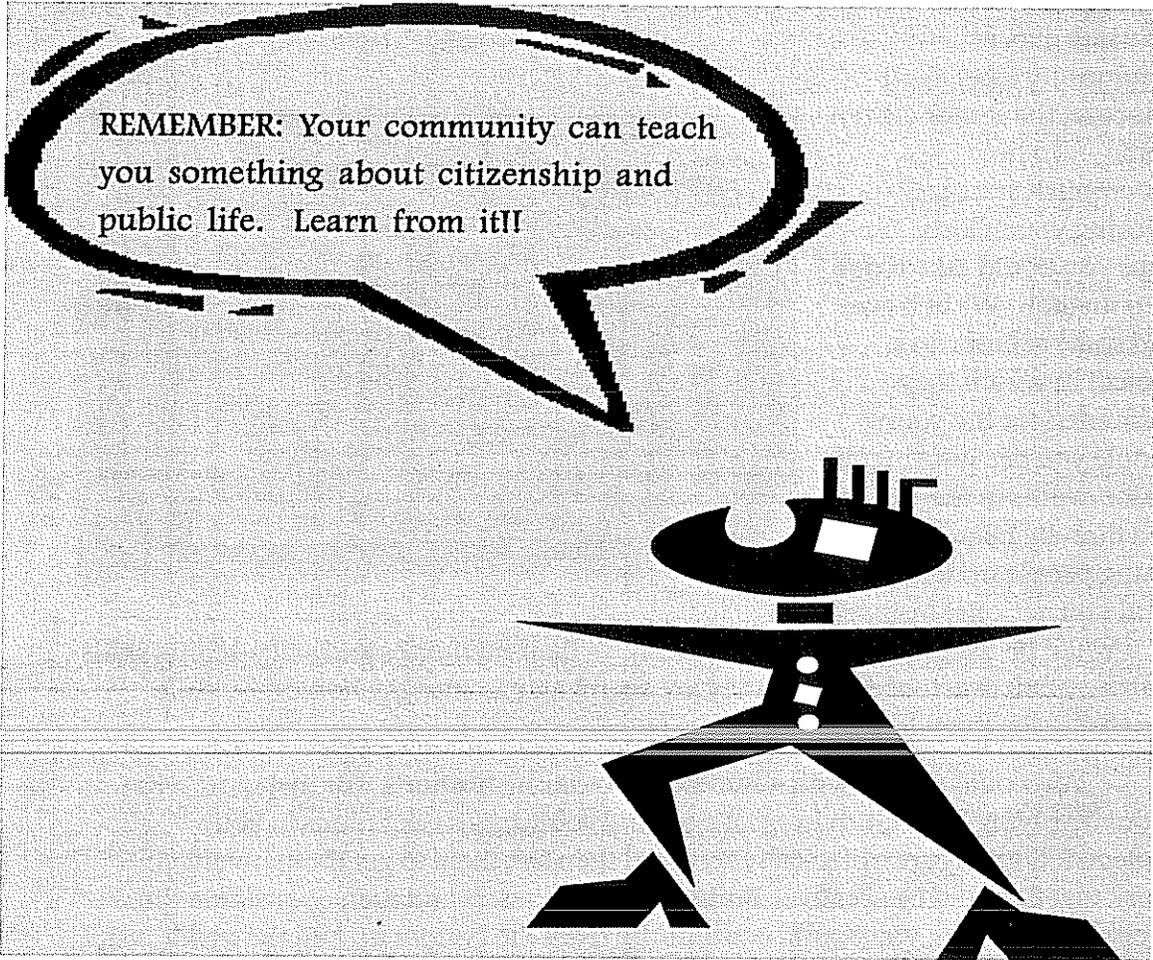


You'd be using the skills of the elderly — their memories and story-telling skills that are often overlooked when they are segregated in nursing homes — while benefiting the knowledge of the young people you are tutoring.

You could do this with a number of other institutions. For instance, what about involving local churches, colleges and voluntary associations in your projects? First, figure out who's there and then ask them to get them involved. Work together and be creative. Build upon their assets and then coordinate these efforts. In this way, you “build community from the bottom up and the inside out,” as John Kretzmann and John McKnight put it.

This should help you accomplish important things in the communities where you are involved. At the same time, it should help you learn something about your service. Service works best when it is in conjunction with other community institutions and associations. You also get to learn about your community in the process. You might even find a resource helpful for your work — perhaps resources at a library, or a civic leader working on a project close to yours who can teach you something about the history of community organizing in your neighborhood, or an association which is organizing a community event at which you can present your efforts and learn what else is going on.





PRACTICING MAPPING



The following critical incident will help you to practice your mapping skills.

Serving Communities was a community service organization that started school-based enrichment programs in urban schools in its local area. Tammy, a young participant in the program, had been volunteering at West Side High School for six months. She was helping to run a tutoring program for Math and Science during the school day. During study hall or free periods, students could come (or were forced by their teachers to come) for extra help. The Tutoring Center, started by Serving Communities, was now in its sixth year.

West Side was notorious as a “tough school.” The principals rotated in and out constantly, and many of the teachers were always trying to transfer to other schools in the area. New textbooks had not been purchased in years, and the facility was in disrepair. Tammy enjoyed her work, but still she thought that the school was not a very amenable place for learning. After six months with the program, Tammy had to leave the program, to get a part time job to pay for her college tuition. She left on very good terms with the teachers and students at West Side and promised to keep in touch. But she was still disappointed to leave the service program.

A few months later, she had to write a paper in a composition class at her college. The assignment was to write about an important community issue. Tammy decided to write about the state of West Side High School and urban education in general. She wrote a paper comparing her own high school, located 16 miles from West Side, in a fairly wealthy community, with the urban school where she had tutored. In the paper, she discussed her discomfort at being a minority, as a white woman in an environment where most people were of color. She talked about security guards in the halls, clogged toilets, disrespectful students and unmotivated teachers. Describing the physical space and overall environment, she wrote:

It is only 16 miles or twenty five minutes from West Side to Menlow High School. The color contrasts between the two environments (not just skin pigmentation) make a distinct impression.

The quality of light both in and surrounding the buildings is very different. One experiences West Side as gray and dingy. The surface of everything seems dull. The windows, protected by screens of heavy wire mesh, are covered by a film of thick, gray dust. Sitting inside looking out is like looking into a dimly lit cardboard box.

By contrast, looking out a window at Menlow High School, one can experience real distance. The rolling mountains are in view and during the winter one might see a spectacular sunset while attending one of the many after-school extracurricular activities.

Few, if any, sunsets are experienced by the students at West Side. Crowded around the school are dilapidated buildings, graffiti-covered walls, uncollected garbage, men hanging out on street corners, abandoned cars and vacant buildings. These are the sights that converge upon West Side every day.



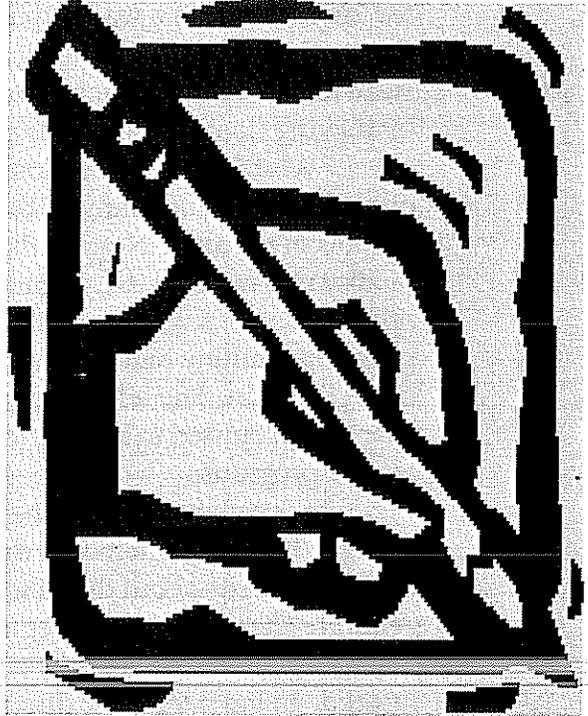
She quoted a disgruntled teacher who said that when she started teaching, she, “wanted to adopt every one of these kids.” But after a few years the enthusiasm waned. Now she thinks, “Every kid here has a story to tell you. They all have an excuse for not doing what they are supposed to. After a while, I just stopped listening to all of their stories. I tell them that the only way they will make something of themselves is to do the work. Very few listened.”

Tammy concluded her paper with, “Everyone deserves the opportunity to learn, but not everyone is willing. The point is not to assign blame for this state of affairs. The point is to ask, ‘What, beside paying lip service, are we doing about these problems as young lives waste away?’”

Tammy’s teacher liked the paper and suggested she submit it as an opinion piece in *The Tattler*, a small weekly paper that circulated throughout the suburbs of the county. She did. But when the article was published, it ran as a news article, under the headline, ‘HOPE IN SHORTEST SUPPLY AT WEST SIDE.’ The article had been edited without her consultation, and the edits changed the tone of the story. While Tammy’s descriptions of the two schools were an implicit question of why schools in poor communities don’t have the same advantages as schools in affluent neighborhoods, the article read as a condemnation of teachers and students of West Side, as well as the neighbors and citizens of the city. The new ending of the story was an indictment of the students at West Side, ‘Everyone has the opportunity to learn, but not everybody is willing.’

The six year relationship between the service organization and West Side was now jeopardized. The teachers and school administrators felt betrayed by their partnership with the service group. They thought that by allowing people who were not members of their community to come into the school, they had opened the door to stereotyping and simplification of the problems facing their community. It was made worse by the graphic detail of the article. They felt as if they had been made fools of through the expose.

The current volunteers in the school were embarrassed and angry. Someone that was no longer involved in the program had just made their work, to build partnerships and relationships in a spirit of cooperation, ten times harder. The service program staff was not sure how to address the problem with Tammy, current volunteers, the staff and administration at West Side, the newspaper and with the broader community of people who had read the article.



Practicing Mapping

Activities

1. Map the different perspectives of the newspaper, the school, the service organization, the community and Tammy? How does each seem to view the situation? Where are the perspectives most different? Where do perspectives and issues overlap? What hints does this give you about solving the problem?
2. What assets do each of the actors possess — the school, the newspaper, Tammy, her college, the service program, the school community? Map ways that they might coordinate these assets to address the larger issue Tammy was addressing — the disparities in public education?

To Think About...

Why are there conflicts and differences between Menlow and West Side communities? Whose community would it be easier to asset map? Why? How can community asset mapping help to change the dynamics between communities that are unequally matched in terms of economic resources or political power?



COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING EXERCISE



Make copies and pass out the following form. Give participants an opportunity to fill it out as completely as possible. After handing out the sheets to other members, arrange a time for them to come back with the sheets filled out and ready to talk about what they've found. On that day, put up a question on the board: How can these different sets of actors help you in your service project? Or: How might you be able to support the efforts of these different sets of actors?

Think about putting together a directory which your group members can use in the future. Talk about the difference of thinking about assets, versus simply needs. Use the discussion as a time to talk about different ideas of service.

1. Individual Leaders:

List out leaders and then a brief description of where they work (if anywhere) and how you learned about them.

2. Associations:

List out associations and their telephone numbers:

Cultural (Art Associations, Clubs working on art projects, etc.):

Civic (YMCA, Kiwanis, etc.):

Political (Parties: Democratic, Republican, Independent, etc.)

Informal (after school programs, sports leagues, etc.)

3. Institutions (Places which have a permanent location):

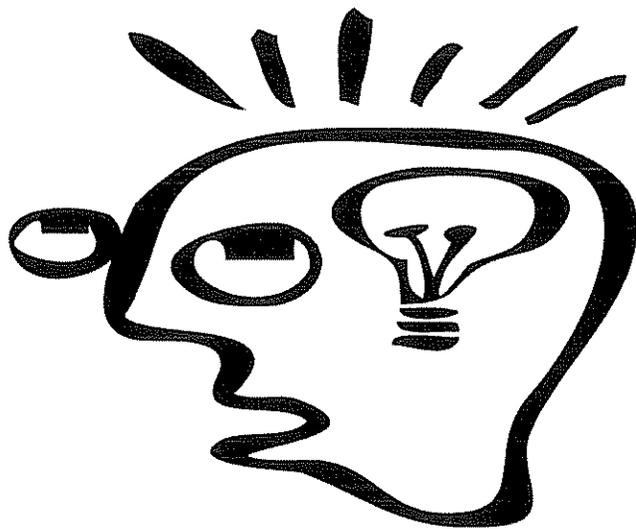
List out institutions with addresses and phone numbers.

Religious (Churches, Synagogues, Mosques, etc.) and Educational (Schools, etc.):



ANALYZING YOUR SERVICE:

DIFFERENT MODELS OF
SERVICE TO THINK
ABOUT



DIFFERENT MODELS OF SERVICE TO THINK ABOUT

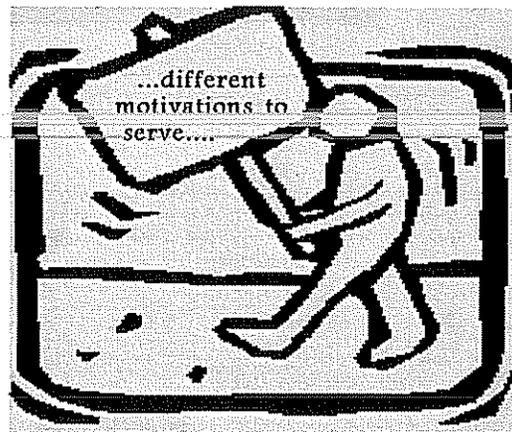


Motivations for Service

When people commit their time to service, their motivations are often very different. Some people believe that by serving others they are expressing their moral values and religious beliefs. Some people think they need to “give back” to their society what their society has given to them. Some focus on their own character development, while others are concerned with the outcomes and impacts of their service. Whatever the commitment you bring to service, it is important to think and talk about it. The reason you are doing service matters. It structures the way you perceive what you are doing, it influences what sort of service experiences you are drawn to, and it affects how you might change when you are doing service. It is not only important to think about what you are doing but why you are doing it. In fact, that is a major component of the learning experience we believe service can be for you.

As this module has shown already, people have been doing service for a long time. Service has its own history. In this section, we set out some differing conceptions of service — historically and politically. This is to help you think more about your own motivations for service. When you read these differing motivations behind service, think about your own. Are

there any conceptions you identify with? Are there conceptions you disagree with? Why? Are there other conceptions we have forgotten? Do you think some ways of approaching service are better than others? Why or why not? You’ll have the opportunity to discuss your motivations as a group and to consider the relationships between conceptions of service and the actual service you engage in.



As you will see, the differing motivations we trace out here have come into conflict with one another. By setting out these motivations and the arguments around them, we hope to give a sense of how dynamic the long legacy of service has been. Your own work grows out of a rich tradition of Americans trying to serve their society in different ways.

Roots of the different motivations for service include:

- ⊗ Religion
- ⊗ Charity/Philanthropy
- ⊗ Professional Social Work
- ⊗ Democratic Community Organizing
- ⊗ Service as Democratic Citizenship

Religion and the Motivation to Serve

In many faith-based traditions around the world, service is a fundamental way of orienting human beings to one another and to the divine. A glance at the world's religions emphasizes this point. The close relationship between faith and virtue is discussed in Taoism:

Cultivate virtue in your own person, and it becomes a genuine part of you. Cultivate it in the family and it will abide. Cultivate it in the community and it will live and grow..." (Tao Te Ching.)

Personalizing the vows of Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "I vow to offer joy to one person in the morning and to help relieve the grief of one person in the afternoon." Muslims also value service. In Islam, a fundamental practice is expressing one's gratitude towards Allah through kindness towards others.

In the Judeo Christian tradition, the call to service is often explicit. Religious and spiritual leaders have historically encouraged their followers to express their love of God by caring for others and creating "God's family" on earth. The Jewish concept of charity is central to the faith. The spiritual leader Hillel wrote this well known statement, "If I am not concerned for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only concerned with myself, what good am I? And if now is not the time to act, when will it be?" Christianity attributes these words to Jesus Christ, "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me." The



The late Mother Teresa, who was well known for her works of mercy and charity, encouraged service:

“We may wonder whom I can love and serve? Where is the face of God to whom I can pray? The answer is simple. That naked one. That lonely one. That unwanted one is my brother and my sister. If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

There are numerous biblical passages which encourage faithful believers to take part in service. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ tells his disciples what has become known as the Golden Rule, “Always treat others the way you would like to be treated” (Matthew, Chapter 7, Verse 12.) In the second letter to the Corinthians, it is written, “...For as a piece of willing service this is not only a contribution towards the needs of God’s people; more than that, it overflows in a flood of Thanksgiving to God...” (2 Corinthians, Chapter 9, Verse 12)



At the turn of this century, many Americans found religious practice to be hollow. As many Americans stopped attending church, religious leaders like Walter Rauschenbusch (a Baptist who lived in upstate New York) argued that religion could be renewed only if people saw their service to God in terms of their service to society — a society beset by class conflicts and industrial crises. Only by making religious teachings become real in everyday personal relations could Americans renew their long tradition of

religious belief. Rauschenbusch argued that the “Kingdom of God” prophesized in Christian teachings (a time when all souls will be made equal in the eyes of the Lord) needed to become a reality on earth. Only by becoming involved in serving humanity and making human relations more equal could the faithful find the real purpose of religious belief. Later religious thinkers who believed religion should direct moral behavior, especially Martin Luther King, were deeply influenced by Walter Rauschenbusch.

In addition, people like Mother Theresa, Mohondus Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day and the many religious missionaries who died in wartime struggles in Latin America and elsewhere had a profound impact on religious people and communities in this country. Their efforts and the stories that were written about them have shaped some of the contemporary thinking about the importance of contributing to the well-being of humanity. After all, the bumper sticker, “If You Want Peace, Work for Justice” was written by the Catholic Pope John Paul.



In addition to advocating service as a way of expressing faith in God and fellowship with others, Christian religious advocates of service have also hoped that those being served would become stronger believers in God in the process. Such thoughts guided many of this country's missionary efforts. While caring for the sick and destitute, religious believers would share the "Good News" of Christianity and convert new believers. This aspect of religious service receives much criticism, since people fear that religious acts of charity might become nothing more than vehicles for religious indoctrination. They argue that religious belief should not play any part in caring for those in need.

Charity/Philanthropy

Often churches set up organized charities to inspire members to service. But charity and philanthropy also developed independent of religion. Foundations were set up to make it easier for people to perform charitable work that the government could not and was not expected to do. Instead of the inspiration of God, charitable persons could be motivated by a sense of "noblesse oblige" — giving to one's community inspired by a sense of sacrifice and nobility. In his book, *Gratitude*, William Buckley advocates for those who want to show thanks to society for all they have been given to serve, "arousing a desire uniquely one's own to help a society." (48)

"FOUNDATIONS WERE SET UP TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR PEOPLE TO PERFORM CHARITABLE WORK THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT AND WAS NOT EXPECTED TO DO."

Many individuals who amassed large sums of wealth at the turn of the century (people with names like Carnegie and Rockefeller) felt a need to give to the society from which they had profited. Andrew Carnegie set up libraries, while Ford and Rockefeller set up charitable trusts. Carnegie explained his charitable and philanthropic work in these terms: "Wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if it had been distributed in small sums to the people themselves." From this perspective, business leaders must give something back to their community and therefore reassert their leadership role in society. In addition, philanthropy stresses the notion that charity benefits everyone involved, including those serving and those being served.

Other people have criticized this approach, saying that these were robber-barons assuaging their consciences through charity. They find fault with the idea that the wealthy, powerful and fortunate can express their social responsibility and feel good through sporadic generosity, instead of making efforts to correct the inequities in society. They question the adage that philanthropists sometimes assume, "The poor will always be with us."



Critics of this traditional view of charitable and philanthropic service also challenge the notion that the person doing the service is necessarily better than the people receiving the service. For instance, Jane Addams believed that philanthropic service (a term she didn't really like) provided a chance for people doing service to find meaning in their lives. Addams wrote at the turn of the 20th century and believed that women especially were given no real purpose in life other than to live for their husbands. She believed that work at a settlement house (community centers within poor, often immigrant neighborhoods) could teach young women who worked there about the different traditions and beliefs of the people being served (who were normally newly arrived immigrants from Southern Europe) and thereby find a richer meaning for their lives. In essence, the philanthropic service actually meant just as much for the charitable actors as for those being served.

Professional Social Work

The idea that service had to be voluntary and dependent on wealthy individuals who were not necessarily competent at providing useful help struck some Americans as wrong. Philanthropic service was too haphazard and dependent on the whims of the wealthy. There were not enough good hearted people — not enough Jane Addams's in the world — to correct all of America's social problems. Some Americans believed that the goods that service provided for people needed to be more regularly and widely distributed. The first arguments for government's responsibility to provide services through a "welfare state" developed around the turn of the 20th century. These arguments accompanied a movement to regularize and professionalize these services and an emerging belief that service to poor people needed to be run by systematic administrators and that those who provided

service needed to be trained. There was no longer any hope that those being served would be converted to any particular religious creed. Belief was not to be the domain of social services. Social work was to be a technical practice.

And so universities started offering courses and degrees in social work. The standard way of doing social work is to practice "case work" where different individuals being served are treated as separate cases and are monitored for progress towards self-sufficiency. There are numerous things social workers learn in their schooling process, but this is not the place to delve into these. The major argument of social workers is that service needs to be regularized and be done by people who are professionally trained. Many religious organizations and foundations have also incorporated standard social work practice as their way of addressing social problems.

"There were not enough good hearted people — not enough Jane Addams's in the world — to correct all of America's social problems."



Others have criticized professional social work, saying that it tries to define and individualize social problems, and that it categorizes and draw boundaries between tightly interwoven issues and problems. Critics of professional social work also assert that the field sometimes exacerbates the problems it purports to correct. By concentrating on people's deficiencies and needs and by specializing care and service, they believe that social service professionals jeopardize communities. And by relegating to professional institutions what was once taken care of by communities, we have forgotten to involve citizens themselves in solving social problems. As John McKnight states, "Despite legions of therapists, social workers and bureaucrats, many believe we have created crime-making corrections systems, sickness-making health systems and stupid-making schools."

Democratic Community Organizing

It's hard to talk about this conception of service without talking about a very important person — Saul Alinsky. Saul Alinsky got his reputation in Chicago during the Great Depression, where soon afterwards he became, "the father of community organizing." He began as a staunch critic of professional social work, arguing that social workers turned people into clients incapable of acting on their own. He took as his motto: "*Never do for others what they can do for themselves.*"

This motto informed his work with the Industrial Areas Foundation, a group that trained community organizers who went into neighborhoods which faced pressing problems — housing problems, poor sewage treatment, etc. Organizers were trained to work with citizens and identify issues in their neighborhoods which could be collectively solved

"Never do for others what they can do for themselves."

with other neighbors. Then organizers worked with local leaders who would try to solve community problems as democratically as possible — that is, with as much citizen initiative that could be mustered. In the process of solving community problems, local citizens would be educated about how power worked and how they could hold politicians accountable to their demands. In the end, the community organizer hopes that local communities will eventually be able to organize on their own. Essentially, the organizer works to put him or herself out of a job.

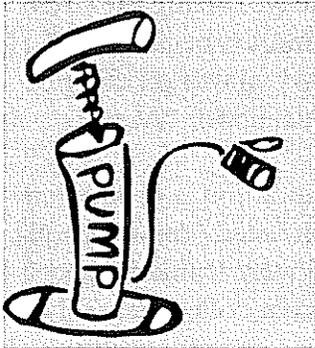
A well known group that uses this community organizing model is COPS (Citizens Organized for Public Service) in San Antonio, Texas. In the 1980's, COPS managed to win important victories through their combination of problem-solving efforts and political work. Not only did they clean up their predominantly poor neighborhoods and get sewage lines brought in, they fought for equal opportunities and the end to discrimination against Mexican Americans in housing, credit and employment.

Community organizing strategies have been adopted by many groups and cities since Alinsky started to practice and write about his approach. During the civil rights movement



and the subsequent Black Power movement, people provided services to others in a way that they believed was connected to a fight for political and social power. For example, groups like the Gray Panthers, a multiracial social justice and protest group, ran daycare programs and food pantries while at the same time they organized for social justice. The controversial Hells Angels have organized in New York and other cities to both keep their streets safe and fight police brutality.

People have criticized democratic community organizing on different counts. Some argue that poor, disenfranchised people should dedicate their energy individually — getting an education to obtain good jobs so that they can gain access to the things they need. They assert that community organizers distract people from being successful by deluding them with ideas of social harmony and



justice. Others state that community organizers are too instrumental — they don't take into account the processes that people must go through to develop and nurture truly democratic institutions. Another common criticism of modern community organizing is that organizers themselves don't follow Alinsky's rule. Instead of facilitating community members efforts to identify and solve problems, organizers become the central, most powerful force in a community-based social movement. Since they control much of the process, when they leave a community, people are no more empowered than when they arrived.

Service as Democratic Citizenship

This idea has much in common with the last one. But it does not stress the role of the organizer. Instead, the stress is on the role service can play in the education of all citizens. Service helps people understand the responsibilities that are required of citizens of a free society. A democratic citizen has “rights” (the right to free speech, the right to assembly) but needs to balance these rights with duties.

Service renews in everyone a sense that they have obligations to their fellow citizens and thus recreates the bonds necessary for healthy social interaction. This model stresses that everyone, from children to the elderly, the very wealthy to the most destitute, has resources and talents that must be put to work for the sake of democracy. By working together on common projects, we build a stronger nation, where differences are respected and individuals can learn to relate to one another as fellow citizens with equally vested interests in the state of our neighborhoods, schools, communities, parks, ecosystems — in short, our society. Through service, we come to a better understanding of our responsibility and our power within a democracy.



EXERCISE ONE

GROUP DISCUSSION ON MOTIVATIONS



Examining our own motivations to serve and recognizing that people come to service with different understandings of their involvement is important. It leads to a better understanding of the relationship between service and society and it highlights service's place in our nation's history. Current efforts follow hundreds of years of formal and informal community engagement through service.

Provide time for group members to think about the following questions. Then break them into groups of four or five to engage in discussion. Ask for a recorder to take notes on the conversation and report back to the larger group.

Questions

1. Which set of motivations best represents your own belief about service? Religion? Philanthropy? Professional Social Work? Democratic Community Organizing? Democratic Citizenship Education?
2. How might one's conception of service affect the way in which one performs community service? Why do conceptions have consequences in action?
3. Do you believe that one of these sets of motivations work best? Which one?
4. Have your motivations changed as you have done service?



EXERCISE TWO

EXAMINING CONFLICTS BETWEEN ORIENTATIONS TOWARDS SERVICE



Historically, the different motivations for service that we described above have often conflicted with one another. This is partially due to the intended goals of service — each tradition prioritizes different goals. For example, religious-based service sometimes prioritizes converting those served to the server’s religious beliefs, while professional social work emphasizes assisting individuals with their needs on secular terms. The models of service often view the person or group that are served differently, as well. In professional social work models, those served are often referred to as clients or “cases,” while democratic citizenship education models stress that all the people engaged are fellow citizens or members of a democratic community.

Some traditions of service argue that we need broad social changes in order to ensure a healthy and prosperous nation; others believe that we have achieved health and prosperity and service is needed to take care of those people who will always be at the bottom. Of course this creates conflict. Debates rage on about the actual consequences of service in our society and on the most useful and meaningful way to contribute through service. In the following exercise, you will have the opportunity to examine the ways that different approaches to service conflict with one another in real ways.

The Roles (Conflicts)

Group members should choose (or be given, depending on preference) an identity for the discussion. It is important that participants “get into” the perspective that they are representing — to think hard about what a religiously motivated person might think, etc. You can either choose people to participate and have the rest of the group listen, assign more than one person to a viewpoint, or break into small groups. Each group must have a facilitator.

The suggested perspectives are:

- ⊙ Religiously Motivated Server
- ⊙ Philanthropist
- ⊙ Social Worker
- ⊙ Community Organizer
- ⊙ Citizen
- ⊙ (Facilitator)



The Scenario

A poor community's day care center burned to the ground and cannot be rebuilt. Families are in a state of panic; without affordable and accessible childcare, parents have had to care for their children, skipping work, school and other programs. An immediate solution to the child care problem must be found, before people begin to lose their jobs or assistance payments. At the same time, a long term plan must be devised to deal with the limited opportunities for safe places for children in the neighborhood.

Gathered together for a meeting to discuss the problem are people from within the community and outside of it. They all want to help solve the problem, but each has very different ideas and agendas for solving the problem. A citizen, a local community organizer, a social worker from a large human services agency, a wealthy philanthropist and a nun are gathered with a facilitator. Each person should summarize their proposal in five minutes or less, and explain why they think theirs is the best solution.

The Discussion

The role of the facilitator is to identify conflicts in the philosophies and approaches. If the philanthropist says he will just give money to have a new daycare built, encourage the community organizer to question the potential costs of that to the community. (Who will design it, who gets to decide where it goes, how long will it take, who will get jobs there, why does the philanthropist want to do it? are all likely questions.) If the social worker suggests that all of the families previously served by the day care center become clients of the agency where she works, so that they can access free child care, encourage others to challenge that?

Follow Up Questions

1. How many different proposals were there?
2. How did they differ — in the way they viewed the families and children, in the way they saw the process of problem-solving, in the ultimate solution?
3. What were practical differences?
4. What were conceptual differences?
5. On what criteria would you judge the proposals?
6. Based on these criteria, which is the best?



IS YOUR SERVICE DEMOCRATIC? TAKE THE TEST AND SEE



If you hope to learn about community and democracy through service, the efforts you engage in should reflect the values and attributes of a genuinely democratic endeavor. You can evaluate your service project using many different criteria, for instance: How many hours of work were contributed? How many people were involved? How did you improve the problem you were addressing? How many people did you educate about an issue? But if you want to assess whether or not your service project is nurturing public and democratic life, you'll have to ask a different set of questions.

We have developed the following test in order to help you evaluate the democratic strengths and weaknesses of your service. These Yes/No questions should also help you to plan projects and to rethink the way you are getting things done. You should also think about the consequences of these questions — that is, beyond just “Yes” and “No.”

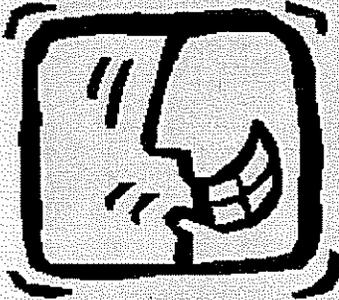
THE TEST

1. Does your service enhance public spaces and public institutions?
2. Can you articulate the public significance of your service project?
2. Does your service get others involved in community and public life?
3. Does your service build on the capacities and strengths of members of the community where you are involved?
4. Does your service help to build relationships between people in the community where you are involved?
5. Does your service address the underlying causes to the problems you confront?
6. Is your service visible?
7. Does your service enable you and others to develop civic skills and talents?
8. Do you have the opportunity to see your service through to a successful conclusion?
9. Do all the people involved in the service project (service participants, community/organization leaders, the people served or affected by service and other citizens involved in the process) decide together what is to be accomplished? Do they all engage in planning and designing the project?
10. Are ongoing decisions made collectively or do certain people call the shots?
11. Do all the people involved in the service project have the opportunity and structure through which to evaluate the ongoing work and raise questions about the process?
12. Are all the people involved in the service project accountable for the success or failure of the endeavor?

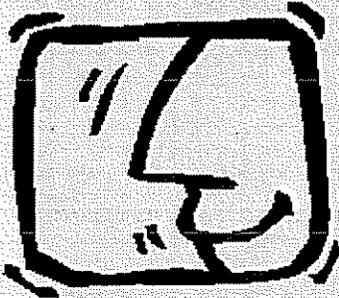
The structure for this test was developed using the criteria established by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs.



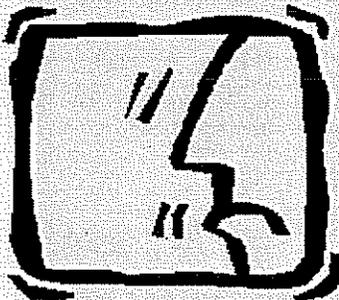
THE SCORE



Democratic Denizen. If you answered 'Yes' to eight or more questions, Congratulations! Your service project reflects the values and attributes of a thriving democracy. Be sure to remain committed to the processes and goals that you have developed in conjunction with other members of your community. Continue to think about the effects of these democratic processes. Your work can be an important model for others to learn from. Share your efforts and tell the story of your work.



Democratic Dabbler. If you answered 'Yes' to four to seven questions, you are obviously doing good work. You are making an effort to build democratic process into to your service project and are taking public issues seriously. Ask yourselves why your project still falls a bit short in nurturing democratic processes? Do you think there are trade offs? What have you gotten in exchange for a less democratically focused project?



Democratic Disappointment. If you answered 'Yes' to less than four questions, you need to look closely at your service project and perhaps rethink its design and implementation. Who benefits from the project? Who makes decisions? Who takes credit or blame? Are people involved and invested in your project? Why or why not? What do you think you can do to introduce democratic processes into your work? Are there obstacles to doing this? How might you overcome the obstacles?



