

Incorporating Meaningful Reflection to Youth Activities

Why should AmeriCorps members facilitate reflection with their youth participants?

- Revisiting planned activities, outcomes and interactions through service allow youth to carefully consider the group's meaning and benefits.
- Youth begin to measure their personal changes and contributions.
- Encourages youth ownership for more meaningful input on *their* activities.
- AmeriCorps members better connect with local youth, learn valuable insights, and turn positive interactions into high quality engagement.
- Youth participating in feedback nurtures youth leadership.

Despite the worthwhile benefits from regular reflection, it is often the most neglected piece of great programs. It's natural to plan an event, focus on executing a successful event, and then report back the "stats." Sitting down to reflect on what happened, how it happened and the results can seem like extra "homework."

Reflection, though, is one of the most important pieces of the service equation because it allows you to gauge what's going on. A "gut-check" can guide you in future plans.

We learn not from doing, but by thinking about what we do.

-Unknown

Taking action, making change, experiencing new adventures...these are awesome reasons to get out and *do something*. But the richness of the experience, the learning from the experience, these are equally important if we are going to *transform* society through action.

ONCE AGAIN: Reflection is integral to learning, because it helps us build self-awareness, strengthen personal and team growth, and improves our action for the next time.

How can we intentionally use reflection strategies in our daily routine and activities?

- Ask youth to share one word related to what they thought about their experience. Make it clear that you're in the process of learning. If a participant makes a negative comment, ask the person afterwards to share any suggestions that could help do the work better.
- Huddle up for a few minutes following the activity and initiate a two-way conversation—no one dominates. Let the youth do the talking, asking, and sharing of ideas. This is an immediate reaction to what just took place.
- At any time...before an event, during it, or the day after, ask youth to share their HIGHS and LOWS. This reflection opens up everything that can be happening in their lives. Tell them to choose ONE High and ONE Low from

the activity, their day, or their week. A High is a highlight: a good thing going on or what has made them happy. A Low is a lowlight: acknowledging something that got them down or bummed out. Expressing those feelings allows the youth to take stock and see how they honestly react to life events. If everyone shares, then a trusting network begins to form.

- Ask youth to journal about hot topics, life events and how they wish to see their peers and community grow stronger. Provide framework for how it will be used (will anyone read it, will they be asked to read it aloud from time-to-time?) and encourage inclusion of favorite quotations, musical lyrics, etc.
- AmeriCorps members and advisors can journal or take notes about activities, their role as a supervisor, recognize group dynamics and note changes in youth over time.
- Have the group stand in a circle. Holding the end of a ball of string, hand the ball off to a participant. Ask them to reflect on a particular question (i.e. what was something new you learned today?). Once they have answered the question, ask them to hold onto their piece of the string and pass the ball onto someone else. Continue the process until everyone has reflected on the question, and has a section of string in their hands. When completed, you should have something that looks like a web. When they are all done talking, make some points about the interconnectedness of people; how they are all part of the solution, for if one person had not contributed to their service projects the outcome would have been different, etc.
- Take the youth on an imaginary tour of their service experience. Ask them to find a comfortable position (lie on the floor, their head on the table, lounge in a chair) and close eyes. Play relaxing music at a low volume. Ask participants to become aware of their breathing, ask them to leave their present thoughts and clear their minds. Once they appear to have relaxed, ask them to begin remembering their service experience. To assist them in remembering their experience mention common events, allow participants to remember how they felt before they did their experience, what their expectations were, what happened in their preparation, how they felt during their service experience. To stimulate their thinking you might mention some of what you remembered. Slowly bring them back to the present. Ask them to become aware of their surroundings, again concentrating on their breathing, and open their eyes when they are ready. Ensure that a quiet tone is maintained. Continue to play music, and ask participants to share their recollections with another person and finally have people make comments to the whole group.
- Plan a way to recognize accomplishments—create rewards! Share in the group's progress and allow youth a voice to share their feelings about those successes!

REMEMBER! Provide youth more *encouragement* (support that inspires confidence and a will to develop), rather than *praise* (approval or admiration of achievements or good qualities).

PLEASE! Keep reflection times confidential. Youth need to know they can trust everyone. Be clear if their comments will be shared anonymously or with an identity.