

Stages of Group Development for AmeriCorps and Other National Service Programs

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When teams and groups join together, they take on a life of their own, each forming a unique personality and energy level. One common factor in groups is the developmental stages they experience, comparable to stages of individual growth: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Each stage has its own characteristics and requirements; each stage builds on the previous ones. The stages in the chart below are generally accepted classifications of development, identified first by Bruce Tuckman and Mary Ann Jensen. They have been tailored with AmeriCorps and other national service programs in mind. Please note that the timelines are average; members and individual groups will often develop at different paces.

FORMING

Characteristics Within the Group	Tips for Members
Stage 1: "Trying to find my place."	Stage 1: "Trying to find my place."
<p>Group begins to experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of excitement, anticipation, and optimism; also feelings of suspicion, fear, and anxiety about the job ahead • Identification of its reason for existence • Self-orientation • Identification of the task to be accomplished • Exploration and discovery of how to interact with one another as a group <p>As the group forms and matures, natural leaders will emerge. The members in these roles will change several times during this phase of group development.</p>	<p>Observe your group so you can help move the energy within it toward building a strong team; you can't control it, but you can make sure it stays positive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve yourself; involve others • Be a positive force • Smile, smile, smile...and laugh as often as you need to • Be informed; read everything you can about the program and about the subject or population with whom you will be working • Be open-minded; be professional; be yourself • Voice your thoughts • Commit to having a good year • Start a journal

Tips for Staff

Stage 1: Observe

Observe the group in action as much as possible. Observe how some people lead and some follow. Notice how members interact, the social skills they use, their mannerisms—all tell a story.

- Be patient—it's a virtue
- Be prepared—a good leader always is
- Be knowledgeable—you are the expert, so know your material
- Be a team—the example you set as a staff will influence the members
- Be a leader—by being a good follower if that is what is needed
- Be a counselor—members may need a shoulder to lean on
- Be a facilitator—help members think things through
- Be a supervisor—like it or not, it's part of the job
- Have members establish group ground rules, the processes for enforcing violations, and the consequences
- Be a teacher—be energetic; make the material alive and not boring
- Develop a common vision and mission

- Have a swearing in ceremony presented by graduating members
- Create a group identity
- Discuss values and start developing an ethic of service

Training for members:

- Development goal—transitioning for the future
- Have workshops on life after AmeriCorps; provide information on job search paths and educational opportunities
- Have presentations on careers, colleges, and family issues

STORMING

Characteristics Within the Group	Tips for Members
Stage 2: “Hey! I’ve got something to say here!”	Stage 2: “Build, Bridge, Understand”
<p>Some group behaviors and attitudes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negativity • Dissatisfaction • Hostility • Crisis mode • Adjustment anxiety <p>Differences and suppressed tension begin to surface Members further define the energy level they dedicate to the task or project at hand; questions arise during this period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do I feel passionate about the purpose of this program? - Do I like how they are planning to meet the needs? - What am I going to do or say that will get my opinion heard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a motivator! Someone is always in need of some building up • Be a positive force; maintain a sense of humor—it truly is good medicine • Accept and be open-minded—no one is perfect, and a closed-mind doesn’t accomplish anything • Know the issues before expressing your opinions, and then voice your thoughts clearly • Think about your motivation - it's easy to cross the line to anger • Write in your journal—it’s a good place to vent • Be aware of others’ feelings, listen to others, and leave the personality clashes at home • Think about and prepare for your future • Commit to letting nothing ruin your year!

Tips for Staff

Stage 2: Team Building, Reflections, and Training

The storming phase is just what it implies—staff should know members and their personalities by now, how they get along with each other, and how each tend to react to situations. Presence in the field is highly recommended to maintain order and ensure situations do not get out of hand, making the entire program look bad.

- See Stage 1 for all of the things to be, and add mediator—use your good skills to handle disagreements
- Arrange for group meetings with venting sessions—allow members’ voices to be heard
- Set and maintain a positive tone for the group
- Use job swapping as a way to prevent boredom
- Make sure ground rules are understood and observed
- Break workloads into manageable steps
- Take time for fun activities
- Allow members to contribute changes to the program
- Spend time one-to-one with members
- Develop a common vision and mission

Training for members:

- Continue with trainings in Stage 1
- Conflict resolution
- Communication skills
- Self-esteem building exercises
- Continue to discuss values & developing an ethic of service
- Discuss group dynamics

NORMING

Characteristics Within the Group

Stage 3: "We're all in this Together!"

Some group behaviors:

- Cohesion around shared goals
- Resolution of conflict
- More acceptance of diversity in the group
- Reconciliation; show of affection
- Re-evaluation

Members have seen the coming together (forming), the semi-separation (storming), and now they have reconciled themselves to working together (norming) despite their differences with a new definition of purpose.

Tips for Members

Stage 3: "Motivate, Collaborate, Create"

See Stage 2—be a motivator and watch your own motivation; maintain your sense of humor and be a positive force

- Be a leader—if you're called to the role, try it out and use it to get things done
- Be yourself
- Voice your thoughts
- Collaborate—assist each other to complete a goal or solve a problem
- Continue writing in your journal
- Think creatively

Tips for Staff

Stage 3: "We're all in this together!"

Members are trying out how they can best work together; more solid leaders merge and must be nurtured and encouraged. Make sure that these leaders have the skills to lead, and also that they have the respect and approval of the other members.

- Be happy—you made it through storming
- Be a cheerleader—encourage your group and recognize them for the good work they are doing

Training for members:

- Continue with trainings in Stage 1
- Stronger community awareness
- Community reporting
- Initiative development skills
- Team development (ropes course, activity day, etc.)
- Personal development (career planning, budgeting, etc.)

PERFORMING

Characteristics Within the Group	Tips for Members
Stage 4: "Getting Things Done!"	Stage 4: "Focus, Produce"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesiveness • Teamwork • Leadership • Performance <p>The group is starting to utilize its newly found "norms of trust," and can begin focusing on the service to be done; there should be enough drive, creativity, and cohesiveness to take on most tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve yourself and others • Be a positive force • Enjoy the laughter! • Read about the subject or population with whom you are working • Be professional • Continue thinking about what you will do after your service year • Continue writing in your journal

Tips for Staff

Stage 4: Promote Productivity

As the group enters the phase of creative and constructive service, be aware and attentive toward keeping them on track and productive. Let the group assume more responsibility, but remain available for problems that might arise. Members will emerge more and more as leaders and as a team.

- Involve the members more in the community
- Assist members in implementing their decisions
- Involve the group in community events
- Stay attentive to their needs

Help members evaluate the group and realize that the group is not an end in itself—that most of the work takes place outside the group

Training for members:

- Continue with trainings in Stage 1
- Development goal—better community awareness
- Communication skills (public)
- More project-related skills
- Project planning and development

ADJOURNING

Characteristics Within the Group	Tips for Members
Stage 5: "Now What?"	Stage 5: "Prepare, Think, Dedicate"
<p>Possible group feelings or reactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negativity • Dissatisfaction • Hostility • Purging • Crisis <p>The group is realizing the end of service is near; it has been a year of sharing and growing with each other and now members are going to separate. For many, the group has been a safety net and truly has become their community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to think about and prepare for your future • Build bridges—goodbye doesn't have to mean forever • Enjoy the laughter, and don't be afraid to cry • Voice your thoughts and feelings • Give staff suggestions on how things could be done even better next year • Dedicate yourself to being a person of service for the rest of your life!

Tips for Staff

Stage 5: Promote Interaction, Reflection

Some members may exhibit negative behavior—be aware that some people hate to say goodbye, and members are also wondering about the future. Offer ample opportunities for interactive discussions and times for reflections. Staff may lead the sessions, but allow free rein for the group to express themselves as needed.

- Speak to each member individually about the experience; thank each one for their part in the year
- Stay attentive to the needs of the group
- Continue to help members prepare for the future; offer suggestions for those still unsure of what to do next
- Have a graduation ceremony with recognition awards; call the press for coverage of the event
- Have a going away party, a banquet, and/or appreciation day
- Place accomplishments in perspective

Training for members:

- Continue with trainings in Stage 1; this will be a time when members realize how important it has been to begin this in the first month.

Charting the Progression of AmeriCorps Members and Group Development

