SERVICE YEAR®

TOOLKIT:

Engaging Individuals After High School in Service Years

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INTRODUCTION

At Service Year Alliance, we strive to make a service year a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. Central to this mission is our belief that everyone who wants to serve should have the opportunity, and that through service individuals are able to strengthen their communities, transform their own lives, and fuel civic renewal.

Service years provide transformational experiences for individuals as they serve their communities and there is under-realized potential for them to offer unique post-secondary pathways. America's growing need to expand and strengthen postsecondary pathways was only exacerbated by the growing number of disconnected youth during the coronavirus pandemic. Coupling this need with the historic recruitment challenges facing service year programs across the country, we see a real opportunity for service year programs to develop new recruitment pipelines while providing an unmatched opportunity for young people to find their path, build connections, and support communities while building the necessary skills for long-term success.

In October 2020, Service Year Alliance and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation partnered to understand how service years could be a solution to the challenges individuals after high school were facing across the nation. This toolkit shares our journey to identify and elevate strategies to engage, recruit, and support more individuals after high school in a service year, particularly those from racially diverse backgrounds and economically disadvantaged communities.

For the purpose of this toolkit, the terms "individuals after high school" and "high school graduate" are used interchangeably, though we recognize that many individuals complete high school by earning their GED. Henceforth in this toolkit, we have defined "high school graduate" to include any person that has obtained a high school credential including a General Education Diploma.

In light of the coronavirus pandemic, the lives of many high school graduates were disrupted and their futures made uncertain. In Measure of America's report, A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus, and its subsequent update, it is estimated that the number of disconnected youth would swell to almost one-quarter of all young people, or nearly nine million youth and young adults in the immediate future. This impacted their intended postsecondary pathways, and left them without the necessary knowledge, experience, and support systems required to develop and navigate a successful life plan. These challenges were magnified for high school graduates from communities of color and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, compounding existing challenges such as lack of social capital, limited knowledge of and access to career sectors, and insufficient support to identify higher education opportunities.

Within the service year field, there is often hesitation about engaging high school graduates and they are often viewed as "too risky" when it comes to being able to retain them for the full service year. Through this work, we found that when service year programs provide support and resources to prioritize corps member development, it not only increases the likelihood that high school graduates will engage in and complete service year experiences successfully, it creates a stronger experience for all of their corps members, and helps programs achieve their overall recruitment and retention goals. Engaging high school graduates in your service year program is an investment in young people and encourages psychological diversity amongst service year programs and organizations, which can improve the experience for corps members and the service being delivered to beneficiaries. An inclusive service year program design that includes the recruitment of high school graduates also allows for a more robust candidate pool and the development of talent pipelines across various sectors.

This guide shares the steps we took, in partnership with service year programs and stakeholders from across the country, to identify strategies and practices for engaging individuals after high school in a service year. You'll also be introduced to tools that will help you assess your program's readiness to engage individuals after high school and ensure that all of your corps members have a positive and transformative experience throughout their service.

DEFINING QUALITY

Establishing Goals and Defining Quality

When we began this work, we were striving to find a path to more individuals serving after high school, so that we could expand the candidate pool for programs and better position service years as postsecondary pathways. To pursue this, we established three primary goals for the project:

1. To define what a quality service experience looks like for individuals after high school;
2. To explore and test practices with service year programs that support meeting the definition of quality; and
3. To identify and unblock common barriers that prevent more individuals from having access to service years following high school.

To get started, we gathered baseline data to understand what was already working well and what challenges programs were facing in engaging this population. Through a landscape scan, including conversations with over 60 service year programs, youth-serving organizations, and workforce development agencies, we explored different practices to offer stronger supports for individuals with varying education levels, lived experiences, racial backgrounds, or those that come from economically disadvantaged communities. The practices that exemplar programs were embedding into their models fell within a baseline set of five standards:

- Program Culture & Environment
- Outreach & Recruitment
- Corps Member Development & Training
- Corps Member Supervision
- Corps Member Support

The baseline data collected through the initial landscape scan allowed us to analyze the standard practices that contribute to quality service year programming for high school graduates and to outline an initial quality definition. Along with the definition, we built upon the five baseline standards and established specific quality indicators to represent what we believe is essential for engaging, recruiting, and supporting individuals after high school.

QUALITY STANDARDS

QUALITY INDICATORS

HELPFUL TIP

QUALITY DEFINITION

Service year programs that bring an intentional, holistic approach to their corps members' experience, as defined by the quality indicators below, are better equipped to provide a transformational experience that prepares corps members for life during and after service. To support individuals with different lived experiences, they incorporate practices to foster inclusivity, advance equity in the program's culture, and develop pathways to post-service opportunities for corps members. This is a systemic approach to service years, with equity at the center, that creates the right conditions to support this population through service and contributes to the development of the next generation of leaders and professionals.

Quality Standards and Indicators:

PROGRAM CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

An organizational culture that welcomes diversity, celebrates differences, values lived experiences and personal journeys, and fosters an environment where individuals can show up authentically in service.

Indicators:

- *Promote an Environment/Culture of Inclusivity and Belonging for its Corps*
- *Provide Support to Corps Members through an Asset-Based Framework*
- *Highlight Opportunities for Skills Attainment and Leadership Development Opportunities*

OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

A well-developed outreach and recruitment plan that identifies the target population that may be most interested in serving in the program. The outreach and recruitment plan highlights what an average day looks like for a corps member, the benefits of a service year including the skills development for corps members, the support provided to corps members during the service term, and the impact the corps members service will have on the beneficiaries of the service.

Indicators:

- *Build Recruitment Practices that Uplift the Voices of Corps Members and Alumni*
- *Highlight the Benefits and Impact of the Service on the Corps Member*
- *Increase Recruitment Partners to Better Engage High School Graduates*

CORPS MEMBER TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

A defined training curriculum to prepare corps members for service and support corps members in their professional and personal development. The member development and training ensures corps members are prepared to deliver service activities and demonstrate skills attainment for life-long success as future civic leaders and professionals.

Indicators:

- *Develop Post-Service Pathways to Education and Career Opportunities*
- *Expand Engagement of Proximate Leaders and Industry Professionals Who Have Similar Life Stories to Your Corps Members*
- *Embed Industry-Recognized Training and Credentialing Opportunities*
- *Cultivate Mentorship Opportunities that Provide Feedback and Support*
- *Promote Social Capital Development and Relationship Building*
- *Map Skills Development and Attainment to Post-Service Opportunities*

CORPS MEMBER SUPERVISION

Well-trained staff that provides oversight and guidance to corps members during their service year. Member supervision is delivered at a regular cadence and offers direct feedback to corps members as they navigate their service activities.

Indicators:

- *Establish Professional Expectations for Before, During, and After Service*

CORPS MEMBER SUPPORT

Dedicated program staff, volunteers, partners, or even second-year corps members that support and assist members while serving. Member support incorporates mentorship and prepares corps members for life after service.

Indicators:

- *Enhance In-Service Coaching Opportunities and Feedback Channels for Corps Members*
- *Understand and Build Structures to Support a Wide Range of Needs*

Assessing Quality: Creating the Continuum

Our next step was to test the quality definition and understand what it takes to make progress against these indicators. First, we needed to translate the definition into a usable tool – the Quality Continuum – so that programs could identify where they are on their path to quality. This Continuum allows programs to self-assess their current practices and strategies geared toward creating high-quality service year experiences for individuals after high school. It is designed to fuel an ongoing, iterative process with continuous improvements each program year. By examining their own approaches and practices, programs are able to self-assess as either Beginner, Intermediate, or Advanced across each indicator.

Second, we recruited service year programs to participate in our High School Transitions Learning Cohort to test our assumptions of the quality definition, as well as create a learning community and testing ground for strategies and practices tied to the quality indicators. Based on the information gathered in the landscape review, this Cohort included service year programs from varied geographical regions, sizes, and interventions. The commonality among each Cohort participant was that they were already engaging or were seeking to engage more individuals after high school in their service year program. Over a nine-month period, the Cohort committed to working collectively to assess their program models, identify specific barriers and challenges, and amend their corps member training and development processes to provide quality and supportive experiences for individuals after high school. We are grateful to the following service year programs, whose unique approaches and perspectives are represented in this series:

- *American Youthworks, Austin, TX*

- *Cherry Health, Grand Rapids, MI*

- *City Year, National*

- *CivicWorks, Baltimore, MD*

- *GRID Alternatives, National*

- *Improve Your Tomorrow, Stockton, CA*

- *Partners for Education at Berea College, Berea, KY*

- *Serve Philadelphia VISTA Program, Philadelphia, PA*

Once we established the Cohort and finalized the Quality Continuum, Service Year Alliance worked intentionally with Cohort participants to determine priority areas they were focused on and had them self-assess their service year program. The graphic below shows the percentage of Cohort participants and where they landed across the Continuum based on their self-assessments.

PROGRAM CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

37.5% Beginner	37.5% Intermediate	25% Advanced

OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

37.5% Beginner	12.5% Intermediate	50% Advanced

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

75% Beginner	12.5% Intermediate	12.5% Advanced

CORPS MEMBER SUPERVISION

50% Beginner	25% Intermediate	25% Advanced

CORPS MEMBER SUPPORT

37.5% Beginner	50% Intermediate	12.5% Advanced

The Cohort programs' self-assessments on the Continuum revealed that they were all in different parts of their journey, so we worked with each program to identify one to three areas they wanted to advance during their nine-month engagement with the Cohort. Throughout the engagement, we facilitated small group conversations on a monthly basis to learn from each others' experiences with specific practices, understand the successes and barriers they encountered along the way, and identify shared solutions. Additionally, we utilized the self-assessments and Cohort conversations to identify the most prevalent and challenging barriers to advancing quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through intentional engagement with stakeholders, proximate leaders, consulting partners, the High School Transitions Cohort, and high school graduates, we identified key recommendations for service year programs that want to provide quality experiences for individuals after high school:

- **Commit to Advancing Equity at Your Organization** – When your organization builds its programming with equity at the core, you are better prepared to meet your corps members where they are and help them to identify their strengths, skills, abilities, and talents to better deliver your service intervention, while also advancing their personal and professional goals during service.

- **Foster a Belonging Culture** – An integral part of fostering a belonging culture is rooted in a human-centered approach, with an understanding and acknowledgment of our shared humanity. When you understand ways to build positive social relationships that foster physical, psychological, and social safety to make learning and growth more possible, you will help reduce and break down challenges and barriers that may prevent corps members from bringing their full selves to their service.

- **Incorporate an Asset-based Framework** – Applying an asset-based framework can shift the conversation between your staff and corps members to see one another based on aspirations, contributions, and the value they bring, rather than focusing on personal challenges, barriers, and backgrounds. Incorporating an asset-based approach in your service year program enables you to view and assess individuals beyond their professional experiences while magnifying the assets and strengths gained from their personal and lived experiences.

- **Enhance Intentional Skills Attainment** – Skills development and attainment is one of the primary value-adds for individuals considering a service year after high school. By serving others and communities, your corps members can gain essential skills that prepare them for career or higher education opportunities post-service. By mapping skills and incorporating intentional skills attainment, your corps members will be able to identify, understand, and articulate newly acquired skills, as well as understand where they can practice, hone, or continue to develop new skills that will contribute to ongoing success post-service.

- **Invest in Our Nation's Future Leaders** – The next generation is full of spirited change-makers who are unprecedentedly interested in global and national issues such as climate change, healthcare, poverty, human rights, and inequality. When you open the door for them to serve, your program plays a critical role in strengthening their abilities, shaping their worldviews, and informing their attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs. Intentionally engaging young people in service can equip them with better problem-solving and decision-making skills that will lead to them becoming more effective leaders and build a talent pipeline for high-demand sectors, including national service.

After establishing these key recommendations and exploring where Cohort programs were on their journeys to quality, Service Year Alliance sought opportunities to unblock barriers to more programs advancing quality and being in a position to engage more high school graduates in service. To do so, we invested in three areas:

1. The development of foundational and off-the-shelf tools for any and all programs to utilize and adopt to directly advance the recommendations;

2. Program-specific areas that were less likely to produce immediately scalable solutions, but that would help other programs explore opportunities to advance quality; and

3. Focus groups and digital marketing tests to gather current sentiments from high school graduates to help inform field-wide and program-specific efforts to recruit and engage more high school graduates.

Foundational and Scalable Tools

We took on the development of foundational resources that any program could utilize, to unblock barriers across the Cohort participants in relation to the key recommendations for advancing quality. Our major efforts went into developing curriculum that service year programs could incorporate into existing corps member training plans to advance fostering a belonging culture, incorporating an asset-based framework, and enhancing intentional skills attainment. The curriculum, *Corps Member Curriculum: Strengthening Service Years as a Postsecondary Option* which can be incorporated in part or in its entirety, provides programs a baseline to build upon to provide individuals after high school and all corps members with a supported experience.

Additionally, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is a foundational component for providing a quality service year experience. If your organization has not yet identified core areas of investment related to DEI, the curriculum component focused on fostering a belonging culture is a good step forward on your organization's DEI journey and will help reduce and break down challenges and barriers that may prevent corps members from bringing their full selves to their service. However, this curriculum is just one step on the journey — more work is necessary to develop an equitable, inclusive, and diverse organization for program staff and corps members alike.

Program-Specific Solutions and Case Studies

As we explored other barriers to quality, we identified a few solutions and practices that were not prime for scale, but were best suited to explore specifically at the program level. To do so, Service Year Alliance provided subgrant opportunities for interested Cohort participants to move through the practice of implementing strategies to address these program-specific solutions which are discussed in greater detail later in the toolkit:

- *Developing stronger high school partnerships* – Civic Works worked to build stronger high school partnerships to help inform marketing, recruitment, and retention strategies for high school graduates.
- *Embedding an industry-recognized credential* – American Youthworks worked to implement an industry-recognized credential — the Community Health Worker certification — into their AmeriCorps program.
- *Developing post-service pathways* – Cherry Health worked with employers and higher education partners to build stronger post-service pathways for their corps members who are recent high school graduates; and GRID Alternatives worked with employers, high school graduates, and workforce development partners to identify ways to strengthen post-service outcomes for corps members who are high school graduates.

The Perspective of High School Graduates: Focus Groups and Advertising

In an effort to understand effective strategies to recruit and support individuals after high school in a service year, Strategies 360, a public affairs and communications firm, conducted a focus group of current and recent high school students ages 16 to 19. Participants had all expressed some degree of interest in participating in a national service year with a mix of attitudes toward and awareness of service. Participants were recruited to represent a mix of demographic backgrounds, including age, race, gender, region, urbanicity, and socioeconomic status. The goals for this focus group were to:

- Explore the barriers to service years for current and recent high school students and how to navigate those barriers
- Identify ways in which the service year experience falls short of expectations
- Better understand what the service year experience should include to enhance interest and increase participation among this demographic

From this focus group, we found that young people are not entirely set in their career pathways and future goals. Most of the participants only had a general sense of how they want to spend their futures, and there seemed to be quite a bit of room for more information and persuasion – nearly all participants needed more information on their options before making any firm commitments.

While there is opportunity to peak the interest of youth about service years, a few main barriers rose to the top. The first was the financial benefits. While skills development and gaining experience was important, financial security and the ability to support themselves was essential in order for service years to be seen as a viable option. In order for service year programs to effectively recruit high school graduates into service, they must make the financial benefits clear up front before promoting other benefits, and ideally provide a living wage.

Another barrier was the need for a support network. Most youth are accustomed to having a strong support network in place – from their family and friends, to their church, school, and activities. Participants struggled to envision themselves committing to a full-time opportunity – especially something away from home – where they would need to exist in a self-sufficient and unguided environment. To overcome this

barrier for a younger and more inexperienced demographic like high school graduates, it is clear that service year programs must establish a sense of community and support system for participants, through mentorship or other community building opportunities.

Participants also wanted to know more about the impact of their service – both personally and altruistically. They were interested in the connections they would make with their peers, employers, and through other networking opportunities. Establishing these connections and the communication skills to maintain them was important. For those who were already somewhat interested in service or a service year, they were excited about making a positive impact and working towards a common goal. And, most participants wanted to know what exactly they would be doing and what impact they can have during their service. Throughout the entire discussion they wanted more tangible information about what their service would actually look like and the impact it would have on the community. Being up front about the specifics of your program and the impact it has through its service intervention is important for this younger demographic.

Finally, participants made it clear that they have other things they can be doing that, at first glance, seem a lot like a service year — from volunteering in their community to participating in their church or getting a job. And while skills development and training was an important benefit, it came off as a given that they would be trained during their service year. Instead, they want to gain skills that will help them in the long-run and make them successful in their careers. Programs must make it clear that a service year is a unique and worthwhile experience, and corps members will develop new skills throughout the experience.

Service Year Alliance also ran a digital marketing pilot campaign to test messages, audiences, and platforms for recruiting high school graduates into service years. The pilot campaign reinforced a core element of Service Year Alliance's past research and message testing for all audiences. When marketing to recent high school graduates, it is important to highlight the dual concept that service years provide professional growth and benefits as well as make a community impact. Ads or messages that only focused on personal or professional growth were not as successful — but the dual benefits proved successful and compelling.

Another critical takeaway from the digital marketing pilot, was the essential need for authenticity when marketing to individuals after high school — and to Gen Z more generally. This same finding was clear in the focus group — this demographic wants to be respected. It is important to be clear about what a service year opportunity offers and involves, and programs should consider ways to offer opportunities to youth to ask questions to build trust. Finally, acknowledging that high school graduates are making a big life transition is key. This recognition allows young people to understand that their interests and lives are taken into consideration throughout the service year.

TAKING THIS ON:
HOW TO PURSUE QUALITY

There are many different steps you can take to advance the quality for high school graduates within your program. The best way to get started is to complete your self-assessment and understand where your current practices land within the Quality Continuum. The next section will walk you through how to utilize the Continuum, as well as provide specific program examples to highlight steps you can take across the various indicators.

This Continuum is designed to help your program:

- Identify your designation and placement on the continuum;
- Provide a roadmap for incorporating new strategies and practices that best engage and support high school graduates through a transformational experience; and
- Track progress of quality indicators through a phased approach.

The High School Transitions Quality Continuum outlines three phases – Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced – with incremental steps to help your program incorporate and advance practices that best engage and support high school graduates while serving. Each phase is designed to build on the previous phase. Due to the differences in programming structures and priorities, your program may have advanced steps in a later phase before covering everything in an earlier phase. In this case, indicate any step that your program has completed, and then create an action plan for completing all steps of your program's designation before advancing to the next phase.

Your program will begin by defining its designation on the Continuum. Start with the Beginner column.

STEP 1: Read each step in the Beginner column. Place an (X) next to each step your program has completed.

STEP 2: If your program has completed every step in the Beginner column, move to the next column and REPEAT STEP 1 for the Intermediate column, then the Advanced column as needed.

STEP 3: When you reach a step that your program has not completed, this denotes your program's designation on the continuum. Record this phase in the "Program Designation" column.

STEP 4: Due to your program's organizational structures and priorities in your programming, you may have advanced steps in a later phase. For this reason, continue by placing an (X) next to each step your program has completed in each phase of the continuum.

Please note: Your program's designation will not change. However, this process will help you understand progress your program has made across the continuum.

STEP 5: Once you have determined your program's designation, your program will develop an action plan to complete the subsequent steps of that phase.

Now that your service year program has learned how to assess your program on the Quality Continuum and identified quality indicators that you can advance in your program, let's take a closer look at some of the best practices and strategies for engaging, recruiting, and supporting individuals after high school gleaned from the High School Transitions Cohort.

Examples of What You Can Try Along the Way

The following examples will walk through each of the quality standards and indicators on the Quality Continuum and provide examples of ways to advance your program in the respective areas.

PROGRAM CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

PROGRAM CULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

A well-constructed service year program ensures its organizational culture is designed to support corps members in achieving the service intervention. To best engage high school graduates, service year programs should:

Promote an Environment/Culture of Inclusivity and Belonging for its Corps

High school graduates value working in environments where diversity is welcomed, differences are celebrated, and they can be themselves and feel a sense of belonging.

To achieve the above, programs will need to explore holistic approaches that incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into the organizational culture. This will be an ongoing process requiring dedicated time and commitment by many members of your staff. To ensure its effectiveness, programs will need to establish practices, procedures, and evaluation tools. An integral part of creating a sense of belonging is meeting high school graduates where they are. This includes creating a safe space to share their lived experiences and personal stories, and supporting them by encouraging them along their journey

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has:	*My program has:*	*My program has:*	*My program's definition is:*
☐ established DEI as an organizational priority with buy-in and commitment from my program's leadership and staff	☐ developed an action plan to advance DEI priorities and goals	☐ examined organizational practices to better engage and support my corps members	
☐ identified key terminology to promote a common language for advancing DEI	☐ defined the process to implement DEI practices that will help foster a belonging culture for staff and corps members	☐ identified a timeline to execute against DEI goals that result in building a belonging culture	
☐ assessed organizational practices and strategies to determine areas that will foster inclusivity and belonging	☐ created safe spaces for corps members to share their lived experiences	☐ begun implementing practices for creating a belonging culture	
		☐ reassessed and determined if the organizational practices help foster an inclusive and belonging culture	

Promote an Environment/Culture of Inclusivity and Belonging for its Corps

Program Highlight: CivicWorks identified their designation as Advanced for this quality indicator. Even still, they put this quality indicator into practice during their participation in the Cohort by adjusting their program components to further enhance a belonging culture. Candice Blackwell, Director of Education Programs and YouthBuild Program Director, facilitated a series of trainings and discussions focused on Liberation and Leadership, led by The Corps Network as a part of their Moving Forward Initiative with their corps members and staff. In this training and discussion, Candice explored disempowering systems and the impact they have on the lived experiences of their service year corps members. Staff and members participated in tours of their local communities, identified structures of power that exist, and discussed opportunities that could distribute power equitably. These experiences resulted in an opportunity for their service year corps members to share their lived experiences and increase their understanding of how to dismantle oppressive structures. Additionally, their program staff learned more about the impact of their service intervention on the lives of their corps members, their beneficiaries, and the communities they serve. This increase in knowledge among staff and corps members helped to inform internal policies, practices, and strategies that were being perpetuated in their organization. Ultimately, working groups were created to leverage the corps members' unique perspectives in decision-making. This combination of practices provided corps members a chance to develop an affinity for their community and recognize themselves as part of a larger whole.

> *Belonging is the emotional state of inclusion, associated with efforts that involve a feeling of being taken in, approved of, accepted, and welcomed. In order for individuals to feel a sense of belonging, they need to feel welcomed exactly as they are and should not be required to abandon parts of their identity to fit within a culture, group, and/or society*

Program Highlight: American Youthworks, who identified their designation as Intermediate for this quality indicator, incorporated Transformative Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into their service year program to allow staff to work with their corps members to build strong, respectful, and lasting relationships that facilitate co-learning. Within this process, service year corps members critically examined root causes of inequity, and developed collaborative solutions that lead to personal, community, and societal well-being. This work has helped the organization's program staff understand their corps members' cultures and lived experience, rather than what they believe their corps members should bring to their service year. This practice allows staff to understand the trauma related to growing up in white male-dominant culture to identify how that trauma may influence their performance and experience.

PROGRAM CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Provide Support to Corps Members through an Asset-Based Framework

High school graduates seek opportunities that value their assets, strengths, attributes, and abilities that will cultivate opportunities for self-empowerment.

To achieve the above, programs must understand and implement an asset-based framework. Asset-based framing defines an individual by their aspirations, contributions and the value they bring to society rather than by their barriers and cost on society. When defining an individual by something that stigmatizes them, we cause further injury, reinforce mistrust, and create a lack of understanding. For organizations to develop an asset-based framework, it is necessary to assess the strengths, skills, abilities of its corps members.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: ☐ identified the strengths, skills, and abilities of corps members during the selection/onboarding processes using an assessment and/or evaluation tool ☐ utilized an assessment tool to determine service placement and activities. ☐ explored the asset-based questions with corps members during the orientation process **Questions may include:** What existing strengths/assets do you bring to a service year experience? What are your current goals? What do you hope to accomplish during your year of service? What strengths do you wish to develop further during your service year? In what ways, can staff assist you in developing these strengths?	*My program has:* ☐ utilized an asset-based tool to assess and provide support to corps members during their service year ☐ explored opportunities where corps members can increase and hone their leadership skills. (For example, providing corps members the opportunity to participate on a committee at your organization or leading training or service activity.) ☐ developed feedback loops and program evaluation tools to leverage the voices of corps members and incorporate practices that support their assets, strengths, attributes, and abilities	*My program has:* ☐ created opportunities and experiences for corps members to grow and hone their assets during a service year ☐ utilized an asset-based tool to guide the development of corps members while serving ☐ utilized feedback loops and evaluation tools that will help cultivate new opportunities based on its corps members' assets, strengths and abilities	*My program's designation is:*

Providing Support to Corps Members Through an Asset-Based Framework

Program Highlight: One cohort participant, City Year, self-assessed their designation as Advanced for this indicator. City Year is providing training support and collecting both data and feedback on a career planning tool and coaching framework called the Goals Reality Options Way (G.R.O.W.). This framework is an asset-based approach that values individual identity as part of the process for decision-making about college and career decisions post-service. City Year began testing this tool in 2019 and has scaled adoption over the last two years across 29 sites. In 2019 City Year launched this pilot and found that high school and college graduates reported the same level of favorability towards the value of the G.R.O.W. Plan as a tool to advance their post-service plan with their Impact Manager. This trend continued in 2020 when high school graduates reported an even higher favorability among high school graduates at 63%, over the college graduates in their program that rated the favorability of the tool at 48%. City Year also looked at the data with a racial equity lens and found a multi-year trend of Black service year corps members reporting significantly higher favorability compared to White service year corps members.

Asset-Based Framing is defining an individual by their aspirations, contributions, and the value they bring to society rather than their barriers and cost to society. When defining an individual by something that stigmatizes them, we cause further injury, reinforce mistrust, and create a lack of understanding. For organizations to develop an asset-based framework, it is necessary to assess the strengths, skills, and abilities of their service year corps members.

Program Highlight: Cherry Health originally self-assessed their service year program designation as Beginner on this indicator, but implemented resources and tools to support an asset-based framework with their corps members to advance along the continuum. Throughout their cohort participation, Cherry Health tested three assessment tools with service year corps members. The implementation of "True Colors", "Strengths Finder", and "DISC" supported their staff in assessing their corps members' assets, strengths, and abilities. These asset-based tools allowed Cherry Health's program staff to guide their corps members as they identified their strengths.

Program Highlight: American Youthworks also originally assessed as a Beginner on this indicator, so they reframed the corps member activities and training using an asset-based approach. American Youthworks works with service year corps members to develop individual development plans (IDPs). These plans – as well as facilitation practices, conflict resolution, and community engagement strategies – were modified to ensure an asset-based lens. First, American Youthworks program staff began facilitating planning discussions with their training staff to lead and conduct training in a format that incorporated the personal, professional, and lived experiences of their corps members and applied them to their service year experience. From these planning discussions, their training staff identified ways to implement an asset-based lens to their interview and application process as well. Interview questions were refined to illuminate the service year corps members' assets prior to the start of their service year. This allows the staff member interviewing the applicant to better understand these potential service year corps members' aspirations and motivations for service. Corps member training and development plans were also modified to reflect an asset-based approach in relation to employment readiness, life skills, social and emotional learning, relationship building, and self-regulation practices.

PROGRAM CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Highlight Opportunities for Skills Attainment and Leadership Development

High school graduates desire to understand the benefits of service in their life, including what completing a service year will unlock.

By providing examples of how corps members develop skills during service and where they go after service, it helps to show what is possible if they serve.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has:	*My program has:*	*My program has:*	*My program's designation is:*
☐ developed and operationalized a skills inventory	☐ developed a process to share skills attainment and leadership development opportunities with corps members	☐ mapped skills attainment to in-service leadership opportunities and post-service pathways	
☐ worked with staff to identify opportunities and experiences during the service year to cultivate skills attainment and leadership development	☐ prepared your program staff to identify skills development opportunities during service delivery and ensured corps members understand how the skills aligns to post-service pathways	☐ begun engaging industry professionals and stakeholders to help inform and enhance in-service skills attainment and leadership development with corps members	
☐ explored the time allocation needed to foster skills attainment and promote leadership opportunities during service activities		☐ incorporated practices offered from industry professionals and leveraged them during service activities to help corps members further understand skills development and the ways it maps to post-service pathways	
For example, during service activity planning, your program staff should be prepared to discuss skills and leadership opportunities to help corps members hone their abilities.	*For example, provide a corps member the opportunity to lead a corps member meeting. In this example, staff should identify the specific skills needed to accomplish this activity and name how the skills will prepare corps members for post-service opportunities including public speaking, gathering and researching information, designing a presentation, and building knowledge to address follow-up questions.*		

Highlight Opportunities for Skills Attainment and Leadership Development Opportunities

This indicator represents an area for improvement across the Cohort. To assist the Cohort participants in identifying skills, Service Year Alliance developed a skills mapping exercise that would help programs inventory common skills cultivated during their service year. By completing this exercise, programs were able to have intentional discussions with their staff about opportunities to strengthen skills development during service activities and identify areas to increase the types of skills being offered.

Additional tools and resources to assist you with mapping common employability for your service year corps members are outlined in Service Year Alliance's Corps Member Curriculum: Strengthening Service Years as a Postsecondary Option.

Leadership Development is the process of helping to expand the capacity of individuals to perform in leadership roles and responsibilities within a position, organization, and/or life. This process is focused on developing the leadership abilities and attitudes of individuals that advances competency in personal mindset, social awareness, relationship building, communication, collaboration, and problem solving.

OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT			
Service year programs with quality outreach and recruitment strategies seek to engage local community members in the process by leveraging partners, stakeholders, and local leaders. When identifying and selecting high school graduates, service year programs should:			

vHigh school graduates value working in environments where diversity is welcomed, differences are celebrated, and they can be themselves and feel a sense of belonging.

Programs that have an understanding of their targeted demographic will help identify specific stories to highlight during outreach and recruitment.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: ☐ begun developing a process to incorporate the unique voices and stories of corps members and alums into our recruitment plan ☐ identified representatives from my existing corps members and from recent alums that have had transformative experiences while serving ☐ identified individuals that experienced personal and professional success during and after their service years	*My program has:* ☐ identified corps members and alums that can speak about their service year experience ☐ identified opportunities to highlight the diverse stories and lived experiences of their corps members 💡 *Some examples may include:* • *Arrange for corps members and alums to speak during recruitment events* • *Share inspirational stories in marketing materials (i.e. program flyers, social media websites, and/ or YouTube channels)*	*My program has:* ☐ utilized the stories and experiences of corps members and alums into our recruitment plan ☐ incorporated corps members and alumni stories in our recruitment plan 💡 *Some examples may include:* • *Designing outreach and recruitment events that include corps members and alums* • *Ensuring there is enough time at each event for the prospective applicants to ask questions and for corps members and alums to provide additional information about their service year experience*	*My program's designation is:*

OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

Highlight the Benefits and Impact of the Service on the Corps Member

High school graduates are seeking opportunities to define their sense of purpose and life goals.

To achieve the above, programs must understand the value of their service year model and highlight the benefits and impact of a service year experience for the corps members. This process involves a comprehensive understanding of the full slate of benefits afforded to corps members including conducting skills mapping exercises and identifying service opportunities that prepare corps members for career and educational pathways.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: ☐ explored the value of our service year program – its offerings, supports, and connections to post-service pathways ☐ begun a skills inventory, an assessment that identifies specific skills (interpersonal "soft" and technical "hard" skills), offered during the service year	*My program has:* ☐ identified opportunities during the service year where skills attainment may occur during service activities ☐ named and highlighted skills attainment, professional development opportunities, and other benefits during outreach and recruitment	*My program has:* ☐ aligned a skills inventory with specific career and education pathways *This process may require an analysis of the local/regional labor market including conversations with the local workforce board, employers, and other key stakeholders that inform workforce development strategies.*	*My program's designation is:*

OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

Build Recruitment Practices that Uplift the Voices of Corps Members and Alumni

Program Highlight: During their participation in the Cohort, CivicWorks accepted a subgrant from Service Year Alliance to increase and develop sustainable partnerships with local high schools to introduce service years as a post-secondary pathway for individuals after high school. As an Intermediate program on this indicator, CivicWorks was interested in strategies to increase youth involvement in their program design. They identified increased awareness among high school students and their trusted stakeholders, such as counselors, teachers, parents, and mentors, as a strategy for increasing the engagement of individuals after high school in their service years. Program staff also recognized a need to engage with high school students, currently serving corps members, and alumni to provide input towards the development of marketing strategies. Throughout the duration of the project, Civic Works gathered feedback, modified marketing materials, and implemented recruitment strategies to increase the recruitment, engagement, and retention of individuals after high school in-service years. As a result, Civic Works recruited 50% more high school graduates than the previous year. Additionally, approximately 30 individuals after high school or disconnected youth applied to participate in the February 2022 service year program. Civic Works is on a trajectory to reach both recruitment and retention goals in 2022 based on this preliminary success. Civic Works also attributed their success in this work to their investment in increasing their recruitment partners, which is another indicator on the Quality Continuum. You can learn more about their work with their key partners later in this section.

Highlight the Benefits and Impact of the Service on the Corps Member

Being able to use tangible, real examples within your recruitment materials of skills developed and opportunities gleaned as a result of a year of service with your program is critical for painting the picture for prospective corps members about your program. As we learned in our high school graduate focus group, it is important to be clear about what a service year opportunity offers and involves, and programs should consider ways to offer opportunities to youth to ask questions to build trust. Incorporating the examples isn't the hard part, but the underlying process for identifying these opportunities and developing partnerships to expand these opportunities takes effort. This can require invested partnerships with employers, higher education institutions, and stakeholders. Cohort participants with key partnerships, shared how important it is that these partnerships be built with intention. You will need to understand your program model, how it is structured, and how additional leadership or skills attainment opportunities can complement what already exists.

OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

Increase Recruitment Partners to Better Engage High School Graduates

High school graduates need to understand that service year opportunities exist.

To do this, there needs to be more engagement with local high schools and organizations that engage and support high school students, so that they are informed about service opportunities along with other post-secondary opportunities.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: □ developed a list of local, regional, and national organizations and stakeholders to engage in my recruitment planning	*My program has:* □ identified contacts and processes to engage organizations and stakeholders in my recruitment plans □ aligned strategies for my recruitment plan with local organizations and stakeholders	*My program has:* □ established frequent touch points that result in high engagement of high school graduates *Some examples of engagement may include:* • *hosted a community forum to increase awareness of my program and its benefits* • *attended parent night at a local high school and shared information about my program* • *invited a local high school to a joint service event with my corps*	*My program's designation is:*

Increase Recruitment Partners to Better Engage High School Graduates

Program Highlight: CivicWorks identified their designation as Intermediate for this indicator. They joined the Cohort having already developed robust partnerships with local nonprofit organizations, community-based programs, and youth-serving entities. Throughout their engagement in the Cohort and through the additional subgrant area for developing stronger high school partnerships, program staff identified pre-existing and new opportunities for organizational partnership. Initially, they focused on tapping into the local school system network to access the largest number of high school graduates and trusted stakeholders. However, pandemic protocols and the ability to gain direct access to decision-makers within the system made this difficult. In response, CivicWorks decided to utilize pre-existing relationships with a local charter school and workforce development program to engage students, parents, and school staff in providing feedback and exploring opportunities to develop a more intentional partnership model. After engaging in discussion and trust-building, school staff provided valuable insight and supported the coordination of student meetings with CivicWorks staff, individually coordinating time with student participants. These conversations proved to be essential for gathering deeper insight and narratives into young peoples' experiences in high school and preparing them for life after graduation. Once the objectives of high school staff and students were understood, CivicWorks was able to identify how their objectives aligned to enhance the recruitment, engagement, and retention of individuals after high school in service years from the school system.

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Quality service year programs ensure corps members are prepared, trained, and supported to deliver the service intervention to communities and/or beneficiaries. To best train and equip high school graduates, service year programs should:

Develop Post-Service Pathways to Education and Career Opportunities

High school graduates benefit from experiences that enhance their social networks, foster skills attainment, and prepare them to make critical decisions about their future post-service.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/ NOTES
My program has:	*My program has:*	*My program has:*	*My program's designation is:*
☐ developed a corps member assessment tool that will highlight areas of growth and opportunity that can be fostered during the service year.	☐ utilized the assessment tool with relevant questions	☐ developed partnerships with educational institutions and employers that will benefit corps members	
Service Year Alliance created an Asset-Based Growth Assessment Tool as part of their Corps Member Curriculum: Strengthening Service Years as a Postsecondary Option, which can be used for this assessment.	☐ begun engaging educational institutions and employers to ensure alignment for post-service opportunities for corps members	☐ positioned our program as a talent pipeline for post-service opportunities by developing partnerships with career and educational partners and increasing awareness of our service year program	
☐ developed a list of local educational institutions and employers that align to experiences and skills cultivated during our service year program	☐ begun understanding the local labor market and skills mapping to specific post-service opportunities	*Service Year Alliance has created a Connecting to Employers Guide to help program staff develop a plan for identifying and engaging with employers that may be interested in hiring their service year alums.*	

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Develop Post-Service Pathways to Education and Career Opportunities

Program Highlight: Cherry Health, which self-assessed as a Beginner for this indicator, developed strategies for post-service pathways to make service years more accessible and appealing to high school graduates. Cherry Health aimed to establish career and educational paths for members post-service. They learned that many of their corps members may not know how to pursue higher education to meet their career goals and that partnerships between service and higher education institutions can illuminate the steps, provide support, and obtain clarity on what those steps are. As a result of this work, Cherry Health established two opportunities to partner with Grand Valley State University (GVSU) through its Integrative Studies program and the GVSU School of Social Work. The Integrative Studies Program at GVSU is ideal for high school graduates who have completed some undergraduate credits, have some field experience, and want to finish an undergraduate degree to pursue the career of their choice. Both programs plan to attend a Cherry Health AmeriCorps team meeting to discuss these degree-seeking options and related careers as post-service pathways.

Program Highlight: GRID Alternatives, a Beginner on this indicator, led a series of focus groups and interviews with high school seniors, high school educators, job-training organizations, employers, and GRID's affiliate-based workforce development leaders to identify key barriers to post-service employment pathways for individuals after high school and proposed solutions for mitigating those barriers. Their National SolarCorps Program Director, Courtney Williams, conducted a landscape analysis to understand the motivational factors and barriers to accessing full-time service year opportunities that lead directly to full-time employment. The analysis of the data collected through this project led to the identification of several themes associated with the barriers and motivations for individuals after high school to join service year opportunities that lead directly to employment post-service. As a result of this work, GRID Alternatives established meaningful relationships with employer partners and collected valuable data to build on their strategy for post-service pathways.

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Expand Engagement of Proximate Leaders and Industry Professionals Who Have Similar Life Stories to Your Corps Members

High school graduates need to engage with leaders and professionals that they can relate to and understand. This engagement will encourage inspiration and help them define a pathway to success while exploring post-service opportunities with confidence.

Programs have a unique opportunity to engage corps members and alums as proximate leaders.

Proximate leaders are individuals who have meaningful relationships with groups whose identity, experience, or community are systemically stereotyped, feared, dismissed, or marginalized. Proximate leaders move beyond exposure and those who have studied a group of people and their struggles to overcome adversity. Rather, they are actually a part of that group or are meaningfully guided by that group's input, ideas, agendas, and assets.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: ☐ begun drafting a list of proximate leaders and industry professionals that are currently being engaged with my program	*My program has:* ☐ engaged proximate leaders and industry professionals, and defined specific information through informational interviews that should be shared with corps members	*My program has:* ☐ begun incorporating guest speakers into programming	*My program's designation is:*

BEGINNER (continued):

This list should include corps members, alums, program partners, individuals from host sites, and employment partners. These individuals will be able to speak about their lived experiences and highlight the specific paths taken to achieve success after a service year.

INTERMEDIATE (continued):

☐ prepared a list of questions (see below) for proximate leaders and industry professionals and/or identified key experiences

Some examples of questions include:

For proximate leaders:

What was most impactful about your service year experience?

What steps did you need to take to prepare you for a service year?

What was the most challenging about your service year experience and how did you overcome it?

For industry professionals:

How did you get started with your career paths?

What are the essential steps a person should take to start a position in your field?

What type of preparation is necessary to advance your career? Higher Education? Credential? Years of Experience?

ADVANCED (continued):

This process involves identifying opportunities during the service year to share these stories and information. Programs should plan to identify opportunities at least once a month. The storytelling can take place at a service site, during monthly meetings, or by making individual connections with corps members and stakeholders that have similar experiences.

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Embed Industry-Recognized Training and Credentialing Opportunities

High school graduates are best prepared for career opportunities when they are able to gain the knowledge and hone the skills necessary to be successful during and post-service.

Identifying and embedding industry-recognized training and credentialing opportunities into programming can be a complex process that requires a full understanding of the AmeriCorps training hours cap, exploring new funding streams to ensure sustainability of offerings, and engagement of diverse stakeholders to ensure the training and/or credentialing has a return on investment for programs and corps members.

This quality indicator aligns with the *Outreach and Recruitment: Highlight the Benefits and Impact of the Service on the Corps Member* section. In order to begin work on this quality indicator, it is recommended that your program has conducted a skills assessment as outlined in that indicator

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has:	*My program has:*	*My program has:*	*My program's designation is:*
☐ begun identifying industry-recognized training and credentialing opportunities that will prepare corps members for post-service opportunities ☐ identified industry experts that help inform decision making, cost analysis, and validate the currency of the training or credential ☐ identified stakeholders to inform labor market trends and alignment to service delivery to identify industry-recognized training and credentialing	☐ developed partnerships with key stakeholders to inform industry-recognized training and credentialing ☐ explored new training and credentialing options for corps members including cost per member, accreditation, and prerequisites ☐ determined if the training or credential can be offered during or outside service hours *In some cases, programs may not be able to offer training and/or credentials during service hours, but this should not limit how these opportunities are shared with corps members. A best practice is developing a partnership with the training provider and ensuring that corps members are fully prepared to take advantage of the opportunity. This means exploring transportation options, scheduling the training when it is most feasible, and ensuring corps members have the appropriate prerequisites. Programs can determine if the training or credential is mandatory. Additionally, programs should be explicit with corps members about the benefits and advantages of the training or credential.*	☐ incorporated or enhanced a new/existing training or credential into programming ☐ began tracking the success of alums with the new credential or training ☐ created evaluation tools and strategies that assess the effectiveness of the specific industry-recognized training or credential and its alignment with career placement and advancement ☐ re-evaluated labor market trends to assess training and credential relevance *Each year, programs should evaluate the training and/credential to ensure effectiveness and that it supports the advancement of corps members in post-service opportunities.*	

Expand Engagement of Proximate Leaders and Industry Professionals Who Have Similar Life Stories to Your Corps Members

While Cohort participants asserted that engaging proximate leaders is important to engage individuals after high school because leaders and professionals that have similar lived experiences can provide inspiration and encourage individuals to define their paths to success, the programs prioritized other quality indicators to advance first. Through discussions, the Cohort identified proximate leaders as individuals with meaningful relationships with groups whose identity, experience, and community are systemically stereotyped, feared, dismissed, and/ or marginalized. By partnering with proximate leaders in your communities and among the beneficiaries you serve, program staff and corps members are able to leverage their unique ideas, input, feedback, and agendas through an asset-based approach to solve local challenges and barriers. Additionally, this engagement allows program staff to understand and implement strategies for corps members that place an intentional emphasis on equity because of an enhanced understanding of different races, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic statuses of diverse populations.

Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

Embed Industry-Recognized Training and Credentialing Opportunities

Program Highlight: American Youthworks, who self-assessed as Intermediate in this indicator, participated in an additional subgrant opportunity offered by Service Year Alliance to embed an industry-recognized credential into their service year program. Given American Youthworks' experience offering healthcare training as part of their YouthBuild program, they chose to incorporate the Community Health Worker certification. As a result of their work, American Youthworks has developed meaningful relationships with a number of potential program partners interested in hosting service year corps members with a CHW certification. These sites could accommodate more placements and would offer a significant clinical experience for their corps members, as well as the most direct connection to future employment. This opportunity has the greatest potential to be implemented at a scale that could support the administrative infrastructure needed to properly support a full-time Public Health AmeriCorps program, enable uniform training across multiple sites, and has the greatest potential for contributing the matching funding needed for an equitable living allowance for members.

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Cultivate Mentorship Opportunities that Provide Feedback and Support

High school graduates want mentorship opportunities where they can engage with leaders, ask questions, and incorporate feedback to enhance their professional development and personal agency.

Building a mentorship framework in your programming ensures corps members are provided with the essential feedback and support needed during a service year. To establish mentorship opportunities, programs will need to engage members of the program staff to understand how mentorship is currently being offered, where opportunities exist during service, and define consistency and continuity across all supervisors.

Mentorship, feedback, and support is impacted by a program's organizational culture. It is recommended that programs begin with the quality indicator: *Program Culture & Environment: Promote an Environment/Culture of Inclusivity and Belonging for its Corps* before advancing this quality indicator.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: ☐ begun identifying in-service mentorship opportunities that promote professional development and foster personal agency ☐ identified feasible times throughout the service year to discuss areas of opportunity and development with corps members	*My program has:* ☐ developed a mentorship framework ☐ developed a mentorship framework leveraging staff to ensure professional development and understanding of personal agency for corps members= *This process involves developing a training on constructive feedback and providing it to corps members to help set clear expectations and gather information from corps members about ways they would like to receive feedback and support.*	*My program has:* ☐ incorporated a mentorship framework that cultivates feedback and support for corps members ☐ trained staff that will incorporate the mentorship framework to provide feedback, guidance, and support corps members ☐ began tracking the impact of the mentorship framework by exploring the corps members' receptiveness ☐ determined whether the feedback demonstrated progress and growth of the corps members ☐ reassessed the mentorship framework to refine practices	*My program's designation is:*

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Promote Social Capital Development and Relationship Building

High school graduates benefit from engagement with diverse stakeholders that will help them cultivate relationships to open up new opportunities.

Social capital is the network of relationships within individuals who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively. Social capital development involves the effective functioning of social groups through interpersonal relationships with a shared identity, understanding, norms, values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. When individuals are able to understand their social capital and its value, they are able to understand their contribution to society as well as identify individuals that support or aid them in accomplishing their goals.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has:	*My program has:*	*My program has:*	*My program's designation is:*
☐ identified industry-recognized training and credentialing opportunities that will prepare corps members ☐ implemented opportunities throughout the service year to help corps members identify and explain their service year experiences and skills development	☐ utilized a skills assessment inventory to highlight specific skills attainment during service year experiences **Some examples include** • *Facilitate informational interviews with corps members and local stakeholders to understand their organization, role, and contribution to communities and society.* • *Host mock networking events with corps members* • *Conduct trainings that provide content on elevator pitches, making introductions, and/or talking about their service experiences*	☐ connected corps members to stakeholders that are connected to post-service opportunities and that may support members in their life-trajectory ☐ developed evaluation tools and strategies to assess social capital and relationship building strategies that lead to new opportunities for corps members	

Cultivate Mentorship Opportunities that Provide Feedback and Support

Building a mentorship framework into your programming can help to provide essential feedback and support to corps members, especially those that are navigating their first professional experience. Mentorship is a great way to utilize the time, expertise, and passion of others, so that supervisors can focus on supervision and other priorities. There are many different models you can pursue: models that depend on second year corps members, models that focus on service delivery, and/or models that explore personal and professional development. Identifying the best compliment for your program and target corps members is key to getting full utility out of this practice.

Promote Social Capital Development and Relationship Building

When individuals recognize their social capital and its value, they are able to understand their contribution to society as well as identify individuals that support or aid them in accomplishing their goals. Creating opportunities for corps members to connect with stakeholders at their placement sites, community leaders, proximate leaders, and other professionals can create new levels of comfort in these environments and allow corps members to walk away from their service with less hesitation to pursue similar situations in the future. Exposure to different environments, stakeholders, and processes can be empowering and pave the way for future opportunities.

Social Capital Building is the process of supporting the individuals to function effectively as a member of social groups through interpersonal relationships with a shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity that can be meaningful to the individual and their role in society.

CORPS MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Map Skills Development and Attainment to Post-Service Opportunities

High school graduates seek to understand specific skills and opportunities that will align with college and career opportunities.

Service years that conduct a skills inventory (i.e. a list of skills gained during a service year) will be able to highlight and translate skills gained with corps members. This includes preparing corps members to discuss their service year experience in ways that will be meaningful during future interviews for career and higher education opportunities.

This quality indicator aligns with the *Outreach and Recruitment: Highlight the Benefits and Impact of the Service on the Corps Member* section. In order to begin work on this quality indicator, it is recommended that your program has conducted a skills assessment as outlined in that indicator.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: ☐ explored existing relationships with stakeholders, community members, and beneficiaries to understand how they can be leveraged to support your corps members ☐ created a list of key stakeholders my program typically engages and determined the role they can play with corps members ☐ developed in-service strategies and training to support corps members in cultivating relationships that can enhance corps members' social capital development	My program has: ☐ developed relationships and partnerships with stakeholders that support social capital development for corps members *Service Year Alliance created Intentional Skills Attainment Curriculum as part of their Corps Member Curriculum: Strengthening Service Years as a Postsecondary Option. The Curriculum's Employability Skills Inventory can be used for this skills assessment.* ☐ defined opportunities during the service year where staff highlight skills for corps members to practice and hone how they talk about their service year experience to better relate to employers and educational opportunities. *The Skills Mapping and Development Tool has been designed to help program staff determine what skills their service year program cultivates, how to best communicate those skills to applicants, and how to ensure ongoing skills development takes place throughout the service year.*	My program has: ☐ incorporated practices and strategies that allow corps members to demonstrate skills attainment for post-service opportunities ☐ leveraged stakeholders, like employers and education providers, to assess how corps members talk about their service year experiences (i.e. mock interviews and/ or informational interviews)	My program's designation is:

Map Skills Development and Attainment to Post-Service Opportunities

Through our landscape analysis and conversations with Cohort participants, Service Year Alliance identified skills attainment as a primary barrier for service year programs. Connecting skills development and attainment to post-service opportunities is far more challenging and complex, than it may first appear. There are many steps involved, from understanding the common skills gained in your program, to inventorying and tracking progress on individual skills attainment, and to building partnerships that are aligned with the competencies your corps members have at the end of their service. While none of our Cohort participants directly focused on addressing this quality indicator, Service Year Alliance developed Corps Member Curriculum: Strengthening Service Years as a Postsecondary Option to start to address this barrier and enhance corps member skills attainment through development and training in service years that leads to stronger pathways post-service. Through this work, we have developed a skills inventory and assessment tools that programs can utilize to identify skills, strengthen skills attainment, and incorporate skills-building opportunities during the service year experience that will align to career and higher education pathways.

CORPS MEMBER SUPERVISION

CORPS MEMBER SUPERVISION

Service years programs ensure corps members have appropriate oversight and supervision during service delivery. When engaging high school graduates, service year programs should:

Establish Professional Expectations for Before, During, and After Service

High school graduates benefit from well-constructed professional experiences with clearly defined expectations. This affords them context and intention leading to their consent and commitment.

For this quality indicator, program staff will need to conduct a needs and growth assessment within the first two months of the service year. This will inform goal setting and map to personal and professional accomplishments.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has:	*My program has:*	*My program has:*	*My program's designation is:*
☐ designed coaching models and structures in-service that help support corps members, including training their staff to provide regular engagement with corps members	☐ incorporated coaching models that support corps member development and provide guidance to address barriers, challenges, and growth potential	☐ incorporated training that prepares corps members for service during orientation, during service, and post-service	
☐ explored new opportunities to engage corps members and receive their feedback	☐ scheduled regular coaching and engagement sessions with corps members that will help clarify personal and professional goals	☐ evaluated the curriculum and strategies to determine areas of opportunity that will enhance corps members professional development in their next steps	
Some examples of a feedback loop include:			
• *Promoting journaling among corps members to ensure they are capturing opportunities to address behavioral interview questions.*	*This process involves developing a training on constructive feedback and providing it to corps members to help set clear expectations and gather information from corps members about ways they would like to receive feedback and support*	☐ discussed professional norms and expectations with employers and higher education staff to better prepare corps members for post-service opportunities	
• *Creating opportunities for corps members to discuss skills development with other corps members .*			
• *Celebrating corps members' success by highlighting accomplishments during meetings and/or in the media.*			

CORPS MEMBERS SUPERVISION

Establish Professional Expectations for Before, During, and After Service

Program Highlight: Prior to their engagement in the Cohort, Serve Philadelphia VISTA received unfavorable feedback from service year program managers supervising individuals after high school. According to the supervisors, these service year corps members were not "professionally prepared" and needed additional support to accomplish their service activities. As Serve Philadelphia's staff discussed these experiences with site supervisors and their VISTA members, they learned that many of the challenges raised were rooted in biases and misconceptions about engaging younger populations. In response, Serve Philadelphia VISTA hired a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) consultant, Youtee Wheagar, who worked with their VISTA Program Coordinator, Ana Polanco to assess feedback from the city departments and their VISTA members. The DEI consultant led a series of focus groups with site supervisors, city departments, their program staff, and their VISTA members to implement a more equitable, human-centered approach to the service year program. These conversations identified a point of tension.

Many individuals in the focus group conversations identified that professional norms and expectations are rooted in white supremacy which proved particularly challenging for individuals coming from marginalized communities. To respond to both the needs of the service year corps members and site managers, Serve Philadelphia developed and implemented two strategies. First, they re-examined the program's core values, practices, and policies with an anti-racist lens, then developed VISTA Core Values and Anti-Racist Action Items which enabled their program to intentionally embed anti-racist practices into their program's structure, systems, policies, procedures, and outcomes. In addition, Youtee and Ana implemented monthly professional development sessions that reinforced Serve Philadelphia's core values, building upon the cultural and professional norms and expectations that were set as a group during orientation. This work supported multiple quality indicators on the Quality Continuum. Serve Philadelphia's focus group engagement with every individual engaged in their programming supported the establishment of professional expectations and the development of a more inclusive program and organizational culture. Serve Philadelphia identified their designation as Beginner in professional expectations when they first joined the Cohort but advanced their work overtime.

CORPS MEMBER SUPPORT

CORPS MEMBER SUPPORT
Service year programs provide appropriate support to corps members to ensure they are able to complete the service year and service activities. When engaging high school graduates, service year programs should:

Enhance In-Service Coaching and Feedback Channels for Corps Members
High school graduates feel supported when they are able to work with program staff and partners to understand their strengths, clarify expectations, and achieve goals in their service activities. Continuous feedback that is direct and authentic will help foster professional development and growth for high school graduates, while also supporting them throughout the service experience.

Defining professionalism and professional norms and expectations at an organization is critical to ensuring corps members are prepared to meet expectations. To do this, programs need to explore both written and unspoken professional norms among their organization, host sites, and partners. Transparency and authentic communication with corps members about these norms will help prepare them for success.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: ☐ developed a list of professional norms and expectations for corps members. ☐ This process will help identify inconsistencies and determine where information should be shared. ☐ begun tracking professional norms in order to incorporate them into a corps member handbook or other similar communication ☐ discussed professional norms and expectations with host sites and other key partners	*My program has:* ☐ designed specific training throughout the service year that prepares corps members to serve/work in a professional setting during both the service year and post-service ☐ implemented a curriculum and strategies that will support corps members' professional development *Service Year Alliance created an Asset-Based Growth Assessment Tool as part of their Corps Member Curriculum: Strengthening Service Years as a Postsecondary Option, which can be used for this assessment. This growth assessment can be used to better understand corps members' personal and professional goals throughout their service year and is intended to be utilized during check-ins and coaching sessions.*	*My program has:* ☐ assessed our coaching model to ensure it is appropriately meeting the needs of corps members and make modifications when necessary *By implementing feedback loops mentioned above, programs will be able to identify and incorporate new practices that will enhance the experiences of their corps members.*	*My program's designation is:*

CORPS MEMBER SUPPORT

Understand and Build Structures to Support a Wide Range of Needs

High school graduates benefit from resources to help them navigate emerging challenges and barriers.

Creating relationships with organizations that administer support programs you believe corps members may need will allow you to address challenges in the moment. To understand the support needs for your corps members, you should reflect on the needs of your corps members over the past 3-5 years. Building relationships with stakeholders and organizations is an ongoing process and it is important to maintain these relationships, especially during times of high turnover.

BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	PROGRAM DESIGNATION/NOTES
My program has: ☐ developed a list of supports and resources provided through the program ☐ developed a list of common challenges, needs, and barriers that have prevented the successful completion of a service year by former corps members ☐ identified supports that can be offered with program staff and/or hired a member of staff to support common challenges and barriers	*My program has:* ☐ begun mapping needed supports to local stakeholders and organizations that offer these supports *The process should include identifying specific services, when they are offered, required documentation, and the length of time required to address challenges and barriers.*	*My program has:* ☐ started building relationships (both formal and informal) with key stakeholders and organizations that can support our corps members ☐ shared information broadly across your organization to ensure every staff member is prepared to assist corps members, if engaged	*My program's designation is:*

CORPS MEMBERS SUPPORT

Enhance In-Service Coaching Opportunities and Feedback Channels for Corps Members

Program Highlight: Improve Your Tomorrow identified their designation as Intermediate for this indicator. Improve Your Tomorrow is an organization that strives to ensure that young men of color are overrepresented in higher education, underrepresented in the criminal justice system, and that they provide leadership in communities. Improve Your Tomorrow's service year program was established to support these objectives and is focused on providing mentorship to local high school students on topics such as college advising, civic engagement, character education, and life skills. After their first program year, it was evident that the service year corps members themselves would benefit from mentorship and support to guide them throughout their service year team and to prepare them for post-service success. In response, the program instituted monthly professional development discussions with guest speakers and presenters that could help their corps members identify key career sectors and paths to success. These monthly discussions were informed by the service year corps members themselves to ensure they addressed common challenges that their corps members were facing during service and in their individual lives. The discussions supported the service year corps members' ability to simultaneously strengthen their service delivery while also achieving their personal and professional goals.

Understand and Build Structures to Support a Wide Range of Needs

Program Highlight: American Youthworks, who self-assessed as a Beginner for this indicator, chose to enhance this area in both their YouthBuild and AmeriCorps programs. YouthBuild has a well-developed foundational skills structure for young people entering the workforce. Additionally, their AmeriCorps program, Conservation Corps, provides certifications and technical skills for career readiness. While each of these programs have structures to support a wide range of needs for their service year corps members, their staff had not effectively collaborated across the two programs to share enhancements. To advance on the Quality Continuum, American Youthworks explored opportunities for programmatic overlap to enrich the service year corps member experience across the board. As a result, their staff developed collaboration points throughout the service year including shared orientation sessions, "shadow days" where members can shadow a crew or other corps members to better understand their roles, and community building activities such as field days and shared meals. Currently, both programs' service year corps members receive case management services to provide additional support, and staff is working together to establish a restorative justice framework.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this project, the service year field was largely hesitant to engage high school graduates in service years and many Cohort participants struggled to provide ideal, quality service year experiences for their corps members. Through the development of the Quality Definition and Quality Continuum – and with the guidance of external stakeholders and partners, as well as the perspectives of high school graduates themselves – Cohort programs were able to make progress in areas of highest priority for their organization.

This work made clear that prioritizing corps member training and development and providing specific support and resources for corps members is critical for service year programs to recruit and engage individuals after high school in a service year. These strategies not only help programs to strengthen their candidate pool, but also increase the likelihood that programs successfully retain those corps members throughout the full year of service, while enhancing the ability to achieve your service intervention and creating a stronger experience that puts corps members on a pathway to success in post-service career and education opportunities.

As your program utilizes the Quality Continuum and aims to improve upon various quality indicators to better recruit, engage, and support individuals after high school, Service Year Alliance encourages you to also explore and adopt its Corps Member Curriculum: Strengthening Service Years as a Postsecondary Option. The curriculum is intended to be incorporated into existing corps member development and training plans and supports service year programs in fostering a belonging culture, incorporating an asset-based framework, and enhancing intentional skills attainment – all three critical elements for engaging high school graduates in a service year. The curriculum, which can be incorporated in part or in its entirety, provides programs with a strong foundation to build upon to provide individuals after high school and all corps members with a supported and transformational experience.

Programs interested in utilizing the Quality Continuum, integrating the Corps Member Curriculum into your training and development plans, or hoping to learn more about engaging individuals after high school in a service year, should please contact programs@serviceyear.org or visit ServiceYearAlliance.org/CorpsMemberCurriculum.

Service Year Alliance is working to make a year of paid, full-time service – a service year – a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. We envision a future in which national service is part of growing up in America. As we enter a new era for national service fueled by recent investments in AmeriCorps, we are focused on ensuring these expansions are successful and set the stage for future growth of the field. We identify opportunities for shared recruitment and data systems to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing our sector. Finally, we foster collaborative approaches to demonstrate the impact of service years as an experience that transforms lives, strengthens communities, and fuels civic renewal at scale. Learn more about our work at ServiceYearAlliance.org.

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