



Reflection Toolkit

Benefits of Reflection¹

- Gives meaning to the experience (was goal accomplished, how did we do, how is community served by this,

Tips for Success

Designing a Reflection Activity:

An effective reflection activity should:

- Have an outcome in mind (i.e. leadership, team building, improved critical thinking, acknowledgment)
- Be appropriate for the team (age, culture, etc.)
- Happen before, during, and as soon after the service experience as possible
- Be directly linked to the project or experience
- Dispel stereotypes, address negative experiences, increase appreciation for community needs, increase commitment to service
- Be varied for different learning styles, ages, etc.
- Actively involve the service recipients for a really compelling reflection session
- Be facilitated well for maximum participation, creativity, and learning

Facilitating a Reflection Activity:

There is plenty of information and resources available about facilitating group activities. Some specifics for service reflection activities include:

- Seek a balance between being flexible to address member's needs, and keeping the process consistent with the theme. In other words, if some notable incident happens during the day, or has been forming for some time, it will probably be on the member's minds enough to prevent their presence in any other conversation. Thus, even if you have an outcome in mind, what needs to get said may be the most important thing to discuss or reflect upon. Similarly, the conversation cannot be allowed to veer with no focus: Reflection questions often lead to other questions, which lead to other questions . . . while these diversions can lead to great discussion, they can, as easily, go all over the place with little value for participants. Maintain focus by bringing it back to the theme or significant topic, and presenting "so what, now what" questions before leaving a decent topic.
- Use silence: People need some silence to reflect internally, some more than others do. Ask the question then wait.
- Ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to become involved
- Remember that in a group setting, each member of the group will learn and reflect in a different way. Allow space for diversity; it, too, is part of the reflection process for the group.

*"The meaning of things lies not in the things themselves,
but in our attitude towards them."*

—Antoine de Saint Exupery

What? So What? Now What?

This is a well-used and successful model to assist you in designing the reflection activities. Although you can derive learning from each question, focussing on all three will provide broader insights and keep participants from getting stuck on only the facts or just the feelings.

What? (Reporting what happened, objectively). Without judgement or interpretation, participants describe in detail the facts and event(s) of the service experience.

Questions include:

What happened? What did you observe? What issue is being addressed or population is being served? What were the results of the project? What events or “critical incidents” occurred? What was of particular notice? How did you feel about that? Let’s hear from someone who had a different reaction?

So What? (What did you learn? What difference did the event make?) Participants discuss their feelings, ideas, and analysis of the service experience.

Questions can also be focused on the meaning or importance of the activity to:

- **The Participant:** *Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest? Did you hear, smell, feel anything that surprised you? What feelings or thoughts seem most strong today? How is your experience different from what you expected? What struck you about that? How was that significant? What impacts the way you view the situation/experience? (What lens are you viewing from?) What do the critical incidents mean to you? How did you respond to them? What did you like/dislike about the experience?*
- **The Recipient:** *Did the “service” empower the recipient to become more self-sufficient? What did you learn about the people/community that we served? What might impact the recipient’s views or experience of the project?*
- **The Community:** *What are some of the pressing needs/issues in the community? How does this project address those needs? How, specifically, has the community benefited? What is the least impact you can imagine for the project? With unlimited creativity, what is the most impact on the community that you can imagine?*
- **The Group (group projects):** *In what ways did the group work well together? What does that suggest to you about the group? How might the group have accomplished its task more effectively? In what ways did others help you today? (and vice versa) How were decisions made? Were everybody’s ideas listened to?*

Now What? (How will they think or act in the future as a result of this experience?) Participants consider broader implications of the service experience and apply learning. Be aware to strike a balance between realistic, reachable goals and openness to spontaneity and change.

Questions include:

What seem to be the root causes of the issue/problem addressed? What kinds of activities are currently taking place in the community related to this project? What contributes to the success of projects like this? What hinders success? What learning occurred for you in this experience? How can you apply this learning? What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or issue? What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties? What information can you share with your peers or community volunteers? If you were in charge of the project, what would you do to improve it? If you could do the project again, what would you do differently? What would “complete” the service?

Gingerbread Models: Draw a large gingerbread person at the beginning of the day, with drawings/writings of what makes a good (mentor, urban forester, team member, etc.). At the end of the day, share what you did well, how you thought you could improve.

5 to 30 Minute Activities (cont.)

Yarn Web: Stand in a circle with a ball of yarn. Each person throws it to another and says one word that explains what they will bring to the next project, something they appreciated in the person they are throwing it to, what they learned, etc. The yarn forms a web supported by the group. Use a thicker string, lower it, and have someone climb on, and try to support a person! (use caution with this one).

Cartoon: Draw a cartoon that teaches something important regarding the service project.

All on the Wall: Put a large piece of paper up on one wall or all the way around the room. Participants write or draw feelings/thoughts/learnings on the paper. Facilitator leads discussion based on writings.

Recommendations: Compose a letter to your site supervisor offering suggestions for working with future volunteers.

Lifeline Biography: Draw a line representing and plot significant periods/events (with writing or drawings) influencing who you are. Share with a partner or small group. This can be adapted many ways: do the same except using a river as a metaphor (where were there rapids, meandering, etc.) or do a Service Biography line (when first service experience, what influenced you, positive and negative impacts on your life)

Object share: Each person brings in and passes around an object, and shares how the object is like them or the

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Journaling: A Primer

Journaling is one of the best reflection tools. Ideally, the program or project would allow for a ten to fifteen minute period every day for the volunteers to journal; preferably at the end of the day or during/after a debrief. It is helpful if staff or the project leader provides substantial structure to insure quality, conscientious journaling. Regardless of the time allotted, it is important to encourage participants to write whatever comes to mind, and to not worry about grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. This entails a commitment to confidentiality, that nobody will ever share what they have written unless they want to. You also want to be definite and clear about the time allotted, (five to fifteen minutes) and let them know when it is almost finished.

Journaling Methods

Clusters: Have people shout out words or phrases that describe the day. Ask each person to take two minutes to write five or six words in random spaces on their journaling page. Give a short speech about the interconnectedness of everything, the web of life, Quantum Physics, or whatever and ask them to do a free write focussing on those five or six items and how they are related.

The Critical Incident: Choose an incident that involved the entire team and give them a couple of minutes to think about the incident. Then ask them to write a detailed, factual report of what happened, making sure to answer the four “W” questions, “who, what, where, when.” You can then have participants share their stories to see how they differ from another.

Dialogue: A good one for developing observation and communication skills. Ask participants in the morning to pay special attention to conversations they hear throughout the day, including light conversations between staff and volunteers, volunteers and sponsors or stakeholders, etc. Ask them to pay special attention to mannerisms, accents, and the tone of the conversation. Later, have the participants pick a dialogue and duplicate as closely as possible how it went. This should be done in a light-hearted manner on a light-hearted day to avoid a “bashing” session. This is an exercise that gets better with time, as their observation and retention skills improve.

Different Perspectives:

Good Reflection Writing/Sharing Questions:

- What is service? What is the difference between service and volunteering?
- Has your definition of service changed? Why? How? Should everyone do service?
- Describe a problem the team has been having. List possible solutions.
- Make a list of the skills used and learned on this project.
- What have been the best and worst parts of this project?
- Describe a person you met on your project. What are their attitudes about the project, where might those attitudes have come from?
- What communities/identity groups are you a member of? How might this be related with your commitment to service?
- Have you ever felt hopelessness, despair, discouragement or burnout related to your service? How have you dealt with this? How can reflection help?
- What are some of the problems facing the world today? (mind map) How does your service connect or address these issues?
- Identify a person, group, or community that you got to know this year, who is significantly “other” for you. What are the needs or challenges facing them that particularly got to you? What is one way in which you’ve allowed yourself to be changed as a result of knowing these folks?
- What community need, work challenge, or public issue have you given the most deliberate, critical, analytical thought to this year? What are some factors and facts you looked at, data you considered? Who or what resources did you consult?
- Over the next two years, what’s one issue or challenge you would like to be a more respected authority on? How will this be a challenge for you?
- Dedicating ourselves to service rather than selfishness or our own comfort can be scary. We risk honestly getting to know others who are different, and come face to face, day after day, with pain, abuse, hatred, violence. What are two fears or inner worries you have, that somehow keep you from being the T,ould0e
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Service Reflection Quotes

Internet Resources

The internet is a vast resource for finding new activities, philosophies, and even discussion groups (if you're really into it) for reflection. Below are a few examples of the myriad useful sites out there—try any search engine and you'll find many more.

www.servicelearningnw.org

Service Learning NorthWest provides trainings and resources for community-based organizations and educators

addressing the expectations of volunteers and what happens when we open to the unexpected in our service. It seems like an excellent model and resource.

The following sites are simply examples of on-line places you can find lists of potential reflection activities:

www.ethics.org/resources/activities.html

Kids' activities

www.getinvolved.wustl.edu/service/Reflection_for_Groups.pdf

Washington University in St. Louis, Reflection Activities for Groups

www.svc.rit.edu/reflection.php

Rochester Institute of Technology's Volunteer Survey (similar to IMDP form/ formal reflection).