Introduction to Service and Questionnaire For Disability Organizations

National service provides opportunities for people--with and without disabilities--to build skills, bolster self-confidence, and broaden networks that can lead to meaningful employment. Disability agencies and organizations that work with potential service members may or may not have a broad understanding of the opportunities available to service members and of the potential for successful organizational partnerships with service programs. The Service Program Questionnaire provides basic information on why service is a viable option for people with disabilities, how disability organizations can connect with service programs, and what questions to ask and what information to gather from service programs.

Service opportunities open the door for individuals to experience new roles and responsibilities, and service programs and communities benefit from a diverse workforce addressing needs and completing tasks. All individuals pursuing service learning bring differing skills and abilities; this informational interview is a great time to discuss success strategies for all members with the service programs themselves.

Service programs are all a little different from another and it's important to know what specific service programs offer, how they do their work, and the types of opportunities they typically have available for potential service members. Additionally, your disability organization may be able to help by offering to support the individual with the application process, joining the service organization (onboarding) or even throughout the service term.

Partnering with the service programs gives both of your organizations a chance to learn more about each other and opens doors for individuals seeking to build skills and experience service learning. Learning more about what service programs do and how they operate is a key factor in the relationship-building needed to work successfully together. It is also really important to discuss your mutual goals, the values, vision and mission of each of your organizations, to see where you can work together to support individuals. This shared strength is a fantastic community resource to share and grow together.

This questionnaire is intended for you to use when communicating with service programs and should be tailored to the organization and what they offer. It is beneficial to obtain as much information as possible prior to the actual interview with the service program. If your organization provides employment services, the process you use to getting to know employers is similar to what you need to do to learn about service programs. When communicating with a service program, request some/all of the following:

- **Marketing materials**: to see how they talk about their program and the characteristics of the individuals who typically serve. Be sure to ask for materials available in alternative formats–braille, large print, etc.
- **Success stories**: from previous volunteers highlighting the strategies that made those matches successful
- **Other paperwork**: e.g., the application; that might be helpful for illustration and reference

NextSTEP website: www.serviceandinclusion.org/nextstep
Facebook: www.facebook.com/service2employ
Twitter: @Service2Employ
Once you have gathered and absorbed the information, think about a set of questions that you’d like to ask the program when you go to meet with them (see suggestions in the following section).

**Sample questions to ask when meeting with a service program:**

- Tell me a little about your program and the various volunteer opportunities you offer.
- Have you had experience supporting people with intellectual or developmental disabilities in service? Describe the supports that helped the individual become a successful service member, etc.
- Can you describe some of the successful experiences of members with disabilities? What did they do? What worked well about the match between the member and the service opportunity?
- Can you describe a typical volunteer (e.g., personality traits) who was a good fit with opportunities you offer.
- Have you ever carved out new roles for individuals based on their skills and a need you might have in a specific location or for a particular job?
- Have you worked with organizations like ours in the past? What has made the experience successful or what could have been improved?

**Basing these questions on your research will indicate to the program:**

1. You are interested in what they do
2. You are committed to working together in finding applicants
3. You will be an active partner in providing supports for success

As you get to know the various service programs, it would be helpful to keep track of what you learn for reference in the future, creating short “profiles” of each program on file. You could develop a simple database listing contact information, primary program activities, tasks and skills, and application process guidelines. Maintaining job description, either virtually or in paper is also a good idea. Some individuals, families/guardians, and advocates may be interested in service but not know which programs to which to apply. Over time you will build a familiarity with these service programs and can better suggest which ones look like a good fit. You can develop stories about individuals who have been successful in service, giving individuals and family members a clear picture about the benefits of a service experience.

The goal is to have a conversation, learning specifics about the service program and what characteristics make for successful service terms. You should aim to find out enough about the program so you can assist an individual pursuing service learning opportunities. You may also help plant ideas for including people with disabilities and make them aware of the resources and supports available to them.

**Some ways you might use the following questions:**

- Invite the service programs to come to your agency’s staff meeting or in-service
- Host a small group discussion with you and a few colleagues over a cup of coffee
- Offer to meet at the service program’s office and bring a couple of colleagues

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**Primary Contact Information**

Name: 
Phone number(s): 
Email address: 
Website:

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**Additional Contacts**

Name: 
Phone number(s): 
Email address: 
Website:
Questions for Service Programs

Recruitment and Application Process
- Describe your recruitment process for new members.
- Describe your application process (Look through the application itself. The disability organization may have specific questions about sections of the application.)
- Are members typically centrally located? What transportation options are available?
- What supports/accommodation do you provide for the application process?
  - Do you provide alternative formats for applying (e.g., paper application rather than online, additional time to complete the application)?
- What is the annual timeframe for applying to the program (i.e., when are slots open)?
  - Describe the selection process (specifically: how are decisions made, how do you track applicants, can service members be selected after the start of the next session for back-up positions, who do they contact to touch base while waiting to hear about selections)?

Program Requirements
- Are there prerequisites such as previous experience or certifications that are required before a member starts in service?
- Describe the orientation process and what information new members receive early on to learn the job and how to manage their responsibilities?
  - Are there trainings that members must go through during orientation (e.g., CPR, equipment usage)?
  - What types of supports have been provided to individuals for orientation and training?
  - What are your overall requirements for all applicants (e.g., CORI checks, educational minimums, age range)?

Interests and Skills
- What areas does your program focus on?
- What types of activities are typical for your service members, e.g., can you describe a typical day for a service member?
- What specific skills are you looking for from members?

Schedule
- For your program, what is a typical schedule (e.g., number of days, which days, how many hours)?
- Can you describe what kind of work schedule you are offer and does that vary with the specific role the service member would play?
- What experiences have you had accommodating changes in a member’s schedule (e.g., if they request a flexible schedule or need to work different days each week)?

Environment/Setting
- In what types of settings do members typically work? (e.g., indoor, outdoors, in a team or without a team)
- Describe any uniforms or dress codes that are required.
- What types of equipment are used and are there safety hazards associated with any of the equipment? How do members receive training to operate them?

Questions continue on the next page.
Career Planning

- Service members can build valuable employment skills while serving (volunteering). Can you describe how you have worked with individuals to build marketable career or employment skills during service?
- Do you work with individuals to track and log experiences during the service term that will be useful when writing a resume?
- As the service term is nearing the end, does your program assist with resume-writing, building a personal profile or other tools that an individual can use when seeking employment?
- Do you provide references for employment?

Support

- Based on your experience and what we’ve discussed today, can you describe what types of supports you anticipate needing to successfully include a person with a disability in your program?
- This is the time to discuss any health/safety issues, and areas others see as important for the person to be successful in a service term.
- How can we as a disability organization assist in setting up supports? Could we provide assistance to ensure member success?