Section Three

Training Members and Volunteers to Work in Out-of-School Time Programs

This section offers some basic ideas and tips on training topics and techniques appropriate for use with members and volunteers who will be working in out-of-school time (OST) programs. The “Training Materials” section of this manual offers complete sets of handouts that can be used to conduct training sessions on many of the topics suggested in this section.

Why is Training Important?

The quality of an out-of-school time program rests heavily on the ability of adults working in the program to:

- Understand young people’s needs and relate effectively with them
- Plan and carry out interesting and creative activities
- Help young people resolve behavioral problems and issues between themselves and others
- Interact effectively with parents, school staff, and any other stakeholders
- Understand the mission, goals, policies, and regulations of the program

In order to have these abilities, all adults who help to run the program must participate in staff development and training.

Working effectively with young people requires patience, knowledge, understanding, and a genuine interest in their welfare and development. Many individuals who choose to work with children may have prior experience and/or natural abilities when it comes to working with young people, but all staff and volunteers can benefit from participation in ongoing training opportunities where they can contribute their knowledge and gain new information. Because each program has its own philosophy, policies, and focus, program-specific training is very important to ensure that all participating adults have a basic understanding of the program’s mission, goals, and procedures.

What Training do Members and Volunteers Need to Work in an Out-of-School Time Program?

If members and volunteers from Corporation programs are working in tandem with the "regular" (long-term, paid) staff of an OST program, they should receive the same training that regular staff members in the program receive. Ideally, any National Service partnership with an out-of-school time program should start with an understanding that members and volunteers can be very valuable assets and integral parts of the program – but in order to magnify the contributions they can make, members and volunteers need to have a full understanding of the program's goals, philosophy, and policies. Members and volunteers should participate in a thorough orientation to the program, basic training on child and youth development and activity planning, and ongoing in-service training throughout their term of service.

Introductory training for members and volunteers may include the following topics.

Suggested Training Topics

- Program philosophy, mission statement, and/or goals
- Program policies
- Child and youth development
- Behavior guidance
- Activity/curriculum planning
- First Aid and CPR
- Detecting and reporting child abuse and neglect
- Activities and curriculum specific to the program (e.g., tutoring, homework help, arts activities, sports, clubs)

How Can Members and Volunteers Get the Training They Need?

Effective training can be offered in a variety of ways.

- Training can be conducted by team leaders, Corporation program staff, non-Corporation staff of OST programs where members and volunteers are working, or trainers from outside agencies. Team leaders and program staff can use the training materials included in this manual to conduct their training. Training materials entail ready-to-use handouts to guide training sessions.

- Contact State Service Commissions to learn about other programs in your state that may have similar training needs. Share training resources.

- Contact your local school district for help with tutor training.

- Trainers from outside organizations can be brought in to conduct training. Usually this involves paying trainers a fee, but some organizations provide training services free of charge. To set up a training, you can contact such organizations as the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) or the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA). NIOST works with training associates around the country and can set up a training to fit your needs. To contact NIOST, call (781) 283-2546. NSACA has affiliates in almost every state that can provide training. To search for NSACA affiliate organizations near you, look at the NSACA web site (www.NSACA.org) or call them at (617) 298-5012.

- You may also find help with training by contacting local community colleges and four-year colleges and universities – many offer courses and training on pertinent topics.

- The National Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) is another resource for learning about possible training resources in your community. They have offices in most areas of the country and can be reached at www.NACCRRA.org or (202) 393-5501.

Training should take place during a concentrated block of time at the beginning of a member's or volunteer's term of service. In-service training should also be offered on an ongoing basis day period of introductory training and then follow up with regular in-service training.

(See training ideas at the end of the Program Profiles section for specific examples of effective training practices.)

Ideas for effective in-service training

In-service training can be part of weekly, bimonthly, or monthly staff meetings. In-service training should include opportunities to learn new things and reflect on activities and interactions that have resulted in learning.

To help members and volunteers gain new knowledge and understanding at in-service training sessions, experts from different organizations can be invited in to speak on a variety of pertinent topics. Staff, volunteers, or members can also take turns making presentations on different subjects. Examples of possible in-service training topics include:

- Working with young people who have special needs
- Building relationships with parents and families
- Effective homework help strategies

- Conducting creative arts projects
- Mentoring
- Specific conflict resolution techniques to use with young people

In order to make the most of the learning potential involved in their work, it is important that members and volunteers have regular opportunities for structured reflection and discussion. The following text box contains some ideas for integrating reflection and sharing as part of regular staff meetings and in-service training.

Ideas for Reflection

- Sit in a circle and have each person share the best thing and the hardest thing that he or she has experienced in working with youth since the last time you met. Take time to share both the joys and the frustrations involved in this work. Discuss issues and ideas that arise.
- Ask participants to come to each staff meeting/in-service training with a specific problem or issue in mind that they would like to share with the group. Work together to find possible solutions and/or figure out a way to integrate new ideas into the program.
- Use role plays or scenarios to engage participants in small group discussions where they will share ideas about what could be done in a given situation. (See sample scenarios in the behavior guidance training materials in this manual.)

Basic Tips for Planning and Conducting Effective Training Sessions

Training sessions should be interactive and model methods that participants can use with the young people they will work with.

Planning Training Sessions:

- **Gather information about those you will be training:** What do they already know? What are some areas where they might need extra instruction? If they have participated in training previously, what worked and what did they find to be ineffective?

- **Establish and Prioritize Goals:** What do the participants need to know? What would they like to learn? What do you hope to convey to participants during this training session? What topics are most important? What goals are reasonable given time constraints?

- **Brainstorm and Select Methods:** What methods best meet the goals? Think about the inclusion of large and small group discussion, panels, role plays or scenarios, lectures, stories and personal experiences, hands-on activities, games, and time for questions and answers. Be sensitive to different learning styles and develop a variety of methods that you will use in presenting each topic.

- **Design the Agenda:** In what order will you present topics? How can you break up a lecture with small group work or hands-on activities? Think about the types of activities involved in each topic on your agenda and order the topics in such a way that participants will be presented with a balanced variety of training activities. You may want to select lively, interactive, and/or hands-on activities for the block of time immediately following lunch since that tends to be the time when participants are sleepy. You may want to offer more lecture-oriented topics early in the day when participants are fresh. Plan adequate breaks.

- **Prepare Materials:** Do you need handouts? Many participants find it easier to follow a trainer if they have handouts to look at. What materials do you need to present your hands-on activities? Think about the use of overheads, chalkboards, and/or flip charts. Some trainers find it effective to wait until the end to pass out handouts and keep participants' focused by using overheads or flipcharts during the session.

Conducting Training Sessions:

- **Start with Introductions and/or an Icebreaker Activity:** How can you create an atmosphere that welcomes discussion and input from participants? Introduce yourself and talk a little about your experience in the field. To get people talking to each other, have everyone introduce themselves, interview and introduce another person, do a scavenger hunt looking for people who have a specific interest or talent, or participate in some other sort of icebreaker activity.

- **Go Over the Agenda:** How can you prepare participants for the content and pacing of your session? Make sure that everyone knows what will be covered and how long they should expect to be in each session. Highlight some aspects that participants can look forward to. Be prepared to adjust your agenda to fit the needs of the group.

- **Gauge Participants' Knowledge and Interest:** How can you gear your session toward the specific interests and needs of your audience? As you start presenting each topic, take a few minutes to find out how much participants know about the topic and what areas they would like to focus on.

- **Pay Attention to Participants:** Do the participants look like they're following well? Are they nodding, volunteering comments, asking questions? Stop from time to time to ask for questions and ask how everyone is doing. If participants are tired and/or unengaged, you may need to slow down, turn the material into questions and generate discussion, move more quickly, switch to a different type of activity, or offer a short break.

- **Be Flexible:** What will you do if some things do not go as you planned? Expect that some of your activities may take longer or shorter than planned. Explain to participants what is going on if you need to deviate from the schedule you've laid out. If participants don't seem to be engaged in a given activity, be prepared to adjust, stretch, shrink, or eliminate activities as necessary.

- **Think about Pacing:** How can you keep the interest of participants? Start with simple concepts, build them into more complex ideas. Integrate physical movement, humor and games. Tailor the presentation to this specific group of participants. Interject personal stories and humor.

- **Make the Conclusion Strong:** How can you help participants tie everything together at the end of the session and encourage participants to incorporate what they have learned in your session into their work? End each session with a summary and a chance for participants to share last thoughts. It can be very effective to end with a challenge – something you urge participants to do in relation to what you've presented. Have participants set goals related to the topic and/or work in teams to brainstorm new ideas related to something that is needed in your program. Ask everyone to share one thing that really stood out.

- **Have Participants Evaluate Each Session:** How can you find out what worked in your session? Have participants fill out evaluation forms that ask what they learned in your session, what they enjoyed most, and what they would change.