NORTHWEST SERVICE ACADEMY

Community Action Project

Members Starting January 2006

Section 1
Project Proposal Guide and Reporting Form

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DISTRICT 112

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Community Action Project

A Guide to Creating Positive Community Change

Every day is a journey, and the journey itself, home.
--Matsuo Basho, 1689

Why does NWSA do the Community Action Project (CAP)?

In the early 1800's, Alexis DeToqueville visited the United States from France. The United States had recently gained its independence. Unlike France, which had returned to dictatorship after the French Revolution, the US had maintained its democracy. DeToqueville wanted to know why. In his travels around the new nation, DeToqueville marveled at the level of civic knowledge and engagement of the average American.

Unfortunately, civic engagement is not what it was in DeToqueville's time. In just about every form - attending community meetings, joining organizations, serving on committees, knowledge of how policy and government works, and basic elements of democracy such as voting - civic participation has been in decline since the early 1960s.

The Community Action Project (CAP) is NWSA's way of boosting civic engagement. Our goal is to build future leadership so that NWSA members, during their service and after their service with NWSA, will be active agents of change, rather than passive members of society. To achieve this, NWSA requires full-time members to lead a CAP that speaks to their vision of society. The CAP provides an experiential understanding of how an individual can create positive change.

Both the beauty and the challenge in the CAP lie in freedom. When you work on the CAP, you are working on it for yourself - there are no sponsors giving you a set of goals or a workplan, and nobody at NWSA will tell you what project you should pursue as long as it complies with some basic guidelines.

This also means that you will go through the process of deciding where you can have the most impact and what you should be doing to bring about changes in society. You will develop the ability to decide what needs to be done in the absence of any recipe, instruction manual, or direction from someone else. This ability is the critical step that keeps most Americans from stepping forward to become involved in the community issues that surround them. Most people are aware of the problems, but they are unable to envision a solution.

Therefore, it's the process of developing your CAP that's important, not the outcome. The CAP process will guide you through the steps of organizing a community project in your area of interest. Members are required to complete all of the steps. The project you choose will guide how intensive each step is.

The CAP can be a great adventure. Like NWSA's entire Member Development program, the CAP is what you make of it. You have an opportunity to shape your own project based on what is important to you. Investing the right amount of time to have an effective and fulfilling CAP within your schedule is important. While some members choose to do elaborate projects, others feel time constraints and plan accordingly.

The choice is yours. It's a fun adventure.

Table of Contents

WHAT IS THE CAP? **2**

HOW THE CAP WORKS **5**

HOW REPORTING WORKS **8**

STEP 1: SELECT AN ISSUE **9**

Identify and select an issue of both personal and community importance

STEP 2: INVESTIGATE THE ISSUE **10**

Gather information about the issue and interview community experts.

STEP 3: SELECT A PROJECT **11**

Brainstorm, select, and articulate a project for your CAP

How Does it Work?

Each full-time NWSA member completes a CAP during their service. Each member will also have a set of due dates for their CAP reporting based on the dates of your service term with NWSA. This reporting is a requirement of the program, and the CAP must be complete before you can exit the program and receive an Education Award.

There are relatively few rules about CAPs:

1. ***Members need to complete the CAP***. The CAP is a requirement of full-time NWSA members. The CAP reporting needs to be submitted electronically to the Member Development Coordinator by the required due dates indicated in this guidebook.

2. ***Leadership vs. volunteering***. The CAP is about community leadership. This is different from volunteering at someone else's direction. For instance, volunteering with a tree-planting project led by SOLV, where you are told what to do by the event leader, would not qualify as a CAP. However, organizing your own planting project would qualify because you would be designing and planning the project and leading others.

3. ***Community Need.*** Your CAP should meet a community need and cannot be strictly recreational in nature. You can also find ways to link your personal passions with community needs.

4. ***Prohibited Activities***. NWSA members cannot engage in any of the prohibited activities during their CAP. Members doing a Policy Analysis CAP should be particularly conscious of not lobbying for changes in policy. (See "Types of Projects") below. The list of Prohibited Activities can be found on page 17 of the Member Handbook.

5. ***Different From the Work at Your Sponsor Site***. Your CAP cannot be the same activity as the service you perform for your sponsor. However, if you choose, you can work with your sponsor on a separate project. For example, a member whose service focuses on recruiting volunteers to lead field trips at a local wetland could choose to start a monitoring program at the wetland to assess wildlife populations as their CAP. You can also choose to do your CAP on something totally unrelated to your sponsor site.

There are Three Types of CAPs: *Direct Service, Education and Outreach, or Policy Analysis*. You should have no trouble fitting your interest into one of these three categories:

Direct Service: Projects that directly meet community needs. Examples of Direct Service projects include:

- Develop an after-school program at a school related to AmeriCorps goals (environment, education, health and human needs, public safety, etc.).
- Lead a restoration project at a site in your neighborhood
- Evaluate the volunteer program for a local nonprofit and make recommendations for how to improve the volunteers' experience.
- Develop a workshop series on diversity awareness (or another topic) for NWSA members.

Education and Outreach: Educating the community about issues and ways they can help solve them. Examples of Education and Outreach projects include:

- Work with local nurseries to provide information and workshops to consumers on the effects of non-native invasive plants and native plants that could replace non-natives in their gardens.
- Develop a volunteer recruitment and outreach program for a nonprofit organization whose work you value.
- Partner with a local HIV/AIDS organization to improve education about HIV among homeless teens.

Policy Analysis: Laws and policies affect every area of AmeriCorps service, from recycling to education to watershed restoration. Understanding policy is also part of being an active and informed citizen. In a Policy Analysis CAP, you analyze laws and policies on a subject that interests you. *Please note that because of AmeriCorps' prohibited activities; you cannot lobby for policy change on AmeriCorps time.* However, we encourage members to learn about how these policies work, since it's a fundamental part of participatory Democracy. Some examples:

- Research laws and enforcement of discharges of pollution into the Willamette River.
- Research policies of universities and graduate schools regarding inclusion and accessibility for people of different cultural backgrounds. Identify recommendations for improvement.

Frequently Asked Questions About the CAP

- **Can I work with others on my CAP?**

Yes. You can do their CAP individually or as a team. Your CAP team could be the team you serve on, or a completely different group of NWSA members. If you are doing your CAP as a team, the team only needs to submit one CAP Reporting Form on each required due date, with everyone's name on it. The division of work will be a team decision.

- **How much time should I expect to spend on the CAP?**

There is no minimum or maximum amount of hours required to complete the CAP. However, a general range is likely to be somewhere between 40 and 120 hours depending on the scope of your project.

- **How do I keep track of CAP hours?**

Most of the time spent on your CAP, including research and reporting, is counted as Development Hours. They are recorded as CAP hours on your time log.

Time spent fundraising *–for both money, and in-kind donations—logged as CAP Fundraising Hours*. ***There is a maximum of 35 CAP fundraising*** hours that can be logged. The actual requests (writing grant proposals, requesting donations, etc.) count as fundraising and toward this 35-hour limit. Researching for these activities does not, and is counted as regular CAP hours, which have no limit.

- **How do I find time away from my service to work on my CAP?**

It's all about planning. Since NWSA requires 1725 hours, and only 1390 of these need to be service hours, there is plenty of time left over for Development, including the CAP. You can take time away from your site for Development and CAP, and NWSA sets this expectation with sponsors. You can also work on your CAP on weekends and evenings if you want, but if you plan ahead you should be able to avoid this.

If you are on a field team, you may request days away from your team to work on your CAP as long as you request the time away in advance. If your team will have a cell phone that you can use occasionally for CAP purposes if you need to receive calls while your team is in the field. You can also plan on taking a few hours away from your team if you need to be available for phone calls.

Do I need to connect with my sponsor about my CAP?

You should. Sponsors know that you will be working on a CAP project, but it will be good to touch base with them. Sponsors are responsible for signing your timesheet, so communicating with them about how you are spending your time is important. Your sponsor may also be able to share ideas and contacts for your project.

Can I change or adjust my CAP midway through?

Yes. Projects often naturally morph from the original idea. Small changes are expected. If you decide to change projects entirely, you'll need to complete the reporting for the new project. *But you'll need to stick to the original deadlines if you change projects*. It's advisable to change projects earlier rather than later due to time constraints since you'll be playing catch-up.

What if my CAP reaches a dead end?

Some projects reach a dead end, and this is part of the process of learning. If you've tried everything that you can, it doesn't mean that you failed. If your project dead-ends before Step 5, we'll ask you to either adjust your project or start a new one. If it dead-ends during or after Step 5, you can adjust your project, start a new one, or conclude the project with special focus on why the project couldn't move forward.

How can I connect with NWSA members about CAP?'

We encourage you to connect with your team about your CAP projects to share ideas. If you have an event that you want to involve other members in, you can post something in the Weekly Briefing by emailing it to the NWSA Center Secretary. Items for the weekly briefing must be received by 5 PM Friday for items to be included in the briefing the next Monday.

Where can I go for questions and advice?

If your team leader doesn't know the answer, ask the Member Development Coordinator.

This guidebook only goes up to Part 3, the project proposal. What happens after that?

This is a guide to the proposal process, due on April 10, 2006. When your proposal is approved, we'll e-mail you the rest of the guidebook and the reporting form. The guidebook you receive will depend on the type of CAP you decide to do.

How this Proposal Guidebook Works

This is a guide to the first part of your CAP. It will help you investigate issues that matter to you, find out more about those issues, and develop a proposal that you will submit to NWSA. When your proposal is approved, you will then receive the guidebook forms relevant to your project type.

PLEASE FOLLOW THIS GUIDEBOOK AS YOU WORK ON YOUR PROJECT INSTEAD OF AFTER THE FACT. It is designed to guide you through the process. Doing the project and then doing the reporting later will create some extra work for you and may make you back up and re-create steps that you missed.

How Reporting Works

This guidebook also contains the reporting for your CAP. You'll be filling it out as you go along.

- Respond to each step and sub-step in the space provided. Add extra lines as needed.
- Save a copy of it on your computer or on a disk.
- E-mail your document to the Training and Development Coordinator at the NWSA Lower Columbia Center on the dates indicated for each required due date. (Neil.Schulman@esd112.org)
- Feel free to attach any additional material to support the document.
- When your proposal is approved, you will receive the guidebook for the rest of the CAP.

Grey boxes like this contain the questions you will need to answer. Type your answers in the box, save this form as a word file, and continue working on the form until the proposal is complete.

Begin by filling this out for yourself or your CAP team.

Basic Information.....			
Names of people working on this CAP:	NAME	TEAM OR REGION	E-mail Address

Due Dates:

.....

April 10, 2006	CAP Proposal Due	**Complete through Step 3**
May 15, 2006	CAP Project Plan Due	**Complete through Step 5**
November 13, 2006	Completed CAP due	**Completed CAP through Step 7**

Step 1: Select an Issue

The first step is to decide what issue you want to focus on. Homelessness? Education of at-risk youth? Good stream habitat for salmon?

What's Important to the Community?

Government, business, nonprofit groups, and individual volunteers all work on pressing community issues. There aren't enough resources to deal with every problem, so hard choices must be made between crucial issues such as AIDS, illiteracy, child abuse, environmental pollution, violence, drug abuse, habitat conservation, and other issues. Government officials, business leaders, community groups, grantors, and voters decide every year which programs will be funded (and which issues and populations will be served) and which will not. Similarly, you'll need to pick one issue among many to focus on for your CAP.

Each issue operates on multiple levels. For instance, watershed restoration occurs because of policy (for instance, government requirements that new developers mitigate for their impacts), on-the-ground efforts (such as community-based restoration projects), and the cumulative behavior of individual people (such as individuals disconnecting their downspouts).

What Moves You Personally?

For citizens to become engaged in their community, two factors must come together. The first is an issue that's important to the community. The second is a person's individual passion. Our motivation in serving the world is fueled by our personal beliefs and values around certain issues. Usually, when people start working on an issue that's important but that they're not emotionally excited about, they lose interest after a while. A large part of making the CAP successful is to find a project that you're passionate about.

If interested in working on a CAP team:

If you would like to involve more members than yourself, take opportunities to give your "pitch" to a group of members, or put something in the weekly briefing.

Regardless of who originated the issue and project idea, your CAP team will share decision-making equally. Everyone will need to be flexible to the project evolving over time. Exchange contact information with others and arrange a future meeting to talk about ideas and begin the next steps.

Section 1: Select a broad issue you want to focus on

1-A What issues do you think are most important for communities in this region? Why?

1-B Which issues are most important to you personally? Why?

1-C Given your thoughts about community needs and your passions, **select an issue** on which to focus your CAP.

Step 2: Investigate the Issue

Before deciding upon a project, you need to investigate the issue more deeply. First, research more about the issue, what's already being done, whether it's working or not, what's feasible, and what barriers exist.

There are several ways to start investigating the issue:
-Experts in the community. They may be professionals in the field, long-time volunteers, or professors of a related topic.
-Government and nonprofit organizations will often have staff with expertise. (Especially important to Policy Analysis CAPs).
-Local organizations that serve a segment of the population you anticipate working with or that are in the area of your likely project site.
-Web searches, library resources, and local colleges/universities (these will be particularly important to Policy Analysis CAPs). Another resource for a Policy Analysis CAP will be the staff of your state legislator or congressional representation in Washington D.C.).

2-A How much background do you feel you have on this issue? What are some things you feel you need to learn to work on it effectively?

Interview Experts Involved in Your Issue

You or your CAP team will interview at least two people with experience or expertise in the issue you're working on. Ask them at least three of the following questions, and other questions you think are important.

These conversations will help you understand the issue better, what is already being done, what the needs are, the barriers to success, and the other issues that play a role in your project. For instance, promoting pesticide-free food is related to economic issues, since organic food is more expensive.

Take notes with everyone you talk to. Each person will likely lead you to additional sources. Develop a list of contacts that you can go to as your project develops.

2-B Interview at least two issue contacts, and ask them ***at least three*** of the following questions. Then list the people you interviewed in the chart below.

I. What are greatest needs of the community regarding this issue?
II. What are influential groups (government; nonprofit; commercial; and local, state, national) that are working on this issue?
III. What needs are not being met or not being met sufficiently, and who is best suited to meet them?
IV. What are some of the barriers to addressing this issue?
V. What are some of the laws, policies, and rules that most directly affect this issue?
VI. What are some ideas for projects that would help address this issue?
VII: Who else is doing work in this area that you can contact to ask similar questions?

Complete the following chart to track who you talked with and their contact information, as well as other people they suggest to you. Add lines if you like.

Person (Lead)	Organization	Phone #	E-Mail

Thank You Notes
Please remember to take a moment to send each person you interview a thank you note for taking the time to share information with you.

Step 3: Select a Project

Now that you have selected the broad issue, you need to select an actual project to focus on. **A good project has five characteristics:**

1. A clearly defined goal. For instance, a finished brochure with information on gardening with native plants, or a policy analysis of the City of Portland's policies regarding renewable energy.

2. A sense of how this project will help address the larger issue. Most projects are small steps toward larger issues. For instance, the brochure may provide information to people interested in native plants and be targeted at people who aren't already conscious of native gardening.

In your interviews in Step 2, you might have found that an organization is already doing some of the work you're considering for your project. Take care not to duplicate their efforts. Instead, talk to the folks overseeing these efforts to see how your CAP might compliment or supplement their efforts.

3. It can be completed within a year of service. Your CAP can be as large and small as you want it, but it should be something you can complete by the due date. Rome wasn't built in a day—but it did get built, by the cumulative effect of lot of people's effort over time.

4. A plan for sustainability. Since you're AmeriCorps service will end in 11 months, you'll want to think about what will happen to your project after you leave. Some may wrap up neatly. Others will have maintenance and continuation need you will need to plan for.

5. Tangible goals that can be evaluated. How will you know if your project was a success?

Statement of Need

Describe the need that you are trying to address. The statement of need explains the gap that you think your project will fill. Be specific, yet succinct.

Brainstorm Project Ideas

Now that you have a clear statement of the need, brainstorm with your group as many different ideas for projects that address this need. For instance, if the problem is a lack of knowledge about native plants, you could produce a brochure, develop a website, organize a symposium for gardeners, work with nurseries to promote the sale of native plants, or do a policy analysis of laws and regulations regarding the sale of noxious weeds. While you're brainstorming, remember that there are no bad ideas. If you're working in a team, everyone should contribute ideas.

Evaluate the Ideas and Select a Project

Take a look at your brainstormed list and the five characteristics of a good project listed above. Answer these questions:

1. *Which projects meet these five characteristics?* Eliminate those that meet the fewest and keep the ones that *meet the most.*
2. *Which project ideas is the group most excited about?* These should rise to the top of the list.
3. *Which projects are most likely to have the most community support?* This makes a project much easier to implement and sustain.
4. *Does the project meet the basic CAP requirements?*

Identify Measurable Goals and Evaluation Tools

Every project needs a way of measuring whether or not it was successful. For instance, if your goal was to inspire more people to plant native plants by organizing a native plant workshop, you could do one of several things. You could measure workshop attendance - this measures interest in the topic and your ability to conduct outreach. You could survey people who attended on their opinion of the workshop, which would tell you if the workshop content was good. Or you could do a survey two months later that asks them if they

started planting native plants - this would measure if your workshop changed behavior. Of course, you can measure more than one thing if you have the time.

A few guidelines on how you measure your project:

- Be sure your project has a tangible goal that can be measured statistically.
- Measure what you think is the most important end outcome of your project. If you don't measure what you value, you'll end up valuing what you measure. Don't measure things that are out of your control or ability to influence.
- Use an evaluation tool that captures what's important without taking tons of time.

NOTE: Measuring success can be a bit tricky if you're analyzing policy. You might consider having others review your analysis.

Anticipate Obstacles

Think about possible barriers and obstacles. Frequently, these include scheduling conflicts with key people who are busy and may not be able to work with the schedule you need. Projects based out of schools often run into the obstacles presented by the school year—nobody's around in the summer, fall is hectic getting started, and the end of spring is a busy rush to the end of the school year. Some on-the-ground projects depend on the willingness of a property owner, whether a private party or a public agency, or on permits or funding to move forward.

Identify a Likely Mentor

A mentor is a person who guides and advises you without actually doing the project. A mentor may emerge in your interviews or in other people who have dealt with similar projects before. If you need help identifying a mentor, contact the Member Development Coordinator.

Select a Community Action Project

3-A Statement of Need: In a sentence or two, describe the issue and how it affects the community.

3-B Brainstorm and list at least three project ideas based on your thoughts, interviews, and your understanding of the issue that would help address this need in some way.

3-C: Pick one project for your CAP. What is it?

3-D: Describe what you hope to accomplish with this project. Who will benefit and how?

3-E: Success Measurement: How will you tell if your project was successful?

3-F: What do you think will be the biggest obstacles to this project?

3-G Identify a likely mentor

Type of project for your CAP (Check one box)

☐ **Direct Service** ☐ **Education/Outreach** ☐ **Policy Analysis**

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU"VE COMPLETED YOUR CAP PROPOSAL. SUBMIT YOUR WORK UP TO THIS POINT TO THE MEMBER DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR.