

# Service Corps

## to Social Impact Career

A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers

*by*

**Amy Potthast**



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The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealyst.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealyst.org/servicecompanion).



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Service Corps to Social Impact Career

# INTRODUCTION



## Getting started

### A quick introduction to this book

#### Introduction Overview

The Introduction contains brief discussions of the following topics:

- What makes a corps member's transition unique? (page 2)
- Whom is this *Companion* for? (pages 2-3)
- How is this *Companion* structured? (page 3)
- Archetypal corps members (pages 4-5)
- How this *Companion* relates to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*, including the table of contents for these free books (pages 5-6)
- About the *Companion*'s author and organization (page 7)

Your participation in national or international service gives you an incredible starting point for a career and life with social impact. This is true whether you are a recent high school or college graduate, or an encore professional. For people early in their careers, service also offers an opportunity to build hands-on experience before applying to college or graduate school.

The beauty of many service corps is that they effectively introduce you and other participants to public service roles while also providing you with the skills you need to succeed:

- With very little full-time work experience, recent college graduates may accept positions during their service term with nonprofit organizations, schools, or government agencies that offer a great deal of responsibility, autonomy, challenges, and opportunities for training and professional growth.
- People with years of professional experience can take on new positions in nonprofit and government agencies that immediately utilize their skill sets while allowing them to gain experience from a different perspective.



No matter what stage of life you were in as you started your term of service, this book aims to help you parlay your service experience into a social impact career.

Pathways to public service careers are often unclear. Because you are responding to a calling that comes from within you—that commits you to strengthening your community and the world—your career path isn't easy to predict or even to plan:

- People you meet may inspire you to new heights.
- You may discover your own solution to an intractable social ill, start a new program or organization, and never look for a job again.
- Opportunities may arise that impel you to act in innovative and unplanned ways.

Because your career path is a journey of discovery—and as unique in the world as your own thumbprint—the advice in *Service Corps to Social Impact Career—A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* aims to prepare you for opportunities to make a tangible, positive impact in the world. This *Companion* also aims to position you to engage the people who will support and inspire you as you grow.

## **What makes a corps member's transition unique?**

As a service corps participant, your transition to a career or school is unique for several reasons.

Right now you have an awesome opportunity to become part of the next wave of public service leaders. Projections indicate that from 2006 to 2016, U.S. nonprofits will need to attract and develop 640,000 new senior managers, or 2.4 times 2006 levels.<sup>1</sup> By learning career transition skills during your term of service, you can plan your professional growth and prepare to assume leadership roles throughout your career.

Moreover, the relatively short-term nature of your experience means that you can spend the entire term engaged in the transition to your post-service career. As you develop new skill sets and networks, you'll also need to learn how to leverage these quickly for the job or school search.

A term of service may be brief, but it's *incredibly powerful*. Learning how to explain the difference between a service corps experience and any other one- or two-year role is crucial in some settings, as is telling the story of your experience.

## **Whom is this *Companion* for?**

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career* has been written for prospective, current, and former participants of a wide range of service corps like Peace Corps, AmeriCorps,



**Right now you have an awesome opportunity to become part of the next wave of public service leaders."**

<sup>1</sup> The Bridgespan Group (Thomas J. Tierney) "The Nonprofit Sector's Leadership Deficit" March 2006. Available at: <http://www.bridgespan.org/nonprofit-leadership-deficit.aspx>



Teach For America, City Year, Avodah, Jesuit Volunteers, HealthCorps, Mississippi Teacher Corps, Volunteer Service Organisation, Atlas Corps, Indicorps, and many more. It's meant for people who want to use their service experience as a building block to their next steps, whether that's a social impact career or a related academic pursuit.

This *Companion* does not offer preparation for other options you may have when you leave your term. For example, it's not intended to help with retirement issues, staying home to raise a family, or taking time off to travel abroad—although some of the insights contained may be useful in these pursuits, too.

Also, this *Companion* primarily focuses on the experience of U.S. residents serving domestically or internationally. Some of the advice may be useful to service corps participants from other countries.

Different programs choose different terms to refer to their participants, such as “volunteer,” “corps member,” “member,” “coordinator,” “fellow,” or “teacher.” This book usually uses the terms “participant” and “corps member” to refer to the people who have committed to a term of service.

## How is this *Companion* structured?

Besides this introduction and a conclusion, this *Companion* has three main parts:

**Part One:** What you can do during the term of service to better position yourself for next steps. Next steps can include transitions to a career (searching for a salaried job) or educational setting (going on to school for an associates, bachelors, or graduate degree). Part One discusses discerning your professional calling, networking, building skills, and documenting achievements—all within the context of a term of service.

**Part Two:** Help for making the transition. This part covers the emotional and logistical challenges of your transitions and ways to overcome them. It also helps you effectively translate your service experience for prospective employers and admissions counselors, as well as provides tips for how to present your service experience on paper. If you have only just found this *Companion* and you are finished with your term, you'll find tips for getting yourself up to speed in this part as well. Part Two spells out alternatives to the nonprofit sector as a career choice, including government and business sector careers, as well as starting your own organization and going to school.

**Part Three:** Professional development after your transition, and staying in the loop as an alumnus. This part outlines some of the adjustments you'll make in a new job, as well as opportunities for lifelong career development.



## Archetypal corps members

We've found a few (fictional!) people to take this journey with you. We hope that the archetypal corps members outlined below help to illustrate some of the successes, challenges, and opportunities you will encounter throughout your own transitions.



### ACE'S STORY

Ace, 19, is the proud father of a pre-schooler and recently earned his GED in a program that supports formerly incarcerated and other court-involved youth. In high school he was involved in drugs and was considered a nonviolent juvenile offender. He's started a term of service with a conservation corps near his home in New Orleans, LA, greening buildings and homes. Ace is considering college, but is also interested in other opportunities that don't require a college education for the immediate future. Participating in his service corps makes him feel proud to be identified with something really positive for the community.



### BEA'S STORY

Bea, 22, just graduated from college in Western North Carolina and has moved an hour away to do a term of indirect service, connecting public schools with local organic farmers in Asheville. She is not sure what her plans are after her term is up, but she knows that sustainable agriculture and education are the issues she cares about most. In college, Bea majored in public health and led a student organization that procured an acre of campus to build a new community garden for students, faculty, and town residents to use. She has spent several spring breaks volunteering for Habitat for Humanity as well.



### CESAR'S STORY

Cesar, 33, participates in a faith-based direct-service program, teaching English, life skills, and U.S. citizenship test content to immigrants in a community center in a small city in Massachusetts, far from where he grew up near Tampa, FL. He is considering staying in his new city post-service. Before his term of service, he sold cell phones at a kiosk in a Florida mall, volunteered for a political campaign, and occasionally helped out at a community radio station. He majored in communications in college.

### DIRECT AND INDIRECT SERVICE

Direct service means working directly with an organization's constituents or clients, or doing physical labor as part of one's service. For example, tutoring children; helping low-income people access community services; hanging dry wall in a new house; or building trails.

Indirect service means working on an organization's programs to strengthen its capacity. Examples include developing a volunteer program that recruits and trains school-based tutors; writing grant proposals to fund a community center for low-income adults; soliciting in-kind donations of building materials for a new house; or co-ordinating the work of trail-building crews.





## DEENA'S STORY

Deena, 47, is in her second year of international service in Ecuador, helping women apply for micro-loans and start up small businesses. She spends most of her time traveling to rural villages without much access to telephones, the internet, or news from outside the local community. She plans to stay abroad once she's ended her term. Before leaving the United States, Deena ran her own bakery for over a decade and volunteered for a local Girl Scouts troop. She graduated from college with a degree in nursing.



## ED'S STORY

Ed, 70 and retired, also serves internationally, teaching English in a middle school in a small city in Southwestern China. A lifelong resident of Pittsburgh, Ed will move to Portland, OR for the first time when he returns to the United States, to be near his adult daughter. Before volunteering abroad, Ed taught high school English for most of his adult life, where he also coached the school's basketball team. He is a Vietnam veteran and after leaving the Service, he studied education and literature in college.

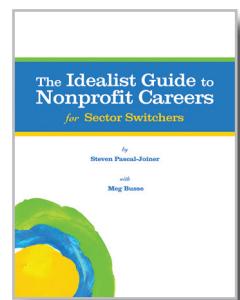
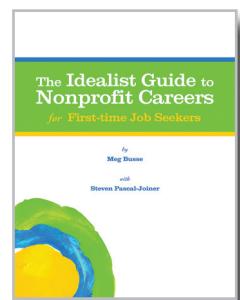
### How this *Companion* relates to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career* is designed to serve as a targeted supplemental companion to either of the free career guides published by Idealist.org in 2008:

*The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for First-time Job Seekers* by Meg Busse is primarily geared toward emerging professionals seeking their first position in the sector; the intended audience includes college students, recent graduates, and people entering the workforce for the first time. Little or no prior paid work experience is assumed. ([www.idealists.org/beginacareer](http://www.idealists.org/beginacareer))

*The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers* by Steven Joiner is conceived for transitioning professionals pursuing new career options in the non-profit sector; the intended audience includes mid-career professionals (from the for-profit or public sectors), encore careerists, and anyone else who has several years of experience under their belt. ([www.idealists.org/sectorswitcher](http://www.idealists.org/sectorswitcher))

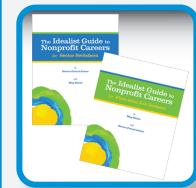
While this *Companion* presents career transition advice within the specific frame of the service corps experience and stands on its own as a book, it frequently makes



reference to relevant discussions and applicable activities contained in the aforementioned *Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*. These references point you toward additional guidance, insights, and resources that can enhance your understanding of various aspects of the career transition. Each reference to content in the *Idealist Guides* is accompanied by the chapter and/or page number for both versions, enabling you to access only the sections of an *Idealist Guide* that you need.

When you want to read a part of an *Idealist Guide* referenced in this *Companion*, you don't have to read both *Idealist Guides*—just choose the version you identify with more closely and download the relevant chapters as PDFs (they're all completely free). If you prefer, you can also download the complete version of either *Idealist Guide* as a PDF (also free).

Although they contain uniquely calibrated information for their intended audiences, both of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* follow the same basic structure, detailed in the table of contents below.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Throughout this book,

you'll see these tie-ins to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*. By following the links, you'll be taken to a page on the Idealist.org website where you can download the chapter as a free PDF.

**Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for First-time Job Seekers**  
[www.idealista.org/beginacareer](http://www.idealista.org/beginacareer)

**Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers**  
[www.idealista.org/sectorswitcher](http://www.idealista.org/sectorswitcher)

## Table of contents for The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers

<b>Introduction</b>	Opening thoughts: Why do you want to work in the nonprofit sector anyway?
<b>Chapter One</b>	What exactly is a nonprofit? (The answer will surprise you)
<b>Chapter Two</b>	Balancing act: The psychology of the job search
<b>Chapter Three</b>	Self and career assessment: The foundation of a successful job search and career
<b>Chapter Four</b>	Networking: Is it really all about who you know? Yes.
<b>Chapter Five</b>	Become a stronger candidate: Nine ways to get out and involved
<b>Chapter Six</b>	Tools for the job search: Researching <i>all</i> the opportunities in your chosen location
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	Does your work work for you? Evaluating organizational culture
<b>Chapter Eight</b>	Presenting yourself on paper: Resumes and cover letters
<b>Chapter Nine</b>	Presenting yourself in person: Interviews and first impressions
<b>Chapter Ten</b>	Closing the deal: Understanding benefits and the art of negotiation
<b>Chapter Eleven</b>	Staying ready: A career search doesn't end when you get a job
<b>Chapter Twelve</b>	Nonprofit hiring practices: The challenges of the job market
<b>Chapter Thirteen</b>	It's not what you think: Dispelling some misconceptions about the nonprofit world
<b>Chapter Fourteen</b>	Starting your own nonprofit: Five tips, one warning, and eleven first steps
<b>Conclusion</b>	Closing thoughts: Know yourself, the sector, and the points of synergy
<b>Appendix One</b>	Nonprofitspeak 101: A primer on the nonprofit sector's vocabulary



## **Amy Potthast, author of *Service Corps to Social Impact Career***

Amy Potthast, Director of Idealist's Service Initiatives, has served as a Peace Corps volunteer and trainer, an AmeriCorps member, and an AmeriCorps VISTA team leader. At Idealist, Amy has spearheaded the development of new resources, trainings, and events to promote public service careers and graduate education.

Amy has also helped develop and implement the Institute on Public Service Careers (IPSC), recipient of the 2006 National Association of Colleges and Employers/Chevron Award for innovative programming for undergraduate career service professionals. Also in 2006, she developed content for *What's Next: Life After Your Service Year*, the career transitions website for AmeriCorps VISTA (<http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/whatsnext/index.shtml>). In 2007, she earned the Building Bridges Award from the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals for developing the Idealist.org Graduate Degree Fairs for the Public Good. In 2008, she founded The New Service blog ([www.idealst.org/thenservice](http://www.idealst.org/thenservice)). Her work has increasingly focused on highlighting pathways to service corps participation as preparation for school and social impact careers.



## **Idealist.org, the organization behind this book**

[Idealist.org](http://idealst.org) is an interactive website where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, locate opportunities and supporters, and take steps to turn their good intentions into action. Run by the nonprofit Action Without Borders, Idealist creates opportunities for collaboration among individuals and organizations around the world, receiving over 60,000 unique visitors every day. It is one of the leading resources for nonprofit and public service-oriented people, with thousands of job openings, volunteer opportunities, internships, and events posted by more than 86,000 organizations worldwide.

Beyond the web, Idealist also runs face-to-face events and trainings. Idealist workshops build the capacity of nonprofit human resource professionals, volunteer resource managers, career counselors, job seekers, and others. Since 2004, Idealist has also organized over 120 Nonprofit Career Fairs, 60 Graduate Degree Fairs for the Public Good, and four Global Volunteering Fairs—attracting more than 10,000 organizations and 100,000 individuals from around the world.

Idealist is positioned to play an increasingly crucial role in connecting people to the vast number of diverse citizen service opportunities like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps. Idealist helps people find service opportunities that will strengthen their professional skills while giving them experience contributing to high-need communities throughout the world. Once established in a corps, corps members find career transitions support on Idealist, to help them move on to further education and careers.



## Credits

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Special thanks to our editorial readers—**Erin Barnhart, Meg Busse, Jung Fitzpatrick, Celeste Hamilton, Hannah Kane, Leah Nusse, Katrina Mathis, Steven Joiner, and Stacie West**—who generously contributed their insights, anecdotes, and proofreading powers. Thanks also go to the **entire staff at Idealist.org** for their support and collaboration in all of this work.

This book incorporates elements of the design work of **Kerstin Vogdes** of **kvdesign** ([www.kvdesign.net](http://www.kvdesign.net)), who created the original templates for *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

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## SUMMARY

At the end of each part of this book, you'll find a **summary** of the main points in that part. You'll also find handy **page number cues** to point you to the precise pages where you can read more about a particular topic.

## Disclaimer

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## You are here

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- This is the **Introduction**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealyst.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealyst.org/servicecompanion).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

Action Without Borders is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. [Idealist.org](http://Idealist.org), a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career – A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* by Amy Potthast is a product of Action Without Borders' Careers and Service Team based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and domestic and global volunteer opportunities. Published in 2009 by Action Without Borders.



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