

Chapter 1. Introduction

Career Benefits of AmeriCorps Service

You are probably well aware of and excited about the tangible skills you will gain during your year with AmeriCorps. What you may not realize is that along with the practical skills you will acquire over the coming year, you will also be developing intangible skills and resources that will lead to greater career success. According to a 2014 article by Maria Caruso on the AmeriCorps Alums' website, the Top 5 Skills AmeriCorps Alums provide employers are:

1. **Initiative:** Alums are immediate contributors who lead by example as well as through direction, delegation, motivation, and inspiration.
2. **Interpersonal and Intercultural Communication:** Alums serve with and excel in partnering and communicating with diverse racial, religious, ethnic, cultural, and geographic groups.
3. **Adaptability:** Alums have a proven ability to quickly learn new concepts and skills.
4. **Collaboration:** AmeriCorps fosters members' ability to work individually and as a team, instilling a strong work ethic and responsibility to and appreciation of one's colleagues.

5. **Accountability:** Alums understand the responsibility that comes with being accountable for their own actions, the actions of team members, and their individual and collective results.

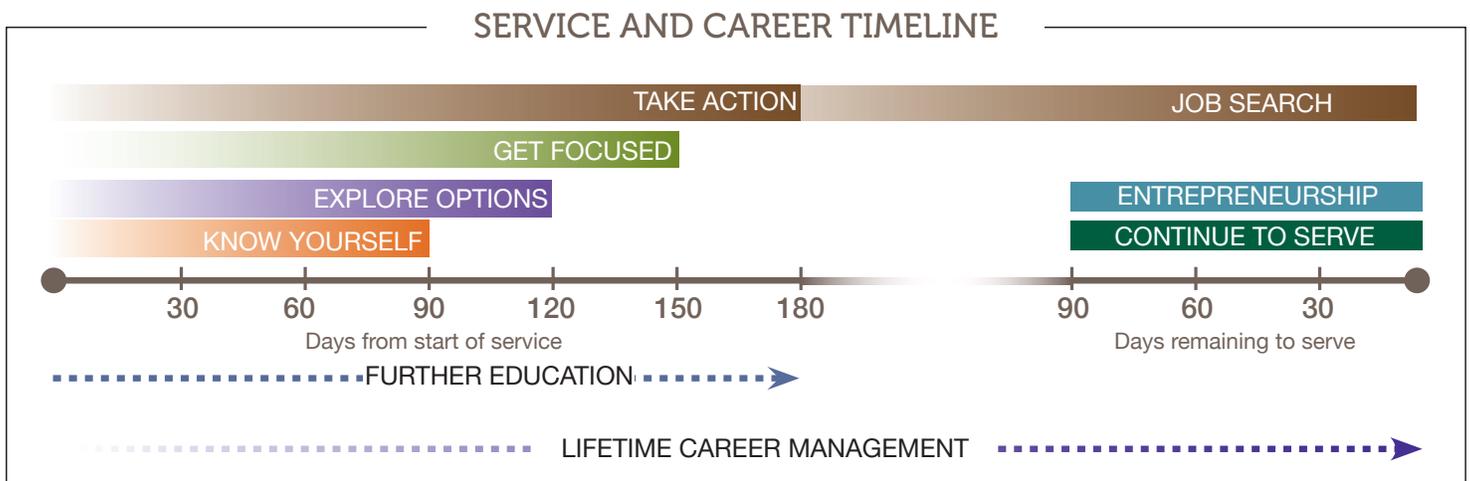
Other intangibles gained during your year of service will likely include:

- **Increasing your awareness of the world of work:** Knowing what a professional work environment consists of and how to function as a professional team member in that environment. Understanding that completing your assigned responsibilities on time and with high quality impacts the entire organization, not just you.
- **Learning to solve problems and face challenges head on:** Success in your career will be directly tied to your ability to identify and solve problems. As found in the 2017 AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Study conducted by Abt Associates, 90% of Alums reported that their service experience improved their ability to solve problems.
- **Developing a service mindset:** One could argue that the most significant long-term benefit AmeriCorps members receive is the satisfaction of incorporating service into their lives and making a difference in their community and country.

- **Beginning to Build Your Professional Network:** Your year of service will likely present multiple opportunities to network with people in the nonprofit world, many of whom started out as AmeriCorps members themselves. In addition, you may have the opportunity to meet those working in government, higher education, and the private sector, where your year of service is respected as a training ground for leaders and career ready employees.
- **Becoming Career Ready:** Basic employability skills- professionalism, communication, critical thinking, organization, work ethic, perseverance, positive attitude, teamwork, leadership, customer service, and willingness to learn- are in high demand and these are exactly the competencies you will be working to enhance as the year unfolds. Employers want to hire people who are self-aware and know how to use their talents, strengths, and interests... **SO LET'S GET STARTED!!**

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Your year of service presents an amazing advantage to accelerate your career development. The experiences, connections, resources, and support available to you are tremendous. If, during your year of service, you read through the chapters in this guide, follow the timeline outlined below, and use the AmeriCorps Advantage Action Plan on the following pages to plan and track your progress outlined below you will be well on your way to a satisfying career. Each member has their own unique set of experiences, skills, and areas for development so make this plan your own- add or remove tasks as appropriate, set target dates and monitor your progress to keep yourself on track.



AmeriCorps Advantage Action Plan

Action Step	Target Date	Completed Date
Chapter 1. First Steps (First 30 days)		
Take the Career Fitness Pre-test		
Conduct a Career Development Interview		
Get inspired through AmeriStories: http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/join-ameri-corps/ameristories		
Register for an account with CareerZone		
Get a notebook that you can use throughout the year to complete exercises in this Guide and record your career thoughts		
Secure a professional email, record a professional phone message, and add a signature line to your outgoing email		
Chapter 2. Know Yourself (First 90 days)		
Complete the Envision Your Career Future Exercise		
Complete the Positive Experience Stories Exercise		
Complete the Work Importance assessment on CareerZone		
Complete a personality and/or personal strengths assessment		
Complete an interest assessment		
Complete the Skills Profiler on CareerZone		
Answer the questions about your passions		
Complete "Make Money Choices" on CareerZone		
Complete the "Pulling it all Together" worksheet		
Discuss the results of your assessments with your supervisor and/or program manager. Reflect on how your results can help you determine your short-term and long-term career plans		
Make a list of other issues you need to take into consideration as you explore career options (health, finances, etc.)		
Create a list of career options that you want to explore		
Chapter 3. Explore Options (First 120 days)		
Research career options online through the Occupational Outlook Handbook, the O*NET, CareerZone, California CareerCafe and other online tools		
Conduct informational interviews and/or do some job shadowing with people working in positions that are of most interest to you.		
Conduct at least 3 Informational Interviews		

AmeriCorps Advantage Action Plan (continued)

Action Step	Target Date	Completed Date
Chapter 4. Get Focused/Make Decisions (First 150 days)		
Compare information from your self-assessments to data gathered through your research on various careers		
Use one or more of the tools provided in the Guide to evaluate the pros and cons of the careers that interest you		
Create an Action Plan that includes S.M.A.R.T. goals		
Discuss your Action Plan and goals with your supervisor/program manager and enlist their support in helping you to succeed		
Consider your "Plan B"		
Chapter 5. Take Action- Job Search (First 180 days/60-90 days left)		
Complete your Job Search Data Worksheet		
Create a Resume		
Draft a Cover Letter		
Develop a list of references who are willing to speak positively about you to potential employers. Confirm name, title, and contact information of anyone at your service site who you plan to use as a reference.		
Create a portfolio of your work (if appropriate for your field)		
Create a LinkedIn profile		
Clean up your online presence		
Write and practice delivering your 30-second Introduction		
Complete the My Network Worksheet		
Begin to implement a networking plan		
Make a list of 5-10 organizations that you would like to work for and look for ways to connect with people in those organizations		
Search for positions on relevant job boards		
Attend a career fair		
Consider contacting one or more staffing agencies		
Look in the newspaper, magazines, journals, websites for job listings		
Identify a position to apply for and create a customized resume and cover letter		
Review the Commonly Asked Interview Questions		
Create S.T.A.R. Stories for your skills and experience		
Identify two interview outfits		
Conduct at least 2 mock interviews (interview yourself if you're feeling brave!)		

AmeriCorps Advantage Action Plan (continued)

Action Step	Target Date	Completed Date
Research salary ranges for the types of positions you are applying for		
Create a spreadsheet to track your job applications – LAST 2-3 MONTHS		
Complete a weekly Job Search Activity Sheet – ONGOING DURING JOB SEARCH		
Chapter 6. Pursue Your Path - Other Options (First 180 days/60-90 days left)		
Further Your Education (Within first 30 days up to 180)		
Explore options for using your Segal Education Award		
Identify colleges, universities, technical schools, certification programs that will help you reach your goals		
Complete any necessary testing		
Complete college applications		
Apply for financial aid through http://fafsa.ed.gov		
Explore other funding options and scholarships		
Continue to Serve (During last 3 months of service)		
Visit the Corporation for National & Community Service website to learn about considerations for serving an additional term: https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/ed-award/multiple-terms		
Entrepreneurship (During last 3 months)		
Complete the Entrepreneurship Assessment through CareerCafe		
Visit the Small Business Administration Website for Tips and Resources for getting started		
Chapter 7. Experience and Evaluate - ONGOING		
Keep a journal of your accomplishments and reflections		
Seek feedback to continue to improve your skills		
Thank those who have supported you during your year of service		
Collect contact information from your network		
Join AmeriCorps Alum Association and Facebook page; Follow the AmeriCorps Alums Twitter feed @AmeriCorpsAlums, #NationalService, #AmeriCorps		
Take the Career Fitness Post-test		
Notify your network of your next endeavor		
Stay in contact with your network		

**EXERCISE****CAREER FITNESS PRE-TEST & ROADMAP TO LIFE AFTER AMERICORPS**

As you set out on your Career Development how career ready are you? Complete the Pre-Test below and/or refer to the Roadmap to Life After AmeriCorps (Appendix 1) as you begin your year of discovery.

Career Fitness Pre-Test

	YES	STARTED	NEED TO DEVELOP
I know the five stages of the career development process.			
I am aware of my strengths.			
I know my weaknesses and have developed methods for improvement.			
I understand how my personality influences my career satisfaction.			
I can identify 5 things I need in a career for it to be satisfying.			
I am clear about my most important work-related values.			
I can describe the type of work environment in which I would feel happiest and most productive.			
I know how to explore career options.			
I have developed a list of career options to explore and research.			
I have conducted an informational interview in the past year.			
I can clearly and confidently state my career goals.			
I have a written career development plan.			
I have identified steps to take in the next six to twelve months to achieve my goals.			
I have an updated, accomplishment-based resume.			
I have developed a list of professional references.			
For my past job-related experiences, I can list: 5 work activities, 5 skills used, 5 accomplishments			
I understand how to network effectively.			
I have developed and can effectively deliver my 30-second Introduction.			
I know how to use social media in my job search.			
I'm aware of other ways to look for a job besides online job boards.			
I have practiced my interviewing techniques and am prepared to answer the most commonly asked interview questions.			
I actively seek feedback and mentoring from others.			
I maintain a network of contacts for learning and sharing ideas.			
I know how to project a professional image both in-person and online.			
I keep current about issues related to my career interests.			
I attend events, conferences, or trainings to learn more about my current field or fields I might explore.			
I have joined and become active in a professional association related to my interests.			
I know how much money I need to meet my needs.			
I have taken ownership of my career development.			

Count the number of "Yes" Answers you had.

22-29: Congratulations! You have likely been working on your career fitness already and have just a few items to add to your career management toolkit. Keep up the good work!

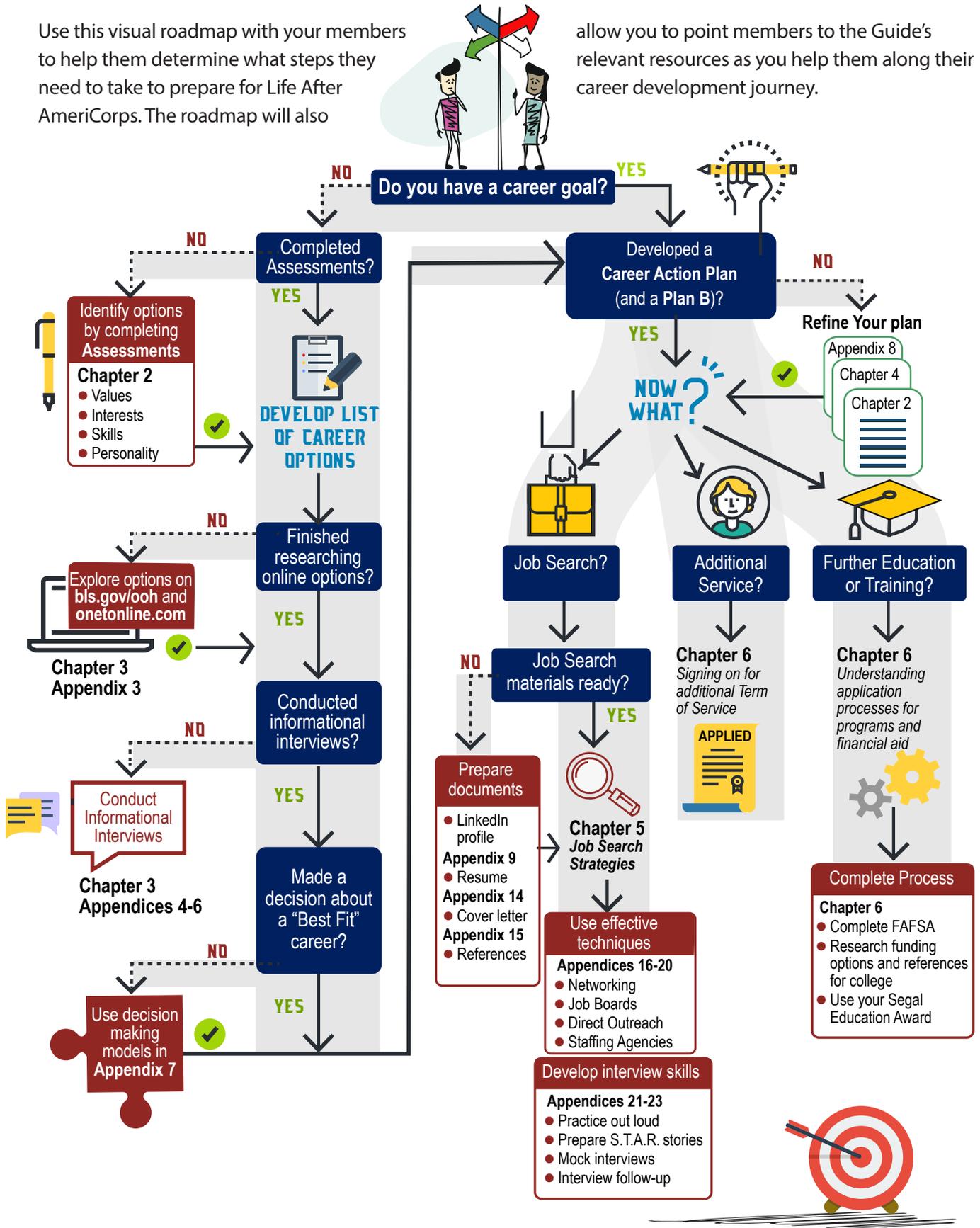
11-21: You are headed in the right direction but have some work to do to more effectively manage your career. Build on the skills you already have developed to enhance your career fitness level.

Less than 10: Now is a good time to get started in building your career management skills so you are "career fit" at the end of your year of service.

Career Development Roadmap to Life After AmeriCorps

Use this visual roadmap with your members to help them determine what steps they need to take to prepare for Life After AmeriCorps. The roadmap will also

allow you to point members to the Guide's relevant resources as you help them along their career development journey.



THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

What is a Career?

You may have held jobs in the past that helped pay the bills or provided you with some extra spending money. While important in building basic skills, these experiences may not have been in a field of interest that you are passionate about or included the types of tasks you imagine yourself doing for years.

Desiree for example has held jobs that don't have much in common including being a barista at Tasty Brew Coffee, babysitting for neighbors, and doing landscaping work for Green Acres. With this mix of positions, who knows what her next job might be and her experience in one job is not likely to lead to increased pay or responsibility in her next job.

Your year of AmeriCorps Service provides you with a luxury that the majority of people never have during their lifetime- the resources, support, and time to think not just about your next job, but also about how you want your career to progress. Like Desiree above, you may have seen friends and family go from one job to the next liking some positions better than others but never feeling truly excited about or connected to their work. By taking time to understand yourself, explore a variety of career fields, make decisions, and set a plan for pursuing your goals you will increase the chances of finding a meaningful career that you love, not just a job. And research shows that when we do work we love, happiness increases.

Looking again at Desiree's work experience, if she enjoys her work as a barista with Tasty Brew Coffee, she might decide to move up to being a shift leader. Then as she discovers her affinity for supervising others she could become the assistant manager, then store manager, and eventually move into a regional manager position overseeing stores in a large geographic area. Along the way,

Desiree's salary and responsibilities increase, she finds satisfaction in mentoring new managers, and perhaps, after a successful 10-year career with Tasty Brew, she leverages her management skills, food service industry experience, and passion for creating welcoming environments for customers to secure a Senior Level Management position with a leading national hotel chain.

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines career as:

"The pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in public, professional, or business life" and "a profession for which one trains and which is undertaken as a permanent calling."

In other words, a career is a person's journey throughout their lifetime, particularly as it relates to their work. A career is a series of positions over a long period of time, rather than just one position. It also encompasses internships, volunteer work, and of course your AmeriCorps service. While we've all heard the analogy of climbing a career ladder, for most, it is more like rock climbing- sometimes you have to move laterally or go down a step or two to start heading back up. Desiree's career trajectory if she stays with Tasty Brew is linear but for many, the path is not so clear cut, but rather filled with twists and turns, missteps and mistakes, success and failure, and life can throw us challenges when least expected that impede our career growth for a number of years. Mix in some luck and coincidence and you have the makings of your own exciting and unique adventure!

**EXERCISE**

Conduct a Career Development Interview to Learn about Someone Else's Career Journey

Talk with a supervisor, program manager, former teacher, or mentor who has been working for at least ten years. Ask them the following questions:

- What has been your career journey from your first job to your current job?
- How does your education and training relate to your work?
- What might you do differently if you were starting over?
- What advice would you have for someone starting out on their own career journey?

Career Self-Reliance and the Career Development Process

We all have a desire to find satisfying work but if we only rely on others to give it to us, it will likely be a long wait filled with disappointment. Finding a career that is personally fulfilling means taking responsibility for your career development. Do a little math and calculate the number of hours, days, and years you have left to work (consider that the average age of retirement in the US is 65 but many people choose to, or need to, work into their seventies). Now think about how you want to spend those hours. Do you want to leave how you spend those hours up to chance or do you want to become career self reliant and create a meaningful career for yourself? Your supervisor, program manager, friends, family and others will provide resources, guidance, and connections, but you are in the driver's seat!

If you chose to take responsibility for your own career happiness then understanding the Career Development Process is the first step on your journey.

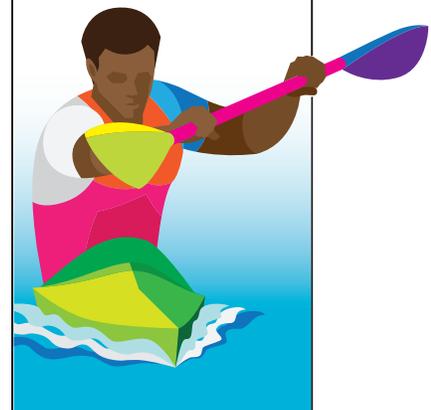
Career development isn't a one-time activity that is crossed off your "To Do" list by the time you reach your mid-twenties. It is a lifelong process that you will likely cycle through multiple times as you become more self-aware, experience life cycle events, gain new skills, and seek new experiences. The following chart summarizes the five phases of this ongoing career development cycle:

1. Know Yourself
2. Explore Options
3. Get Focused
4. Pursue Your Path
5. Experience & Evaluate



Get inspired by reading the career experiences of AmeriCorps Alums at AmeriStories: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/join-ameri-corps/ameristories>

You can let the current take you where it may. Or grab the oars and guide yourself towards the experience you want.



CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



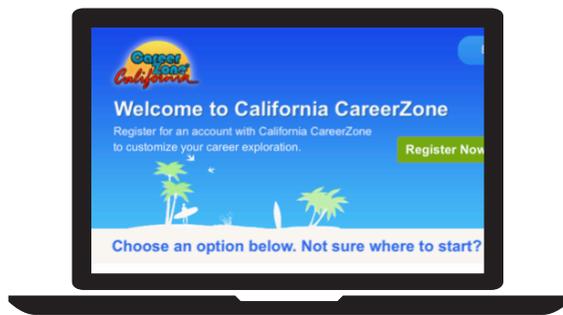
When someone is dissatisfied with their job or needs to find work, they typically jump to Phase 4. They start scanning job boards and sending out resumes with a dartboard approach hoping something will stick. However, this rarely leads to greater career satisfaction. Consequently, with each career transition it is important to start back at Phase 1- looking inward to know yourself.

Information, tips, exercises, and resources for each phase will be presented as you work your way through this Guide. Use the chart on pages 3-5 to pace yourself and stay on track with building your career fitness and reaching your career goals so you are ready to launch when your AmeriCorps service is completed.

Career Counseling Services

Career management can sometimes seem like a lonely business but the truth is that you're not alone. Beyond your support network, there are plenty of professionals whose business it is to assist you in reaching your career goals. Their expertise and support can be great motivation and help move you forward in your search. If you've completed college within the last year, check in with your college career center, as they will often provide services to alumni. In addition, college alumni associations may offer career services if you are a member. Career counselors and coaches can also be located through:

- California's OneStop Career Centers:
 - Most counties in California have at least one One-Stop Career Center; locate one near you at: <http://www.careeronestop.org>.
 - Most of the resources and tools are free to job seekers!
 - Provides workshops for job seekers, students, businesses, and career professionals.
 - Many One-Stop Centers also serve as employment centers. Employers go there to find employees.
 - Staff members are there to help you, if you have questions, ask someone!
- Private career counselors can be found through the National Career Development Association website: <http://www.ncda.org>.



note

As you work through this Guide, it will be helpful for you to have an account on the California CareerZone website. Take a few minutes now to register for a free account at: <https://www.cacareerzone.org/index>.



BEFORE YOU MOVE ON...

As you move through the activities in this Guide, you will learn the importance of creating a professional image and how that will impact your career success. As a first step, be sure your voice mail message and email address convey that you take yourself seriously and so should employers.

Voice Mail Message:

- ✓ **Do:** Record a personal message: *"Hello, You've reached Desiree. Please leave a message and I will return your call as soon as possible. Thank you."* Speak clearly. No music or other noise in the background.
- ✗ **Don't:** Use the default message, just record your name, or have an unprofessional message: *"Hey, I'm not here. Call me later."* Mumble. Have your favorite song playing or have other noise in the background.

Professional Email Address:

Consider having an email address dedicated to your career activities. Do not use this address to forward jokes, photos, or chain mail.

- ✓ **Do:** Use your name: First and last; middle initial if necessary or desired (e.g., isabeljones@gmail.com). And if you need to go further in finding an available address add something that relates to your career field (e.g. jonathan4education@gmail.com)
- ✗ **Don't:** Use nicknames (e.g., lifeoftheparty@gmail.com), personal interests unrelated to your career (e.g., susanlovescupcakes@gmail.com) or addresses that are easily mistyped (e.g., henry.m3p_smith@gmail.com).

For an added touch of professionalism, use a signature line at the bottom of your message:

Your Name
 Title
 Organization
 Phone and Email Address