

Colorado State University

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Service Debrief Guide

Intentionally debriefing service events and challenging chapter members to make meaning out of community service in which they have engaged can be a daunting and overwhelming task. Many officers struggle with the level of self-awareness and introspection required to make meaning of service for themselves, much less facilitate a conversation for a group of brothers or sisters. This guide is designed to help create intentional space for chapter members to make meaning of service experiences.

There will likely be some push back when someone suggests doing a service debrief. Some common questions may include:

- What's the point of this? Why does it matter?
- If we are making an impact, why do we even need to do a debrief?
- As long as we hit our service hours why do we care?

Here is a list of why/how a service debrief can be beneficial:

“We do not learn from doing, we learn from thinking about what we do” (AmeriCorps)

- Meaning Making- through debriefing service as a chapter, you can make meaning from personal and collective participation in the service project.
- Critical Thinking- debriefing allows one to think critically and challenge individual experiences, identities, assumptions, and beliefs.
- Improved Service – Individuals who participate in the service project can examine the effects of their behavior and discover ways to improve the quality and quantity of their service.
- Personal and Chapter Development- Not only do individuals that participate in service debriefs benefit, connections within your chapter has the opportunity to develop as well. Debriefs help to clarify organizational values and validate the experience of those who participated in the service. Thus, creating a stronger sense of brotherhood/sisterhood.

For an effective debrief that educates and fosters growth, active engagement and participation from everyone is essential. There are 3 main steps in a debrief process:

1. What happened? (discuss what you physically did, did it go well, did it go poorly)
 - a. Have participants describe what happened at the event.
 - b. Have as many people share as possible (this may seem redundant to have multiple people recap the same event, but it's not).
 - i. Everyone might have a different interpretation about what happened based on their identity or lived experience. It is helpful to see through the eyes of someone else especially moving forward into the next steps.
 - c. Sample questions:
 - i. What did you like best about this service activity?

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- ii. What did you like least about this service activity?
 - iii. What are two or three words you can use to describe how you feel about this service activity?
 2. What are the implications of what happened?
 - a. Talk about the impact your service had or the impact you saw.
 - b. If the service had a large impact on those being served, talk about why.
 - c. If the service had a large impact on those doing the serving, talk about why (this is where having the context about someone's lived experience and identity is helpful).
 - d. Sample Questions:
 - i. What did you learn by participating in this service activity?
 - ii. Why was it important that we worked together to complete this service activity?
 - iii. How was the community being served impacted by our service? What does that mean to you?
 - iv. What did you learn through this experience that connects back to the values of our organization? How did this service experience help us live our values?
 - v. Would you like to participate in this service activity again? Why or why not?
 3. Assess the applications from the results of the implications (how can we apply what we just learned)
 - a. Talk about what could be done differently in the future to make the event more successful (better planning, more people participating, more supplies etc.).
 - b. Discuss how the event can be more impactful (for those serving and those being served).
 - c. Everyone should be prepared to reexamine their own knowledge in light of new information.
 - d. Sample questions:
 - i. What are some other service activities that you would like to do?
 - ii. What, if anything, will you do differently at home or future service involvement because of the experiences you had while participating in this service activity?
 - iii. Would you like to participate in this service activity again? Why or why not?

Here are some example scenarios for utilization as you practice a service debrief:

(Use the questions listed above)

1. Your organization is looking to provide service to [Crossroads Safe House](#). They just received a large donation and need volunteers to help re-stock their pantry with non-perishable foods and other products like diapers, feminine products, clothing, and hygiene products. They ask your chapter to volunteer for four hours on

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a Saturday morning. You arrive on that day with about ten other members and complete the tasks asked of your chapter.

2. You and a few of your chapter members just finished volunteering at the local homeless shelter, the primary resource for people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity in the community. During your time of service, you fed many people and talked with many more about the challenges they face. Your conversations ranged from something as simple as being down on their luck and losing their job, to mental illness, substance abuse, and everything in-between. Most people were quiet, but generally very grateful for what you were doing and kept repeating how much they appreciated your group. It is a cold day in the middle of winter. Due to the cold weather, the shelter is very busy, and you manage to distribute all the food you and your chapter members prepared. As you are wrapping up your shift and cleaning up, a woman walks in the door and asks if you have any more food. You have to tell her no, you just passed out the last of the food and you are really sorry, but you don't have anymore. She nods her head in acknowledgment and as she turns to walk out the door to return to the chill of winter, you can see her shoulders slump as she lowers her head in defeat as if this is not the first time she has had to go without a meal.

Other Effective Debriefing Activities:

- **Written Reflection:** Pose three or four questions, using “what, so what, now what” model, and allow time for writing. (i.e. What you did, why/how you did it, how you could do it better).
- **Yarn Web:** Stand in a circle with a ball of yarn. Each person throws it to another and expresses what they learned from the service project.
- **Interviews:** Break the group into pairs or triads and have them interview each other about their service experience, take notes, and summarize a couple of things to the larger group.
- **One to Three Words:** Each person shares one to three words to describe the service activity or how they feel about the service activity.