

## Chapter 4. Get Focused

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### Make Decisions and Create an Action Plan

Reflect on what you've learned so far about yourself and about the world of work from the previous three chapters. You've likely gained valuable insights and gathered a great deal of information. This knowledge of yourself and the world of work will allow you to make sound decisions as you move forward with your career planning. Hopefully, you've taken some time to reflect on what excites you AND what is realistic. At this point in the process, for some, the path forward is crystal clear but for others the seemingly endless possibilities may feel overwhelming.

### Making a Career Decision

Integrating the results of your self-assessments with the information you gathered in the career exploration phase will help you set specific and realistic goals so you can begin to own your career development. You will want to consider what you are able to do and what you are willing to commit to. This choice doesn't have to be your career for the next 30 years, just focus on the next positive step. You can, and will, make adjustments along the way; remember it is common to go through the Career Development Process multiple times in your life. Most people will have 12-15 jobs over their lifetime and it is not uncommon for someone to have 2-3 career changes.



#### EXERCISE Decision-Making Models

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Looking at the careers that you are still considering from your "Tree of Options" (or "Trees" as it may be), for your time after AmeriCorps, put each of these careers through the test of one or more of the decision-making models below (worksheets for each model can be found in **APPENDIX 7**). They are all effective so select a model that works best for you. Use this model to narrow your options and select a path forward.

- **Decision Making Tools**
  - Career Options Evaluator Tool
  - Pros and Cons List
  - SWOT Analysis
  - You may also want to utilize the Thinking Caps Decision Making Model from California Career Café which can be downloaded as a PDF from this link: <http://www.cacareercafe.com/start/decisions/>

As you move through the decision making process you may need to do additional self-assessment and/or delve more deeply into exploring the career options at the top of your list. There's no rush to make a decision so if you are feeling stuck take a break from thinking about it for a week and come back to it later with a fresh perspective. Ask others for input and feedback but remember to be true to yourself!

## Create an Action Plan with S.M.A.R.T. Goals

At this point, you may have decided on a very specific career path (e.g. I want to be a high school counselor in a rural community in northern California) or you may have narrowed your options down to a specific sector, industry, or type of work (e.g. I want to work in the public sector on projects that create more livable urban communities). If you have a very specific path that's wonderful! If you've become clearer about your path forward but you don't have a specific job title in mind that's wonderful too!

Once you've chosen a path to pursue, whether it is very specific or a bit more general, you'll need to create a plan of action to help you get from where you are today to where you want to be. Your Career Action Plan states your career goal and breaks down this big goal into small, doable steps or mini-goals. An effective plan will be in writing and have specific steps and deadlines. Multiple studies have shown that when we write down our goals we are much more likely to achieve them.

The most helpful goals are S.M.A.R.T (Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic, and Time-Bound) goals. Use the guidelines below to ensure your goals are S.M.A.R.T.

### Set "S.M.A.R.T" Goals

- Specific: What exactly do you want to accomplish?
- Measurable: How will you measure your progress?
- Action-Oriented: How will you make it happen?
- Realistic: Is your goal attainable?
- Time-Bound: In what timeframe will you reach the goal?

"If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else."

LAURENCE J. PETER

### NOT-SMART AND SMART GOAL EXAMPLES

✗ **Not SMART** - Learn how to write grants.

✓ **SMART** - Register for the "Going After Grants" workshop on May 3, 2019" at the Nonprofit Resource Center, report what was learned to my team by June 1, 2019 and apply the relevant concepts while helping my supervisor complete the Irvine Foundation grant application.

✗ **Not SMART** - "Be less defensive when people give me feedback."

✓ **SMART** - "At my monthly progress meetings, ask my supervisor for feedback on what I am doing well and what suggestions they have for how I could improve. At the end of each meeting write this information in a notebook and try out the suggestions. Each week record what worked and what didn't in my notebook. Seek additional input at my next monthly progress meeting."



## EXERCISE Goals to Reality

Use the Career Action Plan in **APPENDIX 8**, or create your own, to map out the steps you will take to turn your goal into reality.

Using your Career Action Plan as a tool to communicate your goals, take the initiative to schedule a time to talk with your supervisor, program manager, and others to enlist their support and ideas. Post your Career Action Plan on your refrigerator, your bulletin board or some other spot where you will see it daily. This will allow you to keep your goals in focus!

Now, work your plan. Initially, it may seem overwhelming but take that first step. Your Career Action Plan is a living document so it can, and will, be updated and revised as you continue to move forward. Don't forget to build in rewards as motivators to complete tasks and remember to celebrate your successes along the way!



## BEFORE YOU MOVE ON...

### *Always Have a "Plan B"*

Even with the best planning, life is unpredictable, and so are careers. Putting all your eggs in one basket doesn't leave you with many options if Plan A falls apart. The disappointment can be a blow to your self-esteem and sap your energy to move forward with your career. However, if you've already created a fallback plan, you can move on to your next best option more quickly. Plan B may involve taking a job that doesn't match with your dream job but is in the same industry. For example, working as an office manager in a veterinary office rather than becoming a veterinarian. It might mean taking a job that is a step down but that allows you to gain valuable supervisory skills that, once mastered, will make you more marketable for your goal of acquiring a management job. A Plan B could even involve having to continue your education in your home town versus attending a more prestigious program in another city so you can be on hand to help care for an elderly relative. Plan B may even involve enrolling in an additional year of AmeriCorps service. If you have a fallback plan you'll be more likely to adapt and be resilient if the job search doesn't go your way, you aren't accepted into the graduate program you thought was a slam-dunk, or life puts an unexpected obstacle in your path.

It is very important to remember that having to pursue Plan B doesn't mean you've failed or have to give up on Plan A. It just means you have to take a different route than you had originally planned, which when it comes to careers is a very common occurrence. Just ask around!

"A goal without a plan is just a wish"

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY