

THE FULL VALUE COMMITMENT (FVC)*

The Full Value Commitment is a powerful tool for creating behavioral norms and values. In this context norms and values refer to the way members of the community will agree to treat one another and behaviors they want to see within the group. Not only is the adventure facilitator able to create a safe environment through the FVC, but he/she is able to help participants explore, understand and clue healthy behaviors.

The Full Value Commitment is a participatory, thoughtful and fun method of developing norms for any group. Resiliency research has found the one of the ways in which resiliency is fostered is to enable people to participate in their program (school, family life) in a meaningful manner.¹⁶ Positive youth development theorist, Karen Pittman, tells us that development is what youth actively do, and positive youth development agents, like SFMC support this, in part, by empowering youth to create their own positive community(ies).¹⁷

The norms need to be ones that both staff and participants agree to, will use and will be responsible to. As staff, you should be part of the group when developing your Full Value Commitment and in sharing the norms and values that are important to you. However, let the group take the lead. Your role is to ask clarifying questions and to add any non-negotiable norms that they haven't already added- like no violence or no destruction of the garden.

Developing a Full Value Commitment cannot be a voting activity - the group must achieve consensus on each behavioral norm. Otherwise, it won't work. Determine a method to symbolize consensus around commitment to the agreed upon norms. Some group leaders will have their participants sign the Commitment and others prefer to make it a verbal or thumbs up/down agreement.

The norms and values created in the Full Value Commitment are the ideal for which the group will strive. None of us are perfect; therefore the ideal will not always be met. There will be times when people do not follow the norms or "mess up." Once norms and values have been agreed upon, systems to reinforce them need to be developed. The group and its leader (you) need to develop these systems for reinforcing the norms and values with your group. The following is an example of how this discussion might be led.

"Has anyone here ever messed up before? (All hands should go up). I did once about three years ago... (Heh, heh). If I mess up again here, or someone else does, - for example blurts out "That's a stupid idea!" - what should we do to remind her of her commitment? Can we come up with a word (sign, activity, etc.) to remind her without yelling at or devaluing her?"

The FVC cannot be successful until the members of the community (staff and participants) have had a chance to get to know each other and done a few teambuilding activities. The community must have an understanding of the expectations and tone of the program before beginning the Full Value Commitment. Otherwise, groups will just write down what they

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¹⁶ Benard, Bonnie; Fostering Resiliency in Children; ERIC Digest; 1995

¹⁷ Pittman, Karen J & Wright, Marlene; Bridging the Gap: A Rationale for Enhancing the Role of Community Organizations in Promoting Youth Development; Carnegie Council on Youth Development; Washington DC;

think would want to hear - respect, teamwork, honesty - without really thinking about what they are saying.

Facilitators have found that most groups are ready for norm setting after four hours of working together. Four hours of working together means interacting as a team and truly becoming comfortable with one another. For example, your participants will not be ready for norm setting after four hours of watching a video, doing homework, etc.

Reflect on your FVC regularly. The Full Value Commitment is an important program element that should be added to and subtracted from as appropriate - it will be developed with your group. It is not a tool for beating up on participants: "You didn't let each other speak and your Full Value Commitment says you will." Rather, as listed above, it is a tool that will help the group be who it wants to be: "How do you think you're doing on listening to and not talking over each other? Is there anything that we could improve upon? What are we doing really well?" Evaluating your FVC and how well the group is meeting the norms and values could be your ritual for starting a program day.

The following is a sample of one way to establish a FVC. Some folks use homes, an outline of a person, etc. to represent their community - all are effective. This activity uses a circle made of participants' hands to represent the community.