

SHADOW A LIVELIHOOD

Objectives:

- Walk a mile in the shoes of another
- Grow in empathy
- Develop perspective and understanding
- Expand vision

Suggested Scheduling: First week of orientation

Time Required: 6-8 hours

BACKGROUND AND ORGANIZATIONAL INSIGHT

Livelihood Day complemented the first week of orientation. Alongside learning language as well as basic government, education and social systems of India, Indicorps fellows spent a full day shadowing livelihoods that are essential, but often overlooked in society. The goal was to give fellows a firsthand experience of community and of the invisible labor that supports sour lifestyles. Indicorps fellows shadowed rag-pickers, washermen/women (*dhobi*), tea vendors (*chai-wallas*), office/house cleaners, and so on. Some of the assignments started at 4 am when the rag-picking women left their homes. Others spent the day at the dhobi ghats or chai stand or scrubbing floors in office buildings. Each walked away with a newfound respect for the labor class and a sense of camaraderie with the working poor. Also, after the Livelihoods Day activity, Fellows were more willing to do their own daily chores, use plastic and trash-bags differently, and be more empathetic towards different classes of society.

PREPARATION FOR THE FACILITATOR

Identify day labor trades/occupations that are essential and generally invisible to the volunteer and to visitors. Build a relationship (ideally through a trusted organization) and get permission to shadow the “principal” laborer(s) for a full work day. Set up the day so that volunteer is not seen as a guest or observer, but rather an extra set of hands to engage fully in the day’s tasks. Ideally, the volunteer joins just as the principal walks out of his/her home. And ask that as much as possible, the volunteer can roll up his/her sleeves, work/eat alongside. Encourage the volunteer to be fully present and to observe the principal’s circumstances, strength, dynamics with others, outlook, etc.

ACTIVITY

Spend a full day with someone from an invisible profession in the labor class. You should see yourself as an apprentice and an extra pair of hands. Roll up your sleeves and work/eat alongside. Do your best to be fully present and pay special attention to the dynamics, circumstances, the strength and outlook. Try not to be an aloof observer.

ADAPT EXERCISE FOR A SOLO FELLOW OR VOLUNTEER:

This activity has a lot of opportunity for a solo volunteer and can be easily adapted. for a solo volunteer. The tricky piece maybe in building the community relationships that will allow you to be a labor apprentice for a day without being too awkward or transactional. The solo volunteer may in fact be a day-apprentice with several different community members as a way to build ties and to better understand the community.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Describe the trade/occupation and what you learned about its importance.
- Describe the principal and his/her outlook on life.
- What did you learn from the activity?
- What did you learn about what it means to be invisible?
- How might this day change the way you walk in the world?
- How does it impact your approach to development and to service?

