

FY2005 AMERICORPS*VISTA PROGRAM GUIDANCE



In 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) will celebrate its forty-year legacy of capacity building and empowerment of faith-based and other community-based organizations aimed at alleviating poverty. The VISTA mission within the national service movement was first conceived by President John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert Kennedy as a domestic Peace Corps. Under the current administration of President George W. Bush, the Corporation for National and Community Service (Corporation) has been significantly enhanced through increased funding and a unique national service call to a new generation of Americans through USA Freedom Corps.

As we embark on a new AmeriCorps*VISTA program year, thousands of new AmeriCorps*VISTA members will join hundreds of new and existing community-based organizations to answer President Bush's call to foster a culture of service and civic responsibility. These AmeriCorps*VISTA members represent a broad and diverse spectrum of our fellow Americans. They are recent college graduates, individuals searching for a new career path in community service, and retirees looking to give back to their communities. These AmeriCorps*VISTA members and our community-based sponsoring organizations are joining forces to empower local communities and individuals in their efforts to eradicate poverty from the lives of their families, neighbors, and communities. They are bringing much needed financial and in-kind resources, as well as an increased organizational capacity to urban neighborhoods, small towns, and tribal communities. They are starting homeownership programs, coordinating mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents, organizing local microenterprise initiatives, raising funds to support after-school programs, bridging the digital divide in disadvantaged communities, recruiting volunteers for community food banks, and bringing economic resources that are imperative to the sustainability of rural communities.

In this our 40th year, the AmeriCorps*VISTA program will increase our efforts to achieve even greater strategic outcomes in addressing poverty and meeting the needs of families and communities. We will continue to support these community-driven initiatives as our members and sponsoring organizations collaborate to create and implement solutions to resolve poverty-related issues across the nation.

The following guidance sets forth AmeriCorps*VISTA's strategic priorities for fiscal 2005 and new requirements with regard to performance measurement, accountability, our grant-making process and customer focus. This guidance applies to all AmeriCorps*VISTA project applicants, as well as current projects. AmeriCorps*VISTA remains committed to ending poverty one individual, one family, one community at a time. I am confident that the acts of service and compassion demonstrated by AmeriCorps*VISTA projects and members will continue to offer productive and effective models for family and community-based solutions in neighborhoods throughout our nation.

On behalf of the Corporation for National and Community Service and our volunteers and many supporters, I offer my sincerest appreciation for the critical role you have played in helping to bring the vision of AmeriCorps*VISTA into reality through effective and substantial service projects all across this nation.

Howard Turner
Acting Director of AmeriCorps*VISTA

I. OVERVIEW

AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) provides full-time volunteers to faith-based and other community-based organizations and public agencies to create and expand programs that bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty. Each year, more than 6,500 AmeriCorps*VISTA members leverage human, financial, and material resources to increase the capacity of thousands of low-income communities across the country to solve their own problems.

AmeriCorps*VISTA embraces the following guiding principles:

- **Anti-Poverty Focus** -- Any private nonprofit organization, educational institution, tribal or public agency with a program idea that is poverty-related in scope can apply for an AmeriCorps*VISTA project. The project's goal should address helping individuals and communities out of poverty rather than focusing on making poverty more tolerable.
- **Community Empowerment** -- Organizations must ensure that each project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, and implementing the project to ensure that it is responsive and relevant to low-income residents' ownership and self-help initiatives tapping inherent community strengths.
- **Capacity-Building** -- AmeriCorps*VISTA achieves its mission by assigning members to organizations in order to expand the ability of those organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, volunteer recruitment and management, outreach, and collaborative development, AmeriCorps*VISTA members mobilize community resources and increase the capacity of organizations to better address the needs of the communities in which they serve.
- **Sustainable Solutions** -- AmeriCorps*VISTA members are people power to help organizations address a new or existing program area related to their mission. However, it is crucial to the concept of local self-reliance that organizations plan for the eventual phase out of AmeriCorps*VISTA members and the absorption of their functions by other facets of the organization or community. AmeriCorps*VISTA projects are encouraged to develop a long-term sustainability plan beginning in year one of the project's existence.

For a copy of the AmeriCorps*VISTA Project Application along with instructions for applying to become an AmeriCorps*VISTA sponsoring organization, visit www.americorps.org/vista/sponsorinfo.html.

II. KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS FOR 2005

A. ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES

In fiscal 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to ensure a strong return on investment and attempt to maximize the impact of its sponsoring organizations' efforts to reduce poverty. To improve effectiveness and accountability, AmeriCorps*VISTA will institute clear performance goals and continually promote best practices and innovation among its sponsoring organizations.

To measure its success and ensure it is programming for long-term, anti-poverty outcomes, AmeriCorps*VISTA will focus its resources within the following four areas: Empowering Faith-Based and Other Community-Based Organizations, Asset Development, Strengthening America's Children and Families, and Homeland Security.

AmeriCorps*VISTA recognizes that successful projects are community-driven. Flexibility and innovation at the local level will continue to be encouraged.

Also in FISCAL 05, AmeriCorps*VISTA will place a stronger focus on developing programs in the nation's most impoverished counties, as determined by socio-economic indicators and recent poverty statistics.

1. Empowering Faith-Based and other Community-Based Organizations

Small faith-based and other community-based organizations often design some of the most innovative and effective ways to reduce youth violence, nurture the spirit of entrepreneurship, combat drug addiction, and increase self-sufficiency among the poor. These groups, however, frequently are challenged due to lack of administrative support, few staff members, and scarce financial resources.

AmeriCorps*VISTA has a long history of working with faith-based and other community-based organizations that serve poor communities around the country:

- According to the 1999 accomplishments study by Aguirre International, 51 percent of the 883 organizations AmeriCorps*VISTA supported in 1999 had nine or fewer staff members. An estimated 26 percent of the organizations had fewer than four staff members.
- According to the same study, 54 percent of AmeriCorps*VISTA's sponsoring organizations in 1999 had annual budgets of less than \$500,000, and 37 percent had budgets of less than \$250,000.
- According to a recent survey conducted by ORC Macro, more than 16 percent of AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve directly with faith-based projects or are assigned to projects that support the work of faith-based organizations; and an additional 34 percent of AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve in small community-based organizations.

In FY04, approximately 25% (or 1 in 4) of AmeriCorps*VISTA sponsors had not received any government funding prior to their engagement with AmeriCorps*VISTA, making the program one of the most accessible resources for faith-based and small community based organizations. In fiscal 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to prioritize outreach to faith-based and other community-based organizations that have never received federal resources, and those that increase the diversity

of the AmeriCorps*VISTA program. In particular, AmeriCorps*VISTA's structure ensures that its resources are accessible with few barriers to these organizations.

2. Asset Development

According to the Federal Reserve Board, an estimated 10 million U.S. households have no savings or checking accounts. This population tends to include low income families that often face multiple barriers to developing assets and becoming financially secure. In addition, 12 percent of the U.S. population is considered to be poor by income standards, while 25 percent are poor by financial asset standards¹. Programs that focus on asset development can help a low-income individual save money and build equity in physical assets, such as a home. Acquiring equity, financial education and generating savings are critical to helping move people permanently toward self-sufficiency.

Entrepreneur Corps. AmeriCorps*VISTA has been a leader in initiating asset development and wealth creation programs such as Individual Development Accounts (IDA), home ownership, and automobile acquisition programs. More recently, AmeriCorps*VISTA has dedicated members to entrepreneur education and micro-enterprise initiatives, which help low-income individuals become self-sufficient by developing their own businesses. In 2002, AmeriCorps*VISTA launched the Entrepreneur Corps to expand its efforts in this arena by allocating an estimated 400 members to assist organizations in creating asset development programs for families and individuals while also developing the capacity of the organizations in which they are placed through sound technology planning and financial management and development. In fiscal 2005, the Entrepreneur Corps will enter its final year, however AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to dedicate substantial resources toward asset development programming through standard project development at the state level.

Overcoming Barriers to Long-Term Employment. AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to support programming that helps provide access to safe and affordable child care, job search and placement services, job training, reliable transportation, medical care, and emergency services.

Bridging the Digital Divide. AmeriCorps*VISTA also will renew its effort to support and expand an extensive network of sponsoring organizations that are tackling the problems of the digital divide. AmeriCorps*VISTA members will continue to play a significant role in helping community organizations to assess their technology needs; develop and design technology plans; set up school-based or neighborhood-based computer learning centers; secure resources for hardware and software; and recruit community volunteers for a variety of activities including hardware installation, instruction and mentoring, and staffing computer labs.

3. Strengthening America's Children and Families

As AmeriCorps*VISTA works to move more low-income individuals and communities toward long-term financial independence and self-sufficiency, it also will work to protect children—often the most vulnerable victims of poverty—by strengthening their families.

When developing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families legislation in 1996, Congress recognized that two-parent families represent the ideal environment for raising children.

¹ Michael Sherraden, Research on Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) Summary of Results to Date, Center for Social Development, Washington University . St. Louis, September 2002

AmeriCorps*VISTA will work to ensure that children and their families, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have an opportunity to achieve their fullest potential.

A mounting body of research data attests to the imperative of this investment, which President Bush has prioritized in the reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families anti-poverty program. According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-97), children raised without the benefit of an intact two-parent family are four to seven times more likely to experience poverty than children raised in the context of intact married families.² Focusing on breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty offers the greatest long-term return on investment, as it is easier to prevent poverty within the context of the family than to attempt to break the cycle in later years.

Each year, approximately 600,000 men and women are released from prison into society.³ Two-thirds are likely to be rearrested within three years of leaving prison, creating a cycle of crime and incurring countless costs to the community.⁴ Prisoners leaving the correctional system often find themselves without the support necessary to become productive members of society. In his 2004 State of the Union address, President Bush proposed a \$300 million prisoner re-entry initiative aimed at helping returning offenders find employment and housing to break this cycle of poverty.

In fiscal 2005 the Corporation for National and Community Service and AmeriCorps*VISTA will prioritize projects that focus on strengthening those children and families that have been impacted by incarceration. Technical assistance needs resulting from fiscal 2004 outreach efforts through the regional issue conferences will continue to be met.

Empowering Local Grassroots Initiatives for Family Formation and Development. During the past decade, it has become widely accepted that youth delinquency, poverty, poor academic performance, and child abuse are rooted in a number of interrelated social problems stemming from the breakdown of the family structure. The Adolescent Health Study of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services noted the interconnected behaviors of teen violence, drug and alcohol abuse, pre-mature sexual activity, tobacco, and suicide and their linkage to a lack of parent-child connectedness.⁵ In fiscal 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA will work to assist community-based efforts throughout the country in concert with state demonstrations and local initiatives to provide families in low-income communities with access to resources and best practices in areas such as responsible fatherhood, marriage skills training and mentoring programs, child care, and strengthened parental roles. Technical assistance needs resulting from FY2004 outreach efforts through the regional issue conferences, will continue to be met.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. 2002. *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 cohort, 1979-2000*. Center for Human Resource Research, The Ohio State University. Columbus, OH.

³ A.J. Beck, "State and Federal Prisoners Returning to the Community: Findings from the Bureau of Justice Statistics." Paper presented at the First Reentry Courts Initiative Cluster Meeting, Washington, D.C., 13 April 2000. For more information, see <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/sfprc.pdf>.

⁴ "Reentry trends in the United States," Highlights from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. For more information, see <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/reentry.htm>.

⁵ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). 1997. *The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health*. Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina. Chapel Hill, NC.

After School Programs and Child Care. A large majority of the individuals remaining or cycling back onto public assistance are women with children – making affordable childcare more critical than ever. Because research has shown the powerful impact the first few years of development have on a child’s ability to achieve in later years, AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to afford resources to projects that create or expand after-school programs and quality child care centers. These initiatives will include developing a strong professional workforce (including those transitioning out of welfare), expanding the capacity of current childcare systems, and deepening the quality of programming with enhanced parental roles in strong child development.

Childhood Literacy. President Bush has made reading a national priority and AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to maintain a focus on literacy in support of the No Child Left Behind Act. Current AmeriCorps*VISTA sponsoring organizations undertaking literacy efforts should continue to look to a new set of sites for AmeriCorps*VISTA members (or participate with substantial cost sharing), and we will look to bring literacy efforts to new locations. Faith-based and other community-based organizations also will be encouraged to explore funding and program opportunities through state supplemental education resources pursuant to the No Child Left Behind Act. All new literacy projects will be developed on a three-year timeline with sustainability as the result.

Older Americans in Poverty. Poverty and isolation among seniors, while frequently overlooked, is one of the most tragic manifestations of poverty in America today and continues to be a focus of attention for AmeriCorps*VISTA. With an eye toward helping the elderly escape poverty, AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to support projects that provide prescription drug education, transportation, home health care alternatives, employment opportunities, other health and nutrition needs, and housing modifications to help people overcome shut-in situations. AmeriCorps*VISTA also will emphasize youth service and intergenerational programming as strategies for assisting the low-income elderly. AmeriCorps*VISTA will strengthen its collaborations with Senior Corps programs in furtherance of these initiatives.

4. Homeland Security

On November 8, 2001, President Bush announced that the Corporation would support homeland security in three major areas: public safety, public health, and disaster mitigation and preparedness.

Low-income communities and citizens are frequently under-resourced in critical areas of public health and public safety. In addition to traditional problems regarding access to preventive health care and exposure to higher incidences of crime, many residents of low-income communities are situated near power plants and chemical plants, thus making them susceptible to homeland security threats.

Across the country, programs have begun to explore the extraordinary potential that AmeriCorps*VISTA members represent in building the capacity of local Citizen Corps, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), Community Emergency Response Teams, and Neighborhood Watch groups by developing infrastructure to leverage part-time volunteers. In fiscal 2005, the development of homeland security projects will continue to be a priority.

B. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

1. Project Lifecycle

AmeriCorps*VISTA projects are generally expected to last up to three years. The existing policy in states that approval authority for projects continuing past a third year lies with the area manager, and for those continuing past a fifth year, approval authority lies with the Director of AmeriCorps*VISTA. In fiscal 05 AmeriCorps*VISTA is clarifying this policy and documenting the necessary threshold criteria for the continuation of AmeriCorps*VISTA projects after the third and fifth program years. (*Subject to availability of funds and current Corporation policy.*) The continuation criteria will include at least one of the following: a cost sharing component; the sponsor is acting as an umbrella or intermediary organization (meets requirements described below); and/or the sponsor has demonstrated an extenuating community need for the AmeriCorps*VISTA project.

*For AmeriCorps*VISTA projects to continue beyond year three*, the state office staff will provide an analysis of the project plan along with discussion on the project's accomplishments and end outcomes as of year three, an analysis of the performance measurement indicators for the project, site monitoring visit summary documentation and a written recommendation from the state program director to the Area Manager (final) for approval on the continuation of the AmeriCorps*VISTA project. The sponsor will also be required to submit (year 4 and 5) an updated project plan where they will outline specific end outcomes tied to the additional program years.

*For AmeriCorps*VISTA projects to continue beyond year five*, the state office staff will provide analysis and review of the project plan (years 1 thru 5) along with discussion on the project's accomplishments and end outcomes as of year five, an analysis of the performance measurement indicators for the project, and site monitoring visit summary documentation. The state office will submit a written recommendation from the state program director (approved by the area manager) to the Director of AmeriCorps*VISTA for approval on the continuation of the project. The sponsor will also be required to submit (year 6+) an updated project plan outlining specific end outcomes tied to each additional program year. The Director's decision will be based on (1) the recommendation of the area manager, (2) the updated project plan, (3) to-date achievement of project goals, (4) fit with overall AmeriCorps*VISTA strategic program goals, and (5) availability of resources.

The analytical process to be completed by the state staff will include comments on the sponsor project's sustainability and the ability of the sponsor to meet the end outcomes/ accomplishments described in the project plan(s). When a project sponsor is determined to be an umbrella or intermediary organization, the sponsor will be required to meet a set of criteria including but not limited to:

1. A minimum of three partner organizations for whom the sponsor functions as lead agency
2. A demonstrated capacity to provide ongoing program management and operational T&TA to the smaller partner organizations
3. A demonstrated capacity to respond to reporting requirements (aggregating of project data and outcomes, etc) for all of the partner organizations
4. A demonstrated capacity to function as a mentor agency for smaller community-based or grass roots organizations (not necessarily partners).

AmeriCorps*VISTA will use these intermediary organizations as community program mentors to provide best practices driven support (recruitment, program management, data collection, etc.) to smaller developing community based organizations. The state office staff will enlist the intermediaries to participate in cross-stream training efforts for new and smaller organizations where feasible.

As part of this process, AmeriCorps*VISTA will do an impact analysis to determine key strategies and approaches to terminating AmeriCorps*VISTA projects. This process will be linked to the annual VSY allocation process to ensure that regional poverty rates and other needs analyses are considered as the termination process takes place.

National Project Pool. In fiscal 05, AmeriCorps*VISTA will initiate a process to develop a pool of resources to support national programs dedicated to meeting human service needs, supporting community based programs and fostering civic engagement across the United States. These projects will have finite terms allowing for the re-generation of the resource pool to support the development of ongoing national program development. The primary purpose for developing this national pool will be to provide the Corporation with resources to respond to larger scale issue area national program needs tied to the eradication of poverty. The resources necessary to support this effort compel the need for key management improvements including increased cost-share efforts, reducing member attrition/reducing per member training costs and achieving greater efficiency in the program development process.

The national pool will be divided into two groups. The first group of resources will be a discretionary (standard) pool to allow the Corporation to address special issue area programs designated by the Board and CEO. This discretionary pool will allow AmeriCorps*VISTA/ CNCS to allocate resources to create strategic public/ private sector partnerships that benefit the community at-large or strategically leverage AmeriCorps*VISTA resources in CNCS cross-stream program efforts. These discretionary national projects will have a finite three-year term with the resources being recycled back into the national pool.

The second pool will be used to support a competitive (VSY) grant process in future fiscal years for larger umbrella/ intermediary organizations that propose to implement large multi-state programs to address Corporation issue areas (re-entry, youth mentoring, community economic development, etc) on a national scale. This competitive process will allow AmeriCorps*VISTA to engage large-scale national sponsors as intermediaries in our efforts to perform outreach to community-based sponsor organizations. Through the competitive process, these intermediaries will be compelled to include these smaller organizations as partners.

The grants allocated via the second pool will have an evaluative component that will allow AmeriCorps*VISTA to drill deeper in our efforts to study and draw conclusions on the impact of AmeriCorps*VISTA resources in communities. These grants will have a three-year finite term with the resources being recycled back into the national pool.

It is anticipated that the majority of these national pool (both standard and grant) projects will be managed out of the state offices with the resources to be provided by AmeriCorps*VISTA

headquarters during the three-year terms of the projects. It is also anticipated that some of the larger national scope projects will be managed by headquarters program staff where deemed appropriate.

The AmeriCorps*VISTA headquarters program staff will provide written guidance, function as issue area program experts and will provide on the ground support and T&TA to state office staff in the management of these national projects.

It is estimated that by year three, this pool will consist of resources equivalent to 500 volunteer service years or at approximately 8.5 to 9% of the total annual VSY inventory.

2. Leveraging Volunteers and Dollars

For decades, AmeriCorps*VISTA has developed systems and structures within nonprofit organizations to effectively engage community volunteers in long-term, meaningful service. AmeriCorps*VISTA members help train volunteers, develop volunteer management systems, and foster greater volunteer involvement within the projects and organizations they serve. AmeriCorps*VISTA members are also instrumental in identifying and pursuing funding sources for community initiatives through grant writing, in-kind solicitations, and other innovative fundraising endeavors.

According to the last comprehensive study of the program, AmeriCorps*VISTA members recruited more than 283,000 community volunteers who donated 6.6 million volunteer hours to project activities annually (*1999 AmeriCorps*VISTA Accomplishments*; 2000, Aguirre International).

Currently, all AmeriCorps*VISTA sponsoring organizations are required to include information regarding the number of volunteers and donations generated by AmeriCorps*VISTA in the project progress reports submitted to their Corporation State Office. In FISCAL 05, until this information can be collected in egrants, AmeriCorps*VISTA will undertake an initiative to aggregate this data to aid in more effective reporting on the impacts of AmeriCorps*VISTA on low-income communities.

In an effort to lessen the burden of this data collection effort on staff, Corporation state offices are asked to provide a roll-up of (1) total number of community volunteers leveraged, (2) total number of community volunteers hours donated, and (3) total amount of funds or in-kind donations raised; for *all projects submitting progress reports in the fourth quarter of FY04*. We will use this three month period as a sample timeframe for this effort. State Offices should submit their totals to their respective Area Manager by November 1, for a final report to Headquarters on November 5, 2004.

3. Special Initiatives

Summer Associates. In an effort to create more opportunities for individuals to serve their community and country and encourage a movement of civic engagement among today's youth, AmeriCorps*VISTA will recruit Summer Associates to spend a summer serving with AmeriCorps*VISTA. In fiscal 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to encourage existing sponsoring organizations to develop Summer Associate projects, pending availability of funds.

Martin Luther King Day Projects. AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to encourage sponsoring organizations to organize service events and celebrations of Martin Luther King Day. For up to date information on availability of grants to intermediary organizations to support Martin Luther King Day projects, please visit the Corporation's website.

10th Anniversary of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Ten years ago the Corporation for National and Community Service opened its doors, uniting America's national service programs – both new and old – under the roof of a single agency. The Corporation is kicking off a year-long effort to commemorate the past decade of national and community service. For up to date anniversary celebration information and to utilize the new online toolkit, visit the Corporation's website.

Legacy of Service. Along with the CNCS 10th anniversary, AmeriCorps*VISTA is celebrating a milestone of its own – 40 years serving America. In fiscal 05, AmeriCorps*VISTA will publish a compilation of stories of service from AmeriCorps*VISTA members past and present. Anyone who has not yet done so is invited to share their story of service and the impact of AmeriCorps*VISTA on our communities. The stories that best exemplify the AmeriCorps*VISTA Legacy of Service will be highlighted in this commemorative publication. For more information, contact Anne Latimer at elatimer@cns.gov.

President's Volunteer Service Award. The President's Volunteer Service Award was created to recognize the millions of Americans who make a sustained commitment to volunteer service and civic participation over the course of a 12-month period. AmeriCorps*VISTA will work to promote the award among its sponsoring organizations and the communities in which they serve. The President's Volunteer Service Award is given to youth ages five to 14 who have completed 50 or more hours of volunteer service within a 12-month period; individuals 15 or older who have completed 100 or more hours of volunteer service within a 12-month period; or families or groups who have completed 200 or more hours of volunteer service, including at least 25 hours by each individual, within a 12-month period. Award winners will receive a certificate of achievement, a signed letter of congratulations from the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation, a note from the President of the United States, and an official President's Award pin. To learn more about the award, visit www.presidentialserviceawards.gov.

Spirit of Service Award. At the 2005 National Conference on Community Volunteering and National Service in August in Washington, DC, AmeriCorps*VISTA will once again present its Spirit of Service Award. Again this year, nominations will be accepted from any individual wishing to highlight the contributions of an AmeriCorps*VISTA member. There will be a separate nomination process for alumni. Additional information on the Spirit of Service Award including deadlines for nominations will be updated on the Corporation's website.

C. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

AmeriCorps*VISTA reinforces its members' commitment to being socially responsible, engaged citizens. By orienting members prior to beginning service, training members in requisite skills to increase program impact, and assisting project supervisors in project planning and developing on-site orientation and training, AmeriCorps*VISTA emphasizes experiential learning and the professional development and personal growth of its members.

1. Training

Pre-Service Orientation. Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) is a basic orientation to AmeriCorps*VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service for all those who are accepted for service. Generally, it is the first step in a year-long learning process. PSO provides AmeriCorps*VISTA members with foundational program development skills, an esprit de corps with other members, and identity with the AmeriCorps*VISTA mission of helping communities help themselves. Each PSO is led by a staff person of the Corporation and a group of professional trainers.

Continued Development Training (CDT). In fiscal 2005, the Early Service Training (EST) model will no longer be used by AmeriCorps*VISTA. Instead, each cluster will be determining specific local or regional trainings that meet individual needs. Various models will be tested for efficacy, meaningful content and cost-effectiveness, and a full-scale review of all options will be vetted by a team of field and HQ staff. Comments, concerns and ideas are welcomed and should be communicated to the AmeriCorps*VISTA Training Manager. A final formula for CDT will be instituted in fiscal 06.

Supervisors Training. All new Project Supervisors must attend training before the training window in which their members will attend PSO. The purpose of Supervisors Training is to provide supervisors with an understanding of the Corporation and AmeriCorps*VISTA as they relate to national and community service; an overview of key strategies involved in designing and managing clear, realistic, outcome-based member assignments within multi-year projects; tools to draft effective on-site orientation and training plans; knowledge of the recruitment resources available to them and effective screening and selection strategies; tools to assist developing and reporting on required performance measures, and an understanding of their role in program monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. Upon returning to their projects, Project Supervisors are responsible for orienting site supervisors and other individuals associated with oversight of the AmeriCorps*VISTA project. Project Supervisors with signed Memorandums of Agreement (MAs) can travel to Supervisors Training using A27 funds. Under limited circumstances when a State Office has a need for the Project Supervisor to attend training prior to the MA being signed, invitational travel must be used.

Training Windows. The majority of AmeriCorps*VISTA trainings are held within regional clusters. However, members and supervisors associated with national projects attend national events held in Washington, D.C. or other designated areas. Updated detailed training calendars will be distributed by Danielle Neveaux, dneveaux@cns.gov or (202) 606-5000, x126.

*Use of AmeriCorps*VISTA/NWREL Flexible Funds in FISCAL 05.* Beginning with the January training window in 2005, NWREL's flexible funds will be directed to support state-based or regional CDT events only. They will no longer be accessible for support of state-based or regional PSO or Supervisor events. Through the November 2004 training window, flex funds can still be used to support state-based PSO/Supervisor events. Use of NWREL's flexible funds requires approval from the appropriate cluster area manager. These "gatekeepers" will be updated by NWREL regularly regarding use patterns and the amount of funds remaining in their cluster's allocation.

Flexible funding may be accessed for:

- Reimbursing facilitators' consultant fees and their travel, lodging and per diem expenses.
- Facilitator or NWREL curriculum development/customization costs

- Training materials costs (session packets and handouts, etc.)

Flexible funding is NOT approved for:

- Participant costs related to training attendance
- Site, AV, or other logistics costs (e.g. meals, overhead projectors, room costs, certificates, name tags, etc.)
- Supporting events other than CDT events (such as retreats, close of service trainings, PSO or Supervisor trainings).

Regarding facilitator selection for flexible-fund events:

- To ensure that the Corporation's goals for CDT are met and that there is consistency/quality assurance in the training content members received, states should access facilitators from the NWREL cluster training lists for flexible funded events.
- In the event that a state wants to use facilitators outside the NWREL system, they will need to submit additional documentation for approval by HQ and the area manager (facilitator electronic resume, training goals and agenda).

Guidelines for accessing flexible funds:

- Requests should be made via email to the cluster area manager, copying Michelle Sugahiro at NWREL (sugahirm@nwrel.org or 503-275-9639). Requests should be made at least 60 days prior to a planned event. (Additionally, state-based events should not be scheduled during the same week as the cluster events in that cluster).
- Requests should include information such as dates, location, purpose of event, # attendees, and costs requested to be covered by flexible funds.
- Upon approval by the area manager, Michelle Sugahiro will work with the requestor to finalize details, budget the services, and determine facilitator/curriculum development needs.

2. Leadership Development

Leaders. AmeriCorps*VISTA Leaders support and help coordinate larger AmeriCorps*VISTA projects and/or regions, involving at least eight AmeriCorps*VISTA members, in their efforts to address the needs of low-income communities. They are individuals who already have successfully completed a term of national service and demonstrated leadership qualities in doing so. Leaders play a supporting role in recruiting, mentoring, and coordinating AmeriCorps*VISTA members. For more information regarding the AMERICORPS*VISTA Leaders program, visit www.americorps.org/vista/leaderinfo.html.

All AmeriCorps*VISTA Leaders are required to attend one Leaders Training early in their service. Leaders should attend Leaders Training within the first two months of their terms of service, with limited exceptions. Leaders Training is a weeklong intensive leadership experience that provides Leaders with an introduction to their new roles and equips them with a set of skills to help support members and ensure that their projects are sustainable.

Civic Engagement. One of AmeriCorps*VISTA's goals is to provide training opportunities and use the service experience to help members acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be

active citizens of communities--local, state, and national. In fiscal 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to work with other CNCS programs to develop civics training and technical assistance for members that will focus on the responsibilities of democratic citizenship and community service.

3. Member Benefits

Subsistence Allowance. AmeriCorps*VISTA members receive a subsistence allowance determined by the Corporation. The subsistence allowance is approximately \$9,500 but will vary based on the local cost of living within the area in which members are serving. AmeriCorps*VISTA Leaders receive an additional \$200.00 per month subsistence allowance. For more information regarding the subsistence allowance, see the AmeriCorps*VISTA Member Handbook located at <http://www.americorps.org/members/resource/manuals.html>.

Education Award. In order to ensure that enough resources are available in the National Service Trust before committing education awards, the Corporation for National and Community Service has issued member enrollment procedures for AmeriCorps*VISTA. These procedures require all sponsoring organizations to collect post-service benefit election information along with the completed member application from AmeriCorps*VISTA applicants 30 days prior to each training date. The form is available through state offices, and should be returned to the state office through the project supervisors upon completion.

Every AmeriCorps*VISTA applicant may elect one of two post-service benefits, an education award of \$4,725 or a cash stipend of \$1,200. The completion of the AmeriCorps*VISTA Member Benefits Election form prior to training and enrollment is the only opportunity for applicants to elect and to receive an education award.

Health Care. A working group of headquarters and field staff is reviewing the health care plan regularly to assure proper performance and to consider options for the future. In FISCAL 05, AmeriCorps*VISTA is soliciting field comments and suggestions on the current system. Comments should be framed in one of the following categories: what is working, what challenges are faced on a daily basis in the work of AmeriCorps*VISTA members, and what innovations and improvements can be made within the funding available. Those interested in submitting comments and suggestions should send them via email to vistahealthcare@cns.gov.

III. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

A. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR PROJECTS

AmeriCorps*VISTA implementation of new performance measurement requirements for all new and renewing projects will roll out in fiscal 05. Within their AmeriCorps*VISTA Project Application Work Plan, applicants must identify a central goal from which to measure 3-5 proposed results (at least one output, one intermediate outcome, and one end outcome). The performance measurement expectations were designed in order to empower organizations to determine their own priorities and to measure their achievement; increase the capacity of community-based organizations to better analyze the impact of their work and use that analysis for program improvement purposes; generate new and better information to inform the policies, training, and technical assistance provided by AmeriCorps*VISTA; and demonstrate the value and impact of community-based projects and national service to a broad range of stakeholders.

A copy of the Performance Measurement Toolkit for AmeriCorps*VISTA Project Applicants is available through Corporation State Offices or online by visiting www.projectstar.org. Training and technical assistance will be provided through AmeriCorps*VISTA Supervisors Training. Project STAR, a training and technical assistance provider, is also available to provide technical assistance to projects and facilitate cluster-based performance measurement trainings.

*B. AMERICORPS*VISTA AND GPRA*

In compliance with Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), the Corporation's programs report publicly on their progress toward achieving their goals in an effort to improved government effectiveness and public accountability. For fiscal 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA has identified the following indicators to demonstrate its performance to the general public:

- Number of AmeriCorps*VISTA members enrolled annually;
- Average percent of expected service time completed by AmeriCorps*VISTA members;
- The number of AmeriCorps*VISTA members serving in organizations expanding asset accumulation and entrepreneurial opportunities for the poor;
- The number of AmeriCorps*VISTA members serving in organizations focusing on children and youth;
- The number of AmeriCorps*VISTA members serving in faith-based organizations;
- The number of AmeriCorps*VISTA members serving in small community organizations;
- The number of AmeriCorps*VISTA members serving in organizations focusing on family strengthening;
- Percentage of AmeriCorps*VISTA members receiving education awards that use the award to further their education or reduce their education loan debt during the seven-year award period;
- Percentage of sponsoring organizations increasing their organizational capacity because of AmeriCorps*VISTA;
- Number of community volunteers resulting from AmeriCorps*VISTA activities;
- Total value of funds raised by AmeriCorps*VISTA members to strengthen the capacity of non-profit and voluntary organizations;
- Percentage of AmeriCorps*VISTA members indicating that their service experience influenced their career, educational or professional goals;
- The percentage of AmeriCorps*VISTA service recipients reporting that they received high quality services; and
- Percentage of sponsoring organizations reporting that AmeriCorps*VISTA members achieved their anti-poverty objectives.

In addition, in an effort to standardize metrics across all Corporation programs and in consultation with the CNCS Department of Research and Policy Development, AmeriCorps*VISTA will capture information with a stronger focus on performance. These measures include the following:

1. Percent of community volunteers who believe their experience has been a worthwhile use of their time to a "great" or "moderate extent" (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current Volunteer End Beneficiaries Survey 2003-2004.)

2. Percent of organizations that reported the services of members “considerably helped” or “moderately helped” the organization to leverage additional volunteers. (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current Service Delivery Organization Survey 2003-2004.)
3. Special Initiatives: Children of Prisoners and Ex-Offenders
Percent of parents/legal guardians of children of prisoners reporting that their child has increased self-esteem, pro-social behaviors, and stronger family relationships after being involved in the program. (Instrument-- Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, forthcoming, TBD.)
4. Value of dollars and in-kind contributions generated by VISTA members (Instruments: Corporation and VISTA data systems)
5. Increased (% change) number of projects demonstrating increased organizational capacity. (Instrument: Capacity Building Index—forthcoming, use VISTA’s model and build into Urban Institutes Performance Measurement Survey for the 04-05 year forward)
6. Percent of former members who are very likely or likely to recommend VISTA to other individuals. (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current/former member survey 2003-2004.)
7. Percent of current members completing service who say their experience was “excellent” or “good”. (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current member survey 2003-2004.)
8. Percent of former members who, since they concluded service, have exhibited a high level of active citizenship and community participation, as measured on a multi-item scale. (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, former member survey 2003-2004.)
9. Percent of organizations that reported the services of members helped the organization to: increase the number of persons served over the last 12 months by expanding their programs or services, offer new programs or services, increase capacity or expand and improve the infrastructure to deliver services. (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current Service Delivery Organization Survey 2003-2004.)
10. Percent organizations that reported the services of members “considerable helped” or moderately helped” the organization to:
 - diversify their funding
 - bring in additional funds
 - bring in donations of goods or services, including “in kind” donations
 - leverage additional volunteers
 - build or increase their involvement in coalitions or partnerships with other organizations
 - increase publicity; or

- improve relationships with sponsors or other organizations that provide them with support.

(Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current Service Delivery Organization Survey 2003-2004.)

11. Percent of organizations that reported they would “highly recommend” AmeriCorps*VISTA member(s) to other organizations. (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current Service Delivery Organization Survey 2003-2004.)
12. Percent of current members who believe their service benefited the organization in which they served “a lot” or “moderately”. (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current Members Survey 2003-2004.)
13. Percent of organizations that reported their interactions with AmeriCorps*VISTA offices were “excellent” or “good.” (Instrument: Urban Institute- Performance Measurement Survey, current Service Delivery Organization Survey 2003-2004.)

AmeriCorps*VISTA will work to ensure it captures the information necessary to report against these performance measures.

C. *MONITORING PROJECTS*

In fiscal 2005, state offices will continue to utilize AmeriCorps*VISTA’s previously defined protocols for project monitoring to assess a project’s progress towards meeting the specific goals stated in their application work plans, ensure project compliance with applicable program and fiscal requirements, and identify and address specific technical assistance needs. The following criteria will be used to prioritize selection of AmeriCorps*VISTA projects and grants to be visited in this fiscal year:

1. Sponsors that receive *grants* will be visited once a year.
2. All projects will be visited in their *first year of operation* (ideally, soon after the first AmeriCorps*VISTA members are placed).
3. Projects also will be visited in their *3rd year of operation*.

Additional information on project monitoring can be found in the 2/26/04 memo from Acting AmeriCorps*VISTA Director Howard Turner, also on the intranet at http://intranet.cns.gov/vista/filing%20cabinet/new_memorandums/2004/0226_memo_sitevisits.htm.

D. *STUDIES AND EVALUATIONS*

1. Faith-Based and Community Initiatives AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue the evaluation of faith-based and small community based projects and develop standard performance measures within its portfolio of Faith-Based and other Community-Based Initiatives. The evaluation will assess how and to what extent AmeriCorps*VISTA resources have increased the capacity of organizations to provide services specific to their intended goals and outcomes. In addition, the study will evaluate project processes and identify common performance indicators within each portfolio to help AmeriCorps*VISTA assess aggregate project impact within a given strategic

priority. Findings from the first year of the study will be made available on the Corporation's website.

2. 40th Anniversary Study of AmeriCorps*VISTA Alumni

In conjunction with the 40th anniversary of AmeriCorps*VISTA's authorizing statute, the Corporation for National and Community Service has awarded a contract to Abt Associates to design and carry out a study assessing the long-term effects of participation in the AmeriCorps*VISTA program. The study will assess how and to what extent AmeriCorps*VISTA service affected participants' attitudes, decisions, goals, values, and habits of civic engagement. As the study is defined, state offices and sponsors will be asked to participate in brief data collection exercises and/or surveys to better inform the study process and outcomes. AmeriCorps*VISTA is currently working with the Corporation's Department of Research and Policy Development to develop the parameters of the study, and field input is welcome throughout this process.

3. AmeriCorps*VISTA Accomplishments Study

In an effort to gain important information on the effects of AmeriCorps*VISTA on community organizations and end beneficiaries, in FISCAL 05, AmeriCorps*VISTA will develop an accomplishments study to be completed by year's end. The study will closely mirror the previous accomplishments study completed in 2000, to make data comparisons possible.

E. SF424 ADDENDUM AND DEFINITIONS OF FAITH-BASED AND OTHER COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

The Corporation seeks to identify faith-based and other community-based organizations as part of its effort to remove barriers to the involvement of such groups in its programs. Consequently, the Corporation requires a sufficiently precise definition so that the changing degree of participation by these specific groups can be accurately assessed.

In fiscal 2005, faith-based organizations (FBOs) will be defined as follows:

- A religious congregation (church, mosque, synagogue, temple, etc.);
- An organization, program, or project operated or sponsored by a religious congregation;
- A nonprofit organization that clearly shows by its mission statement, policies, and/or practices that it is a religiously motivated or religiously guided institution;
- An organization that, when asked, designates itself as a faith-based or religious organization; or
- A collaboration of organizations which is led by an organization from the previously described categories, or of which half or more of the members are from the previously described categories.

To define smaller community-based organizations, the Corporation has concluded that it is appropriate to set a reasonable upper limit in full-time employees and size of budget for organizations that it will be designated as "smaller community-based organizations (CBOs)." AmeriCorps*VISTA defines a small community-based organization as follows: an organization with 5 or fewer full-time employees (FTE) and annual expenditures for program of \$500,000 or less.

During the application process, organizations will be requested (though not required) to complete the SF 424 addendum (Survey on Ensuring Equal Opportunity for Applicants) that requests applicants to identify themselves as FBOs or smaller CBOs. Using the definitions discussed above, an organization would be counted as an FBO if it checks the box indicating that it is “a faith-based/religious organization.”

The Corporation also recognizes the value of intermediary organizations to provide capacity-building and technical support to smaller community-based entities. Intermediaries can be national, regional, state, or local in scope and serve as the legal applicant for an AmeriCorps*VISTA project application, ensuring that the systems to manage federal resources are in place.

For more information regarding the Corporation’s faith-based organizations and smaller community-based organizations, visit www.cns.gov/fbci.

IV. APPLYING FOR AMERICORPS*VISTA PROJECTS

A. THREE TYPES OF VISTA PROJECTS

1. Standard Projects

AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to program most of its resources through the standard project application and award process administered through Corporation State Offices. Standard projects are those projects whereby AmeriCorps*VISTA awards a certain number of AmeriCorps*VISTA members to a sponsoring organization with no grant provided or, subject to available funds, a small line item grant to support transportation and supervision needs where deemed necessary. For Standard Projects, AmeriCorps*VISTA members are payrolled by the Corporation and receive other member benefits stipends directly from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

2. Support Grant Projects

Subject to available funds, a small line item grant to support transportation and supervision needs where deemed necessary may be provided. For Support Grant Projects, AmeriCorps*VISTA members are payrolled by the Corporation and receive other member benefits stipends directly from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

3. Program Grant Projects

Program grants are those projects whereby AmeriCorps*VISTA provides a financial grant to the sponsoring organization. The grant includes funds for the subsistence allowance and other member benefits; therefore members assigned to grant projects are paid directly by the sponsoring organization. Grant projects are awarded through a competitive process. In fiscal 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA does not anticipate availability of funds for a competitive grant process. If funding becomes available, all Notices of Funds Available (NOFA) will be published on <http://www.grants.gov>. The Corporation website, www.nationalservice.org, regularly features CNCS NOFAs.

Cost-Share Projects

Each of the above types of AmeriCorps*VISTA can also be cost-share projects. AmeriCorps*VISTA has limited federal funding each year to support the full-time work of its

network of approximately 1,200 nonprofit sponsors and their corresponding 6,000 members. In order to increase the availability of AmeriCorps*VISTA resources, sponsoring organizations are encouraged to share a portion of the costs associated with supporting AmeriCorps*VISTA members. Given the resource constraints projected in FISCAL 05, the most significant area for new project growth is with cost-shares.

As a cost-share project, an organization covers the subsistence allowance of all or some of its members (approximately \$9,500 per year per member). In exchange for this investment, AmeriCorps*VISTA provides each member with health benefits, post-service benefits, childcare assistance, and any travel or relocation costs for the member.

For standard and support grant projects, AmeriCorps*VISTA will payroll the members directly and invoice the sponsors for those members who are cost share. For program grant projects, the cost share will appear as non-federal contribution to the subsistence allowance and be reported in the Financial Status Report. For those projects receiving invoices, the sponsor's portion of support does not have to be paid in advance. For more information on the cost-share partnership, please refer to the cost-share brochure available upon request or visit www.americorps.org/vista/costshare.html.

4. National Demonstration Initiatives

AmeriCorps*VISTA will continue to conduct outreach to national organizations that use unique, innovative strategies to reduce poverty on a multi-state basis with a focused emphasis on our continued asset development and faith-based and other community-based initiatives.

AmeriCorps*VISTA also will consider unsolicited proposals for new project sponsorship subject to funding availability, unique performance outcomes, and innovative implementation of AmeriCorps*VISTA's anti-poverty programming priorities on a multi-state basis. Based on the project design and geographic scope, a determination will be made as to whether a project will be most effectively managed nationally or by a lead state office.

B. EGRANTS

AmeriCorps*VISTA is currently field testing eGrants, the Corporation's online grant application system. As testing proceeds, training and technical assistance options will be developed for both staff and current AmeriCorps*VISTA supervisors. Over the course of fiscal 2005, AmeriCorps*VISTA will phase in use of eGrants among all existing sponsoring organizations and new project applicants. The first group to use eGrants will be those current sponsoring organizations whose Memorandums of Agreement expire in the second or third quarter of FY 2005.

C. Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS)

The Office of Management and Budget has directed federal agencies to provide a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number to all organizations applying for federal grants or cooperative agreements on or after October 1, 2003. The DUNS is required whether an applicant is submitting a paper application or using eGrants and whether an applicant is applying for a new award or renewal award. AmeriCorps*VISTA encourages all current projects and potential applicants to obtain a DUNS number. To request a DUNS number, projects should call 1-866-705-5711.