AmeriCorps VISTA
Program Guidance

Fiscal Year 2008

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Introduction and Purpose

AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) provides full-time volunteers to non-profits, community-based organizations, and public agencies to create and expand programs that bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty. In fiscal year 2008, more than 6,000 VISTAs will leverage human, financial, and material resources to increase the capacity of thousands of low-income communities across the country in developing self-sustaining solutions to the problems of poverty.

The tremendous success of the VISTA program is attributed to its core principles: anti-poverty focus, community empowerment, sustainability, and capacity-building. Through adherence to these principles, VISTA has effectively adapted in response to the ever-changing social, economic, and technological environment throughout its 42 year history.

The purpose of the fiscal year 2008 Programming Guidance is to aid Corporation State Offices in developing and managing projects with potential sponsors for the best possible use of VISTAs and resources in relation to the Corporation's strategic plan.

A companion to this guidance, the VISTA Desk Reference, is available to Corporation State Offices on the VISTA Intranet site at http://intranet.cns.gov/vista/DeskReference/index.htm. The VISTA Desk Reference is updated continuously and contains more detailed policies and procedures for the day-to-day implementation of VISTA projects and as a resource for member support issues. (Note: you must be connected to the Corporation network to view the VISTA Intranet site.)

Key Changes in Fiscal Year 2008

Section	Topic	Change
I	Strategic Initiatives	Adds the fifth Strategic Initiative, Supporting Disaster Preparedness and Response
III	Programming for VISTA Priorities and Strategic Initiatives	Focuses Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service on Asset Development
VI	Project Implementation	Adds requirement to use eGrants for all project and grant applications

I. Corporation Strategic Initiatives and AmeriCorps VISTA

For 42 years, VISTA has been in the forefront of helping communities across America to help themselves fight poverty. VISTAs devote a year of their lives to challenge poverty's root causes. They do this by mobilizing community volunteers and local resources, and by increasing the capacity of people in low-income communities.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS or Corporation) identified five cross-program strategic initiatives to focus on during 2006 to 2010. This strategic plan is available at http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/focus_areas/index.asp. While every VISTA project need not respond to a specific strategic initiative, the VISTA program blends well with the Corporation's strategic initiatives:

Mobilizing More Volunteers
In fiscal year 2008, the VISTA program will continue to improve the capacity of communities and organizations to recruit and engage community volunteers, resulting in an increase in the number of volunteers and an increase in the number of sponsoring organizations indicating the services of VISTAs helped the organization leverage volunteers.

Strategies to address the provision of more opportunities for citizens to serve and volunteer in low-income communities include:
- Ensure that training and technical assistance materials related to developing and implementing volunteer generation and management systems are available
- Provide curriculum and support materials for VISTA sponsors and VISTAs that reflect constituent-targeted information (e.g., Baby Boomers, college students)
- Emphasize projects directed toward supporting organizations that are devoted to connecting volunteers with service opportunities
- Execute a targeted outreach campaign to rural communities, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations on program development, community volunteer recruitment, and sustainability
- Increase organizations' capacity to serve as a volunteer connector organization for their communities or to partner with existing volunteer centers and connector organizations

Ensuring a Brighter Future for All of America's Youth
VISTA will continue to encourage projects that focus on the future of youth. VISTA is continuously developing and providing resources that will contribute to the life of youth through such projects as: after school programs, child care, mentoring programs, and children's literacy programs. VISTA will focus and put emphasis on reaching disadvantaged youth, such as the children of prisoners and youth aging-out of foster care. In FY08, VISTA will increase the number of youth reached by mentors and those serving as community volunteers as a result of VISTA programs.

Strategies to provide opportunities for youth from or in disadvantaged circumstances include:
- Participate in targeted promotional efforts to attract youth to national service
- Increase the number of VISTA project sponsors who are developing new mentoring programs for youth or implementing existing programs
- Implement summer associates projects aimed at engaging youth in community service
- Collaborate with the Departments of Justice and Labor in prisoner re-entry projects
- Develop relationships with governmental agencies to address issues of children aging out of foster care

- Collaborate with state mentoring partnerships and State Commissions on promoting National Mentoring Month

Engaging Students in Communities

There is a significant resource of volunteerism on our nation's campuses that have the potential to make an impact on poverty if effectively directed towards low-income communities. Students are a wealth of experience, ideals, energy, and motivation for low-income communities and the organizations that serve them. In fiscal year 2008, VISTA will continue to support campus-affiliated projects that engage college students in volunteering in anti-poverty activities.

Strategies to engage students in low-income communities include:
- Implement summer associates projects with higher education partnerships
- Develop training and technical assistance that focuses on skills needed to overcome barriers to higher education
- Develop training and technical assistance that prepares higher education institutions to engage community volunteers effectively
- Support Service Learning programs in under-performing low-income schools

Harnessing Baby Boomers' Experience

Baby Boomers bring a wealth of work- and life-experiences to their VISTA service that enriches their contributions to supporting low-income communities. For fiscal year 2008, VISTA will continue to tap this valuable national resource to serve as VISTAs and/or as community volunteers recruited through VISTA projects.

Strategies to harness Baby Boomers' experience in serving low-income communities include:
- Participate in the Corporation-wide Boomer promotional and recruitment campaign
- Devote resources toward recruiting Baby Boomers as VISTAs and as community volunteers
- Develop training and technical assistance that focuses on the readiness of nonprofit organizations to appeal to and use the skills of Baby Boomers
- Develop training and technical assistance that focuses on preparing nonprofit organizations to shift from the "greatest generation" to Baby Boomer volunteers

Supporting Disaster Preparedness and Response

VISTA recognizes the importance of disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery efforts in low-income communities. In fiscal year 2008, VISTA will continue to support programming in these areas. Notably, since VISTA is primarily intended as a capacity-building resource that supports long-term, sustainable solutions to poverty, VISTA programming related to disasters is primarily directed at preparedness and long-term recovery activities in low-income communities, such as rebuilding the infrastructure, supporting permanent housing, and revitalizing the local economies.

Strategies to support disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery efforts in low-income communities include:
- Continue to develop and provide training and technical assistance for project sponsors and VISTAs that focuses on the readiness of communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a disaster event
- Continue to disseminate the VISTA Ready Kit, which gives immediate access to field-tested resources and tools that help address the unique challenges of community crises
- On a limited basis, provide opportunities for sponsors to participate in short-term relief activities in low-income communities. Any current sponsor interested in participating in

disaster-related activities is encouraged to apply for a CNCS Disaster Response Cooperative Agreement. This agreement enables interested Corporation-sponsored programs to participate in disaster response deployments with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or another agency and be eligible to be reimbursed through CNCS for expenses related to the disaster deployment. Details regarding the agreement can be found on the Corporation's website. Applications may be submitted at any time.

II. Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program

Authorized in 1964, the AmeriCorps VISTA program supports efforts to alleviate poverty by encouraging individuals from all walks of life to engage in a year of full-time service. VISTA fulfills its purpose of supporting anti-poverty programs through three primary objectives as identified by the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended:

- To generate the commitment of private sector resources
- To encourage volunteer service at the local level
- To strengthen local organizations that are working to combat poverty

The VISTA program places VISTAs at sponsoring organizations, which absorb most of the costs related to project supervision and logistical support. VISTA provides a small living allowance and certain benefits for members. Investment by the sponsoring organization and the community is fundamental to the VISTA program, as the VISTA resource is intended to be short-term. To achieve its program purpose, VISTA operates under the following core principles:

Anti-Poverty Focus – The purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, or tribal or public agency with a program that is poverty-related in scope may become a VISTA project sponsor. The project's goal addresses helping individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply making poverty more tolerable through short-term services.

Community Empowerment – Sponsoring organizations ensure that the project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, and implementing the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community strengths.

Sustainable Solutions – VISTAs are a short-term resource to help sponsoring organizations address a new or existing program area related to their mission. Members help build the capacity of an organization to implement its anti-poverty program on its own after a period (typically three years), as sponsoring organizations plan for the eventual phase-out of VISTA members.

Capacity-Building – VISTAs do not provide direct services to low-income individuals, but rather work to increase the capacity of organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of community volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and collaborative development, VISTAs mobilize local resources to achieve lasting solutions.

Join with VISTA in fighting poverty with passion. Organizations can apply to become an AmeriCorps VISTA sponsor by visiting http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp or contacting the Corporation State

Office in their state. Individuals can apply to become a VISTA member online: http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/ready/programs_vista.asp.

III.   Programming for VISTA Priorities and Strategic Initiatives

Section I describes how the VISTA program is focused on the Corporation's strategic initiatives; Section II describes the VISTA program's guiding principles. This section brings together VISTA's priorities for programming in fiscal year 2008 and the Corporation's strategic initiatives. These priorities reinforce the Corporation's strategic initiatives, support VISTA's core principles, and call upon the program's unique methods for engaging volunteers and participants of all ages and backgrounds to meet critical needs in low-income communities. These priorities provide a framework for the VISTA program to focus its efforts and achieve its goals.

A. Financial Asset Development
Acquiring equity, financial education, and generating savings are critical to helping move people toward financial stability, as are becoming trained in and having access to current technology, which benefits both students and adults.

The United States has experienced a marked disparity between wealthy and low-income Americans. It is estimated that one out of four Americans are asset-poor; they have insufficient net worth to live more than three months, even at the poverty level. VISTA members can have a direct impact on developing financially stable communities through financial asset development.

Individual Asset Development   Financial asset development remains one of the most promising *and* proven program areas by which VISTAs can truly effect sustainable change in partnership with low-income communities and the organizations serving them. The VISTA program dedicates members to micro enterprise initiatives, which help low-income individuals become self-sufficient by developing their own businesses, and to programs focusing both on general financial literacy and asset savings programs, such as Individual Development Accounts (IDA).

Bridging the Digital Divide   Locally, VISTAs continue to play a significant role in helping community organizations 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, mentoring, and staffing computer laboratories.

On a national level, VISTA is partnering with One Economy on its AT&T "Access All" project to deploy VISTAs at local One Economy and Habitat for Humanity sites. These VISTAs work to have technology packages (hardware, software, access, and training) placed in the homes of low-income families. The access and training to utilize current technology, through programs such as this, enable individuals to connect with resources and information that catapult sustainability of these programs.

Community Economic Development   VISTAs are actively involved in projects that contribute to the economic development of low-income communities across the nation with the purpose of contributing to economic growth. By improving the key indicators of sustainable growth in living standards, VISTAs are able to have a lasting impact on the community and build the economic infrastructure.

VISTA projects focused on financial asset development are likely to respond to four of the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Examples are:

- VISTAs recruit volunteers for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance projects (VITA), as well as for outreach activities to inform low-income persons about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTAs expand micro enterprise development for individuals in low communities recovering from a disaster (DISASTER RECOVERY)
- VISTAs initiate after school projects for children to hone their computing skills. (YOUTH)
- VISTAs develop school-based financial literacy programs, including KIDS Accounts (IDAs for youth), with students, who both benefit from the program and contribute to the program as volunteers, for example, as tellers at youth credit unions. (STUDENTS)
- VISTAs garner the expertise of retired Baby Boomers who act as coaches to low-income persons in putting together business plans. (BOOMERS)

B. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service

VISTA supports the extra opportunities for community service that take place on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, the third Monday in January. MLK Day of Service is a way to transform Dr. King's life and teachings into community service that helps empower and strengthen local communities.

MLK Day of Service provides an opportunity for VISTAs and projects to reach out to and engage different populations and potential new partners. All Corporation State Offices and VISTA sponsors should encourage their VISTA(s) to lead or take part in a Day of Service project, making the most of this opportunity to promote community volunteering.

In fiscal year 2008, all VISTA projects and members are strongly encouraged to create or participate in a national initiative that promotes individual asset development in low-income communities. Since MLK Day of Service is near tax season, VISTA projects and members are encouraged to create or support MLK Day activities that promote the availability of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) as well as free tax preparation services through Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites. To this end, VISTA is partnering with the IRS to provide outreach materials on Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites as well as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

VISTA projects focused on MLK Day of Service are likely to respond to at least three of the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Examples are:
- VISTAs identify local VITA sites in their community and share referral information with their sponsoring organization and its program beneficiaries (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTAs research other non-EITC/VITA related MLK Day of Service activities occurring in the community and set up an information table about VITA sites and the EITC (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTAs assist a local VITA site in identifying potential tax preparation volunteers from the Baby Boomer community (BOOMERS)
- VISTAs connect the VITA site with a local school so that students can bring VITA and EITC information home to their parents (STUDENTS)

Sponsors should e-mail mlkday@cns.gov with their plans for their events and share results and media coverage. A toolkit and other resources are available at www.mlkday.gov.

C. Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

The Foster Care program, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and states, provides funds for children who need placement outside their homes in a foster family home or in an institution. Some of the children who are in foster care are adopted. Other children, who are not adopted or who do not return to their families, "age out" of foster care when they are 18 years old.

For those youth, HHS and the states also administer an Independent Living program that provides services to foster children who are 16 years or older to assist them in making the transition to independent living. These services include assistance to earn a high school diploma or receive vocational training; training in daily living skills such as budgeting, locating housing, career planning, and job search; or help in making the transition to independent living.

Even with the assistance, it is difficult for youth aging out of foster care to become completely independent on their 18th birthday and to be able to afford housing on their own and other living expenses. For many, a support network does not exist or is very fragile. The youth are at risk of homelessness and engaging in risky behavior to survive.

VISTA projects can assist youth aging out of foster care in developing a support network and other means to improve their situation. In conjunction with the HHS initiative, Another Planned Living Arrangement, VISTAs can develop mentoring projects for youth aging out of foster care. The youth identify adults, with whom there is already some bond, who are willing to serve as mentors during this vulnerable time.

VISTA projects that are focused on youth aging out of foster care respond to at least two of the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Examples are:
- VISTAs recruit and mobilize adults to serve as mentors until a youth is financially stable and has permanent housing. (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTA members, in establishing projects, contribute to ensuring a brighter future for youth from disadvantaged circumstances. (YOUTH)

On a national level, VISTA will explore potential partnership activities with organizations and agencies that are dedicated to improving the lives of our nation's most vulnerable young people. Additionally, VISTA will study best practices, projects, resources, and lessons-learned from collaborators and pilot projects of youth aging-out of foster care and make results available for technical assistance VISTAs and sponsors.

D. Prisoner Re-entry

Prisoner re-entry projects will continue to be an emphasis area for the VISTA program during fiscal year 2008. Beginning in 2005, the Corporation signed an interagency agreement with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to place VISTAs in communities served by DOJ Weed & Seed sites to develop community based prisoner re-entry programs. The Corporation received resources from DOJ to support VISTAs and training and technical assistance. The DOJ reports this effort has resulted in a leveraging of resources and development of local capacity that could not have achieved without the VISTA partnership. The partnership has also served as a springboard for VISTA prisoner re-entry programs throughout the country.

The VISTA program has expanded work in this area by developing a partnership with the Department of Labor (DOL). Under an interagency agreement, DOL grantees can apply for one full-time VISTA member to develop resources and strengthen programs for ex-offender re-entry. The DOL projects are developed locally through the respective Corporation State Offices. State

Offices are encouraged to explore cost-sharing options with project sponsors, as well as to promote collaboration between the DOJ Weed & Seed sites and the DOL grantees.

In addition to prisoner re-entry, the VISTA program addresses a particularly challenging subset of youth in disadvantaged circumstances, those with an incarcerated parent. These youth not only reside in a single parent household, but also experience the stigma of having a parent in prison. According to the Department of Health and Human Service's Administration for Children and Families, in 2003, more than two million children had an incarcerated parent. These children are seven times more likely to become involved in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems themselves. AmeriCorps VISTA continues to encourage programming in this important area.

The following are examples of elements for which sustainable systems could be developed for prisoner reentry projects:
- Community mobilization – Developing reentry "circles" by bringing together community resources to develop and implement reentry plans tailored to an individual's needs. Reentry "circles" address multiple challenges of offender reentry and provide a forum for community collaboration.
- Housing – Providing a positive living environment which serves to acclimate returning prisoners to life on the outside while helping them develop marketable skills.
- Family Strengthening –Teaching pre-release and ex-offenders and their families the techniques necessary to create a caring, healthy, and supportive family environment.
- Life Skills – Teaching prisoners, either before or after their release, about conflict resolution, financial planning, decision-making, and other related areas.
- Employment – Assisting pre-release and former prisoners in acquiring the skills they will need to be competitive in the job market and assisting them in finding jobs.
- Mentoring – Recruiting Baby Boomers to serve as adult mentors for offenders and ex-offenders to provide them with life-skills as they transition from institutional care. Adult mentors may also mentor children of incarcerated parents. Programming for children of incarcerated parents is also a likely area of involvement for engaging both college students and other youth. Programming possibilities include, but are not limited, to after-school care, mentoring, curriculum development, financial asset development
- Substance Abuse Prevention – Offering treatment or counseling to pre-release and ex-offenders who are currently or formerly addicted to drugs or who are at risk of becoming addicted.
- Health Care – Providing mental and physical health services to address some of the common needs of ex-offenders as they transition from institutional care.

VISTA prisoner re-entry programs provide excellent opportunities to expand upon the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Some examples of how these programs interface in low-income communities are:
- VISTAs recruit and mobilize volunteers from the faith and secular communities to engage them in local re-entry initiatives. (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTAs ensure a brighter future for youth by developing programs to provide services for children of incarcerated parents. Some programs include, but are not limited to, after school programs, mentoring, and financial asset development. (YOUTH)
- VISTA members develop student volunteer recruitment systems and management to tutor and provide peer support to children of incarcerated parents. (STUDENTS)
- VISTAs develop community volunteer programs to utilize Baby Boomers as adult mentors for ex-offenders and their families. Baby Boomers mentor ex-offenders in life skills, such as parenting, building relationships, and other vital areas for successful living. (BOOMERS)

E. Rural Community Development
VISTA hosted the Summit for Healthy and Stronger Communities in Appalachia and the Rural South in 2003. Participants developed strategies, action plans, and recommendations to advance the agenda, focusing first on access to fresh, potable water, including plumbing, sewage and wastewater facilities.

VISTA continues to invest resources to move people in rural communities out of poverty. In addition to the Summit's focus on water, VISTA supports programming to:
- Create economic enterprise zones, such as the National Center that canvasses low-income communities, finds out what is working, and then applies "miracle-grow" in the form of training, technical assistance, and linkages to support community development (YOUTH)
- Rehabilitate housing, such as the Habitat for Humanity model (VOLUNTEERS; BOOMERS; YOUTH; DISASTER RECOVERY)
- Establish day care and after-school programs, such as People Incorporated (YOUTH)
- Start education, recreation, and day care for residents, such as the Progressive Community Club of Hayter's Gap programs (VOLUNTEERS; YOUTH; BOOMERS)
- Promote homeownership, such as People Incorporated, which help families become homeowners by providing low-interest loans; rehabilitate, repair, and weatherize homes; enable families to obtain safe drinking water and sewage disposal; provide rental subsidies to families; and assist with transitional housing (YOUTH)
- Generate volunteers, such as the Volunteers for Communities model, which trains community groups in Virginia and the surrounding states to host volunteers in short- and long-term volunteer experiences (VOLUNTEERS; BOOMERS; DISASTER RECOVERY)

VISTA projects focused on rural community development in low-income communities are likely to respond to at least three of the Corporation's strategic initiatives, as noted above.

The VISTA program has invested this year in pre-service and in-service training designs for VISTAs and sponsors in rural Gulf state communities, which are adaptable for a wider audience of all rural communities. Contact the Training Unit for more information on designs and providers. Also available is VISTA O-LINC, designed to link VISTAs and sponsors to share strategies and critical resources and to cultivate new working relationships. This resource is available at www.vistaolinc.net. In addition, VISTA has collected and collated tips sheets, tools, and articles in a "Sustainability One-Pac", focused on supporting VISTAs in their roles as capacity builders, advancing rural community development efforts. This toolkit was sent in April 2007 to each Corporation State Office and any sponsor recommended by a state office.

F. Tribal Community Development
Many American Indian, Alaska Native, and Pacific Territory Communities continue to struggle with poverty and related issues. American Indian and Alaska Native children in single-parent homes are more likely to live in poverty than any other racial or ethnic group. Nearly two-thirds of elders live in poverty.

VISTA continues to reach out to tribal governments and organizations supporting tribal communities that seek to expand their capacity to fight poverty. VISTAs assist existing and potential sponsors to increase their effectiveness and access to resources in culturally appropriate ways. In addition, support is provided for existing and potential sponsors and VISTA members to participate in training events such as the biannual Tribal Supervisors' Orientation and the annual National Conference on Service in Indian Communities.

VISTA projects and members in low-income tribal areas respond to the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Examples are:

- VISTA members mobilize volunteers from within and without the community to strengthen community programs and to encourage volunteerism in a culturally appropriate manner. (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTA projects help develop community capacity to implement tribal Boys and Girls clubs to support the healthy development of children living in Indian Communities. (YOUTH)
- VISTA members connect tribal elders with school age children and use service projects as a vehicle to preserve tribal culture and language. (STUDENTS)
- VISTA members employ the talents of elders when designing projects, engaging them in volunteer activities designed to use their skills and talents. (BOOMERS)

IV. VISTA Project Resources

To leverage resources and meet local community needs, VISTA makes use of several project types. These are described below. Corporation State Offices work closely with sponsoring organizations to ensure development of a project type that is most effective for achieving community goals.

A. Standard Projects
Standard projects are those projects in which the Corporation awards a certain number of VISTAs to a sponsoring organization, and the sponsoring organization funds only local operating and logistics costs. In standard projects, VISTAs receive a living allowance biweekly from the Corporation and other benefits as described in the *AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook*.

B. Support Grants
For a support grant, the sponsoring organization receives a small grant to be used for transportation, supervision, and/or VISTA member and supervisor training needs. For projects with support grants, VISTAs are paid by the Corporation and receive other member benefits directly from the Corporation in the same way as standard projects.

C. Program Grants
The VISTA program is allowed, by law, to allocate a limited amount of grant programming. For such projects, the grant includes funds for the living allowance and other member benefits. VISTAs assigned to projects with program grants are paid directly by the sponsoring organization. Grant projects are awarded through a competitive process. Having a program grant entails setting up a separate pay system for the VISTAs.

New Projects   In fiscal year 2008, the VISTA program does not anticipate availability of grant funds for new projects. If funding becomes available, a notice of funds available (NOFA) will be published on http://www.grants.gov. The Corporation website, www.nationalservice.org, regularly features CNCS NOFAs.

Existing Projects   In fiscal year 2008, the VISTA program may convert existing projects to projects with program grants. To be considered eligible, projects must:
- Have been in operation for at least twelve months
- Be a high-performing project that has met all compliance requirements

- Have demonstrated the potential to manage a grant-based program, including financial aspects
- Understand the fiscal requirements and be able to convey them to their auditors
- Have at least 15 VISTA members

D. Cost-share

In order to expand the number of VISTAs that can be supported with the limited federal funding each year, sponsoring organizations that have the financial means are encouraged to share a portion of the costs associated with supporting VISTA members. In cost-share, the sponsoring organization covers the living allowance of some or all of its VISTAs (which range from $9,996 to $13,056 per member per year, depending on geographic location). In exchange for this investment, the Corporation covers all the remaining costs for each member. The Corporation pays the members directly and invoices the sponsors monthly for the living allowance of cost-share VISTAs.

For projects with program grants, the cost-share appears as a nonfederal contribution to the living allowance and is reported in the Financial Status Report. For those projects (standard and support) receiving invoices, the sponsoring organization's portion of costs does not have to be paid in advance, but rather may be reimbursed on a monthly basis. For more information on the cost-share partnership, please visit http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp.

While cost-sharing can be an effective means to leverage funding, it should never be considered a requirement for becoming or remaining a VISTA sponsor. VISTA recognizes that many potential sponsors, particularly those most in need of VISTA resource for capacity building, may not be able to support a cost share agreement.

E. Leaders

VISTA Leaders are available to support and help coordinate the efforts of larger VISTA projects involving at least eight VISTA members. Leaders are individuals who have successfully completed a full term of VISTA service. While Leaders do not directly supervise VISTA members, they can play a strategic role in assisting project supervisors with member recruitment, retention, and support.

F. Summer Associates

Existing sponsors of year-round VISTA projects are eligible to apply to Corporation State Offices for adding Summer Associates to their projects. The concept paper and assignment descriptions for the Summer Associates must directly address one of the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Additionally, sponsors who participate in the Corporation's Summer of Service initiative to provide service opportunities for youth ages 5 – 21 may use VISTA summer associates in support of those efforts.

Summer Associates are individuals who serve 8 or 10 weeks between May and August. In developing the concept paper for Summer Associates programming, sponsoring organizations focus on the Corporation's strategic initiatives and incorporate activities that should result in a credible effort to help people escape poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. Unlike full-time VISTA members, Summer Associates may carry out direct service activities.

Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards in the amount of $1,000 will be available to Summer Associates, following successful completion of their service. The education award counts as one of two education awards allowed as a lifetime limit.

V. Project Models

A. Single Site Projects
The majority of VISTA projects involve placing one or more VISTAs with a sponsoring organization at one location. There is no limit (beyond available funds and sponsor capacity) to the number of members placed with a sponsoring organization. In this model, VISTAs typically work toward common outcomes that the sponsoring organization identifies during the application process. The sponsoring organization may, on the other hand, have several VISTAs working on different outcomes at a single site.

When applying through eGrants, the Corporation's web-based grant and project application and management system (see Section VI.C below), the sponsor submits a concept paper and full application for the project. A single site project model is referred to as "prime" or "prime-only" in eGrants. Figure 1 shows some characteristics of a prime project model.
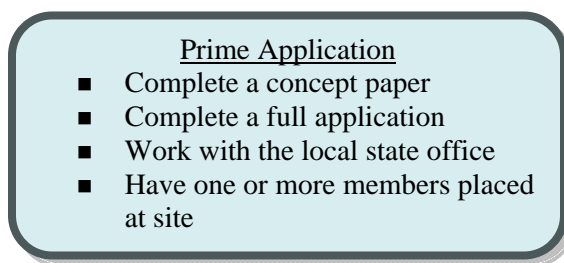
> **Prime Application**
> - Complete a concept paper
> - Complete a full application
> - Work with the local state office
> - Have one or more members placed at site

Figure 1. Prime project model

B. Multi-Site Projects
In multi-site placement projects, VISTAs are placed in a single state through either (a) a sponsoring organization that operates at multiple sites in the community, region, or state or (b) a sponsoring organization that has memorandums of understanding with local organizations that serve as sub-applicants. The sponsor proposes the number of sites and the number of members at each site, based on the expected outcomes of the project. Generally, VISTAs in this model work toward large, sponsor-identified goals; however, each site may have different outcomes.

When applying through eGrants, the Corporation State Office staff determines, in consultation with the prime sponsor, whether the project is a "prime" or "prime plus sub" model. The decision is based on factors such as the amount of responsibility the sponsor takes if there are sub-applicants, magnitude of the project, and proximity of the sites.

If the sponsor applies using the prime project model, the prime sponsor submits one concept paper and full application for the entire project (Figure 1). If the sponsor is applying using the prime plus sub model, the sponsor submits a concept paper and full application for the overall project; sub-applications are submitted for the sites in the project. Figure 2 shows some characteristics of a prime plus sub project model.

Using the prime plus sub model offers the sponsor and Corporation State Office several benefits. For example, the sponsor can use the eGrants functionality to hold a competition for its sites. In addition, the sponsor and Corporation State Office can track progress of individual project sites. Further, Corporation State Offices are provided with the flexibility to divide the site management and monitoring responsibilities of a multi-site project among different program specialists.

C. Multi-State Projects

Sponsors sometimes wish to develop a project that has sites in several states. Sponsors have two options for developing these multi-state projects.

In the first option, sites simply work with each Corporation State Office independently. For example, sites in Alabama work directly with the Alabama State Office, sites in Montana work directly with the Montana State Office, and so on. When applying through eGrants, sponsors should follow the guidelines for a single site or multi-site project, as described in Sections V.A and V.B above.

In the second option, the prime sponsor works with one Corporation State Office to coordinate the development of project sites across states. In this option, the sponsor proposes the number of sites and the number of members at each site, based on the expected outcomes of the project. Generally, VISTAs in this model work toward large, sponsor-identified goals; however, each site may have different outcomes. In development and management of such a multi-state project, the Corporation State Office coordinating the project contacts Corporation State Office staff in the other states with proposed project sites to:

- Inform them that a sponsor is requesting to place a project site in their jurisdiction
- Provide information to enable them to make a determination about the need for such a project in their jurisdiction

When applying through eGrants in this second option, the Corporation State Office staff determines, in consultation with the prime sponsor, whether the project is a "prime" or "prime plus sub" model. The decision is based on factors such as the amount of responsibility the sponsor takes if there are sub-applicants, magnitude of the project, and proximity of the sites.

If the sponsor applies using the prime project model, the prime sponsor submits one concept paper and full application for the entire project (Figure 1). If the sponsor applies using the prime plus sub model, the sponsor submits a concept paper and full application for the overall project; sub-applications are submitted for the sites in the project in each state. Figure 2 shows some characteristics of a prime plus sub project model.

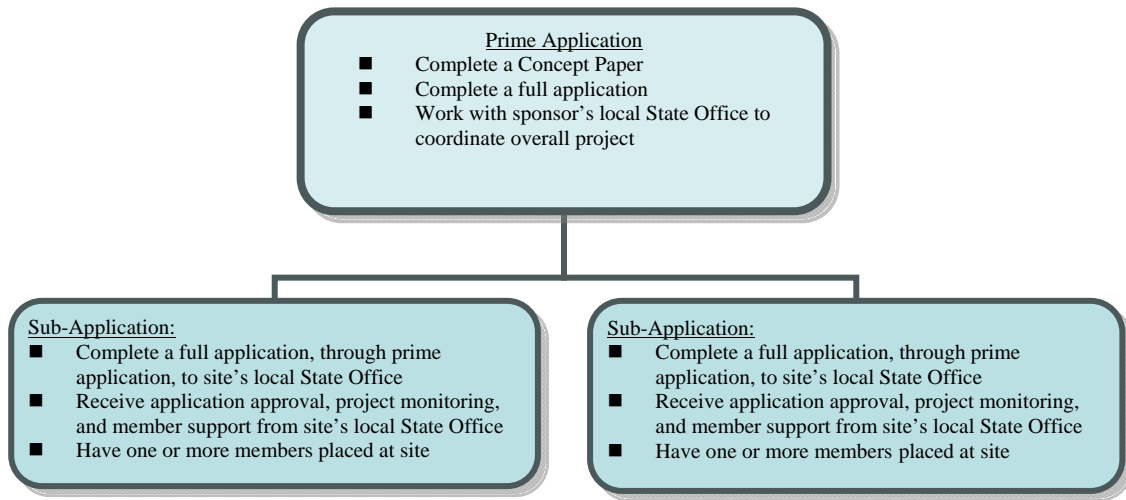Some of the advantages in using the prime plus sub approach are mentioned just above (see section V.B).

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│               Prime Application                │
│   ■   Complete a Concept Paper                 │
│   ■   Complete a full application              │
│   ■   Work with sponsor's local State Office to│
│       coordinate overall project               │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌────────────────────────────────────┐   ┌────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Sub-Application:                    │   │ Sub-Application:                    │
│ ■  Complete a full application,     │   │ ■  Complete a full application,     │
│    through prime application, to    │   │    through prime application, to    │
│    site's local State Office        │   │    site's local State Office        │
│ ■  Receive application approval,    │   │ ■  Receive application approval,    │
│    project monitoring, and member   │   │    project monitoring, and member   │
│    support from site's local State  │   │    support from site's local State  │
│    Office                           │   │    Office                           │
│ ■  Have one or more members placed  │   │ ■  Have one or more members placed  │
│    at site                          │   │    at site                          │
└────────────────────────────────────┘   └────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 2. Prime plus sub project model

Involving all Corporation State Offices in which VISTAs are placed in project sites is necessary to ensure that:

- Collaboration of activities among organizations working in communities takes place and duplication of activities by other entities is avoided
- Sponsors have not received VISTA resources in the state for the same purpose
- Requirements for notifying state governors of project activities are fulfilled
- VISTAs are able to receive the support of the local Corporation State Office staff and other local VISTAs during their service
- VISTAs can be included in local in-service training opportunities
- VISTAs can be contacted in the event of a disaster
- Requirements for project monitoring and oversight are fulfilled
- Reporting to Congress, governors, and the public on the location of VISTA activities is accurate

D. National Demonstration Projects
From time-to-time, the Corporation develops national demonstration projects. These demonstration projects, which are initiated and managed by VISTA headquarters, have finite terms and have the primary purpose of testing promising concepts tied to the eradication of poverty. At completion, the Corporation assesses performance for the national demonstration project and captures best practices and lessons learned from the demonstration.

VI. Project Implementation

A. One Year Project Period with Annual Renewals
For fiscal year 2008, the project period defined in the Memorandum of Agreement remains a period of at least 12 months, with allowances made to accommodate pay period start and end date requirements. AmeriCorps VISTA projects are generally expected to last up to three years.

Projects will be provided renewal guidance each year by their Corporation State Office or VISTA HQ program specialist.

B. Additional Years Beyond Year Three
Approval authority for projects continuing for a fourth or fifth year lies with the Area Manager, and for those continuing past a fifth year, approval authority lies with the Director of AmeriCorps VISTA.

The criterion for the renewal of VISTA projects after the third year, subject to the availability of funds, is at least one of the following: a cost-share component; the sponsor is acting as an intermediary organization (meets requirements described below) and is changing the sub-applicant organizations according to the three-year period; and/or the sponsor has demonstrated an extenuating community need, such as a being the only sponsor available in a high-poverty area for the VISTA project.

To be considered an intermediary, a sponsoring organization must meet all of the following criteria:
- A minimum of three partner organizations for whom the sponsor functions as lead agency
- A demonstrated capacity to provide ongoing program management and operational training and technical assistance to the smaller partnering organizations
- A demonstrated capacity to respond to reporting requirements (aggregating of project data and outcomes, etc.) for all of the partner organizations
- A demonstrated capacity to function as a mentor agency for smaller community-based or grassroots organizations (not necessarily partners)

For VISTA projects to continue for a fourth or fifth year, the state office staff provides an analysis of the project plan to the Area Manager for approval. The sponsor also submits an updated application outlining specific end outcomes tied to the additional program years. In their analysis, state office staff assesses the project's progress toward sustainability and the ability of the sponsor to meet the end outcomes and accomplishments described in the application.

For VISTA projects to continue beyond year five, the state office staff provides an analysis and review of the project plan to the Area Manager, and, upon approval by the Area Manager, to the Director of AmeriCorps VISTA. The sponsor also submits an updated application outlining specific end outcomes tied to each additional program year.

C. Applying Through eGrants
The Corporation accepts applications throughout the year using eGrants, the Corporation's web-based grant and project application and management system. If a potential sponsor is unable to use eGrants, they may submit a paper application and the Corporation State Office will enter the application into eGrants for them. The FY 2008 NOFA for applications (except national demonstration projects) was made available in July 2007 for new and continuing projects with start dates between October 1, 2007 and September 30, 2008. Applicants may click on: AmeriCorps VISTA State FY 2008. The FY 2008 NOFA for national demonstration projects has been opened as well, but at this time, applications are only being accepted from continuing national demonstration projects and predetermined new applicants

Training in eGrants is available to all existing and potential sponsoring organizations through a training and technical assistance provider. Sponsoring organizations may contact their Corporation State Office to access the training. Corporation State Office staff are also able to

provide technical assistance. The <u>eGrants Help Desk</u> is available to provide technical assistance, as necessary.

D. Training of Project Supervisors and VISTA Members

Training in the context of the VISTA program is a series of training and developmental opportunities provided at points when they are most useful. VISTA training is guided by the principle that what is learned must be practical and directly relevant to the members' service or supervisors' work. Knowledge, skills, and abilities required of a person to successfully carry out tasks in his/her work plan and attain project goals are the basis for each VISTA training design.

Member training is a shared responsibility among Corporation staff, the sponsoring organizations, and members themselves. When coordinated the result is an integrated training plan in which all involved have ownership and input, which serves to best prepare both sponsoring organizations and VISTAs to effectively realize their own and VISTA's goals.

Equally, sponsor and supervisor orientation and ongoing training and technical support (T&TA) is a collective responsibility between Corporation staff and our T&TA providers and the sponsors themselves, who communicate their professional development needs to the Corporation State Offices.

Training Cycle (in months)
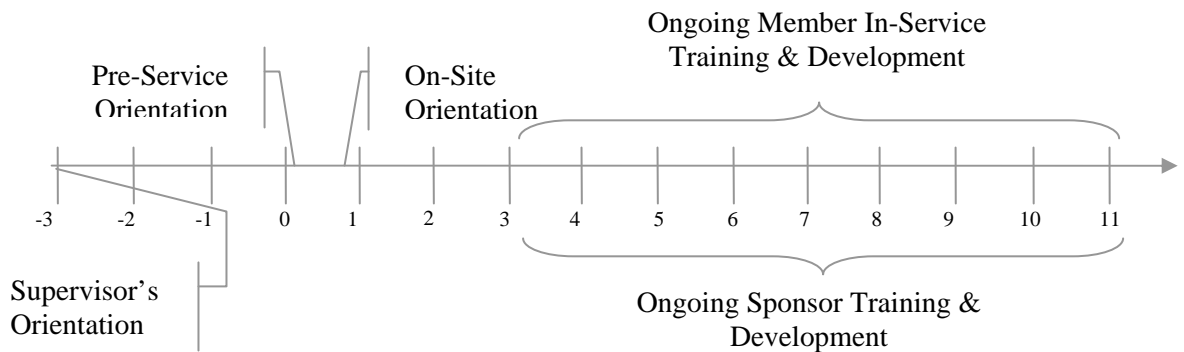
<u>Supervisor's Orientation</u> is an introduction to the management of a VISTA project and the supervision of members. Usually held as a separate training track at PSO, the orientation addresses VISTA's expectations and requirements, while sharing effective practices in developing the sponsoring organization's capacity. All new site supervisors must attend training in a window at least three months prior to their members' start date. If a supervisor who has completed Supervisor's Orientation leaves, his/her replacement should attend Supervisor's Orientation. Some Corporation State Offices periodically hold supervisor training. Corporation State Offices should inform sponsors whether a supervisor training is being planned for their area.

Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) occurs just prior to the time a VISTA begins service. It is an orientation for candidates to the VISTA program—its mission, programming initiatives, conditions and benefits of service. Candidates also complete administrative in-processing and are introduced to key skill areas and effective practices.

On-Site Orientation, conducted by the supervisor and other staff, introduces the new VISTA member to the community, organization, project plan, and the member's work plan during the first few weeks on the project site.

In-Service Training takes place during the service year. It may be implemented by the sponsoring organization, Corporation State Office, intermediary organization, State Commission, or a partnership of any and all of the above. It is conducted at key points in a member's service, for example, early on, to develop knowledge and skills the member and supervisor identified as required in reviewing the work plan; later in service, should a development opportunity present itself; and late in service, as the member transitions out of his/her service year.

Member development and training opportunities may be a course, a conference, or a professional development activity (such as a detail or shadowing a colleague) that meets the professional development needs of the member. Further, we stress the importance of supervisors mentoring and coaching members throughout their service.

Ongoing Sponsor/Supervisor Training and Development is made available in a range of training and technical assistance for our sponsors' and supervisors' continuing professional development. An online self-assessment tool for identifying key competencies for managing sustainable community development automatically links sponsors to online resources and workshops.

Our T&TA providers, with access facilitated by Corporation Headquarters and Corporation State Offices, offer an array of support, such as web-based courses, web-conferences, and teleconference coaching, in addition to the online resources. In concert with the Corporation as a whole, Corporation-sponsored workshops and forums addressing key programming areas are also available to our sponsors.

Training Deferment for a VISTA candidate is allowed in a few exceptional instances. Candidates may be allowed to begin their service prior to attending a PSO, only with their Area Manager's approval, after having attended the online Terms, Conditions and Benefits course and taken the oath of office, and if they are:

- Cost-Share Placements – If a cost-share sponsor requests that cost-share candidates be placed before the next PSO, an Area Manager can approve such a placement but is under no obligation to do so.
- Scarce Skill Applicants – A candidate may also be placed before attending a PSO if the candidate is a hard-to-recruit applicant, with accreditation or life experience demanded by the assignment description, and cannot wait for the next PSO start date. This situation also requires Area Managers' approval.
- Dire Need – Candidates, under unusual and pressing circumstances, such as disaster response efforts, may be placed before attending a PSO. Such circumstances, and the limits by which training can be deferred, will be announced by the Director of AmeriCorps VISTA. These placements also require Area Managers' approval.

Under all circumstances, members must attend a PSO no later than the one immediately following their placement. If a candidate has just missed the cluster's PSO, states should also investigate whether attending another cluster's PSO is an option.

VII. Strengthening Performance and Accountability

A. Performance Measures
The Corporation emphasizes performance measures as both a program management tool and a means by which to communicate program impact.

VISTA sponsoring organizations and project applicants develop performance measures within the context of their application, and they report on these measures through quarterly or semiannual project progress reports.

Setting project milestones in the VISTA application and measuring progress through progress reports provide VISTA projects with a variety of benefits, including:
- Helping to document their program's achievements and legacy
- Capturing milestones and serving as an assessment tool for planning for improvement to enhance the project's impact on the community
- Helping projects achieve sustainability by demonstrating their effectiveness to future funders—such as foundations and public agencies—and by demonstrating their effectiveness to broaden community impact

Training and technical assistance continues to be available to sponsoring organizations and to project applicants through Project Star at www.projectstar.org.

B. Project Monitoring and Oversight
In fiscal year 2008, all VISTA projects are monitored according to an agency-wide system for prioritizing project monitoring and oversight. Annual assessments help predict potential vulnerabilities, which are used to prioritize monitoring activities. Monitoring activities range from standard review of progress reports to on-site compliance visits.

The protocols for assessing vulnerability and establishing monitoring plans for VISTA projects are consistent with those established for all Corporation grant programs. More information about assessments can be found at http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0731_cncs_assessment.pdf.