



# **AmeriCorps\*VISTA Program Guidance**

## **Fiscal Year 2007**

September 15, 2006



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## Introduction and Key Changes in Fiscal Year 2007

In the past year, the Corporation for National and Community Service finalized a Strategic Plan that sets goals for the Corporation over the next five years, including specific performance targets. The Plan defines the Corporation's overall mission and guiding principles and lays out four focus areas that hold great promise for expanding the reach and effectiveness of national service.

The vision includes specific targets for the country to reach by 2010, such as 75 million Americans volunteering, three million more youth from disadvantaged circumstances with mentors, another three million youth from disadvantaged circumstances serving others in their communities, service-learning in one-half of all K-12 schools, and almost 29 million baby boomers engaged in service.

AmeriCorps\*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) provides full-time volunteers to community-based organizations and public agencies to create and expand programs that bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty. In fiscal year 2007, more than 6,000 VISTA members will leverage human, financial, and material resources to increase the capacity of thousands of low-income communities across the country to solve their own problems.

This Program Guidance describes how VISTA projects can be developed to support the Corporation's strategic initiatives and the VISTA program's purpose of supporting efforts to alleviate poverty in America. Corporation State Offices should apply this guidance to developing projects. A companion to this guidance, the VISTA Desk Reference, will be available early in fiscal year 2007 to Corporation State Offices on the VISTA intranet site. The VISTA Desk Reference describes procedures for the day-to-day implementation of VISTA projects and handling member issues.

### Key Changes in Fiscal Year 2007 Program Guidance:

Section	Topic	Change
I	Strategic Initiatives	Description of VISTA goals for fiscal year 2007 with regard to the Corporation's strategic initiatives
III	Programming for VISTA Priorities and Strategic Initiatives	Listing of VISTA priorities with examples of how the priorities encompass the Corporation's strategic initiatives
IV	VISTA Project Resources	Allowance for the conversion of existing projects to become a project with a program grant and a listing of the eligibility criteria  Requirement that the work plan for Summer Associates directly address one of the Corporation's strategic initiatives  Allowance for a Summer Associate to decline a Segal AmeriCorps Education award*
VI	Project Implementation	Update on applying through eGrants
VII	Strengthening Performance and Accountability	Update on project monitoring

\*Congress recently renamed the AmeriCorps Education award to honor of Eli Segal, first chief executive officer of the Corporation, following his death.

## I. Corporation Strategic Initiatives and AmeriCorps\*VISTA

For more than 40 years, VISTA has been in the forefront of helping communities across America to help themselves fight poverty. VISTA members 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 to rely on themselves.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS or Corporation) has identified four cross-program priorities to focus on over the five years from 2006 to 2010. While every VISTA project need not respond to a strategic initiative, the VISTA program actually blends well with the Corporation's strategic initiatives:

**Mobilizing More Volunteers.** In fiscal year 2006, VISTA members mobilized over 500,000 volunteers and generated over \$150 million in other resources to support programs in low-income communities. For fiscal year 2007, the goal is to mobilize 564,000 volunteers and generate \$170 million in cash and in-kind resources. In order to accomplish this increase, each cluster is expected to develop opportunities for placement, by the end of fiscal year 2007, of approximately 30 additional VISTA members above the number in fiscal year 2006 who will serve with volunteer connector organizations.

The VISTA program will 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 VISTA members helped the organization leverage volunteers.

Strategies to address the provision of more opportunities for citizens to serve and volunteer 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 VISTA members 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 partner with existing volunteer centers and connector organizations

**Ensuring a Brighter Future for All of America's Youth.** In fiscal year 2006, 122 VISTA projects focused on youth, for example, developing after school programs and child care, children's literacy programs, and programs for family formation and development. For fiscal year 2007, the goals are to increase the number of youth, including children of prisoners, mentored to 7,000 and to increase the number of youth 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.** In fiscal year 2006, 72 VISTA campus-affiliated projects engaged college students in volunteering in low-income communities. For fiscal year 2007, the goal is to increase the number of campus-affiliated VISTA projects and, thus, increase the number of college students serving in low-income communities. Each cluster is expected to add opportunities for placements, by the end of fiscal year 2007, with existing partnerships or develop new partnerships which result in an increase of approximately 30 VISTA members above the fiscal year 2006 base with programs that engage college students in service in low-income communities.

Strategies to engage students in 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

**Harnessing Baby Boomers' Experience.** In fiscal year 2006, 1,754 baby boomers served as VISTA members. These baby boomers brought a wealth of work- and life-experiences that enriched their contributions to supporting low-income communities. For fiscal year 2007, the goal is to increase the number of baby boomers serving as VISTA members and/or as community volunteers recruited through VISTA projects.

Strategies to harness baby boomers' experience include:

- Participate in the Corporation-wide boomer promotional and recruitment campaign
- Devote resources toward recruiting baby boomers as VISTA members 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

## 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 who are working to combat poverty

The VISTA program places VISTA members 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, tribal or public agency with a program that is poverty-related in scope can apply to sponsor a VISTA project. The project’s goal addresses helping individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply making poverty more tolerable through short term services.

**Capacity-Building** – VISTA members 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 management systems, volunteer recruitment and management, community outreach, and collaborative development, VISTA members mobilize local resources to achieve lasting solutions.

**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** – VISTA members 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 of time (typically three years), as sponsoring organizations plan for the eventual phase-out of VISTA members.

For a copy of the AmeriCorps\*VISTA Concept Paper along with instructions for applying to become an AmeriCorps\*VISTA sponsoring organization, visit [www.americorps.org/vista/sponsorinfo.html](http://www.americorps.org/vista/sponsorinfo.html) or contact the Corporation State Office in your state.

### III. Programming for VISTA Priorities and Strategic Initiatives

Section I describes how the VISTA program is focused on the Corporation's strategic goals; Section II describes the VISTA program's guiding principles. This section brings together VISTA's priorities for programming in fiscal year 2007 and the Corporation's strategic initiatives. These priorities reinforce the Corporation's strategic goals, support 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 permanently toward self-sufficiency, as are becoming trained in and having access to current technology which benefits both students and adults. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, "The issue of assets and wealth inequality in the United States is as critical as it has ever been. The personal savings rate has dipped below zero, and the wealth gap between rich and poor is wider than at any time in the past 75 years."

Asset Development. Financial asset development remains one of the most promising *and* proven program areas by which VISTA members 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, VISTA members 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 VISTA members work to have technology packages (hardware, software, access, and training) placed in the homes of low-income families.

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

- VISTA members 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)
- VISTA members initiate after school projects for children to hone their computing skills. (YOUTH)
- VISTA members develop school-based financial literacy programs, including KIDS Accounts (IDAs for youth) with students both benefiting from the program and contributing to the program as volunteers, for example, as tellers at youth credit unions. (STUDENTS)
- VISTA members garner the expertise of retired baby boomers who act as coaches to low-income persons in putting together business plans. (BOOMERS)

## **B. 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 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and being 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 develop a support network and other means to improve their situation. In conjunction with the HHS initiative, Another Planned Living Arrangement, VISTA members 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:

- VISTA members 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)

## **C. Prisoner Re-entry**

Prisoner re-entry projects will continue to be an emphasis area for the VISTA program during fiscal year 2007. Beginning in 2005, the Corporation signed an interagency agreement with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to place VISTA members in communities served by DOJ Weed & Seed sites to develop community based prisoner re-entry programs. The Corporation received resources from DOJ to directly support an additional 16 VISTA members plus training and technical assistance. The DOJ reports that 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 with 132 members currently serving in this area, up from 46 in 2005.

The VISTA program has expanded work in this area by developing a partnership with the Department of Labor (DOL). Under an interagency agreement, 20 DOL grantees are receiving 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 encourage 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 re-entry projects:

- 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 at risk of becoming addicted.
- Health Care - Providing mental and physical health services to address some of the all too 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 are:

- VISTA members recruit and mobilize volunteers from the faith and secular communities to engage them in local re-entry initiatives. (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTA members 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 engage students in mentoring children of incarcerated parents. (STUDENTS)
- VISTA members 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)

#### **D. 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. A website, [www.RuralInitiative.org](http://www.RuralInitiative.org), was established that year to serve as a hub of information for rural community development, which now includes information on the summit, models of innovative programming, a resource library, and more.

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 (YOUTH)
- Rehabilitate housing, such as the Habitat for Humanity model (VOLUNTEERS; YOUTH)
- 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 (PCC) of Hayter's Gap programs (VOLUNTEERS; YOUTH)
- Promote homeownership, such as People Incorporated, who helped twelve families become homeowners by providing low-interest loans; rehabilitated, repaired, or weatherized homes for nearly 150 families; enabled more than 110 families to obtain safe drinking water and sewage disposal through its grants program; provided rental subsidies to 110 families; and assisted more than 25 people with transitional housing (YOUTH)
- Generate volunteers, such as the Volunteers for Communities (VFC) which trains community groups in Virginia and the surrounding states to host volunteers in short- and long-term volunteer experiences (VOLUNTEERS)

For details on the projects cited above, please visit [www.RuralInitiative.org](http://www.RuralInitiative.org) and follow the link to “Models” 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, critical resources and cultivate new working relationships. This resource is available at [www.vistaolinc.net](http://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 will be available online and as a briefcase by the close of FY06.

### **E. 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 projects that seek to expand their capacity to fight poverty. The VISTA program has service opportunities in Indian Communities through assisting existing and potential sponsors to increase their effectiveness and access to resources. In addition, support is provided for existing and potential sponsors and VISTA members to participate in training events such as the bi-annual Tribal Supervisors’ Orientation and annual National Conference on Service in Indian Communities.

VISTA projects and members in 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. (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)

The American Indian and Alaska Native 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.

AmeriCorps\*VISTA continues to reach out to tribal projects that seek to expand their capacity to fight poverty. The VISTA program has service opportunities in Indian Country through assisting existing and potential sponsors to increase their effectiveness and access to resources. In addition, support is provided for existing and potential sponsors and VISTA members to participate in training events such as the annual Tribal Supervisor's Orientation.

AmeriCorps\*VISTA projects and members in 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. (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTA projects incorporate initiatives to improve the future for children living in Indian Country. (YOUTH)
- VISTA members reach out to college students and to institutions of higher education to engage them in projects with a mission to serve the target community. (STUDENTS)
- VISTA members employ the talents of elders when designing projects, engaging them in volunteer activities designed to use their skills and talents. (BOOMERS)

#### **F. Students In Service**

Educational institutions play a key role in guiding students to become responsible citizens. The VISTA program can be used at or with educational institutions at all levels (K-12 and higher education) to increase volunteer and service-learning opportunities in low-income communities. Moreover, the VISTA program can be a means of increasing academic and civic skills of low-income students as they take advantage of the opportunities to volunteer and help others.

VISTA projects can involve students at schools, universities, colleges, historically black colleges and universities, tribal colleges, and community colleges in service activities to alleviate poverty in low-income communities near the institution. At this time, over 300 sponsoring organizations engage VISTA members to mobilize the energy of thousands of students to join with low-income communities to develop sustainable, poverty-fighting projects.

VISTA projects that involve students in service respond to three of the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Examples are:

- VISTA members recruit and mobilize students who, in turn, use the skills they are developing through their schooling to attack poverty in the local communities. (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTA members develop literacy projects at which engineering students volunteer to tutor low-income children in math and science. (YOUTH)
- VISTA members connect law students with low-income people needing assistance with legal issues. (STUDENTS)

#### **G. Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Recovery**

VISTA supports disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery efforts. However, 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. This programming may include such areas as rebuilding the infrastructure, supporting permanent housing, and revitalizing the local economies of low income communities.

On a limited basis, sponsors may 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.

VISTA programming related to disaster preparedness, relief, and response efforts is likely to respond to all four of the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Examples are:

- VISTA members mobilize volunteers from other areas as they arrive for service in the disaster area. (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTA members re-institute day care and after school programs to ensure a brighter future for youth affected by the disaster. (YOUTH)
- VISTA members engage students in relief and recovery efforts. (STUDENTS)
- VISTA members organize relief and recovery efforts that include putting to use the experience of baby boomers. (BOOMERS)

For the latest updates on Corporation guidance, activities, and other information, visit the Corporation's [website](#).

#### **H. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service**

VISTA supports the extra opportunities for community service on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, the third Monday in January. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service is a way to transform Dr. King's life and teachings into community service that helps empower and strengthen local communities. During his lifetime, Dr. King sought to forge the common ground on which people from all walks of life could join together to address important community issues. Working alongside individuals of all ages, races and backgrounds, Dr. King encouraged Americans to come together to strengthen communities, alleviate poverty, and acknowledge dignity and respect for all human beings.

VISTA's unique focus on the alleviation of poverty through long-term sustainable community programs provides a solid foundation for creating short-term, finely focused 'day of service' efforts to meet a specific community need.

VISTA projects on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service in low-income communities are likely to respond to at least three of the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Examples are:

- VISTA members recruit and mobilize volunteers from the community to address a specific community need. (VOLUNTEERS)
- VISTA members engage students for one-day projects such as organizing a clean-up day of a community park or a day of repair and refurbishment of a building. (STUDENTS)
- VISTA members recruit volunteers to participate in a neighborhood community center planning session, putting to use the experience of baby boomers. (BOOMERS)

All VISTA sponsors are expected to lead or take part in a Day of Service project. Corporation State Office staff should encourage sponsors to play a leadership role in developing local projects, making the most of this opportunity to promote community volunteering. The Day of Service provides an opportunity to reach out to and engage different populations and potential new partners.

Sponsors should e-mail [mlkday@cns.gov](mailto:mlkday@cns.gov) with their plans for their events and to share results and media coverage. A toolkit and other resources are available at [www.mlkday.gov](http://www.mlkday.gov).

## **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 VISTA members to a sponsoring organization, and the sponsoring organization funds only local operating/logistics costs. In standard projects, VISTA members receive a living allowance on a bi-weekly basis from the Corporation and other benefits as described in the 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/supervisor training needs. In standard projects with support grants, VISTA members 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. Members assigned to projects with program grants are paid directly by the sponsoring organization. Grant projects are awarded through a competitive process.

New Projects. In fiscal year 2007, 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](http://www.nationalservice.org), regularly features CNCS NOFAs.

Existing Projects. In fiscal year 2007, 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
- Have at least fifteen VISTA members
- Have a scope of operations with single state or multi-state service areas, but not cross-cluster

### **D. Cost-share**

In order to expand the number of VISTA members that can be supported with the limited federal funding each year, sponsoring organizations 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 VISTA members (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 quarterly 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 receiving invoices, the sponsoring organization's portion of costs does not have to be paid in advance, but rather may be

reimbursed on a quarterly basis. 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](http://www.americorps.org/vista/costshare.html).

### **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 service with any AmeriCorps program or Peace Corps. While Leaders may not directly supervise VISTA members, they can play a strategic role in assisting project supervisors with member recruitment, retention, and support. Recent VISTA members are ideally suited to serve as VISTA Leaders, given their experience with the program and familiarity with its policies and procedures.

### **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.

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 four 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.

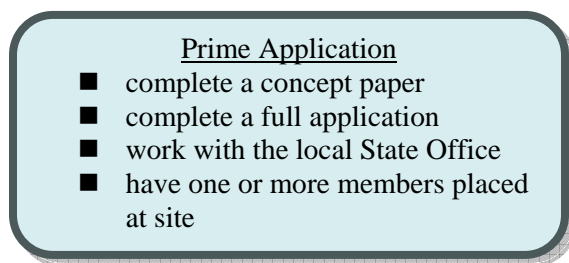
Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards in the amount of \$1,000 will be available to Summer Associates, following successful completion of their service. The education award counts as one of two education awards allowed as a lifetime limit. A Summer Associate may decline the \$1,000 education award in order to later earn two full-time awards.

## 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 are typically working 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 (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.



**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 operating 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 determine, 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 is applying 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 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

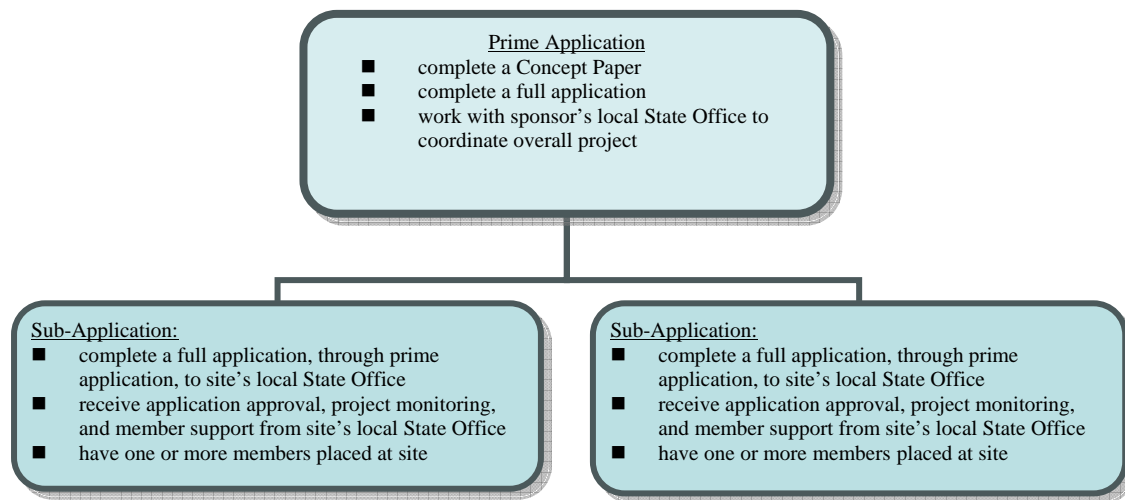
Sponsors sometimes wish to develop a project that has sites in several states. Sponsors have two options for developing these multi-state projects.

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



**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 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. Three-Year Project Period**

For fiscal year 2007, 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.

### **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-sharing 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 time 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. The FY 2007 NOFA for applications (except national demonstration projects) was made available in early July 2006 for new and continuing projects with start dates between October 1, 2006 and September 30, 2007. Applicants may click on: AmeriCorps\*VISTA State FY 2007. The FY 2007 NOFA for national demonstration projects is being opened in the fall with applications initially accepted only from continuing national demonstration projects.

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 eGrants Help Desk is available to provide technical assistance, as necessary.

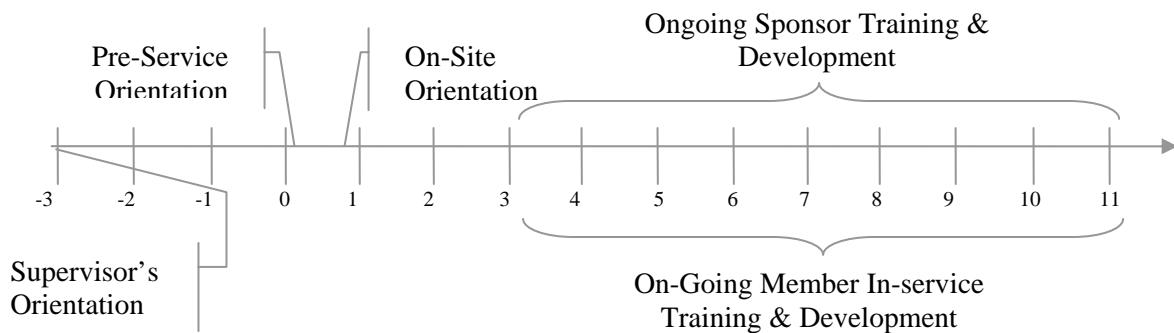
#### D. Training of Project Supervisors and VISTA Members

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 VISTA members to effectively realize their own and VISTA's goals.

Equally, sponsor/supervisor orientation and ongoing training and technical support (T&TA) is a partnership 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)



Supervisor's Orientation 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 Orientation leaves, his/her replacement should attend Supervisor Orientation. Some Corporation State Offices periodically hold Supervisor training. Corporation State Offices can give information on whether one is being planned for your 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—as well as administrative in-processing, introductions to key skill areas, and effective practices.

On-Site Orientation is an orientation conducted by the supervisor and other staff that 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 (IST) takes place during the service year. It may be implemented by the sponsoring organization, by the Corporation State Office, an 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, e.g., 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 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 being made available in a range of training and technical assistance for our sponsors' and supervisors' continuing professional development. An on-line self-assessment tool for identifying key competencies for managing sustainable community development automatically links sponsors to on-line 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 on-line 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 on-line terms conditions and benefits course and taken the oath of office, and if they are:

- Cost-Share Placements: If a cost-share partner 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 s/he 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

Since 2003, the Corporation has continued to emphasize the importance of performance measures as both a program management tool and a means by which to communicate program impact. Since March 2005, VISTA sponsors have been required to identify three to five key performance measures within their project plan.

In fiscal year 2007, VISTA sponsoring organizations and project applicants continue to develop performance measures within the context of their project plan and to report on these measures through quarterly or semi-annual project progress reports.

As we move forward to implement performance measures, it is important that we all work to clarify for our constituents these requirements and the rationale behind them. Performance measurement provides VISTA projects with a variety of benefits including:

- Helping to document their program's achievements and legacy;
- Serving as a yardstick and assessment tool for identifying progress and planning for improvement in order to enhance the project's impact on the community; and
- Helping projects achieve sustainability by demonstrating their effectiveness to future funders—from foundations and public agencies—and by demonstrating their effectiveness to broaden community impact.

A full description of the requirements for developing performance measures can be found on the AmeriCorps\*VISTA project application, which can be found on the intranet at: [http://intranet.cns.gov/vista/filing%20cabinet/new\\_forms/applications/VISTA%20Project%20App%20and%20Instructions\\_OMB.doc](http://intranet.cns.gov/vista/filing%20cabinet/new_forms/applications/VISTA%20Project%20App%20and%20Instructions_OMB.doc).

Some key points to remember include:

Within their project plan, applicants develop at least one goal statement that is central to the work of their project. Goal statements should be kept to as few as possible and should reflect very broad outcomes expected for the life of the project. Project plans should not have a separate goal statement for each VISTA member.

For each of their proposed goals, applicants identify the activities and the results (outputs and outcomes) appropriate to that goal.

Applicants select at least one goal that they consider to be central to their project mission. From this goal(s) applicants will identify a total of three to five results as performance measures. While applicants may select performance measures from more than one goal, but they should be encouraged to keep them grouped under one or no more than two.

A performance measure is a result (Output, Intermediate Outcome, or End Outcome) that includes indicators, targets, and data instruments. While applicants may select up to five results within the project plan to identify as performance measures, they are required to include at least one output, one intermediate outcome, and one end outcome.

For each performance measure selected, applicants then identify:

- The results (Outputs/Outcomes) and indicators they expect to achieve;

- The targets they expect to meet; and
- The data instruments they will use to measure the results and/or data source.

In relation to these performance measures, sponsors will be expected to:

- Report, through the AmeriCorps\*VISTA Progress Report, on progress achieved towards all results, including those identified as performance measures;
- Make the underlying documentation of their performance available for review; and
- Report on any operational changes and project improvements that resulted from information learned from the performance data.

Training and technical assistance continues to be available to sponsoring organizations and to project applicants through Project Star at [www.projectstar.org](http://www.projectstar.org).

### **B. Project Monitoring and Oversight**

In 2006, AmeriCorps\*VISTA began the process of transitioning to an agency-wide system for prioritizing project monitoring and oversight. All VISTA projects are monitored based on annual assessments that predict potential vulnerabilities. Monitoring activities may 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. In fiscal year 2007, all VISTA projects, including grant projects and non-grant projects, will be monitored according to this process.

Detailed information can be found on the intranet at <http://intranet.cns.gov/fieldliaison/map/risk&monitoring.htm>.