



Volunteers in Service to America – VISTA

**Program Guidance
Fiscal Year 2009
October 1, 2008 – September 30, 2009**



Contents

- Contents 2**
- Introduction..... 4**
- Key Changes in Fiscal Year 2009 4**
- I. Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program..... 4**
 - The Purpose of VISTA..... 5
- II. Framework for VISTA Programming..... 7**
 - Effective Programming Characteristics 7
 - Key Principles 7
 - Ensure a Diversified Portfolio..... 9
- III. Programming Areas 9**
 - Independent Living 10
 - Housing 10
 - Employment 10
 - Transition..... 10
 - Financial Development 10
 - Asset Development..... 11
 - Financial Literacy..... 11
 - Community Economic Development 11
 - Education 11
 - Bridging the Digital Divide 12
 - Educational Advancement..... 12
 - Knowledge and Technical Skills 12
- IV. VISTA and Corporation Strategic Initiatives 12**
 - Mobilizing More Volunteers..... 13
 - Ensuring a Brighter Future for All of America’s Youth 13
 - Engaging Students in Communities 13
 - Harnessing Baby Boomers’ Experience 14
 - Supporting Disaster Preparedness and Response..... 14
- V. VISTA Resources 14**
 - Corporation State office 14
 - Standard Projects..... 14
 - Grants 15
 - Cost Share 15
 - VISTAs 15
 - Leaders 15
 - Summer Associates 16
- VI. Project Models 16**

Single Site Projects	16
Multi-Site Projects	16
Multi-State Projects.....	17
National Demonstration Projects	18
VII. VISTA Project Resources.....	18
Corporation State Office	18
VISTA Campus.....	19
Resource Center	19
Technical Assistance.....	19
ListServs.....	19
Online Resources	19

Introduction

The purpose of the FY 2009 VISTA Programming Guidance is to inform stakeholders, including current and prospective sponsors, of the programmatic highlights for the fiscal year. This guidance is intended to direct the development of VISTA projects, support the VISTA mission through the Corporation’s strategic initiatives, and outline the national programming priorities for the VISTA program.

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 detailed information for the day-to-day implementation and management of VISTA projects and is also a resource for managing VISTAs, leaders, and summer associates.

Key Changes in Fiscal Year 2009

Section	Topic	Change
I	Purpose	Adds current and relevant information on poverty
II	Framework for VISTA Programming	Adds the sections Effective Programming Characteristics and Ensuring a Diversified Portfolio
III	Programming Areas	Organizes around three programming areas Independent Living, Financial Development and Education with sub-focus areas in each and target populations.
	Project Implementation	Section moved to the VISTA Desk Reference
	Strengthening Performance and Accountability	Section moved to the VISTA Desk Reference

I. Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program

AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. Authorized in 1964 and founded in 1965 as Volunteers in Service to America, the program was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993. VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for more than 43 years.

VISTA supports efforts to alleviate poverty by encouraging individuals from all walks of life to engage in a year of full-time service, without regard to regular working hours, with a sponsoring organization (sponsor) to create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

About VISTA Sponsors

Public, private, and faith-based nonprofit organizations—as well as local, state and federal organizations can apply to be a sponsor. Sponsors must be able to direct the project, supervise the VISTAs, and provide necessary administrative support to complete the goals of the project. Sponsors develop and manage projects with the involvement of the communities that will be served.

Organizations can apply to become a sponsor by visiting <http://www.americorps.gov> or contacting the Corporation State Office in their state.

About VISTAs

VISTAs come from all walks of life. They live and serve in some of our nation's poorest urban and rural areas. Each VISTA makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project with a sponsor. In return for their service, VISTAs receive a modest living allowance and health benefits during their service, and have the option of receiving a \$4,725 Segal AmeriCorps Education Award or a \$1,200 stipend after completing their service.

In fiscal year 2009, more than 6,000 VISTAs will serve with over 1,100 sponsors. They will leverage human, financial, and material resources to develop self-sustaining solutions to problems in low-income communities across the country.

Individuals can apply to become a VISTA online at <http://www.americorps.gov>.

The Purpose of VISTA

VISTA is a federal program charged with alleviating poverty in the United States. Since its authorization in 1964, its purpose has been:

to strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty and poverty-related problems in the United States by encouraging and enabling persons from all walks of life, all geographical areas, and all age groups, including low-income individuals, elderly and retired Americans, to perform meaningful and constructive volunteer service in agencies, institutions, and situations where the application of human talent and dedication may assist in the solution of poverty and poverty-related problems and secure and exploit opportunities for self-advancement by persons afflicted with such problems.

To understand how the VISTA program carries out its purpose, it is helpful to consider a few characteristics of poverty in the United States, which has many faces and causes.

- According to the Census Bureau, which reports the official poverty measure in the United States, thirty-eight million people live in poverty today. To determine who is in poverty, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. If a family's total income is less than the federal threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered to be living in poverty. For example, to be considered poor in 2008, a family of four living in the continental U.S. would have an income of less than the federal threshold of \$21,200.
- Some people live in poverty for a short time as the result of a situational circumstance such as unemployment, chronic illness, disability, divorce, or death of a family member. Nearly 40% of those entering poverty had a household member lose a job. Employment is the most common trigger event for exiting poverty (10.5%) (Transition Events in the Dynamics of Poverty, 2002, The Urban Institute).

- Of Americans living below the poverty line, about 75% are in generational poverty, which refers to people living in poverty for two or more generations. Without interventions, it is very likely that people living in generational poverty will remain in this state for the remainder of their lives. Studies suggest that the longer a person has been poor, the less likely it is that he or she will escape poverty (PSID, University of Michigan). Further, without interventions, it is also very likely that their children will join them in remaining in poverty. Individuals in generational poverty often do not see a choice or know how to access proper resources.
- In 2004, 16 million Americans lived in “severe poverty,” according to the U.S. Census Bureau (people living at less than half of the poverty level; e.g., an individual making \$4,800 per year or less). Approximately 3.5 million individuals experience homelessness in the U.S. each year. Of that number, about 600,000 are families and 1.35 million children (National Alliance to End Homelessness).

Because there is no single path into or out of poverty, with many events throwing people into poverty and many events helping people exit from poverty, the VISTA program supports locally-driven solutions to fighting poverty. Specifically, as noted in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, the program is designed:

- To strengthen local agencies and organizations to carry out the purpose of the organization.
- To encourage volunteer service at the local level.
- To generate the commitment of private sector resources.

Accordingly, in choosing which applications to support, VISTA projects and sponsors are evaluated based on their capability to support the VISTA program through efforts of building long-term solutions to poverty in their community. A project must:

- Involve beneficiaries in project development and implementation throughout the life of the project.
- Address the needs of low-income communities and otherwise comply with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Services Act Of 1973, (DVSA) as amended (42 U.S.C. 4951 et seq.) applicable to VISTA and all applicable published regulations, guidelines and Corporation policies
- Lead to building organizational and/or community capacity to continue the efforts of the project once VISTA resources are withdrawn.
- Describe in measurable terms the anticipated self-sufficiency results at the conclusion of the project, including the sustainability of the project activities.
- Clearly state how VISTAs will be trained, supervised, and supported to ensure the achievement of program goals and objectives.
- Be internally consistent; the problem statement which demonstrates need, the project plan, the assignment, and all other components must be related logically to each other.
- Ensure that VISTA and community resources are sufficient to achieve project goals.
- Have the management and technical capability to implement the project successfully.

- Have an appropriate number of requested VISTAs to match the project goals; the skills and qualifications described in the application must be appropriate for the assignment(s).

II. Framework for VISTA Programming

VISTA projects contain the elements required by law, are driven by the needs of the local community, are developed and implemented with the people who are beneficiaries of the project, and are a part of a diverse portfolio of projects.

Effective Programming Characteristics

Programming priorities are derived from local, state and national needs or trends, and they may change over time as needs change.

Programming should be primarily based on addressing local needs, and the Corporation State Office should be guided by locally-driven programming.

Key Principles

Each VISTA project must be developed in accordance with the parameters defined by law, federal regulations, and the key VISTA principles: Anti-poverty Focus, Capacity Building, Sustainable Solutions, and Community Empowerment.

Anti-Poverty Focus

By law, the purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. The goal of every project must be to help individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. The project should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

Community Empowerment

Organizations working with VISTA must 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 and resources. This is not only required by law and federal regulation, it has proven to be highly effective in guaranteeing appropriate, sustainable programming.

Unlike VISTA, some organizations think of beneficiaries merely as clients that receive services. Their involvement in the project is minimal, often just filling out an evaluation. In other words, “professionals” plan projects *for* beneficiaries, not *with* them. Even applicant organizations who think beneficiary involvement is important may let it fall to the wayside when they are short on time and resources if they believe that potential funders are only interested in “glitzy” outcomes. Unfortunately, since there is less community ownership and control, this approach may decrease the chances the project continues. Without beneficiary involvement, the project may not fully reflect the community need.

That is why sponsors working with VISTA are required to ensure that the project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, and implementing the project. This approach allows low-income individuals the freedom to speak for themselves in determining the

projects that suit their specific needs. It often results in innovative, effective programming that supports lasting change in the community, as well as meaningful experiences for the VISTAs.

The Corporation State Office must take care to ensure that an applicant, eager to receive VISTA resources by providing a well-developed project plan, also sufficiently involves project beneficiaries. If the potential VISTA sponsors' board of directors is not made up of at least 51% of the low-income beneficiary community, they must create an advisory group with a composition of at least 51% of its members from the low income community. The role of the board or advisory group is:

- To the extent practical, assist the sponsor in the initial planning of a new project proposal and in the planning of a continuation project application.
- To review and provide written comments concerning any project application prior to the submission of the application. A copy of such comments shall accompany the application.
- To meet with the sponsor's staff at periodic intervals, but no less than twice per project year, for the purpose of reviewing and commenting on the development and implementation of the project. Such project review and commentary should be directed toward the adequacy of the project to meet the identified needs of the project beneficiaries.
- To submit, if it so chooses, written reports and/or copies of minutes of its meetings to the sponsor to accompany the Project Progress Report.

Capacity Building

VISTAs are assigned to sponsors to expand the ability of organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and partnership development, VISTAs help sponsors to achieve lasting solutions to poverty.

Examples of capacity building include:

- Helping sponsors develop new programs and services or expand existing programs and services
- Helping sponsors improve the quality of existing programs and services
- Increasing the number of low-income beneficiaries served through programs and services provided by the sponsor organization
- Improving service utilization by beneficiaries (e.g., more of them stay in a program long enough to experience real benefits)
- Assisting with partnerships and collaborations
- Helping to improve organizational infrastructure (e.g., by developing volunteer recruitment and training systems or developing and revising policies and procedures)
- Increasing organizational resources by establishing or expanding a pool of volunteers to assist with programs and services
- Increasing financial resources and helping to build sustainable funding streams for organizations
- Conducting public outreach to increase participation in programs and services

In order to build capacity, VISTAs do not perform direct service. Often, applicants assume that the prohibition against direct service means that VISTAs must do “office work.” However, office work could be direct service just like tutoring children is direct service. Direct service does not refer to the intensity, difficulty, or the work-place of the tasks, but rather to the focus and nature of the tasks. VISTAs are community mobilizers, not temporary employees. Ideally, VISTAs work themselves out of a job and create systems that remain long after their service ends.

Sustainable Solutions

VISTAs are short-term resources who work to ensure the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty projects. All VISTA projects should be developed with a goal of an eventual phase-out of the need for VISTAs.

Ensure a Diversified Portfolio

It is the responsibility of each Corporation State Office to ensure that their current portfolio of VISTA projects is diverse, both in terms of programmatic areas as well as geography. An additional factor to consider is the type of sponsors – from small grassroots organizations to large intermediary agencies.

VISTA projects have an average lifecycle of three-five years; new project development takes place throughout the year. However, there may be a waiting period for final project approval and ensuing VISTA placement depending on the number of VISTA projects being closed, the amount of resources available, and a new sponsor’s attributes in regards to the portfolio. For instance, is the applicant organization the sixth university sponsor in a major city where VISTA resources already exist or the first sponsor in a rural area of the state that currently has no VISTA resources? The second example would fill a gap in the State Office’s portfolio and would be most likely to receive VISTAs first.

Of course, all sponsors, regardless of organization type, geography or existing status as a sponsor, must have projects designed specifically to fight poverty.

Key Legislation

- Domestic Volunteer Service Act (as amended by Public Law 106-170, December 1999)
- National Service Trust Act (as amended by Public Law 106-170, December 1999)

Key Regulations

- I. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Parts 1206, 1210-1211, 1216-1220, 1222, 1226

III. Programming Areas

This section outlines, at a macro-view, poverty-related issues affecting many communities around the country. It also provides examples of how VISTA projects might address these areas. When developing new projects in this fiscal year, Corporation State Offices may consider these programming areas as they relate to their state’s local priorities (often in coordination with State Commissions), and, most importantly, the specific needs of local communities.

For fiscal year 2009, Corporation State Offices may wish to consider three programming areas: independent living, financial development, and education.

Independent Living

Each year, millions of adults, some of whom are responsible for the care of children, find themselves unable to or unequipped for successful independent living. Independent living programs help to empower low-income individuals and provide pathways out of poverty. VISTA supports the development of sustainable systems that assist individuals in navigating all of the elements that contribute to living securely and independently.

Housing

VISTA supports programming dedicated to connecting families and individuals to emergency housing and transitional services, providing affordable permanent housing, and encouraging advocacy with populations in need.

In particular, VISTA supports projects that enhance the capacity of community groups to empower individuals to be involved in preserving and maintaining affordable housing and pursue and ensure equitable development and revitalization that is inclusive of residents.

Employment

VISTA supports programming that enables individuals to obtain or train for employment that is sufficient to avoid or exit poverty, provide necessities, and allow individuals to save for the future.

Transition

VISTA supports programming for youth transitioning to adulthood and for adults to access the systems, opportunities, and relationships to successfully live on their own. In particular, VISTA supports programs dedicated to assisting prisoners reentering society and youth aging-out of foster care.

Examples of VISTA projects focused on independent living include:

- VISTAs recruit and mobilize adults to serve as mentors of youth with no support system as they transition to adulthood and seek financial stability and permanent housing.
- VISTAs connect disadvantaged youth with opportunities to advance or complete their education and employment.
- VISTAs organize volunteer-based tenant advocacy organizations that ensure decent housing as well as connect residents with local opportunities.
- 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.
- VISTAs develop community programs that utilize students as volunteers in connecting homeless and elderly veterans with resources that are available to them.

Financial Development

Acquiring equity, financial education, and generating savings are critical to helping move people toward financial stability, recognize and avoid financial predators, begin to reduce the high costs of

poverty, increase access to sound financial products and services in low-income communities, and capitalize on financial opportunity.

The United States is experiencing growth in the financial asset disparity between wealthy and low-income Americans. It is estimated that one out of four Americans are asset-poor; they have insufficient net worth for basic necessities for more than three months, even at the poverty level. VISTAs can have a direct impact on developing financially stable communities through financial asset development.

Asset Development

Asset development remains one of the most promising 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).

Financial Literacy

VISTA supports programs dedicated to empowering individuals and low-income communities to take advantage of opportunities and build wealth that will ultimately lead to an exit from poverty. The ability to budget, plan, manage, and capitalize on financial opportunities are important skills to all, but are vital to those with limited financial resources available. Individual financial literacy is the first line of defense against fraud, deception, and the high financial costs that often plague low-income communities.

Community Economic Development

VISTA supports programming that contributes to the economic development of low-income communities. By improving the sustainable growth in living standards, VISTAs are able to have a lasting impact on the community and build the economic infrastructure that will provide tangible and intangible benefits for residents of the surrounding area.

Examples of VISTA projects focused on financial development include:

- 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).
- VISTAs recruit pro-bono financial professionals to host personal finance workshops in rural communities.
- 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.
- VISTAs garner the expertise of retired baby boomers who act as coaches to low-income persons in putting together investment and business plans.

Education

Education continues to be one of the most important components of successfully advancing and securing opportunities. VISTA supports programming that assists individuals and communities through educational opportunities.

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.

Educational Advancement

VISTAs continue to play a role in developing programs that promote education among at-risk children through early childhood education; encourage educational access and assistance to youth; and connect youth with the resources that will lead them to college. The completion of high school greatly affects the chances of one's ability to provide sufficiently for themselves and to gain a future of prosperity. Pursuing education beyond high school provides more likelihood of a prosperous future.

Knowledge and Technical Skills

VISTAs play a vital role in developing education and skills projects that make individuals more marketable, current, and increase their opportunity for employment and career advancement.

Examples of VISTA projects focused on education include:

- VISTAs initiate after school projects for children from a tribal nation to hone their computing skills.
- VISTAs harness the professional experience of baby boomers by setting up a professional and academic mentoring program.
- VISTAs develop an English program that includes GED preparation in which volunteers begin giving foreign-born individuals an opportunity for prosperous advancement.
- VISTAs recruit students to assist low-income youth in preparing materials, searching, applying for financial aid and scholarships, and applying to colleges on-line.

IV. VISTA and Corporation Strategic Initiatives

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS or Corporation) identified five cross-program strategic initiatives in their strategic plan to focus on during 2006 to 2010: Mobilizing More Volunteers, Ensuring a Brighter Future for All of America's Youth, Engaging Students in Communities, Harnessing Baby Boomers' Experience, and Supporting Disaster Preparedness. This strategic plan is available at http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/focus_areas/index.asp.

The strategic initiatives are effective in focusing the Corporations resources and highlighting its efforts in addressing serious development issues of our nation. VISTA projects incorporate these initiatives as appropriate in order to *enhance* their efforts meet the requisite of the program which is to eliminate poverty.

For over 43 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. Their service is with sponsors who are creating programs to ensure a brighter future for low-income youth. They engage students and baby boomers in service. And, they join with low-income communities to recover from disasters.

The VISTA program continues to contribute in many ways to the Corporation's strategic initiatives. Below are some examples of how the strategic initiatives are used to increase VISTA projects' effectiveness in fighting poverty.

Mobilizing More Volunteers

The VISTA program continues to add sustainability to anti-poverty projects by helping improve their capacity to recruit and engage community volunteers. By increasing their own capacity to recruit and manage community volunteers, projects lessen their dependency on outside episodic volunteers who, although highly motivated and well meaning, cannot provide the level of continuity needed for mentoring and other programs that require long-term commitment.

Strategies to effectively mobilize more volunteers to enhance anti-poverty programs include:

- Incorporate volunteer generation and management into existing programs
- Help organizations develop partnerships with existing volunteer centers and connector organizations
- Help organizations operating in low-income communities to develop long-term relationships with colleges and universities to effectively tap the enormous and diverse talents and skills they can provide on a sustained level

Ensuring a Brighter Future for All of America's Youth

VISTA is continuously developing and providing resources that will contribute to the life of low-income youth through such projects as: academic after school programs, access to child care for working parents, mentoring programs, and children's literacy programs. Some VISTA projects focus and put emphasis on reaching specific populations of disadvantaged youth, such as the children of prisoners and youth aging-out of foster care.

Strategies to provide opportunities for youth from or in disadvantaged circumstances include:

- Participate in targeted promotional efforts to attract youth to national service
- Implement summer associates projects aimed at engaging youth in community service
- Collaborate with federal and nonprofit partners in prisoner re-entry projects
- Develop relationships with governmental agencies to address issues of children aging out of foster care

Engaging Students in Communities

As service learning becomes increasingly widespread and more high schools and universities require service learning for graduation, VISTA can play a critical role in building the necessary framework to effectively leverage that resource to support low income communities in fighting poverty.

Strategies to engage students in supporting low-income communities include:

- Help VISTA projects to recruit and manage students from nearby high schools, colleges and universities to contribute to bettering nearby low-income communities.

- Help VISTA projects to develop relationships with educational institutions that require service learning to build a sustainable flow of students who experience and develop the habits of concerned citizens for their poorer fellow citizens.
- Build the capacity of existing VISTA projects to effectively attract, recruit and manage local high school and university students as volunteers to tutor at schools in low-income areas

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. VISTA continues 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

Supporting Disaster Preparedness and Response

VISTA recognizes the importance of disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery efforts in low-income communities. As a capacity-building resource that supports long-term, sustainable solutions to poverty, VISTA's most effective and appropriate role related to disasters is one focused on long-term recovery activities in low-income communities.

Strategies for recovery in low-income areas include:

- Building the capacity of organizations that are rebuilding infrastructure, supporting permanent housing, and revitalizing the local economies.
- Increasing the overall level of VISTA projects that focus on developing affordable housing and creating jobs in areas recovering from disasters
- Building partnerships and securing funding sources needed for sustainable recovery and growth in a low-income neighborhood.

V. VISTA Resources

To leverage resources and meet local community needs, VISTA makes use of several types of project resources. These are described below.

Corporation State office

Corporation State Offices work closely with sponsoring organizations to ensure development of a project type that is most effective for achieving community goals.

Standard Projects

Standard projects are those projects in which the Corporation places a certain number of VISTAs with a sponsor, and the sponsor funds 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](#).

Grants

Funds may be awarded to organizations to assist in the support of a VISTA project. Funds can be used for one or more of the following:

- Supervision of the VISTAs, leaders, and summer associates
- Service-related transportation expenses of VISTAs, leaders, and summer associates
- Training for VISTAs and leaders when it is in the interests of the VISTA advancing the project

In some instances, with the approval of the VISTA Director, existing sponsors may be awarded funds to implement the VISTA living allowance.

Cost Share

In order to expand the number of VISTAs that can be supported with the limited federal funding each year, sponsors that have the financial means are encouraged to share a portion of the costs associated with supporting VISTAs. In cost-share, the sponsor covers the living allowance of some or all of its VISTAs (which range from \$9,996 to \$14,784 per VISTA per year, depending on geographic location). In exchange for this investment, the Corporation covers all the remaining program costs for each VISTA. The Corporation pays the VISTAs directly and invoices the sponsors monthly for the living allowance of cost-share VISTAs.

For those projects (standard and support) receiving invoices, the sponsor's portion of costs does not have to be paid in advance, but rather may be reimbursed on a monthly basis.

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.

For more information on the cost share partnership, please visit http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp.

VISTAs

A VISTA makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project at a nonprofit organization or public agency. VISTAs live and serve in some of our nation's poorest urban and rural areas. They do not provide direct services, such as tutoring children or building homes. Instead, they focus their efforts on building the organizational, administrative, and financial capacity of sponsors and apply four key principles (see page 7) in their service.

Leaders

VISTA Leaders serve in large VISTA projects or in regions. Leaders are individuals who have successfully completed a year-long term of service. Their aim is to expand and build the capacity of the VISTAs they lead in coordination with the projects in which they serve. While Leaders do not directly supervise VISTAs, they can play a strategic role in assisting project supervisors with recruitment, retention, and performance.

Summer Associates

Summer Associates are individuals who serve 8 or 10 weeks between May and August. Existing sponsors of year-round VISTA projects are eligible to apply to Corporation State Offices for adding Summer Associates to their projects. In developing the concept paper for Summer Associates programming, sponsors incorporate activities that should result in a credible effort to help people escape poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. Unlike year-round VISTAs, Summer Associates may carry out direct service activities.

VI. Project Models

Single Site Projects

The majority of VISTA projects involve placing one or more VISTAs with a sponsoring sponsor at one location. There is no limit (beyond available funds and sponsor capacity) to the number of VISTAs placed with a sponsor.

When applying through eGrants, 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.

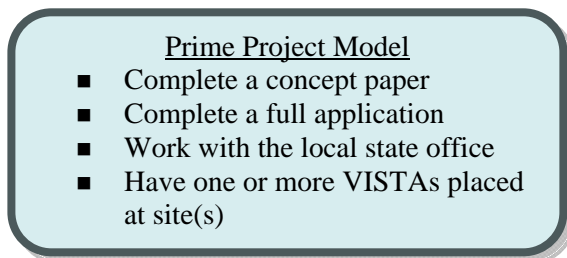


Figure 1. Prime project model

Multi-Site Projects

In multi-site placement projects, VISTAs are placed in a single state through either (a) a sponsor that operates at multiple sites in the community, region, or state or (b) a sponsor that has agreements with local organizations that serve as sub-recipients. The sponsor proposes the number of sites and the number of VISTAs 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 goals.

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 when there are sub-recipients, 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 subrecipients 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 subrecipients. In addition, the sponsor and Corporation State Office can track progress of individual subrecipients. Further, Corporation State Offices are provided with the flexibility to divide the subrecipient management and monitoring responsibilities of a multi-site project among different program specialists.

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 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 VISTAs 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
- Obtain their approval/disapproval to accept a project site 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 when 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.

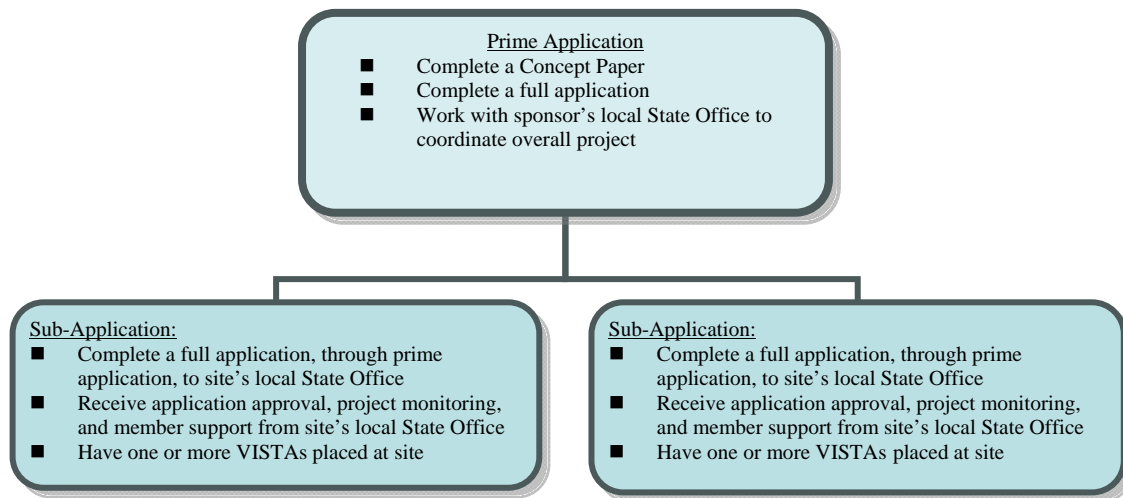


Figure 2. Prime plus sub project model

Involving all Corporation State Offices in which VISTAs are placed 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 already 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

National Demonstration Projects

From time-to-time, VISTA develops national demonstration projects. These demonstration projects, which are initiated and coordinated 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.

VII. VISTA Project Resources

Corporation State Office

The Corporation for National and Community Service has field staff working in State Offices throughout the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The role of the state office is outreach, program development, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation in support of the Corporation's national service network, and AmeriCorps*VISTA

member support. A complete list of State Offices can be found at:
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp>.

VISTA Campus

Launched in July 2008, the VISTA Campus is an online learning environment for the VISTA community. The aim is to support VISTAs in their development, narrowly defined by professional roles and broadly defined by life's path. The VISTA Campus contains tutorials, courses, resources and links for VISTAs, supervisors and Corporation staff.
www.vistacampus.org

Resource Center

The **National Service Resource Center** is a web-based clearinghouse that contains over 2,500 downloadable tools and e-courses. The publications, tip sheets, web links, toolkits, and other resources cover a wide range of topics. Sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the website makes it easy to find resources that help national service and volunteer programs grow and thrive.
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/>

Technical Assistance

Project STAR is the Corporation's technical assistance provider for performance measurement. On-line toolkits and tutorials provide step-by-step guidance in developing performance measures, creating project plans, and developing data collection instruments. Sample project plans, VISTA assignment descriptions are also available. Access the VISTA-specific Project STAR webpage by going to <http://nationalserviceresources.org/star/star> and choosing the VISTA topic section.

ListSerts

Want to connect with other people working in the national service field? The Corporation sponsors several **listservs** which are targeted towards different audiences and topic areas. Descriptions of the listserves and instructions on how to sign up can be found on the Resource Center at <http://nationalserviceresources.org/email-lists>

Online Resources

There are many other online resources which can be helpful to the VISTA community. The following list includes a variety of resources focused on poverty, asset development, and other topics.

Poverty and Poverty-related issues:

- US Census Poverty page: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html>.
- Institute for Research on Poverty, Univ. of Wisconsin: <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/>
- UNC School of Law, Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity:
<http://www.law.unc.edu/centers/poverty/default.aspx>
- National Poverty Center at University of Michigan: http://www.npc.umich.edu/about_us/
- Rural Poverty Research Center: <http://www.rprconline.org/>
- University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research: <http://www.ukcpr.org/>
- West Coast Poverty Center: <http://wcpw.washington.edu/>

- HHS, Poverty, Income, and Assets: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/ /topic/topic.cfm?topic=Poverty,%20Income,%20and%20Assets>
- World Hunger Year: <http://www.worldhungeryear.org/default.asp>

Asset Development Links:

- California Association for Microenterprise Opportunity - <http://www.microbiz.org/>
- Micro Business Development Program - <http://www.vtmicrobusiness.org/>
- National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship - <http://www.nfte.com/>
- Pact - <http://www.pactworld.org/>
- The Virtual Library on Microcredit- <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/>
- Institute for Poverty Research at Northwestern University - <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/abcd/>
- CFED - <http://www.cfed.org/>