

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Corporation for National and Community Service

VISTA Program Recovery Plan

Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)

The mission of the AmeriCorps VISTA program to create and expand programs that bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty is strongly aligned with Administration and Congressional priorities in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). Existing VISTA projects already support job creation, the abatement of home foreclosures, credit counseling and financial asset development programs. Corporation state office staff allocate VISTA resources based upon the critical needs of their state.

Funding

Operating Expenses, Recovery Act (95-2729 2009 \ 2010)
Volunteers in Service to America \$65,000,000

Objectives

AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed to fight poverty and build economic opportunity. VISTA engages individuals 18 years and older in a year of full-time service in our nation's poorest urban and rural areas, working to build the organizational, administrative and financial capacity of programs that help pull and keep Americans out of poverty.

VISTA members are assigned to community organizations (e.g. non-profit, faith-based) and public agencies to help the organizations build on locally-driven solutions to both the causes of poverty as well as the problems that arise in poverty-stricken communities.

The specific objectives of the VISTA program, as outlined in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, are:

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

With additional funding from the Recovery Act, the VISTA program will recruit up to an additional 3,000 full time VISTA members to fulfill the related goals of the Act and the VISTA program.

Activities

VISTA members funded through the Recovery Act will augment the ongoing work of the program through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach and partnership development. These activities will help non-profit and other community organizations to build greater capacity and to be a sustainable local resource to their communities as they work to

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Corporation for National and Community Service

VISTA Program Recovery Plan

increase economic opportunity for Americans living in poverty or who are in danger of falling into poverty.

Characteristics

The VISTA program does not typically support projects through cash grant awards. Instead, a non-profit organization or public agency signs a Memorandum of Agreement with the VISTA program to sponsor a specific number of full-time VISTA members. In this way, the funding to support VISTA members is administered directly by the Corporation, rather than by the selected organizations. Organizations that sponsor VISTA members are required to submit a detailed application outlining their overall program, including a work plan and annual performance outputs and outcomes. Project sponsors are required to report quarterly on their progress in achieving these performance goals.

In some cases, the VISTA program can provide a cash grant to a selected organization to offset the costs incurred by providing the necessary supervision, training and/or on-the-job transportation support to VISTA members. In a few cases, the VISTA program has provided a cash grant to an organization to enable them to directly administer subsistence payments to the VISTA members assigned to them. Any organization receiving a direct cash grant as part of their agreement with the program is subject to all standard federal fiscal reporting requirements.

To create worthwhile volunteer positions for the additional VISTA members recruited with Recovery Act funding, the VISTA program will expand existing projects and accelerate the development of new ones. All VISTA projects are required to create or expand the capacity of an organization to fight poverty. While the program could augment all existing projects with additional VISTA members funded by the Recovery Act, the VISTA program will instruct State Offices to give priority to new projects and supplement existing projects that work in the following areas:

- Employment and skills training programs;
- Financial Planning;
- Home foreclosure prevention and housing assistance;
- Nonprofit Capacity Building;
- Volunteer Generation and Management; and
- Other activities that will support economic recovery in communities

The Corporation will also consider placing VISTA members outside of these priority areas if necessary to maximize the impact of the funding.

Expanding existing VISTA projects

The quickest and most efficient way of expanding existing projects with Recovery Act funding is to increase the number of slots available to current project sponsors that have the capacity to effectively use the additional resource. The Corporation has held a

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Corporation for National and Community Service

VISTA Program Recovery Plan

number of preliminary conversations with targeted current sponsors and learned that they are prepared to recruit new members for their projects as soon as Recovery Act funding is made available.

The VISTA program will focus this expansion on large, existing sponsors who can grow without significant technical support from the State Office. However, wherever possible, the program will consider targeting Recovery Act funding to small but strong VISTA sponsors who may require some support.

Developing new VISTA projects

The VISTA program will support new projects with funding from the Recovery Act, particularly in programmatic areas where few existing projects exist. State office staff is in the process of completing the development of new projects already in the pipeline and will conduct targeted outreach to additional organizations working in the area of poverty alleviation. In addition, VISTA has been contacted by a number of potential sponsors interested in establishing new partnerships.

New project development can be effectively accelerated by teaming with proven national organizations, such as NeighborWorks and Habitat for Humanity. The VISTA program will require that national organizations such as these have the local capacity to effectively support new VISTA members.

As appropriate, new projects will be supported beyond this one-time increase by reprogramming resources in our current portfolio that are due to close in fiscal 2010 and beyond, or in the event that an enhanced level of resources is available to VISTA in the fiscal 2010 budget or beyond.

Delivery Schedule

State offices have already begun new program development and have notified existing sponsors to begin recruiting additional VISTA members. However, actual awards for new programs and the assignment of additional VISTA members to existing projects will not be made until approval of the Corporation's plan. Assuming the plan is approved by mid-March, VISTA will aim to have all Recovery Act VISTAs placed by the end of fiscal year 2009. To accomplish this, VISTA is scheduling additional pre-service orientation sessions beginning in April. Since Recovery Act funding is not available after fiscal 2010, it is likely that Recovery Act VISTA members who were to begin their term of service at any time in fiscal 2010 would have to be supported by the Corporation's fiscal 2011 appropriation for the final one to six months of their terms.

Environmental Review Compliance:

Not Applicable.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Corporation for National and Community Service

VISTA Program Recovery Plan

Savings or Costs

As this is a one-time influx of volunteer resources only, there are no expected increases or reductions in future operational costs to the Corporation.

Measures

The VISTA program will be able to report on the placement of every Recovery Act funded VISTA member and will provide a description of the project on which members are serving, including the service activities and project goals.

All VISTA projects currently provide annual performance data identified by the Corporation for national reporting purposes. These performance data are reported by the sponsoring organizations through the Corporation's eGrants database. Performance metrics reflect the objectives of the VISTA program and include data on the number of community volunteers recruited and the amount of private sector resources raised as a result of VISTA member activities.

The VISTA program will require projects receiving support through the Recovery Act to report separately the impact of the supplemental VISTA members funded through the Recovery Act on a quarterly basis. Because VISTA members do not perform direct service, but instead work collectively to build organizational capacity, performance measures will be tied to project accomplishments, rather than accomplishments by individual VISTA members. The VISTA program is currently reviewing its existing measures to identify additional outputs and outcomes specific to Recovery Act activities.

All Recovery Act related performance data will be reported on Recovery.gov and made available to the public.

Monitoring/Evaluation:

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

The protocols for assessing vulnerability and establishing monitoring plans for VISTA projects are consistent with those established for all Corporation grant programs.

Regular monitoring of VISTA project sponsors includes quarterly and semi-annual review of Project Progress Reports that include data on project specific performance outputs and outcomes.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Corporation for National and Community Service

VISTA Program Recovery Plan

Transparency

The VISTA program will provide reports listing all projects receiving VISTA members funded through the Recovery Act. The reports will include the following information:

- The name and address of the recipient organization.
- A description of the VISTA project and the activities in which VISTA member will be engaged.
- The number of Recovery Act VISTA member and their site location(s).
- The amount of funds awarded, if any.
- The amount of funds expended.

Accountability

Managers and employees are held accountable for operations and results of the AmeriCorps VISTA program through the Corporation's appraisal system. Performance plans include criteria that measure the performance of each manager and employee on the completion and quality of essential duties and responsibilities, including oversight of program partners and achievement of key program milestones on schedule and within budget.

Barriers to Effective Implementation:

Programmatic

- The ability of existing sponsors to expand slots and to develop new project sponsors in time to expend funds in a timely manner.
- The availability of viable, qualified candidates for VISTA service.
- Funding for subsistence allowances (which are paid directly by the Corporation) expires on September 30, 2010, while the VISTA member's term may end in FY 2011. VISTA and Office of Field Liaison will work together to place as many VISTA members as possible before the end of FY 2009. The VISTA program will use the Member Service Year (MSY) tracking tools to project the amount of funding that will be needed from the FY 2011 appropriation to support any Recovery Act VISTA member placed after October 1, 2009.

Proposed Solution: State Offices have already commenced working with existing sponsors eligible for recovery placements as well as developing new projects. Additionally, an outreach effort, focused on generating new project sponsor applications, as well as new VISTA member applications, has begun. Tracking of VISTA placements will be accomplished using system reports.

Systems

- Release 3 of the Member Portal must function properly and be available within 120 days of plan approval.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Corporation for National and Community Service

VISTA Program Recovery Plan

- Tracking systems need to be created to track production of the MSYs through the end of fiscal 2010.

Funds provided to support IT systems should mitigate the Member Portal issues. Tracking systems, such as the MSY charts and Discoverer reports are already being developed. VISTA is also working with the Budget Office and Accounting to ensure other required tools and systems are in place before Recovery Act funds are expended.

Administrative

Augmentations of the Corporation's infrastructure will be needed for outreach, training and member support and at the Field Financial Management Center (FFMC) and VISTA Member Support Unit for additional processing of member files and travel expenses. Corporation management has approved the hiring of some temporary/term appointment staff for positions external to VISTA required to support the program. The VISTA program office also is in the process of filling an Outreach position (an offer should be made in the next 30 days). Upon approval of the fiscal 2009 budget, other VISTA positions may be filled.