



# Launching Your VISTA Service



**VISTA**  
Volunteers In Service To America

*Session 2 of VISTA Member Orientation  
for incoming VISTAs*

Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 

Hello and welcome to AmeriCorps VISTA! We are excited to be with you as you start your service, and glad to have you participating in this session called Launching Your VISTA Service.

# Session Objectives



In this session, we will:

- Describe VISTA's mission and the program
- Review a few of VISTA's recent accomplishments
- Identify support persons and resources
- Highlight action items needing your attention
- Prepare you for the Oath of Service

Here are the objectives for this session:

In this session, we will:

Describe VISTA's mission and the VISTA program

Review a few of VISTA's recent accomplishments

Identify people and resources that can support you

Highlight action items needing your attention today and in the coming days and

Administer the Oath of Service

With that, let's get started.

Welcome to VISTA!



# VISTA

Volunteers In Service To America

Let us welcome you to AmeriCorps VISTA!

Today you will join a national service program with a very rich history. Currently, more than **5,000** full-year VISTA members are serving in rural and urban areas, in all 50 states, and in several territories and Tribal nations.

Volunteers In Service To America or VISTA has been supporting the charge towards economic equity for more than 50 years. Our strength comes from the talent, motivation, and energy of our members— which will soon include you. So let me thank you for stepping up to share your skills and passion to serve our communities. It truly is an honor for me to welcome you on behalf of the VISTA program.

Now, let's take a look at a few milestones in VISTA's history that have led us to this moment.



*"...you will be opening up new vistas of hope for the poor..."*

*- President Lyndon Johnson*

The VISTA program was born out of the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty in the mid-1960s. And, all these years later, social equity and economic opportunity remain our mission.

Our first volunteers were assigned in 1965, to Appalachia; Hartford CT; and the camps of migrant farm workers in California.

President Lyndon Johnson, whom you can see in this photo, said to those first VISTAs:

"The initials of your organization spell VISTA. It is an appropriate name, for you will be opening up new vistas of hope for the poor, achievement for yourself, [and] greatness for your Nation...."



## A network of national service programs

Fast forward about 30 years to 1993, and VISTA joins AmeriCorps, becoming part of a network of national service programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service or CNCS. You may have heard of some of our grantees and partners—Habitat for Humanity, City Year, Teach for America, as well as the Rockefeller Foundation and Service Year. CNCS programs fall under two broad umbrellas – Senior Corps and AmeriCorps, and within AmeriCorps are AmeriCorps NCCC, AmeriCorps State and National, and AmeriCorps VISTA.

You are joining the ranks of over 220,000 VISTAs who have served since the program began. And VISTA alumni have gone on to make significant contributions in other ways, such as:

- serving in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives
- heading up a chamber of commerce
- founding and leading nonprofit organizations
- hosting a program on NPR, and even
- writing a series of books called A Song of Ice and Fire (which some of you may know as the television series Game of Thrones)

...just to name a few.



Strengthen organizations that alleviate poverty through the mobilization of volunteers and resources

We know that the VISTA program is committed to economic equity, but if someone were to ask you what VISTA's mission is, how would you explain it? What really makes VISTA unique in the federal government?

We'll start with this, which is our elevator speech: The VISTA program strengthens organizations that alleviate poverty through the mobilization of volunteers and resources.

Let's talk a minute about organizations that seek the support of the VISTA program. Many nonprofits are under-resourced and under-staffed, particularly when you consider their mission. They are staffed by innovative, hard-working people who are making things happen with few resources. Often, organizations turn to VISTA for assistance in strengthening their infrastructure, developing processes, or generating resources. If they already had everything in place, they wouldn't need a VISTA.

The role of the VISTA member is to support the organization's mission by providing solutions that enhance efficiency and build capacity by raising money, developing systems, recruiting volunteers, and creating lasting change. So by serving at a sponsoring organization, you are essential to VISTA's mission of strengthening organizations.

In addition to our mission there are four principles that underpin the program.



Strengthen organizations that alleviate poverty through the mobilization of volunteers and resources

Key principles:

- Ending poverty
- Empowering communities
- Creating sustainable solutions
- Building capacity

Ending poverty – Every VISTA project, and every VISTA member, aims to end or alleviate poverty one person, one family, or one block at a time.

Empowering communities – In contrast to parachuting in and doing good things for people, VISTA members live among and involve community members in planning and carrying out the project. This is often facilitated by your sponsor, but strengthening and improving the community is our long-term goal through learning about values and beliefs, and applying good community development principles.

Creating sustainable solutions – Whatever you develop or create—whether it's a process, a system, or resources—you will develop them in such a way that people will be able to use them once you're gone.

Building capacity – All VISTA members aim to:

- increase the size of a project,
- increase the number of people served,
- improve the project's efficiency, or
- improve the project's impact on the community. That is how we measure capacity.

Let's spend a moment going over capacity building and what that looks like....



## Capacity Building

Efforts that help an organization's ability to:

- Increase reach
- Improve efficiency
- Scale up
- Be more effective

## Direct Service

Efforts that serve individuals in need, but do not address the development of systems or organizations. Includes:

- Tutoring
- Manual labor
- Foodbank service
- Counseling

In the VISTA Mission and Program tutorial you completed, you learned that your VISTA service should focus on building the capacity of your organization and not focused on performing direct service. This is a unique aspect of the VISTA program which sets it apart from all of the other AmeriCorps programs.

Quickly – Capacity building in essence is about helping your organization do more with what they have, so they can serve more people or operate more efficiently. Direct service is about providing tangible assistance directly to those who need it.

# Capacity Building vs. Direct Service



Capacity Building

Direct Service

So to make sure you understand and have a good feel for what we're talking about, we are going to play a quick round of This or That to explore the differences between capacity building and direct service.

We're going to read a service activity out loud, and you decide whether you believe the activity is capacity building or direct service.

First up.....



Recruiting volunteers to build houses

Capacity Building or Direct Service?

Recruiting volunteers to build houses. Do you think this is capacity building or direct service?



Recruiting volunteers to build houses



Capacity Building

The correct response is capacity building, because you are not directly building the house. You are developing capacity by recruiting volunteers who will then be able to do the construction work as well as engage with the organization in other ways.



Delivering meals to seniors

Capacity Building or Direct Service?

How about delivering meals to seniors or people with disabilities in their homes? Is this capacity building or direct service?



Delivering meals to seniors



Direct Service

The correct response is direct service, because in this example you would actually be picking up food and delivering it to people. In contrast, Capacity building activities would be working to improve a senior meal delivery program, putting together policies and procedures, or developing partnerships to help with food delivery.



Teaching a financial literacy course

Capacity Building or Direct Service?

How about teaching a financial literacy course to low-income individuals. Capacity building or direct service?



Teaching a financial literacy course



Direct Service

The correct response is direct service, and this is because this example involves hands-on educating individuals. Some capacity building activities that a VISTA would do, would include things like developing the curriculum for the financial literacy course, connecting with other organizations who can refer clients to take the course, or identifying financial literacy experts to advise the curriculum development.



Organizing a fundraiser

Capacity Building or Direct Service?

How about organizing a fundraiser? Capacity Building or Direct service?



Organizing a fundraiser



Capacity Building

The correct response is capacity building, because raising resources is building capacity ... the money raised builds the resources of the organization so it can do its work.

Okay, we have one more.



Setting up partnerships in the community

Capacity Building or Direct Service?

Setting up partnerships in the community. Is it Capacity Building or Direct Service?



Setting up partnerships in the community



Capacity Building

And again, this is capacity building, since you are striving to link the community with organizations, people, funds, and more to eliminate poverty and make a positive difference. So you are building capacity by helping community members find new ways to get things done and new partners to help them do it.

I hope you found this activity useful in reinforcing your knowledge of capacity building.



## Expanding Economic Opportunity



Let's shift gears a bit and take a look at what you will be doing in your individual VISTA project and how it connects to the mission of the VISTA program.

If you believe that we have a responsibility to bring an end to poverty, and if you are committed to working with your community to do so, then you are in the right place.



## Key Principles:

- Ending poverty
- Empowering communities
- Building capacity
- Creating sustainable solutions

We'd like you to reflect for a moment on the key principles of the VISTA program. These four principles guide community development for us. Community work requires coordination, even collaboration, and working together towards long-range goals. As you think about these principles that we've been talking about, which one resonates with you?

- Maybe it's ending poverty – many VISTAs join the program because they want to help people move out of poverty.
- Maybe empowering the community is a passion of yours through working with community stakeholders to identify needs, and putting those needs into action with the help and support of the community.
- Perhaps capacity building is at the heart of who you are and what you do. Maybe you see a project and can identify a plan to increase its effectiveness and engage more individuals.
- Or maybe sustainability is something that drew you to your VISTA position. Maybe you have an eye for processes and developing them in such a way that they can be used once you've left.

The good thing is that all of these are important and all of them are useful. Hopefully as you look at what you will be doing as a VISTA, you'll be able to pinpoint activities that touch on some or all of these key principles. And you'll be able to talk about how to sustain the work you're doing by building capacity, empowering communities, and how these efforts contribute to ending poverty.

Progress in this type of work is slow and incremental, and it's important to know that our work isn't just about fixing stuff—it's about sharing perspectives and skills. The results of your work as a VISTA member may not be apparent immediately nor happen overnight (which at times may be a little frustrating), but once you step back you'll be able to see the larger changes that have resulted from your work.

# VISTA Assignment Description



Each VAD includes:

- Project goal
- Objectives
- Member activities

|                         |                                                                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TITLE                   | Mentor Recruitment and Management Systems Designer                              |
| SPONSORING ORGANIZATION | Waketa Community Services (WCS)                                                 |
| PROJECT NAME            | MentorCorps                                                                     |
| PROJECT NUMBER          | 12ABCD345                                                                       |
| PROJECT PERIOD          | 08/20/20XX - 08/19/20YY                                                         |
| SITE NAME               | <i>if applicable</i>                                                            |
| FOCUS AREA(S)           | Education (Primary)                                                             |
| NOTE                    | If your VAD is not accepted, the State Office will note the reason(s) why here. |

## VISTA Assignment Objectives & Member Activities

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PROJECT GOAL      | <i>To help ensure that children of incarcerated parents receive the educational, social, and emotional support they need to help them break the cycle of poverty, the MentorCorps VISTA project will build the capacity of WCS by developing a sustainable volunteer recruitment and management system for its mentoring program.</i> |
| OBJECTIVE         | Assess the current state of WCS' efforts in reaching, selecting, and supporting volunteer mentors, and create or revise policies, procedures, and documents to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the mentor recruitment and matching system.                                                                            |
| MEMBER ACTIVITIES | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Research the history of volunteer programs at WCS.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Identify strengths and challenges of the current program.</li></ol></li></ol>                                                                                                                     |

Let's focus now on what you will be doing as a VISTA, and the best way to do that is by reviewing your VISTA Assignment Description or VAD. Each VISTA has a VAD that was created by the VISTA project. You might have received your VAD during the interview and selection process, or perhaps your VISTA supervisor gave it to you today. If not, you can download it from your account in My AmeriCorps.

All VADs include the following three elements: a project goal, objectives, and member activities.

The **Project Goal** is related to or identical to the overall goal of your VISTA project.

The **Objectives** describe what you will achieve by the end of your service year. They are a bridge between the project goal and the member activities.

The **Member Activities** specify what you will be doing this year. Those activities add up to the objectives, and the objectives add up to the goal.

Each of you has your own VAD, no matter how many VISTAs may be serving or have served at the same project.



## Making Sense of Your VAD

(Through the lens of VISTA's Four Key Principles)

**The Four Key Principles that all VISTA projects represent are:**

### Ending Poverty

A VISTA project helps individuals and communities move out of poverty, rather than simply making poverty more tolerable.

### Empowering Communities

A VISTA project engages residents of low-income communities in planning, developing and implementing projects. A VISTA program should collaborate with community members on creating solutions, rather than simply providing services.

### Building Capacity

VISTAs build capacity by working on projects with staff and volunteers, rather than directly with people in need.

Because the VISTA Assignment Description is your work plan for the year, we strongly recommend that you focus on it with your supervisor in the next few weeks. And that you refer to it throughout your year of service.

There is a VAD worksheet that is part of your Early-Service Coursework on the Starting VISTA page of the Campus. This worksheet can help you tease apart the various elements of your VAD. It provides a nice framework for you and your supervisor to discuss your tasks step by step. So it's a good idea to download the worksheet and start filling it out so you're well-prepared to discuss your VAD with your supervisor. If you don't already have a meeting set up with your supervisor, here is a good reason to schedule one. The VAD is a great place to start a conversation about your year of service.

Based on what you know about your VAD, what will you be doing as a VISTA? What steps, tasks, or activities will you be doing to help eradicate poverty, build capacity in your community and in your organization? Having answers to these questions will help you explain to others what you will be doing this coming year.



# WHAT IF?

You're probably thinking about what you'll be doing as a VISTA, and we want to take your thinking a bit further. Let's talk about what happens as a result of your service.

What if you plan a community meeting?

If you bring people together around a common issue, what is the impact of that activity?

What if you write grant proposals?

How will writing a grant proposal actually make a difference in your community?

What if you recruit volunteers?

Why specifically is it important to have other people help with your project?

What if you write a lesson plan?

What purpose does this lesson plan achieve, and how will it impact others within your community?

So the big question we ask is what if?

And we ask this because we want you to reflect on why you are serving. Think about this question in your service activities and when reviewing your VAD, as well as when talking with your supervisor. Taking time to think about the reason behind your activities, and the purpose of the things you're doing, will help you understand and stay focused on the intended impact of your VISTA service.



# WHAT IF?

The impact you make this year depends on you. And it also depends on your community, your VISTA sponsor, and a lot of times, on good luck. Think about the “what if” when answering this next question.

What impact do you hope to make as a VISTA member? And by impact, we mean what will be the end result (rather than what will your activities look like)? What will happen as a consequence of your success?

Please think about this overarching goal as you go into your year of service. The work isn't always immediately satisfying, but it is always very important. Keeping the impact in mind will help you get through tough times when you feel you may not be making a difference.

# VISTAs get things done!



**\$194 million**

Cash and in-kind resources



**2.4 million**

Disadvantaged youth served



**8,000**

VISTA members served



**728,638**

Community volunteers mobilized



**\*140,000**

Veterans and military families served

\*FY2017 data



**4,500+**

Sites across the country

Speaking of outcomes, let's take a look at some of the things VISTA members have accomplished recently so you'll have a sense of how your accomplishments add to the bigger picture.

In the last year, ...

- VISTAs have raised \$194M in cash and in-kind donations for their sponsoring organizations. That's more than twice what Congress has given AmeriCorps VISTA to run the entire program. **THAT'S AMAZING!**
- VISTAs have recruited, trained and assigned 728,638 community volunteers, who collectively served more than 7.5 million hours.
- VISTA members made it possible for their sponsors to serve 2.4 million children living in poverty—in after school programs, tutoring, and assistance in food security.
- Programs supported by VISTA members served 140,000 veterans and military families.
- In a single year, about 8,000 VISTA members built the capacity of more than 4,500 nonprofits and public agencies, about 70% of them in their own hometowns. Since 1965, more than 220,000 VISTAs have served.

These are just some of the remarkable impacts VISTA members like you made, are making, and will make.



Before we move on, let's quickly review what we've just covered.

- We looked briefly at how VISTA relates to other national service programs.
- We then dove into the VISTA mission and its key principles, and discussed how they relate to your VISTA Assignment Description.
- And finally, we shared with you some of the impact VISTA members have had in the past year.

Now let's shift to looking at your rights and responsibilities as a VISTA member, and some sources of ongoing support for you during your year of service.

# Rights and Responsibilities



## Red flags:

- Discrimination
- Harassment



CNCS Equal Opportunity Program (EOP)

Phone: 202-606-7503

Email: eo@cns.gov

Let's talk about some important issues that you learned about in the Civil Rights and Responsibilities course on the VISTA Campus. The VISTA program takes very seriously the issues of discrimination and harassment, so we want to make sure you're all aware of what your rights are, as well as your responsibilities.

As you learned, discrimination is being treated differently because of a difference in sex, race, or any other protected class.

Harassment is behavior that is severe or pervasive and creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

If you believe that you have experienced or witnessed discrimination or harassment, here are steps you should take:

- Approach and talk directly to the person you suspect of engaging in harassing or discriminating behavior, if you feel safe and comfortable doing so.
- If that does not work, or if you do not feel safe and comfortable doing so, you should talk to your VISTA supervisor.
- If you cannot go to your supervisor, or if you do and the matter is not resolved to your satisfaction, you should contact your CNCS State Office.
- Finally, you can contact the CNCS Equal Opportunity Program (EOP).

Rights go hand-in-hand with responsibilities. So while you have the right to a service experience that is free from harassment and discrimination, you also have the responsibility not to subject anyone to harassment or discrimination. So please be conscious of how your words and actions might be perceived by others, whether fellow VISTAs, staff at your site, or community members.

As a reminder, the contact information you see on the slide is included in the handout for this session. You will also find it in the Member Handbook.

# Rights and Responsibilities



## Red flags:

- Replacing staff or serving as administrative assistant
- Assignments unrelated to the VAD
- Direct service



CNCS Office of Inspector General

Phone: 800-452-8210

Email: [hotline@cncsoig.gov](mailto:hotline@cncsoig.gov) Website: [www.cncsoig.gov](http://www.cncsoig.gov)

AmeriCorps VISTA is a federal program, and like anything supported by taxpayer funds, we need to ensure that the program is well-run, doing what it's supposed to, and spending money wisely. Like all federal agencies, CNCS has an inspector general whose office is responsible for preventing and detecting waste, fraud, and abuse.

Most VISTA sponsors are familiar with the rules and do a good job of following them. But sometimes, things can get off track. There are a few red flags to be aware of:

- If you are being asked to take over the work of a staff person, say someone who is out on extended leave, that is considered replacing staff and it's not allowed.
- Or, if most of what you're doing is administrative support for someone else, that's also not appropriate work for a VISTA member.
  - You should be focusing on the things outlined in your VAD, which ties directly to the overall project plan that was approved by CNCS.
- Finally, the majority of your work should be capacity building – not direct service. From your coursework and today's activities, you now have a good idea how to distinguish the two, so be sure you're focusing on capacity building.

If you feel you are being asked to do things that are not appropriate for VISTA members, first talk about it with your supervisor. From there, you can talk with your CNCS State Office. If the issue isn't resolved (or if you want to remain anonymous), contact the CNCS Office of Inspector General.

This is one of your responsibilities: Say something if you see something.

# Fingerprinting



- Receive fingerprint cards from your supervisor today
- Your responsibility
- \$25 fingerprinting subsidy
- Get fingerprinted ASAP
- Submission Deadline:
  - **Within 30 days of your first day of service**



Here is one more thing you're responsible to do. We mentioned in the first session that you will need to submit your fingerprints so we can run a background check.

So let's talk about how to get fingerprinted. Your supervisor has your fingerprint kit that includes two fingerprint cards, a disclosure form, and instructions. You should also receive a return UPS label from your supervisor to ship them to VISTA Headquarters.

You are responsible for getting fingerprinted and submitting your fingerprints to VISTA Headquarters. Go to a local police station, sheriff's department, or other fingerprinting location and bring the fingerprint cards with you. Your prints must be submitted in ink on our cards. We cannot accept electronic submissions or fingerprint reports—we need the actual prints.

The VISTA program provides you with a \$25 fingerprinting subsidy, that will be included in your first living allowance payment. You have 30 days to do this, but please get it done as soon as possible. Failure to submit your fingerprints on time could result in termination from service, so please don't let that happen!

If your supervisor doesn't have the fingerprint kits or shipping labels, your supervisor should contact the CNCS State Office immediately to get them.



- Criminal History Questionnaire: If you failed to disclose any conviction, send this form in as instructed.

The other part of this process is comparing your background check results to what you disclosed on your AmeriCorps VISTA application. You might recall that when you applied, you were asked if you had ever been convicted of a crime.

It's possible you didn't disclose everything in your AmeriCorps application, perhaps because you thought you needed to include only recent arrests, or because you thought a DUI is a minor traffic violation, or because you were a minor and it was expunged.

If you failed to disclose any conviction in your AmeriCorps application, you will need to fill out the member disclosure form that's included with the fingerprint cards and send it in as instructed.

When your FBI background investigation is completed, we will compare the report to your disclosures in the application and on the form. If everything aligns, you won't hear from us. A minor offense with no relation to your assignment will generally not bar you from service.

If there is a conviction that you *have not* disclosed to us, it could be grounds for dismissal, and we will have extensive follow up.

# Show Your VISTA Pride



- Add the VISTA logo to your business cards and email signature
- Decorate your space with VISTA gear
- Share your VISTA photos and stories on social media
- Order your VISTA gear once you receive ordering instructions

Let's talk about identifying with your fellow VISTAs. One of the greatest things about being part of AmeriCorps VISTA is showing off your VISTA pride! You never know where you may make a connection with someone who knows about the program.

Put the AmeriCorps VISTA logo on your business card, in your email signature, and on your organization's website and brochures. The more visible you are, the more support you may be able to get—for your project and the AmeriCorps VISTA program as a whole. That means more VISTA members in communities doing the work we need to get done.

The Helpful Links handout posted in this webinar includes links to business card templates, publications, and gear to use in your office and represent VISTA in the field.

Also, please share any service or training photos with us through our Twitter and Facebook accounts. We love to share your stories and retweet your photo!

You will receive an email with instructions on how to order your free – yes, I said FREE – VISTA polo, lapel pin, tote bag, t-shirt, water bottle, and journal - within the next two weeks. However, you will receive that email once your electronic Oath has been submitted, and all of your pre-work (online forms and courses) has been completed, so stay tuned.

# Where to Get Support



## AmeriCorps VISTA Resources and Contacts

| Benefits                            |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Living Allowance                    | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/livingallowance">vistacampus.gov/livingallowance</a><br>Statements in <a href="http://my.americorps.gov">my.americorps.gov</a>                             | <a href="mailto:vmsu@cns.gov">vmsu@cns.gov</a>                                                     |
| End of Service Benefit              | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/benefits">vistacampus.gov/benefits</a>                                                                                                                     | <a href="http://questions.nationalservice.gov">questions.nationalservice.gov</a>                   |
| Healthcare                          | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/healthcare">vistacampus.gov/healthcare</a><br><a href="http://americorpsvista.imglobal.com/healthcare.gov">americorpsvista.imglobal.com/healthcare.gov</a> | <a href="mailto:vistacare@imglobal.com">vistacare@imglobal.com</a><br>1-855-851-2974               |
| Travel/Relocation                   | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/relocation">vistacampus.gov/relocation</a>                                                                                                                 | <a href="mailto:vmsu@cns.gov">vmsu@cns.gov</a>                                                     |
| Leave                               | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/handbook">vistacampus.gov/handbook</a>                                                                                                                     | Your VISTA Supervisor                                                                              |
| Child Care                          | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/childcare">vistacampus.gov/childcare</a><br><a href="http://americorpschildcare.com">americorpschildcare.com</a>                                           | <a href="mailto:americorpschildcare@gapsi.com">americorpschildcare@gapsi.com</a><br>1-855-886-0687 |
| Policy                              |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                    |
| Fingerprinting and Criminal History | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/fingerprinting">vistacampus.gov/fingerprinting</a>                                                                                                         | <a href="mailto:vistafingerprint@cns.gov">vistafingerprint@cns.gov</a>                             |
| Laws/Regulations/Hatch Act          | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/handbook">vistacampus.gov/handbook</a>                                                                                                                     | <a href="http://nationalservice.gov/stateoffices">nationalservice.gov/stateoffices</a>             |
| Oath                                | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/oath">vistacampus.gov/oath</a>                                                                                                                             | <a href="mailto:vmsu@cns.gov">vmsu@cns.gov</a>                                                     |
| Outside Employment                  | <a href="http://vistacampus.gov/handbook">vistacampus.gov/handbook</a><br><a href="http://vistacampus.gov/outsideemployment">vistacampus.gov/outsideemployment</a>                         | Your VISTA Supervisor                                                                              |

Let's recap some of the many sources of support for VISTAs. You already know about My AmeriCorps and the VISTA Campus. This graphic is a reminder of the List of Resources that's on the Starting VISTA page of the VISTA Campus. (A direct link is available in the Helpful Links document for this session.)

Whether it's questions about sick leave or healthcare benefits, pay schedule or policy, this list points you in the right direction. For benefits questions, you can also contact the benefits administrator directly. And, if you've exhausted all other options, you can contact the VMSU through the National Service Hotline. They are here to support you throughout your year of service.

# What's Ahead



## Early-Service Coursework

- Make the Most of Your On-Site Orientation and Training
- The Minute Intro
- Learn About Theory of Change
- How Poverty is Measured in the U.S.
- VAD Worksheet
- Creating a Community Profile
- 13 Lessons About Poverty



Now, let's look at what's ahead for you as you get into your VISTA service.

There are seven elements of Early-Service Coursework that we ask all VISTAs to complete. They are self-directed and intended to help prepare you for success.

- First is a guide to help you make the most of your On-Site Orientation and Training – which is the training provided by your supervisor to prepare you for what you will be doing at your site.
- The Minute Intro exercise helps you develop your elevator pitch, so you can clearly and succinctly explain to others who you are and what you are doing as a VISTA.
- The resource on theories of change looks at various ideas about what causes poverty and theories on how to reduce or eliminate it.
- There's also a great video explaining how poverty is measured in the United States.
- A worksheet to help you unpack your VISTA Assignment Description and use it as the foundation for your work plan for the year.
- A tutorial on how to understand the community you are serving by looking at demographic data and research.
- And a video with Dr. Stephen Pimpare sharing 13 lessons about poverty that came out of the VISTA program.

The worksheets and resources dovetail nicely with your on-site orientation and training, and can provide structure for the first few meetings with your supervisor. We're not going to collect your worksheets – they are there for your own benefit and we hope you will use them.



## In-Service Training (IST)

- Geographically-based invitations
- Designed for first 2-5 months of VISTA service
- Core Modules:
  - Capacity Building
  - Empowering the Community
  - Navigating the Member-Supervisor Relationship
  - Using Storytelling in Marketing and Outreach

You can't spell  
VISTA without...

IST



And looking a little further ahead, VISTA offers an In-Service Training (IST) to members early in their service terms, typically between months 2 through 5 of service.

IST addresses common training needs among VISTA members; provides an environment for VISTA members to discuss their projects and ask questions in person; and offers a forum for VISTAs to connect with their peers. At this point in their service, participants should be able to identify their training needs and will be able to apply knowledge from their IST during the remainder of their terms. These trainings are optional to members, and not required. There are 4 core training modules and an additional 6 elective training modules developed by CNCS.

You will be notified of an IST opportunity based on your geographic area via email, so be sure to keep your email address up-to-date in your My AmeriCorps portal. VISTA will arrange your travel, hotel room, and meals during the training, and the 3 ½ days at training count as regular days of service (so no leave days are needed on your part). Supervisor approval is required to attend.

So as you go over your VISTA Assignment Description with your supervisor and start working on your first tasks, you can begin thinking of potential areas of training needs that benefit you at IST.

## Action Items - Benefits



- Is your Direct Deposit info correct?
- Did you select the right End-of-Service Benefit?
- Enroll in a Healthcare Benefit
  - Enrollment instructions sent by email from IMG in ~10 days



There are a few key decisions and actions that you'll need to complete today and in the next couple of weeks. These first items relate to your VISTA Benefits.

First, is your direct deposit. As we mentioned last week, your direct deposit details need to be perfectly correct in order to be paid on time. Any small mistake can result in a 2 week delay, so please double-check the information in My AmeriCorps.

Second is your end of service award. You know there are two options, the Cash Stipend or the Education Award. If you chose the Cash Stipend, today is the last day to change your selection. If you chose the Education Award you have 10 months to change your selection.

Third is health care. You will be eligible for one of the benefits that VISTA offers, and which one depends on whether you already have health insurance. If you have insurance, you can enroll in the **Healthcare Allowance**, which reimburses your out-of-pocket costs. If you don't have insurance, you can enroll in the **Health Benefit Plan**. In about a week to 10 days, you will receive an e-mail from IMG with instructions on how to enroll.

Refer to the Benefits section of the VISTA Campus for more details.

## Action Items - Entry



- Set up a recurring meeting with your supervisor
- Complete the Early-Service Coursework
- Get fingerprinted
- Order your VISTA gear



There are a few other action items that you'll work on over the next couple of weeks.

- First is to set up a recurring meeting with your supervisor to discuss the VISTA project and your progress on a regular basis.
- Second is to complete the Early-Service Coursework that was just described. You'll find it on the Starting VISTA page of the Campus. Be sure to download a copy of your VAD to help you complete the On-Site Orientation and Training worksheet and the VISTA Assignment Description worksheet.
- Third, get fingerprinted and submit a member disclosure form (if applicable) within 30 days.
- And fourth, order your VISTA gear. You should receive the email with instructions for ordering your free gear within about two weeks.

# Oath of Service



Now let's discuss the Oath of Service.

The Oath of Service is a required and important step in you becoming a VISTA member. Because of the importance of this topic we want to provide you some information about the Oath, how to schedule your swearing in, and then how to submit your oath form.



I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.

Let's first consider the oath you're about to take, because you shouldn't take it lightly. This is the same oath taken by all federal employees up to and including the vice president (the president's oath is a little different).

In the Oath it includes the phrase "*...to defend the Constitution of the United States.*"

Defend: This is not a call to arms. For some, in some positions, it may be. But for most of us, defense of the constitution may be just the opposite of using arms. We're pledging to defend the document that contains our civil rights.

It also includes the phrase...*against all enemies...*

Enemies: In the context of VISTA, the enemy is poverty.

Okay, two more things about the Oath. First, you may replace the word swear with the word affirm, if you so choose. You may also omit the phrase so help me God, if you so choose.

## Scheduling Your Swearing-In



- Your supervisor contacts the CNCS State Office to schedule your swearing in
- On your first day of service
- At your VISTA site



If you're watching this video, that is probably because you were not able to join a live webinar with other incoming VISTAs. If that's the case, your supervisor will need to contact the CNCS State Office to schedule your swearing in. You should take the oath on your first day of VISTA service while you are at your VISTA service site.

# Electronic Oath Form



- Oath form in my.americorps.gov
  - Requires log in and password
- Form needs to be unlocked
- Submit oath form the same day you are sworn in

A screenshot of the electronic oath form interface. It contains three main input sections: 1. 'Date of Your First Day of Service at your Project Site\*' with a text box and the instruction 'Please type MM/DD/YYYY'. 2. 'Name of CNCS Official Who Administered and Witnessed the Oath\*' with a text box and the instruction 'Please type the First and Last Name of the person who administered and witnessed the Oath'. 3. 'AmeriCorps VISTA Member's E-Signature' section, which includes 'Electronic Signature\*' with a text box and the instruction 'Please type your First and Last Name', and a checkbox with the text: 'By checking this box and typing my name above, I am electronically signing and understand that by checking this box constitutes a legal signature confirming my Service administered by a federal official.'

When you take the Oath of Service, a CNCS staff member at your state office will give you specific instructions for filling out the electronic oath form.

To make sure you're prepared, we'll give you this quick preview. First, the electronic Oath Form is in my.americorps.gov, so you need to have your log-in and password handy. Second, the form needs to be unlocked so you can complete it. The state office will coordinate that. Finally, you need to login to complete and submit your electronic oath form the same day you take the oath.

Again, your CNCS state office representative will provide you more specifics on filling out the fields of the form.



“On your **idealism** and on your **success** rests much of our **hope** for the final elimination of poverty in our American **life**.”

- *President Lyndon Johnson,*  
*December 12, 1964*

Let's go ahead and wrap up the session. Before we depart, we want to leave you with another quote from President Lyndon Johnson.

“On your idealism and on your success rests much of our hope for the final elimination of poverty in our American life.”

Thank you for watching and welcome to AmeriCorps VISTA. We wish you much success during your year of service!



*Thank you for your service!*



**VISTA**  
Volunteers In Service To America

Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 