



## **Criminal History Checks for VISTA members and leaders Sponsor Responsibilities**

Below is an overview of sponsor responsibilities regarding the Criminal History Check policy for VISTA members and leaders. If you have questions about AmeriCorps VISTA's criminal history check policy, please contact your Corporation State Office.

### **1. Inform all applicants of the VISTA Criminal History Check Policy**

The AmeriCorps VISTA application process requires a criminal history check to ensure community members with whom we work are secure; particularly children, individuals with disabilities, and adults aged 60 and above.

AmeriCorps VISTA investigates for past sexual offenses, violent crimes, and crimes that would have a direct bearing on an individual's service. This background check entails a search of the National Sex Offenders Website (NSOPW) and an FBI criminal history check, which requires candidates to be fingerprinted during their first month of service.

### **2. Review an application for disclosure of a criminal history and discuss the history with the applicant during the interview.**

In determining whether to allow the applicant to serve with VISTA, consider, where applicable, the following:

- Number of offenses in the history;
- Nature of the offense(s);
- Conditions or circumstances that led to the offense(s);
- How long ago the offenses were committed; and applicant's age at the time of the offense(s), if pertinent;
- Evidence of rehabilitation or change in behavior (e.g. courses, community service hours, life achievements, motivations);
- Whether the VISTA applicant is currently on probation or parole.  
*Note that if a person is on parole or probation, VISTA will accept the individual only under rare, extenuating circumstances. A compelling argument must be made on behalf of the applicant.*
- Your organization's capacity to effectively supervise and support the applicant in order to mitigate risk to the program given his/her criminal history
- Nature of the VISTA assignment and the value the applicant's experience brings to the assignment;



**3. Ensure the applicant's criminal history has been accurately reported on the application.**

Misrepresentation or omission of a criminal history on the part of an applicant may result in disqualification for service.

Please ask the VISTA applicant whether s/he disclosed his/her complete criminal history on the application. If an applicant's criminal history has not been fully disclosed, notify the Corporation State Office (CSO).

Applicants who disclose a criminal history at the time of application or interview will be asked to provide any relevant court documentation to the CSO.

**4. Make recommendation to the Corporation State Office**

Any criminal history disclosed on an individual's application must be accompanied by a Criminal History Justification Form (CHJF). The CSO is responsible for communicating with both the sponsor and applicant in drafting the CHJF to ensure all supporting details and/or required documentation are provided to the Criminal History Check Team.

If the Criminal History Check team supports the CHJF, the CSO may accept the applicant for service. Approval to serve is contingent on the candidate having fully disclosed his/her history, verified by an FBI Criminal History Check.