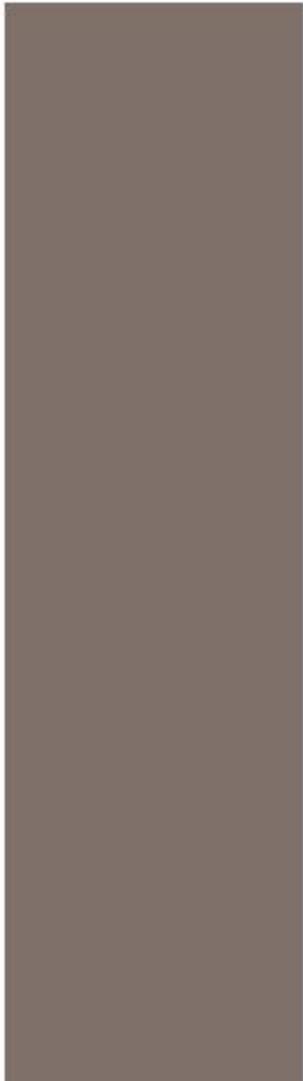




# On-Site Orientation and Training Guidebook

By: Alicja Kania, Allison Wilhite, Ingrid  
Velez, Kara O'Neil, Patricia Lomax,  
Porsche Holland, Pricila Novoa, &  
Sabrina Kliman

Coached By: Kapila Wewegama



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	<a href="#"><u>Introduction &amp; How to Navigate this Guide</u></a> .....	3
II.	<a href="#"><u>Meet the Team</u></a> .....	4
III.	<a href="#"><u>Problem Statement</u></a> .....	6
	a. <a href="#"><u>Team Vision, Mission, &amp; Goals</u></a>	
	b. <a href="#"><u>To Download: OSOT Resources Spreadsheet</u></a>	
IV.	<a href="#"><u>OSOT Outcomes for the VISTA Member</u></a> .....	8
V.	<a href="#"><u>Suggested Planning Timeline</u></a> .....	10
VI.	<a href="#"><u>Creating an Agenda</u></a> .....	12
	a. <a href="#"><u>Planning Tools</u></a>	
	b. <a href="#"><u>Sample Agendas</u></a>	
VII.	<a href="#"><u>Common Training Topics</u></a> .....	13
VIII.	<a href="#"><u>Take your OSOT from Ho-Hum to Wow!</u></a> .....	17
	a. <a href="#"><u>Example Activities</u></a>	
	b. <a href="#"><u>How to Quickly Engage Your Audience</u></a>	
IX.	<a href="#"><u>OSOT Evaluation Tool</u></a> .....	23
	a. <a href="#"><u>Evaluating the VISTA Member Experience</u></a>	
	b. <a href="#"><u>Evaluating the Supervisor/ VISTA Leader Experience</u></a>	
X.	<a href="#"><u>What Comes Next?</u></a> .....	25

# INTRODUCTION

This guidebook is intended to help program supervisors and VISTA Leaders effectively plan, implement, and evaluate On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) for VISTA members. This project was initiated by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and carried out by a team of eight VISTA Leaders serving across the nation as an Action Learning Challenge. These Leaders applied insights from attending and facilitating OSOT at their sponsoring organizations as well as from surveying program supervisors for input and perspectives to develop this guide. The team started by first identifying the problem then decided their vision, mission, and goals for addressing it. After an exhaustive review of the OSOT resources already available on the VISTA Campus to supervisors and Leaders, the team created additional resources and compiled this tool as a comprehensive, yet accessible, reference guide to producing a quality On-Site Orientation and Training.

## HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS GUIDE

This guidebook provides complementary insight to assist you when constructing your On-Site Orientation and Training, in addition to highlighting useful online resources. This guide is presented in a logical, progressive order to get you started with planning your OSOT and to help you develop a thorough agenda and appropriate follow up for your training.

To start, experience has shown that a well-prepared orientation covers the elements presented in the [CNCS Objectives and Learning Outcomes](#). A [Planning Timeline](#) and [Sample Agendas](#) provide our recommended steps toward preparing your OSOT. Since we recognize that each VISTA sponsoring organization has different needs and project goals, we provided 3 areas of focus that universally apply and can be tailored to your needs: [Training Topics](#), [Interactive Activities](#), and [Evaluations](#). Lastly, throughout this guide you will find “Tips from the Field” shared by VISTA members about their OSOT experience - what worked well and what could have been improved.

In addition, the team reviewed many VISTA Campus and online resources, and organized the links into an easy to search [OSOT Resource Spreadsheet](#) for your quick reference.

# MEET THE TEAM

To complete this VISTA Leader Action Learning Challenge, eight Leaders from across the nation collaborated via phone, email, and Google Drive from December 2013 - April 2014.



**Alicja Kania** is serving as a VISTA Leader with LAF (formerly known as Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago), where she also completed her first year of service. Her experiences have shown her how crucial OSOT is to a successful VISTA term.

**Allison Wilhite** has served 3 VISTA terms, 2 as a Leader, with Greater Homewood Community Corporation in Baltimore, MD. She moved from San Diego, CA to Baltimore, MD, having never visited the city before, and her OSOT was integral to welcoming her to the Charm City she now calls home.



**Ingrid Velez** is serving as VISTA Leader with the Boys & Girls Club Washington State Association in Seattle, Wa. She has previously served with Catholic Family & Child Service in Pasco, WA. She believes that an engaging OSOT, that also builds and strengthens a member's VISTA relationships, provides the essential building blocks for community greatness.

**Kara O'Neil** is serving as a VISTA Leader with the Serve New York VISTA program in Buffalo, NY, and completed her first term of service at the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County. She is grateful for the opportunity that AmeriCorps has provided her to become meaningfully involved in her hometown, and to work with so many other dedicated and passionate individuals.





**Patricia Lomax** is serving as a VISTA Leader with the Parent Community Student Services Branch in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), where she completed two service terms before becoming a leader. Born and raised in Las Vegas, NV, Patricia is enjoying learning about and serving in Los Angeles.

**Porsche Holland** is a Philadelphia native that served as a Program Specialist VISTA at Bridge Builders Alabama in Montgomery, AL. She returned to the City of Brotherly Love to serve as VISTA Leader with SERVEPhiladelphia (Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement & Volunteer Service). She was fortunate to begin her VISTA Leader term with an OSOT guide and is excited to strengthen and refine it for her team.



**Pricila Novoa** is currently in her second VISTA term. She previously served at the Boys & Girls Club in Santa Monica, CA and is now thoroughly enjoying her VISTA Leader position at UCLA BruinCorps. She was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA and strives to give back to the community she grew up in.

**Sabrina Kliman** serves as a VISTA Leader with the UW-Parkside VISTA Project in Racine, WI. Originally from Massachusetts, Sabrina completed her first term in Denver, CO with the Western Hardrock Watershed Team. With these very different experiences she knows how important a strong OSOT is to a successful VISTA year.



A very special thank you to **Kapila Wewegama** for guiding our team process as our coach!

# SO, WHAT'S THE NEED?

As AmeriCorps VISTA members start their service terms, sponsoring organizations are required by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to provide an On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) to orient them to the organization, community, and project and train them in the skills needed to accomplish the project goal. CNCS provides a list of objectives for sponsoring organizations to meet with OSOT, but the quality of these trainings varies greatly.

On-Site Orientation and Training is a challenge for sponsoring organizations to plan because VISTA placements differ geographically, by project focus, and member experience even within one program. This makes it difficult to keep information relevant to each individual. Furthermore, sponsoring organizations may not have the resources or guidance to prepare for it. Another challenge is striking a balance between providing enough information to help the VISTA begin in their new role and not overwhelming members on their first day. Without proper documentation from year to year by the sponsoring organization, expertise on the OSOT model can easily be lost.

An ineffective OSOT can cause difficulties for the VISTA member to adjust to their position and the community they serve. This can also result in conflict between the VISTA and their site. If expectations and issues are not addressed from the beginning, a VISTA may not achieve the goals set by the sponsoring organization and may not have as great an effect in the community as hoped. Ultimately, it can have devastating effects on the morale of the VISTA, potentially leading to an early exit.

On-Site Orientation and Training from the sponsoring organization prepares the VISTA to start their assignment with confidence. Providing OSOT in an effective manner upon arrival at their site gives members the foundation, direction, and skills that will allow them to have a successful VISTA term.

## *Our Vision*

The vision of the AmeriCorps VISTA Action Learning Challenge team is that all sponsoring organizations provide a quality On-Site Orientation and Training to facilitate an effective year for their VISTA members.

## *Our Mission*

The mission of the AmeriCorps VISTA Action Learning Challenge team is to meet the needs of sponsoring organizations that are faced with the challenge of facilitating a quality member On-Site Orientation and Training by providing necessary templates and effective practices. As a result of these resources, member retention, morale, and project effectiveness in the community will be improved.

### *Team Goals*

1. To create sample On-Site Orientation and Training models including guides, learning objectives, or agendas to address the needs of a sponsoring organization whether it is a single site, multi-site, local, or national program.
2. To provide effective practices to assist sponsoring organizations achieve the guidelines laid out by the Corporation for National and Community Service in the VISTA Member Handbook.

This On-Site Orientation and Training Guidebook meets our team goals to provide a sample model and effective practices that assist sponsoring organizations of all types.

### *TO DOWNLOAD: OSOT RESOURCES SPREADSHEET*

Along with this OSOT Guidebook, we have created a comprehensive, searchable document of the resources we reviewed and referenced when creating this tool. It can be downloaded or viewed online here: [[Excel!](#)] [[Google Doc](#)]

# BEGIN AT THE END

## *OUTCOMES FOR THE VISTA MEMBER AS PROVIDED BY CNCS*

On-Site Orientation and Training is the second step in the VISTA member's training continuum. Its primary purpose is to build on concepts and knowledge introduced and developed at Pre-Service Orientation. Effective orientations can take many different shapes depending on your time and capacity, but each must meet the below outcomes as set by CNCS. Begin your OSOT planning by reviewing these outcomes and brainstorming how you could meet them with your VISTA(s).

### **Understanding of common expectations and agreements for working relationship between VISTA and supervisor**

- Supervisor's other roles and responsibilities
- Supervisor's management style
- Meetings/Interactions between VISTA and supervisor
- Clear understanding of the lines of communication between VISTA and supervisor
- Clear understanding of the support provided to the member
- Clear on the terms and conditions of VISTA service
- Clear on the chain of command

### **Understanding of the culture and mission of the sponsoring organization**

- History of organization
- Organizational mission
- How it functions as a non-profit, municipality, state, county or federal entity
- Its role in the community
- Introductions to staff

### **Knowledge of the bigger picture related to the VISTA project and the community**

- The VISTA project and its history
- How and where does the VISTA fit into it all
- Introduction to the community
- The socio-economic and political structure
- Potential resources that can be applied to achieve project goals
- History and present status of community self-determination and problem-solving efforts

### **Understanding of the organization's VISTA Policy**

- Roles and responsibilities
- Time and attendance, duty hours
- Annual leave
- Sick leave

- Mileage reimbursement policy and procedure
- Working with the media
- Fund raising activities
- Evaluation of individual VISTA and of the project
- Reporting requirements for the VISTA project

**Defining a VAD with the supervisor that:**

- Specifies tasks and activities with goals and objectives in the project plan.
- Specifies training that builds upon PSO, OSOT, and the ongoing personal and professional development of the VISTA member.

**Building skills and knowledge needed to implement the VISTA Assignment Description:**

- Depending on the project, areas such as:
  - computer skills
  - public speaking
  - group facilitation
  - conflict resolution
  - needs assessment and asset mapping
  - proposal writing
  - negotiation and interviewing skills
- Assignment specific such as:
  - domestic violence hotlines
  - early childhood literacy
  - laws regarding foster care
  - credit management
  - micro enterprise development

Next, consider the logistics and elements of your orientation and training, such as where you will host it, who will present, and the agenda.

***Tip from the Field:** Have VISTAs share their VADs with your organization’s staff to ensure the staff understands the VISTAs’ role and purpose.*

*“My site supervisor instructed me to share my VAD with, and interview each program staff member to get a foundation in the organization's previous efforts - successes and challenges, programs the staff member would like to see implemented, and programs which have been requested by residents.”*

# SUGGESTED PLANNING TIMELINE

Whether you are planning an OSOT for 20 VISTA members or 2, starting early is always best and will keep it manageable during your normal work flow. Here is a recommended timeline to help you check off all the essential elements of an OSOT with energy to spare. Don't forget to document throughout the process; you'll be glad you did when you start to plan for next year!

## 6+ weeks before

- Set date(s) for OSOT and share with your incoming VISTAs and project supervisors
- Reserve a meeting space
  - When considering different spaces, look for free parking, access to public transit, and ADA accessibility. Is one room enough for your orientation? Will you have breakout sessions? Will you need outdoor space for icebreakers or other activities? Make sure that space you choose can meet your needs.
- Brainstorm topics and begin developing learning objectives
  - Incorporate the wisdom of former members
  - Ask departing VISTAs to write letters to their replacements, which are read at orientation
- Contact potential presenters to inquire about their availability and interest
  - Secure free or low-cost skill training from community resources
  - Ask staff, colleagues with other organizations, and community experts to share their knowledge and best practices
- Draft an early agenda and map out the critical pieces. Your agenda will be full of holes at first, but will serve as a guide in your process.

## 4 weeks before

- Set agenda (sessions and timing) and learning objectives
- Map out critical pieces first (for example, if key presenters are available only on certain dates, the rest of the schedule must work around them).
- Send agenda to CNCS State Director for review

## 3-2 weeks before

- Confirm presenters and send them presenter guidelines and learning objectives
- Check supplies and order any additional materials if needed

## 1 week before

- Send final agenda to VISTAs and project supervisors
- Follow up with presenters, re: parking, timing, offer to print handouts

## 1 day before

- Print agendas and any handouts
- Set up room

## Day(s) of OSOT

- Put out refreshments, i.e. brew coffee and set out cups, creamer, sugar, and napkins
- Greet VISTAs and presenters as they arrive
- Introduce presenters before their session with brief bio or blurb
- Facilitate agenda and keep VISTAs and presenters on time
- Wrap up with reminders and announcements
- Clean up room

## Within 1 week after:

- Create and send out evaluation to VISTAs along with relevant e-handouts, presentation slides, and presenter contact information
- Send hand-written thank you notes to presenters
- Review evaluations and debrief with VISTA staff and/or presenters

***Tip from the Field:** Inform your organization's staff about VISTA before the members start: what it is, when the members will be starting, and what they will be doing. A warm welcome sets a positive tone for the year!*

*"I once had a supervisor keep me waiting in the lobby for 45 minutes before showing up - no phone call, no one in the office was expecting me; I was just sitting there feeling out of place... I felt completely disrespected, and I immediately became less invested in that organization."*

# CREATING AN AGENDA

OSOT can take many forms and yours may be longer or shorter than the examples provided below. Start by allocating time to review CNCS requirements and policies in addition to the requirements and policies of the sponsoring organization. Then plug in time for skills training and round it out with team building exercises.

These are examples only – feel free to customize them, or use them for ideas during the planning process. The nature of your OSOT will depend on the particular characteristics of your organization, project, and VISTA member(s) as well as the time you have available.

## PLANNING TOOLS

- [This worksheet](#) will guide you through planning activities that meet specific needs of your VISTA member.
- [OSOT Checklists](#) like this one can be helpful for VISTA members to fill out as they get oriented. Make sure that in your planning you address the things on the list!

## SAMPLE AGENDAS

- This is a [comprehensive checklist](#) that covers things that can easily fall through the cracks. The time laid out is three weeks – and if you’d like to customize it for your site, it’s also [available as a Word document](#).
- This is another example of a [three week OSOT](#) that can be used as a guide of things to be sure to include.
- For those who would like a slightly [shorter OSOT](#), this one covers quite a bit in a two-week period.

***Tip from the Field:** Orient your VISTAs to your organization’s culture - dress code, hierarchy, other protocols and norms - as well as the culture of the community.*

*“My service was split between two of the organization’s sites, one a community center within a residential neighborhood, and one was an office building downtown. These two locations had distinct cultures, dress codes, and hierarchy. I was not oriented to the office building... It was only by getting cozy with the receptionist that I was able to navigate that part of the organization.”*

# COMMON TRAINING TOPICS

Beyond orienting your VISTA member, it is helpful to equip them with the initial skills and knowledge they will need to get their project started. Training your VISTA during their first weeks of service will give them confidence and enhance their ability to begin accomplishing their VAD goals.

Below are suggested general training topics to cover during On-Site Orientation Training (OSOT) and example learning objectives, suggestions for how the VISTA can practice and retain these new skills, and links to where you can find relevant training tools on the VISTA Campus. Ask other staff, colleagues with other organizations and other experts to share knowledge and best practices.

In addition, think about what specialized training may be necessary for your VISTA, such as domestic violence hotlines, early childhood literacy, microenterprise development, and legal procedures. You may be able to secure free or low cost skill training from local resources including community colleges, libraries, trade associations, and adult education programs, among others.

## PREPARING FOR MEETINGS:

VISTAs will most likely attend and plan dozens of community meetings during their service term. Orient them to how meetings at your organization, at stakeholder organizations, and the local community run as well as the steps they should take to organize their own meetings. Also, having your VISTA conduct informational meetings with staff and stakeholders in their first few weeks is a great way to help them make contacts and build relationships with key people.

- Steps to take when planning for a meeting, such as identify the:
  - What – What is the topic and goal (information, consensus, action items...)?
  - Why – Why is the meeting necessary? Can you accomplish your goal via email/phone?
  - Who – Who needs to be present? Who are the stakeholders?
  - When – Work with stakeholders to determine availability and best chance for turnout.
  - Where – Set the right tone, make it convenient, have the appropriate comforts.
- Tips for getting the most out of meetings (before, during, and after), i.e. bring a notepad/pen, come prepared, listen actively and contribute, be timely, sit in a visible place and introduce yourself
- How to conduct a 1 on 1 relational or informational meeting – what are the goals of these meetings, what questions should you ask, using active listening, and how to follow up

**Suggestion for retention:** Have your VISTA attend a community meeting and report back on what they observed and learned from it. Attend the meeting with your member to introduce them to key stakeholders, and ask the VISTA to request informational meetings with these people.

**Resources:**

[Meeting Ground Rules & Overcoming Roadblocks](#) (PDF)

**PARTNERSHIPS & NETWORKING:**

Partnership development may be a key component of your VISTA’s project. Regardless, they will surely be meeting many new people and exchanging ideas. Providing them basis for how to network with others and form a partnership to enhance their project outcomes is best done early in their year before an opportunity passes them by!

- How to assess your organizational need for partnerships and identify what you can offer in exchange, including what approval is needed before proceeding
- Overcoming the anxiety of networking through simple steps that make connections and build relationships, i.e. knowing your 30 second elevator speech, asking about what challenges or upcoming opportunities the other is experiencing, following up appropriately
- How to establish expectations for a successful partner arrangement, i.e. drafting an MOU
- Tips for facilitating connections for partnerships external to your own needs, such as through email introductions

**Suggestion for retention:** Host a “Meet the VISTAs” event at your organization. Have VISTAs network with staff members and practice delivering their elevator speeches. Invite attendees to evaluate and provide feedback for the VISTAs.

**Resources:**

[Tools for True Collaboration and Partnership Success](#) (PDF)

[Building Relationships Through Community Partnerships](#) (Webinar)

[Building Partnerships](#)

[Networking in Your Community](#)

**MANAGING UP & OFFICE PROFESSIONALISM:**

For some VISTAs, service may be their first professional experience after college. Offering advice on how to best communicate with their supervisor can help them realize the steps they should be taking to have a great working relationship.

- Host a panel discussion with experienced supervisors at your site to gain tips and insights for how VISTAs can best engage supervisors, i.e. create an agenda for check-ins and send it in advance, be proactive about rescheduling missed check-ins, ask clarifying questions, take the initiative and present ideas or recommendations to consider

- Recognize how your supervisor’s success is a benefit to you and your project, and learn how you can assist your supervisor to achieve successes

**Suggestion for retention:** Have the VISTA prepare an agenda for a meeting with their supervisor to discuss the VISTA’s progress on their VAD.

**Resources:**

[Communication Styles and Problem-Solving](#)

ORGANIZING 101:

Community organizing can take many different forms, but the foundation of good organizing is relationship building through two-way communication. Provide your VISTA with an understanding of how organizing can create change and the steps to take to appropriately enter the new community and make connections.

- Provide your VISTA with an overview of community organizing, its philosophy, and the strengths inherent in a well-organized community
- Brainstorm how to get started – the first steps when entering a new community, i.e. how to learn the personality of the community, how to approach members and stakeholders, how to identify key assets and issues
- Encourage your VISTA to meet community members through door knocking. Practice the 3 goals of door knocking:
  - To learn at least one new thing about the person - have a conversation
  - To share one new piece of information with the person - a flyer for an upcoming event or community meeting, or simply to introduce your VISTA role
  - To get contact information - come prepared with a contact or sign-up sheet

**Suggestion for retention:** Have VISTAs take a walk through the community and create an asset map. Alternatively, have VISTAs partner up and practice a door knock.

**Resources:**

[Strategic Factors for Building Community: The Five C’s](#)

[Mapping Assets to Build Community](#)

EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS:

Community outreach and education is a common goal on VADs. VISTAs must be able to effectively plan and deliver a presentation whether it is to train volunteers or educate homeowners about their rights during foreclosure. In order to deliver effective presentations VISTAs should be able to:

- Identify the various types of presentations and decide which one is best to use for their specific audience
- Tailor a presentation based on time, audience, technology and event
- Build an engaging PowerPoint
- Manage audience challenges
- Create their own “Public Speaking Toolbox” - tips to calm nerves, planning tools, etc.

**Suggestion for retention:** Schedule a follow up to the training and have each VISTA plan and deliver a presentation. Provide each VISTA with feedback on their presentation delivery.

**Resources:**

[6 Principles of Powerful Presentations](#)

*Tip from the Field: Open your network to VISTAs so they can start making connections and developing partnerships.*

*“I accompanied my site supervisor to a relevant conference and she opened up her network to me, introducing me to nearly everyone in this region who's in the field. I left the conference with a stack of business cards, and good leads on who to ask for what in terms of developing partnerships and resources.”*

**ADDITIONAL GENERAL TRAINING TOPICS TO CONSIDER:**

- Computer skills
- Group facilitation & active listening
- Conflict resolution and managing difficult conversations
- Needs assessment and asset mapping
- Fundraising and grant writing
- Volunteer recruitment and program management
- Emotional and social intelligence
- Cultural sensitivity/diversity
- Time and task management
- Goal setting
- Skills assessments (communication styles, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, StrengthsFinder)
- Creating PR, Marketing and outreach material

# TAKE YOUR OSOT FROM HO-HUM TO WOW!

## TIPS AND TOOLS FOR ENCOURAGING INTERACTION

Put yourself in your member’s shoes for a moment. They are new to your organization, your community, and perhaps they are tired from Pre-Service Orientation. The learning curve may be steep for them given that they are still acclimating to their new role. Despite their best intentions, it may be hard for them to remain engaged and focused during your OSOT.

Adding activities and opportunities for interaction are great ways to energize the group, spark conversation, ease tension, and to test retention of information. Additionally, interaction is integral to building relationships between new people, such as VISTA members, supervisors, staff, and community partners. Taking time to facilitate intentional introductions creates a welcoming environment that allows the member to feel comfortable and confident at the start of their service year.

Below are tips and tools for infusing interaction into your OSOT, including examples of activities you can do. First, however, it is important to keep in mind different learning styles, the characteristics of the group, and your goals for OSOT when deciding on an activity. Some considerations are:

- different backgrounds of the VISTAs (culture, experience, physical ability, etc.)
- group size
- available time
- creating a safe and welcoming environment

Below are three categorical types of interactive components to help you think through where and when you can add an activity with examples of activities for each category:

Introductory	Team Building	Topic Exploration
Are used to introduce participants to each other and to facilitate conversation amongst the participants.	Are used to bring together individuals who are in the early stages of team building. This can help the people start working together more cohesively toward shared goals or plans.	Are used to explore the topic at the outset, or perhaps to change pace and re-energize people during the event.
1. <a href="#">The Name Game</a> 2. <a href="#">Affirmative Inquiry</a>	1. <a href="#">Picture Pieces Game</a> 2. <a href="#">Blind Numerical Order</a>	1. <a href="#">Three-way communication</a> 2. <a href="#">Good/Bad VISTA Game Show</a>

**Tip from the Field:** Send your VISTA on a “scavenger hunt” to introduce them to your community.

*“I was sent on a ‘scavenger hunt’ to meet our community partners. I was given a list of our partners and was told to introduce myself to as many as possible by the end of the day – either in person or over the phone. This was a great way for me to get to know my way around town and to start building relationships.”*

## EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES

### INTRODUCTORY

#### 1. The Name Game

*Timing:* varies by group size, about 1-2 minutes per participant

*Materials:* Flipchart to post questions

*Goal:* To facilitate introductions and start relationship building by sharing a personal story.

In a circle have each person introduce themselves along with any key information you wish to know (i.e. position title, department, service site, etc.). In addition, they should answer one question from the following about their name:

- Do they have a nickname? How did they get it?
- Were they named after someone? Who? Tell us about them.
- Would you like to change their name? To what and why?

#### 2. Affirmative Inquiry

*Timing:* 20-30 minutes depending on group size

*Materials:* Handout with the questions to facilitate note taking, pens

*Goal:* Build relationships through positive storytelling and group sharing.

Pair participants up and have them interview one another about their previous service experiences. Ask the following questions:

- What was a high point service experience for you?
- What is an accomplishment you had during this experience?
- What about the organization or team you served with made it so good?
- What are two ways this year could also have such high point experiences?

Participants take turns interviewing, actively listening to their partner and capturing notes on what they said. After 8-10 minutes, have pairs connect with one other group and then take turns reporting out what their partner said. If there is time, have the whole group come together and report out in a circle.

## TEAM BUILDING

### 1. Picture Pieces Game

*Timing:* 20-30 minutes

*Materials:* an image, scissors, flip chart, markers, tape

*Goal:* Problem solving activity to teach participants how to work in a team. Demonstrates 'departmental' working, which is the understanding that each person working on their own part contributes to an overall group result.

The activity leader chooses a well known picture or cartoon that is full of detail and cuts it into as many equal squares as there are participants in the activity. Do not show the original picture to the participants yet. Each participant is given a piece of the "puzzle" and instructed to create an exact copy of their piece of the puzzle five times bigger than its original size. Provide them paper, rulers, pencils, markers, etc. to complete the task. When all the participants have completed their enlargements, ask them to assemble their pieces into a giant copy of the original picture on a table.

Debrief with the group about the end product:

- How does the team picture compare to the original?
- How did the team communicate while making the enlargements? Did they communicate?
- Why is communication across departments, with other organizations, or with the communities they serve important?

### 2. Blind Numerical Order

*Timing:* 20 minutes

*Materials:* blindfolds (optional)

*Goal:* Encourage communication and active listening to solve problems as a team.

Blindfold all the participants or have them close their eyes. Whisper a number to each of them without letting other participants hear. The numbers should be random instead of in order. For a few participants, use negative numbers, "0", really high numbers, etc. After whispering the number, move the participant to a random location in the room. Once every participant has a number, instruct them to organize themselves in a line in order from lowest to highest number. At intervals during the game, create restrictions for the whole group or certain members, i.e. no talking, no using their right arm, one person must sit down and remain sitting. Stop when the team successfully gets in order or when the time is up.

Debrief with the group about the experience:

- What was the most difficult aspect of this exercise?
- Did you assume that the assigned numbers would be in order?

- Did you have a sense of working together? Why/why not? How frustrating was it when you could not talk?
- What was necessary in order for you to be successful?
- How important is good communication in groups?
- How does this activity relate to our group?

## TOPIC EXPLORATION

### 1. Three-Way Communication

*Timing:* 20-30 minutes

*Materials:* flip chart, markers, a few bandanas, clipboards, pen and paper

*Goal:* Discuss pros and cons of different communication methods and styles. Groups physically mimic a specific communication type to make them aware of the differences.

Preface the game with a brief discussion about the various ways in which people communicate with their friends, supervisors, colleagues, etc. Tell them that in this activity, they will discuss and determine key aspects, pros/cons and guidelines for a specific type of communication. Three different communication methods will be explored: Face to face, telephone, and email.

Divide the group members into three groups:

1. *Face to Face:* These people do not have any controls on their communication. They should sit in one area of the room and use pen and paper to write their findings during the activity.
2. *Telephone:* These group members should be blindfolded in order to replicate the telephone environment (in which they cannot see the person they're talking to). They should sit together in one area of the room. One person will act as the scribe for the group's findings and will not wear a blindfold.
3. *Email:* These participants should sit back to back and may not speak. They should each have paper, pens, and clipboards. In order to communicate, they must write notes and pass them to one another.

Give the groups a scenario they may encounter during their service that requires a clear solution or next step. Give them 5-7 minutes to get to a solution using their method of communication, and then have them report back to the whole group their findings. If time allows, switch groups and test multiple scenarios with increasing complexity.

Capture the findings on a flip chart and debrief with the group the pros/cons of these forms of communication given the scenario.

### 2. Good VISTA/Bad VISTA Game Show

*Timing:* 10-15 minutes, and can be adjusted per the group size

*Materials:* Good/Bad cards, prepared scenarios

*Goal:* To test understanding of policies and procedures.

Prepare in advance some scenarios your VISTA may face either in regard to VISTA policies, office procedures, community interactions, or whatever other topic of relevance to their service experience. Write GOOD and BAD on two separate note cards.

Have each VISTA take a turn pulling a card at random and responding to your scenario as either a “good” VISTA or “bad” VISTA. The rest of the group then responds with which they think it is, and the facilitator provides further explanation or a “better” VISTA response depending on the answer. It can be fun to add cheesy game show style introductions and cheering after each answer - add some personality!

Example scenarios:

- The Walmart is hiring! Finally, your chance to work your way up the ladder of success in corporate America for real and for true. Your project only has you busy during business hours, and if you could work nights you could make a lot of money, so you decide to ...
- Monthly reports are due tomorrow, but you’ve been invited to go on a tour of the city with underprivileged youth which could really inform your project. However, you won’t be able to do both. Conundrum! You had better ...
- Your VAD is really easy. Like, super super easy. You honestly think you could complete the entire thing in two weeks without even breaking a sweat. When you talk to your supervisor, you realize that they knew it was going to be easy, but they just didn’t know what else to do with you. So you ...

## HOW TO QUICKLY ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

If time is limited, try these simple activities below to quickly engage your audience during your presentation.

- **Brainstorming:** Generate ideas amongst participants by eliciting quick contributions without trainer comment or opinion. Record the ideas as they are shared.
- **Case Study:** Have participants discuss a real case study. Give them discussion questions as applicable to the topic.
- **Create a Quiz:** Have participants create a quiz question that they know the answer to, based on the topic. Have them write the question on one side of an index card, and the answer on the other. Then have them work in pairs or small groups to share questions.
- **Field Trips/ Scavenger Hunts:** Engage participants by showing and introducing them, not only to the organization, but the community.
- **Group Review:** Ask participants to share what they learned. Use a flip chart to record their responses.
- **Guided Teaching:** Use Leading questions to guide participants through the material, using their own knowledge.
- **Learning Plan:** Ask participants to write down specific additional things they want to learn because of what they have learned in the course.
- **Movement poll:** Poll participants and have them do something physical in response, such as

standing up, shaking a Leg, or spinning around.

- **Next Steps:** have participants write down how they will use what they've learned and what they want to learn next. Have members share before leaving.
- **Post-its Questions:** Have participants write their questions on post-its and stick them on the board during the break. When you come back from break, answer the questions and take down the sticky notes as they are answered.
- **Role Play:** Have participants work in pairs act out scenarios. Give them time to discuss what it feels like to be in a different position.
- **Self-Assessment:** Have participants reflect on what they have learned about a topic by giving a written or verbal self-assessment. Do not require that they share their responses.
- **Stretch Break:** If participants are getting restless or sleepy, take a quick guided stretch break to get the blood flowing and their brains working.
- **True/False:** Have participants work in groups. Give a list of true/false statements and have people discuss what they think is true and what is false, then give the correct answers.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY RESOURCES

VISTA Campus:

[Delivering Orientation](#)

CNCS National Service Knowledge Network:

[Warm Up Activities & Ice Breakers](#)

Other Websites:

[Teampedia](#)

[MindTools](#)

[101 Interactive Training Techniques](#)

[Ice Breakers: Ease Group Contribution](#)

# OSOT EVALUATION TOOL

You have just completed your VISTA On-Site Orientation and Training - congratulations! Before filing away your OSOT documents until next year, it is recommended that you evaluate your OSOT and incorporate the information into next year's planning. Depending on the nature of your program, you may find that an informal method of collecting feedback works better than formal surveys.

Below you will find sample questions to use to measure the success of your OSOT, and isolate areas for future improvement. These questions have been structured around the CNCS Learning Objectives. You will also find tips on survey design and how to build these suggestions into future trainings.

Anonymous surveys can be collected via Google Forms, online programs such as Survey Gizmo or Survey Monkey, or on paper. We suggest limiting surveys to no more than 10 questions to increase validity of the results.

## EVALUATING THE VISTA MEMBER EXPERIENCE

### *SURVEY OF INDIVIDUAL TRAINING SESSIONS*

Consider breaking the survey down by topic to have VISTA members evaluate the effectiveness of a specific training or session. These topic surveys should be limited to no more than 5 questions. This design is best utilized for an OSOT with fewer, but more intensive, training sessions.

**Please rate the sessions presenters on their level of effectiveness (engaging, knowledgeable, articulate, and well-prepared)**

	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	N/A
Session 1	<input type="radio"/>				
Session 2	<input type="radio"/>				
Session 3	<input type="radio"/>				
Session 4	<input type="radio"/>				

**How applicable was this topic to your VISTA experience**

	Not Applicable	Somewhat Applicable	Applicable	Very Applicable	N/A
Topic #1	<input type="radio"/>				
Topic #2	<input type="radio"/>				
Topic #3	<input type="radio"/>				
Topic #4	<input type="radio"/>				
Topic #5	<input type="radio"/>				

*Example questions:*

1. How effective (engaging, knowledgeable, articulate, and well-prepared) was the facilitator during this session?
2. Would you recommend this training to future VISTA members?
3. Do you have suggestions of topics that should be included in future OSOT?

*If the survey format allows it, provide additional space for open comments.*

You may also consider using a format that allows the VISTA member to rate the sessions and presenters on a scale

of Very Effective, to Not Effective.

#### *SURVEY BY LEARNING OBJECTIVE*

Depending on the structure of your OSOT, you may find that collecting feedback around the CNCS provided Learning Objectives better suits your program. Below are sample questions to ask your VISTA Members to make sure you covered all the target areas. Remember to keep this to no more than 10 questions.

- 1. Have you addressed management, communication, and learning styles between your supervisor and yourself?*
- 2. Do you know the mission of [insert organization name]?*
- 3. Do you have an adequate understanding of the community you serve (socio-economic and political structure, physical boundaries of the service area, how the VISTA project will impact the community, tour of community and introductions to key community partners, and potential resources to help reach project goals)*
- 4. Do you have an understanding of reporting policies?*
- 5. Do you know who to contact for work- related issues, including questions regarding your VAD, timesheets, and other project issues?*
- 6. Do you understand the overall goal of your VAD?*
- 7. Do you have an understanding of the steps you will need to take to complete your VAD?*
- 8. What are your immediate needs/concerns with respect of to your VAD and project assistance?*
- 9. How effective (engaging, knowledgeable, articulate, and well-prepared) was the facilitator during this session?*
- 10. Do you have suggestions of topics that should be included in future OSOT?*

#### *SHAPING THE QUESTIONS*

When designing your survey, consider the use of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Proper use and balance of these two types of questions can elicit responses to determine the effectiveness of the OSOT, while also bringing insight of future VISTA needs. Closed-ended questions, such as multiple choice surveys, should be used when a short or one word response provides sufficient information. Open-ended questions garner an exploratory response and allow for more in-depth answers, including answers not yet considered, to be shared and addressed. Keep in mind that if you choose closed-ended questions, the 'additional comments' section can still provide the in-depth feedback found in open-ended questions.

#### *EVALUATING THE SUPERVISOR/ VISTA LEADER EXPERIENCE*

Following OSOT, it is important that you as a supervisor or VISTA Leader reflect on how the training went. You may find that an informal method of collecting feedback from those who were involved in OSOT is more appropriate than a survey. A debriefing session no more than 1 week after the

conclusion of OSOT with all individuals who were involved in the planning process is recommended. Bringing questions to guide the discussion may help facilitate conversation. If you are the sole planner of OSOT, reflect upon these topics and write down the answers for future reference.

*Example questions:*

1. What went well with the planning process of OSOT? What needs to be improved upon?
2. Were the training topics relevant?
3. How effective were the facilitators?
4. Review member survey results

The main points of this discussion should be recorded to incorporate into future OSOT planning, through an internal memo or other document.

*Tip from the Field: Review the VAD and program performance measures with your VISTAs. Talk about the work plan and explain how the project fits into your organization's short-term and long-term.*

*"It's important that the site supervisor and VISTA sit down together and thoroughly review the VAD and performance measures. Talk about the work plan, and explain clearly how the project fits into the organization's near-term and long-term goals. This will help the VISTA feel more connected to the organization, and it provides them with a more solid foundation to build their service upon."*

## WHAT COMES NEXT?

OSOT is only the second step of the VISTA member training continuum. The third is In-Service Training to be held throughout the member's term of service as needed. Incorporating evaluation into regular check-ins with the VISTA will help identify areas where further skills-building or a refresher of OSOT resources and skills is needed as understanding of their project evolves. However, as the supervisor or VISTA Leader, you are now experienced enough with the planning process and equipped with the tools to effectively continue your member's development toward completing project goals and having a successful year of service!