LEADING FROM A DISTANCE

*An Information Module for Remote AmeriCorps*VISTA Teams*

AN ACTION LEARNING CHALLENGE PROJECT
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LEADING FROM A DISTANCE

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MODULE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Leading from a Distance training module! The module is designed to assist AmeriCorps*VISTA Leaders, remote VISTA supervisors, sponsoring supervisors and other affiliates as they seek to develop dynamic and efficient remote teams.

No matter what size the team or how far the distance, leading remote teams is a challenging task that requires intentionality and creative planning to foster a supportive environment. In this module, you will have access to **effective practices**, **tips**, and **resources** to break four common roadblocks to successful distance leadership. Along the way, you will also discover **real-life stories** from AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders, and for supervisors and project partners seeking to prepare VISTA Leaders for the remote team challenge, check out the **training** section.

NOTE: The term "remote leader" is used throughout this module in reference to any individual, whether VISTA Leader, Supervisor or other affiliate, leading two or more team members from a distance.

Read on to find helpful information in the **Four Roadblock Breaker** sections:
1. **Communicating**
2. **Connecting**
3. **Cheering**
4. **Cultivating**

Each **Roadblock Breaker** will include the following:
- **Introduction**: *Description of the Roadblock*
- **Symptom Checker**: *Signs that your project is in need of assistance*
- **Words from the Field**: *Real-life scenarios from remote team VISTA Leaders*
- **How-to-Guide**: *Common obstacles, tips/effective practices, and resources*

For **supervisors**, we've prepared the following section as a tool to help train remote leaders:
- **Training the Remote Leader Toolkit**: *Key points, activities, questions and action steps for facilitators to consider when training distance leaders; the training documents can be combined to formulate one training or used individually to emphasize particular skills.*

These resources were developed over several months as a collaborative Action Learning Challenge (ALC) effort. ALC team members put their research into practice as they developed this module from five remote locations across the United States. While the research is not fully comprehensive, we hope it will be a launching point for you and your remote team as you seek to engage communities and build capacity in your region and beyond.

*Founded in 1965, AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a national service program dedicated to fighting poverty through capacity building and community engagement.*

LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Roadblock Breaker 1: Communicating

INTRODUCTION

ROADBLOCK DESCRIPTION: Communicating
How to facilitate effective, meaningful messages and minimize the unique obstacles of communicating at a distance in relation to: • Proximity • Potential problems and troubleshooting • Project management • Establishing expectations • Creating trust

Definition/Scope of the Problem
Communicating effectively is a crucial element to building a successful team and being a strong leader. The modes of communication we choose to use, the words we say, and the non-verbal gestures we make all affect and shape our messages. As a leader your responsibility to be an ambassador, facilitator/educator, mentor, liaison, resource generator and recruiter all rely on effective communication.

In a remote setting, communication challenges are amplified and traditional communication tools become constrained. Since most team members do not share the same office and at times represent different work cultures, time zones, and professional backgrounds, miscommunication often results. Moreover, a lack of face time, limited communication modes and the inability to read and interpret nonverbal gestures add up and create a barrier for the leader to connect and build trust with the team. This is especially evident during crisis and when tight deadlines approach.

In this section, you will discover various tips and resources to help bridge the communication gap with your team members as you navigate the service year.

The Symptom Checker: *If you check yes to any of the following symptoms, **communicating** may be a Roadblock your team needs to address:*
☐ My VISTAs are unaware of who to turn to in order to address various issues
☐ My VISTAs do not feel comfortable seeking assistance during times of crisis
☐ Members are working on similar projects without collaborating with each other
☐ There is a lack of trust among VISTAs, VISTA Supervisors, and the whole program
☐ VISTA members do not feel like they are part of a larger movement
☐ VISTAs are anxious and feel overwhelmed
☐ VISTA members constantly fail to meet expectations
☐ I don't know the best way to reach out to my VISTAs
☐ There is confusion within my project about who is responsible for which task.

Words from the Field: *Eric Mejia, NeighborWorks America (2009 – 2010)*

As a remote leader, Eric Mejia teamed up with fellow VISTA Leader (VL), Liz, in supporting 159 remote VISTAs. They soon found leading from distance and communicating with VISTAs extremely difficult. Below is a narrative of their experience.

At the beginning of their service year, Eric and Liz tried to connect with their members through surveys. They asked a myriad of questions ranging from personal interest areas to professional expectations. While there were patterns of responses that emerged, clearly each and every member responded differently. Responses ranged from minimalistic, one word responses to verbose, essay style paragraphs. Others responded with pictures in lieu of the requested narrative. Eric and Liz instantly realized their team needed to develop synchronicity.

According to Eric, these communication barriers led to miscommunication related issues between VISTAs, VISTA Leaders and VISTA supervisors in multiple ways. He recalls the instance of a particular college educated, hardworking and dedicated VISTA. Despite the fact that the VISTA produced what her supervisors considered "good work" for the community, her unfamiliarity with the communication style and work culture at her host site created tension. Each time the member expressed disagreement, her actions were perceived as confrontational. Additionally, the site failed to clearly express expectations and neither the VISTA nor VISTA Supervisor followed proper procedures to resolve the situation. Eventually the tension escalated and the VISTA left the program.

A lack of common expectations, proper communication channels and understanding of follow up procedure led to resentment and distrust, eventually bringing an interesting AmeriCorps*VISTA project to a stop. Is this scenario familiar to you? Keep reading to discover methods for addressing and overcoming communication barriers.

LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Roadblock Breaker 1: Communicating

HOW-TO GUIDE

OBSTACLE	TIPS/EFFECTIVE PRACTICES	AVAILABLE RESOURCES

What are the basic, **must-do communication practices** for a remote leader?	• **Use Multiple Mediums**: There are multiple methods to communicate and bond with your members: e-newsletters, weekly update e-mails, social networking, message boards, webinars, conference calls, video conferencing blogs, virtual ice breaker activities, etc.
	
	• **Availability and Contact**: Make it easy for your team members to reach you by sharing your schedule and multiple contact methods (e-mail, phone, etc.). Establish a set time that you will be available for calls, chat, instant messaging, etc.
	
	• **Timeliness**: Always respond to requests and needs in a timely manner. This will not only build trust with your team, but help reduce miscommunication.
	
	• **Know Your Team**: Initially spend time learning about team members' personalities, cultural backgrounds, and work habits through both formal and informal conversations. Also make sure to record how each team member prefers to communicate. Consider developing a survey to initiate this task.
	
	• **Feedback:** Ask others for feedback on your listening and communication skills. Ask them what works well and what you can do differently to put your ideas across more effectively.
	
	• **Frequency**: There is a significant relationship between frequency of communication and group performance in distance leadership, so frequent, informal contact with members on a regular basis is
		• **Software Advice and Information**:
		  o techsoup.org
		  o idealware.org
		  o http://www.wiki.techsoup.org/NTC+Virtual+Team+Resources
		• **Webinar Tips**: The following sites include information on how to create exciting virtual presentations/webinars:
		  o http://www.brighthub.com/office/collaboration/articles/86258.asp
		  o www.prezi.com
		  o http://www.presentationzen.com/presentationzen/
		• **Conference Tools:** Telephone, video conference, instant messaging, etc.
		  o **No Cost Conference**: Free conference call services: nocostconference.com
		  o **Freebinar**: Free site to host your own webinars. Once you register, you will have access to screen-sharing and teleconferencing for up to 150 webinar attendees. www.freebinar.com
		  o **Zipcast**: A free meeting space that doesn't require a download. www.slideshare.net/zipcast
		  o **Vyew:** Another free webinar site. No installations required and attendees can interact in a variety of ways. www.vyew.com

important.

- **Regular Updates**: Provide team members with status reports on upcoming changes, deadlines, events, and project progress. Consider utilizing a weekly e-mail or newsletter to circulate this information.
- **Model**: Mastering effective communication and becoming a role model for your VISTAs. This is easier said than done.
  - **Maintain message clarity** and stay consistent with tonality of your language.
  - **Know your audience**. Take into consideration member motives, incentives, personalities, preferences, etc.
  - **Express key points**. Being clear doesn't ensure that the other person will interpret something the way a leader or supervisor wants, therefore ALWAYS describe and highlight key points.
  - **Assess your medium** (e-mail, phone, etc.). Deliberate about the chosen medium and consider the advantages and possible venues for misinterpretation in choosing that medium
  - **Welcome feedback**. Receiving feedback and evaluating the communication channel is critically important.
- **Define Roles**: The VISTA Leader, Program Coordinator, and Supervisor should each have a description of how their job translates into daily activities and support for the VISTA members. Define and share tangible goals and get feedback from all parties to

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- **Jing**: Not exactly a webinar, Jing records up to five free minutes of video of your screen with narration - a good tool to introduce your members to an online resource. Videos may be saved and posted via internet. www.techsmith.com/jing/
- **SlideShare**: A way to share online presentations. They offer a limited free account option. www.slideshare.net
- **Social Networking Tools**:
  - www.linkedin.com
  - www.facebook.com
  - leadersforcommunities.org
  - Guide to Blogs and Social Networking: http://encorps.nationalservi ceresources.org/resources/d ocuments/Technology_Yo uth_ProgramTOOL.pdf
  - Virtual Ice Breakers: http://encorps.nationalservi ceresources.org/warmup_a ctivities_ice_breakers.php

	ensure a successful VISTA year.	

How do I overcome the **lack of nonverbal cues** when communicating from a distance?	• **Tip**: Since you and your VISTAs cannot rely on nonverbal gestures and cues, it is pertinent that each message is conveyed clearly and consistently in order to avoid misunderstanding.
	• **Preparing a Message**: Below is a list of questions you should consider when crafting a message:
	  o What is the overall purpose or main idea I want to communicate?
	  o Why is it important to communicate it?
	  o To whom will I communicate it?
	  o How will I communicate it (face-to-face, in writing, an email, at a meeting)?
	  o What impact is the message likely to have on the receiver?
	  o How will I respond to the receiver's anticipated reaction to the message?
	• **Designing a Message:** The list of questions below will help you design your message clearly:
	  o Is the purpose clear and up-front?
	  o Have I avoided unnecessary words?
	  o Do my ideas flow smoothly and logically?
	  o Did I use bullets and subheadings for visual appeal?
	  o Is each step clearly communicated?
	• **Important Messages**: Nonverbal cues such as a serious face can often convey gravity of a subject matter, but these messages can often be lost when communicating remotely. Therefore, confirm important and new messages, such as complex new	

	assignments or key policies, in writing and in multiple formats. • **Understanding VISTA Interest:** Nonverbal gestures help you understand others' interest levels, comfort level, or general enthusiasm regarding work. As a remote leader, it is important to create multiple channels to gauge VISTA engagement. In order to increase project involvement, invite team members in discussions about setting or prioritizing goals.	
What are the factors I should keep in mind while **communicating in the beginning** of the VISTA year?	• **Take Time:** Many VISTAs are still unprepared after PSOs, and may have lots of anxiety regarding their VISTA position. Take time to go through all the details; explain your program in detail and always end on an encouraging note. • **Setting a Tone**: First impressions matter especially in a remote setting. Initially as a leader, you will have to set the tone. Realize that you have not earned their trust and they don't know anything about you except with the information you present them. As a leader, you will have set a tone so all the VISTAs to create a comfort level and with the Supervisors to create an open environment. • **Creating Familiarity**: Conduct monthly trainings especially in the beginning to help bolster the initial connections and continue to build team member skills. Familiarity based on shared experiences helps create banter which is essential in creating a collaborative environment. • **Policies and Procedures:** Inform supervisors and members of the program processes, procedures and communication lines in case of	

	conflict or emergency. Consider developing a communication chart - it is important that members know who to turn to from the start.	

How do I **identify and address conflict** in my remote team?	• **Blame:** The most common reason for conflict is miscommunication and misinterpretation. Therefore, it is important to be conscious of communication practices and remember to not blame the conflict on any one individual.
	
	• **Tip:** Respond quickly when problems arise, provide each member with the information needed to do the job, involve every member in decisions, and share feedback with one another.
	
	• **Feedback**: In a remote team, members may not share when others let them down. Always follow up with an email and let them know that they have been heard.
	
	• **Facilitating Conflict Resolution:** Identify the individuals involved in the conflict and lead the conversation with the questions mentioned below. Remember to focus on the problem instead of the person.
	  o What did I do that might have contributed to this problem?
	  o What can I do to get things back on track?
	  o What can I do to prevent this from happening again?
	
	• **General Conflict Management Process:** Seven step process for managing conflicts:
	  o Describe what is important to you and why it is important
	  o Check your understanding of what is important to the other person and why it is important.
	  o Identify common ground and look for points of	

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interdependence.
- o Invite alternatives that address your needs/goals and the other person's needs/goals.
- o Use active listening (paraphrase, questions, balanced response) to evaluate alternatives, resolve concerns, and improve ideas.
- o If an alternative isn't immediately available, temporarily remove constraints to invite and propose new alternatives.
- o End the discussion by summarizing key points and stating next steps.

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How do I **manage a project** without regularly meeting face-to-face with my team?

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- **Creating an Open and Collaborative Space**: As a remote leader, you and your team rely on the information shared by every stakeholder in order to perform on a higher level. As such, creating a collaborative and open work environment is essential for effective project management. In order to create an such a space, use the steps below:
  - o A "virtual silo" refers to the tendency of remote teams to become isolated in their work and fail to share roadblocks and findings. In order to break these virtual silos and stimulate interaction, gather your team for regularly scheduled teleconferences to brainstorm and share feedback.
  - o Provide and set up collaborative work spaces to help share information (a blog, website, shared drive, etc.)
  - o During a lower participatory period, remind team members about the importance of sharing experiences and the different

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- **Collaborative Work Spaces**:
  - o www.sites.google.com
  - o www.docs.google.com
  - o www.zoho.com
  - o writeboard.com
  - o Tips on File Sharing: http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/software/page8378.cfm?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_term=gt&utm_content=feb4&utm_campaign=btc
- **Free Surveys and Polls:**
  - o www.surveymonkey.com
  - o www.limesurvey.org
  - o Visit this page for other survey resources (some require a small fee): http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/software/page10744.cfm

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	ways a problem can allow room for innovation. • **Empowering Team Members**: In case the group needs a booster, take a known team members problem and gather the whole group for a problem solving session. This will empower your team to utilize and strengthen skills while building team rapport. • **Supervisor Engagement:** Ensure intentional and regular contact with supervisors at each site. Consider hosting quarterly supervisor teleconferences to ensure all sites are on the same page. Highlight a supervisor's experience in dealing with a challenge and invite others to share their experiences. • **Team Investment:** During your regular meetings use surveys and polls to gauge member interest regarding the project at hand. Encourage a high level of member involvement in every step of a project to properly utilize and develop member strengths, perspectives and competency levels. This will also increase team investment and interest.	

How do I **establish expectations** for my VISTAs and VISTA Supervisors?	• **Team Norms:** The first step to establishing clear expectations is to develop team norms as a group. Do this early in your service year and involve the whole group in this process which includes team members and their site supervisors.
	
	 • **Goal Setting**: During the initial introductory meetings, bring the group together to establish shared goals and vision. Doing this will bring in clarity and make team members feel included. Moreover, from time to time, involve team members in discussions about
		• Recommended sources of communication for different functions:
		     o **Emails** - Group wide information, pertinent information, highlights, new and or difficult information, tasks and assignments.
		     o **Phone calls** - Most effective for personal conversations and should be used when addressing concerns.

	reorganizing or prioritizing goals to increase commitment. • **Write it Down:** Confirm important communications, such as complex new assignments or key policies, in writing. • **Updates**: Provide all the team members, including both team members and supervisors, with status reports on upcoming changes. Sharing information in a common email helps create a team mentality.	
How do I **build trust** with my team members in a remote setting?	• **Clarify Commitment**: At the outset, make sure your team members and supervisors know your role and make verbal and written commitments. Never commit to anything you don't think you can follow through on. • **Informal Contact:** Have frequent and informal contact with members on a regular basis, but remember to use their time well. Often a quick, personal e-mail or phone call will go a long way in making a team member feel valued. • **Know Your Team:** Learning about one another is essential to building relationships and ensuring successful remote teams. • **Small Steps**: Keep in mind that "trust" can mean different things to different generations, cultures and individuals, so start with small steps. These small steps can include professional training resources that help them further pursue their personal and or professional goals, an e-mail to say thanks completing a task, etc. • **Work First**: Due to the distance, the initial interaction between the remote leader and team is often superficial and short term. Therefore, start by focusing on moving from **task-based trust*** to	• **Recommended Book:** *Managing Virtual Teams – Getting the Most from Wikis, Blogs, and Other Collaborative Tools*. Brown, Huettner and James-Tanny. Wordware Publishing, 2007. • **Building Trust**: Tips to help you build trust in a virtual environment: http://www.ittoday.info/ITPerformanceImprovement/Articles/2010DecNSM.html

	interpersonal trust by communicating openly and honestly, leading by example, employing consistent team interactions, and being accessible and responsive. ○ *** Task-based trust** occurs when remote team members are responsive, follow through on commitments and take responsibility for results. Start with establishing competency, move towards defining integrity and finally help develop personal connections in order to create a relationship. ● **Talk about trust early on**: It can be awkward to discuss trust right up front. Most teams wait for a team breakdown to bring it up, but by that point it may be too late. With a remote team, it's hard to discern when, how or why trust has been breached. That's precisely why it's so important to put it on the table at the outset. ● **Encourage team members to discuss behavior that builds, and breaks trust:** Guide the team in creating norms that help cultivate trust and minimize opportunities to cause friction. For example, how will team members ask for help or admit when they're behind? What's the best way to address and manage frustrations and misunderstandings? Such norms create guidelines for new members and serve as a checkpoint for all members, should problems arise.	
How can I help my **group members build trust** among each other?	● **Interactive Space**: Create an interactive space so the team members have an informal reason to interact with others in the group. Use blogs and other resources to start an exchange of ideas. ● **Collaborative Environment Tips**:	● **Team Communication**: Encourage VISTA members to use all available technology – telephone conversations, teleconferences, video conferences, e-mail, social media websites, blogs, voice

	An atmosphere that fosters collaboration among team members automatically facilitates trust and relationships. A few suggestions include: ○ Keep reinforcing a message of mutual reliance and trust. ○ Remind the team of their shared goals and the role each team member plays in successfully achieving those goals. • **Feedback**: Ensure that remote team members are comfortable giving feedback to one another in a virtual setting. Teach them to question ideas with open ended questions and to use team-based language vs. first-person language.	mail, instant messaging, etc. – to stay in touch with the each other. • **Collaborative Work Spaces**: ○ www.sites.google.com ○ www.docs.google.com ○ www.zoho.com ○ writeboard.com ○ Tips on File Sharing: http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/software/page8378.cfm?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_term=gt&utm_content=feb4&utm_campaign=btc

INTRODUCTION

ROADBLOCK DESCRIPTION: Connecting
How to identify meaningful ways to create, strengthen and enhance relationships-at-a-distance for both: • Interpersonal connections • Team connections

Definition/Scope of the Problem

The ability to build trust, and in some cases *re-build* trust, is the major component of connecting, bonding and creating rapport with your VISTA members. Building trust is difficult for any team, but it is especially difficult for teams working remotely whose members have few opportunities to interact face-to-face. As a remote team, problems are much harder to detect, and can be awkward to address – and when teams span different cultures and regions, misunderstandings can crop up more frequently. In addition, virtual teams rarely allocate special time for relationship building. So when times are tough, it's almost impossible to drop everything for the kind of heart-to-heart talks that can repair relationships.

In this section, you will discover various tips and resources to help you create rapport and charisma on your team as you journey through the service year.

The Symptom Checker: *If you check yes to any of the following symptoms, **communicating** may be a Roadblock your team needs to address:*

☐ I feel that I do not know my VISTA members' personal interests.
☐ I don't know my VISTA members' long term goals.
☐ I need ideas for helping my remote members relate to each other.
☐ I don't know which technological tools to use to develop a productive and supportive team.
☐ I sense a need to establish trust between my team and myself.
☐ My team needs to feel comfortable sharing experiences and ideas with each other.

Words from the Field: *Linda Jordan, Hands On Network/GenerationOn (2010 – 2011)*
Being a VISTA Leader at a national organization has various advantages, but it also presents some challenges. During Linda's year of service, she and her co-VISTA Leader were responsible for connecting and providing resources for 47 VISTA members serving at affiliate organizations. The members were located in every time zone and focused on various projects ranging from parental engagement in schools to financial literacy. One of their goals was to connect the VISTA members, and establish a sense of community. They wanted the VISTAs to be aware that in addition to the work they were doing locally, the members were also part of a much larger, national movement. It was initially very challenging to connect with all of the members, let alone connect the members to each other. The Leaders started by scheduling biweekly phone calls to explain the role of the VISTA Leader, inquire about training needs or general concerns surrounding their service-year, and to become familiar with their project and with the members as individuals. The initial outreach was extremely important to establish a relationship and demonstrate that a VISTA leader can be a great resource and advocate. After the initial contact and follow-up calls, the Leaders established "office hours," or, a set time where the VISTA members knew that a VISTA Leader would be available to answer questions by phone. Moving forward, the Leaders embraced social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Wordpress to establish a sense of community. VISTA members were requested to contribute to the Wordpress blog. The member-generated content provided a wealth of material surrounding general VISTA concerns and regarding a specific issue (i.e. food security, service-learning, or youth engagement). It was discovered that while the VISTA members were working on diverse projects, many of them shared professional development and training needs. The VISTAs were surveyed to see what kind of training they would find helpful and hosted several webinars over the course of the year. On occasion, the VISTAs contributed to the presentation. A monthly e-newsletter was sent which featured helpful information concerning upcoming training, important dates and relevant resources. In addition, the Leaders connected members working on similar projects, via email, phone and conference call, to enable them to share best practices, successes and strategies.

LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Roadblock Breaker 2: Connecting

HOW-TO GUIDE

OBSTACLE	TIPS/EFFECTIVE PRACTICES	AVAILABLE RESOURCES
How do I **build trust** with my remote team members?	• **Talk about trust early on**: It can be awkward to discuss trust right up front. Most teams wait for a team breakdown to bring it up, but by that point it may be too late. With a remote team, it's hard to discern when, how or why trust has been breached. That's precisely why it's so important to put it on the table at the outset. • **Encourage team members to discuss behavior that builds, and breaks trust:** Guide the team in creating norms that help cultivate trust and minimize opportunities to cause friction. For example, how will team members ask for help or admit when they're behind? What's the best way to address and manage frustrations and misunderstandings? Such norms create guidelines for new members and serve as a checkpoint for all members, should problems arise. • **Clarify Commitment**: At the outset, make sure your team members and supervisors know your role and make verbal and written commitments. Never commit to anything you don't think you can follow through on. • **Informal Contact:** Have frequent and informal contact with members on a regular basis, but remember to use their time well. Often a quick, personal e-mail or phone call will go a long way in making a team member feel valued. • **Know Your Team:** Learning about one another is essential to	• **Recommended Book:** *Managing Virtual Teams – Getting the Most from Wikis, Blogs, and Other Collaborative Tools*. Brown, Huettner and James-Tanny. Wordware Publishing, 2007. • **Building Trust**: Tips to help you build trust in a virtual environment: http://www.ittoday.info/ITPerformanceImprovement/Articles/2010DecNSM.html

	building relationships and ensuring successful remote teams. • **Small Steps**: Keep in mind that "trust" can mean different things to different generations, cultures and individuals, so start with small steps. These small steps can include professional training resources that help them further pursue their personal and or professional goals, an e-mail to say thanks completing a task, etc. • **Work First**: Due to the distance, the initial interaction between the remote leader and team is often superficial and short term. Therefore, start by focusing on moving from **task-based trust*** to interpersonal trust by communicating openly and honestly, leading by example, employing consistent team interactions, and being accessible and responsive. • *** Task-based trust** occurs when remote team members are responsive, follow through on commitments and take responsibility for results. Start with establishing competency, move towards defining integrity and finally help develop personal connections in order to create a relationship.	

How do I **get to know my members?**	• **Invite members to reveal a piece of themselves at every opportunity.** Realize some people dislike "chatting" on team calls, especially when time is of the essence. Others feel they can't really trust another without knowing something about the real person behind the voice.
	 • **Make it easy** and fast for people
		• **Social Networking Tools**:
		     o www.linkedin.com
		     o www.facebook.com
		     o leadersforcommunities.org
		     o Guide to Blogs and Social Networking: http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/documents/Technology_Youth_ProgramTOOL.pdf

	to reveal a little bit of information about themselves. For example, you can ask people to answer a quick (non-invasive) personal question as they log in/dial in, such as "What is the title of the last book you've read?" or "Describe what you like best about this season." Little by little, people will develop a deeper sense of the whole person, enabling them to forge connections they may otherwise never have been able to make.
	
	   o **Team Blog**: Develop a team blog and ask members to respond to questions or topics (personal or professional) on the blog. Consider asking team members to take turns blogging at intervals.
	   o **Survey**: At the beginning of service, ask members to complete a short "All about Me" survey online. Keep the survey light and be respectful about the questions you ask – don't get too personal or invasive.
		o Virtual Ice Breakers: http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/warmup_activities_ice_breakers.php
		• **Free Blogging Sites**
		   o www.yolasite.com
		   o www.wordpress.com
		   o www.blogger.com
		   o www.livejournal.com
		   o www.webs.com
		   o www.sites.google.com
		• **Surveys and Polls:**
		   o www.surveymonkey.com
		   o www.limesurvey.org
		   o Visit this page for other fee based survey resources: http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/software/page10744.cfm

How do I get **team members to visualize** each other?	• **Face Time**: Even though your team may not be able to meet face-to-face, technology provides easy ways to "see" one another on a regular basis. This simple low-tech tool is a very effective way to keep team members in the mind's eye during virtual meetings and online conversations: o When you can't bring the team together in one room, help make them feel like they're together by creating a simple team photo. Ask team members to share a digital photo of themselves, whether	• **Building Trust**: Tips to help you build trust in a virtual environment: http://www.ittoday.info/ITPerformanceImprovement/Articles/2010DecNSM.html

	a candid shot, family portrait, professional head shot, etc. Cut and paste the images together to create a team photo, perhaps sitting around an imaginary conference table ready for your next virtual meeting. Add names to the photos and share the collage with the team and include it in every webinar PowerPoint. Consider asking members to post it on their wall and near their phone.	
How can I help **build camaraderie** with/among my team?	• **Make everyone a star**! Celebrate individuals as a team. Here are a few ideas to keep things light and build a team mentality: o **Video**: If all of your team members have access to a video camera, ask them to make videos of themselves in their own work environment (or in their favorite setting) to share with others—maybe by posting online, attaching in an email, or embedding into a blog. This will help team members get a better feel for each other's environment without having to travel. You can make this a contest by awarding "best video" for funniest clip, cleanest office, etc. o **Take turns facilitating:** Have VISTAs take turns facilitating networking calls to give others a chance to facilitate the meeting. o **Group Project**: Allow the team to develop a project (whether work related or not) that can be collaborated on from a distance. Make sure each team member has a role in bringing the project together. Perhaps members can collect donations or work on a	

	similar project at each site – then compile the amount raised/donated, etc. and applaud the team for the effort involved. Let them be creative in conceptualizing this!	
How soon does my team need to connect?	• The "connectivity function" is especially important **when a new team is forming or new members are coming on board.** • It is also important for team leaders to **connect with all team members**, to maintain a level playing field and avoid being seen as playing favorites. • Eventually, team members will be spurred on to **connect with each other** on their own volition.	• **Team Website**: ○ sites.google.com ○ Guide to creating a free program website through Google Sites: http://www.box.net/shared/egdl7suscw

LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Roadblock Breaker 3: Cheering

INTRODUCTION

ROADBLOCK DESCRIPTION: Cheering
How to maintain or increase individual enthusiasm, team commitment and sense of ownership of the project.

Definition/Scope of the Problem

Motivation is key for the continued success and growth of any VISTA project. Each team is composed of individual members with different abilities, skill sets, and motivational aspirations. Teams of individual VISTA members working under the same organization also need to be nurtured to develop a sense of ownership of the project and team identity. VISTA Leaders and VISTA Supervisors are tasked to engage each VISTA member and develop a functional VISTA team.

The challenge of motivating VISTA members and VISTA teams becomes compounded when one steps into the role of a VISTA Leader or VISTA Supervisor leading team members remotely from another building, city, or state. Enacting the right motivational tactics for each situation and communicating those resolutions is a difficult obstacle for remote leaders as the try to motivate their team members.

In this section, you will discover various tips and resources to help motivate and encourage your team members as they develop during their service year.

The Symptom Checker: *If you check yes to any of the following symptoms, **communicating** may be a Roadblock your team needs to address:*

☐ My VISTA is from out-of-state and is unfamiliar about the area where they are serving
☐ My VISTAs communicate that they feel overwhelmed
☐ My VISTAs feel isolated
☐ My VISTAs don't feel like a team
☐ My VISTA doesn't have the direction they need to get motivated about their project
☐ My VISTAs may feel like they are "spinning their wheels" and not on track with their project
☐ My VISTAs often call me to vent the frustrations they are feeling about their supervisor or the project site
☐ VISTA Supervisors frequently contact me with concerns about their VISTA

Words from the Field: *Sara Martinovich, Team-Up for Youth (2010 – 2011)*

For VISTA Leaders and VISTA Supervisors who support their VISTA members remotely, the task of motivating members during their service can be a specific and difficult challenge to address. As a VISTA Leader with Team-Up for Youth, Sara Martinovich supports 10 VISTA members throughout the state of California and knows the issues associated with leading from a distance. She knows that when VISTA Leaders or Supervisors are at the same site as VISTA members it is easy to motivate them to perform at their peak potential. Informal gatherings and casual conversations naturally present an opportunity for VISTA members to share their accomplishments, large and small, with staff members and organizational leaders. These casual encounters can motivate a member as a result of one staff member's interest in the VISTA.

However, as a VISTA Leader, Sara has found it hard to recognize the minor achievements of her VISTAs without these day-to-day casual meetings. From a programmatic standpoint, Sara is typically unaware of a VISTA's success unless it impacts the organization as a whole. Knowing that a VISTA is achieving a lot for the organization but not receiving the credit they deserve can become disheartening to both VISTA and VISTA Leader. This makes the check-in process essential for keeping members engaged and accountable to the VISTA program.

Measurable outcomes for success also play into how motivation is felt by VISTAs working remotely from their Leader or Supervisor. "When you aren't sure what success looks like for a member of your team, feedback like 'good job' or 'you're doing great' seems phony and detached," Sara affirms. When a VISTA is lacking motivation or feeling apathetic, often they crave face-to-face conversation and feel uncomfortable telling a Leader that they do not like their position or supervisor. Remote leaders must be capable of detecting when VISTA members are in need of some encouragement and cheering despite the lack of face-to-face interaction; this may require the development of a strong Leader-Member relationship early on in the VISTA's service. VISTA supervisors may be great allies for a remote leader with their insight on when the VISTA produces great work and when the VISTA is in need of motivation and support.

Reflecting on an episode when two VISTAs transferred host organizations half-way through their service term because of a lack of support from the site, Sara mentions that "the transfer process took months and in the meantime, the VISTAs had to endure an uncomfortable stay at their original site. I would continue to tell them how thankful I was that they were flexible and I encouraged them to complete the tasks on their VAD, acknowledging that their current situation wasn't ideal." Frustrated by the slow process, it was hard for everyone to stay positive; eventually the VISTAs were transferred while maintaining good spirits throughout the process.

In hindsight, Sara says that she wished she could have better connected her team with other VISTAs and VISTA Leaders in their area so they had another outlet to express their frustration. "It's hard to cheer someone on when you know they really just want you to listen and NEED an actual person to talk to, not a phone."

LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Roadblock Breaker 3: Cheering

HOW-TO GUIDE

OBSTACLE	TIPS/EFFECTIVE PRACTICES	AVAILABLE RESOURCES

How can I **motivate my VISTAs** if their enthusiasm for service begins to wane?	• **Enthusiasm Dip:** Usually, though not always, VISTA members experience a dip in their level of enthusiasm around month 3 or 4. As a remote leader, anticipating the times when a VISTA may need support will help strengthen your relationship and foster trust.
	   o **Note**: A lack of enthusiasm from one VISTA may affect the VISTA Team's overall morale.
	• **Acknowledgement**: Supporting and acknowledging accomplishments are simple ways to recognize a member's contribution to the program. Make VISTA accomplishments visible to staff and others using a virtual newsletter or mention them on conference calls.
	• **Take turns facilitating**: Ask members who are excelling in a particular area to help facilitate meetings.
	• **Developing a Relationship:** Connect early with your VISTAs to establish a relationship. As a remote leader the opportunities to get to know your members may decrease once they are fully engaged in their project. Be proactive and develop a relationship when they are still figuring things out. Developing a relationship early will help VISTAs feel comfortable approaching you when they have questions or problems.
	   o **Note**: Connect with VISTAs before PSO Training so they have a better sense of who you are and how you can help them.
	• **Building Trust:** To help build trust
		• **Coaching Guide**: Help motivate your members using this free online guide: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/resources/leadershi p/coaching.php
		• **Volunteer**: Websites for members to find local volunteer opportunities and discover other service agencies:
		   o www.handsonnetwork.org
		   o www.volunteermatch.org
		   o www.idealist.org
		   o www.dosomething.org
		• **Stress Management**: A guide about stress and how you can coach members to identify, address, and overcome it: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/resources/life_after _americorps/stress_survival_g uide.php
		• **Visioning**: Help your VISTAs envision their goals and map them out: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/resources/leadershi p/visioning.php

	outside of the professional environment ask your members how they are doing personally. Let members know you are there to support them in any way you can. **It may be necessary to talk with them privately, after-work hours**, because the issues that they are facing may be work related. Be open and flexible to their needs and establish boundaries before "getting in too deep." Video Chat, instant messaging services, and free conference call lines are low cost ways to keep in touch. • **Achieving Goals:** Engage the VISTA in a conversation about their personal goals and how service is helping them to achieve those goals. Since remote leaders are not engaging their VISTAs every day, making note of their goals and revisiting them whenever you talk will help re-focus and re-engage a waning VISTA. • **The Personal Touch:** Send cards or other hand-written notes to individual VISTAs to let them know you are thinking of them. Little reminders that someone is supporting their efforts will go a long way in making a VISTA feel valued. • **Being Available to VISTAs:** Responding to requests promptly paves the way for continued encouragement. No one likes to feel ignored or put on the back burner. As a remote leader be mindful that other people are busy too; make an effort to address their needs when possible.	
How do I help **a VISTA who has**	• **Connect with the Community:** Suggest ways in which the VISTA	• **www.meetup.com**: An online networking resource that helps

relocated to serve adjust to the culture of their service community?	could engage in their community, i.e. seek out other volunteer projects, community associations, church affiliations, or like-minded groups. Encourage them to find community groups or activities by visiting local libraries or community centers. Explore the area by taking walking tours. Suggest joining an intramural sports team or book club.
	• **Network:** Other VISTAS or AmeriCorps members are in the area; suggest looking for them. Local AmeriCorps Alum groups are located in many communities too.
		people organize local groups or find local groups meeting face-to-face. Their mission is to "revitalize local communities and help people around the world self-organize."
		• **Volunteer**: Websites for members to find local volunteer opportunities and discover other service agencies:
		  o www.hadnsonnetwork.org
		  o www.volunteermatch.org
		  o www.idealist.org
		  o www.dosomething.org
		• **AmeriCorpsAlums.org**: A national network of alumni from the AmeriCorps national service (including NCCC, VISTA and pre-AmeriCorps VISTA). Their goal is to get alumni connect, equip and engage alumni in order to foster their natural leadership drive and potential.

How can I help **a VISTA that feels confined** in their work and believes they could be doing more or something different?	• **Tip:** Have a conversation with your VISTA about what they would like to take away from their experience and what initially motivated them to serve. Use yourself and your previous VISTA experience to exchange ideas. As a distance leader, help define the expectation of success and what it can look like for your VISTA. • **Empower the VISTA:** Brainstorm ideas about what else they can contribute; have the VISTA discuss this with their supervisor. Follow up with them at a later date to see what came out of their meeting with their supervisor. • **Challenge the VISTA:** VISTAs can	• **Visioning**: Help VISTAs envision their goals and map them out: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/resources/leadershi p/visioning.php • **Reflection:** Have VISTAs reflect on their experiences, and what they can learn from them. http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/mt_reflection.php • **Empowerment**: Read more about empowerment and how to apply it on your team: o http://www.managementski llsadvisor.com/employee-empowerment.html

	be challenged in a manner that is appropriate for their skill level and time commitments. As a remote leader, by developing a challenge with them, you can stay in the loop about how they are doing and what more you can do to support them. • **Capacity Building**: Utilizing site supervisor support, help the VISTA explore capacity building activities at their organization. Consider expanding on activities outlined in the VAD. • **Tip:** Ask the VISTA if they would like to facilitate a networking call or upcoming training. • **Mentoring:** Encourage the VISTA to take on a role as a leader by mentoring and supporting a less experienced VISTA.	o http://www.teambuildingin c.com/article_cookies.htm
How can I help a **VISTA who is not receiving the adequate direction** or guidance from their supervisor?	• **Engage:** Make the effort to check-in with this VISTA more regularly. The lack of attention and direction can lead to a lack of encouragement, make sure you engage them often so they don't feel isolated and leave the program. • **Managing Up:** Educate the VISTA in the technique of "Managing Up" and the importance of learning how to ask for a supervisor's time. Also encourage the VISTA to speak with their site supervisor about the lack of direction. • **Develop More Support:** Find other staff members at their organization that the VISTA can look to for guidance. Designate another staff member to function as the VISTA's supervisor when the actual supervisor is unavailable. • **Supplementing Support:** Ask another VISTA member to mentor this VISTA and provide another	• **Managing Up**: Review these articles on "Managing Up" to become familiar with the term and ways to practice it. o http://online.wsj.com/articl e/SB122511931313072047 .html o http://www.moneyinstructo r.com/art/managingup.asp o http://blog.penelopetrunk.c om/2006/11/03/7-ways-to-manage-up/ • **OSOT**: The following resource contains info and tips on affectively utilizing the On-Site Orientation Training: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/vista_orientation.p hp

	source of support. • **Review Expectations**: Ask the site supervisor and the VISTA to review the On-Site Orientation expectations and agreements discussed at the beginning of the VISTA term. Ask the site supervisor and the VISTA if they feel like they are honoring those expectations and agreements.	

How can I help **a VISTA who feels overwhelmed with the scope of their project** and stressed out?	• **Questions to ask:** Is the VISTA is taking on more projects than they are realistically able to accomplish? Is the VISTA having a hard time saying "No" to new projects or tasks? Is the project site asking the VISTA to do non-capacity building activities?
	• **Time Management:** Is the VISTA needs help managing their time? If this is a problem, it may be an issue others are also dealing with and hosting a training on the topic may be worth the effort.
	• **Break it Down:** Help the VISTA break the project down into appropriate chunks of time. Help put issues in perspective of the "bigger picture."
	• **When to Check-In:** Determine how frequently you and your VISTA should check-in to answer any questions that have come up and how progress is coming.
	• **Review what is Stressful:** Suggest some de-stressing activities. As a remote leader, you can't see the individual stressors on a VISTA; remind them that life is more than work.
	• **Healthy Balance**: Help the VISTA put things in perspective and acknowledge that their work, although important, is also only one part of their life. Suggest they
		• **Time Management**: The following websites contain helpful articles on time management and other leadership related issues:
		  o www.mindtools.com
		  o www.managementskillsadvisor.com/time-management-tips.html
		• **Healthy Balance**: An article on the topic of work-life balance: http://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/5-strategies-for-life-balance
		• **Stress**: A guide about stress and how you can coach members to identify and overcome it: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/resources/life_after_americorps/stress_survival_guide.php

	evaluate their work-life balance and how that may be affecting their ability to manage their work stress.	
How do I **address the challenges** that several of my VISTAs that are facing?	• **Translate Challenges:** Translate the challenges faced by some VISTA members into a situation that can be used as a training experience for other team members who may yet face these same motivational challenges in the future. • **Define Challenges & Plan Ahead:** Develop a conversation about the issue being faced. A formal training or an informal networking event may be ways to approach this topic. • **Utilize your members**: Have members share their current/past challenges and how they handle(d) these experiences. • **Focus on Opportunities:** Help VISTAs focus on the opportunity that this challenge can serve; try to document the ongoing conversation so new VISTAs will be able to avoid it. • **Other VISTA Leaders**: Other VISTA Leaders (VL) may be invaluable to your search for a solution; determine if other VLs are having similar challenges with their VISTAs and how they dealt with the situation.	• **Facebook**: Join the VISTA Leader group to stay connected to colleagues and hear about upcoming webinars and training opportunities (you must have a FB account and log in to join): https://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_112551362145813 • **Stress**: A guide about stress and how you can coach members to identify and overcome it: http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/life_after_americorps/stress_survival_guide.php. • **Leadership**: Help your VISTAs learn about the skill building opportunities that they may be overlooking during their challenges: http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/mt_leadership.php
How can I make my **VISTA group feel like a** *Team?*	• **VISTA Visibility:** Make VISTA accomplishments visible to staff and others using a virtual newsletter. • **Group Networking:** Provide a time for VISTAs to network with one another and talk about themselves and what they are doing. • **Leading the Team:** Have VISTAs take turns facilitating networking calls to give others a chance to facilitate the meeting.	• **Motivation**: This article is directed toward IT managers, but it includes good advice on team motivation for any leader: http://www.techrepublic.com/article/dont-give-up-on-team-morale-problems/6176697 • **Team Projects**: Ideas and opportunities for members to get involved in a project

Define the Space & Collaborate: Develop a networking area for VISTAs to collaborate on. Use a shared blog or website. **Work Similarly & Collaborate:** Create a VISTA service/work project that everyone will work on together. Use a shared blog or website. **Engagement Beyond Work:** Find a topic that everyone has in common (work related or not) and create a conversation or activity to engage everyone. **Dream Together:** Draw or conceptualize dreams/desires/visions for the team and/or individual members; refer to this shared or individual vision periodically. **Mentoring & Support:** Pair VISTAs up as "buddies" to mentor and support one another. **Recognize member birthdays.** It's always nice when someone says, "Happy Birthday!" Take the time to send a card through the mail.	together: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/member_team_pro jects.php **Book Club**: Use a book to help facilitate a group dialogue. The following is an example of how to engage members in a discussion about the communities they are serving through a narrative approach: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/2008/08/poverty_tr aining.php **Free Blogging Sites** - www.wordpress.com - www.blogger.com - www.livejournal.com - www.webs.com - www.sites.google.com **Volunteer**: Websites for members to find local volunteer opportunities and discover other service agencies: - www.hadnsonnetwork.org - www.volunteermatch.org - www.idealist.org - www.dosomething.org **Visioning**: Help VISTAs envision their goals and map them out: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/resources/leadershi p/visioning.php
How can I support my **VISTA who is having conflicts** with other VISTAs, site supervisor, or their host	**Questions to ask the VISTA:** Is this a communication issue? What do you feel the conflict is? Know the issue from the VISTA perspective before moving forward. Don't assume to know what's going on. **Communicate with VISTAs:** Be proactive about the problem facing	Conflict Resolution: EnCorps resources dedicated to the topic of conflict resolution: http://encorps.nationalservicere sources.org/mt_conflict.php

organization?	• your VISTA; find out that there is a problem *before* it escalates. Communicate with VISTAs, early and often. The last thing you want is a VISTA who feels isolated and leaves the program. • **Define Conflict:** Explore the possible sources of conflict with the VISTA. Not being at the site means a remote leader needs their VISTA to fill them in on the situation. • **Mediation**: Use an intermediary at the site to help facilitate a conflict resolution discussion.	
How can I support a **VISTA who is transferring** to a different host organization?	• **Communicate with VISTAs:** Be proactive about the problem facing your VISTA; find out that there is a problem *before* it escalates. • **Prior to Month 3:** Communicate with VISTAs, early and often, before their 3 months of service is completed. By the third month of service VISTAs should have an idea whether or not they and the organization are a good fit. • **Communicate with Program Coordinators:** Talk to your Program Coordinator as soon as you hear about the issue; there may be ways to mitigate problems before the VISTA needs to leave their host site. • **Chain of Command:** Generally, if a VISTA or host site is not satisfied with the placement they should contact the Site Supervisor and VISTA Leader, or Project Coordinator, if needed. If the issue is larger than the Project Coordinator is able to accommodate, contact your State Program Specialist. • **Keep Everyone in the Loop:** Moving VISTAs within umbrella	• **CNCS Contacts**: Use the local State Program Office and State Program Specialist to help get everyone on the same page. A directory of State Offices is located here: http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp

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organizations can get complicated; be available to help answer questions from the VISTA, host organizations, and State Specialist. During these times of complication, promptly respond to voicemails and e-mails so everyone is in the loop about the situation

- **Inform the Team:** If your VISTA is certain they will be transferring to a different host site, have them update the VISTA Team about their new site and transfer status.
- **Project Engagement:** Make sure VISTAs are busy and have projects to do when they are in the process of transferring. The situation will be stressful for everyone so keeping people busy and focused will alleviate some tension and help bring some normalcy to the situation.
- **Professionalism as a VISTA:** Teach the VISTA how to close out of their program strongly and professionally. Remote leaders should strongly emphasize professionalism to ensure that host organizations continue to hold the program in high regard long after an individual VISTA's term of service.
- **Note:** If a VISTA is moving from one program to another it is the job of CNCS and *not* the VISTA Leader to facilitate the transfer. Because members commit to a limited span of service, CNCS tries to accommodate changes in host sites early in the VISTA's service. Generally, CNCS will consider a transfer to a different host organization up to month 3 after the VISTA begins their service. There are rare case-by-case exceptions.

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LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Roadblock Breaker 4: Cultivating

INTRODUCTION

ROADBLOCK DESCRIPTION: Cultivating
How to promote project success and sustainability in distance-led teams by: • Facilitating Professional and Resource Development • Fostering VISTA competence to effectively seek out and find tools/resources

Definition/Scope of the Problem

Every VISTA Leader is charged with the roles of Facilitator/Educator and Resource Generator. The Leader's task is to identify opportunities for growth in each individual member and for the team as a whole. As is the nature of AmeriCorps, members hail from a variety of backgrounds and experience levels. These disparities become a particular difficulty for distance leaders as members are spread across geographic locations as well; compound this with the reality of multiple funding streams, resources, and community partners at each site, and cultivating member development becomes a distinct roadblock for remote VISTA Leaders.

In this section, you will discover various tips and resources to help equip and empower your team members as they transition through their service year.

The Symptom Checker: *If you check yes to any of the following symptoms, **communicating** may be a Roadblock your team needs to address:*

☐ My VISTAs often express feeling overwhelmed
☐ My VISTA members consistently lack initiative and follow-through
☐ I am unable to name/provide resources and contacts for VISTAs at remote sites
☐ There is a lack of progress in my project toward specific project milestones
☐ VISTA supervisors in my project verbalize a lack of key skills and abilities in VISTA members
☐ I often feel overwhelmed by requests for assistance in my e-mail and voicemail
☐ Our VISTA projects seem to be stalled
☐ The "Challenges" narrative is the longest section of my Progress Report!

Words from the Field: *Andrew Snyder, Kentucky Campus Compact (2010 – 2011)*

As a VISTA Leader, Andrew Snyder took on the challenge of supporting a team of VISTA members spread across the state of Kentucky. Among a myriad of challenges Andrew encountered as he began his service, cultivating members neared the top of the list. Says Andrew, "The distance the VISTAs have to travel when we meet for a team training often means more than a full-day time commitment, which greatly complicates finding a date that fits into everyone's schedule." He also sites lack of funding for travel reimbursement and difficulty in arranging schedules as obstacles to cultivating member development.

As a result of the long-distance struggles, some of the VISTA members in his project became increasingly isolated. These members maintained only minimal, required contact and were unlikely to seek out the VISTA Leader as a helpful resource. "When a VISTA becomes this isolated," says Andrew, "it is much more difficult to find training topics and opportunities, plan logistics for a training, and receive post-training feedback."

After losing short-term training funds, Andrew's ability to train project members faced serious jeopardy. He took immediate action by contacting member institutions and host sites for ideas and assistance. Says Andrew, "The result of these conversations was a new way to provide training to the VISTAS through regular webinars, for which a member institution donated use of their software." The webinars enabled Andrew to gather his team and facilitate trainings throughout the state without leaving his desk.

Andrew also implemented an online collaboration site through Google Sites. The website allows VISTAs to upload files and share resources with one another. "Each member is a collaborator and can post questions to the group, thoughts about their service, and tips on surviving on the VISTA living allowance," says Andrew.

The collaboration site also opened the door for a Question of the Week reflection program. Each week, Andrew posts a question on the website for the team to answer and discuss. Questions generally focus on topics such as hunger, homelessness, sustainability, and project updates. Another reflection training piece Andrew tried out was a book reflection. "We read one of the articles [in the book] every two weeks and then the VISTAs rotate responsibility for leading an online discussion of the article," says Andrew. "My VISTAs seem to enjoy it and are much more engaged with discussion."

This team project helped bring the group together. States Andrew, "I think that anything you can do together with your VISTAs working as a team, no matter how far away they are, will strengthen their experience and enhance any training program you have developed."

As a word of advice to remote VISTA Leaders, Andrew says, "Communication and patience are the two most important characteristics for the VISTA Leader of a distance project. With good communication, the level of trust rises, and VISTAs remember to turn to you for help and advice, which to me is the biggest reward of this position."

HOW-TO GUIDE

OBSTACLE	TIPS/EFFECTIVE PRACTICES	AVAILABLE RESOURCES

How do I **determine training needs** for VISTA members when I am not present at the sites?	• **Progress Report**: Always make sure to review the narrative section of your progress reports to glean challenges or obstacles your site may be facing.
	
	• **Survey**: Ask make sure to inquire about VISTA needs at the beginning, middle and end of the service year. Phone calls or surveys with open ended questions like, "What do you see as your biggest challenge?" may open up the conversation. As your VISTA member transitions out of AmeriCorps, make sure to find out what trainings they found most helpful and/or wish they'd had.
		• **Free Surveys and Polls:**
		  o www.surveymonkey.com
		  o www.limesurvey.org
		  o Visit this page for other survey resources (some require a small fee): http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/software/page10744.cfm

How do I **conduct trainings** when my members are spread across many miles/sites?	• **Virtual Meeting**: Teleconferences and webinars are common professional tools used in nearly every field. You have the opportunity to share PowerPoint presentations, documents, and instant messages in real time. Don't forget to utilize members and specialists in your network to help develop and/or facilitate these trainings as needed. They may be willing to facilitate a Virtual Meeting.
	
	• **Read and Respond**: Develop a reader-friendly document (or utilize an existing one) that covers the main points of your training. Forward this to your VISTA members and ask them to answer a set of prepared questions about the reading material through e-mail or team blog. If training funds are available, consider purchasing a book (virtual or print)
		• **Webinar Tips**: The following sites include information on how to create exciting virtual presentations/webinars**:**
		  o www.prezi.com
		  o http://www.brighthub.com/office/collaboration/articles/86258.asp
		  o http://www.presentationzen.com/presentationzen/
		
		• **Free Webinar Sites:**
		  o **Freebinar**: Free site to host your own webinars. Once you register, you will have access to screen-sharing and teleconferencing for up to 150 webinar attendees. www.freebinar.com
		  o **Zipcast**: A free meeting space that doesn't require a download. www.slideshare.net/zipcast

	for each site. Members can respond to each chapter on a blog or by e-mail to ensure they are reading the text.	o **Vyew:** Another free webinar site. No installations required and attendees can interact in a variety of ways. www.vyew.com o **Jing**: Not exactly a webinar, Jing records up to five free minutes of video of your screen with narration – a good tool to introduce your members to an online resource. Videos may be saved and posted via internet. www.techsmith.com/jing/ o **NOTE**: most *free* webinar websites are supported by advertising. • **Free Blogging Sites** o www.yolasite.com o www.wordpress.com o www.blogger.com o www.livejournal.com o www.webs.com o www.sites.google.com
How do I **facilitate site specific trainings** for the needs of a particular VISTA member at a remote site?	• **Tip:** Make sure to communicate with the supervisor at the VISTA's host site. They may have access to agency or local trainings to assist the member. • **Resource Websites**: Quality information and resources are only a click away: see the "Available Resources" section for a few sites that provide articles and resources for many common VISTA topics (fundraising, volunteer management, grant writing, etc.). • **Online Trainings:** There are often webinars and trainings offered online through CNCS or other service partners. Make sure to stay connected to other VISTA Leaders	• **nationalserviceresources.org**: Tools and training for volunteer and service programs • **encorps.nationalresources.org**: Resources to support member recruitment and development • **www.vistacampus.org**: One-stop shop for VISTA-specific information on a variety of topics • **Local Libraries**: Many libraries offer/advertise trainings on a variety of topics. Research libraries for each of the sites in your agency or encourage members to seek these out.

	through Facebook and other networking tools.	• **Facebook**: Join the VISTA Leader group to stay connected to colleagues and hear about upcoming webinars and training opportunities. (you must have a FB account and log in to join): https://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_112551362145813

How do I **collect/provide resources** when members are in different locations and regional resources are different for each site?	• **Host Knowledge:** Don't forget about the host agency supervisor, staff and community. Provide your members with a list of individuals they can go to for assistance.
	• **Resource Sharing:** Ask members to collect information about resources utilized by their agency (provide a draft of categories like Volunteer Recruitment, Promotions, Coalitions, etc.). Compile these and distribute to the team - this will empower VISTAs to explore the community, increase personal knowledge of resource, and serve as an idea generator for members as they view resources used in other communities.
	• **Team Blog**: List compiled resources (as referenced above), or ideas for seeking trainings/resources, on a team blog or website.
		• **Resource Sharing Blog (example):** A compiled list of community resources using the resource sharing method: vistasintheville.webs.com
		• **FREE BLOGGING SITES**
		  o www.yolasite.com
		  o www.wordpress.com
		  o www.blogger.com
		  o www.livejournal.com
		  o www.webs.com
		  o www.sites.google.com

How do I ensure my team members have **face-to-face support and assistance** in their respective regions?	• **Supervisor Check-in**: Sometimes supporting your VISTAs means supporting their supervisors. Encourage supervisors to access the resources available through VISTA Campus. Check-in with members and supervisors on a regular basis to ask about supervision and support. • **Collaborate**: Vital information, support and connections for your VISTA may be just an agency away. o **Group Collaboratives**: Many	• **CNCS Contacts**: It's a good idea to have contact information for the State Office for each of your VISTA sites. This will help you get in touch with local VISTA members and Leaders and keep in touch with any state-specific news. A directory of State Offices is located here: www.americorps.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp

	areas have local, program specific collaboratives. These groups often share best practices, join together for promotional, recruitment and training events, etc. Site supervisors may be aware of these collaboratives, and some groups may have official websites as well. If needed, VISTA members may wish to begin a collaborative by connecting with like-minded agencies. o **Associates**: Encourage VISTA members to contact agencies or individuals working with similar populations and/or problem areas within their region to hear more about what is going on in the area and discuss possible partnerships. o **Local VISTAs**: Contact respective VISTA Leaders and/or the State Offices to see if you can connect your member with other VISTAs in their area. Consider requiring your members to report one VISTA connection per quarter to encourage collaboration.	• **VISTA Campus**: One-stop shop for supervisors to access relevant information and tools and bump their VISTA program to the next level o www.vistacampus.org

LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Training the Remote Leader Toolkit

TRAINING THE REMOTE LEADER TOOLKIT INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Training the Remote Leader Toolkit. This resource is intended for use by supervisors and other affiliates as they seek to equip and empower distance leaders. The toolkit is **a supplement to the Leading from a Distance Module**; in order to adequately utilize the training material, we recommend facilitators become familiar with the entire module.

There is one training section for each of the **Four Roadblock Breakers** covered in the module:
1. **Communicating**
2. **Connecting**
3. **Cheering**
4. **Cultivating**

In each training section, you will find the following:
- **Key Points**: *Three main points of the Roadblock to focus on in training*
- **Open Ended Questions**: *To encourage discussion/reflection*
- **Activities**: *To illustrate key points and encourage discussion/reflection*
- **Action Steps**: *To promote positive change and application after the training*

The Training the Remote Leader Toolkit can be tailored to develop separate trainings on individual Roadblock Breakers or combined to offer one comprehensive Leading from a Distance training session. Please feel free to edit and adapt any portion of the toolkit to best fit the needs of your project and/or remote leader(s).

LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Training the Remote Leader Toolkit

TRAINING THE REMOTE LEADER TOOLKIT
Communicating

KEY POINTS *of the Roadblock to focus on in training*
1. All virtual leadership tools and skills rely on **effective communication** and key factors to communicating effectively include being open minded, being clear, listening and providing feedback.
2. Virtual teams **build relationship** and **trust** by frequent and informal interactions.
3. Establishing **clear expectations** and **engaging** team members through **goal setting** is key to an engaging team members and creating a successful team.

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS *to encourage discussion around key points*
- Please remember, everyone listens and processes information differently and therefore, it is crucial to uncover and become sensitized to the other person's style of communication. Use the questions below to help the remote leader understand personal communication style, assumptions, expectations and responses.
1. How do you communicate openly, without prejudices, expectations and judgment?
2. How can you add value to a conversation by allowing the other person to contribute?
3. What are some of your assumed expectations for your team? What reactions and outcomes result when expectations are not met?

ACTIVITIES *to illustrate key points and encourage discussion/brainstorming*
1. **Effective Communication**: *Fear of rejection, disapproval and criticism along with lack of feedback and organization are the main reasons for failure in communication. In order to establish a team, form relationships and eventually collaborate and perform successfully, every step of the remote leader experience will require communicating effectively. Discuss the following*:
   a. **Failure in Communication**: As remote leader to think of a stressful incident induced by breakdown in communication, then discuss the questions below:
      i. What were the immediate results of that situation?
      ii. Did that incident hurt their relationship with the person involved?
      iii. What could have they down to salvage that situation?
   b. **Feedback**: Consider the questions below and describe how others may answer these questions.
      i. How do you prefer to *receive* critical feedback? In what manner and for what attributes?
      ii. How do you prefer to *give* feedback? In what manner and for what attributes?
      iii. Do you prefer to *receive* feedback the same way they *give* it?
2. **Building Relationships**: *Most of us take it for granted how much sharing office space, eating meals together and seeing one another on a regular basis contribute to creating a relationship. In a virtual setting these daily workplace activities are forgone and become luxuries that should be cherished. Discuss the following methods to build improve team relationships*:

a. **Virtual Ice Breakers**: When with working remote teams, the purpose of icebreakers is critical. VISTAs represent a diverse group of dedicated volunteers who have chosen to serve their country. Use this common service commitment to create a conversation and get to know each member of the group. In the beginning, VISTA Leader and Supervisor should put an emphasis on conversation starter icebreakers that revolve around individual passions.

b. **Social Media Guru:** Before you jump onto the Facebook-Twitter- LinkedIn-Blogs-Chat Session bandwagon, consider the question - do you know how to use these various platforms correctly? Does the whole team know how to use which platform to convey what message? **Social media is an affordable and informal tool through which a leader can build relationship with their team but before using it in professional setting, master the use of these platforms for your personal life.** VISTA Leader and VISTA Supervisor should consider how many people within their own circle they keep up with using the social media tools? What are the messages others respond to? Would similar messages help build their relationship with team members?

3. **Goal Setting**: Over 80% of conflicts in a team are attributed to **unclear goals**, 16% to **unclear roles** and 3% to **unclear processes**. Discuss each of the following areas with the remote leader:

   a. **Goals**: Defining tangible goals and coming together to share them and get feedback is a necessary step in ensuring a successful VISTA year. Are you clear on your personal, project, and organizational goals? You must first know where you are going in order to guide team members there.

   b. **Processes**: Think about your last professional or education experience. Where there processes and procedures that you needed to know in order to get the job done? Who introduced you to these? How can you make sure the transfer of procedural knowledge passes on to your team members?

   c. **Define Roles**: What roles do your team members need to know (VISTA Leader, Program Coordinator, Supervisor, etc)? Take time to define how these job descriptions translate into daily activities. Remember to include what kind of support each role offers to the team members.

ACTION STEPS *to promote positive change and accountability after the training*

1. **Effective Communication:** *Mastering effective communication requires a lot of patience and an understanding of personal and group assumptions. Encourage remote leaders to practice the following steps with their team*:

   a. **Maintain message clarity** and stay consistent with tonality of your language.

   b. **Know your audience**. Take into consideration member motives, incentives, personalities, preferences, etc.

   c. **Express key points**. Being clear doesn't ensure that the other person will interpret something the way a Leader or Supervisor wants, therefore ALWAYS describe and highlight key points.

   d. **Assess your medium**. Deliberate about the chosen medium and consider the advantages and possible venues for misinterpretation for choosing that medium.

   e. **Welcome feedback**. Receiving feedback and evaluating the communication channel is critically important.

      i. **Feedback Questionnaire**: Ask the whole team to consider the questions below:

-How do you prefer to *receive* critical feedback? In what manner and for what attributes?

-How do you prefer to *give* feedback? In what manner and for what attributes?

-Do you prefer to *receive* feedback the same way they *give* it?

2. **Building Relationships**: *The action steps below will help jump start relationship cultivation from the very beginning. Encourage remote leaders to incorporate the following at the beginning of their service year:*

    a. **Icebreaker Conference**: Even before a project orientation meeting, it is recommended to dedicate a whole session to orient the group by introducing key contacts and the history of the program. Invite all the team members and supervisors to join this session so that they can meet the group of people they will be serving with. This meeting can be modified depending on the size of the group. <Visit this site for virtual icebreaker ideas and tips: http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/warmup_activiti es_ice_breakers.php>

    b. **My VISTA Story**: In order to learn more about your team members, their passions and how they fit into the VISTA project, ask everyone to write their VISTA story. You can start by asking why they chose to serve with AmeriCorps*VISTA for a year. Post the answers in a format so that everyone can read them and learn a little more about where each member comes from (blog, website, e-newsletter).

3. **Creating a Common Vision and Setting Goals**: Encourage remote leaders to incorporate the following steps and tips as they begin to make goals for their team:

      i. **Team norms and ground rules**: During a project orientation it is critical that the group devotes some time to come up with team norms and ground rules. Engage the group to decide on:

-A designated channel/medium for team communication

-The assumed timely manner to respond to emails and assignment when a "due date" or time is not readily apparent

-How the group is plans to support, accept and encourage differing opinions within the team

      ii. **Creating goals:** Besides establishing general professional team norms, it is pertinent to include VISTAs in establishing project and program goals for their service year. The most common mistake recognized throughout many VISTA programs is that supervisors fail to explain how their member's project goals complement the organization's overall goals. VISTA Leader and VISTA Supervisors need to **describe the program and project goals and program evaluation methods** so that the VISTAs don't feel lost and are equipped with appropriate information in order to contribute effectively.

TRAINING THE REMOTE LEADER TOOLKIT
Connecting

Key Points *of the Roadblock to focus on in training*
  How to build trust using
  1. **Reliability**
  2. **Integrity**
  3. **Competency**
  4. **Familiarity** with your members

Open Ended Questions *to encourage discussion around key points*
  1. What written commitments could be given to team members to build reliability?
  2. How can a leader build integrity with the team?
  3. How will a leader utilize a team member's competencies to promote individual success and high team performance?
  4. How can a remote leader encourage familiarity *with* team members and promote familiarity *between* team members?

Activities *to illustrate key points and encourage discussion/brainstorming*
  1. As you discuss the open ended questions above, place a flip chart or pages on a wall and capture key thoughts and ideas mentioned. Refer back to these thoughts as they are reinforced throughout the training.
  2. Ask attendee(s) to recall a time they connected well with a team. What was the result?
  3. A valuable activity resource you might consider researching is ThinkerToys, Michalko, Michael. 2006. Ten Speed Press.

Action Steps *to promote positive change and accountability after the training*
  1. **Team Survey**: Encourage remote leader to develop a written survey for members during the first week of leadership. The goal is to begin the relationship-building by allowing members to share about themselves. Suggest that they model this by prefacing the survey with their own answers to the questions. Some examples of possible questions to include in the survey:
      a. Why did you decide to become a VISTA?
      b. Where do you see yourself in _____ years?
  2. **Commitments and Expectations**: Have the remote leader create a written list of commitments and expectations to all team members during the first two weeks of service and provide this for their team. Make sure to encourage feedback from team members and site supervisors.
  3. **Self Analysis**: Ask remote leader to perform a self analysis of using this tool (From Pulling Together, Murphy, John J., Simple Truths, 2010.):
      a. As a VISTA Team Leader, evaluate yourself with this checklist:
          i. Are you modeling trust and integrity?
          ii. Are you trustworthy? What specific evidence do you have on a day-to-day basis that proves this? How do you know?

iii. Do you demonstrate courage, fearlessness, trust and inspiration?   Is it who you are and not just what you do?

iv. Are you covering for your team members when need be?

v. Are you openly sharing pertinent information?

vi. Are you honest and candid with your team?

vii. Do you show up on time?

viii. Do you finish on time?

ix. Do you walk your talk?

x. Do you hold yourself personally accountable for exceeding expectations?

xi. Are you visible and approachable?

xii. Do you invite "push back" and divergent points of view?

xiii. Do you treat people with dignity and respect, demonstrating that you value the "me" in each individual enough to transcend the team to a "we" orientation?

TRAINING THE REMOTE LEADER TOOLKIT
Cheering

KEY POINTS *of the Roadblock to focus on in training*
1. Make sure your VISTAs have Goals defined for themselves so they feel like they are accomplishing something during their service.
2. Be mindful of the challenges that VISTAs express and document them accordingly. Other VISTAs may experience the same situations.
3. Team cohesion happens over a period of time and cannot be rushed. Get to know each member of the team before trying to take on the team itself. Using more experienced VISTAs to mentor newer members can help you develop your team and connect members.

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS *to encourage discussion around key points*
1. What could you do to help a VISTA who feels overwhelmed by the scope of their VISTA Assignment Description or other projects that the host organization has asked the VISTA to complete?
2. What steps would you take to motivate a member to stay passionate about their project when they are not getting good feedback or coaching from their supervisor?
3. What can you do to develop a team identity and purpose as leader?

ACTIVITIES *to illustrate key points and encourage discussion/brainstorming*
1. **Backwards Timeline – Goal Setting Exercise:** Use this *Goal setting activity to help VISTAs budget their time wisely and to keep them motivated on a personal, professional, or educational goals.*
   a. Find a monthly calendar and copy three consecutive months (ex. January, February and March).
   b. Tape the sheets together chronologically to create a 3-month visual diagram; this will be your time frame.
   c. Have your VISTAs plan an event to occur using this 3-month visual diagram.
      i. Select an end date (ex. Mar. 21st)
      ii. Starting with the end date, work backwards work backwards toward the start date; count the number of weeks until start date (ex. Jan. 5th)
      iii. Count and mark the number of weeks on the side of the calendar. Begin by counting the week prior to the deadline as Week 1 (ex. the week of Mar. 13th would be Week 1, the week of Mar. 6th would be Week 2, etc)
      iv. Mark the weeks that are **halfway between the end and start dates** (ex. the week of Feb. 6th)
      v. Mark the week that is **halfway between the start and halfway point** (ex. the week of Jan. 24th)
      vi. Mark the week that is **halfway between the halfway point and end date** (ex. the week of Feb. 27th)
      vii. Mark hard deadline dates of when documents need to be submitted (ex. Jan. 16, Feb. 7, Feb. 17, Mar. 3)

       viii. The calendar now has hard deadlines and check-in points. Develop more check-in points as necessary.

       ix. Develop action items that should be done by each check-in point or hard deadline.

2. **Overcoming Common VISTA Challenges:** *Use common VISTA Challenges to frame your motivational thinking*
   a. Give an example of a common issue that many VISTAs may face during their service year.
   b. Talk about how you would set-up and facilitate a networking conversation or training session about the challenge you described.
   c. What would be the end result of your networking conversation or training session?
   d. Brainstorm other issues that many VISTAs may face.

3. **Opportunity Thinking:** *Opportunity thinking is concerned with positive assessment. It ranges from the logical and practical at one end to dreams, visions, and hopes at the other end.*
   a. Ask the group to suspend judgment for the following exercise.
   b. Tell them that they will be receiving an unorthodox statement and their challenge will be to find the up side, the potential positive outcomes.
   c. The group's challenge is to look at through the lens of opportunity. What positive things could come from this?
   d. Critically judging the statement ends the game.
   e. ASK the group: What if our arms were twice as long?
   f. What good could come from this?
   g. Give everyone 3 minutes to write down their thoughts. Remind them to see the opportunities that can arise out of the situation.
   h. Have the group share what they wrote down after 3 minutes.
   i. Everyone thinking in the same direction at the same time is called parallel thinking.
   j. Opportunity Thinking requires deliberate thought. It is not as easy as critical thinking. It is worth the effort because new ideas, breakthroughs, persistence, and hope come from Opportunity Thinking.
   k. You can adapt this to help VISTAs that are having a difficult time with a situation find the opportunities that come with all of the challenges. This is also a great opportunity to develop team cohesion about service.

ACTION STEPS *to promote positive change and accountability after the training*
1. Within each VISTA's first month of service ask them what their goals are for the year.
   a. Develop a road map of goals they would like to accomplish during their service; have the VISTA write it down, send you a copy, and put a copy where they work.
   b. Make it open ended and ask them to add goals as they see fit.
   c. When a VISTA feel stuck or down about their service, revisit the goals they set for themselves.
   d. Check-in with them about how their goals are coming along.
2. Ask your VISTAs if they feel like they are being challenged enough with the projects that they currently have or if they would like to add something different.

    a. Not all VISTAs begin their VISTA year with the same skill sets and abilities.

    b. It is the remote leader's responsibility to make sure that their VISTAs are appropriately challenged by their projects throughout the VISTA service year.

    c. For a VISTA who feels stressed out all the time, talk with them about what you can do for them and what they can do for themselves to lighten the work strain.

    d. If your VISTAs feel like they are not challenged enough, brainstorm with them on how they can address that and how to communicate that to the supervisor/organization.

3. Create a space for VISTAs to get to know one another and share resources, tips, and challenges. Optional monthly networking meetings might be a good avenue for this.

    a. Keep the conversations positive; don't let them turn into gripe sessions.

    b. Let the VISTAs do the talking and support the conversation when needed.

    c. Developing a monthly newsletter of VISTA Accomplishments to share with your organization and other VISTAs creates a way for your VISTAs to feel validated and part of a team.

TRAINING THE REMOTE LEADER TOOLKIT
Cultivating

KEY POINTS *of the Roadblock to focus on in training*
1. Determining/Meeting VISTA Needs
2. Utilizing Technology and Online Tools
3. Local Resources and Knowledge Sharing

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS *to encourage discussion around key points*
1. What personal training needs have you encountered as a VISTA? How were these needs met?
2. How does the Internet/technology affect modern communication? Positives? Negatives?
3. Who are the stakeholders you can approach to help your members connect in their respective communities?

ACTIVITIES *to illustrate key points and encourage discussion/brainstorming*
1. **Needs Activity**: *To help identify methods for involving/empowering other stakeholders to be involved in the cultivation process*
   a. Ask VISTA Leaders to share common VISTA training needs - list these where team members can seem them.
   b. Ask VISTA Leaders to identify common project stakeholders (VISTA members, VISTA Leader and team members, host agencies, community partners, target population, etc.) - you may wish to provide this list yourself.
   c. Referring back to the list of stakeholders, ask the group to brainstorm ways each stakeholder can assist with meeting the common training needs identified.
2. **Technology Definitions**: *To introduce specific technological tools and their applications*
   a. Provide a definition for each of the following: Teleconference, Webinar, Blog, Social Networking, Podcasts or any others you find helpful. Consider providing examples of each. *<The following article outlines several common online tools:* http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/documents/Technology_Youth_ProgramTOOL.pdf*>*
   b. Ask VISTA Leaders to discuss how each tool could be helpful in cultivating team members (specific examples). Write these ideas on a board or poster as they are discussed.
   c. Ask VISTA Leaders to share any experiences they've had utilizing these tools in the past.
3. **Synergy Exercise**: *To explore the concept of synergy and emphasize the benefits of collaboration*
   a. Provide a list of 25 trivia questions (consider questions related to VISTA history, pop culture, historical facts, etc.). Ask VISTA Leaders to individually answer as many questions as they can (include a time limit). When time expires, read off the answers and have VISTA members grade their responses (1 point for each correct answer).

b. Now read through the answers a second time. Award the group 1 point for each question at least one member in the group was able to answer correctly. Compare this final group score with the individual scores of the team.

c. DISCUSSION: Read the definition of Synergy: *"The sum is greater than its parts."*

    i. Ask members to discuss how this was exemplified in the activity.

    ii. How can this apply to cultivating a VISTA team?

ACTION STEPS *to promote positive change and accountability after the training*

1. **CULTIVATION PLAN**
   a. Have each VISTA Leader individually list the following:
      i. **Stakeholders**, including specific names/titles, available to assist with cultivating members (supervisors, specialists, community partners, etc.)
      ii. **Needs** already determined or foreseen in the project
      iii. **Methods** available to determine future member needs as they arise (periodic VISTA check-ins, supervisor interviews, surveys)
      iv. **Questions** or issues that need to be addressed before moving forward in the cultivation process

2. **TRAINING BLOG**
   a. Develop a training blog for attendees before the start of the session (you may wish to use this as an example when discussing media tools)
   b. Ask members to log in and post a short reflection on the blog within one week of the training session. This will encourage members to consider/apply training principles.

3. **RESOURCE SHARING**
   a. Refer to the Resource Sharing tip in the How-To section of the Cultivating module. Encourage VISTA Leaders to develop a plan to complete this exercise with their VISTA teams.

LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
Acknowledgments

THANK YOU!

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LEADING FROM A DISTANCE
ALC Team Bios

Rebekah Farley: *Louisville, KY*

Having worked for two years with youth aging out of foster care as a VISTA member at the Boys and Girls Haven Mentor Program, Rebekah is currently the VISTA Leader for the Americana Community Center (ACC) VISTA Project, a position that encompasses 7 agencies and 12 VISTA members in Louisville. While ACC provides services primarily to immigrants and refugees, the project as a whole covers everything from food literacy, to education, to career services in diverse, low-income communities throughout the city. Says Rebekah, "My hope is to leave behind an encouraging, sustainable network for VISTAs in the Louisville community to connect and collaborate with one another."

Rebekah Farley graduated from Asbury University in 2007 with a B.A. in Communication Arts. She hopes to utilize her education and experience to continue working in some capacity in the nonprofit sector.

Swati Karandikar: *Washington, DC*

Swati served her first VISTA term with Alamo Area Mutual Housing Association in San Antonio, Texas developing curricula, training staff, and collaborating with local organizations and partners to offer Financial Literacy classes and utilize other asset building programs. She currently resides in Washington, DC and serves as the VISTA Leader for the NeighborWorks America VISTA Program. Her position provides support and training to 87 VISTA members at 38 NeighborWorks Network Organizations across the country. "I consider it my fortune to have served as a VISTA and be part of the legacy of such a wonderful program," says Swati. "As a VISTA Leader I hope to strengthen the capacity to serve a large group of VISTAs from a distance."

Swati graduated in 2009 from the University of Wisconsin–Madison with a B.A in Economics. She hopes to utilize her educational background and VISTA service to make a positive contribution to our society.

Bonnie Roberts: *Atlanta, GA*

Bonnie first served as a VISTA member with VITA, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, through United Way of Palm Beach Co., Florida. There she helped recruit and train volunteers to be certified by the IRS to prepare taxes for free for low to moderate income households. She also facilitated application for family assistance programs such as food stamps, Medicaid and unemployment benefits, and was involved with financial education targeting budgeting and home buying programs. Currently Bonnie is the VISTA Leader for the Georgia Commission for Volunteer and Service statewide VISTA project.

Bonnie has a B.S. in Education from the University of Delaware and a graduate degree in Liberal Arts and Gerontology from Florida Atlantic University. Her personal goal is to set an example in her family for giving to America and serving others. She hopes to continue AmeriCorps service in a project targeting housing issues or social service case management needs.

Chris-Michael (CM) Tena: *Sacramento, CA*

CM served his first VISTA year with the California Conservation Corps (CCC) at their Monterey Bay Operations satellite in Watsonville, California. He developed career development curricula and post-corps opportunities, recruited and trained volunteers, assisted with training events, and developed marketing materials and partnerships with the surrounding community. CM now serves as VISTA Leader for the CCC VISTA Project placing 19 VISTAs throughout the state of California at CCC centers and Local Conservation Corps partner locations. Says CM, "My goal is to leave behind a legacy of motivated and committed VISTAs empowered by the resources and training available to them to serve their communities in a sustainable capacity."

CM graduated in 2009 from the University of California, Santa Cruz with a B.A. in Sociology. He plans to return to school and pursue a career in Student Affairs in higher education and continue to help underserved communities grow to their peak performance potential.