



A Supervisor's Guide to

FINDING AND SELECTING
EXCELLENT VISTA
LEADERS

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Introduction:

Welcome to the Supervisor's Guide to Finding and Selecting *Excellent* VISTA Leaders! This handbook was created to help VISTA Leaders, program supervisors and other staff members successfully and efficiently recruit and select for the VISTA Leader position. This project was initiated by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) after realizing an area of need within the VISTA Leader Program. The three VISTA Leaders who contributed to this project—Brad Hunter, Kathleen Burkhardt, and Patrick Magee-Jenks—applied their own experiences from successful VISTA Leader terms and conducted original research to determine the most effective information to provide, and to deliver best practices in recruitment. For this project, 7 CNCS State Program Specialists and 11 Program Supervisors were interviewed, and over 100 VISTA Members and 30 VISTA leaders were surveyed to distill information about the experiences regarding VISTA Leaders and their recruitment processes.

How to Use this Guide:

This guide contains important background information that will be useful as you consider the benefits of a VISTA Leader and what sorts of traits, experiences and leadership to look for as you recruit for your program. As you use this guide, consider it a set of basic, but essential, tools to apply to your own strategy for recruitment. Remember, no two programs have the same needs and expectations from their VISTA Leader. This guide was created to be useful and relevant to as many supervisors as possible. These ready-made materials and resources are meant to be altered at your discretion as they help you create vital documents to recruit for and fill your VISTA Leader position.

Through assessing the needs of your VISTA members, considering the roles and attributes most valuable to your program, and determining the organizational importance of bringing in “fresh blood” versus promoting from within, you will craft a solid approach to your recruiting strategies that will enable you and your program to get the most from the materials contained within this document. Because the VISTA program is, by design in many ways, a stepping stone in members' career paths, career development opportunities for VISTA members takes on new significance when viewed from the perspective that each member has the potential to become a great leader for their peers.

By working through this guide, you will be able to clearly articulate what sort of candidate would best fill the position, advertise and market the opening, assess and evaluate applicants, and ultimately place your new VISTA Leader and empower them to bring their strengths into the position, as your organization continues to foster the skills and growth of your members.

VISTA Leader Traits, Definition, and Benefits

The VISTA Leader traits, definition, and benefits below were all established by analyzing the results of the surveys and interviews conducted by this team. The most common themes and results were synthesized to give the best understanding of an effective VISTA Leader.

Traits:

- Excellent communicator
- Organized
- Flexible
- Passion for helping VISTA's succeed
- Good 1st VISTA term
- Personable and professional

Definition:

The VISTA Leader role, in its essence, is doing everything possible to ensure that the VISTA members have a good year of service. This encompasses many different areas that include the 6 VISTA Leader roles included in this guide as well as the intangible benefits that having an experienced peer in the program to mentor VISTA's both professionally and personally can provide.

The Corporation for National and Community Service defines the AmeriCorps VISTA Leader position as a select group of former AmeriCorps VISTA members who help recruit, mentor, and coordinate teams of members serving with large projects or within a given region. Just as VISTA members work to expand and build the capacity of community projects, Leaders work to expand and build the capacity of individual VISTA Members and their respective project sites.

Benefits to Supervisors:

- Peace of mind that VISTA's are able to access another skilled and experienced individual for support, problem solving, and other needs that arise professionally and personally
- Having access to an esteemed former member who understands the VISTA program and the VAD
- Free the Supervisor to stay focused on project feedback and moving the project forward to completion, while the Leader deals with daily interactions with members
- Assist supervisor in maintaining required paperwork and keeping communication open with project sites/state office
- Preventing and/or managing conflicts before they escalate and require supervisor involvement
- Dividing responsibilities for project management

Roles of the VISTA Leader

Ambassador

Ambassadors are representatives or messengers for certain organizations or interests. VISTA Leaders represent and promote national and community service in their region of service. Leaders also serve as a spokesperson and advocate for VISTA and his or her sponsoring organization.

Facilitator/Educator

Facilitators are those that help to bring about an outcome by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance, guidance, or supervision. Leaders serve to help identify VISTA members' learning and development goals and work with them to achieve those goals. Educators are responsible for conveying knowledge, skills, and attitudes to group members. This transfer of knowledge, skills, and attitudes may occur both formally and informally as Leaders serve as a teacher, instructor and/or role model.

Mentor

A mentor is a trusted counselor or guide. In this role, leaders seek to influence and guide VISTA members toward achieving the goals set out in their VISTA Assignment Description (VAD). Mentoring can be a peer-to-peer relationship or it can be a relationship between an individual with more experience who shares information and skills with one who is less experienced. Mentoring can also be a combination of the two in which varying levels of experience in different areas can be shared within the partnership.

Liaison

A Liaison is someone who connects two or more individuals or groups. In this role, the VISTA Leader identifies the relationships and needs of key players, such as self, members, sponsor, state office and community. These needs may include resolving conflicts between a VISTA member and the sponsor site, or connecting a VISTA member with someone who can help her to meet her project goals.

Resource Generator

Resource Generators identify and build relationships that lead to the acquisition of needed resources. These resources generally include, but are not limited to, money, materials, supplies, people, knowledge, information, partnerships and alliances. VISTA leaders will serve to actively identify, link, educate and connect yourself and other VISTA members with those who have power and influence when it comes to getting the resources you need. This role is often dependent on your ability to build and constantly expand a network of relationships.

Recruiter

Recruiters persuade others to connect their abilities and expertise to achieve common goals. A recruiter finds the right VISTAs when VISTA positions are available. VISTA Leaders in this role are responsible for "selling" the VISTA positions within his or her agency. It also means being able to connect someone's skills and desires with the requirements and vision of the position and the shared VISTA goal of eliminating poverty.

Recruitment Resources

➤ **Current Members**

Current members already know the organization and VISTA well. If you have a good candidate for leadership already within your ranks, begin talking with them now about the VISTA Leader opportunity. Most projects report the highest success rates with VISTA Leaders when they are able to develop members who had already served a year at their project.

➤ **Current VISTA Leaders**

No one knows what this experience takes more than your current Leader. Your leader also likely has access to a greater Leader and VISTA community that he or she can use to network and get the word out about the position.

➤ **eGrants**

Members seeking to do more service will be looking on their my.americorps.gov portal page. The supervisor's side of the portal, it is known as eGrants. Having an inviting position description posted on eGrants is a great way to attract qualified candidates to apply for your VISTA Leader opportunity.

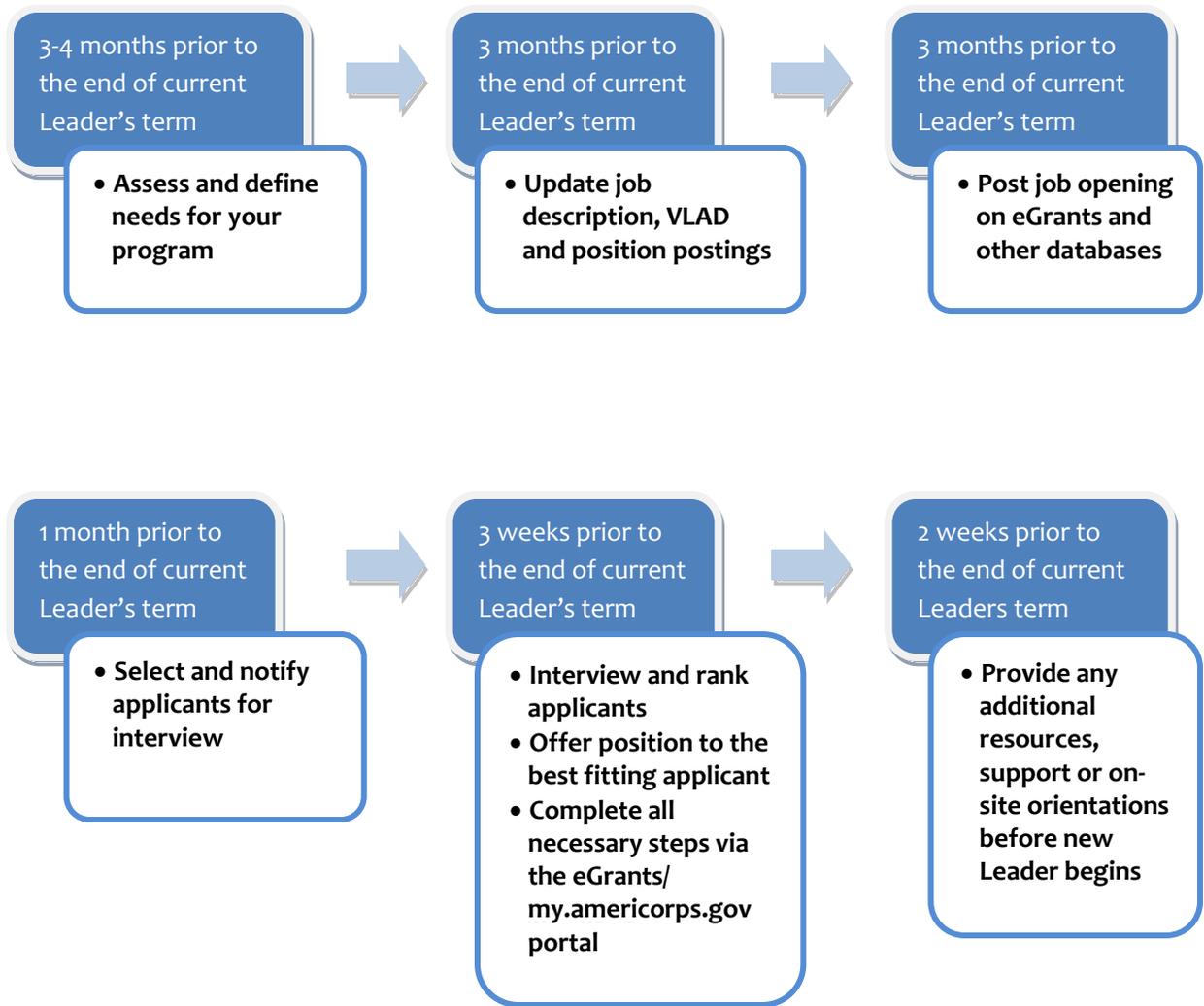
➤ **State Office/Other projects in the state**

Connect with other projects in your state or region or use your State CNCS Office to help you do so. Other project sites might have exemplary members they could recommend to you for the Leader position you are trying to fill.

➤ **Idealist.org and local classifieds**

In terms of the classifieds recruitment hierarchy, www.Idealist.org might be the last place you would want to consider posting the Leader position if other methods are not yielding enough interest. Idealist.org is a likely place former VISTAs will be looking for opportunities after their service year. They might not have known about or have fully considered the possibility of becoming a VISTA Leader, so this could be a likely way to catch good candidates and help them reconsider the possibility of serving another year.

Recruitment Timeline



Sample Position Posting

GENERAL POSTING:

Draw from these suggestions to advertise your program and the VISTA Leader position.

Be a Leader in the national service movement! If you're looking to gain leadership experience and handle more responsibility consider applying to be a VISTA Leader. Not only will you be continuing the fight on poverty by aiding fellow national service members, you will be gaining access to valuable training opportunities and critical skills and experiences to help you develop and achieve your professional goals. VISTA Leaders also receive a stipend increase from their first VISTA year.

As a VISTA Leader you will be a resource to the VISTA members you serve with doing everything from recruiting and mentoring to generating resources for your members. The VISTA Leader will play an instrumental role in helping to coordinate the VISTA program towards achieving its goals. Successful Leaders will have a passion for guiding their members and will be excellent communicators who have great initiative.

The VISTA Leader will:

- Increase VISTA project effectiveness;
- Increase VISTA project sustainability
- Increase VISTA Member effectiveness
- Increase VISTA recruitment
- Decrease VISTA attrition
- Foster greater communication between VISTA members and their sponsoring organization
- Facilitate a learning community among VISTA members within a state or region
- Enhance training for VISTA members
- Provide an extended service opportunity for VISTA members to demonstrate outstanding leadership skills and abilities; and
- Promote leadership development within the national service field

AmeriCorps*VISTA Leader Assignment Description (VAD)

VISTA Project:

VISTA Member Name:

Site Name:

Assignment Area:

Date:

VISTA Member Activities and Steps Checklist

Goal 1: *Serve as VISTA Leader for ORGANIZATION project VISTA members.*

**Planned
Period of
Work**

Comments/Summary of Accomplishments

Quarters
1,2,3,4

Activity 1: **Become versed in ORGANIZATION service areas.**

1

- Step 1: Attend trainings and workshops as recommended by ORGANIZATION site supervisor.
- Step 2: Regularly review professional publications in areas of ORGANIZATION services. Keep pertinent articles on file.
- Step 3: Learn best practices in areas of ORGANIZATION services.
- Step 4: Learn operational procedures of ORGANIZATION (program approval process, executive functions, role of the board, etc.)
- Step 5: Examine members VADs and study the specific service areas they pertain to.

Activity 2: Plan member development and training

1,2,3,4

VISTA Member Activities and Steps Checklist	Planned Period of Work	Comments/Summary of Accomplishments
<p>Step 1: Resource collecting and sharing: Collect resources developed by VISTA members related to building partnerships, fundraising, program development, etc. Compile these resources in a useful format for all VISTA sites to use in support of related work</p> <p>Step 2: Assess member training needs. Assist VISTAs in accessing avenues for development and training within <u>ORGANIZATION</u> and within the community.</p> <p>Step 3: Collaborate with <u>SUPERVISOR</u> to develop and implement a training plan. Plan and execute at least two in-service trainings and an end of the year.</p>		
Activity 3: Establish communication plan for member engagement	1,2,3,4	
<p>Step 1: Assess and respond to member needs regarding integration into host site and community</p>		
<p>Step 2: Assess and respond to member needs regarding site relations and project related issues</p>		
<p>Step 3: Facilitate communication amongst and between VISTA members. Formally check-in each month with VISTAs through phone calls, email, site visits etc. to provide support, ensure that activities are in compliance with VISTA mission and member VAD, and answer member questions as they arise as well as inform and remind members of upcoming deadlines, events, etc.</p>		
<p>Step 4: Assist members establish record keeping and data collecting systems for required reporting, ensure required reports are completed in a timely fashion.</p>		
<p>Step 5: Prepare a VISTA quality of service survey to be distributed on a quarterly basis.</p>		

VISTA Member Activities and Steps Checklist	Planned Period of Work	Comments/Summary of Accomplishments
Goal 2: Support <u>ORGANIZATION</u> VISTA Project		
Activity 1: Communicate regularly with other VISTA Leaders, Project Supervisors, and Project Director	1,2,3,4	
Step 1: Facilitate communication amongst and between VISTA Leaders and relevant Project Staff via conference calls and email to share information about progress with overall VISTA project plan and seek any support and guidance that is needed to move program forward.	1, 2, 3, 4	
Step 2: Assist with evaluation of member training and training plans.	2, 3, 4	
Step 3: Review members monthly progress reports, aggregate and summarize information.	1,2,3,4	
Step 4: Collaborate with other VISTA Leaders and Project Staff in member communication.	1,2,3,4	
Activity 2: Coordinate with other VISTA Leaders and Project Staff to sustain and grow recruitment goals to ensure project stability and continuation.		
Step 1: Assess current recruitment methods, determining best practices.	1	
Step 2: Develop a recruitment plan and create related materials.	2,3	
Step 3: Implement plan.	3,4	

VISTA Member Activities and Steps Checklist	Planned Period of Work	Comments/Summary of Accomplishments
Step 4: Assist in candidate screening and new member onboarding.	4	
<hr/>		
Activity 3: Sustainability	4	
Step 1: Create Resource Center or Manual to assist others with implementing your efforts, by documenting and filing training materials and other printed information you receive throughout the year.		
Step 2: Archive all significant materials you have created, and document all procedures for implementing your program, for convenient future retrieval by <u>ORGANIZATION</u> staff.		
Step 3: In collaboration with <u>STAFF MEMBER</u> , create and implement a written plan for sustainability of your programs by <u>ORGANIZATION</u> staff.		

This document has been approved by the Sponsoring Organization, the State Office, and the Member.

Sponsoring Organization Supervisor:

State Office:

Member:

Am I a good VISTA Leader candidate?

A self-assessment tool for applicants considering the VISTA Leader position

- I have already completed at least one year of service with VISTA
- I understand that I would be committing to one full year of service and that I cannot hold another job during the service year.
- I understand that VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty
- I'm not looking at VISTA Leader as "just another job" but rather as a unique and rewarding experience
- I am passionate about the mission of this organization
- I am flexible and deal well with change
- I can be creative and innovative
- I have strong oral and written communication skills
- I work well with a wide variety of people
- I can communicate effectively with supervisors
- I consider myself to be a Leader
- I work well independently AND with others
- I am motivated and driven
- I am able to both plan and execute successfully
- I understand what is meant by "indirect service," "building capacity" and "sustainability"
- I understand that any outside obligations I might have cannot conflict with my VISTA Leader responsibilities.
- I have a network of family and/or friends that would support me through this year
- I feel comfortable using the computer (email, Microsoft Office, internet research)
- I understand that if selected, I would be a resource and mentor for members NOT their supervisor
- I see no reason (mental, physical, financial) that I would not be able to perform the role of VISTA Leader to its fullest capacity

VISTA Leader Interview Questions:

- 1) Tell us why you are interested in the leader position.
- 2) What leadership skills are you confident in? What skills would you be looking to improve upon during the course of the Leader position?
- 3) Who are the best communicators you have ever known? What characteristics make them effective communicators?
- 4) How might you encourage involvement from VISTAs throughout our network?
- 5) What lessons did you learn during your first year as a VISTA that you might apply to your role as VISTA Leader?
- 6) Describe a situation that demonstrates your ability to work with a diverse group of people. How or why were you effective?
- 7) Describe a time that you had to enforce a rule or make a decision that made you unpopular and how you handled it.
- 8) If you got the position at the VISTA Leader what changes to the program would you like to implement?
- 9) What situations cause you to feel anxious or nervous at work?
- 10) As a VISTA Leader what might you anticipate your needs to be? Expectations from the Program Director? The VISTA members?
- 11) Describe experience that you have planning and implementing a training or workshop.
- 12) If you got the position, how would you describe your role to VISTA member?

Concluding Remarks

By assessing the needs of your members and project, having a detailed and specific recruitment strategy and a rigorous screening process we trust that this guide will assist you in adding a valuable new member to your VISTA team. We created this guide to be as useful and beneficial to as many supervisors as possible and would like to re-emphasize that these are flexible tools for your recruitment of a VISTA Leader and should be customized to fit your needs. We wish you success in your VISTA Leader search and trust that you will empower your members and enhance your program with the next wave of national service leaders.