



Volunteer Iowa AmeriCorps VISTA Project

Volunteer Iowa

Host Site Applicant Guidance

About the Project

Our Purpose: The VISTA project, through service and volunteering, will seek to create a climate where economically disadvantaged individuals and students are provided the tools needed for academic success and financial well-being and communities have the resources needed to address the substance abuse such as opioid use.

How You Can Partner With Us: By completing the attached host site application form you can request one or more full time VISTA members to complete a year of service meeting a specific need in your community. This document will detail the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service, the larger AmeriCorps VISTA program, and key details about utilizing full time VISTA members to fight poverty and build capacity in your community. Please read this document in its entirety before completing the host site application.

About the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service

The Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (ICVS), also known as Volunteer Iowa, is a state agency whose mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. Volunteer Iowa and its partner agencies work with organizations on three main fronts. The first is to help them develop quality programs that use service as a strategy to fulfill their missions and address Iowa's greatest areas of need. The second is helping organizations employ strategies to engage Iowans in their communities. The third is to build the volunteer infrastructure to allow service to happen.

One tool used by Volunteer Iowa is the AmeriCorps VISTA project. This document helps outline what you need to know as a host site. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact the Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer at any time.

Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer:

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About AmeriCorps VISTA

AmeriCorps is a national service program that allows individuals to commit a significant amount of time to serving their community. AmeriCorps is often referred to as the domestic Peace Corps, because rather than going abroad, AmeriCorps members help address problems here in the U.S. The AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program began during the War on Poverty of the 1960s and remains the poverty-fighting branch of AmeriCorps. All VISTA placements support the overall goal of eliminating poverty.

As a host site applicant, you should be prepared to articulate how the position you are proposing to create will help address poverty-related issues in Iowa and/or your local community. If you are in need of AmeriCorps members or volunteers for other types of service activities, please contact Volunteer Iowa to discuss your options.

AmeriCorps VISTA Priorities

1. **Economic Opportunity:** AmeriCorps VISTA's commitment to ending poverty requires focusing on project sponsors that provide opportunities to low-income individuals to get training, education and skills that will meet the needs of employers. In addition, projects that focus on asset building are encouraged to apply. Volunteer Iowa will continue to give priority to projects that support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to the improved economic well-being and financial security of economically disadvantaged people in rural communities.

VISTA project activities should focus on the following objectives of Economic Opportunity:

- Employment: Improving or creating job skills training programs that lead to increased employment
- Financial Literacy: Improving access to services and benefits aimed at contributing to enhanced financial literacy
- Housing: Transitioning individuals into or helping them remain in safe, healthy, affordable housing.

2. **Education:** AmeriCorps VISTA will give priority to projects that support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children.

Projects should focus on the following objectives:

- School readiness for economically disadvantaged young children
- K-12 success in student educational and behavioral outcomes in low-achieving schools
- Post-secondary success

3. **Healthy Futures:** The VISTA program will give priority to projects that meet health needs, including access to food resources and health care, for economically disadvantaged individuals.

Projects should support the following Healthy Futures Objectives:

- Obesity and Food (Food Resources): Improving access to nutritious food.
- Access to Health Care: Connecting economically disadvantaged individuals to preventative and primary health care services.
- Bring culturally relevant services to underserved groups according to age, geography, and disability
- Create wrap-around support including physical, mental, and social welfare elements
- Education, Resource Development, Prevention, and Treatment: Increase and improve services to low-income individuals affected by substance abuse.

Volunteer Iowa Partner Host Site Selection Process

Through our grant with the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS), we place members with partner host sites across the state as well as directly with Volunteer Iowa.

Eligibility: Public and nonprofits with a 501(c) status addressing substance abuse, such as the opioid epidemic, AND/OR programs based in rural communities supporting K-12 academic success AND/OR economic well-being including financial literacy, affordable housing, or improved employability are encouraged to apply.

Volunteer Iowa will use the following procedures for determining when to award VISTA positions to partner agencies.

1. Interested organizations must complete the VISTA host site application in their relevant focus area (Healthy Futures, Economic Opportunity or Education: K-12 Academic Success) and submit it to the Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer.
2. Applications will be reviewed by the Volunteer Iowa staff to determine whether the proposed goals and activities of the VISTA placement fit within Volunteer Iowa-identified priority areas of (1) Healthy Futures (2) Economic Opportunity and/or (3) Education. Staff will also consider information regarding the potential host agency including: the ability to provide costshare funding, the ability to provide adequate supervision to a full-time AmeriCorps VISTA member, the eligibility of the potential host site (i.e. whether proposed member activities are allowable, whether the proposed host agency is permissible, etc.), the quality of proposed service activities, the ability of partners to meet the needs of unserved or underserved communities, the past performance of previous partner host sites, and other factors that help determine which placements would best further Volunteer Iowa strategic goals. Volunteer Iowa staff will then determine whether the applicant should be approved for placement within the Volunteer Iowa VISTA project.
3. Once approved, partner host sites will consult with VISTA project staff to refine areas of the application, such as the Volunteer Assignment Description (VAD), and will work together to develop a recruitment and outreach strategy focused on the agreed upon VISTA start date.

Deadlines: The following schedule outlines the due dates of the partner host site application as well as the selection of the VISTA member. Applicants can submit at any time as there can be additional VISTA start dates offered based on the best fit for the partner host site and Volunteer Iowa. Please contact the Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer to discuss alternative dates.

Summer is the primary enrollment period for the VISTA project as, nationally, this is when the highest number of VISTA member applicant are looking to start their year of service.

Applicants should know that it takes approximately 120 days from application to place a VISTA member with your organization.

January Start Date

- Start date January 21, 2020
- **Application due September 15, 2019**
- Applicant notification and consultation – late October 2019
- Recruitment October – December 2019
- Final candidate selection due to Volunteer Iowa December 22, 2019

February Start Date

- Start date February 18, 2020
- **Application due October 14, 2019**
- Applicant notification and consultation – late October 2019
- Recruitment November 2019 – January 2020
- Final candidate selection due to Volunteer Iowa January 20, 2019

March Start Date

- Start date March 16, 2020
- **Application due November 10, 2020**
- Applicant notification and consultation – early December 2019
- Recruitment December 2019 - February 2020
- Final candidate selection due to Volunteer Iowa February 16, 2019

April Start Date

- Start date April 13, 2020
- **Application due December 8, 2020**
- Applicant notification and consultation – mid-December 2019
- Recruitment December - March 2020
- Final candidate selection due to Volunteer Iowa March 15, 2019

May Start Date

- Start date May 11, 2020
- **Application due January 5, 2020**
- Applicant notification and consultation – mid-January 2020
- Recruitment January - April 2020
- Final candidate selection due to Volunteer Iowa April 13, 2019

Summer Start Dates

- Start dates: June 8, 2020, July 6, 2020, or August 3, 2020
- **Applications due March 15, 2020**
- Applicant notification and consultation March 2020
- Recruitment March – Summer 2020
- Final candidate selection due to Volunteer Iowa
 - o June start due May 14, 2020
 - o July start due June 11, 2020
 - o August start due July 9, 2020

Cost Share

One factor considered when awarding positions to VISTA partners is the host site's ability to provide a cash payment towards our cost-sharing fee from CNCS. There are two types of VISTA positions that are awarded to us by CNCS: Standard members (which require no cash match by Volunteer Iowa) and Cost-Share members (for which Volunteer Iowa is charged a fee to help cover a portion of the expenses involved). Our project always includes a mix of Standard and Cost-Share members. Typically, the full cost share fee is about the same amount as the living allowance paid to the VISTA member for the year. Volunteer Iowa divides these costs among all program sites and our expected cost share fee for sites in this program is between \$4,000 - \$12,500 for a full-time VISTA slot. In some cases, Volunteer Iowa may award VISTA positions to partner host sites with demonstrated financial need at a lower cost share rate.

In addition to a cost-share fee, all partner agencies should expect to incur some additional expenses in hosting a member. These may be in-kind expenses, such as those involved in providing a phone and computer to the member, or cash expenses, such as paying for your member to attend a conference related to his/her service activities. We expect each partner organization to set aside \$200 per VISTA for professional development opportunities. Details about the cost-share fee and other financial responsibilities are outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement.

Memorandum of Agreement

Once a VISTA member placement is awarded to a partner host site, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) will be sent to you for signature. The memorandum of agreement with Volunteer Iowa outlines the responsibilities of each party regarding the placement of the AmeriCorps VISTA member. Signed memorandums of agreement should be in place with each site before the VISTA member begins service.

VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

The VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) is the document that will guide your VISTA Member in his/her service and it is helpful for creating a position description once you are ready to start recruiting for a member. The VAD is included in the host site application. There are a number of resources available to help you develop an effective VAD.

1. Creating Effective VADs Tutorial: <http://www.vistacampus.gov/resources/creating-effective-vads>
2. [VAD Checklist](#)
3. Sample VAD <http://www.vistacampus.gov/resources/sample-vad>

You can use the VAD in your recruitment, to share with your applicants the specific problem they will be working to address, the long-term goal of their efforts, and the specific activities in which they will be engaged. Once your Member is chosen, he/she should receive his/her own copy of the VAD.

Recruitment and Placement

There are multiple times per year when VISTA members may begin their service and recruitment begins well in advance of these dates because selected candidates must be identified and enrolled in the online system up to one month in advance of their start date.

Primary responsibility for recruiting the AmeriCorps VISTA member rests with the local host site. Failure to recruit a member when you are awarded a position will decrease the likelihood that you are offered a position at a later date. Volunteer Iowa provides recruitment support through one-on-one assistance to partner host sites, as well as through distribution of opportunities to serve through our partnership network, Commission members, Service Year, and more broadly through social media and other online platforms. Additionally, the VISTA Leader, when serving, assists with recruitment.

If you are awarded a VISTA position, you will be notified by Volunteer Iowa staff regarding when to start your recruitment and what the due date is for nominations. The AmeriCorps Member Portal/My AmeriCorps is used to manage applications for AmeriCorps positions.

Recruitment and placement of members will take place in three phases. See below for an outline of the process and instructions on the steps that are involved in recruiting an AmeriCorps VISTA member once you have been awarded a placement through the Volunteer Iowa VISTA Service Project.

Recruitment Materials: Volunteer Iowa will give you or help you create recruitment materials to help spread the word about your position. Volunteer Iowa staff will post your position and open it for electronic applications. Potential applicants will see your position by searching on the AmeriCorps website, www.americorps.gov. You will also be expected to advertise the position locally and through your own recruitment channels (i.e. through local college and university service or career centers, in local newspapers, on your agency website, by forwarding to your contacts, etc.).

- All host sites should use the "[Overview of VISTA](#)" document.
- You should review the "[What to Know Before Beginning Service](#)" document, which all members and site supervisors must sign before the member will be enrolled.

Interviews & Deadlines: Volunteer Iowa will use a three-step process for selecting AmeriCorps VISTA Members.

1. The Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer and/or VISTA Leader will do the initial screening of applicants to ensure their understanding of the VISTA program and its terms, conditions, & benefits. These interviews will occur on a rolling basis as applications are received. Please advise the Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer of applicants you directly recruit to expedite the review of their applications. Candidates must apply for the position through the AmeriCorps website (www.americorps.gov) before they interview with Volunteer Iowa.
2. Your organization will receive information about the applicants who have passed the initial screening on a rolling basis. Host sites will do their own round of interviewing and select their top candidate (and one to two alternates). The name of the top candidate(s) should be submitted to Volunteer Iowa with the "VISTA Sponsor Recommendation Form".
3. If no concerns arise, Volunteer Iowa will notify the host site that the applicants are approved, and an offer may be made. If the first-choice candidate does not accept the position, an offer may be made to the next alternate (after completion of the VISTA Sponsor Recommendation Form and approval of Volunteer Iowa). Those who accept the offer will be nominated by Volunteer Iowa and/or host site staff (final approval of candidate's rests with the Corporation for National & Community Service [CNCS] State Office and the Iowa Governor's office). All enrollment steps by selected applicants, Volunteer Iowa, and partner host sites must be completed by a specified due date.

Eligibility & Preferred Skills

When recruiting for a VISTA member, it is important to keep in mind the member eligibility criteria and recruitment priorities established by the CNCS and Volunteer Iowa:

- Members must be at least 18 years of age at the time of placement.
- Members must be U.S. Citizens, Nationals or Legal Residents.
 1. To earn an education award, members must be U.S. Citizens, U.S. Nationals, or Legal Permanent Residents.
 2. To earn a cash award, members must be Legal Residents.

- Applicants must have earned a high school diploma or GED or they must agree to work toward completion during their service. You may set additional educational standards for your position, depending on the skills you feel will be necessary for fulfilling the responsibilities of your position.
- Members must serve on a full-time basis for the 12 month term.
 1. Typically, full-time means the Members should follow the work schedule of regular employees at their site—this may be a regular 9AM-5PM schedule, or may include some evening and weekend hours.
 2. Members should be given the same holiday leave as paid employees at the site.
 3. Ten sick and ten personal days are allowed, as well as emergency leave, if necessary.
- Members may have part-time outside employment during the project period if it does not conflict with AmeriCorps VISTA duties. More information and the Outside Employment Request Form can be found on the VISTA Campus at: <http://www.vistacampus.gov/resources/outside-employment-policy>
- Members may not attend classes full-time during their term of service. Part-time attendance may be allowed if it does not conflict with AmeriCorps VISTA duties.
- Members must not be listed on the National Sex Offenders Public Registry (visit <https://www.nsopw.gov/Search/Verification> to check a candidate's name on the list—official checks will be conducted by CNCS).

Member Benefits

Members receive:

- Virtual Member Orientation (VMO)
- Relocation allowances (if eligible)
- On-site orientation and training
- A living allowance to cover necessities during service
- Healthcare benefits while in service
- Life insurance for purchase at a low rate
- Childcare allowances (if eligible) while in service
- Student loan forbearance or deferment while in service
- An End of Service Benefit which consists of either
 - the Eli Segal AmeriCorps Education Award from the National Service Trust (equal to the maximum Pell grant);
 - OR a cash stipend accrued at a monthly rate
- One year of noncompetitive status for a federal government job

The Federal Employee Compensation and Federal Tort Claims Acts cover VISTA Members. In addition, the Income Disregard provisions apply to any Member who receives government benefits.

The CNCS relocation allowance only covers members moving over 50 miles to begin service. Sponsoring organizations may cover expenses related to a VISTA Member who relocates a shorter distance in order to serve. In addition, the VISTA housing policy encourages sponsors to find ways to provide free or low-cost housing for VISTAs. This practice might yield a larger and more diverse applicant pool.

Training

Virtual Member Orientation (VMO)

All VISTA members must attend a CNCS-sponsored virtual member orientation on the first day of their VISTA service. Staff from the Corporation will present information on AmeriCorps* VISTA and the expectations for and requirements of the program. Your VISTA member should expect to attend the VMO and will then be officially sworn into service on the last day of the orientation.

On-Site Orientation & Training

All AmeriCorps VISTA members need to receive an orientation to their service site and local community. Each host site will develop an On-site orientation and training (OSOT) plan to make sure their member is acquainted with the expectations and plans at their site. OSOT plans will vary according to the background of the Associate, but they should provide:

- An understanding of common expectations and agreements for the working relationship between VISTA and supervisor
- An understanding of the culture and mission of the sponsoring organization
- Knowledge of the bigger picture related to the VISTA project and the community
- Understanding of the organization's VISTA Policy, including
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Time and attendance, duty hours
 - Travel reimbursement policy and procedure
 - Working with the media
 - Evaluation of individual VISTA and of the project
 - Reporting requirements for the VISTA project
- A training plan to build skills and knowledge needed to implement the Volunteer Assignment Description (VAD)

All sponsors will be required to conduct OSOT with their members during the first two weeks of service and submit a copy of OSOT plan to Volunteer Iowa. The OSOT should be submitted to Volunteer Iowa before the VISTA member starts service.

Orientation to the Volunteer Iowa AmeriCorps VISTA Project

All members will be required to attend an in-person orientation to the Volunteer Iowa AmeriCorps VISTA project within the first months of their service. At this orientation, they will learn more about Volunteer Iowa and the programs we operate, how Commissioners and staff can support the VISTAs, expectations we have for the VISTAs to represent AmeriCorps and Volunteer Iowa in the communities they serve, and other requirements of serving on the Volunteer Iowa project.

Ongoing Training

Sites should provide on-going training and member development activities to VISTA Members, as needed, to improve their skills and provide them with the knowledge and resources to complete their assigned activities. Volunteer Iowa will notify host sites of trainings we sponsor that may be relevant to VISTA Members. Sites are also expected to set aside \$200 per member to support the member's participation in trainings, conferences, and other professional development activities relevant to his/her position.

Member Management & Supervision

Each host site is required to designate up to 10 hours local site supervisor for the AmeriCorps *VISTA member(s). This supervisor will:

- Provide day to day oversight of the AmeriCorps *VISTA member(s).
- Provide regularly scheduled supervision time, twice a month at minimum, though weekly scheduled one-on-one supervisions are highly recommended and considered a best practice.
- Serve as the agency contact with Volunteer Iowa.
- Complete the online AmeriCorps *VISTA Terms, Conditions, and Benefits tutorial prior to the service start date, and certify completion by sending a confirmation email to the Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer (see Resource section for more information).
- Be allowed to attend any necessary supervisor training.

Sites must also provide AmeriCorps VISTA Members with sufficient office space, materials, and supplies to complete their duties, as outlined in the VAD. Materials and supplies will generally include access to a computer, phone, printer, etc.

Additionally, if travel is required for the completion of service activities, sites must provide AmeriCorps VISTA Members with mileage reimbursement and/or access to agency vehicle. If members will be required to use their own personal vehicle, they must be notified of this in advance. Mileage reimbursement and/or agency vehicle access for AmeriCorps VISTA member(s) should be in accordance with agency travel policy for other employees or the state rate of \$.39/mile, whichever is greater.

Reporting

Reports on VISTA Members' progress will be due on a regular basis to the Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer. Volunteer Iowa uses an online reporting system, IowaGrants.gov, to collect reports. All AmeriCorps VISTA members and site supervisors will be required to register in this system in order to enter and submit reports. These Progress Reports document volunteer recruitment and resource development include narrative sections on challenges and highlights of service, and document progress under the specific categories outlined in the VAD.

Partner Host Sites should develop a plan for tracking the required reporting items. Sample reports can be sent, upon request. Additional reports may be required throughout the AmeriCorps VISTA member's service year, especially as requested by CNCS. Information about any additional reporting requirements will be communicated to host sites in writing.

Promotion

Volunteer Iowa supports not only this AmeriCorps VISTA project, but also many other national service and volunteer efforts throughout Iowa. We see our VISTA host sites and members as partners in our work to promote service and volunteerism. Since we are a very small agency with staff located only in Des Moines, our VISTA host sites and members serve as our "eyes and ears" in communities throughout the state. We ask host sites to share with Volunteer Iowa any potential partners or opportunities to expand our work. VISTA members and host sites are also expected to share information about Volunteer Iowa and our programs with the communities and clients they serve.

We also expect AmeriCorps members to participate in Days of Service, special days that highlight various volunteer efforts. Volunteer Iowa VISTA members will be required to design and/or participate in a service event for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, held the third Monday in January each year, and AmeriCorps Week, typically held in the spring each year.

Volunteer Iowa encourages AmeriCorps VISTA host sites and members to seek additional ways to partner with Volunteer Iowa, such as by nominating individuals or groups for our volunteer awards programs, sharing information with partner businesses about the Employer Volunteer Initiative, utilizing the statewide volunteer opportunity database "Get Connected" to post volunteer opportunities, or presenting at the Iowa Nonprofit Summit. Organizations that actively collaborate with Volunteer Iowa are looked upon favorably when being considered for continued VISTA placements at their site.

Evaluation & Recognition

Both members and supervisors will be required to complete a mid-term and an end-of-term evaluation. Volunteer Iowa should be notified immediately if performance problems arise before the end of term.

The Volunteer Iowa VISTA Program Officer and/or other designees from Volunteer Iowa will make at least one site visit to the host agency during the VISTA member's term of service. These visits will help to ensure compliance with VISTA regulations but also provide host sites an opportunity to demonstrate what has been accomplished due to the service of a VISTA Member at their site. The site supervisor and the VISTA Member must participate in these visits, but other host agency staff, clients, and/or board members may also be made available to discuss the impact of the VISTA.

Host sites should also consider what they can do to recognize and thank VISTA Members for their service. Volunteer Iowa also makes every effort to support other member gatherings and recognition opportunities.

Resources

- VISTA Campus: <http://vistacampus.org/>
 - The VISTA Campus is an online learning environment for the VISTA community. The online campus has resources and tutorials that are useful for the management and oversight of a VISTA member. At this site you can also find electronic copies of the VISTA handbook and the VISTA Supervisor handbook.
 - You should:
 - Register as a Supervisor
 - Complete the online VISTA Terms, Conditions, and Benefits course and email your certification of completion to me at Julie.Struck@iowaeda.com (it's important to register on the VISTA Campus first, in case you need to save your progress and come back later).
 - Familiarize yourself with the other resources available on the VISTA Campus site.

- VISTA Supervisor Resources: available on the VISTA Campus at <https://www.vistacampus.gov/vista-campus-supervisors>
- National Service Hotline: 800-942-2677 or <https://questions.nationalservice.gov/>.
 - The Hotline is a national call center for VISTA members seeking assistance on issues from payroll to end of service benefits.
- National Service Resource Center
 - The Resource Center provides a variety of tools and training for volunteer and service programs: www.nationalservice.gov/resources. The Resource Center lending library can be used by all members and programs.