



PRE-SERVICE ORIENTATION MATERIALS

Week One Assignments

After the Launching Your VISTA Service webinar on your first day of service, your On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT), coordinated by your supervisor, will begin. During your first week, you will also complete the homework assignments below. These assignments are designed to help you understand your VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) and to help you, your peers, and your facilitator learn more about each other.

Although your OSOT homework is not due until the following week, please preview it, print out the OSOT inventory worksheet, and keep it with you to complete as you experience OSOT.

Assignment due dates for this section: The following assignments are due by 11:59 pm Eastern time on Sunday, at the start of Week 2.

- [Introducing Yourself and Your Organization: The Minute Intro](#)
- [VAD Worksheet Assignment](#)
- [How Poverty is Measured in the United States](#)

Introducing Yourself and Your Organization: The Minute Intro

Crafting and practicing a compelling introduction to yourself and your organization can help you connect with your community and the individuals you will serve as a VISTA. It can also help you get to know your peers in your online PSO Blend classroom.

In this activity, you will create a short, passionate “minute intro” which you can use to talk about what you do as a VISTA and persuade others that your work and your organization really matter. You will record and post a video of your minute intro, and it can also be used as a written introduction, or on social media channels such as LinkedIn or blogs.

A strong minute intro creates interest in learning more about your organization and your role in fighting poverty. Below is a template you can use, but feel free to create your own. Just remember the following key points:

- Introduce yourself as an AmeriCorps VISTA first, with just a word or two about your focus
- Briefly explain why your organization exists
- Use simple, jargon-free language
- Begin from a place of conviction and passion
- Focus on describing your program or organization’s impacts
- Avoid overwhelming the listener with too many details



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- Align with your organization’s branding and messaging
- Leave your listener wanting more

After you have written your minute intro, practice it a few times in front of a mirror and record it on your smartphone, webcam or other device. If feasible, deliver it to your supervisor or others at your site and get their feedback.

Here are two different templates you can use.

1. I’m _____ (your name). I’m an AmeriCorps VISTA _____-ing (doing) _____ (your service focus) with/for _____ (organization). We believe that _____ (deeply held value). Every day, we _____ (verb) _____ (object) for _____ (constituents/beneficiaries), because _____ (problem statement).
2. Hi, I’m _____ (your name). I’m an AmeriCorps VISTA serving with _____ (your organization). Our organization _____ (short statement about the mission/antipoverty focus). My role is to _____ (your VAD/service focus) and I’m really passionate about this because _____.

And here are a couple of examples:

1. I’m Sandra, and I’m an AmeriCorps VISTA, creating partnerships for the Prescott Area Women’s Shelter. We believe that housing is a human right. That’s why we ensure that our constituents have a roof over their head. Because nobody should have to call the streets their home.
2. Hi, I’m Eric. I’m an AmeriCorps VISTA developing a fundraising plan for the Harmony Clinic. Harmony Clinic believes everyone should have access to quality healthcare whether or not they can pay. Every day, we meet the needs of patients at no cost---because healthy people build healthy communities.

Once you are happy with your minute intro, record yourself (video and audio) and upload your video to YouTube or another video sharing site of your choice. Then click "Reply" in the lower right corner of this post and share your video with the class. You can either paste a link to the video in your reply, or you can embed the video directly into your reply. Refer to the [Online Classroom User Guide pgs 16-17](#) for assistance with embedding your video. Once you have posted your own video, view those of your classmates and provide comments on at least three minute intros.



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VAD Worksheet Overview

Now that you have been sworn in as a VISTA, it's time to learn more about the specific goals of your project and the tasks you are responsible for during your year as a VISTA. There are two primary tools to help you get started.

Your VISTA Assignment Description, or VAD, is the main guiding document for your VISTA service. When an organization submits an application for a VISTA, it identifies the community need the project will address, the intervention(s) it will use to address it, and the goal(s) that describes the impact the project will have on the community need during the project's duration. These are key items that inform development of the VAD. By accomplishing the activities in the VAD, VISTAs help their organization meet its performance objectives, which contributes to meeting the community need.

To help fulfill the goals of the project and of the VAD, you must first ensure you understand the goal of your VAD, the objectives that must be completed first to achieve the goal, and the activities that will facilitate completion of the goal.

You will review your VAD with your supervisor as part of your On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT), but it's helpful to spend additional time with your VAD to ensure that your questions are answered and that you are best prepared throughout your VISTA year.

Download and save the VAD worksheet (DOC or PDF), which will help you break down your VAD into the key elements: Goal, Objectives, and Activities. Obtain a copy of your VAD and follow the directions to complete the worksheet. You will need highlighter pens in multiple colors if you are working from a hard copy of your VAD.

Once you have reviewed your VAD and completed the worksheet, set up a time to meet with your supervisor to discuss any questions you have. This is an opportunity for you to clarify anything that you're not quite sure about and to discuss your VAD in more detail. To get started, we have added some questions to help you start off the conversation with your supervisor.

Once your worksheet is completed and you have met with your supervisor, you will need to submit the worksheet by clicking the "Add submission" button below. You will also want to retain a copy of your worksheet and bring it with you to the first virtual meet-up in Week 2, during which you can ask any lingering questions about your VAD.



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How Poverty is Measured in the United States

For over 50 years, VISTA has built capacity in nonprofit organizations to help bring individuals and communities out of poverty. You are one of nearly 7,000 VISTA members nationwide working to support this mission. With a socio-economic phenomenon as large and complex as poverty, advocates, policy-makers, and those who study poverty have sought ways to define and measure it. As a VISTA, it's important to understand and reflect on those definitions and measures, as well as your own assumptions about poverty and its causes.

To help you begin to think about this complex issue, complete the assignment below. In a subsequent assignment, due at the beginning of Week 3, you will have a chance to share your personal perspectives and reflections on poverty.

1. View [How Poverty is Measured in the United States](#) on the VISTA Campus.
2. Reflect on the following questions. You may want to keep a journal of your thoughts.
 - What struck you about this video?
 - What impact might an inaccurate measure of poverty have on policies, programs and people?
 - Can you think of a more effective way to measure poverty?
3. If you wish, share your reflections with your classmates by replying to this forum post.



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Week Two Assignment

As you experience your OSOT, use the **OSOT Inventory Worksheet** to note important information along the way. While this assignment isn't due until the end of Week 2, you'll want to preview it and get started as soon as possible.

Assignment due dates for this section: your **OSOT Inventory Worksheet** assignment is due by 11:59 pm Eastern time on Sunday, at the start of Week Three.

- [OSOT Inventory Worksheet Assignment](#)

OSOT Inventory Assignment Overview

On-Site Orientation and Training, or OSOT, is delivered by your supervisor and others at your organization at the start of your service. It is designed to introduce you to your VISTA sponsor, your community and the goals and operations of your VISTA project. OSOT should provide you with the basic knowledge and skills you need to get started as a VISTA.

Your OSOT will take place over the course of several days. Before it begins, **download and save the OSOT Inventory Worksheet** (DOC or PDF). As you experience your OSOT, fill in the answers on the worksheet. Schedule a chat with your supervisor or other key staff to help you answer any unanswered questions.

When your worksheet is complete, upload it by clicking the “Add submission” button.



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Week Three Assignments

The next set of assignments will help you dig deeper into poverty and its causes and learn more about the community you serve. Work at your own pace to complete the following assignments.

Assignment due dates for this section: Your assignments are due by **11:59 pm Eastern time on Sunday, at the start of Week 4.**

- [Thirteen Lessons About Poverty](#)
- [Creating a Community Profile](#)

Thirteen Lessons About Poverty

In Week 1, you watched a short video on [how poverty is measured in the United States](#). In this assignment, you will watch another video and share your reflections on poverty with your peers.

1. View [13 Lessons About Poverty](#) on the VISTA Campus.
2. Identify one lesson about poverty that resonates with you based either on your personal experience, your service assignment, or your passion as a VISTA. Reflect on your personal and/or professional stake in that particular lesson.
3. Create a pictorial representation based on your response to one of the lessons (photograph, drawing, collage or other visual). Post your image by replying to this forum post, with a caption that expresses what this image represents to you related to your experience or your VISTA service. After you've posted, comment on at least one image shared by one of your classmates.

Creating a Community Profile

Whether you are serving in your home community or have relocated for your VISTA service, understanding what poverty looks like in your community is a cornerstone of your success. In fact, an important element of your OSOT is exploring your community and making a mental inventory of assets, needs and cultural practices.

A Community Profile is another way to learn about the community in which you serve. It can help you understand the makeup of your community as well as the particular challenges people navigating poverty face. To create your own, complete the following assignment.

1. View the [Poverty in Your Community VISTA Campus tutorial](#) and create a Community Profile.



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2. When your Community Profile is complete, share it with your supervisor. Discuss how this might be used in grant applications, presentations, volunteer mobilization, community engagement efforts and any other aspects of your VISTA assignment.
3. Reply to this forum post, and attach your Community Profile.
4. In your reply to this posting, please also share one idea from your discussion with your supervisor.

Additional tips and considerations for creating your Community Profile

- This tutorial relies on external websites, including the U.S. Census Bureau, the New York Times, and others. If you experience problems with these sites, please check back later, or use another data source such as those listed below.
- If you cannot find data for the community or communities you are serving, ask your supervisor for help identifying 1) a neighboring or nearby community that may be comparable and/or 2) additional or alternate sources of data on your community. Additional data sources may include:
 - [Census Scope](#) - Features a wide array of datasets, searchable by county, that can give you unique insights into your community including segregation indices, migration, household & family structure, and occupation. You may find tailored data and reports on your state and county.
 - [USDA](#) - Features county-level data that are searchable by poverty, population, unemployment and median household income, and education.
 - [USDA Rural Poverty](#) - Features resources on rural poverty and well-being.
 - Opportunity Nation's [Opportunity Index](#) - Provides an annual composite measure at the state and county levels of economic, educational and civic factors that expand opportunity.
 - The Annie E. Casey Foundation's [KIDS COUNT data center](#) - Is a source for data on child and family well-being in the U.S.
 - The [United States National Library of Medicine American Indian Health Research & Data](#) — Provides links to numerous data sources related to American Indian and Alaska Native communities.
- If your community includes multiple census tracts, ask your supervisor for guidance on which part of your community to focus on.
- Make this tool your own and feel free to make additions and adaptations that make the most sense for your specific service site.