

APPENDIX A: VISTA Competency Model

Tier 1: Personal Effectiveness Competencies

1. **Interpersonal Skills: Displaying skills to work effectively with others from diverse backgrounds.**

Relating Socially and Working Collaboratively

- Establish professional relationships with people of diverse backgrounds.
- Assess the personalities and abilities of others and adapt so as to work effectively with them.
- Hear and respond to the verbal and nonverbal behavior of others in diverse organizational and social contexts.
- Respect the opinions, perspectives, customs, and individual differences of others.
- Pay attention and acknowledge the value of others' viewpoints.
- Take action to learn about the climate, orientation, needs, and values of other groups, organizations, or cultures.
- Recognize the contributions of others in collaborative endeavors.

Cultural Competency

- Appreciate the diversity of people and ideas.
- Have the capacity for cultural self-assessment.
- Be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact.
- Institutionalize cultural knowledge.

Personal Style of Communication

- Communicate well with others – oral, written, and body language
- Exhibit a flexible style of communication in order to work effectively with diverse individuals.
- Use effective communication skills to address confrontation and respectfully resolve conflict.
- Ensure communication is understood constructively by all groups.

2. **Initiative: Demonstrating a willingness to work individually and collectively to address problems.**

Take Initiative

- Seek to identify problems to be addressed and explore new ways to solve them.
- Exhibit confidence in capabilities.

Set Challenging Goals

- Establish personally challenging but attainable work goals (short-, medium-, and long-term goals).

Work Independently

- Work effectively with a moderate degree of support.
- Seek advice and information from others to successfully perform assignments.

3. **Personal Responsibility: Demonstrating responsible behaviors.**

- Demonstrate honesty, integrity, and fairness.
- Fulfill obligations, following through on commitments, dependability.
- Exhibit consistent self-control and communication so as to establish a high degree of trust and credibility with others.
- Exhibit helpful attitudes and personality traits: outgoing, gregarious, adaptive, openness to new learning.
- Exhibit capacity for imagination, creativity, and empathy.

4. **Ambition: Demonstrating desire and dedication to achieve goals.**

Motivation

- Demonstrate a commitment to quality and ongoing efforts toward improvement.
- Possess a desire for change, and personal accomplishment.
- Strive to exceed standards and expectations.
- Demonstrate a commitment to make positive community change through collaborative work with individuals, organizations, and social institutions.

Perseverance

- Show patience, tenacity, and determination to achieve goals.
- Cope with stress and ambiguity, especially in times of uncertainty.
- Recognize when objectives have not been met and adapt approach.
- Embrace challenges and seek to accomplish tasks even when conditions are difficult or deadlines tight.

5. Adaptability & Flexibility: Displaying the capability to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements.

Demonstrate Curiosity and Willingness to Explore New Ideas and Strategies

- Seek innovative ideas and strategies to address persistent problems.
- Explore alternative methods of obtaining resources when insufficient resources are available.
- Discard approaches that are no longer working.
- Treat failures, should they occur, as valuable learning experiences.

Deal with Ambiguity

- Show tolerance for ambiguous, unstructured situations.
- Change plans, goals, actions, or priorities to deal with unpredictable or unexpected events, pressures, situations and job demands.

6. Leadership: Displaying the qualities that motivate people to cooperate and participate in a plan of action.

- Demonstrate a positive attitude and the ability to self-motivate
- Align the activities of others around a common goal.
- Motivate and influence others to act.
- Empower others to succeed.
- Manage change.

7. Willingness to Learn: Displaying a willingness to learn and apply new knowledge, insights, and skills.

Demonstrate an Interest in Ongoing Learning

- Assesses own knowledge and skills and determines individual learning priorities to achieve personal or organizational objectives.
- Remain open to learning from diverse individuals and information resources.
- Utilize multiple modalities for learning--e.g. online self-directed learning, conversation, formal courses or workshops.
- Participate in work assignments or training that enhances personal skills.
- Treat unexpected circumstances as opportunities to learn.

Pursue Life-long Learning

- Be lifelong learner (open to new ideas, techniques, processes, information, activities, etc.).
- Identify when it is necessary to acquire new knowledge and skills.
- Processes and retain information.
- Integrate newly learned knowledge and skills with existing knowledge and skills.
- Use newly learned knowledge and skills to complete specific tasks.
- Use a range of learning techniques, including informal discussions, formal consultations, and review of different information resources to acquire new knowledge.

Tier 2: Academic Competencies

1. **Reading: The ability to read materials.**

- Determine both what the text says explicitly and what can be inferred logically from the text.
- Support or challenge assertions about the text by citing evidence in the text explicitly and accurately
- Discern the most important ideas, events, or information, and summarize them accurately and concisely.
- Synthesize data, diagrams, maps, and other visual elements with words in the text to further comprehension.
- Extract key information efficiently in print and online using text features and search techniques.
- Ascertain the origin, credibility, and accuracy of print and online sources.
- Analyze how two or more texts with different styles, points of view, or arguments address similar topics or themes.
- Draw upon relevant prior knowledge to enhance comprehension, and note when the text expands on or challenges that knowledge (i.e. integrate what is learned with prior knowledge).

2. **Writing: The ability to communicate through writing.**

- Write clearly, logically and concisely demonstrating command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics and understanding of audience.
- Gather the information needed to build an argument, provide an explanation, or address a research question in written forms.
- Support and illustrate arguments and explanations with relevant details, examples, and evidence (i.e. synthesize information from multiple relevant sources, including graphics and quantitative information when appropriate, to provide an accurate picture of that information).
- Create a logical progression of ideas or events, and convey the relationships among them.
- Link claims and evidence with clear reasons ensuring that the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims and acknowledge competing arguments or information, defending or qualifying the initial claim as appropriate.
- Use appropriate mechanics in writing: i.e. standard syntax and sentence structure; correct spelling, punctuation and capitalization; and, appropriate grammar.

3. **Mathematics: The ability to understand and do core mathematical practices.**

- Perform basic math computations accurately.
- Construct viable math arguments.
- Compare numbers and make sense of their magnitude.
- Use estimation and approximation to solve problems.
- Use and interpret quantities and units correctly in graphs and data displays.
- Formulate key issues/questions that can be addressed with data.
- Identify the relevant data, collect and organize it to respond to issues/ questions.
- Understand the concepts of financial literacy (apply personal money-management principles and strategies to personal finances and basic understanding of functions and services of financial institutions).

4. **Science/Technology/Basic Computer Skills: Applying scientific principles and using technology to solve problems or develop solutions.**

- Demonstrate a basic understanding of scientific principles.
- Use basic computer hardware (e.g. PCs, printers) and software (e.g. word processing software, spreadsheet software) to perform tasks.
- Compose e-mails to communicate effectively and appropriately on various topics with a broad range of co-workers, collaborators, and stakeholders.
- Navigate the e-mail system and its basic functions (e.g., replying to/forwarding messages, using electronic address books, attaching files).
- Organize, analyze and interpret information systems and data, electronically towards project completion.
- Navigate the Internet using a Web browser.
- Use key computer programs (i.e. Microsoft Office).
- Use the Web and technology in a knowledgeable and ethical manner (i.e. appropriate and inappropriate computer usage standards).

- Adapt to the evolution of software and hardware.
- Select appropriate technical tools and procedures to accomplish work tasks.

5. Communication- Listening & Speaking: Giving full attention to what others are saying and speaking in English well enough to be understood by others.

Active Listening

- Actively listen to others (including listening to complex information, and discern the main ideas, the significant details, and the relationships among them).
- Assess the perspective and the reliability of information incorporated in a message.
- Pick out relevant and useful information from listening to diverse individuals
- Use eye contact and non-verbal expressions effectively.
- Attend to the non-verbal cues of others.
- Follow the progression of the speaker's message, and evaluate the speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Ask questions to clarify ambiguities, factual points, issues or unclear or inconsistent messages

Speaking & Presenting

- Demonstrate a command of formal Standard English when appropriate to task and audience.
- Convey information to individuals or groups taking into account the audience and social context.
- Speak clearly and confidently acknowledging limitations of own knowledge.
- Present information in a logically organized manner.
- Select and use a format, organization, and style appropriate to the topic, purpose, and to the audience.
- Track audience responses and react appropriately to those responses.
- Respond constructively to advance a discussion and build on the input of others.
- Respond appropriately to either negative or positive feedback.

6. Critical & Analytical Thinking: Using logic and reasoning to address problems.

Analyzing, Managing, and Deploying Information

- Assess the accuracy and utility of information from diverse sources.
- Identify connections between issues.
- Categorize and classify data so as to make use of it when needed.

Reasoning

- Possess sufficient inductive and deductive reasoning ability to perform job successfully.
- Critically review, analyze, synthesize, compare and interpret information.
- Uses logical reasoning to draw conclusions from relevant and/or missing information.
- Apply knowledge of the relationships among facts when solving problems.
- Understand principles of cause and effect.

See the Big Picture

- Possess broad knowledge and perspective.
- Piece together seemingly unrelated information to identify patterns and trends.
- Make connections between the parts and inter-dependence of a system.
- Understand the consequences of actions on parts of the system.

Tier 3: Workplace Competencies

1. **Networking: Establishing collaborative relationships and partnerships.**

Building Relationships

- Seek opportunities to make and reinforce contact with organizational, community, and partner events; external organizations; and professional activities.
- Exhibit trustworthy behavior to build successful relationships and partnerships.
- Establish strong and lasting partnerships with diverse organizational and individual contacts.

2. **Planning & Organizing: Planning and prioritizing work to manage time effectively and accomplish assigned tasks.**

Planning

- Approach tasks in a methodical manner.
- Develop plans to map out approaches to new ventures.
- Prioritize various competing assignments or elements of assignments to further the objectives of the assignment.
- Keep track of details to ensure work is performed accurately and completely.

Allocating Resources

- Allocate time and resources effectively.
- Keep all parties informed of progress and relevant changes to project timelines, processes, or projects.

3. **Problem Solving & Decision Making: Applying critical-thinking skills to solve problems.**

Identifying the Problem

- Recognize the existence of a problem.
- Deal with problems and challenges in priority order.
- Identify the nature of the problem by analyzing its component parts.
- Recall previously learned information that is relevant to the problem.

Locating, Gathering, and Organizing Relevant Information

- Use all relevant information sources to solve a problem.
- Collect and analyze data.
- Examine and assess information obtained to gain a better understanding of the problem.
- Recognize important gaps in existing information.
- Takes steps to obtain information to eliminate gaps.

Generating Alternatives

- Integrate previously learned and externally obtained information to generate a variety of alternative approaches to the problem.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses, the costs and benefits, and the short- and long-term consequences of different approaches.

Choosing and Implementing a Solution

- Evaluate numerous potential solutions.
- Make difficult decisions even in the absence of solid data or in ambiguous situations.
- Commit to a solution in a timely manner.
- Develop a realistic approach for implementing the chosen solution.
- Observe the outcomes of implementing the solution.
- Assess the need for alternative approaches.
- Identify lessons learned.

4. **Documentation: Entering, transcribing, recording, storing, or maintaining information in written or electronic/magnetic format.**

Completing Necessary Forms and Clearances

- Ensure necessary and appropriate forms are completed quickly and completely – e.g. permission to use pictures or to use name of an organization in a publication or announcement.
- Ensure partners or others required to complete forms understand their purpose, why they are required, and agree willingly to complete them.
- Complete paperwork. Fill out reports as required.

- Keep logs, records and files that are up-to-date and readily accessible.

5. Organizational Fundamentals: Applying knowledge of basic organizational principles to your work.

Business Ethics

- Demonstrate respect for the role of colleagues, coworkers, other members of the community, and partners.
- Act in the best interest of an organization.
- Comply with applicable laws and rules governing work.
- Recognize relevant, ethical issues as they arise.

Organizational Knowledge

- Understand an organization's mission and objectives.
- Understand the chain of command and reporting relationships of key personnel within an organization.
- Understand the position responsibilities of key personnel within an organization.
- Understand the role of an organization in the community.
- Understand the relationships with other organizations that interact with, regulate or depend on an organization.

Tier 4: VISTA Technical Competencies

1. **Planning and Collaboration: Taking appropriate action to develop and implement a plan of action.**

Assess an Assignment

- Conduct needs assessment, asset-mapping, monitor progress toward pre-established objectives, and contribute to the design and implementation of evaluation

Implement a Plan

- Develop clear and useful goals and objectives and action plans.
- Describe role, responsibilities, concepts and intended outcomes.
- Organize groups of people.
- Plan and facilitate meetings.
- Participate in meetings and brainstorming sessions.
- Recruit and cultivate volunteers.

Partner and Collaborate

- Partner and collaborate to achieve goals.
- Work effectively and respectfully in diverse teams.
- Reduce and resolve conflicts.
- Make compromises to accomplish a common goal.
- Assume shared responsibility for work while valuing individual contribution.
- Be a valuable resource in the community.
- Frame issues and solutions in ways that address and respond to different concerns.
- Reach out to, recruit, and be inclusive of engagement of diverse groups in addressing community and organizational issues.

2. **Resource Management: Effectively manage all resources to achieve goals, mitigate risk, control costs, and use technology.**

Effective Management

- Gain a knowledge of the laws, regulations, and policies that apply to volunteer programs.
- Apply the elements of risk management (avoidance, prevention, reduction, and control).
- Maintain records as required.
- Collect feedback and information to ensure quality results.
- Develop policies and procedures as needed.

Financial Management

- Monitor budget allocations and expenditures to operate within the available funding limits.

Technology Management

- Analyze technology needs and uses.

3. **Organizational and Program Development: The principles and concepts fundamental to fostering capacity building and community change.**

- Understand the role of the organization in the community and how the organization interacts with the community.
- Grasp how organizational, local, state and national issues affect civic engagement and community development.
- Develop programs and services or enhance existing programs and services that reflect an understanding of diversity between and within cultures.
- Increase the capacity of low-income communities to solve their own problems by building permanent infrastructure in host organizations.
- Establish partnerships to promote sustainability of the project.
- Improve collaboration with existing partners through effective communication techniques.
- Frame issues to engage stakeholders (sponsoring organization as well as community and partner organizations) to maintain the effort.
- Be a good listener – able to reflect on key points and appreciate relation to topic.
- Clearly express relevant opinions.
- Demonstrate appreciation and disagreement respectfully and constructively.

- Assess impact of government and private partner actions on non-profit ventures

4. Volunteer Management: Assemble, organize, and provide ongoing guidance to work teams, including clear performance expectations, constructive feedback and acknowledgement of performance that exceeds expectations.

- Identify potential sources of volunteers.
- Implement effective recruitment strategies to attract volunteers.
- Employ selection and placement practices to match volunteers to accomplish tasks.
- Use communication skills persuade them to get involved.
- Articulate a vision to those involved in a project.
- Connect the vision to achievable goals.
- Convert goals into action plans.
- Gain commitment and support for proposed strategies or work agendas.
- Empower others to achieve goals and a level of independence to continue the effort.
- Recognize and reward/reinforce good performance.

5. Evaluation: Collecting and analyzing information to assess the effectiveness of an effort.

- Identify appropriate occasions and purposes for evaluation.
- Develop appropriate screening procedures and data collection processes.
- Collect and use data.
- Organize and manage data collection appropriately and efficiently.
- Synthesize and summarize data collected.
- Use appropriate data management tools and software.
- Interpret results appropriately and solicit feedback on conclusions.

Tier 5: VISTA Knowledge Competencies

1. **VISTA: Understanding of the history, mission and focus of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and VISTA.**

Critical Work Functions

- Understand the VISTA mission and focus and work within that context to accomplish project goals.
- Understand organizational priorities and how your work objectives fit in that context.
- Understand the causes, effects, and cycle of poverty using the knowledge to further the VISTA mission in successfully implementing assignments.
- Understand and work within the chain of command in the organization.
- Understand the importance of building community capacity to engage in and sustain a project when the VISTA assignment ends.

Knowledge Areas

The CNCS family

- Knowledge and understanding of CNCS history and organizational culture
- Knowledge and understanding of VISTA history and organizational culture
- Understand reporting relationships and responsibilities in the organization

History of poverty

- Theories of Poverty: Individual Circumstances, Cultural, Political-economic structure, Geographic, and Cumulative and Cyclical
- Types of Poverty: Absolute Poverty, Relative Poverty, Situational poverty, Generational Poverty
- Measuring poverty
- Poverty thresholds
- Community development solutions

VISTA focus

- Capacity building strategies
- Fund-raising strategies
- Sustainability strategies

2. **Life as a VISTA: Critically assess one's own skill set and seek information, advice, and assistance as needed to complete assigned tasks and build own ability in one's job.**

- Understand other organizations that interact with, regulate or depend on the sponsoring organization as they affect the work, mission, and assignment.
- Understand organizational priorities and how the organization perceives your work objectives fit in that context.
- Understand and work within the VISTA chain of command.
- Obtain needed support from the VISTA supervisor and co-workers.
- Understand reporting relationships and responsibilities in VISTA.
- Understand and adapt to the VISTA service conditions.
- Work with others to document and communicate the achievements of VISTA, the sponsoring organization, and its partners in addressing community needs and meeting the objectives of the Sponsoring Organization, and diverse stakeholders in the VISTA and Sponsoring Organization's mission
- Stay informed about local and national news and trends that affect their organizational work.
- Critically assess one's own skill set and seek information, advice, and assistance as needed to complete assigned tasks.
- Identify training opportunities that support the successful completion of the assignment.
- Reconcile personal values, objectives, and goals with VISTA priorities, culture, and guidelines.
- Manage personal life and workload effectively.

Knowledge Areas

Rules and Regulations

- Administrative Policies
- Administrative Procedures/ Processes
- Relationship to Sponsoring Organization
- Relationship to political and community events

- Media Relationships
- ***Roles, Responsibilities and Interactions of Key VISTA stakeholders***
- AmeriCorps VISTA Headquarters Office
- CNCS State Offices
- VISTA Leaders
- VISTA Supervisor
- VISTA Member
- Community
- Sponsoring Organization
- ***VISTA Service Conditions***
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Living Allowance
- Educational Benefits
- Travel and Transportation Benefits
- Health Benefits
- Leave
- ***VISTA Resources and Training Opportunities***
- Pre-service Orientation
- VISTA Campus Website
- VISTA Handbook
- On-line training
- VISTA Forums
- Online training
- ***VISTA Service Year***
- Stress management
- Life after Vista.

3. VISTA placement and VISTA Assignment Description (VAD): Demonstrate an understanding of the assignment and the activities for carrying out the assignment.

- Determine factors affecting the success of the VISTA assignment, or the sponsoring organization's objectives.
- Find out the non-negotiable community cultural norms.
- Demonstrate how organization and community culture impact the assignment plan and outcomes.
- Demonstrate how the VISTA culture of eradicating poverty impacts the assignment plan and outcomes.
- Identify and work with formal and informal community leaders to implement effort.
- Establish working agreements that reflect the culture and norms in the community.
- Encourage ownership of the agreement.
- Address the goals and guidelines of VISTA and the VAD to meet the goals of the assignment.
- Describe appropriate actions that reflect an understanding of the assignment descriptions.
- Describe the assignment relationships to capacity building and to addressing poverty.
- Develop a plan for getting started.
- Review the work plan on a regular basis to keep the assignment on track.
- Establish a working relationship with the supervisor to effectively manage the VAD.
- Maintain regular contact with supervisor and other appropriate parties.
- Use appropriate communication styles and venues to accomplish the goals of the assignment.

Knowledge Areas

VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

- The community need and culture
- The goal statement
- Brainstorming for solutions
- Milestones: indicator, targets, measurement criteria, data collection
- Supervisor role and support in accomplishing the assignment

4. Community Outreach and Marketing: Promote the value of the project to decision makers within and beyond the organization to garner support for the project.

- Use communication styles appropriate to particular media, including email, teleconference, and video conference.
- Promote the program through appropriate marketing techniques by tailoring marketing efforts to reach and engage the attention of diverse audiences.
- Creating appropriate print material as needed (e.g., flyers, brochures)
- Develop and deliver presentations that effectively convey a message addressing the interests of diverse audiences, limitations of time, and key issues, challenges or, accomplishments, the organization seeks to highlight
- Market the program to partners and stakeholders to garner support and to fellow practitioners in order to replicate its activities or strategies.
- Write clear and accurate task and job descriptions, notices, summaries of meetings, reports and summaries of accomplishments
- Demonstrate flexibility in adapting communication style to the circumstances of a wide range of situations, including one-on-one situations, small group work sessions, public meetings.

Knowledge Areas

- Marketing Techniques
- Presentation Techniques

5. Resource Mobilization: Work with colleagues and stakeholders to mobilize resources and raise funds.

- Communicate program goals, resource needs, and project status to stakeholders and volunteers.
- Identify diversified sources of funding.
- Participate in the development of and participation in fund-raising activities.
- Participate in the development and writing of grant requests.

Knowledge Areas

- Business writing
- Grant Writing
- Fund-raising

6. Community Capacity-building for Sustainability: Enabling the relationships and processes to establish the permanent infrastructure in nonprofit organizations to help them more effectively sustain the effort.

- Inventory personal and organizational resources in light of community needs assessment in order to determine areas where it is most feasible to make a contribution to community capacity-building
- Identify potential capacity-building activities and negotiate with community stakeholders to agree upon a plan of action which responds to expressed priorities and which has an adequate likelihood of success
- Plan and prepare capacity-building activities while securing any resources necessary which are not already available within the organization
- Implement capacity-building activities, monitor progress, and adjust as necessary to address unforeseen developments

7. Training Development: Ensure programmatic quality and community volunteer capacity through the creation and/or revisions to training resources

- Inventory and research training material necessary to the organization's functioning (e.g., volunteer training manuals, program curriculum for staff)
- Draft outlines, timelines and identify resources for the development or revision of training or education material (e.g., manuals, guides)
- Plan and contribute to the revisions or creation of support training (e.g., handouts, exercises, PowerPoints)
- Pilot materials with key audiences (staff, community volunteers) and revise accordingly
- Publish and disseminate materials within the organization and to external audiences, as appropriate.
- Provide Train the trainer sessions to ensure capacity to implement training.

8. Technology Development and Support: Develop and/or up-date technology support systems to maximize organizational functions (program outreach, communication, resource distribution)

- Assess existing technology systems (platform, software, etc.) including limitations and strengths, budgets for expansion or new components.

- Research technology solutions (e.g., web presence, database system) used by similar organizations.
- Work with key stakeholders within the organization and larger community of experts on identifying the rationale (why needed) and functionality (what is needed) of the technology to guide decision-making.
- Gather feedback from user groups on mock-up (alpha test?) before full development.
- Create and/or up-date web pages;
- Develop electronic spreadsheet or databases.
- Alpha/Beta test (?) technology support and gather and incorporate feedback
- Train staff to sustain and trouble-shoot technology issues of users.
- Monitor progress, and adjust as necessary to address unforeseen developments

Upper Tier – VISTA Program Areas

- Community Development
- Community Outreach
- Children and Youth
- Disaster Recovery
- Economic Development
- Education
- Entrepreneurship
- Eldercare
- Ex-offender
- Environment
- Health
- Hunger
- Homelessness
- Housing
- Homeland Security
- Neighborhood Revitalization
- Public Safety
- Technology
- Web Design/Computer Skills