



Federal Jobs & VISTA Benefits:
Everything you need to know!



Double the Value of Your Ed Award? Here's How!

VISTA Viewfinder
Issue 14:
October 28, 2008

VISTA: Volunteers In Service To America
Since 1964, 175,000 Strong



VISTA viewfinder

1 VISTA since 1964

2 Volunteers in Service

3 175,000 Strong

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www.americorps.gov
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SNAPSHOTS

ISSUE 14: October 28, 2008

Learn how to use social media (Facebook, YouTube, etc.): [learn here](#)

[Non-competitive Eligibility and Federal Jobs](#)
[VISTA Rights and Responsibilities during Election Season](#)
[V is for... Free VISTA Hoodie!](#)

'68/'69 VISTA alum searches for children he served: [view here](#)

Non-competitive Eligibility and Federal Jobs

New VISTA recruitment campaign, "Fight Poverty with Passion:"

When VISTAs complete their year of service, they earn the status of having one year of non-competitive eligibility (NCE) for federal employment. NCE has opened the door to federal positions for many VISTA alumni and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, and can help you as well!

THE LANDSCAPE



VISTA Campus now launched!

"V is for ____"



To learn more about "V is for," visit www.vistacampus.org

[learn more](#)

Learn about the President's Volunteer Service Award:

[learn more](#)

VISTA Bethany Warner blogged her entire year of service:

[view here](#)



Matt Zielsdorf, who recently finished his second year of service with VISTA as a [VISTA Leader](#), used his non-competitive status to obtain a full-time position with the VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) in Austin, TX.

VISTA has created a [Non-competitive Eligibility Frequently Asked Questions](#) resource on the VISTA Campus which describes the significance of NCE and details information you should provide when applying for competitive service positions.

Competitive service positions are civilian positions in the Federal Government that are subject to the civil service laws passed by Congress. They give hiring officials broad authority to review different types of applicant groups, with different status, before determining the best-qualified candidate based on job-related criteria. Non-competitive eligibility permits an agency to hire a VISTA alumnus who meets the minimum qualifications for a position without going through all the formalities of the competitive process.

These competitive service positions can be found on [USAJOBS.gov](#), which is the official job site of the United States Federal Government. When applying for a competitive service position, a VISTA alumnus who has NCE status should highlight this status in their cover letter, resume, and through the supplemental documents area these online application systems contain. To obtain proof of your eligibility for non-competitive status, a VISTA alumnus can download a copy of their AmeriCorps VISTA certification letter by visiting [myamericorps.gov](#) and selecting the "My Service Letter" link.

Applying to competitive service positions on USAJOBS.gov is just one of the routes available to alumni with non-competitive eligibility. VISTA and/or Peace Corps alumni

To request a V pin (limit one per VISTA), e-mail your name and address to VISTAOutreach@cns.gov

Win a VISTA hoodie. [Click here](#) to find out how

Join AmeriCorps Alums—for current VISTAs too! [Join now](#)

My AmeriCorps Portal: Is your information up-to-date? [visit My AmeriCorps](#)

V Cafe Question of the Month: What neighborhood programs have you discovered that are having a positive effect in your community? [answer now](#)

VISTA on MySpace: [visit Myspace](#)

VISTA on Flickr: [visit Flickr](#)

VISTA on YouTube: [visit Youtube](#)

VISTA on Facebook: [visit Facebook](#)

FAQ

[Click for Frequently Asked Questions](#)

have obtained positions with the federal government through informational interviews with federal agencies and by attending career fairs and meeting with federal agency recruitment representatives. With NCE status, one can be hired for one federal position while interviewing for another. The key for all alumni was that they were qualified for the position and let the agency know that they had non-competitive status. For additional information and helpful hints on applying to a federal position, please visit the [Information Center](#) on USAJOBS.gov.

CURRENT OPENINGS

If you are a VISTA alumnus with NCE, the USDA is currently looking for individuals to fill open positions. If you are interested, please click [here](#) to see if the opportunity is right for you.

Federal Employee Retirement and Leave Credit

If you are already a federal government employee (or even a state employee, depending on the state), you may credit your VISTA and/or Peace Corps service for retirement and leave time calculation benefits. For example, if you served one year as a VISTA, it means you can retire one year earlier than your planned departure date from the federal government. You can pay more into your retirement account as well. And it also means you would be one year closer to an increase in leave time, which varies by agency.

To credit your VISTA service, a VISTA alumnus can download a copy of their AmeriCorps VISTA certification letter by visiting myamericorps.gov and selecting the "My Service Letter" link. Present the letter to your agency's human resources office for processing. Some agencies may require additional paperwork.

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Making the Most of Your AmeriCorps Education Award



By Christy Hicks
Associate Director

AmeriCorps Alums

When you complete your VISTA term of service, you are eligible to receive a \$4,725 AmeriCorps Education Award (if you chose it instead of the stipend). It's a valuable resource to put toward qualified student loans or the cost of attendance at an institution of higher learning. There are strategies that can actually double the value of your Education Award. Here are a few simple tips and Web sites where you can find more details:

- More than 70 schools offer **scholarships** to AmeriCorps alumni or **match the value of the Education Award**. In some cases, a 100 percent match is offered, essentially turning your \$4,725 into \$9,450! To see if a school near you offers these incentives, visit the AmeriCorps Alums "Ed Award Center" [here](#). (You must be a member of AmeriCorps Alums (it's free to join) and logged into your account to view this page.)
- If you are using your award to pay all or part of your existing student loans, some lenders will allow you to apply your entire award toward the principal of your loan, which generally reduces your monthly loan payments and results in you paying less over the life of the loan. Check out these short [case studies to learn more about loan-payment strategies](#).
- If you're planning to apply for financial aid to go to school, you can generally **exclude your AmeriCorps living allowance and the Education Award as sources of income**. Since a lower adjusted gross income can sometimes result in a better financial aid package, it's important to make sure your AmeriCorps resources are included on Worksheet C of your financial aid form. A detailed explanation is available [here](#).
- You'll find **all of the details about your Education Award** in the secure "My AmeriCorps" online system. You can check to make sure you chose to receive the Education Award and you can manage how the award is dispersed to schools or loans. Register or log in at <http://my.americorps.gov>.

According to its Web site, "AmeriCorps Alums continue to 'get things done' by connecting alumni, advancing our commitment to service, supporting and advocating for AmeriCorps programs and building the capacity of alumni to be agents of change in their communities." AmeriCorps Alums was founded in 1995 as a 501(c)3 and is not affiliated with the Corporation for National & Community

Service. Current VISTAs and alumni can visit www.americorpsalums.org for free, basic membership.

Note: Current AmeriCorps members (including VISTAs) are expressly forbidden to engage in any advocacy efforts, including visiting the AmeriCorps Alums Advocacy Center, while in service.

More information about using your Education Award is available on the VISTA Campus in the Transitions section. Visit www.vistacampus.org.

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V is for... Free VISTA Hoodie!



V is for... VISTA Rob: You, too, can be as cool as VISTA Rob in his V hoodie. Read on to find out how.

Upload your “V is for” photo on VISTA’s Flickr group or post a “V is for” story on the VISTA Campus for a chance to win. Here’s the scoop:

- One winner will be chosen at random every two weeks and announced in the Viewfinder.
- Winner must respond with his/her name and address to VISTAOutreach@cns.gov to receive the VISTA hoodie.
- One “V” photo or story submission gives you a

chance to win every two weeks for the duration of the contest.

Here's what you need to do to enter:

1. Submit a "V is for" photo.
 - Get creative with a camera. Put on your V pin and snap away! Include in your pictures other VISTAs, community members, your favorite cheap meal, whatever says VISTA to you!
 - Next, visit the "V is for" Flickr page at www.flickr.com/groups/visfor. If you're new to Flickr, you'll need to sign up – go to the bottom of the Flickr page and click on "Create your free account" to get started. (Note: Flickr is part of Yahoo, and if you already have a Yahoo account then you can sign into Flickr with your Yahoo ID.)
 - Once your account is created, join the "V is for" group and upload your picture to the "V is for" group pool. Be sure to include a caption that has your name and where you serve.

2. Submit a "V is for" story.
 - Get creative with a pen and paper or your PC. Write your personal VISTA story of service or create a fictional myth or legend about the "V." Just make sure you include what "V is for."
 - Next, visit the [VISTA Campus](#) and post your "V" story in the ["V is for" forum](#).
 - Make sure to include your name and where you serve.

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Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What is the Viewfinder?

A: VISTA means view-looking out on a broad expanse. The viewfinder, a toy that all generations of VISTAs recognize, was a kind of binocular that focused on points of interest, highlights, and snapshots in living color. The VISTA Viewfinder surveys in the landscape and zeroes in on service.

Q. Why the Viewfinder?

A. Here's your direct link to connecting with other VISTAs,

learning what they are doing, and helping to spread the message of VISTA and national service!

Q. How can I contribute?

A. Have a story to tell? Submission ideas? Contact vistaoutreach@cns.gov. Use the Viewfinder to highlight your VISTA service and share your experiences with others across the country!

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