

# AmeriCorps VISTA Project Development

## **Role of Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) State Offices**

The Corporation's State Offices are federal offices staffed by federal employees in the state. They conduct public outreach and program support and are directly responsible for developing and overseeing all VISTA projects within their state. The CNCS State Offices are the local presence and their decision-making is positively affected by their close proximity to the communities, programs and agencies that help address poverty issues. The Corporation State Office is available to provide technical assistance to organizations interested in VISTA resources. A directory of Corporation State Offices is available at <http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp>.

Each CNCS State Office creates an annual plan for programming based on local priorities and on yearly guidance issued by VISTA Headquarters (which is typically issued toward the end of the federal fiscal year - September 30<sup>th</sup>). When resources are available to develop new VISTA projects, the State Office, under the direction of the State Office Director, reviews proposals from organizations interested in becoming VISTA sponsors. Staff may review Concept Papers previously submitted as a result of general outreach, or they may work in collaboration with an intermediary agency to identify new placement sites. Intermediary agencies are VISTA sponsors that are approved to place VISTAs at other placement sites with concurrence by the State Office. A State Office may also elect to release a Request for Concept Papers.

## **New Project Development**

CNCS State Offices can only develop new projects when resources are available. Annually, State Offices receive an allocation of resources to support VISTA projects for a given fiscal year. A portion of each year's allocation must go to support any previously existing projects. If any resources remain, the State Office can support new projects. Depending on commitments to existing projects and new resource availability, a State Office may not be able to develop new projects for one or more years. However, organizations interested in VISTA resources can still submit Concept Papers year-round, and the State Office will place compelling Concept Papers on hold pending resources for future development.

If resources for new project development are available, the State Office staff will review Concept Papers previously received to determine an organization's eligibility as a sponsor and the proposal's alignment with programming priorities. The State Office may also conduct outreach to eligible organizations and/or issue a Request for Concept Papers, which outlines the process, timeline and programming priority areas. Finally, a State Office might collaborate with an existing sponsor that can serve as intermediary to develop new single-project sites annually.

## **State Office VISTA Resources**

Resources for new VISTA project development and placement of VISTA members is dependent upon the budget provided to VISTA by Congress. Funds are distributed by VISTA Headquarters to the field based on prior year production, population, poverty rates and other factors.

## **Project Approval**

All CNCS grantmaking and project approvals are done through [eGrants](#), an online grants management system. The entire application process – from initial contact to award -- typically takes three to five months.

For steps to application development, please see the publication [Is VISTA Right for Your Organization?: A Guide to Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA Project Sponsor](#).

## **Concept Paper Consideration**

State Office staff considers Concept Paper submissions based on a number of criteria, including how the proposed project:

- Fits with one or more of the programming priorities of the Corporation, the VISTA program, or the State Office.
- Addresses the needs of low-income communities.
- Leads to building organizational capacity so that the project can continue once the VISTA resources are withdrawn.
- Involves beneficiaries of the service and the low-income community in project development and implementation.
- Is designed to generate public and/or private-sector resources.
- Promotes local volunteer service.
- Otherwise complies with the VISTA program.

In addition, the State Office may consider other criteria, such as:

- Whether the applicant has the management and technical capability to implement the project successfully.
- Data on applicant history and performance.
- Relative risk and opportunity (e.g., experience in the issues related to the beneficiaries of service and those being addressed by the proposed project)
- How the proposal helps the State Office compile a balanced portfolio with respect to geographic representation as well as equitable treatment of rural and urban communities, small and large programs, and single and multi-state programs.

## **Full Application Consideration**

If the Concept Paper submission is approved, the applicant is invited to complete a full project application. In addition to the criteria used for Concept Papers, State Office staff considers application submissions based on additional factors, such as:

Whether the applicant:

- Ensures resources are available for VISTAs to perform tasks; i.e., space, consumable supplies, telephone, computer/internet access, in-service transportation reimbursement; and be able to provide emergency cash advances when needed.
- Requested the appropriate level of resources to achieve proposed goals and activities.
- Has capacity and commitment to recruit, orient, train, supervise and otherwise support recruited Members in appropriate capacity-building roles.
- Has capacity to involve the beneficiary community in order to achieve project self-sufficiency.

## **Questions?**

Please contact your Corporation State Office or AmeriCorps VISTA.