



Refugee Support Network Orientation and Info 2013

- I. What you should do once you have accepted your VISTA position
- II. Benefit information
- III. The Pre-Service Orientation
- IV. What you should do (and what you should expect) when you start at your site
- V. Time cards, illness, vacation, and holidays
- VI. Mileage reimbursement and training funds
- VII. Role Clarifications (Site Supervisor, VISTA Leader, Project Director, CNCS State Office Representative)
- VIII. Refugee Support Network information and expectations
- IX. Documentation and reporting
- X. Workplace conflicts
- XI. Important links, contacts, and listservs

The Refugee Support Network AmeriCorps*VISTA Project

*The Refugee Support Network (RSN) is an AmeriCorps*VISTA project with the goal of increasing the quality and capacity of services provided to refugee and immigrant populations in King County.*

The participants in 2013/2014 are **Asian Counseling and Referral Service** (located in South Seattle), **Coalition for Refugees from Burma** (located in Seattle's International District), **East African Community Services** (located in South Seattle), **International Rescue Committee** (located both in SeaTac and downtown Seattle), **Jewish Family Service Refugee and Immigrant Service Center** (located in Kent and Bellevue), **School's Out Washington** (located in Seattle's Central District), and **Somali Community Services Coalition** (located in SeaTac). Each of these agencies provides services to various refugee and immigrant groups in Seattle and King County.

Agency backgrounds:

Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) was founded in 1973 out of a grassroots effort. During that time, Asian Pacific Americans were at risk of misdiagnosis and receiving inappropriate care from service providers unfamiliar with their culture and language. Today, ACRS provides a continuum of services for primarily low-income, immigrant, refugee, American-born Asians and Pacific Islanders through 13 programs.

The **Coalition for Refugees from Burma** (CRB) has been helping refugees from Burma since 2006. Established as a Mutual Assistance Association and registered 501c(3) in 2009, CRB's goal is to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate social support services to improve the living conditions and quality of life of resettled refugees. CRB intentionally reaches across ethnic, religious and language barriers to foster community cohesion and build capacity.

East African Community Services (EACS) was established in 2000 to provide culturally specific advocacy, information, referral, and direct social services to the more than 20,000 Somali, Oromo, Ethiopian, and other East African refugees living in King County. EACS is committed to improving the well-being and quality of life for East African immigrants and refugees by providing the tools necessary for men, women, youth, elders, and families to succeed in the Pacific Northwest.

The **International Rescue Committee** (IRC) was founded in 1933 and is a leading nonsectarian, voluntary organization providing relief, protection and resettlement services for refugees and victims of oppression or violent conflict. The IRC's 22 US Program offices provide assistance to refugees resettling in a number of communities around the United States. The IRC in Seattle ensures new arrivals have food, shelter, and clothing, and works with refugees to help them gain self-sufficiency through English language classes, job training and placement services, and community participation activities. The IRC is also the lead agency in the Washington Anti-trafficking Response Network (WARN).

Jewish Family Service (JFS) was founded in 1892 to provide refugee resettlement to persecuted Russians Jews. Today, the Refugee and Immigrant Service Centers (RISC) of JFS provide services such as resettlement, employment placement, ESL citizenship classes, and access to valuable community resources to refugees and immigrants from all religions and cultures throughout King County. The RISC team strives to encourage self-sufficiency, while at

the same time identifying critical needs that require immediate intervention and case management.

School's Out Washington (SOWA) was founded in 1987, and the organization's history reflects the emergence and development of the afterschool and youth development (AYD) professional field. SOWA's mission, vision, and values reflect a deep commitment to the advancement of the AYD field, the individuals who work in the field, and the children, youth, families, and communities served by the field. SOWA administers Washington State's Refugee School Impact Grant, which supports school systems statewide impacted by significant numbers of refugee children and youth, ages 5-18, in the country three years or less.

Somali Community Services Coalition (SCSC) was formed in 1995 by a group of Somali community leaders to assist the large influx of Somali refugees and immigrants in adjusting to their new lives in the Seattle area. The mission of Somali Community Services Coalition is to enhance and improve the well-being and quality of life of Somali families and individuals, while maintaining the cultural heritage of the Somali community.

RSN Accomplishments:

The Refugee Support Network (RSN) is entering its sixth year, and the RSN VISTA members' accomplishments have far surpassed the goals of the project plan. In its first five years, RSN members recruited and placed over **1700 new volunteers**. In addition, members brought in more than **\$250,000** in cash donations and over **\$350,000** in in-kind resources to build and expand new programs at the sites. These programs have utilized volunteers to provide increased support services to approximately **3500 refugee and immigrant clients!**

I. What you should do once you have accepted your AmeriCorps*VISTA position

- i. First, this is very important!!! **If you are already in King County, go online to the DSHS website (www.dshs.wa.gov) or find your local CSO (Community Service Office) and apply for food stamps.** Do not wait until tomorrow!

On the DSHS website, click the "Ask Us for Help" tab at the top of the page. Then click on "Food or food stamps" in the left-hand column. You can either apply online or print a hardcopy application to take to your local Community Service Office. We will provide you with a DSHS letter with all necessary information upon request. Bring this letter along with a proof of identity when you go in to interview at your CSO. If you applied online, also make sure to bring your online application number with you as well.

If you are relocating, apply for food stamps as soon as you arrive in the Seattle area prior to leaving for orientation and starting at your site. If you are staying somewhere temporarily while searching for housing, use the address of the site at which you will serve on your application. Once you have a more permanent local address, you will need to inform DSHS of your change of address.

There have been lots of issues with VISTAs being denied benefits because they applied after their start date. If you apply for food stamps **after** you begin your VISTA service, then your stipend counts as income. If you apply for food stamps **before** your VISTA service begins, then your stipend does **NOT** count as income. This income disparity is very significant and will change the amount of food stamp benefits you will receive.

You will be applying based upon the income that you currently have (\$0), not based upon the stipend that you will soon be receiving. Remember, you are applying for food benefits **before** you have become a VISTA with the Refugee Support Network. Once you are in the interview, you can tell your caseworker that you will be starting an AmeriCorps*VISTA position, but also that you have **not** started in this position yet. They will ask you to update your status when you begin your new position. Also, make sure that they understand that you will be an AmeriCorps*VISTA member not just AmeriCorps. The rules are different for these programs, and you want to make sure that they enter your placement in correctly.

Here's what the VISTA manual says regarding food benefits:

“The Department of Agriculture administers the Food Stamp Program. Department of Agriculture regulations state that AmeriCorps*VISTA members who were receiving food stamps before joining AmeriCorps*VISTA will not have their food stamp allotment reduced or eliminated as a result of their allowances. Members not receiving food stamps before joining AmeriCorps*VISTA will have their allowances counted as income for purposes of determining their level of food stamp eligibility. Members may be held responsible for food stamp overpayments. Carefully check your allotments to ensure that you are not given food stamps for which you are not eligible. If you apply for food stamps after you become an AmeriCorps*VISTA member, you will have a decreased food stamp allotment. Department of Agriculture Food Stamp Regulations pertaining to AmeriCorps*VISTA income exclusion are contained in the 7 CFR § 273.9.”

If you do have issues with getting your food stamp benefits (even though you did everything correctly), there are some resources that are available to you. First, you may request a fair hearing at DSHS. Next, contact your VISTA Leader and ask about getting connected to your CNCS state rep for advocacy in that arena. Finally, there are several other advocates who may be of use: **Family Assistance** (Solid Ground) (206) 694-6742 (email: familyassistance@solid-ground.org), Washington Service Corps (360) 486-5990, and for **legal assistance** (especially if you are requesting a fair hearing), contact the **Northwest Justice Project's** King County Office (206) 464-1519 (website: www.washingtonlawhelp.org).

Here is a link to a document explaining use of the food stamp card (also called EBT card)--<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/onlinecso/ebt.shtml>.

Also, if you wish to check your balance online, use this website--<https://www.ebtaccount.jpnmorgan.com>.

Special Note on Residency: (adapted from the Washington Service Corps website)

One consideration for members coming from out of state is whether or not to gain Washington State residency. Factors to consider include (but are not limited to) taxes (especially if you are listed as a dependent on someone else's return), eligibility for food stamps, voting, state university tuition, and vehicle registration.

For those who want to become a WA resident or plan to live here for an extended time beyond your year of service, you are required to get a WA state driver's license (\$45 application and license fee). If you are planning to become a WA resident and own your own vehicle, you will also need to register your car in WA, which costs around \$45. You'll also be required to get an emissions test. AmeriCorps members who do not wish

to become WA residents are not required to do so. AmeriCorps members can be considered students for these purposes if they plan to be in WA for only one year.

Another factor in residency is voter registration. If you choose to become a WA resident, you should register to vote in WA. If you choose to retain residency in another state, make sure to register for an absentee ballot so you can vote in your home state.

- ii. If you have moved here from another area specifically for this AmeriCorps*VISTA position, you need to make sure that this is stated on your electronic application on your My AmeriCorps page. If you are relocating more than 50 miles to serve, you will be eligible for a relocation allowance (up to \$550) as well as reimbursement for your travel/shipping costs (keep your receipts!). Fill out the Relocation Travel Form and return it to your VISTA Leader, who will send it on to the state office for approval. The VISTA Member Support Unit will then contact you about any additional paperwork that may be necessary. Be aware that it can take up to six to eight weeks to be reimbursed for travel/shipping costs. Your contact for this and other reimbursement issues will be the **VISTA Member Support Unit** in Austin, TX, at **(866) 473-5733**.
- iii. Also, if you don't have a housing situation that will work for your new income level, then apply for low income housing. According to the HUD website, VISTA stipends are not included in assessing income for their programs:

“Amounts specifically excluded by any other federal statute from consideration as income for purposes of determining eligibility or benefits under a category of assistance programs that included assistance under the U.S. Housing Act of 1937...(b) Payments to volunteers under the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (42 U.S.C.5044, 5058)...”

Sometimes this process will take some time, so it is better to get it started early. Here are some low-income housing resources that we have found:

Apartment Finder Low Income Housing	http://aptfinder.org/listingsSeattle.html
Seattle Housing Authority	http://seattlehousing.org/housing/programs/liph/liph.html
Low Income Housing Institute	http://www.lihi.org
Housing Resources Group	http://www.bellwetherhousing.org/
Capitol Hill Housing	http://www.chhip.org
Housing and Urban Development	http://www.hud.gov/apps/section8
King County Housing Authority (Section 8 vouchers)	http://www.kcha.org/lookingforhousing/section8.aspx
Plymouth Housing Group	http://www.plymouthhousing.org
Association of Washington Housing Authorities	http://www.awha.org/contact.html
Affordable Housing Online (ignore the ads at the top; look for ads that state low income or subsidized)	http://www.affordablehousingonline.com/apartments.asp?mnuState=WA

To give you an idea of how much you can save with low income housing, one VISTA member paid \$413/month for a studio apartment in downtown Seattle. There are a lot of hoops to jump through, but it is really worth it in the long run. If you want to share an apartment, your roommate will also have to be eligible for low-income housing.

Other resources are websites such as Craigslist (<http://seattle.craigslist.org>), Roommate finder (<http://www.roommates.com>), My New Place (<http://www.mynewplace.com>), and Subletting and Rentals (<http://www.sublet.com>). aPodments (<http://apodment.com>) may be another option that you want to look at.

When you are considering your housing situation, **make sure that you take into account transportation to and from your site.** Transportation costs in both time and money can be an unwanted additional stressor during your service year. Try to locate yourself in a housing situation that allows easy transport to your work site.

- iv. Finally, you need to make sure that your **AmeriCorps online application** is complete and that you **accept** the position formally. (*Again, remember to check the appropriate box if you are moving here from another location.*) If you find that you cannot complete your application, go through the entire application again and make sure that all of the red asterisked (*) questions have been filled out completely. You will also need to make sure that you have two references on file for your application to be completed.

If you have any missing information on your application that is required for processing, the application will not go through, and the Corporation can't complete your enrollment paperwork (this can cause a delay in your stipend disbursement).

II. Benefit Information

VISTA Member Handbook: Read your VISTA Member Handbook (<http://vistacampus.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2093>) for more detailed information about your benefits and year of service.

Monthly Stipend: Your monthly stipend will be paid by direct deposit into your checking account. In addition, you can access your payment information by way of the My AmeriCorps website (<https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do>). The current (2012-2013) amount for RSN VISTAs is \$491.96 (pre-tax) paid biweekly.

Health Care: Your health care benefit is administered through Seven Corners. For more information about these benefits you can access their website (<http://americorps.sevencorners.com>). To access your profile, go to <https://myplan.sevencorners.com/default.login.cfm>. This is also where you can check on claim info. They have a member handbook that is accessible there as well as provider and pharmacy information.

Important things to note regarding the AmeriCorps Health Care plan—

- The AmeriCorps plan is a health benefits plan and not health insurance.
- The AmeriCorps plan will NOT cover any health issues that you had prior to the start of your AmeriCorps term. It also will not cover vision or dental (with the exception of emergency dental procedures).

- Ask providers if they are in the Choice Care network when trying to determine whether or not a provider is in the network. Providers will not know what you are referring to if you ask about Seven Corners or the AmeriCorps plan.
- If you have specific questions, call the Seven Corners line, staffed 24/7, at 866-699-4186.

The **2-1-1** website (<http://www.resourcehouse.info/WIN211>) is a good source for a variety of free and low-cost resources to supplement your health care plan. You can access this information by calling 2-1-1 as well. Also, see the attached document “Low Cost Healthcare examples” for more specific resources.

Child Care: You will need to access this website (<http://www.americorpschildcare.com>) for documents and information.

Student Loan Forbearance/Deferment: You can begin this process on the My AmeriCorps website. Also, you can be eligible to have your loan interest paid by the National Service Trust after you complete a full term of AmeriCorps Service (Read Chapter 6: Education Benefits of your **VISTA Member Handbook** carefully to ensure that you understand how this process works).

Individual Development Accounts: (Also known as **IDAs**.) These are savings accounts designed to assist low income populations plan and practice saving for a personal financial goal (either **Education**, **Home Purchase**, or **Small Business**). They will provide double (for small business) or triple matching of your investment for an approved use (so \$2,000 of your investment will be transformed into \$8,000).

Some of the expectations that you will have to participate in the program include attendance in financial literacy classes and consistent minimum monthly payments (other expectations vary according to the type of financial goal that you are working toward).

Contact the United Way of King County to learn more about IDA programs in Seattle.

Reduced Fee GREs and University Applications: More information about applying for reduced fee GREs can be found in the VISTA Handbook (<http://vistacampus.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2093&chapterid=2546>).

Other benefit information can be accessed at the My AmeriCorps website my.americorps.gov or in your VISTA Member Handbook. (If you are having problems accessing the My AmeriCorps website, be sure to communicate your problem to your VISTA Leader.)

III. The Pre-Service Orientation (PSO)

The learning objectives of Pre-Service Orientation include a basic knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Mission and structure of the Corporation for National and Community Service
- Philosophy and goals of AmeriCorps and the AmeriCorps*VISTA program
- AmeriCorps*VISTA legal and administrative requirements

- Role of the Corporation State Office
- Role of the sponsoring organization, project work plan, and member assignment description
- Terms, conditions, and benefits of your AmeriCorps*VISTA service
- Your equal opportunity and civil rights and responsibilities as an AmeriCorps*VISTA member
- Your role in working with community organizations and low-income persons
- Your role as a developer of sustainable efforts
- Community development, networking, and problem-solving

The PSO is also where you need to submit a lot of your formal paperwork for your VISTA position (think of it as a human resources retreat!). You will be compensated for travel to and from the PSO. The Corporation for National & Community Service representative at the VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) will make travel arrangements. Lodging and meals will be provided.

The other location where you will need to fill out paperwork will be online at the **My AmeriCorps** website (<https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do>). This website is where you fill out your direct deposit form—this is very important as this is how you will be receiving your stipend (unless you fill out a direct deposit waiver).

You will also need to fill out the **V-81** form if you are planning on using a vehicle (either personal or site owned) or public transportation for project related travel (this doesn't include transportation from home to work at the beginning and ending of each day).

Another aspect of the PSO will be a series of workshops that are designed to assist you with your placement. It is important that you bring two things along with you to these workshops in order to get the most out of the experience. The first is your VISTA **VAD** (Volunteer Assignment Description). You will get this from either your Site Supervisor or VISTA Leader. The other item is your **Project Plan**, which you can request from your VISTA Leader. These are the two parts of the plan for your year of service in AmeriCorps VISTA. Your VAD is the specific plan of what you will be expected to do; your Project Plan describes the goals of the project as a whole (sort of what you as a team are hoping to accomplish in the next year).

You will also receive your VISTA Member Handbook during the PSO. Reading this is crucial because, although we have excerpted important aspects of this document here, your ability to maximize your experience during your service year relies heavily upon your ability to utilize efficiently the resources that are available to you. Rather than spouting some cliché or another, just remember that it is ultimately your responsibility to advocate for yourself, and knowledge is one of the basic principles of effective advocacy.

The last piece of the PSO is the instruction on the history and mission of AmeriCorps*VISTA. They will go into it in depth, so we won't cover it here.

IV. What you should do (and what you should expect) when you start at your site

Ok, you've got your VAD and your Project Plan. You've been to the PSO, and have had help understanding these two documents. Now you will be starting at your site. Here is what the VISTA manual says that you should expect when you arrive at your site:

ON-SITE ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) is an extension of Pre-Service Orientation. It takes place immediately after you report to your project site. The sponsoring organization conducts the orientation, building on concepts presented during Pre-Service Orientation. OSOT may continue for an extended period because it involves introducing you to the sponsoring organization, the local community, and your role within the community. The objectives of OSOT are to provide a basic knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Background, purpose, and structure of the sponsoring organization
- Roles and responsibilities for you and other members within the organization
- Roles and responsibilities of your supervisor that are related to AmeriCorps*VISTA
- Job responsibilities of your supervisor other than those associated with AmeriCorps*VISTA
- Personnel and attendance policies of the sponsoring organization, including use of equipment such as computers and the Internet
- Specific member assignments and skills needed to accomplish tasks
- Evaluation of member performance by the sponsoring organization
- Background of the local community and identification of community leaders
- Nature of the low-income population served by the project
- Potential resources that can be applied to achieve project goals

Some of the first discussions, if you have not addressed them already in the interview with your site supervisor, should involve:

What will your typical work week look like?

When would be a good time to schedule weekly meetings?

Will you be working 9-5, or are there evening and/or weekend expectations?

Who do you contact at your site in case you need to call in sick or request time off?

In general, the expectation (as far as the typical work week is concerned) is 40 hours/week. There will most likely be times when you will need to work more than that during a week. **It is up to you**, in conjunction with your site supervisor, to negotiate how to accommodate these demands and prevent burn-out.

V. Timesheets, Quarterly Reports, Vacation, Holidays, and Illness

Timesheets and quarterly reports are required and will be submitted to the VISTA Leader on a quarterly basis. You will receive a copy of the timesheet and quarterly report templates electronically and can submit it to the VISTA Leader by e-mail on the noted due dates. The RSN is required by CNCS to keep all timesheets on file for the duration of the project.

AmeriCorps VISTA members have **10 personal leave days and 10 medical leave days per year**. There are also special leaves available to members for other purposes (parental, emergencies, military, etc.) Consult your VISTA manual for more details on these options, and contact your VISTA Leader and Project Director if a situation comes up and you feel you may be eligible for a special leave.

If you wish to request a personal leave, you first want to consult with your site supervisor in order to ensure that the dates you wish to request off are possible in light of the needs at your site. You should also check your RSN calendar to see if there are any RSN obligations that will conflict with your plans. It is important that you begin this procedure with plenty of advance notice so that your site and the project can plan ahead. A good guideline for requesting personal leave is **two weeks advance notice**. However, that being said, your site may have additional requirements that you should respect and follow. Also, know that during some timeframes (such as the Winter Holiday season) there may be a larger than normal demand for time off, so plan accordingly. In addition, you should set your Outlook with an Out of Office assistant to inform people when you will be back and whom to contact in your absence. If you have your own phone line, set your voice mail to respond in a similar way so that everyone understands where you are, when you will be back, and who to contact.

As for holidays, your VISTA manual states the holiday policy as follows:

“AmeriCorps*VISTA members enjoy the national holidays that are recognized by their sponsoring organization and are given as time off to the rest of the organization’s personnel. Members do not get federal holidays that are not recognized by their sponsoring organization. For example, if your organization does not give its staff a holiday for Veterans Day, you are also expected to work unless you request and receive approval for one day of personal leave. Additionally, if you want the day off for a religious observance, you should request a day of personal leave. If your sponsoring organization provides its staff additional “floating holidays,” “spring breaks,” “summer recesses,” etc., you are expected to continue to serve on your assignment unless authorized to take the time off as part of your personal leave. Your work plan should spell out the assignments expected of you during these periods. If it does not, consult with your supervisor.”

Listed below are the IRC’s (the RSN’s sponsoring agency) scheduled holidays for the 2013 calendar year.

New Year’s Day	Tuesday	January 1 st
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	Monday	January 21 st
(NOTE: you will be <i>required</i> to participate in a service project for MLK Day)		
Presidents’ Day	Monday	February 18 th
Memorial Day	Monday	May 27 th
Independence Day	Thursday	July 4 th
Labor Day	Monday	September 2 nd
Thanksgiving Day	Thursday	November 28 th
Day after Thanksgiving	Friday	November 29 th
Christmas Day	Wednesday	December 25 th

Please keep in mind that although this is the schedule of the IRC holidays, your site may have different needs, and you should discuss the holiday schedule with your site supervisor to try and accommodate the needs of your site as well as your own.

If you are sick or injured, it is important to contact your site supervisor as soon as feasibly possible. You should attempt to contact your supervisor by phone first, and if he or she is unavailable, send an email followed by another phone call to follow up. If your site supervisor is away from the site and other employees need to know about your absence, you should also contact them so that they can plan accordingly. Check in with your site supervisor at the start of

your placement to clarify the needs of the site as far as sick calls are concerned. You should also contact the Project Director and VISTA Leader if you have any RSN obligations on the day(s) that you are ill or injured.

VI. Mileage Reimbursement and Training Funds

Mileage reimbursement is done through your individual site. Your organization might also have training funds that you can access. Make sure to talk with your site supervisor to find out what the organization's procedures are for reimbursement and training.

Also remember that if you are using your vehicle for work related transportation, then you are required to fill out a V-81 form on your My AmeriCorps site.

VII. Role Clarifications (Site Supervisor, VISTA Leader, Project Director, CNCS State Office Representative)

So who are all of these people that you will be working with during your term of service? Who do I go to in order to ask questions? Here is a breakdown of roles in the Refugee Support Network VISTA team (the quoted text is from the VISTA manual).

- **Site Supervisor:**

“Each AmeriCorps*VISTA member has a supervisor responsible for managing the project. The member receives direction and guidance from a supervisor who works for the sponsoring organization, rather than the Corporation State Office or AmeriCorps*VISTA Headquarters. An AmeriCorps*VISTA member is not an employee of the sponsoring organization. An AmeriCorps*VISTA member is a federal resource on loan to a local organization.”

Your site supervisor is the person who will be providing you with the expectations, resources, and training that is specific to your placement. Site supervisors will be your **first point of contact** for all site related issues (unless you have issues with your supervisor which you feel you cannot address with him or her directly). They will be involved in the defining/redefining of your VAD. You should have weekly meetings scheduled with them for supportive issues as well as feedback and prioritization guidance.

- **VISTA Leader:**

“AmeriCorps*VISTA Leaders are assigned to some larger projects or regions to assist sponsoring organizations and members in achieving program objectives and developing new project activities and sources of community support. . . . AmeriCorps*VISTA Leaders are not permitted to perform administrative or supervisory functions for their sponsoring organizations or Corporation State Offices. Hence, they do not supervise other AmeriCorps*VISTA members. They provide support and coordination for members to increase the impact of the project.”

VISTA Leaders are responsible for a lot of things, but their main focus is helping with the development and sustainability of the project as a whole as well as helping the members

of the team in their efforts as VISTAs. They also assist site supervisors in recruitment for empty RSN VISTA slots. They will provide information about AmeriCorps VISTA and best practice examples to both VISTA members and site supervisors as needed.

They will be in charge of coordinating quarterly reporting to the Corporation for National and Community Service (under the supervision of the project director).

They are the first point of contact for member supportive issues exclusive of site based issues (unless it is a conflict/issue that involves the site supervisor). They are responsible for team meetings and trainings provided by the RSN as well as coordinating any team service projects (such as Martin Luther King Day of Service).

The contact information for your RSN VISTA Leader is:

Yvette Sumner
Refugee Support Network VISTA Leader
International Rescue Committee
100 South King St., Ste, 570
Seattle, WA 98104-2885
tel: 206.623.2105
Yvette.Sumner@rescue.org

- **Project Director:**

The member handbook doesn't spell out the role of the Project Director outside of discussions involving the sponsoring organization, partly because the Director's role is less directly interactive with the members and primarily focused upon project issues.

In the Refugee Support Network, the Project Director is responsible for the overarching issues involving the project and the guidance of the project as a whole (in conjunction with the Corporation for National and Community Service). They provide supervision for the VISTA Leader as well as leadership in inter-site related issues.

The contact information for your RSN Project Director is:

Jennifer Malloy
Development Manager
International Rescue Committee
100 South King St., Ste. 570
Seattle, WA 98104-2885
tel: 206.623.2105
Jennifer.Malloy@rescue.org

- **Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) State Representative:**

"The role of the state office is outreach, program development, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation in support of the Corporation's national service network, and AmeriCorps*VISTA member support. Staff members respond to technical assistance requests from potential sponsoring organizations that wish to develop proposals for AmeriCorps*VISTA projects. Staff also assist the potential sponsoring organization in refining project goals and objectives, in determining if the project is in accordance with the AmeriCorps*VISTA program mission, and in ensuring that a self-sustaining activity will be achieved within the low-income community."

The contact information for your CNCS State Representative is:
Barbara Stahler
WA State Program Specialist
Corporation for National & Community Service
915 2nd Ave., Ste. 3190
Seattle, WA 98174-1103
tel: 206.607.2606 (direct line)
fax: 206.553.4415
bstahler@cns.gov

Much of the member support role of the CNCS State Representative has been shuffled over to the **VISTA Member Support Unit** in Austin, TX. This includes all PSO paperwork processing and VISTA transportation reimbursement (such as to and from the PSO training).

The contact info for the VMSU is:

VISTA Member Support Unit
Corporation for National and Community Services
300 E 8th St, G-169
Austin, TX 78701
Toll Free Number: 866.473.5733
FAX: 512.916.7021

VIII. Refugee Support Network Information and Expectations

The Refugee Support Network has expectations for the members as well. These expectations include

- Attendance and positive participation in all team meetings and events (team meetings typically occur one Friday a month from 3:00 pm until 5:00 pm). There will be service projects during the year, including the MLK Jr. Day of Service—all will require 100% attendance.
- Be open and supportive to fellow team members.
- Provide accurate, comprehensive, and timely information regarding your site (see documentation below).
- Read your VISTA member handbook (completely—yes, we know it is a pain, but you are responsible for knowing the information contained within it).
- Share your knowledge and skills for the betterment of the group.
- Be respectful of other members, the Team Leader, Project Director, Site Supervisors, as well as other employees, volunteers, (and most importantly) clients that you encounter during your year of service.
- Communicate issues and conflicts proactively and be willing to compromise.

As a VISTA, you will be expected to participate in the PSO (mentioned above), which is mandated before you can begin service. In addition to the trainings made available to you at the PSO, the Refugee Support Network will provide support as well. In the past, the RSN provided trainings that covered the following:

Refugee 101 (basic overview of refugee resettlement process)
Immigration Services (basic overview of immigration services for refugee/asylee clients)
Conflict Resolution
Gentrification Issues in King County
WA Anti-Trafficking Response Network
Cross-Cultural Communication and Diversity
King County Community Resources (2-1-1)
Media Access/Public Relations
Background on populations being served by RSN agencies
The Emotional Health and Well-Being of Refugees

Also, some of the resources/websites listed at the end of this document provide excellent information and background to assist you with your role and your development as a VISTA.

IX. Documentation and Reporting

You will need to track a lot of things specifically for your site, but in addition to these expectations, you will also need to keep track of a list of items for the Refugee Support Network and CNCS. Your VISTA Leader will email the form that you will need to submit on a quarterly basis so the accomplishments of the RSN team as a whole can be tracked.

You will need to keep track of the trainings that you attend during the year and how they are paid for (either by your site, CNCS, your own funds, or provided through the RSN). You will also need to keep a running log of the sick days and vacation days that you use to be submitted to the VISTA Leader on a time sheet.

Periodically, the VISTA Leader may ask for other substantive information about your impact at your site so that he or she can report this to CNCS, DSHS's Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA), and other current and potential funders for the program.

There are a number of ways to keep track of this information, and your site will most likely have a database already established. If they do not, then you should let the VISTA Leader know, and they will direct you to other members to use what they have in place as a template for the development of your own materials.

Another important asset in your time as a VISTA is keeping a journal. Having some sort of reference of your VISTA experience will not only make completing your quarterly reports easier (there will be questions that are in a narrative format), but will also provide you with a context that enables you to articulate both the concrete and amorphous accomplishments that you will achieve during your term of service. When the end of your term approaches, and you are thinking, "What have I really done this year?" you can then look back upon these notes and see everything you have accomplished. More importantly, when you are interviewing for jobs in the years to follow, you will be able to say, "This is what I achieved during my year of service."

You are responsible for submitting all requested material and reports by or before the deadline. You will be given plenty of advance notice prior to this date.

Another important document is a VISTA Training Manual specific for your site and position. It is important to leave detailed information for the VISTAs who will come after you. Make sure that

you create or update a site-specific training manual for future VISTA members to leave at the end of your term of service.

X. Workplace conflicts

This is a general framework for a policy on resolving workplace issues and/or conflicts.

Who should you speak to in order to resolve issues in your workplace?

- If you have an issue with a **co-worker** at your site, a **client**, a **board member**, one of your **site's partners**, or a **community member**, then your first point of intervention will be your **Site Supervisor**.
- If you are having an issue with your **Site Supervisor** (that you are unable to work through together), then your initial contact should be with your **VISTA Leader**.
- If you are having an issue with your **VISTA Leader**, then your contact should be with your **Program Director** (possibly in conjunction with your site supervisor).

Your follow-up step would be to communicate with the next person (VISTA Leader if your initial approach was with your Site Supervisor, Project Director if it was the VISTA Leader) if the issue is not resolved. This intervention structure does not indicate any sort of power hierarchy; this is just an organizational structure for mediation. If you have spoken with the Project Director, and you feel that you haven't had your needs met appropriately, then you should speak with your CNCS State Representative (see above for contact information).

Some conflicts are the result of discrimination or harassment. The VISTA member handbook articulates the procedure for reporting these issues as follows:

DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

It is advisable for an AmeriCorps*VISTA member who believes he/she may be a victim of discrimination or harassment as described above to first bring it to the attention of his/her sponsoring organization. If, because of the circumstances, it is not possible to do so, the member should contact the Corporation State Office or the Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness (OCRI) at Corporation Headquarters in Washington, DC. Claims not brought to the attention of OCRI within 45 days of their occurrence may not be accepted in a formal complaint of discrimination. No one can be required to use a program, project, or sponsor dispute resolution procedure before contacting OCRI, and if another procedure is used, it does not affect the 45-day time limit. OCRI may be reached at (202) 606-7503 (voice), (202) 606-3472 (TTY), or eo@cns.gov.

The VISTA manual also states that "it is helpful for a victim of harassment to inform the harasser directly and immediately that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop."

XI. Important links, contacts, and listservs

<http://my.americorps.gov> This is the link to the **My AmeriCorps** website, which has important resources for AmeriCorps VISTA members (including online access to direct deposit forms and other HR paperwork).

<http://vistacampus.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2093> VISTA Member Handbook. It is essential that you are aware of the information in this handbook, so you can take advantage of all of the benefits offered to you as an AmeriCorps VISTA.

<http://nationalserviceresources.org> This is the link to another useful website that contains online lessons provided free to AmeriCorps VISTA members as well as other useful resources.

<http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org> **The EnCorps website.** More resources and member support information. It has a lot of good information and support information for both VISTAs and site supervisors.

<http://www.esd.wa.gov/washingtonservicecorps> This is the **Washington Service Corps member support website**, which has a lot of good information and links available for VISTAs.

<http://www.cal.org/co> **Cultural Orientation Resource Center**—provides excellent cultural and historical information about current and future refugee populations.

<http://refugees.org> **U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants**

www.uscis.gov **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services**

www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=229 **The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program**

<http://www.unhcr.org> **The United Nations Refugee Agency**

<http://www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp> **International Organization for Migration**

<http://www.fmreview.org> **Forced Migration Review.** Good info on refugees and their issues.

<http://www.crisisclinic.org> **Crisis Clinic/Community Resources online**—search engine for community resources in King County. Very useful for referring clients to other service providers.

<http://weareoneamerica.org/resources> **One America Resources Directory**—directory of resource providers in WA state.

<http://www.rhin.org> **Refugee Health Information Network**—website that provides quality multilingual, health information resources for those providing care to resettled refugees and asylees.

<http://www.ethnomed.org> **The EthnoMed site** contains information about cultural beliefs, medical issues, and other related issues pertinent to the health care of recent immigrants to Seattle or the US, many of whom are refugees fleeing war-torn parts of the world.

<http://www.projectmaje.org/index.htm> **Project Maje**—an “independent information project on Burma's human rights and environmental issues.”

<http://www.africafiles.org/eastern.asp> **AfricaFiles website**—good resource for cultural information.

<http://www.idealists.org> **Idealist's website**. Great website for nonprofit resources as well as volunteer recruitment listings.

<http://www.volunteermatch.org> **Volunteer Match**. Another good website for volunteer recruitment as well as training webinars for volunteer recruiters.

<http://www.uwkc.org> **United Way of King County**—has listings of United Way trainings (as well as others provided in the community for nonprofit support), volunteer postings, and service project requests.

<http://www.serviceleader.org> Great resource for volunteer managers.

<http://www.capaciteria.org> Resources and links for nonprofit capacity development.

<http://www.techsoup.org> Technology website for nonprofits.

<http://www.npgoodpractice.org> Great resource for nonprofits—resources and links related to all manner of nonprofit needs.

<http://www.seattlemca.org>. Seattle's **YMCA** website. They offer discounted memberships and waive joining fees for AmeriCorps VISTA members. You need to provide proof of income and proof of affiliation in AmeriCorps to receive the discount. Discount varies between each site, so apply at the YMCA that provides the best discount (you can enroll in the Triangle Plan which allows use of all Seattle YMCAs).

Listservs:

Refugee Discussion listserv—Through Cultural Orientation Resource Center. The Refugee Discussion listserv is used by domestic and overseas refugee service providers to exchange information. To request addition to the listserv, please send an e-mail to COR@cal.org.

NonprofitNetworking—Seattle's Non-profit Networking Yahoo group
(<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NonProfitNetworking>)

CyberVPM—CyberVPM is the international discussion group for volunteer managers.
(<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cybervpm>)

Mentorexchange—The National Mentoring Center's MentorExchange listserv is designed for mentoring program coordinators, staff, and volunteers to share ideas, innovations, resources, and successful practices in the field of youth mentoring.
(http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/mx_listserv.php)