

Request for VISTA Concept Papers

SUMMARY: The Corporation for National and Community Service, Nebraska State Program Office seeks applications for the AmeriCorps*VISTA program from innovative, high-performing and outcome-driven organizations that share the VISTA mission of providing long term solutions to poverty. Approximately 20 AmeriCorps*VISTA positions are available to be placed in late spring/early summer 2014.

AGENCY DESCRIPTION: The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) www.nationalservice.gov is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through its core programs: Senior Corps and AmeriCorps. CNCS leads President Obama's national call to service initiative, United We Serve. As the nation's largest grant-maker for service and volunteering, CNCS plays a critical role in strengthening America's nonprofit sector and addressing our nation's challenges through service. The mission of CNCS is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

PROGRAM TITLE: AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: AmeriCorps*VISTA is a highly professional and rigorous volunteer service program through which national service members serve in organizations full time for one year. VISTA projects focus on building permanent capacity and infrastructure in nonprofit and other organizations to help more effectively bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

Authorized in 1964, the AmeriCorps*VISTA program supports efforts to eradicate poverty by encouraging individuals from all walks of life to engage in a year of full-time service.

Specifically, as noted in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, the VISTA program is designed to:

- Generate the commitment of private sector resources.
- Encourage volunteer service at the local level.
- Support efforts by local agencies and community organizations to achieve long-term sustainability of projects.

The VISTA program places volunteers at sponsoring organizations that absorb most of the costs related to project supervision and logistical support. VISTA provides a small living allowance and certain benefits for members. Investment by the sponsoring organization and the community is fundamental to the VISTA program, as the VISTA resources are intended to be short-term.

To achieve its program purpose, VISTA operates under the following core principles:

Anti-Poverty Focus – The purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, or tribal or public agency with a program that is poverty-related in scope may be considered for VISTA project sponsorship. The project should address helping individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply making poverty more tolerable through short-term services.

Community Empowerment – Sponsoring organizations ensure that the project engages residents of low-income communities in planning, developing and implementing the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community assets, strengths, and resources.

Sustainable Solutions – VISTA Members provide short-term human resources to build long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. All VISTA projects should be developed with the goal to phase out the need for VISTA Members and strengthen the ability of the project to continue indefinitely.

Capacity Building – VISTA Members do not provide direct services to low-income individuals; rather they work to increase the capacity of organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of community volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and collaborative development, VISTA Members mobilize local resources to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. Projects focus on achieving impactful outcomes on the community and/or beneficiary population.

ELIGIBLE SPONSORS: Public organizations such as state and local government organizations, Indian Tribes, and nonprofit private organizations may apply to be VISTA sponsors. Please note that eligible nonprofit private organizations are not limited to those with IRS 501(c)(3) status, but rather all organizations with IRS 501(c) status that focus on anti-poverty community development.

Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible. Organizations can be local, state, or national. National organizations should consider applying to VISTA Headquarters for sponsorship of VISTA if the intent of the project is to benefit more than one state.

Sponsors must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise the VISTA Members, and provide necessary administrative support to complete the goals of the project. Sponsors develop and manage projects with the involvement of the communities that will be served. The beneficiary of any VISTA initiative is the poverty community. The goal for every VISTA program is for the sponsoring organization to sustain the VISTA member's outcomes beyond the service term. Organizations that have previously sponsored VISTA projects for more than 3 years can apply only with a new project and program emphasis and must demonstrate a prior successful record in project management and achieving results.

VISTA MEMBERS: Nearly 6,000 VISTA members serve across the country generate the commitment of private sector resources, encourage volunteer service at the local level and strengthen local agencies and organizations. Members elect to serve their community and commit to a one year term of full time service, be available for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and live at the economic level of the community they serve. VISTA Members come from diverse race, age, geographic, and economic backgrounds. They live and serve in some of our nation's poorest areas. Each VISTA Member makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project with a sponsor. VISTA Members receive a modest living allowance and health benefits during their service and have the option of receiving a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (\$5,550) or an end-of-service cash stipend (\$1,500) following successful completion of one term of service.

Members elect to serve their community and commit to a one year term of full time service, be available for service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and live at the economic level of the community they serve. VISTA Members are not permitted to engage in outside employment during their year of service.

Members are prohibited from performing any activities or duties at their sites that would otherwise be carried out by employed workers, or would supplant the hiring of, or results in the displacement of employed workers, or would impair existing services for contracts. **VISTA members are national service professionals building organizational capacity and perform no direct client service, clerical, staff support, or physical labor.**

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS: AmeriCorps*VISTA Program sponsorship should meet these minimum requirements:

- Reflect National Service priorities as stated under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act.
- Reflect 2011-2015 Corporation for National and Community Service Strategic Priority Areas.
- Clearly demonstrate the grasp and application of national service in the context of the VISTA program.
- Reflect the VISTA poverty mission in all proposed activities and demonstrates how ultimately the project benefits the poverty community.
- Provide a high quality professional VISTA member volunteer service experience.
- Articulate clearly defined goals directed towards building sustainable organizational capacity specifically designed to alleviate poverty and the problems of economically disadvantaged people.
- Define the program plan for sustainability of the VISTA project and member’s outcomes upon completion of the year of service.
- Clearly state the applicant’s financial commitment towards the project.

Programming should be based primarily on addressing local needs. Project approval will be guided by programming that addresses the VISTA program’s core principles, and strategic plan focus areas and objectives along with the requirement of the application.

The maximum duration of any VISTA program is three years however projects are awarded for a single year and may be considered for renewal depending on program performance; the availability of resources; and priorities of the Corporation for National and Community Service. VISTA is not an entitlement and any award should not be construed to be beyond the one year duration. A VISTA project may be continued for up to three years; however, projects are considered for renewal on a year-to-year basis, depending on the availability of resources, program performance and the priorities of CNCS.

To be considered as a VISTA sponsoring organization an application should meet all the requirements of sponsorship listed in the Concept Paper and Application for Federal Assistance. More information is available at <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-vista/sponsor-vista-project> .

STRATEGIC PLAN FOCUS AREAS AND OBJECTIVES

<https://www.nationalserviceresources.org/npm/home>

Education	This focus area refers to unmet educational needs within communities, especially those that help at-risk youth to achieve success in school and prevent them from dropping out.
Healthy Futures	This focus area addresses unmet health needs, including access to health care, increasing physical activity and improving nutrition in youth, and increasing seniors’ ability to remain in their own homes.
Environmental Stewardship	This focus area applies to energy and water efficiency, renewable energy use, at-risk ecosystems, and behavioral change leading to increased efficiency.
Veterans and Military Families	This focus area refers to unmet needs of veterans, members of the armed forces, and family members of deployed military personnel.

Economic Opportunity	This focus area addresses unmet needs of economically disadvantaged individuals, including financial literacy, affordable housing, and employment-related assistance.
Disaster Services	This focus area refers to the preparation, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts that relate to disaster events

Full Program Guidance for Project Sponsors in Fiscal Year 2013 is available at:
http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2013_vista_pg_0.pdf

Some criteria to consider when applying for a VISTA sponsorship are to ensure that the program:

- Reflects the VISTA anti-poverty mission.
- Addresses one or more of the CNCS Strategic Plan Focus Areas.
- Addresses the VISTA program core principles.
- Demonstrates an understanding of national service within the context of the VISTA program.
- Articulates clearly defined goals with measurable impact directed towards eradicating poverty and the problems of low-income communities.
- Clearly states the applicant's financial commitment towards the project.

While not a criteria, consideration will be given to:

- The organization's ability to demonstrate its capacity or community support by providing matching funds or the "cost share" for one or more of the living allowances of the VISTA members. (The living allowance ranges roughly from \$11,200-\$13,000 a year depending on the county where the VISTA member serves.)
- The need for a geographic and programmatic diversified portfolio to benefit from VISTA resources. Existing and past service activities and regions where members have been serving will be considered as part of the review process. This Request for Concept papers (RFCP) is designed to provide new service activities to new communities and needs, where appropriate and possible. Review of applications will take into consideration ensuring that both rural and urban areas across the state have the opportunity for VISTA resources.

NEBRASKA VISTA PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS: The CNCS Nebraska State Program Office seeks applications for VISTA projects with a minimum of 4 full time VISTA members. If an applicant is unable to administratively support this number of full time members, the applicant may collaborate with one or more partnering organizations.

The CNCS Nebraska State Office is specifically seeking projects that are located in rural areas and are focused on Education, Economic Opportunity, and/or Veterans & Military Families.

Cost Share: Sponsoring a Cost Share Partnership Project is a low-cost way to get critical help from skilled VISTA members who will serve with your organization, "Jump-starting" new anti-poverty projects without encountering the complexities and overhead costs associated with start-up or expansion. As a cost share project, the sponsoring organization contributes the living allowance—about \$11,136 – for each cost shared VISTA member. Your contribution to the Cost Share Partnership does not need to be provided up front. There are several flexible options for reimbursing VISTA for your share.

Cost sharing is an excellent way to leverage additional funding resources and see where the dollars will be matched by VISTA. In finding funding for your organization's share of the partnership, consider approaching:

- Community Foundations;
- State government funding sources;
- Municipalities and school districts;
- Colleges and universities; and
- Local corporations.

VISTA covers the cost of a series of benefits and services for the VISTA members and our organizations:

- A Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of \$5,550 or post-service stipend or a \$1,500.
- Health coverage for all members assigned to your project – approximately \$2,700 per member.
- Payroll services: member receive their living allowance payments directly from AmeriCorps*VISTA through direct deposit.
- Training in project management and leadership for members and project supervisors.
- Travel cost associated with training. Moving allowance for member relocating to serve.
- Liability coverage for all members, under the Federal Employees Compensation Act and the Federal Torts Claims Act.
- Criminal history checks (includes NSORP and FBI fingerprint check)
- Child care for income-eligible members.
- FICA
- Assistance with recruiting members.

Estimated total CNCS Contribution: \$14,000

While Domestic Volunteer Service Act VISTA program regulations do not require a non-federal match, organizations that are able to financially support a VISTA member's living allowance will receive priority consideration. It is expected that the longer a project has VISTA resources that more cost sharing will occur.

For example, if a project has 5 VISTA members who are being paid a living allowance by CNCS of \$928 a month, the sponsor might agree to have 1-2 cost share VISTA members in year one (in which case CNCS would bill monthly that amount to the sponsor). In year 2 and 3, however, the project should consider increasing its cost sharing to 3-4 VISTA members. VISTA members may assist their sponsoring organization in fundraising activities and grant writing to expand the organization's resources for cost sharing and program sustainability.

Support and Transportation grants can be awarded to agencies to offset the cost of a VISTA supervisor and transportation costs for VISTA members for projects that have a large geographic scope and apply for 8 or more VISTA members. The CNCS Nebraska State Office has \$20,000 to award to sponsoring organizations and will consider requests for up to \$20,000. Intent to apply for these funds should be specified in the concept paper.

HOW TO APPLY: Applying for VISTA is a multi-tiered process. Organizations interested in hosting VISTA Members need to submit a concept paper by October 15, 2013 in the CNCS eGrants system. If the concept paper is accepted your organizations will be invited to submit a full application to the State Office for review and approval.

If your organization would like to proceed with applying to become a VISTA sponsor in order to develop or enhance a community-supported anti-poverty project, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-vista/sponsor-vista-project>

SCHEDULE: 2014 VISTA Application Deadline* Chart

Process	<i>Late Spring/Early Summer Starts</i>
1. Concept Paper Technical Assistance Webinar/Call 10:00 AM	Sep 10
2. Concept Paper Technical Assistance Webinar/Call 2:00 PM	Sep 12
3. Concept Paper Due in eGrants	Oct 15
4. Concept Paper Approved - go ahead given for full application	Nov 1
5. Full application Technical Assistance Webinar/Call 10:00 AM	Nov 5
6. Full application due in eGrants	Dec 2
7. Full application approved/ Memorandum of Agreement signed	No later than Jan 12
8. Recruiting/Selection Starts – sponsor create listing	Jan 12
9. More recruitment information (training dates, deadlines, etc.) will be provided at a later date	TBD
10. VISTA Members begin service	Late Spring/Early Summer

Please note that it is important to create a Concept Paper in eGrants under the **AmeriCorps*VISTA State FY 2014 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)**.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: The CNCS Nebraska State Office will be hosting two technical assistance calls/webinars on September 10, 2013 and September 12, 2013. If you are interested in learning more about the Request for Concept Papers please confirm your attendance via e-mail to NE@cns.gov at least one week prior to the call and we will then send you the webinar and call-in information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Corporation for National and Community Service, Nebraska State Program Office at (402) 437-5474 or NE@cns.gov .

RESOURCES:

- [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA](#) (Flash Course)
- [Guide to Becoming a VISTA Sponsor](#) (pdf)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Guidelines](#) (pdf)
- [Create and manage an eGrants Account](#) (Flash Course)

AmeriCorps VISTA Federal Register Guidelines

- [Selection of AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsors and Projects Guidelines](#) (pdf)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Supervision and Transportation Support Guidelines](#) (pdf)

2013 AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance (pdf)

CNCS Links (www.nationalservice.gov):

- [Information for Organizations: AmeriCorps VISTA](#) (Web Page)
- [Review sample VISTA assignment descriptions in the “Join AmeriCorps” opportunities data base listed on the right side of the page.](#) (Web Tool)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Supervisors Manuel](#) (pdf)