VISTA
Volunteers In Service To America

VISTA Leader Action Learning Challenge Team: Spring 2014

National Days of Service Project Ideas

Templates, tools, and tips to guide you through planning a National Day of Service Project.

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Section 1: The Challenge

In This Section:

- **Introduction to the Challenge**
- **National Service Days**
- **Our Team**

Introduction to the Challenge

Our Action Learning Team was presented with the challenge of providing detailed guides for five to ten successful National Service Day Events that can be replicated by VISTA projects across the country. This document, the final product of our team, serves as a step-by-step guide for VISTA members to plan and execute their own Service Day Projects. There are five detailed guides for projects that can be completed in diverse settings; with each guide explaining all aspects, from volunteer recruitment and forming community partnerships, to planning for the day's setup. In addition to the comprehensive guides, there are also other ideas for projects, a Marketing and Promotion Guide and a Social Media Guide. While the focus of the project is on providing all of the steps necessary for completing a successful Service Day, many of the sections can be used as a reference tool for other tasks throughout the VISTA year.

Completing a service project with your AmeriCorps VISTA team has many benefits, the most substantial being: creating leadership opportunities for members, having the opportunity to make a tangible difference in the community, increasing the visibility of the program and VISTA's anti-poverty focus, as well as developing partnerships within the community and AmeriCorps network.

Working together to accomplish these tasks allows for AmeriCorps VISTA members to help their community while educating people about National Service. Each project will give members the opportunity to have a day outside of their capacity building role where they can engage in direct service to benefit their community. Completing projects and publicizing the results will increase the visibility of VISTA programs, and also AmeriCorps as a whole.

National Service Days

While a service project can be conducted at any time, there are some specific days that are popular as National Days of Service. Some of which include:

- Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service: http://mlkday.gov/
- Global Youth Service Day(s): http://www.gysd.org/
- September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance: http://www.911day.org/
- Make a Difference Day: http://makeadifferenceday.com/

Our Team

Our team was made up of 8 members from around the country, bringing a diversity of skills, passions, and personalities to our Action Learning Challenge. While we are all very different individuals with unique talents, experiences, and needs, we chose to participate in this challenge for similar reasons. We chose to participate to have the opportunity to be part of a dynamic and virtual team so that we could make connections with other VISTA Leaders, experience professional and personal growth, share knowledge and experience, and create something that can help other VISTA members and Leaders to develop successful service projects.

As a team, our goal was to include new ideas for VISTAs to use, increase program visibility and recognition for the service projects, and provide specific examples of Service Day projects. Our hope is that we have produced a useful resource for creating projects that have a lasting impact on both the VISTAs participating and the communities they serve.

Team Members

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The Advancement Foundation
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Section 2: The Service Projects

In This Section:

- Introduction to the Service Projects
- Which Service Project Should You Choose?
- Book Drive
- Food Drive
- Military Care Packages
- Park Cleanup
- Random Acts of Kindness

Introduction to the Service Projects

As AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders with a strong interest and background in Service Day projects, our goal is to share our combined knowledge and experiences with other VISTA Leaders. Commissioned by Andy King to create service projects fitting the VISTA anti-poverty focus, we have outlined projects that will benefit other VISTA Leaders well into the future.

For the five projects outlined here, our team selected projects that represent the needs of VISTAs throughout the country. We have intentionally included projects that address the CNCS focus areas of Veterans and Military Families, Environmental Stewardship, and Education. Over the course of three months, we met virtually for intensive collaborations, as well as in small teams of members who focused on specific aspects of the projects. Each service event included is something that a member of our team has either directly participated in or helped to coordinate. Our hope is that this insight will guide you through the process of creating your own Service Day event.

As VISTA Leaders from across the county, our experiences and ideas reflect the variety of communities we serve. It is our goal that these projects can be readily adapted to fit the needs of the populations they are aimed at, both rural and urban, small and large. You are the expert in the needs of your community.

Each Project Guide has detailed instructions on how to complete the project as well as Supplemental Materials, which include sample documents to give you an idea of what they could or should look like. These are not meant to be used exactly as they appear; be sure to tailor them to your specific project, community, and partnerships.

National Days of Service are particularly exciting opportunities for VISTAs, who don't typically get to partake in direct service. These events can be great opportunities to learn more about community members and to engage meaningful service projects. Remember to have fun and to soak in the experiences, conversations, and awareness National Service Days spur!

Which Service Project Should You Choose?

When your Day of Service is quickly approaching, it can be difficult to choose exactly which project will best suit your team. We've created a tool to help you narrow your choices! Use the map below to identify a project that will fit your timeline, budget, and volunteer capacity. Keep in mind that you can tailor each project to fit your needs and that this is a broad outline of the workload you can expect.

Do you have 3 months or more to plan a project?

- Yes.
  - Do you have the capacity to recruit more than 10 volunteers and do some fundraising?
    - Yes.
      - Try the **Military Care Package** service project (pg. 38)! This project is very enriching for those you serve, but requires more fundraising and volunteer recruitment than some of the other projects.
    - Not at this time.
      - Which focus area does your service and/or service site support?
        - Hunger
          - Try the **Food Drive** service project (pg. 21)! This project is great for building awareness of your site, VISTA, and hunger in your community.
        - Education
          - Try the **Book Drive** service project (pg. 19)! While lots of partnerships are great for this project, it can be done with few volunteers and funds.
- No way, not me!
  - Is the weather pleasant where you are?
    - Yes, it's warm outside!
      - Try the **Park Clean Up** service project (pg. 54). This project can be organized in as little as one week and requires few resources.
    - No, it's winter and/or rainy and/or cold.
      - Try the **Random Acts of Kindness** service project (pg. 66)! This project can generate positivity in your community, and also requires very few resources.

Project 1: Book Drive

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Project Summary

Project Description: A book drive is a great project for any population size, but if you plan to make this a large-scale project you will need to make sure you have the resources to transport, store, and sort the amount of books you collect.

Number of VISTAs/Volunteers: 1-50+

Cost Estimate: $0 - $700

Time Estimate: 3 months

Target Population and Setting: Local schools or libraries that are in need of books

Keywords: book drive, literacy, education

Objectives/Outcomes:

- Collect enough books to truly impact one or more sites
- Motivate the community to come together for a common cause
- Promote AmeriCorps VISTA, national service, and National Service Day(s)
- Create connections in the community that can be utilized in current and future VISTA projects

Additional Notes: This project can be as large or as small as you choose; but when planning how large you want the event, make sure you consider that all of the books will need to be transported to a central location where they are sorted, then transported again to the organizations that are the beneficiaries. If you do not have access to a large enough space or enough vehicles, then it is best to plan for a smaller book drive.

Project Guide

Timeline

3-4 Months Before	•Contact local schools and libraries to determine recipients of the drive. •Begin recruiting volunteers, if necessary.
3 Months Before	•Contact potential book collection sites. •Begin marketing.
2 Months Before	•Source collection boxes. •Secure transportation. •Secure a facility to sort books on Service Day. •Continue marketing..
1 Month Before	•Distribute collection boxes to book collection sites.
2 Weeks Before	•Confirm volunteer availability and assignments for the Service Day. •Call sites to check how many books they have collected. If necessary, collect books from sites that have a surplus (make sure you have contacted the storage facility to see if you can drop off books early).
1 Week Before	•Confirm transportation. •Confirm logistics with drop-off sites (schools, libraries, etc.). •Confirm all participants have and understand the schedule for the day of the event.
Day Before	•Set up the sorting facility so that everything is in place for when volunteers arrive.
Day of Event	•Bring books to the sorting site and break them into designated categories. •Prepare the books for transport to their final destinations. •Be sure to take plenty of pictures and to keep track of how many books you've collected.
Day After Event	•Confirm that all of the book recipients received their deliveries. •Write and distribute press release to highlight the successes of the Service Day.
Within One Week After	•Send "Thank You" notes to all donors, partners, and outstanding volunteers.

Before You Start

Hosting a book drive might seem like a simple task, but there are three main stages to a book drive: collection, sorting, and distribution. For your main Service Day project, you can focus on sorting and getting the books ready for distribution—but you also need to plan how you will move the books to the sorting location, and out to their designated organizations. If you are not confident in your ability to successfully navigate all three phases, you can coordinate the drive on a smaller scale. Also, this project can work well with a single AmeriCorps program, but can incorporate community volunteers, too.

Supply List

- 1 collection bin per site (often these are large cardboard barrels or boxes)
- Paper and printer (for flyers)
- Tables for sorting
- Extra boxes for distributing books
- Markers and pens
- Tape (to repair any torn boxes)
- Signs for sorting

Community Partnerships

For this Service Day project, there are three main groups of partners that you will need: collection sites, transportation/event space providers, and book recipients.

First, you will need to assess your community need—what organization(s) could really use these books? Finding places that need and will use the books should be one of your first steps. This ensures there will be drop-off sites for the books and gives additional information to use in your marketing.

For the transportation and event space, you may need to get creative with your community partners. Do any local businesses have their own vans/trucks for deliveries? Are there any organizations with warehouse space that would be willing to support a good cause? You may be surprised by how many local organizations are willing to band together for a good cause. These partners will be the key to a successful Service Day, so make sure to connect with them early and confirm their participation. Without event space, sorting the books will be a challenge, and without transportation, it may come down to volunteers filling their cars with books.

Finally, the collection sites should be another easy connection to make. Asking a shop to host a collection bin and display a flyer is not generally an inconvenience, and many local shops love getting behind a good cause that will directly assist their community. Some places to approach are coffee shops, business offices, grocery stores, and book stores. As with the other partners, feel free to get creative! This is a chance to unite your community for a cause, so get as many organizations involved as possible.

** ***For details on how to form a partnership, go to the Food Drive Template (pg. 24)*** **

Fundraising

In this project, try to encourage enough community participation that your program does not need to fundraise. If you make the connections early enough for transportation and event space, then organizations will be more likely to support your cause.

The main items that you should try to get as in-kind donations include:

- Transportation of the books from their collection sites to the sorting facility.
- Transportation of the books from the sorting facility to their donation sites.
- Space to sort the books.
- Cardboard boxes for collection sites to use (also some extras for sorting day).
- Food/beverages for volunteers on sorting day.

** ***For more information about fundraising and requesting donations, see the Food Drive Template (pg. 26)*** **

Recruiting and Managing Volunteers

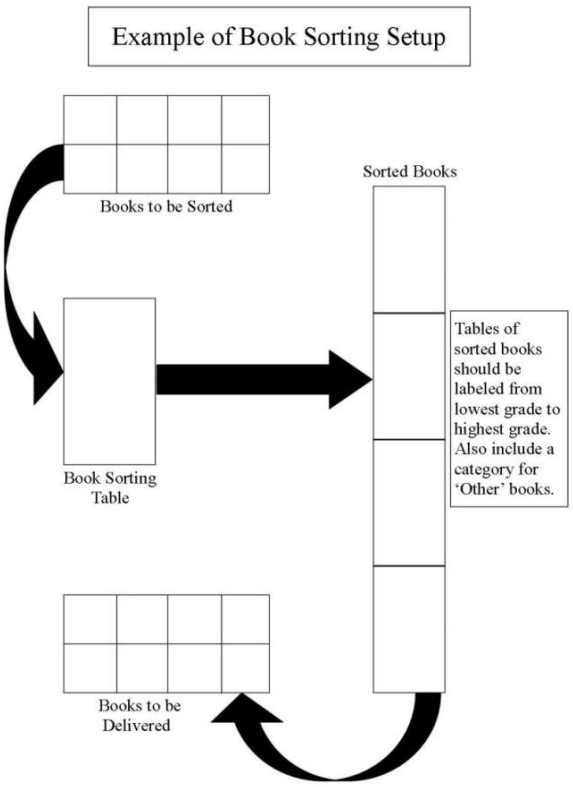
This project can be accomplished with a single VISTA program, but it can easily be opened up to other AmeriCorps groups and community volunteers. Since there are so many stages of this project, it will be important to match the right amount of volunteers for the amount of books you have collected—otherwise you will either have too or not enough work.

Recruiting Volunteers
In order to plan for the scale of your book drive, you will need to contact other AmeriCorps programs and volunteers as soon as possible. Your CNCS State Office can give you contact information for the other AmeriCorps programs in your area. Once you have a contact person, you can easily coordinate how many members will be attending, which will impact how many book collection sites you set up.

If your project reaches the scale that you need outside volunteers to help with sorting, network with your contacts and partners to find the best course of action. One way to advertise for sorting day is to put the time, date, and location of the event on flyers that are on collection bins. Then, people who are donating books will also have the option of sorting them.

Managing Volunteers
On sorting day, most volunteer positions will be the same—sorting books into piles according to ages. Make sure that all volunteers are greeted and briefed with the information they need to properly sort the books (how sorting tables are arranged, where full boxes will go, etc.).

Keep communication clear to avoid any mistakes when sorting, which will benefit the organizations receiving books. Overall, it is best to communicate early and often so all volunteers know when and where they need to be at the sorting location, as well as the tasks they will be expected to accomplish.



Day of Event

The bulk of the Service Day will consist of sorting the collected books, but you also need to consider how the books are arriving to the sorting facility and how they are being transported to their final locations. If you are hosting a large drive, hopefully you can arrange transportation with a community partner. If not, there is always the option of using volunteers' vehicles to transport the books—just make sure to coordinate accordingly so that you do not end up with more books than room in the available cars.

Once all books have arrived to the sorting location (preferably at least the night before), they can then be arranged on tables for sorting. There should be a central table where all unsorted books are placed, and then a line of tables labeled according to age groups. Signs should mark each table to limit confusion, and volunteers should check the book descriptions for what age range it belongs in (most books are labeled on the back). Your advertising should have indicated the age ranges of the books you are collecting, but always expect some outliers. (See illustration for sample set up.)

Wrapping Up

Once all of the books have been sorted, you should take a few minutes for some reflection. Take the time to discuss the impact you are having on your community and those living in it. As AmeriCorps VISTA members, it can be easy to feel removed at our host sites, so taking the time to perform direct service gives us a presence and tangible impact on our community. Your reflection time can be as simple as asking members what their favorite part of the day was, or how they felt about the service. You could instead have a structured reflection with a video or speech and then break into small groups with preplanned discussion questions. No matter what you decide to do, taking a few minutes for reflection can make the day memorable for members.

No matter how the event goes, be sure to thank your volunteers, partners, and donors. The thanks can take different forms, depending on how much work was contributed. For volunteers who just helped out on the day of the book sorting day, giving them a brief "Thank You" speech may be sufficient. For any volunteers that went above and beyond, and all of your donors and partners, a handwritten "Thank You" card is the best way to express your gratitude.

Lastly, make sure to complete a press release detailing the results of your project, and send it to everyone on your Media Contacts Worksheet (pg. 77).

Budget

Line Item	Estimated Cost Range
Transportation	$0 - $250
Supplies	$0 - $100
Promotion/Marketing	$0 - $50
Food and Beverages	$0 - $200

Budget Explanation
Note that these numbers are all extremely rough estimates, as costs will vary significantly depending on what you choose to do, where you are located in the country, and how successful your donations are. These are just intended to give you a general idea of costs and help you decide if this is a viable project for your site.

Transportation: this includes mileage and truck/car rental, if necessary. Remember that mileage can add up quickly; it might be cheaper to rent a car or truck than it would be to pay mileage on a fleet of personal vehicles.

Supplies: try to get as many of these donated as possible. For necessary supplies that aren't donated, be creative! Ask your collection sites if they would be able to supply cardboard boxes for collecting books. Just be sure to cover any existing logos or images with flyers or promotional materials for your specific project—that way people will know exactly what the collection box is for.

Promotion/Marketing: this primarily consists of printing costs, which will mostly be used for flyers and other marketing materials. If you decide to buy advertising, this could increase beyond the maximum budgeted range.

Food and Beverages: it is a nice gesture to have food and drinks available for your volunteers; especially on the book sorting day, which could be a full day. Providing food for a large group can be expensive, so check and see if any local restaurants are willing to provide an in-kind lunch for your volunteers.

Supplemental Materials

Book Drive Check List

What supplies do you need before the event?

- ☐ Cardboard boxes/bins for collection sites
- ☐ Printer and paper for flyers and signs
- ☐ Tape
- ☐ Markers/pens

What supplies do you need for the day of the event?

- ☐ Extra cardboard boxes/bins
- ☐ Tape to repair any damaged boxes
- ☐ Tables to place sorted and unsorted books
- ☐ Signs labeling the age range for each table
- ☐ Markers/pens

Marketing Materials

- ☐ Completed Media Contact Worksheet (see pg. 77)
- ☐ Press Releases (for example see pg. 17)
- ☐ Flyers to distribute around the community
- ☐ Social Media Guide (for example see pg. 79)
- ☐ Liability waivers (check with your host site to see if this is necessary)
- ☐ "Thank You" cards and postage for event supporters

What Partnerships Do You Need?

- ☐ Local organizations to receive the books
- ☐ Partners to advertise for the day and collect books
- ☐ Organizations to help with transporting the books
- ☐ A location to provide space for the event (and possible collection before event)

What Should You Get Donated?

- ☐ Cardboard boxes/bins for collecting books
- ☐ Printing (if not available at your site)
- ☐ Space for the sorting day
- ☐ Transportation of books
- ☐ Lunch for volunteers (if applicable)
- ☐ Tables for sorting books (if not available at the site)

Contact:
Lisa Wayne
800-888-0000 (office)
lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release
January 2, 2014

THE WAYNE CENTER TO COLLECT CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN MLK DAY BOOK DRIVE

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- The Wayne Center is hosting a book drive **January 6 - 19, 2014** in support of Martin Luther King, Jr. National Day of Service. Gently used children's books can be donated at the following locations:

- Gotham City Library
- Gotham County Hospital
- Fire Station #34 of Gotham City
- Eastern Gotham Middle School

The Wayne Center will also purchase wholesale books from The Publishing House from any monetary donations received through this event.

Organized by **AmeriCorps VISTA** members serving at The Wayne Center, this drive will provide identified libraries and literacy organizations throughout the city with thousands of children's books. **Only 60% of children in Gotham City read at an appropriate grade level.** This book drive will provide access to age-appropriate books, helping to raise literacy rates in the city.

About The Wayne Center
The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

About AmeriCorps VISTA
AmeriCorps VISTA, funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a program in which individuals are placed in service sites across America to fight poverty by building the capacity of local organizations. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve on a full-time basis for one year.

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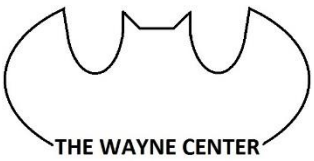
An editable version of this press release is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.



Contact:
Lisa Wayne
800-888-0000 (office)
lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release
January 20, 2014

MLK DAY BOOK DRIVE COLLECTS OVER 40,000 BOOKS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LITERACY

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- The Wayne Center has concluded their MLK National Day of Service book drive and collected a record **40,102 gently-used children's books** from donation boxes throughout Gotham City. The drive also collected **$3,293**, which will provide an **additional 5,000** books through a partnership between The Wayne Center and The Publishing House of GC.

The book drive, organized by **AmeriCorps VISTA** members hosted at The Wayne Center, began January 6, 2014 and ended on January 19, 2014. Bruce Wayne, CEO of Wayne Enterprises said, "It's essential for the success of our city to invest in our children." Some Investment Firm allowed 26 employees to volunteer to distribute the books to libraries and literacy organizations throughout Gotham City, and seven donation boxes were generously donated by A Hardware Store.

This is a great step in the right direction for Gotham City to support children's literacy.

About The Wayne Center
The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

About AmeriCorps VISTA
AmeriCorps VISTA, funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a program in which individuals are placed in service sites across America to fight poverty by building the capacity of local organizations. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve on a full-time basis for one year.

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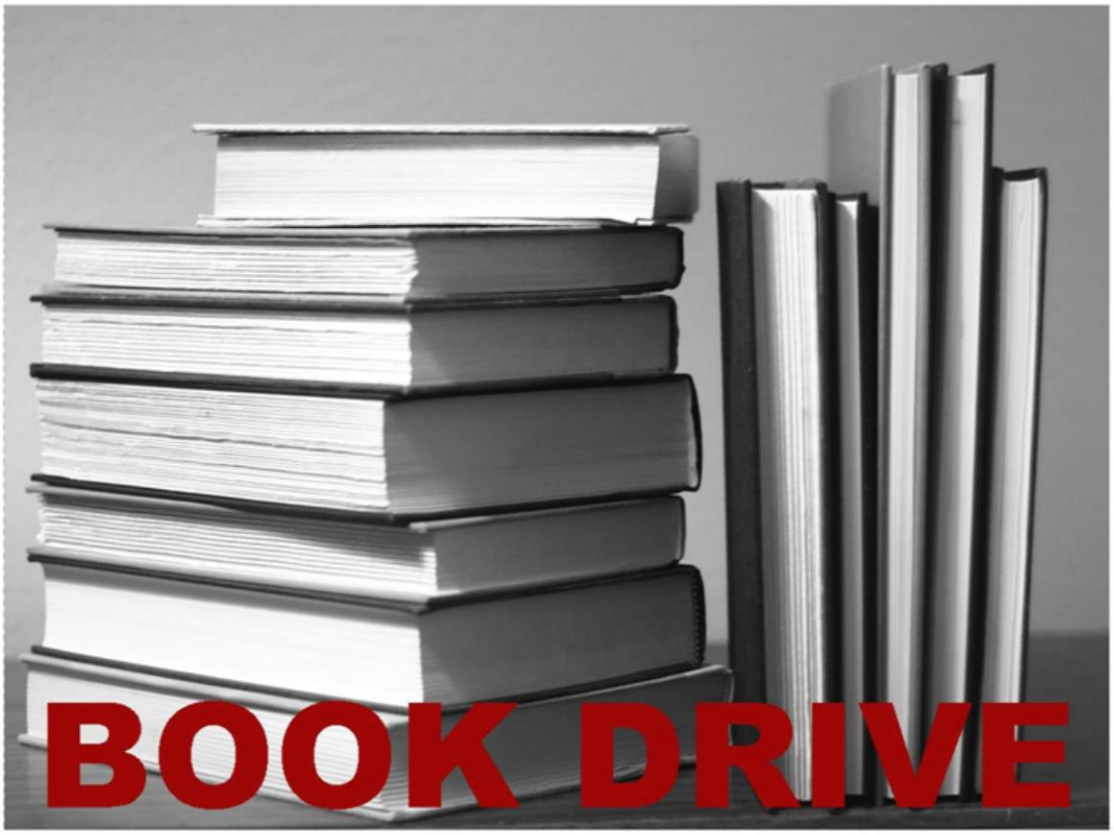


"My Organization" and AmeriCorps VISTA are hosting a city-wide book drive to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.!

Please bring new and gently used children's books to one of the donation box locations.

January 11-18, 2015

8:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

For other ways to get involved, please contact mlkbookdrive@gmail.com.

Donation Box Locations

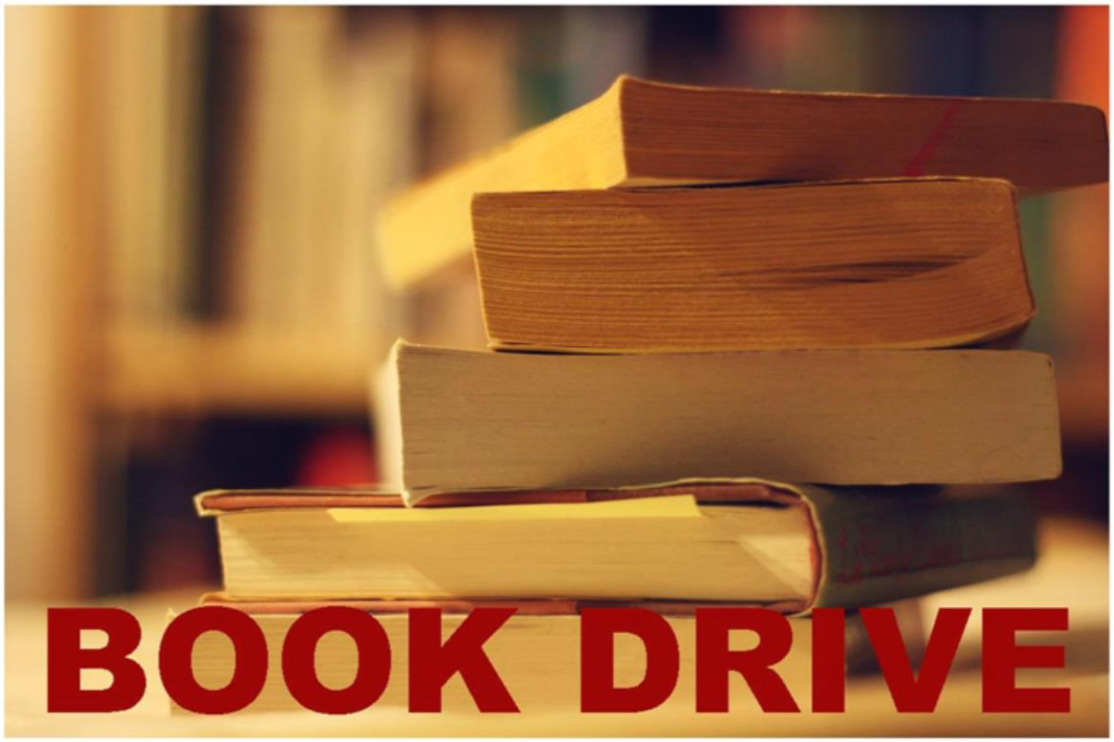
Lansing City Hall

Delta Twp. Fire Dept.

Lansing Street Library

Sponsored by "My Org" and AmeriCorps VISTA!

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.



5555 Mockingbird Lane
Lansing, MI 48912
January 11-19, 2015 11:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

Join us in honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a book drive! Please bring new and gently used books to the address above. All books collected will be donated to the Hope Children and Women's Shelter, who serve to improve literacy rates in the area.

For other ways to get involved and more information, contact:

Chelsea Leser, AmeriCorps VISTA
My_name@gmail.com

800-222-0000

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

Project 2: Food Drive

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Project Summary

Project Description: A local food drive designed to be implemented with a small number of volunteers and with very limited resources. Ideal for small sites and/or sites who need to utilize volunteers over a large geographic area.

Number of VISTAs/Volunteers: 1-10

Amount of food to be collected: 50 pounds per volunteer

Cost Estimate: $30 - $700

Time Estimate: 3 months

Target Population and Setting: local individuals who are food insecure

Keywords: food drive, food bank, food insecurity

Objectives/Outcomes:

- Collect at least 50 pounds of food per volunteer
- Raise awareness of food insecurity and local efforts to combat food insecurity
- Promote AmeriCorps VISTA, national service, and National Service Day(s)
- Create connections in community that can be utilized in current and future VISTA projects

Additional Notes: This is a flexible project that can easily be expanded or reduced to accommodate the resources available. However, it is not suited for a large number of volunteers, unless those volunteers are spread out over a large geographic area (in which case you should run several drives, one for each community being served).

Project Guide

Timeline

3-4 Months Before	•Contact local food banks/pantries to find a recipient for the drive. •Begin recruiting volunteers, if necessary. •Decide what, if any, presentation you would like to have on Service Day.
3 Months Before	•Contact potential food collection sites. •Send fundraising letters or make personal contact with potential sponsors. •Begin planning presentation for day of event (if applicable). •Begin Marketing.
2 Months Before	•Source collection barrels. •Secure transportation. •Secure speaker and venue for presentation for day of event (if applicable).
1 Month Before	•Distribute collection barrels to food collection sites.
2 Weeks Before	•Confirm volunteer availability and assignments for day of event. •Call sites to check on status of food collection barrels. If necessary, collect food from sites with more food than they can store. •Call to confirm speaker and venue for presentation (if applicable).
1 Week Before	•Confirm transportation. •Confirm food drop-off arrangements with food bank/pantry. •Confirm all participants have the schedule for the day of the event, answer any questions they might have.
Day Before	•Set up venue for presentation (if applicable).
Day of Event	•Collect food and distribute to food bank/pantries! **Be sure to take plenty of pictures and to keep track of how much food you've collected**.
Day After Event	•Write and distribute press release to highlight the successes of the food drive.
Within One Week After	•Send "Thank You" letters to all donors, partners, and outstanding volunteers.

Before You Start

Food drives are a fantastic way to serve your community and raise awareness of national service. That said, most communities have multiple food drives throughout the year, usually organized by different agencies. Make sure no one else is planning a food drive at the same time you are. Good places to get this information: your site supervisor, the local food bank or food pantries, local community calendars.

Supply List

- 1 food collection bin per site (large cardboard barrels or boxes)
- High-quality color printer and paper
- General office supplies

Community Partnerships

The Partners – Food Bank, Food Pantry, Shelter, or Soup Kitchen
Your first and most important partnership will be the food bank or other organization that will receive the food you collect.

- Food banks are usually large warehouses where food is stored and can be purchased at a reduced price by food pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens. Many food banks don't give out food directly to clients. Usually there is just one food bank in an area.
- Food pantries are (usually) small food holding sites that provide food directly to clients. They are often affiliated with other organizations (for example: churches or homeless shelters). There can be many of them in one area and some food pantries may not be as well-known as others.
- Shelters, including homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters, will sometimes have food for their clients, but often not for the public.
- Soup kitchens create free hot meals for anyone who needs them.

If you know your community well, you probably know of an organization to approach. If not, the main food bank is a safe choice (even if it isn't actually located in your town). Alternatively, get suggestions from locals at your organization. Keep in mind that partnering with a well-known food distribution organization will likely result in a greater food collection. On the other hand, a food drive can help to raise awareness of a lesser-known organization that might be struggling to meet the needs of its clients.

The Partners – Food Collection Sites and Others
Once you have a partnership with a food distribution organization, it's time to find sites where the food can be collected. Pick places that a large number of people will walk past on a regular basis, such as grocery stores, churches, factories (or other organizations with a large workforce), and post offices. Approach each of these sites to ask if they will allow you to place a collection bin at their location. No matter what their answer, ask if they will help promote the food drive by allowing you to hang flyers and/or by speaking with their employees/parishioners/etc.

Finally, depending on the resources you have on hand, consider partnering with another organization to fill a resource gap. For example, if you don't have ready access to a quality printer, you might see if another nonprofit will print your flyers for you. Or, if you need additional volunteers, see if there's an organization that helps people find volunteer opportunities locally (for example: a volunteer center or RSVP program).

How to Form a Partnership

The easiest and most effective way to form a community partnership is do so in person or over the phone. Ideally, either you or someone you know will have a connection with the organization in question and that person can initiate the partnership with a simple informal phone call. (This is where networking really pays off.)

If you don't have a pre-existing connection with the intended partner, a phone call usually works best. If you're calling a food bank or other nonprofit, research the organization online ahead of time to identify a specific staff member to ask for; if you cannot find anyone online, ask for the executive director. If you're calling a business, ask for the store manager. If you're calling a church, explain that you are helping with a food drive and ask to be directed to whoever would be the best person to speak on the matter.

Once you have the appropriate contact on the phone, it's time to explain why you are calling. If you don't have much experience with making first contact with an organization, here is a sample opening:

> *Hi, my name is _____ and I'm calling on behalf of _____. I'm organizing a food drive for _____ and was wondering if you would be interested in being a collection site for food donations.*

The important thing is to be clear about who you are with and why you are calling. Most organizations and companies get calls like these regularly and will be happy to discuss working with you.

That said, you will get rejections. Try not to take it personally; they are rejecting the partnership, not you.

What to Expect from a Partnership

The most important aspect of a partnership is that both sides must contribute to the partnership for it to be successful. The contributions may not be equal, but there must be some exchange.

From the food distribution organization:

- Expect to receive: assistance with marketing, at the very least. You should also ask if they can help with transportation; most food banks have large trucks and may be able to provide not just the truck, but also a driver. If they don't have a truck, ask if they can help you find one, since this is one of the most expensive components of the food drive.
- Expect to give: the proceeds of the food drive, including all funds raised that aren't spent on the drive itself. You should also promote the food bank/pantry as part of the marketing for the event.

From the collections sites:

- Expect to receive: a public place to collect food.
- Expect to give: some publicity, even if it's just their name on a list of food collection sites you showcase in flyers and press releases.

From other partners in the food drive:

- Expect to receive: whatever resource that you were lacking that prompted you to reach out to the other organization.
- Expect to give: some publicity. This could be on the flyer (if they are making a significant contribution), on your organization's website, or other marketing materials.

Fundraising

Cash Donations
Food drives are usually inexpensive to run. However, there are always costs associated with any event and, fundraising can be a valuable marketing tool, because the very act of asking for money informs people that the event will occur. With that in mind, try to make a small fundraising push in the community, no matter what your resource needs. Just be sure potential donors know that any excess funds you raise will go to support the food bank/pantry's efforts. *See: Sample Fundraising Letter (pg. 35)*

In-Kind Donations
While there isn't much cost associated with a food drive, you will need some supplies. *See: Supply List (pg. 24)* While your fundraising drive might make enough that you don't need to ask for supply donations, it may be easier to get some items donated than it would be to purchase them, especially large containers to collect food donations. When seeking places to request in-kind donations, ask your community partners for suggestions (for example: the food bank/pantry may know where to find bins for food collections).

Requests for in-kind donations can be done by letter, but they're more effective by phone or in person. Ideally, someone you know will have a connection at the company you want to solicit a donation from and can make a call on your behalf. If not, call and ask for a manager. If you are new to making first contact with companies, here is a sample script (modify for the supplies you are requesting):

> *Hi, my name is _____ and I'm calling on behalf of _____. I'm organizing a food drive for _____ and understand you have large barrels that are often used to collect food donations. I was wondering if you would be willing to donate six barrels for our food drive.*

As always, you will get some rejections. In this particular case, if you get a rejection, try asking if they could give you a nonprofit discount instead. It will still save you money. Just be sure not to commit to buying anything until you are sure it is the best choice and cannot secure the items as in-kind donations from another partnership.

Recruiting and Managing Volunteers

This project can be accomplished with a single person, if necessary. If you do end up using volunteers, be sure you have enough for your volunteers to each have something to do. Otherwise, you risk them being bored and less likely to volunteer in the future, not just for you, but for anyone.

Recruiting Volunteers
For this event, you'll likely only need to utilize community volunteers if you don't have local national service members who need a project to work on (no recruitment necessary) or because there is something you can't do on your own and need the extra hands.

If it's the latter, the best way to find what you need is to ask your community partners for suggestions. That way you are sure to find volunteers who have the skill sets you are looking for and who already knows about the project.

Managing Volunteers
If you have volunteers, especially community volunteers that aren't recruited for a specific purpose, you'll need to delegate. To help make the most of your volunteers, take some time to speak with each one and find out what their strengths and interests are. Using that information, do your best to assign them to specific jobs that they are likely to be good at and enjoy. If their tasks are in preparation of the event, make sure to give them clear deadlines for any assignments; if their tasks are on the large Service Day, make sure to give them clear information on how to perform their service.

Day of Event

You'll want to start the day by gathering your volunteers. This gathering is mostly to allow volunteers to check in and clarify their assignments, but it's a good idea to work in reflection time or an activity to make the Service Day a meaningful experience. This could be as simple as you giving a brief explanation about why this project was selected and what it will mean to the community. You could also have a speaker from the food bank/pantry come and give a brief talk. If you have a significant number of volunteers, you might even want to make a full presentation, with one or more speakers and some time for group reflection. For the latter, you'll likely need an indoor venue, with seating for all of your volunteers.

The actual pickup of food from collection sites should be straightforward, especially if you have a large truck (either from the food bank, another nonprofit, or one that you rented). If you have a large number of volunteers to utilize, you should create routes for each volunteer and/or shifts so that each volunteer has something to do during the Service Day. It's a good idea to have volunteers work in pairs or small groups, especially if there are sites where a lot of food will need to be lifted.

One critical aspect of the event is to take pictures. These are vital not only for promotional reasons, but also to celebrate the work that you and your volunteers have done for the community. Try and ensure you get at least one picture of the total quantity of food that you've collected, as well as at least one picture of the entire team of volunteers together.

Wrapping Up

How you end your project is at least, if not more, important than how you start. Your goal should be to leave a positive, lasting impression on the community. This will benefit you in the rest of your service, and enhance the benefits of the drive for your partners and the food bank/pantry you are supporting.

For marketing and promotion, send one final press release about the drive to your media contacts. Keep in mind that you'll likely be exhausted after the day of the event, so it's best to write the press release a few days before, with blanks where you'll eventually put numbers and special notes of interest. Send it to your partners, as well as to your media contacts. *See: Sample Press Releases (pg. 31).*

Finally, it's important to say "Thank You" to everyone who helped with the drive, either with their time, space, money, or resources. These include:

- Community Partners
- Donors
- Volunteers

Your "Thank You" notes should be personal and tailored to the contributions the person/organization made. Be sure to keep them short (this is easier if you print pictures of the event at the bottom of the page) and to include how much food you collected. For volunteers who just helped out on the day of the food collection, giving them a brief speech thanking them for their help may be sufficient. For volunteers who absolutely went above and beyond, a handwritten "Thank You" card is ideal.

Budget

Line Item	**Estimated Cost Range**
Transportation	$20 - $250
Supplies	$0 - $200
Promotion/Marketing/Printing	$10 - $50
Presentation	$0 - $200

Budget Explanation
Note that these numbers are all extremely rough estimates, as costs will vary depending on what you choose to do, where you are located in the country, and how successful your donations are. These are just to give you a general idea of costs to help you decide if this is a viable project for you.

Transportation: this includes mileage and truck/car rental, if necessary. Remember that mileage can add up quickly; it may be cheaper to rent a truck/car than to pay mileage on many personal vehicles.

Supplies: try to get as many of these donated as possible. For things you can't get donated, be creative. Cardboard barrels are very expensive if you can't get them donated, so perhaps large moving boxes would be a less expensive option.

Promotion/Marketing: this primarily consists of printing costs, which will mostly be used for flyers and other marketing materials. If you decide to buy advertising, this could easily increase well beyond the maximum budgeted range.

Presentation: if you opt to hold a presentation, there will likely be some cost involved, whether it be for the venue, for food, or for a speaker. Depending on how many people you expect to attend, however, you might have a community partner that can donate a venue and the food bank can probably provide a speaker, if necessary.

Supplemental Materials

Food Drive Check List

What Supplies Do You Need?

- ☐ 1 Collection bin per site
- ☐ 1 Ream of paper
- ☐ Printer capable of high-quality printing in color
- ☐ Tape
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Markers and pens

Marketing Materials

- ☐ Completed Media Contact Worksheet (*See pg. 77*)
- ☐ Press Release (*See pg. 31*)
- ☐ Flyers to distribute around the community
- ☐ Social Media Guide (See pg. 79)
- ☐ Liability waivers (check with your host site to see if this is necessary)
- ☐ "Thank You" cards for all that supported the event

What Partnerships Do You Need?

- ☐ Local food bank or pantry to support
- ☐ Any local businesses that will host food drive box
- ☐ A central location that will host Day of Service presentation (if applicable)
- ☐ Local news/media outlets
- ☐ Local government representatives (optional)
- ☐ Other AmeriCorps programs and alums networks (optional)

What Should You Get Donated?

- ☐ Space for Day of Service presentation (if applicable)
- ☐ Speakers for morning reflection (if applicable)
- ☐ Lunch for members (if applicable)
- ☐ Donation boxes from local food bank

Contact:
Lisa Wayne
800-888-0000 (office)
lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release
January 2, 2014

5th ANNUAL FOOD DRIVE TO BENEFIT HOPE CHILDREN'S SHELTER

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- The Wayne Center is hosting the 5th annual food drive **January 6 - 19, 2014**. Unexpired, nonperishable food can be donated at the following locations throughout Gotham City:

- Gotham City Library
- Gotham County Hospital
- Fire Station #34 of Gotham City
- Eastern Gotham Middle School

Organized by **AmeriCorps VISTA** members serving at The Wayne Center, the drive will kick off with an event hosted by **Bruce Wayne, CEO of Wayne Enterprises**. This event will occur at The Wayne Center on January 6, 2014 at 1:00 P.M.

This year's goal is to collect 4,500 pounds of food, and all collections will be donated to Hope Children's Shelter to feed their 78 resident children. This is the largest goal ever set for a Gotham City food drive.

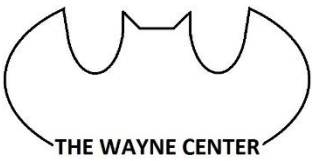
About The Wayne Center
The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

About AmeriCorps VISTA
AmeriCorps VISTA, funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a program in which individuals are placed in service sites across America to fight poverty by building the capacity of local organizations. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve on a full-time basis for one year.

About Hope Children's Shelter
Hope Children's Shelter is a resident shelter for children who have been abandoned or removed from their homes. The shelter's 78 resident children are cared for and educated by a dedicated group of professionals and volunteers.

###

An editable version of this press release is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.



Contact:
Lisa Wayne
800-888-0000 (office)
lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release
January 2, 2014

5th ANNUAL FOOD DRIVE COLLECTS OVER 5,000 POUNDS FOR HOPE CHILDREN'S SHELTER

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- The Wayne Center has concluded their 5th annual food drive and collected a record **5,102 pounds of nonperishable food items** from donation boxes throughout Gotham city. **This is the largest amount of nonperishable food ever collected through a food drive in Gotham City, and will help feed Hope Children's Shelter's 78 resident children for 5 weeks.**

The food drive, organized by **AmeriCorps VISTA** members hosted at The Wayne Center, began January 6, 2014 with an event hosted by Bruce Wayne, CEO of Wayne Enterprises. "Hunger should occur for no one. Let us band together as a city and eliminate it," said Wayne. The food drive ended on January 19, 2014, when ten dedicated volunteers from Some Investment Firm collected the food delivered it to Hope Children's Shelter. Eight collection barrels were generously donated by A Hardware Store.

This is a great step in the right direction for Gotham City tackling hunger and food insecurity.

About The Wayne Center
The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

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Help AmeriCorps VISTA members collect food for the New Hampshire Food Bank

New Hampshire FOOD BANK
A Program of NH Catholic Charities

AmeriCorps VISTA programs are working with the community to combat hunger in our state. To celebrate the Martin Luther King, Jr Day of Service, they will be collecting food donations throughout Manchester and surrounding neighborhoods from

January 1, 2014 to January 20, 2014.

Bring your nonperishable food items to these grocery store

Hannaford

Stop&Shop

shaw's

MARKET BASKET
"MORE FOR YOUR DOLLAR"

Our corporate sponsors are also helping to fight hunger by:

- Hosting collection bins in their workplace.
- Charging a canned good for dress-down days.
- Bringing a bagged lunch and donating what they would have spent on ordering out.
- Having internal competitions to see which department can raise the most food.

And other creative ways!

Want to host your own collection bin?

Contact AmeriCorps VISTA Leader, Lexie Kwiek at 000-000-0000 or vistaleader@nhfoodbank.org

Hunger in Our State:

- 1 in 9 individuals in the state are food insecure.
- 40,000 children under the age of 18 are food insecure in the state.
- 1 in 5 children are food insecure in the Manchester area.
- The Food Bank works with nearly 400 partner agencies throughout the state.
- In 2013 the Food Bank distributed over 8.5 millions pounds of food.

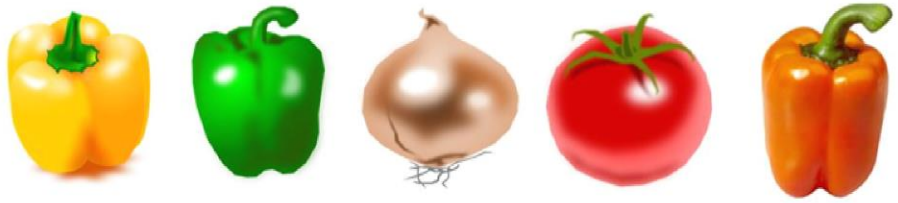
What is food insecurity?

Someone is considered food insecure when they do not know where their next

AMERICORPS VISTA

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides

FOOD DRIVE AT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION



Join The Drive!

To commemorate Veterans' Day, our Community Organization is hosting a food drive to benefit veterans and their families. Please join us in serving these heroes and bring unopened, nonperishable canned goods to our Food Drive! All food collected will be donated to the Veterans' Center in our community.

555 Something Drive
City, State ZIP

Thursday, April 4, 2014
9:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

Most Needed Items:

- Peanut Butter
- Canned Tuna
- Cereal/Oatmeal
- Coffee/Tea
- Beans/Lentils

Sponsored by AmeriCorps VISTA!

VISTA
Volunteers In Service To America

Have Questions? Contact Us!

Chelsea Leser, AmeriCorps VISTA
myname@gmail.com • 800-555-0000

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

Food Drive Fundraising Letter Template

Dear _____,

Did you know that in 2013, more than _____ children benefited from food pantry services? Come be a part of something great and donate to the Josephine County Food Bank Drive this year! Community food drives like ours help make sure those children and their families can get emergency food assistance when they need it.

Josephine County Food Bank, United Community Action Network (UCAN), and AmeriCorps VISTA are coming together to combat hunger in Josephine County. To celebrate the MLK Day of Service, they will be collecting food donations throughout Grants Pass from January 1, 2014 to January 20, 2014. This year our goal is to raise more than _____ lbs. of food - and we need your help!

> *{Tailor the "ask" section to meet your drives needs - whether you are asking for money, volunteer time, barrels for the food etc.}*

Josephine County Food Bank is dedicated to the collection and distribution of emergency food to a food bank network of local member agencies serving low-income individuals and families throughout Josephine County. The food bank supplies over a dozen food pantries and kitchens in the county.

Sincerely,

_____
Executive Director

Tips for Writing Fundraising Letters

- Keep your letter readable - use short paragraphs, subheads, bullets, centering to guide the readers eye.
- Shorter is better! People are busy - keep your message brief and to the point.
- Utilize underlining, bold face, italics to help the reader find the key point of your message.
- If you are asking for money, don't dance around it - make the ask!
- Say thank you quickly, accurately, and personally.

Food Drive Donor "Thank You" Letter Template

Dear _____

Thanks to you, the MLK Day Food Drive was a tremendous success! Together we were able to raise _____ pounds of food for the Josephine County Food Bank, enough to feed _____hungry individuals.

We truly appreciate your donation of _____. *{Tailor this section depending on what the donor gave: time, money, barrels for food etc.}* Thanks to your donation, we were able to surpass our goal of raising ____ lbs. of food for the Josephine County Food Bank. It is generous community members like you that keep us motivated!

{Include any highlights from the day – ex: speakers, raffles etc.}

We would love to keep you in the loop with our emails and newsletter. You can sign up for those at our site, _____

Again, thank you your generous donation to our community.

Sincerely,

_____
Executive Director

P.S. The Josephine County Food Bank depends on volunteers to help them. If you would like to share your time, please contact the Josephine County Food Bank at _____. They would be delighted to have you volunteer!

{Insert photo from food drive}

Tips for Writing Donor Thank You Letters

- Always use the donor's name.
- Give examples as to how the donation will be used.
- Mail your thank you note as soon as possible (within 2 days is best).
- Make the note more about the giver, as opposed to you or your cause.
- Keep the tone personal.
- Say thank you quickly, accurately, and personally. A nicely tailored thank you letter is the first step in securing future donations!

Food Drive Community Partnership "Thank You" Letter Template

Dear _____

Thank you so much for partnering with us to make the MLK Day Food Drive a tremendous success! Together we were able to raise _____ pounds of food for the Josephine County Food Bank, enough to feed _____hungry individuals.

We could not have accomplished this without you generously allowing us to place bins at your grocery store. Thanks to your donation, we were able to surpass our goal of raising ____ lbs. of food for the Josephine County Food Bank. It is generous community members like you that keep us motivated!

{Include any highlights from the day – ex: speakers, raffles etc.}

Again, thank you your generous donation to our community. We would love to partner with you in the future!

Sincerely,

_____
Executive Director

Project 3: Military Care Packages

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Project Summary

Project Description: A flexible project that offers multiple ways to raise supplies and assemble care packages for members of the military. Ideal for collaboration with other organizations, as well as for sites with strong ties to the community.

Number of VISTAs/Volunteers: 1-50+ (there is no real upper limit on volunteers)

Number of service members reached: 1 per volunteer

Cost Estimate: $25 - $300 + postage costs (approximately $20/package)

Time Estimate: 3 months

Target Population: current and former members of the United States military

Keywords: veterans, military, care packages, Veterans Day

Objectives/Outcomes:

- Reach at least 1 member of the military per volunteer
- Raise awareness and support for United States servicemen and servicewomen
- Promote AmeriCorps VISTA, national service, and National Service Day(s)
- Create community connections that can be utilized in current and future VISTA projects

Additional Notes: While this project can technically be done with a small number of volunteers at a single site, it is meant to be a collaborative effort. There are many projects that can be done in-house; this project, though, should engage and serve the community.

If time is an issue, the timeline for this project could be shortened, mainly by reducing the amount of time that care package supplies are collected.

Project Guide

Timeline

3 Months Before	•Make a list of project needs and resources available to you. Decide if you will be mailing the care packages yourself, or if you will partner with another organization. •Find organizations that will collect/donate supplies for the care packages. •Begin recruiting volunteers, if necessary. •Decide if you'd like to have a morning program on event day. •Begin marketing.
2 Months Before	•Secure venue for assembling the care packages and speaker (if applicable). •Ensure you have space to store the supplies. •At this point, supply collection should have begun.
2 Weeks Before	•Confirm volunteer availability and assignments for day of event. •Call to confirm speaker and venue for morning program (if applicable). •Inventory all supplies to date and modify number of planned care packages, if necessary.
1 Week Before	•Confirm all participants have the schedule for the day of the event, answer any questions they might have. •Have supply collection sites deliver all supplies to a holding space until assembly day.
Day Before	•Set up venue for assembling packages and morning program (if applicable).
Day of Event	•Gather volunteers and assemble packages! **Be sure to take plenty of pictures and to keep track of how many packages you complete.**
Day After Event	•Write and distribute press release to highlight the successes of the food drive.
Within One Week After	•Send "Thank You" letters to all donors, partners, and outstanding volunteers.

Before You Start

Because this project is so focused on community involvement, the best and most effective way to run the project is with the help of a committee of motivated community stakeholders. Not only can they provide manpower and experience, they should also have connections in the community to help build local buy-in and ensure project success. (This is especially important when trying to raise the care package supplies.)

If you've never recruited a committee before, start with your community partners. *See: Community Partnerships (pg. 42).* Even if the partners themselves can't provide a representative to the committee, they should know of good candidates to contact and may be able to make the call for you. A team of three to four members is best – that's big enough to make the workloads manageable for everyone, while small enough to be easily coordinated.

Supply List

Packaging

- USPS Flat Rate boxes
- Packaging tape
- Ample table space
- Collection buckets to keep items separate
- Ziploc bags for liquid items
- Postage and completed customs forms

Care Package Contents

- Pre-packaged, non-perishable foods, such as beef jerky, Pringles, granola bars, etc.
- Chapstick
- Sunscreen
- Magazines and books
- Toilet paper
- Feminine products
- Hand sanitizer
- Letters

Prohibited Items

<u>Do not include these items.</u> Prohibited items may vary, but these should be avoided in general (some items are included because they are prohibited for national service members.)

- baked goods or food with open seals
- inappropriate or vulgar reading materials
- religious materials
- political materials
- pork or pork byproducts
- chocolate (it will melt)
- perishable foods
- knives, weapons, flammable items

Community Partnerships

The Partners
There are two key types of partnerships in this event:

- Supply partners, who will raise the supplies for the care packages.
- Other partners, who will help you identify a soldier or fill in your supply, funding, or volunteer gaps to help your project be successful

Volunteers, Supplies and Package Assembly

- Churches, universities, schools, local libraries – these are all good sources for supplies and volunteers; they can also fill any resource gaps you may have. For example, if you don't have ready access to a quality printer, you might see if one of these will print flyers for you.
- United States Postal Service – Contact your local post office for more information regarding customs forms and specific mailing requirements. Be sure to confirm your intended package items to ensure they are all appropriate to include.
- CNCS State Office – Contact your state office to see if there is a project in your area that can provide additional resources.

Finding a Soldier
Finding a local soldier will make it easier to ship your packages abroad as you can ship directly to her/him, as opposed to going through an organization. The soldier can then distribute the packages among his/her unit. Ideally, you or someone involved in the project knows of a soldier who can be the named recipient. If you don't already know someone, there are a few options find a soldier to be your point person.

- Network with community members to find a soldier from your community.
- If your community does not have any soldiers currently serving, check with your nearest Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) chapter, as they may be able to connect you to an organization that regularly collects and ships items to soldiers.
- Local recruiting offices will not be able to provide you with a list of soldiers, but they may know of a particular soldier currently serving. Typically, recruiting offices do not participate in supply drives or package assembly, but they may be able to give you the name and contact information of a specific soldier.
- AnySoldier.com – This website can match your group with a list of soldiers who have volunteered to receive packages from sponsoring groups. AnySoldier will also provide a list of requested items. The site also includes step-by-step instructions of what and how to send.

As always, before you attempt to ship directly to a soldier, check with the post office to confirm any changes or particular requirements regarding shipping packages overseas.

OperationGratitude.com- This organization collects supplies to ship for you. If you are on a budget and cannot afford to ship you packages, this group provides a list of items you can make and donate to a soldier in need. Items include knitted goods, paracord bracelets, cards, and bandanas.

What to Expect from a Partnership
The most important part of a successful partnership is that both sides must contribute to the partnership.

- Expect to receive: care packages supplies, preferably delivered to the destination of your choosing. You may ask them to help with marketing; if nothing else, they should be able to post flyers.
- Expect to give: promotion, as well as the time and energy your team will spend creating the packages.

** ***For details on how to form a partnership, go to the Food Drive Template (pg. 24)*** **

How to Get Care Package and Other Supplies

While it is possible to run your own drive to raise supplies for this project, another solution is to partner with local organizations to have them collect the supplies while you focus on marketing and planning the day of the packaging event. This section will focus on finding community partners to raise and collect supplies for your care packages.

Which Organizations to Partner with
The most likely partners for a drive to collect supplies for military care packages will be local churches and veteran groups. You can look up churches in the phone book or online. Veteran groups can be more difficult to identify; use your community partners to help you find veteran groups in the area.

Aside from any drives your partners might run, you can raise supplies directly from companies or organizations. Any company that uses flags or other patriotic symbols in their advertising is a good one to contact about gathering donations for the care packages. Members of your planning committee might also be able to make recommendations of good organizations to contact based on their knowledge of the area. Keep in mind your fundraising needs. If you need any money to run the event or mail the packages, that might be a better use of these companies. *See: Fundraising (pg. 43)*

Fundraising

Postage
Since the care package supplies will be collected by partner organizations and many packaging supplies come from the post office, the majority of t this project's cost comes from the cost of postage to mail the packages overseas. Even with the APO discount at the post office (ask for military-specific flat rate boxes when picking up supplies), you'll spend up to $20 per package. If you send 100 packages, that's $2000!

With such a large amount of money to raise, you'll need to be very intentional with fundraising. Start by setting clear, reasonable goals for the number of packages you intend to send. The number of packages

will tell you how much money you need to raise for postage. If you exceed the amount of supplies you need, the extras can be donated to other programs that send care packages, such as Operation Gratitude.

First Phase
Once you know how much money you need to raise, you can write your fundraising letter. *See: Sample Fundraising Letter (pg.35)* Take advantage of the special circumstances of this project: instead of asking for a set amount of cash, ask them to sponsor a given number of soldiers. Instead of asking for $100, ask them to sponsor 5 soldiers at $20 per package. By framing the request this way, you'll give potential donors a more powerful and emotional reason to give.

Once you have the letter written, create a list of potential donors. In this first phase, cast as wide a net as possible. Send your letter to every major company in town, especially those that feature any patriotic symbols, colors, or language in their advertising.

Second Phase
If you reach your fundraising goal in the first phase of fundraising, that's great! You're done.

Unfortunately, most sites will need a second round of fundraising to reach the goal. This second round is a two pronged attack:

- First, individually call the organizations that were on your initial fundraising mailing list. Ask if they received the letter, then ask if they would be interested in sponsoring some care packages to veterans and, if they say they are, resend the letter.
- If you still haven't raised sufficient funds after your calls, you will need to do a second round of letters. Modify the existing letter to indicate that if you don't receive sufficient funds by a given date, that you'll have to reduce the number of care packages you send.

If you don't receive sufficient funds by a week or two before the assembly day, you will have to reduce the number of packages that you send. In that case, start contacting nonprofits that specialize in sending care packages to veterans and see if they can use the extra supplies you've raised.

Other Donations
The remaining costs of the project are very small, primarily just mileage (for picking up supplies) and a few packaging supplies. For transportation, you might see if one of your partner sites (or your own site) is willing to cover mileage (or if some of your volunteers are willing to drive without receiving mileage).

For everything else, in-kind donations might be able to get everything you need. When seeking places to request in-kind donations, ask your community partners for suggestions. (For example, they may know a local store that is willing to help nonprofits with packaging supplies.)

** ***For details on how to ask for in-kind donations, go to the Food Drive Template (pg. 26)*** **

Recruiting Volunteers

Recruiting Volunteers
For this project the number of volunteers required will be based on how large of an event you are planning. If you are keeping the project limited to your own VISTA program, you won't need to reach out to the community. If you want a larger, more involved Service Day, there are a couple of options for finding more volunteers:

Other AmeriCorps Programs
As VISTA members, it is easy to forget that we are part of a much bigger family of national service. Connecting with other AmeriCorps programs in your area will immediately increase the number of people you have to volunteer at the event. Your CNCS State Office should have a record of what AmeriCorps programs are in different parts of your state. You could also simply Google AmeriCorps programs in your area. City Year, Senior Corps, and State and National programs are spread across the country and are made up of people choosing to participate in national service – just like VISTA members.

These programs will also have their own set of networks and connections in the community, and will be able to do their own advertising to engage more volunteers, if necessary.

Community Members
If you want to open your service project to include community volunteers, you will need to find avenues for advertising the opportunity. First, see what your state or city has available for posting volunteer opportunities. There are also many websites that were created to help volunteers find opportunities, and your local volunteer center can help you find volunteers, so these are great places to start.

Other avenues would be to connect with K-12 schools to get youth involved, or to contact local colleges to see if there are any clubs or groups dedicated to service. These partnerships could go beyond this initial Service Day and lead to a future pool of volunteers for other events. There are many people actively looking for volunteer opportunities; they just need to be aware of what is available.

Managing Volunteers

While the bulk of volunteer management will take place on the day of the event, your volunteers should have a clear idea of what they will be doing before the day even starts. Be sure to email or call volunteers before the event with details on how the day will run, what they will be doing, and who they can contact if they have any questions before or during the event.

When volunteers arrive they should be able to find registration easily so that they can check-in and get more details about the layout of the event. If you are having a morning program, there should be an event coordinator that is aware of the details of the day and who will be in charge of keeping the speakers and any activities moving before directing people to the packaging stations. Watching the time during a morning program is vital, and an event coordinator may need to think on his or her feet to stick with the timing of the day.

Once volunteers are at their assembly stations the day should progress smoothly. There should be volunteer coordinators circulating throughout the event to answer any questions and to make sure that directions are being followed. If someone is packing the supplies incorrectly, don't be afraid to speak up.

As the event is coming to a close, you give your volunteers time-checks so they know when to begin wrapping up their piece of the project.

Day of Event

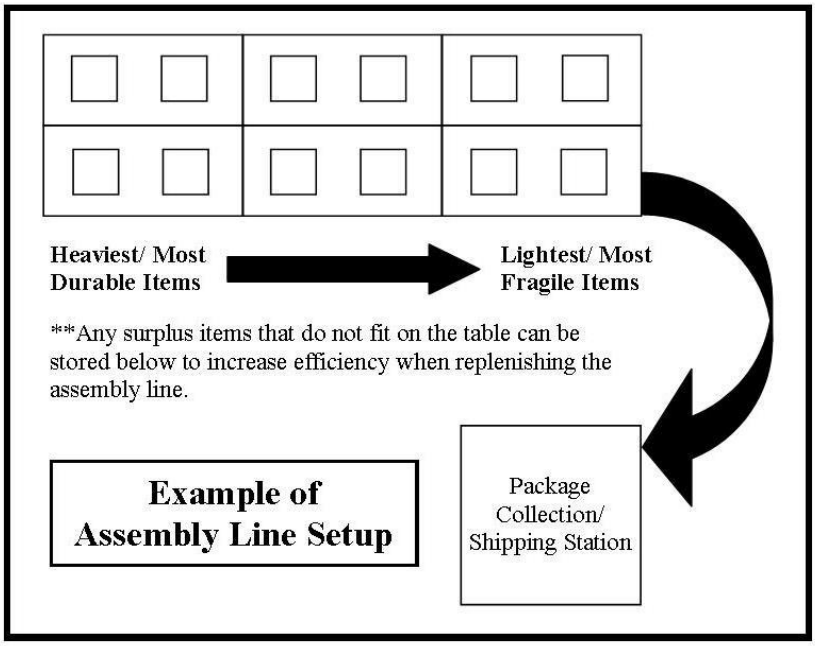
Setting Up
Being prepared and organized is vital to a successful Service Day. All supply items and packaging materials should be arranged before volunteers arrive. If you do not have room for every item to be out, store surplus items under the assembly tables so volunteers can easily replenish their stock.

Gathering
At the start of the event, have a specific meeting location for volunteers to gather. Give out a contact number in case volunteers cannot find the site. Upon arrival, all volunteers should sign in and be reminded of their tasks. If you are having a program before the care package assembly, direct volunteers to their seats or gathering area to await further instructions.

Reflection
With a service project focused around the military, it is key to have time for reflection. This could be a simple moment of silence to show respect and recognition of veterans and those currently serving, or could be made into a full morning program. Encourage volunteers to discuss the importance of their project. Break them into small groups and have specific volunteers equipped with reflection questions and/or readings, to help them feel more connected to their day of service and the project at hand.

Assembling the Packages
To keep things flowing smoothly, set up an assembly line. There are two types to try – pick the one that is best for you:

- One choice is to have volunteers positioned at each supply item and having the box get moved down the line, with each volunteer placing their item in the package.
- An alternate choice is to have one person walk their box all the way through the assembly line, collecting items as they go.



When organizing the packing materials make sure to have the heaviest or most durable items at the front of the line so volunteers place them in the bottom of the boxes. Once the boxes are filled, volunteers will bring the box to the collection/shipping station, where packages will be inspected and sealed for mailing.

Optional Morning Program
Morning programs are optional, but can enhance a National Day of Service event and can make it a meaningful day for your volunteers. It can simply consist of having a community leader in the area of service address the volunteers and thank them for contributing to the cause. For the Military Care Packages project, a local veteran could give the address; and for the Food Drive project, a community leader/advocate for hunger and homelessness could give the address. Make sure to prep the speaker ahead of the event so you're on the same page for the welcome address. If you choose to host a more in-depth morning program, you could bring in a local expert to give an educational lesson on the issue area your project is addressing and give information about how this project will impact your community. Regardless of what you choose to do for your morning program, make sure to take lots of pictures and tweet any memorable quotes from your speakers. If you have any media attending, make sure they have reserved seating at the front so they can take high-quality pictures and record video if applicable.

Wrapping Up

How you end your project is very important to making it a memorable experience for volunteers and partners. You should aim to leave a positive, lasting impression on the community.

For marketing and promotion, send one final press release to your media contacts. Keep in mind that you'll likely be exhausted after the day of the event, so you may want to write the press release a few days before, with blanks where you'll eventually put numbers and special notes of interest. Send it to all of your partners, as well as to your media contacts. *See: Sample Press Release (pg. 50)*

Finally, it's important to say "Thank You" to everyone who helped with the drive, either with their time, space, money, or resources. These include:

- Community Partners *(See: Sample Community Partnership "Thank You" pg.37)*
- Donors *(See: Sample Donor "Thank You" pg. 36)*
- Volunteers

Your "Thank You" notes should be personal and tailored to the contributions the person/organization made. A great note is less than a page in length, and includes pictures from the event as well as impact (for example: how many care packages created and how many service members will benefit). Successful notes of gratitude will remind your partners, donors, and volunteers that they made a difference and will make these individuals and organizations more likely to support you and service in the future.

Budget

Line Item	Estimated Cost Range
Transportation	$0 - $20
Supplies	$0 - $30
Promotion/Marketing	$25 - $50
Morning Program	$0 - $200

Budget Explanation
Note that these numbers are all extremely rough estimates, as costs will vary substantially depending on what you choose to do, where you are located in the country, and how successful your donations are. These are just to give you a general idea of costs to help you decide if this is a viable project for you.

Transportation: this is mileage for picking up supplies and taking completed packages to the post office. Ideally, find volunteers who are willing to drive for free.

Supplies: try to get as many of these donated as possible.

Promotion/Marketing: this is primarily printing costs, which will mostly be used for flyers and other marketing materials. If possible, have the supply collection sites print their own flyers. Other costs are printing and mailing the fundraising letters and "Thank You" letters.

Morning Program: if you opt to hold a morning program, there may be cost involved for the venue, food, or a speaker. Depending on how many people you expect to attend, you might have a community partner that can donate a venue and a veterans or local military support group can probably provide a speaker.

A note on venue
Because you will need to have significant space to store the supplies for several days before assembly day, the cost of renting a space is may be prohibitively high and thus has left off the budget. If your site is unable to provide space for storing and assembling the care packages, there are many community organizations that may donate their space for free. Some examples:

- Schools, libraries, churches
- Restaurants that host service clubs (like Rotary or Kiwanis)
- Community centers
- American Legions
- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFWs)

To find a space, make a list of potential sites and call each one, explaining what you need (space, tables, etc.) until you find a site that will host your event. For sites that are unable to host but demonstrate an interest in your project, ask if they would like to sponsor some packages or provide some supplies. It never hurts to ask!

Supplemental Materials

Military Care Packages Check List

What Supplies Do You Need?

- ☐ Tables for package assembly
- ☐ USPS Flat Rate shipping boxes
- ☐ Packaging tape
- ☐ Containers/bins to separate items for assembly
- ☐ Ziploc bags for liquid items
- ☐ Customs forms
- ☐ Paper and printer (for flyers)
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Markers/pens

Marketing Materials

- ☐ Media Contact Worksheet (*See pg. 77*)
- ☐ Press Releases (*See pg. 50*)
- ☐ Flyers to distribute around the community and promote event
- ☐ Social Media Guide (*See pg. 79*)
- ☐ Liability waivers (check with your host site to see if this is necessary)
- ☐ "Thank You" notes for all who supported the event

What Partnerships Do You Need?

- ☐ Local businesses that will collect supplies
- ☐ Businesses or individuals that will sponsor shipping
- ☐ Somewhere to host the morning program and/or package assembly
- ☐ Contacting local news/media outlets
- ☐ Inviting any local government representatives (optional)
- ☐ Connecting with other AmeriCorps programs and alums networks (optional)

What Should You Get Donated?

- ☐ Items for care packages (for list see pg. 41)
- ☐ Shipping costs
- ☐ Space for morning program (if applicable)
- ☐ Space for assembling care packages
- ☐ Speakers for morning program (if applicable)
- ☐ Lunch for volunteers (if applicable)

Contact:
Lisa Wayne
800-888-0000 (office)
lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release
January 2, 2014

AMERICORPS VISTA AND THE WAYNE CENTER TO HOST MILITARY SUPPLY DRIVE FOR U.S. TROOPS

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- The Wayne Center will be hosting a Military Supply Drive to benefit U.S troops. This year's goal is to collect, assemble, and ship 25 packages for soldiers currently serving with the 101st Infantry Unit in Kabul, Afghanistan.

This supply drive, sponsored by **AmeriCorps VISTA**, will begin at 10:00 a.m. on January 6, 2014 at The Wayne Center. Volunteers will be collecting and packing goods until 6:00 p.m., and the packages will be shipped the following day.

If you are interested in donating supplies, see the list below. Donations will be accepted until 5:00 p.m.

Item suggestions

- pre-packaged, non-perishable foods
- Chapstick
- sunscreen
- magazines and books
- toilet paper
- feminine products
- hand sanitizer
- letters

Prohibited Items

- baked goods or food items with an open seal
- inappropriate or vulgar reading materials
- religious or political materials
- pork or pork byproducts
- chocolate or perishable foods
- knives, weapons, flammable items

To volunteer for the package assembly team, contact Lisa Wayne at lisa@waynecenter.org.

About The Wayne Center
The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

About AmeriCorps VISTA
AmeriCorps VISTA, funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a program in which individuals are placed in service sites across America to fight poverty by building the capacity of local organizations. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve on a full-time basis for one year.

###

An editable version of this press release is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

Contact:
Lisa Wayne
800-888-0000 (office)
lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release
January 7, 2014

AMERICORPS VISTA AND THE WAYNE CENTER ASSEMBLE AND SHIP 42 MILITARY CARE PACKAGES

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- The Wayne Center hosted a very successful Military Supply Drive to benefit U.S troops. The supply drive, sponsored by **AmeriCorps VISTA**, began yesterday at 10:00 a.m. at The Wayne Center. Thirteen AmeriCorps VISTA members and 37 volunteers processed donations and assembled packages until 6:00 p.m.

The Wayne Center exceeded their goal of 25 packages by collecting enough supplies to assemble 42 packages! All packages were shipped today. Soldiers currently serving with the 101st Infantry Unit in Kabul, Afghanistan should receive their care package within three weeks.
The Wayne Center would like to thank all the volunteers who donated supplies and assisted in care package assembly. The Wayne center would also like to acknowledge significant contributions from the following businesses:

- King's Supply Co.
- The Comic Shop
- Dollar General
- Mega-Outlet

About The Wayne Center
The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

About AmeriCorps VISTA
AmeriCorps VISTA, funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a program in which individuals are placed in service sites across America to fight poverty by building the capacity of local organizations. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve on a full-time basis for one year.

###

An editable version of this press release is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

AmeriCorps VISTA members are collecting supplies for military care packages!

Where to Donate

The following organizations are hosting collection boxes:

- Citizens Bank– Manchester, NH
- Comcast– Manchester, NH
- Market Basket– Bedford, NH
- Hannaford's– Concord, NH
- Stop and Shop– Derry, NH

*Care packages will be assembled on **Friday, March 14** at the **New Hampshire Institute of Technology**!*

Other Ways to Help

You can also sponsor the shipping of boxes.

$20 ships 1 package to 1 soldier!

Items to Donate:

- Chapstick
- Sunscreen
- Magazines and Books
- Toilet Paper
- Feminine Products
- Hand Sanitizer
- Letters
- Pre-packaged, nonperishable food

Examples Include:

Beef Jerky
Pringles
Granola Bars
Energy Bars

For More Information Contact:

Lexie Kwiek
AmeriCorps VISTA
000.000.0000
leader@vista.org

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

CARE PACKAGES FOR TROOPS

This Veterans Day, donate time, goods, or money to send care packages to Michigan Veterans and Active Duty Military Personnel.

VOLUNTEER

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2014
1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.

555 East Morningside Dr.
Lansing, MI 48911

DONATE MONEY

$20 Ships 1 Package to 1 Soldier

DONATION CENTERS

Lansing City Library
Kroger on Lake Lansing Road
Owosso High School
Bath Township Office

DONATE GOODS

- Toothpaste/Toothbrush
- Chapstick
- Sunscreen
- Toilet Paper
- Magazines/Books
- Food (such as beef jerky, Pringles, granola bars, energy bars)
- Hand Sanitizer
- Letters
- Feminine Products

CONTACT US

Chelsea Leser, AmeriCorps VISTA
myname@gmail.com • 800-100-2000

SPONSORED BY:

YOUR
HOST SITE
LOGO HERE

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

Project 4: Park Cleanup

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Project Summary

Project Description: A standard cleanup project template that can be used for parks, cemeteries, beaches, neighborhoods, community gardens, etc. Can be organized and run with little planning and/or few resources, though it's best to have some lead time for marketing and promotion. Ideal if you need to put together a project on short notice.

Number of VISTAs/Volunteers: 1 – 100+

Cost Estimate: $0 - $100

Time Estimate: 1 week (for essentials) to **1 month** (for effective marketing)

Keywords: cleanup, nature, outdoor projects, easy projects, fast projects

Objectives/Outcomes:

- Collaborate with organizations and/or local government agencies to clean up public space and/or a local shelter
- Promote AmeriCorps VISTA, national service, and National Service Day(s)
- Create connections in community that can be utilized in current and future VISTA projects

Additional Notes: This is a popular project, because it is easy and can be a lot of fun. However, the lack of an explicit anti-poverty focus makes it a project that requires special consideration. To offset this, be sure to emphasize VISTA's anti-poverty focus in your marketing and promotion for this project. One way to incorporate an anti-poverty focus is to link a clean park with an opportunity for children to have a space to explore nature and play. Play is one of the most important ways for children to learn problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, and independence. All of these skills better equip children to break the cycle of poverty.

Project Guide

Timeline

Aside from marketing, many "1 month before" items can be done much closer to the actual Service Day. The closer to the day, however, the greater the risk of being unable to successfully complete your project.

1 Month Before	•Make a list of places that you are interested in helping to clean/beautify and begin contacting them. •Begin recruiting volunteers, if necessary. •Arrange transportation, if necessary.
1 Week Before	•Confirm event location. •Confirm volunteers, if necessary. •Confirm transportation, if necessary
Day Before	•Collect tools, if necessary. •Check weather forecast. If forecasted weather would make event impossible, call volunteers and community partners to reschedule/cancel event.
Day of Event	•Don't forget to take pictures and post them on social media with updates throughout the day!
Day After Event	•Send "Thank You" notes to donors, partners, and outstanding volunteers. •Write and distribute press release.

Before You Start

Cleanup events can be easy to put together and fun for volunteers. They can also be a great way to engage community volunteers if you have sufficient time for marketing.

Most cleanup projects are outdoor projects and subject to weather. If you might experience severe weather, schedule a second "rainy day" date, in the case of intolerable weather on the official cleanup day. When rescheduling, make sure all volunteers and community partners are aware of the schedule change!

Supply List

- Trash bags
- Gardening tools
- Other tools (as applicable to your specific project)
- Water (*optional: additional refreshments/snacks*)

Community Partnerships

There is only one essential partner to this project: the organization with the park or other area that needs to be cleaned. Most of the time, these organizations are thrilled to have someone come in and clean for them, so developing these partnerships is quite straightforward. In exchange for your time and energy, they may to provide the cleanup tools and/or a supervisor to help direct efforts in the most useful manner.

Other partnerships for this event can include other AmeriCorps programs in your area, and local businesses that may be able to supply tools and cleaning supplies if they aren't provided by your intended cleanup site.

Finding Contact Information
Unlike most service projects, cleanups usually start with a site, rather than an organization. While you might be tempted to just show up at a park or other public site and start cleaning, it's best to contact the person in charge of that site to make sure that cleanup is welcome and allowed. If you don't already know the contact person, there are a few standard contacts for common cleaning projects:

- *Park* – establish if the park is a city or county park. Then, contact the city or county parks and recreation department. (Small towns may not have a separate department. In that case, contact the town hall or mayor's office.)
- *Cemeteries* – typically have trusts that pay for upkeep; these do not need folks to help clean up. Older cemeteries that have run out of money and are starting to run down are sometimes taken over by the local parks and recreations department and/or the local historical society. If neither group knows who the appropriate contact would be, it's best to pick a different site (especially with a large group of volunteers).
- *Beaches* – laws regarding beaches are different in many parts of the country. If no one in your office knows who to contact regarding a beach cleanup, try calling the local police station (look up the number in the phone book – don't call 911!) or the local town hall.
- *Community Gardens* – this is probably the most difficult contact to find. While some gardens have contact information posted at the garden itself, you may need to do a bit of sleuthing to find a contact. Try asking nearby churches and/or nonprofits, the local parks and recreation department, town hall, or any local gardening clubs to find the contact information.
- *Homeless Shelter/Domestic Violence Shelter/Etc.* – call the shelter (or nonprofit that runs the shelter) directly and ask for the shelter manager.

How to Form a Partnership
The easiest and most effective way to form a community partnership is do so in person or over the phone. If you don't have experience making first contact with an organization, here is a sample opening:

> *Hi, my name is _____ and I'm calling on behalf of _____. I'm organizing a service project and was hoping we could help our community by helping to clean up _____. Our project is scheduled for _____. Would this be a good time to clean up _____?*

While most sites are happy to partner with groups for cleanup service projects, you may end up getting rejections, especially if you aren't able to give much notice for your project. Just remind yourself that they are rejecting the partnership, not you.

What to Expect from a Partnership
The most important aspect of a partnership is that both sides must contribute to the partnership for it to be successful. The contributions may not be equal, but there must be some exchange.

- Expect to get: guidance to ensure an effective and helpful project. Ideally you'll also get tools and supplies for the cleanup. Finally, you'll get some pictures for future marketing of your program.
- Expect to give: your time, energy, and enthusiasm.

Fundraising

This project is specifically designed to be as cost-free as possible. In most projects, fundraising is recommended as a marketing tool, even if you don't need to raise any funds. For this particular project, however, the timeline may be too short for fundraising to be effective for marketing.

That said, there are a few supplies you'll need (trash bags, tools, work gloves, etc.) If your cleanup partner can't provide these supplies, it's best to try and get them donated directly (called an in-kind donation) rather than asking for money to buy the supplies. Note that while in-kind donations are often faster than asking for a cash donation, a week is considered *very* short notice for any kind of donation request. The earlier you can start, the better.

Because of the tight deadline for this project, you should make your requests in person or over the phone. If you are new to making first contact with companies, here is a sample script. Be sure to modify it for the supplies you are requesting.

> *Hi, my name is _____ and I'm calling on behalf of _____. We're organizing a park clean-up on Saturday and were hoping you could donate trash bags for the project.*

Some organizations require donation requests to come in a letter, on official letterhead. If you have at least a couple of weeks before your event, you might have time to follow this process. However, you should explain your timeline over the phone; if the organization can't process your request in a prompt manner, your time would be better spent seeking out alternate donors.

The tight timeline of this event may result in rejections from organizations that would otherwise say yes. Understand that they are rejecting the request, not you, and move on to the next potential donor on your list.

Recruiting and Managing Volunteers

Most cleanup efforts can be done with any number of volunteers. It's important that you use your volunteers effectively, especially if community members are participating. For some participants, this might be their very first volunteer experience. If their time is not spent in a valuable and satisfying manner, it might also be their last volunteer experience.

To ensure that everyone has a meaningful and successful Service Day, **be sure to have enough work for the number of volunteers that you are expecting and the amount of time you've allotted**. The worst possible outcome for your event is having a ton of volunteers and nothing for them to do.

Assuming there is plenty of work, and if time permits, ask volunteers (preferably before the event) if there are any particular tasks they enjoy or dislike, and any tasks they are unable to do based on their ability level. Try and assign tasks based on that information.

If you have a large number of volunteers, consider having volunteers work in pairs or teams. This incorporates a social aspect into the project and can help build camaraderie. Just be sure to have at least a few individual tasks for participants who prefer to work alone. Also, make sure you have a few activities prepared or volunteers who may be injured or have a disability.

Liability
Depending on what kind of work and tools your volunteers will be handling, you may want them to sign a liability waiver before participating in the event. Both your community partner and service site should be able to give you advice as to whether a waiver should be used for a given project.

Day of Event

You'll want to start the day with some sort of gathering of your volunteers. Partially this gathering is to allow volunteers to check in and make sure they know what their assignments are, but it's also a good idea to work in a reflection or activity to help make the Service Day meaningful. It doesn't need to be elaborate; all you need is a brief explanation about what this project will mean to the community.

It is absolutely critical that you take pictures, from the very start of the event to the very end. These are vital not only for promotional reasons, but also to celebrate the work that you and your volunteers have done for the community. Try to arrive on site early so you can take some 'before' pictures, and don't forget to take 'after' pictures in those same areas when the project is done. Also, be sure to get lots of action shots of the cleanup, and at least one picture of the entire team together.

Finally, for the health and safety of your volunteers, make sure that there is plenty of water available, especially on a hot day. Most cleanup sites, such as parks, will already have water on site. For those sites that don't have water, you'll have to provide some. If your volunteers will be serving more than 2-3 hours, it's also nice to have snacks and other refreshments available to keep them nourished and happy.

Wrapping Up

How you end your project is as important as how you start. Your goal should be to leave a positive, lasting impression on the community, which will benefit you in the rest of your service year, and will encourage volunteerism in the community going forward.

No matter how the event goes, be sure to thank your volunteers. Because this is a single-day event, the best way to say "Thank You" is to gather everyone around at the end of the event and briefly thank them for their time and for helping improve the quality of the site. The best reward for this project is a positive volunteer experience. Be sure to thank your donors and partners as well. Sending a short "Thank You" note to donors and partners increases the likelihood that they'll support you in the future. Increase the impact of the thanks by including pictures (before and after pictures work great), as well as impact numbers such as number of volunteers that cleaned up the area. *See: Sample Donor "Thank You" Letter (pg. 36).*

For marketing and promotion, you'll want to send out one final press release. You'll likely be exhausted after the day of the event, so it's best to write the press release a few days before, with blanks where you'll eventually put numbers and special notes of interest. Send it to all of your partners, as well as to your media contacts. *See: Sample Press Releases (pg. 61)*

Budget

Line Item	Estimated Cost Range
Transportation	$0 - $50
Supplies	$0 - $40
Promotion/Marketing	$0 - $10

Budget Explanation
Note that these numbers are all extremely rough estimates, as costs will vary depending on what you choose to do, where you are located in the country, and how successful your donations are. These are just to give you a general idea of costs to help you decide if this is a viable project for you.

Transportation: ideally, there shouldn't be any transportation costs. If volunteers are coming from out of town, make sure they carpool together (you might make this a requirement of receiving mileage reimbursement).

Supplies: try to get as many of these donated as possible. If you do have extra funds to spend on supplies, consider buying snacks and refreshments for your volunteers. If nothing else, you will need to buy water, if none is available at the cleanup site.

Promotion/Marketing: the only marketing costs you might have are flyers, "Thank You" letters, postage, and/or costs for printing pictures.

Supplemental Materials

Park Clean Up Check List

Supplies—Day of Event

- ☐ Trash bags
- ☐ Gardening tools
- ☐ Other tools (if needed)
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Drinks/snacks (optional)

Marketing Materials

- ☐ Completed Media Contact Worksheet (see pg. 77)
- ☐ Press Releases (for example see pg. 61)
- ☐ Flyers to distribute around the community
- ☐ Social Media Guide (for example see pg. 79)
- ☐ Liability waivers
- ☐ Paper and printer (for creating flyers)
- ☐ "Thank You" notes for partners, donors, volunteers

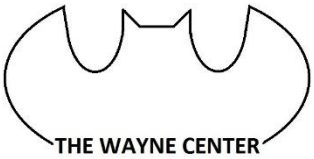
What Partnerships Do You Need?

- ☐ Cleanup location
- ☐ Local news/media outlets
- ☐ Local government representatives (optional)
- ☐ Other AmeriCorps programs and alums networks (optional)

What Should You Get Donated?

- ☐ Gardening tools (if needed)
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Lunch for members (if applicable)

THE WAYNE CENTER



Contact:
Lisa Wayne
800-888-0000 (office)
lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release
May 1, 2014

AMERICORPS VISTA MEMBERS ORGANIZE RIDDLER PARK CLEANUP

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- **AmeriCorps VISTA members** hosted at The Wayne Center are organizing a volunteer service project to clean up Riddler Park on **May 19, 2014 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m**. Volunteer tasks are available for all ability levels and ages. Some tasks include:

- Weed Pulling
- Trash Pick-Up
- Sidewalk Sweeping
- Flower Planting
- Painting

Volunteers register by contacting Lisa Wayne by May 11, 2014. Lunch and refreshments will be provided by The Sandwich Station, and t-shirts will be provided by The Screenprinter for all registered volunteers. In partnership with many hardware stores and small businesses in Gotham City, The Wayne Center has garnered 24 yard and garden tools, 10 rolls of trash bags, 15 trays of seedlings, and 37 cans of spray paint for the event.

About The Wayne Center

The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

About AmeriCorps VISTA

AmeriCorps VISTA, funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a program in which individuals are placed in service sites across America to fight poverty by building the capacity of local organizations. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve on a full-time basis for one year.

About Riddler Park

Riddler Park is located in West Gotham and is bound by Joker Lane, Catwoman Alley, Bane Boulevard, and S. Penguin Street. The site of a booming summer kickball league, Riddler Park requires consistent maintenance and care.

###

An editable version of this press release is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

Contact:
Lisa Wayne
800-888-0000 (office)
lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release
May 20, 2014

AMERICORPS VISTA MEMBERS HOST SUCCESSFUL RIDDLER PARK CLEANUP

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- **AmeriCorps VISTA members** from The Wayne Center hosted a successful volunteer service project to clean up Riddler Park on May 19, 2014. Thirteen AmeriCorps members and 37 community volunteers spent 4 hours cleaning, planting flowers, and painting pavilions. Volunteers also removed trash and cleared weeds.

The Wayne Center would like to thank the following local businesses for their support:

- The Sandwich Station
- The Screenprinter
- Harry's Garden Supply
- Sunny Day Flower Shop

The Wayne Center thanks their AmeriCorps VISTA members and the 37 volunteers who dedicated their time and muscles to this park clean up to better Gotham City.

About The Wayne Center
The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

About AmeriCorps VISTA
AmeriCorps VISTA, funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a program in which individuals are placed in service sites across America to fight poverty by building the capacity of local organizations. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve on a full-time basis for one year.

About Riddler Park
Riddler Park is located in West Gotham and is bound by Joker Lane, Catwoman Alley, Bane Boulevard, and S. Penguin Street. The site of a booming summer kickball league, Riddler Park requires consistent maintenance and care.

###

An editable version of this press release is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

EVERETT PARK Clean up

Help us clean up Everett Park!
Meet at 555 Everett Avenue in Lansing, MI 48911

SATURDAY, MAY 15, 2014
9:00 AM to NOON

Trash Pick-Up/Sidewalk Sweeping/Weed Pulling
other tasks available for those with disabilities

Your Service Site Logo Here

Sponsored by: [your host site] and AmeriCorps VISTA!

For more info, contact Chelsea Leser, AmeriCorps VISTA at:
myname@gmail.com • 800-222-5050

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

AmeriCorps VISTA Park Cleanup!

Join us for a day of fun, sun, and volunteering!
Help your community alongside AmeriCorps VISTA members that have dedicated a year of their life to fighting poverty in the Granite State.

Where: Livingston Park
500 Valley Street
Manchester, NH 03109

When: Friday, April 24, 2014
9:00 a.m.— 2:00 p.m.

What: Help AmeriCorps VISTA members cleanup a local park in preparation for Summer!

For details, contact:
Lexie Kwiek
AmeriCorps VISTA Leader
000.000.0000 ext. 200
leader@nhvista.org

To learn more about AmeriCorps VISTA and how VISTA members are improving your community, visit: **www.NationalService.gov**

Corporation for NATIONAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE

VISTA Volunteers In Service To America

New Hampshire Catholic Charities

AmeriCorps VISTA~ Getting things done in New Hampshire

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

Project 5: Random Acts of Kindness

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Project Summary

Project Description: This is a creative project that could work for VISTA members that are spread out over a great distance, or who are in the same city. The object is to complete as many random acts of kindness as possible, which can be done as a group or as an individual. Good deeds could range from picking up litter to giving a sincere compliment, and they can be tracked by using a common hashtag when posting pictures and updates on social media.

Number of VISTAs: 1 – 50

Time Estimate: 1 month

Keywords: good deeds, acts of kindness, visibility

Objectives/Outcomes:

- Complete numerous acts of kindness in your community, either as an individual or a group.
- Increase the visibility of AmeriCorps VISTA, national service, and National Service Day(s).
- Create community connections that can be utilized in current and future VISTA projects.

Additional Notes: While this project is a great way to increase your visibility in the community, it does not produce as many tangible benefits as the other projects mentioned. This could be used as a fun project to get your team together and raise awareness about national service. Using this project as an awareness campaign will only be successful if everyone wears their VISTA gear so that community members connect AmeriCorps with the event.

Project Guide

Timeline

1 Month Before	•Make a list of potential good deeds that people can complete throughout the day. •Determine where members will be during the day. •If any of the good deeds require permission or some type of clearance (ie. cleaning litter in a park or playground) reach out to the necessary contacts. •Arrange transportation, if necessary.
1 Week Before	•Confirm event location and details with members. •Confirm transportation, if necessary.
Day Before	•Collect tools, if necessary. •Be sure that everyone knows the plan for the day
Day of Event	•Take pictures and document your good deeds! •Post updates on social media using a consistent hashtag. •Make sure everyone wears AmeriCorps gear!
Day After Event	•Write and distribute a press release to highlight the project successes. • Send "Thank You" letters.

Before You Start

Realistically, you only need one month to build awareness about the day, but promotion could also begin much sooner. When developing your marketing plan make sure that members are always reminded to use your consistent hashtag in any social media postings (both before and during the event). This will allow you to track all of the good deeds that members are completing, and will help to show the overall impact that your project made.

In the initial planning stage, it will be important to determine if you will be coming together as a group to complete the acts of kindness, or if volunteers will be required to go out on their own. If you are coming together as a larger group it will be necessary to plan a base project that will occupy the time in between finding small good deeds (like picking up litter throughout the city while looking for people to help).

Finally, it will be easiest to only include AmeriCorps VISTA members in the project initially. On the day of, members can encourage the people they help to “pay it forward,” but finding enough small projects to sustain a large group of people could become difficult, especially if you are trying to keep the focus on small acts of kindness.

Supply List

- Camera/Flip Cam to document each act of kindness
- 1 person or multiple people with mobile social media capabilities to post pictures/videos
- Any tools necessary for specific deeds (like trash bags for collecting litter)

Community Partnerships

Since this project is based on your VISTAs completing many small acts of kindness, there are not many partnerships you have to create. If you are planning to have a base project like picking up litter so your members have a continuous project, contact your local Safety Department. They can tell you the best places to perform your acts, and may be able to assist by supplying items like safety vests and tools.

The only other partners you will need are some local businesses that will display flyers for the event. These relationships should be formed well before the event so your flyers are available to the public for as long as possible. Some ideas of organizations to hang flyers in are: coffee shops, local stores, any offices located in your project radius, and any other organizations that will be in the area where your project takes place.

For more information on Community Partnerships, see Park Cleanup Template (pg. 54) *

Day of Event

If you are completing the acts of kindness as a group, you should have a meeting location planned with all of your members. This could be in a park that you are cleaning or that is near the area you will be picking up litter. Make sure to have a set meeting time and a way to track that all of your members are present—you don't want to head out to complete good deeds and leave a member behind.

While doing random acts of kindness make sure to take pictures! If your members have mobile social media access, post updates/images in real-time so that people can follow your progress. Continue using one hashtag and tagging national Twitter and Facebook accounts so you get as much coverage as possible.

Some ideas of good deeds to complete throughout the day include:

- Kindness Challenge - Challenge your VISTA team to complete as many Random Acts of Kindness as possible. At the end, surprise the entire team with your own act of kindness for them.
- Reserve time to send a "Thank You" note to a mentor
- Contact existing community partners to see if they need additional volunteers for a day
- Volunteer with an organization in need (retirement homes, hospitals, shelters)
- Donate clothing, books, or canned goods as a VISTA team
- Help a neighbor at the office or at home by baking a treat or helping with yard work
- Hold the door or carry bags for a stranger

For more ideas, visit: http://www.randomactsofkindness.org

Wrapping Up

For the end of your event you should have a designated meeting place and time so that you can make sure all of your members are aware that the day is ending. This would also be a good time to have a sort of reflection with your members about the success of the day. Even going around in a circle and saying one word that sums up your experience is enough to bring people together and show the impact you made.

Also, even though your event is technically over, that does not mean that your marketing efforts should stop. Be sure to send out a press release to your media partners detailing all of the work your team completed. Send pictures with captions to help *show* the community impact you made.

Social media can also be used after the event to continue sharing pictures, videos and highlights from the day! Make sure to tag lots of accounts and continue using your unique hashtag so people can search for all of your posts about the day.

Lastly, be sure to thank everyone involved! Thank your members for taking the day to make a positive impact on their community. If you received any donations, be sure to send your donors a "Thank You" note with info on the impact you made in the community.

For more information about wrapping up your event, see **Park Cleanup Template.**

Supplemental Materials

Random Acts of Kindness Planning Check List

What do you need before the event?

- ☐ Printer/paper (for flyers)
- ☐ VISTA gear to wear on Service Day

Marketing Materials

- ☐ Completed Media Contact Worksheet (see pg. 77)
- ☐ Flyers to distribute (see pg. 72)
- ☐ Social Media Guide (for example see pg. 79)
- ☐ Liability waivers (ask your host site if needed)
- ☐ "Thank You" notes for all that supported the event

What do you need the day of the event?

- ☐ Camera/flip cam
- ☐ Mobile social media capabilities
- ☐ Any tools for the specific projects (like trash bags for collecting litter)

What Partnerships Do You Need?

- ☐ Local businesses that will host flyers
- ☐ Department of Safety (if picking up litter)
- ☐ Local parks (if you plan on cleaning them)
- ☐ Encourage the community to get involved!

RANDOM ACTS OF *Kindness*

Join "My Community Organization" and AmeriCorps VISTA to start a movement of positivity and kindness in our community!

Random Acts of Kindness day is

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2015!

To participate, simply take one of the acts below to impact someone's day with an act of kindness. Or, make up your own act of kindness!

Feel free to tweet pictures using #randomactslansing

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

- Aesop

Your host site logo here

Looking for other ways to get involved?

Contact Chelsea Leser, AmeriCorps VISTA

myname@ghmail.com • 800-555-2220

- Put a coin or two in an expired parking meter!
- Offer to pick up groceries for an elderly neighbor.
- Pay for the car behind you at a drive-thru.
- Help a person who is lost get to their destination, even if you're running late.
- Say "Good Morning" to five people today.
- Send or bring flowers to a friend or family member.
- Tell someone you appreciate having them in your life.
- Call a friend you haven't spoken to in a while, just to say "Hi."
- Say "I love you" to someone you love today.
- Throw away your trash—and someone else's, too.
- Leave a penny in a "Take a penny, leave a penny" jar at a store.
- Donate something—time, talent, or treasure.
- Give someone a genuine compliment, and try to make their day.

An editable version of this flyer is available at http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides.

Section 3: Resources

In This Section:

- **Marketing and Promotion Guide**
- **Media Contacts Worksheet**
- **Social Media Guide**
- **Additional Project Ideas**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**
- **Other Resources**

Marketing and Promotion Guide

One key goal of any service project is promotion, which includes promotion of the event itself and of every organization and group involved. The immediate effects of events are often short-lived, but marketing and promotion efforts can reap benefits for months or years to come.

Marketing typically occurs prior to the event, during the event, and after the event. A great marketing plan consists of following components:

- Press releases
- Flyers
- Social media
- Emails to interested parties, volunteers, community partners, etc.

While the details of these components will vary from project to project, they are generally the same for each. With all materials, make sure to include both your service site logo and the VISTA logo, and to be sure to mention your service site and VISTA when you speak to people about your upcoming project.

Before you start on any of the marketing steps below, take the time to complete the Media Contacts Worksheet. Every press release and flyer you create should be sent to those contacts.

Flyers

As soon as you have all of the key information for your event, create a flyer. Your flyer should include the following information:

- Date, time, and location of event
- Who is invited to participate
- Who the event supports
- Which organizations are partnering to support the event
- VISTA and service site logos
- Any actions you want the public to take (RSVP to attend, supplies to donate for a drive, show up to volunteer, etc.)
- Contact information for project organizer (probably yourself)

Note: if you use pictures on flyers, make sure you have permission to use them. If using pictures from the internet, make sure you choose an unlicensed picture that's free to share. For sample flyers, visit pages 19-20, 33-34, 52-53, 64-65, and 72.

Where to distribute flyers:

- Community partners
- All event sponsors
- Everyone on the Media Contacts Worksheet (pg. 77).
- Any e-mail distribution list you subscribe to
- Local colleges
- Local community centers
- Community-engaged businesses (coffee shops, restaurants, book stores, convenience stores, etc.)
- Any public posting board

Note: while you may be able to email flyers to some of these places, you will get higher recognition by physically going to these places to distribute flyers. If you email a flyer, there's a good chance your email will end up in the Trash folder, not printed off and passed out around town. Also, be sure to go through the proper channels when passing out flyers (for example, ask the manager of a local business if you can post your flyer in their store window).

Press Releases

Press Releases are a great opportunity to connect with the media in a formal, more traditional way than social media. Press releases should be concise and include the most vital information.

For each project, two press releases are encouraged:

- Before the event
    - This press release is informational. It discusses what the event will be, supporting partners, and project goals.
    - See samples on pages 17, 31, 50, and 62.
- After the event
    - This press release is celebratory. It should discuss results of the event and why these results matter within your community.
    - See samples on pages 18, 32, 51, and 63.

Information to include in all press releases:

- Date, time, and location of the event
- Supporters and beneficiaries of the event
- VISTA and service site logo
- An "About" section providing info about VISTA
- An "About" section providing info about service site
- Contact information for the event organizer
- Relevant and impactful quotes from stakeholders

How to distribute a press release:

- Send it to everyone on your media contacts worksheet
- Upload it to your service site's website
- Link to it on social media

Note: if a reporter chooses to write a piece on your service project, they will probably contact you. Make sure the contact information listed in the press release is accurate! Many reporters will choose to write an article either prior to or after the event, but some will write articles for both. That being said, it's still very important to write two press releases for each event since you can put them on your site's website and on social media. Also, sometimes you have to send a press release to a media outlet multiple times before they write an article about it – be persistent and plan enough time for this to happen.

Before the Event

Here are some steps you should take prior to your project date:

- Gather all of the information you need to market your project.
- Create and pass out flyers.
- Create "before the event" press release and send it to everyone on your Media Contacts Worksheet (pg. 77).
- Write "after the event" press release; feel free to leave blanks in for numbers of volunteer engaged, number of recipients helped, etc. You can complete this press release after the event.
- Write sample emails to send to your community partners, volunteers, and other stakeholders.
- Develop a social media plan, tailored to the social media most used in your community.
    - See the Social Media Marketing guide (pg. 79).
- Take preparation pictures as you gear up for the event and gather supplies.

During the event

Take lots of pictures! This is a task that's great for either you or a volunteer. Also, even if a reporter comes to your event with a camera, you should take pictures yourself! This way, you own the pictures and can use them for future marketing purposes and "Thank You" notes.

After the event

- Post your pictures online and say "Thank You"!
- Send your "after the event" press release
    - Fill in the blanks for impact numbers and any special notes of interest. Send it to all of your partners, as well as to your media contacts.
- Send "Thank You" notes to all of your community partners, donors, and any volunteers who helped out in a substantial way. You can include pictures to make these even more personal!

Media Contacts Worksheet

Local Newspaper: _____

Contact Name: _____ Position: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Local News Channel: _____

Contact Name: _____ Position: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Local Radio Station: _____

Contact Name: _____ Position: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

VISTA State Office Representative

Contact Name: _____ Position: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

AmeriCorps Alums – Local Chapter

Contact Name: _____ Position: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Community/Nonprofit E-mail Distribution List

Not every community has one; ask your supervisor or someone else working in nonprofit in the area.

_____

Social Media Suggestions

Facebook: use to promote events from start to finish, either through an event-specific page, a local VISTA page, a page for the organizations involved in the project, AmeriCorps Alumni page, etc.) – note that not every message that is posted will be passed on to people who like the page, so the more updates, the better.

Twitter: best for quick updates and important announcements. Every post will be sent to every person following you.

Instagram: use to promote events by taking pictures before, during and after the day of service. Take pictures of event supplies, locations, and service members (with their permission), and use your set of hashtags liberally.

Hashtags for event(s): _____

_____

_____

Note: using consistent hashtags when promoting and describing the service project will make it easier to seek out in each of the social media platforms. A quick search of the hashtags that are trending or used frequently to promote similar projects may help tie your event into what's happening nationally (if applicable).

Social Media Guide

The use of social media has become increasingly important over the years as these tools continue to evolve in function and popularity. The main benefits that social media offers are how it makes everyone accessible and can create a dialogue about your project and service. You can, and should use sites like Facebook and Twitter to show your State Office what kinds of projects you are working on, to increase VISTAs brand recognition with pictures wearing your gear, and to engage other VISTA and AmeriCorps programs so that all of our work can be seen across the country. The best way to increase the visibility of National Service is for members and leaders to take an active role in promoting our projects—and one of the easiest ways to do that is by sharing pictures and updates through social media.

What form of social media should you use?

Twitter
Can you make your point in under 140 characters? If yes, then you should be using Twitter. This is a great medium for connecting with other organizations because you can tag any other account in a post—that includes AmeriCorps, CNCS, and many more.

Some tips for tweeting:

- Don't be afraid of overwhelming your audience with tweets. Since Twitter has a constantly updated 'newsfeed' there will be other posts that break yours up.
- Don't be shy with tagging! Other people and organizations created Twitter accounts knowing that they were going to be tweeted at. Opening up a conversation is the basis of social media.
- Twitter can be a great tool to send out a quick thank you to a sponsor. This shows that you truly appreciate their support, and also gives them some publicity.
- Try to leave some room in your tweets. Yes, you have 140 characters to use, but try to leave some extra space at the end of posts so that others can retweet with their own comment (*see example below*).

Facebook
Much like Twitter, Facebook is designed to create connections and start conversations. One of the main differences is that here there is no limit on characters. That can allow you to give a more thorough explanation of photos, and also allows for more organizations to be tagged in your posts. While there is no character limit, it is still best to keep your posts concise and catchy so people actually read all of your information.

Some tips for posting:

- Unlike Twitter, the Facebook newsfeed is both arranged based on when something is posted, but also on how many 'likes' it receives. That means that if you posted a picture yesterday and someone liked or commented on it today, it would shoot back onto your friends' newsfeed.
- Eventually, some stories get hidden on your timeline. So, if you have an even coming up and are posting updates or save-the-dates, you should post multiple reminders. Otherwise you risk people not seeing your posts.
- While posting multiple updates will keep your audience informed, it could also backfire if your posts do not receive enough action. If you are constantly posting but not receiving any likes or comments, then your posts' will not appear as prominently on the newsfeed. The best way to avoid this is to track when your posts get the most likes and try to post around those times. This will ensure that your updates are being seen, and that they will continue to appear on everyone's newsfeeds.

Other Sites

While Facebook and Twitter are the most well-known social networking sites, there are many others that can help spread the word about your Service Days and programs. One of the best ways to *show* your accomplishments is to create a video after your event that highlights all of your hard work. This video can then be posted on YouTube and the link can be shared via both Facebook and Twitter.

Another way to reach your audience is through Instagram. While there aren't many national accounts on Instagram yet, it is still a great way to show all of your hard work. Here you have no limit on hashtags, so feel free to label your images in any way that will get them noticed.

When should you use social media?

Before

Start building interest about your project in advance by posting on Facebook and Twitter about your plans. Follow the national AmeriCorps accounts and respond to anything they post about National Service Days. You can also tag organizations as they offer support to show that you are thankful for their partnership, and it also gives them some free publicity.

Day of Event

Take lots of pictures! It is known that photos generate more interest on social media than just text posts, so take as many as possible. Posting real-time updates is a great way to keep people interested in your project, and using a consistent hashtag will group all of your posts into a conversation that people can browse during or after the event.

After
Post about your final project outcomes and take the chance to thank sponsors again. Using some pictures from the day will help to engage people in your project and really show the impact that your program had.

Who should you tag?

Don't be shy with tagging organizations or individuals! Social media is designed to open conversation between people who otherwise might never meet. Some of the best accounts to tag on Facebook and Twitter are:

Account	Facebook	Twitter
Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)	@Corporation for National and Community Service	@nationalservice
AmeriCorps VISTA	@AmeriCorps VISTA- Volunteers In Service To America	@VISTAbuzz
AmeriCorps (general)	@AmeriCorps	@americorps
AmeriCorps Alums	@AmeriCorps Alums	@AmeriCorpsAlums
Your own State Office (ex. New Hampshire)	@Live Free and Serve- ME, NH, VT State Office	@MENHVT_CNCS
Project Specific accounts (ex. MLK Day of Service)	Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service	@MLKDay

You can also keep the conversation going by retweeting and sharing posts from these organizations and others. The best way to increase the visibility of the Service Day is to share what everyone is saying.

#Hashtags

Hashtags are now a common feature on all social media. Their main function is to group posts together into a conversation. Using a consistent hashtag throughout your Service Day posts will allow someone to access all of your posts and see how your project has progressed.

Check to see if there are already hashtags in place for your day of service, like #MLKDay for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service. Using hashtags that other programs are also posting will help make the conversation more visible, and will show the connection between National Service participants across the country.

We are aware of all the great work our programs are getting done, but sharing updates on social media can give our programs a wider reach.

Other Tips

One key aspect to keep in mind and promote to your members is wearing your AmeriCorps gear on National Service Days. Having our logo prominent in all of the pictures will increase our brand recognition and will *show* that we are part of something bigger. (It also never hurts to strike a Rosie pose!)

Social media can seem overwhelming when you are first getting into it, but don't be discouraged. Following national accounts and sharing, retweeting, or replying/commenting on their posts is a great way to get more comfortable with posting updates. Just remember, that these accounts *want* to see everything your program is doing. Getting the work done is the most important, but without increasing your program's visibility no one will know everything you are doing. Social media lets you showcase your project and Service Days to show how you are benefiting your community.

Don't forget to have fun with it! The pictures and posts that get noticed are the ones that stand out. If you have a moment of inspiration, grab your camera and take a picture. AmeriCorps VISTA needs to get noticed, and the only way that will happen is by members stepping up, wearing their gear, and spreading the word.

Additional Project Ideas

Back to School Supply Drive

This project has an anti-poverty and education focus, and can be done with limited resources. One option is to set up collection sites at various partner organizations. Depending on your volunteer and time resources, you can take on most of the work yourself (similar to the Food Drive Project on page 21) or partner with other agencies to have them do the drive (similar to the Military Care Packages Project on page 38).

Clothing Drive

Works similarly to the book drive - create one or more collection sites for community members to drop off gently used clothing, then collect, sort and distribute the clothes to a homeless shelter or other social service site. This project has wide appeal as the clothing can be donated for many purposes: warm clothes for winter, work clothes for Dress for Success, kids' clothes for back to school.

College Application/FAFSA Day

Help clients at partner organizations complete college and FAFSA applications. This may require some volunteer training before the day of the event, and you will need to market effectively to ensure that there are enough clients to utilize the number of volunteers you expect.

Community Dinner

Host a dinner for local veterans/police/firefighters. This is a great opportunity to strengthen your community partnerships. Collect donations from local businesses, partner with a local agency for a venue, and recruit volunteers to help set up the event, to make the food, and to clean everything afterwards.

Community Garden Day/Food Bank Garden Day

More and more food banks have their own community gardens (or get fresh produce from gardens in their community). Often they can use an extra hand, especially around harvest time. This is a great service project as it often requires very little prep work - the food banks should provide all the tools necessary for the day.

Emergency Kits for the Homeless

Local Red Cross chapters may already have a team that does this so be sure to contact them first. You may bring a group of volunteers for the day to collect supplies and assemble them as a team. This project can be run similarly to the Military Care Packages Project (pg. 38). By having community partners collect the supplies, you can focus on the kit assembly.

Free Dental/Medical Day

Work with local dentists/clinics to have a day where they offer basic services (checkups, cleaning, fillings etc.) for free or reduced cost. Because transportation can be a barrier for those in poverty, you might look into providing transportation to the service sites.

Free Legal Aid Day

Partner up with a legal aid office, public defender, or even a large local law firm to offer free legal one-on-one sessions. You may choose to set topics such as wills, child custody, landlord/tenant issues, etc. in advance. This way the lawyers know what to expect (and it makes it easier to recruit them for the Service Day.)

Host a Small Benefit

Host a site related event, such as brown bag lunch sessions where community members can come learn about different topics related to your organization. The sessions can be free, but you may ask for donations or ask that attendees bring a canned food item.

Multi-Site Service Day

Connect with multiple nonprofits in your area to host projects for 10-20 members. This is a great opportunity to mix all of our AmeriCorps programs at different sites and provide new networking opportunities for your VISTAs. You may want to reach out to sites like the Salvation Army, local parks or cemeteries for clean-up, housing that may need painting, etc.

Paint a Mural

The possibilities for this project are truly endless. You could team up with a local after school program to paint a small mural with the kids, or you could recruit volunteers to paint a mural on the side of your organizations building, etc.

Toiletries/Cleaning Products Drive

Food drives happen all of the time, but other essentials (especially things like toilet paper, soap, toothpaste, and toothbrushes) are just as vital and can't be purchased with food stamps. This project would be similar to the Food Drive Project (pg. 21) Instead of partnering with food banks or pantries, try partnering with homeless shelters, teen centers (such as Boys and Girls Clubs), public schools, etc.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are "National Days of Service"?
National Days of Service are days that focus special attention on giving back to your community. Please see the "National Days of Service" section starting on page 4 for a more complete definition. You can also access a comprehensive list of potential National Service Days here: http://www.energizeinc.com/prof/events/eventsNA.html.

What if none of the outlined service projects fit my needs?
See our Resources section (pg. 73) for some great websites that provide additional ideas for national days of service or the Additional Project Ideas section (pg. 84) for brief synopses of other Service Day projects that might be better suited to your area or organization.

What's the best way to get connected to other AmeriCorps branches in my area?
Try contacting your state office first for a comprehensive list of other AmeriCorps branches in your area. You may also want to reach out to any AmeriCorps Alums Associations in your area. They can be a great resource as many Alums have wealth of experience with event planning and volunteer management. Additionally, you might be able to recruit alums as volunteers for your event, or they might offer to help in recruiting volunteers.

The project I want to do has a three month timeline, but I only have a month until my National Service Day project. Can I still do that project?
You can! With a little extra dedication and time, you can make an event work on short notice. Choose a project that fits your tight deadline. For example, holding a park clean up may be a better option than creating military care packages, as that event requires more time and planning.

What should I do if more volunteers come to the event than I have space or jobs for?
The best way to avoid this situation is to make sure that volunteers R.S.V.P. to your event. This way you can ensure that you have enough jobs for all volunteers that come to your event. In the case that you do not track volunteers, you can always create additional jobs. However, keep in mind that volunteers like to feel needed and that they are dedicating their free time to something that is meaningful.

Where can I direct people for on-going opportunities if not at my site/agency?

- **Volunteer Match** - www.volunteermatch.org
- **United We Serve** - www.serve.gov
- **Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service** - www.mlkday.gov
- **Idealist** - www.idealist.org

Other Resources

Toolkits

The Corporation for National and Community Service has put together a great website that includes toolkits and action guides to help you plan your own National Day of Service. Check it out here: http://mlkday.gov/index.php

For help planning September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance projects, the website listed below provides tips and information for engaging elected officials and maximizing press coverage: http://www.serve.gov/?q=site-page/sept11-resources

All service-related resources made available by the Corporation for National and Community Service can be found on this website. Take a moment to look through each of the "knowledge networks." There is so much information! https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/

Oregon Volunteers! has put together a great resource page for each National Service Day or Day of Recognition. Check out this site if you'd like to plan your project to correspond with an official National Service Day: http://www.oregonvolunteers.org/volunteer/daysofservice/

Videos

Videos are the best way to get an inside glimpse of an epic Service Day. Remember that as each project is different, each Day of Service will also be different. Watch these videos for some great inspiration and celebrate the success of past Service Days!

AmeriCorps 20th Anniversary Celebratory Service Day:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQvVf5pfHOI

New Hampshire AmeriCorps Day of Service 2014: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQfuSwgiEdM

AmeriCorps VISTA Visibility Days:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVCMFl61R24

Books

101 Social Media Tactics for Nonprofits: A Field Guide by Melanie Mathos, Chad Norman, Beth Kanter
This handy, accessible guide features 101 actionable tactics that nonprofits can start using immediately, and most of the featured resources are free. Broken down into five key areas, it also explains the steps and tools needed to implement each tactic.

Social Media

If you're looking for Social Media tips, take a look at this short blog post: *5 Ways to Find Volunteers in 140 Characters or Fewer*: http://www.nationalservice.gov/blogs/2013-11-19/5-ways-find-volunteers-140-characters-or-fewer

Check out the following AmeriCorps social media sites. Each site will provide the most up-to- date information related to major VISTA events and service projects.

AmeriCorps VISTA Twitter:
https://twitter.com/VISTAbuzz

AmeriCorps Twitter:
https://twitter.com/americorps

AmeriCorps VISTA Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/AmeriCorpsVISTA

AmeriCorps VISTA Leader Facebook (official):
https://www.facebook.com/groups/VISTALeader/691003227633954/?notif_t=group_activity

Corporation for National and Community Service Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/nationalservice

Corporation for National and Community Service Tumblr:
http://nationalservice.tumblr.com/

Request for Verizon Employee Volunteers

Verizon encourages its employees to volunteer with community organizations, and this link will guide you to an online form where you can submit a volunteer request. Their funding priorities are education, healthcare, and energy management, though organizations might not necessarily have to fall into these categories to request volunteers.
https://www.cybergrants.com/cybergrants/plsql/ao_login.login?x_gm_id=1240&x_proposal_type_id=250