



**DATE:** April 17, 2015

**TO:** Potential New AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsor Organizations

**FROM:** California State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service

**SUBJECT:** Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) for New AmeriCorps VISTA Projects  
Concept Papers Due: May 29, 2015

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The California State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) announces the opportunity, subject to availability of resources, to develop and sponsor new AmeriCorps VISTA projects in California. This Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) is open to those organizations that are not currently AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors.

VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a national service program that supports efforts to alleviate poverty by engaging individuals, 18 years and older, in a year of full-time service with a sponsoring organization. VISTA projects help to create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty. VISTA members focus on building permanent infrastructure in sponsoring organizations that bolsters their ability to alleviate poverty in their community.

Public organizations such as state and local government, Indian Tribes and non-profit private organizations can apply to become VISTA sponsors. All organizations with IRS 501(c) status that focus or plan to focus on alleviating and reducing poverty are eligible to apply not just those with IRS 501(c)(3) status. Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible.

Sponsoring Organizations (sponsors) must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise the VISTA members and also provide the necessary administrative support to accomplish the goals of their proposed project.

## **CALIFORNIA VISTA PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES**

The CNCS California State Office is currently accepting Concept Papers that are proposing to address one or more of the following issue areas from the [CNCS Strategic Plan 2011-2015](#) and [FY 2015 VISTA Guidance](#):

- *Economic Opportunity*
- *Education*
- *Healthy Futures*
- *Veterans and Military Families*

In FY 2015, the California State Office will give priority to new projects that focus on the following programming areas:

### ***Economic Opportunity***

Programming that supports and/or facilitates access to services and resources that contribute to the improved economic well-being and financial security of economically disadvantaged people.

VISTA project activities should focus on building capacity in the following programming areas:

- **Housing**  
Connecting families and individuals to safe and affordable housing
- **Financial Literacy**  
Helping individuals and families increase their knowledge and skills to manage financial resources. Programs should also connect low-income individuals and families to financial opportunities to build wealth. Such opportunities may include the Earned Income Tax Credit; individual development accounts (IDAs) and other asset building programs
- **Employment**  
Providing opportunities for individuals to obtain or train for gainful employment.

### ***Education***

Projects that provide support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children.

Project activities should focus on the following Education Objectives:

- **School Readiness** – School readiness for economically disadvantaged young children
- **K-12 Success** – Educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary, middle and high schools
- **Post-Secondary Success** – Preparation for and prospects of success in post-secondary education institutions for economically disadvantaged students.

The VISTA program also places a high priority on new project development in communities that have schools that meet the following conditions:

- Received awards from the Department of Education under the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program and are implementing one of the SIG school intervention models.
- School identified by a state educational agency that has received approval from the Department of Education of its request for Elementary and Secondary Education Act

flexibility, including those schools taking part in the federal interagency initiative, *Together for Tomorrow*.

Where feasible, project activities in these Education Objectives should seek to align with the goals of *Together for Tomorrow*:

- Celebrate and inspire community and family engagement in education and strengthen a community culture of education success
- Foster the capacity of low-performing schools to manage school-community partnerships
- Focus community partnerships on boosting key measurable student outcomes— Attendance, Behavior, Course performance, and College access (the ABCs) —as a means to improve low-performing schools.

Additionally, priority will be given to **STEM Education** programs that will build partnerships between students, schools, higher education and community partners to develop long-term solutions for increasing the number of underrepresented students who pursue and obtain STEM degrees.

Launched by President Obama on February 27, 2014, the **My Brother's Keeper initiative** focusses on connecting boys and young men of color to mentoring, support networks and the skills needed to find a good job or go to college and work their way up into the middle class.

Priority will be given to projects that support the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative by promoting and strengthening programming that aligns with the initiative's task focus areas. These areas include:

- Entering School Ready to Learn
- Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade
- College Access
- Workforce Development.

### ***Healthy Futures***

The VISTA program will give priority to projects that meet health needs, including seamless access for economically disadvantaged individuals to food resources and health care. Areas of focus include:

- Intergenerational Food Security – Increasing convenient and solutions for helping families to seamlessly access food year round.
- Ending Childhood Hunger – connecting families to resources that will help end childhood hunger such as the Summer Food Service Program and solutions for healthy breakfasts.

Ultimately, anti-hunger resources should be co-located with other non-food related resources that help move families toward economic self-sufficiency, and consequently out of hunger

- Health Care – connecting underserved individuals and families to primary health care and on-going preventative health care services.

## Highlighted Beneficiary Populations

### ***Veterans and Military Families***

VISTA will support projects that focus on serving low-income veterans and military families as beneficiaries. Project activities should focus on one or more the following areas:

- Economic Opportunity -- Financial Literacy, Housing, Employment
- Healthy Futures -- Food Security, Access to Health Care

The VISTA program encourages all projects to recruit veterans to serve as VISTA members. This is particularly encouraged for projects that serve veterans and military families.

### ***Refugee Resettlement***

VISTA will give priority to projects that provide support to low-income immigrant and refugee populations including unaccompanied minors and victims of human trafficking. An emphasis will be placed on programs that raise public awareness about human trafficking and connect these vulnerable populations with comprehensive services.

Project activities should focus on one or more the following areas:

- **Economic Opportunity** – Financial Literacy, Housing, Employment, Recertification in professional careers
- **Education** – English as a Second Language, Computer Literacy, Citizenship
- **Healthy Futures** – Food Security, Access to Health Care

## **GEOGRAPHIC PROGRAMMING DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES**

The California State Office is prioritizing VISTA project development in the following counties that have a high percentage and large number of individuals in poverty.

- |                |                    |                   |
|----------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Alameda     | 9. Madera          | 16. San Joaquin   |
| 2. Butte       | 10. Merced         | 17. Santa Barbara |
| 3. Fresno      | 11. Monterey       | 18. Shasta        |
| 4. Humboldt    | 12. Orange         | 19. Stanislaus    |
| 5. Imperial    | 13. Sacramento     | 20. Riverside     |
| 6. Kern        | 14. San Bernardino | 21. Tulare        |
| 7. Kings       | 15. San Diego      | 22. Yolo          |
| 8. Los Angeles |                    |                   |

Proposed projects that fall outside the California programmatic and geographic priority areas should consider proposing a cost share partnership.

## **COST SHARE PARTNERSHIP**

As a federally funded program, VISTA receives a limited financial allocation each year to support the work of VISTA projects across the country. VISTA is able to increase its reach in supporting anti-poverty programs by leveraging resources through cost-share partnerships.

Cost sharing is not required of new applicants seeking two (2) or more VISTA placements. However, it is strongly encouraged in projects wishing to sponsor a single placement or a large number of VISTA members. As mentioned above, projects that fall outside the California programmatic and geographic priority areas are also encouraged to propose a cost share if feasible.

As a cost share partner, a sponsor contributes the living allowance of one or more of its VISTA members. In California this rate ranges from \$11,676 – \$19,800 per year per VISTA depending on the county. Please note that the cost share partner's portion of support does not have to be paid up front. Projects are invoiced every four weeks.

Projects wishing to cost share all or some of the requested VISTA placements should indicate that intention in the concept paper.

### **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Eligible applicants interested in sponsoring an AmeriCorps VISTA project for a minimum of two (2) AmeriCorps\*VISTA members are invited to submit a concept paper via [eGrants](#)---the CNCS electronic grants system. Concept Papers responding to this RFCP should be submitted by **8pm PST on Friday, May 29, 2015.**

Applicants wishing to sponsor a project with only one (1) AmeriCorps VISTA member will be encouraged to provide a cost share for that single VISTA placement.

Please see [A Guide to Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA Project Sponsor](#) and [Creating an eGrants Account and Submitting a VISTA Concept Paper](#) for instructions on developing and submitting a Concept Paper. To apply, use the [eGrants](#) system. When applying, please select the NOFA: *AmeriCorps VISTA State FY 2015*. Our California State Office submission deadline for this RFCP release is October 6, 2015. Disregard the annual NOFA deadline that appears in the system.

### **SCOPE OF PROJECT**

Subject to availability of resources, AmeriCorps VISTA members will be awarded on a full-time basis for one year of service to newly approved VISTA sponsoring organizations. CNCS will make awards covering a period not to exceed one year with the potential for continuation. Members are projected to begin service in **January 2016.**

The CNCS State Office will be guided by locally driven programming that addresses the following "Key Principles." Each VISTA project must be developed in accordance with the parameters defined by law, federal regulations and the key VISTA principles: Anti-Poverty Focus, Capacity Building, Sustainable Solutions and Community Empowerment.

#### *Key Principles:*

- **Anti-Poverty Focus**  
As previously noted, by law, the purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. The goal of every project must be to help individuals and communities out of poverty, not to simply make poverty more tolerable. The project should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

- **Community Empowerment**  
All VISTA project sponsors must ensure that their project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, implementing and evaluating the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community assets, strengths and resources
- **Capacity Building**  
One way to achieve sustainable solutions is to strengthen the ability of local organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach and partnership development, VISTAs help sponsors to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. However, projects should focus their performance measures on achieving outcomes and impact on the community and/or beneficiary population, and not only outcomes on capacity building for the sponsoring organization or its partners, affiliates or intermediary organizations.
- **Sustainable Solutions**  
As originally designated in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act and reinforced in the Serve America Act, VISTA members represent a short-term resource and work to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. All VISTA projects should be developed with a goal establishing permanent infrastructure to sustain the project following the phase-out of VISTA members.

With the exception of cost share and intermediary projects, VISTA projects typically last three years. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must think about how to use the VISTA project to phase-in other resources and systems to replace the VISTA resource.

#### **CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL**

Criteria for approval are based on whether the proposed project:

- Fits with one or more of the **FY VISTA 2015 Programming Priorities or Priority Areas** listed in the California VISTA Programming and Geographic Development Priorities section of this document.
- Addresses the needs of low-income communities by proposing a VISTA project that builds capacity for evidence-based programming that alleviates poverty. Specifies the community need (poverty issue), the number of people impacted, the programming to alleviate poverty, evidence that the intervention reduces poverty, the number of people that will be served, and the number of people whose situation will improve.
- Fosters organizational capacity so that the project can continue once the VISTA resources are withdrawn.
- Involves beneficiaries of the service and the low-income community in project development and implementation. This is required and must be noted in the Concept Paper. If the organizations board of directors does not consist of at least 51% of the low-income beneficiary community, the sponsor must create an Advisory Council with a composition of at

least 51% of its members from the low-income community. The board or advisory council must review and provide written comments concerning the project application prior to submission. A copy of these comments will be a required attachment of any full application submitted.

- Is designed to generate public and/or private-sector resources.
- Promotes local volunteer service.
- Complies with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended; 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, VISTA regulations and VISTA policies.
- Further criteria for determining approval are based on whether the applicant:
- Is a local or state government agency, Tribe or a private organization designated as a non-profit by the Internal Revenue Service.
- Has resources available for VISTAs to perform their activities, such as space, supplies, and on-the-job transportation, and is able to provide emergency cash advances when needed.
- Has the management capacity and commitment to recruit, train, supervise, and otherwise support VISTAs recruited locally and nationally.
- Understands and is committed to promoting national and community service.
- Has the capacity to build community partnerships and collaborative efforts to achieve project self-sufficiency.

New project development occurs annually and is always subject to availability of resources. The CNCS California State Office strives to ensure that the portfolio of California VISTA projects is both programmatically and geographically diverse, and also inclusive of all sizes of agencies ranging from small grassroots organizations to larger statewide and national organizations.

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Any interested organization or individual with additional questions not addressed by this RFCP may contact the CNCS CA State Office at [cavistainquiry@cns.gov](mailto:cavistainquiry@cns.gov).

#### **CLICK LINKS BELOW TO ACCESS SUPPLEMENTAL REFERENCE MATERIALS:**

- [Creating an eGrants Account and submitting a VISTA Concept Paper](#)
- [eGrants system](#)
- [CNCS Strategic Plan 2011-2015](#)
- [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA](#) (Flash Course)
- [VISTA 201: Applying for VISTA Resources](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Supervisors Manual](#)
- [VISTA Performance Measures](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Instructions](#)

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CALL INFORMATION**

**Thursday, April 30 – 11:00 AM-12:30 PM, Pacific Standard Time**

**To join the audio conference**

Toll free number: 888-391-6571

Participant code: 9608672

Leader: DANETTE MARTIN

**Join WebEx Meeting**

Meeting number: 645 021 077

Meeting password: California

## TIMELINE

- April 17, 2015:** RFCP Released –  
To apply, go to: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/index.asp>.  
Select RFCP: FY 2015 AmeriCorps VISTA State
- April 30, 2015:** Technical Assistance Webinar – 11:00 a.m. PST (Call-in details below)
- May 15, 2015:** Interested applicants email letter of intent to apply to  
[cavistainquiry@cns.gov](mailto:cavistainquiry@cns.gov) (Not required and non-binding).
- May 29, 2015:** Deadline for submitting final concept papers in eGrants.
- June 29, 2015:** CNCS California State Office will notify organizations if their Concept Paper has been approved and a full application requested.
- July 31, 2015:** Full application due to CNCS California State Office via eGrants. Submit all supporting documentation and attachments via email on or before the deadline to the designed Program Officer.  
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- August 28, 2015:** CNCS California State Office decision announced and application processed via eGrants. Memorandum of Agreement issued.
- November 3-6, 2015:** Mandatory VISTA Supervisor Orientation for approved project sponsors. Staff should register for orientation 45 days in advance.
- November 2015:** Deadline for approved VISTA projects to submit recommended VISTA candidates to CNCS California State Office. Candidate applications are due 45 days in advance.
- January 2016:** VISTA candidates attend Pre-Service Orientation (PSO); VISTAs start service following PSO.
- March 2016:** Next Request for Concept Papers pending resource availability