

8 VISTA Member Retention Strategies You Can't Ignore

October 18, 2016

Chat Brainstorm

What are some other ways you can ensure staff at your organization knows the role of the VISTA?

Set up a meeting with managers so that VISTAs can explain their role but also learn about the manager's department

Get the staff involved: ask them to say what they think the role of the VISTA is and then correct as needed.

Include new VISTA members via Monthly Reports, share their VADs with other staff, involve the VISTAs in staff gatherings, etc.

Highlight member activities/role in the community or organization's newsletter. The org or community may know about the position before the incoming VISTA does.

We encourage our Vista member to attend staff meetings and include her in weekly planning sessions

Communities In Schools of Kalamazoo has a Back to School Launch which is an information sharing, training week. We introduce or re-introduce VISTAs there and let them share what they have been or will be working on. We also have a Do's and Don'ts handout that we share with our site leaders. VISTAs are a part of the site (school) team.

Explain what tasks staff members can or cannot ask them to do

My organization (UWF) interviewed our Vistas and published an article about them <https://creo.uwf.edu/volunteers-support-public-health-efforts-panhandle/>

We have an extremely small staff, so everyone was involved with the development of the strategic plan before and during the grant writing process. Once the orientation plan is completed, that will be shared with the small staff as well so they know what activities / work we're preparing our VISTA's for. They will also be invited to the first board meeting their attendance to be introduced to that team.

All but two of our staff have served in an AmeriCorps program, so it's great to be able to talk about our own experiences in relation to our VISTAs

How do you provide, or plan to provide, regular feedback and direction?

Making sure if anyone needs assistance or new ideas we're there to help

I plan to have daily "mind dumps" where we will meet at the end of the day to dump what was left on our minds before leaving for the day.

We luckily work in the same office, so it is easy to do daily verbal/email check-ins and weekly in-person meetings.

We meet every week right after the full staff meeting.

Daily 'water-cooler check ins' about work, weekly team meetings reviewing progress on VADS (3 VISTAs + our Program Director). Lengthier once a month meetings for the team to troubleshoot each other's problems without 'making decisions by committee'.

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At City of Las Vegas, our VISTAs are included to our bi-weekly meetings, but we also meet with just the VISTAs to discuss special assignments.

I have regular "support sessions" scheduled weekly with each of the VISTAs I supervise (currently 3). I take notes during each session so I can prepare a guide for the next session to help ensure things don't get forgotten.

We have a weekly check in 'in the books' and start with main activities of the past week, the coming week, and priorities for the quarter.

My members work right across my office. We meet on a daily basis and they ask me questions as needed. We have a great relationship.

We hold weekly meetings, but we check in every day. We are open to questions and suggestions and feedback on activities

We meet regularly and maintain an open door policy, but not all VISTAs are made alike. Some of our VISTA are engaged and walk in frequently, while others prefer to do their own thing.

Weekly meeting and listening and sharing ideas and progress

What strategies or tools have you recommended/plan to recommend to your members to help them succeed in their position?

As 2 year AmeriCorps member I from California's VIP (Volunteer Infrastructure Project), my teammates and I were given monthly 3-4 hour trainings as part of a volunteer management certification program built between NCNS and Hands On Network. I've built a training model around the handouts I had, and will be doing something similar with our VISTAs for professional development. For our one fund development VISTA, we'll be sending her to grant writing workshops as well

Give them tools, materials and the opportunity to meet with other professionals and/or volunteers that can support them with their project. Hire consultants when needed

Regular communication is so important. Make sure they are trained in each task. Letting them know that they are free to ask questions at any time. "I can't help you if I don't know you need help!"

I want them to list their expectations and then I will list mine separately. Then come together and find discrepancies.

Encourage them to explore the Community Toolbox (<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/learn-skill>)

Have an open door policy where they can come and receive regular feedback or ask questions. Also encourage them to come up with their own goals that I can assist them in achieving.

We have started using SLACK as a way for our VISTAs to communicate online with other VISTA members throughout the state regarding project challenges, successes, give and seek feedback, etc...

Being a public entity, we encourage and make time for our service members to attend public meetings (i.e. City Council, candidate forums) as a way to learn about the community and

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decision makers.

We encourage our VISTA's to let us know what they're most interested in learning and hold monthly trainings

We also have monthly in-service training sessions; many times these are led by VISTAs who share what they learned about building partnerships, fundraising, recruiting volunteers, etc.

We send out monthly newsletters with the happenings around town that are at low-cost or free

What type of gestures or contributions do you/or do you plan to provide to make life easier for VISTAs?

Always have snacks at meetings.

list of companies that will give discounts to VISTAs

Invite them to lunch, bring snacks, have coffee around, and mentor them

We sometimes do a potluck and have organized a (voluntary) book club

I provide a lot of nontangible, like extra recognition in emails or during check-ins

Quarterly group outings when our members are all in the same city.

I praise their service contribution in front of all our executive staff and office staff.

VISTA leaders working in our office also get free YMCA memberships

We are in a colder climate, and many of our VISTAs come from much warmer climates. I realized some of them did not have winter clothing/gear to make winter doable. I requested donations of winter gear from City employees and local churches. I then invited all the VISTAs to a "free shopping event" to get whatever they need. Was last Friday and the VISTAs loved it!

Snacks and coffee in the office. Mileage reimbursement.

We provide free campus parking passes and ID's which allow free access to the gym and all college events. (Both are received with much enthusiasm!) Also allowing flexibility in the day to go pick up children from school/sports or let a pet outside, and come back, is also much appreciated. We regularly provide lunch at our events, and have monthly office potlucks. We also have lots of leftovers in the fridge from the other departments' events, too.

Can we get a copy of this presentation? Thanks in advance.

What are some of the ways you have "given ownership" of a project to your VISTA member?

I regularly tell them it is "their project" and they get to choose how to meet the VAD objectives. If they are passionate about something, they can run with it (within reason)

One of our VISTAs is a graphic designer. I give her the content that is needed to go into our website and fliers and then ask her to use her creative flare to design the look and feel of the document

I ask my VISTAs to delegate to me. -what can I do to help them accomplish specific tasks.

Most of our projects include the member doing community/needs assessment during phase I,

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which then helps them in creating their own work plan and coming up with strategies for project implementation that is community specific.

Each of our VISTA's is responsible for creating at least one new small textbook (50-100 pages) by the end of their service year. The subject will be decided between staff and VISTAs and the members will follow a 'branding format' we have for the books, however the VISTAs will be responsible for research, creating activities in the book, writing the content in general, etc.

We talk about the projects as if they are theirs and we are here to guide them, give them resources, to count on me to help them with anything and tell me what to do to help them

We have listed activity resource links (including PPT) featured in today's session on VISTA Campus at: <https://www.vistacampus.gov/calendar/8-vista-member-retention-strategies-you-cant-ignore>

We are located at a university; therefore, our Vistas have the opportunity to participate in a lot of professional activities. Every Friday they have attended a different workshop since they joined our program in September.

What type of formal and informal PD do you/or plan to provide to VISTAs?

We developed our VISTA positions in general to build each member professionally on a fast track. Our goal is to create an experience which ensures by the end of their VISTA year, our members should be able to secure positions that are at least at 'coordinator' levels in the NPO sector.

Nonprofitready.org has a lot of free professional development webinars, curricula and YouTube videos.

Each VISTA can be reimbursed up to \$500 for their professional development, to be used for conferences or classes. Only stipulation is that it has to connect to the VAD and be pre-approved by our office. One of our VISTA leaders has also compiled a list of annual conferences sorted by topic to help members find ideas

With our college ID's we have access to any training from Human Resources, such as "Dealing with Difficult People," and other supervisory training; and we have access to Lynda.com for all sorts of office skills such as Excel or Photoshop.

in our case prepare the VISTA member to become a Spokesperson for the organization.