



Hello and welcome to AmeriCorps VISTA and the first webinar of your orientation: Countdown to VISTA Service. Your upcoming AmeriCorps service is a year-long commitment, and this period before you start service is meant to provide you with the opportunity to learn about VISTA service and your benefits, as well as to ensure that this is the right choice for you.

I know this is a stressful time in our country with our schedules and daily lives disrupted by the spread of the coronavirus, and you likely have many questions about starting your upcoming service. Today's webinar is designed to give you a great foundation to begin to serve as an AmeriCorps member, in general, and we will address a couple of specific details that may apply to your situation at this time. Let me start by saying that AmeriCorps is closely monitoring the latest developments related to the coronavirus.

There are Frequently Asked Questions posted at [nationalservice.gov/coronavirus](https://nationalservice.gov/coronavirus), and we will continually update these as we move forward.

Please know that we are so grateful for your service and want to help orient you to AmeriCorps VISTA as fully as possible on today's webinar. Let's get started.

# Today's Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- AmeriCorps VISTA overview
- VISTA member orientation: Pre-service, day 1
- VISTA member terms and conditions review
- Benefits review
- Q&A
- Resources
- Evaluation and wrap-up

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## Speaker 2

Here's our agenda for today. We'll start out with brief introductions and an overview of the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Then we'll jump into some of the important details of your orientation, including major tasks to complete when you start service next week. We'll take a close look at some of the benefits that members receive and address questions on those benefits. We'll wrap up today with a quick reminder of useful resources for you and ask for your feedback on our presentation.

## Session Overview



What do we want to accomplish today?

- Connect you to AmeriCorps staff and each other
- Help simplify the complex onboarding process (make sense of all those emails!)
- Re-enforce key information from your onboarding work (repetition ahead!)
- Highlight where you find answers/resources



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Here's an overview of what we want to accomplish today. First and foremost, we have asked you to log on today to give our AmeriCorps staff a chance to connect with you and to help ease you into your service year. We also know this webinar is a great way for you to meet other new AmeriCorps members and start to build connections with colleagues across the country. We will also take time today to re-enforce some of the very important details of your AmeriCorps service. We know there is a lot of information coming at you from the AmeriCorps office and possibly from your project site, and we will highlight several critical pieces of information today. And finally, we want you to leave today's webinar with a really good sense of where to find more answers to questions you may have. With our limited time online today, we may not be able to answer all of your questions – though we will work hard to do that in the Q&A.

# Welcome to AmeriCorps



# AmeriCorps

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It is my pleasure to give you this official welcome to AmeriCorps VISTA!

Today you will join a national service program with a very rich history. There are more than 200 AmeriCorps VISTA members beginning service with you this month. Currently, just under 5,000 VISTA members are serving, in rural and urban areas, in all 50 states, and in several US territories and tribal nations.

Volunteers In Service To America or VISTA has been fighting poverty and building communities for more than 50 years. Our strength comes from the talent, motivation, and energy of our members—like you. So let me thank you for stepping up to share your skills and passion to serve our communities.

It truly is an honor for me to welcome you on behalf of the AmeriCorps VISTA program.

# AmeriCorps VISTA's Mission



Strengthen organizations that alleviate poverty through the mobilization of volunteers and resources

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Together, you are joining thousands of AmeriCorps VISTA colleagues around the country to fight poverty. We all do this by providing critical resources to local service organizations or government agencies. The VISTA program mission is to strengthen organizations that fight poverty. We do that by deploying members to serve in local community agencies.

# AmeriCorps VISTA Members



- AmeriCorps VISTA members serve in local project sites.
- About 70% of AmeriCorps VISTAs serve in their own hometowns.
- Since 1965, more than 220,000 AmeriCorps VISTAs have served their communities and country.
- The role of the VISTA member is to enhance efficiency and build capacity. AmeriCorps VISTA members raise funds, develop organizational tools and systems, recruit volunteers, and more.
- AmeriCorps VISTA members are all ages and come from all walks of life.
- Each member is recruited and placed by their particular project, and they are managed by local project supervisors.

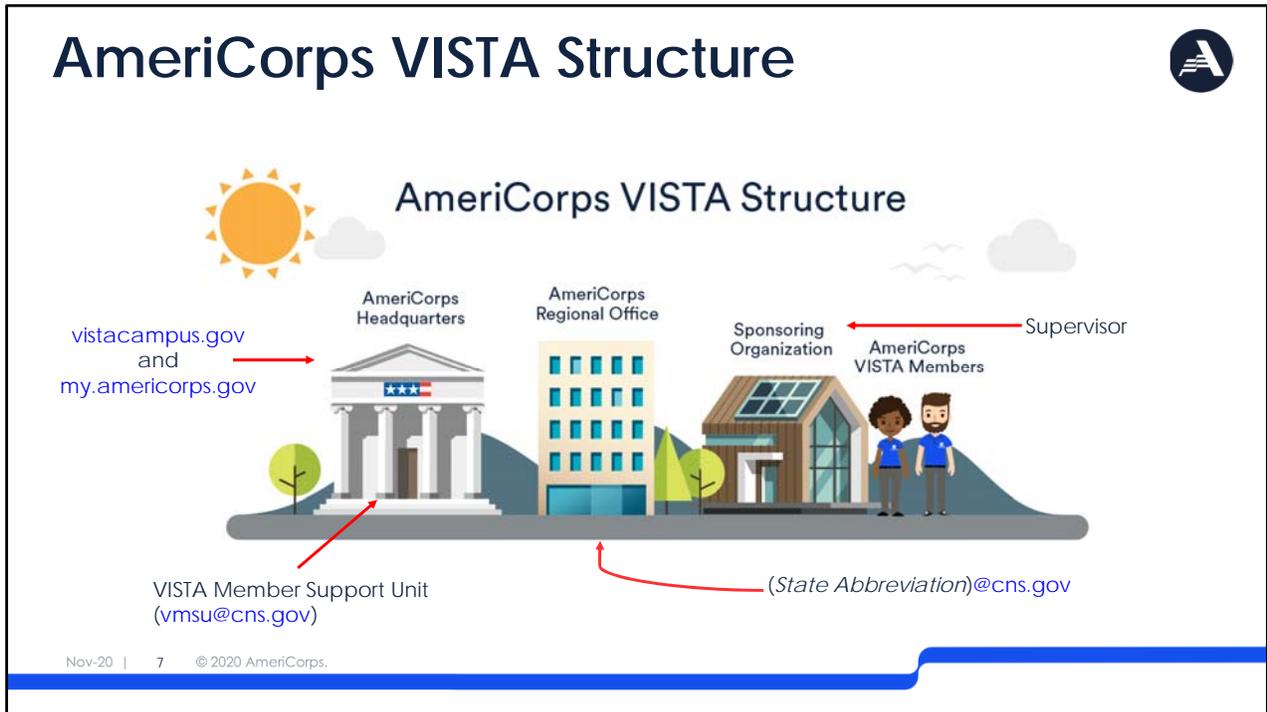
*Chat question:  
What is your project supervisor's name?*

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The role of the AmeriCorps VISTA member is to support the organization's mission by providing solutions that enhance efficiency and build capacity by raising money, developing systems, recruiting volunteers, and creating lasting change. So by serving at a sponsoring organization, you are essential to VISTA's mission of strengthening communities.

And speaking of your organization, we have a quick chat question: What is your project supervisor's name?

Great; thank you for sharing that! I saw a few comments from folks who don't yet know who their supervisor is – and that is OK. Typically your supervisor is the person you interviewed with for the AmeriCorps position or the point of contact that you have at the organization. At this early stage of your service year, there may still be a lot of new information to gather, including details about your site and supervisor.



Here’s a graphic presentation of the AmeriCorps VISTA program model with key partners that make your AmeriCorps service possible. In this graphic, you can see that the AmeriCorps VISTA program involves a lot of different layers that help support the work that VISTA projects are doing as well as supporting you and your fellow members. Our AmeriCorps headquarters is located in Washington, DC.

AmeriCorps also has regional offices across the country; in those offices, AmeriCorps staff collect proposals from local agencies to engage VISTA members; approve VISTA projects; and approve the placement of members into those projects. Your regional office is a key resource for you, and they can help with any questions about your assignment or project that your supervisor may not know. You can reach them by email using the state abbreviation @cns.gov (for example Texas would be TX@cns.gov).

In the graphic, you can see the sponsor organizations are listed along with your specific supervisor. Your sponsor and supervisor will be your day-to-day support and provide all of the details on your project work.

At our AmeriCorps headquarters, you will be supported by the VISTA Training Unit and the VISTA Member Support Unit, or VMSU, among other departments. The VMSU is a helpful resource for questions regarding your benefits.

To help make sense of all of these organizations, there is an AmeriCorps VISTA Resources and Contacts document available that can be found on the Starting VISTA page of the VISTA Campus. You can find it at the link you see in the Chat now.

# Your AmeriCorps Service



- Commitment of 1 year/365 days, full-time service
- Focus on organizational capacity building
- Directed by your VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)
  - Provides project goals, objectives, and service activities
  - Available in your my.americorps.gov account
  - May need to be updated or tailored for your service term



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For your specific AmeriCorps VISTA service, you are making a one year (365 day), full-time commitment to strengthen and support your community.

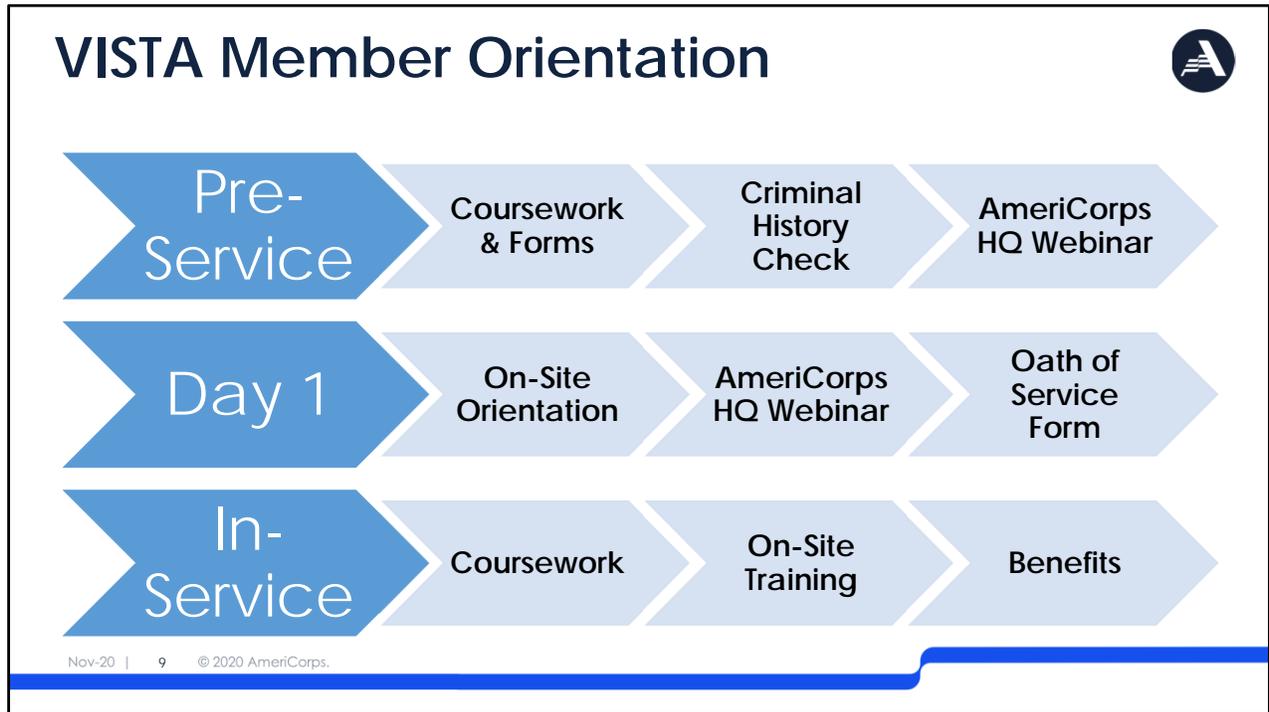
You will strengthen, expand, and increase the reach of anti-poverty organizations and programs. You will work on projects with staff and volunteers to build capacity in your project and community.

Central to your VISTA service is an important document called your VISTA Assignment Description, or VAD. The VISTA Assignment Description provides the overarching goals of your project; it explains the objectives that you're working towards during your service year; and it lays out the specific activities that you will complete to accomplish the objectives.

All AmeriCorps VISTA members have a VISTA Assignment Description. You can find your VAD in the My AmeriCorps Portal at [my.americorps.gov](https://my.americorps.gov).

It is important to know that your VAD was likely written before you were recruited or selected for your project. Be sure to check in with your supervisor next week and talk about what has developed and what the current needs of your VISTA project are. Because VADs are written so far in advance of the members' arrival, it is very common that members and supervisors will update them at the start of the service year. This can especially be true now, with Coronavirus causing many organizations to re-direct efforts to emphasize specific areas of focus.

When we meet again on next **Monday's** webinar, we'll go into more detail about capacity building and the unique nature of your VISTA service. Please make sure you have your VAD by your first day of service.



Today’s webinar is one part of a multi-faceted orientation that all new AmeriCorps VISTA members complete. On the far left of this graphic, you can see the phases of your orientation, and some of the major tasks in the blocks to the right of each phase. This structure is also reflected in the VISTA Member Orientation Checklist that you received via email. You can also find a link to the Checklist in the Chat now. Although you may start off by teleserving, your supervisor will still be providing you with an On-Site Orientation and Training to guide you as you start your year of service.

I encourage you to print or save this checklist right away and keep it close at hand. You can use it as a record of your progress through each phase of orientation and as you complete important tasks this week and beyond.

## Orientation Phases: Timing



- Pre-Service: Everything before your first day
- ↓
- Day 1 of AmeriCorps Service Term
- ↓
- In-Service: From day 1 on (exact timing will vary by project and by members' needs)

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The phases of your AmeriCorps VISTA orientation include pre-service, which is where we are now, your first day of your term of service, and in-service. It's good to know that orientation to your AmeriCorps service is an on-going process and involves a number of people. We know your position will be a complex one, and it takes a bit of time and effort to get you started strong. Let's talk through some of the really important elements of the first two phases of your orientation.

# Pre-Service Tasks



## Coursework

- AmeriCorps VISTA Terms and Conditions of Service
- AmeriCorps VISTA Civil Rights and Responsibilities
- Benefits of AmeriCorps VISTA Service
- VISTA's Mission and Program Goals
- VISTA Campus Overview
- Test your knowledge!



Website: [vistacampus.gov](http://vistacampus.gov)

Track your progress using the VISTA Member Orientation Checklist.

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As part of your VISTA Member Orientation, you are required to complete several courses and tutorials online. You may have already started or completed these, but we just want to take a second to highlight the courses.

- These online courses are located on the Starting VISTA Service page of [VISTACampus.gov](http://VISTACampus.gov) and must also be completed before you begin service.
- Please note that the Terms and Conditions course is linked to your [my.americorps.gov](http://my.americorps.gov) account, so you can certify your acceptance there. You must accept the terms and conditions of service in order to start service as an AmeriCorps VISTA member.

We know there's a lot to do before **Monday**; and, again, you can keep track of your progress on the coursework and required forms using the VISTA Member Orientation Checklist.

# Pre-Service Tasks

## Onboarding Forms

- Direct Deposit
- Federal Tax Withholding (W-4)
- Unpaid Compensation Information
- End of Service Benefit Selection

Website: [my.americorps.gov](http://my.americorps.gov)

The screenshot shows the My AmeriCorps website interface. On the left is a navigation menu with the following items: Applicant Home, My Living Allowance, My Tax Statements, My In-Service Benefits, My Education Award (with sub-items: Create Forbearance Request, Create Interest Payment Request, Create Education Award Payment Request), VISTA Oath of Service, Terms & Conditions Acceptance, My Service Letter, My Travel Request Profile, View/Print My Current VAD, End of Service Benefit Selection, Events, Search Events, My Resources, and Contact My AmeriCorps. A red bracket groups the last four items, and a red arrow points from the text 'Website: my.americorps.gov' to the 'End of Service Benefit Selection' link. The main content area displays a 'Welcome, VISTA!' message, a 'My Information' form with fields for Name, Preferred Name, NSPID, SSN, SSN Status, Citizenship Status, Veteran/Active Duty/Military Family Status, Date of Birth, Username, E-mail, Transfer Eligible, Permanent Address, Preferred Phone, Other Phone, Preferred Method of Communication, and Receive E-mail Notification. Below this is a 'Service Terms' table.

Program	Organization	City/State	Service Start	Service End	Certificate
VISTA - AmeriCorps	AZ Board of Regents for/on Behalf of Northern AZ University	Flagstaff, AZ	05/11/2020	05/10/2021	

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In addition to the coursework on the VISTA Campus, you'll need to complete your onboarding forms. These include a direct deposit form for your living allowance, federal tax withholding (W-4 form), unpaid compensation information, and end of service benefit selection.

All of these forms are located in [my.americorps.gov](http://my.americorps.gov); if you haven't completed these already, please plan on doing it right away. We need these forms to officially enroll you in AmeriCorps and process your living allowance and other service benefits.

There are a number of benefits available to members. And, if you haven't already, please go through all of the information available on the VISTA Campus. In just a few minutes, we'll also talk through some of your benefits and highlight important details.

# Online Criminal History Check



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- Your responsibility to do ASAP
- Online name-based check
- Look for an email from: [support@checkr.com](mailto:support@checkr.com)
- Email will indicate deadline for submission ★

- Here is one really big to do item on your orientation checklist: You will be required to undergo a background investigation PRIOR to starting service, which includes securely submitting information online to complete a background check at no cost to you. **[CLICK]** You will receive an email from [support@checkr.com](mailto:support@checkr.com) with instructions on how to securely submit the required information for the background check. Once you receive the email, you must complete the online background check information immediately upon and a new deadline will be indicated at that time.
- Please ensure that your email address in MyAmeriCorps is correct. **[CLICK]**
- You are required to submit the online background check within 7 days of receiving the email; failure to complete the background check requirements on time could result in a delay in your service start date, and we really don't want that happen!
- If you have any questions on this process, please email [VISTAFingerprint@cns.gov](mailto:VISTAFingerprint@cns.gov). This email address is also listed on the Resources and Contacts pdf that was shared.

# Criminal History Disclosure



- Criminal History Questionnaire: If you failed to disclose any conviction, send this form in as instructed
- To request a blank form or to submit a completed form, email: [VISTAFingerprint@cns.gov](mailto:VISTAFingerprint@cns.gov)

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The other part of this process is comparing your background check results to what you disclosed on your AmeriCorps application. You might recall that when you applied, you were asked if you had ever been convicted of a crime.

It's possible you didn't disclose everything in your AmeriCorps application, perhaps because you thought you needed to include only recent issues, or because you thought minor traffic violations didn't need to be reported, or because you were involved in something as a minor and your record was expunged. There are any number of reasons why you may have omitted relevant information here.

If you failed to disclose any conviction in your AmeriCorps application, now's the time to fix that problem. To do that, you will need to fill out the member disclosure form. Please contact [VISTAFingerprint@cns.gov](mailto:VISTAFingerprint@cns.gov) to obtain a Member Disclosure Form for completion.

When your FBI background investigation is completed, we will compare the report to your disclosures in the application and on the form. If everything aligns, you won't hear from us. A minor offense with no relation to your assignment will generally not bar you from service.

If there is a conviction that you *have not* disclosed to us, AmeriCorps will have extensive follow up with you and your supervisor to get all the details. Depending on the specific conviction, it is possible that you would be terminated from service. Again, we really don't want that to happen. So, please be completely up front in your criminal history questionnaire (err on the side of caution) so we can work with you to fully assess the situation.

# Day 1 of Your Service Term



- Your first day of service: **Monday, [[DATE]]**
- Participate in the **Launching Your VISTA Service** webinar with AmeriCorps HQ, 3:00-4:30 p.m. ET
- Contact your AmeriCorps project supervisor before **Monday** to confirm:
  - Your required start-time on day 1
  - Project site details (e.g., dress code, parking, or other transportation details)
  - Workstation setup
  - Any other special considerations



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Next, let's talk about your first day of service.

- Your first day of AmeriCorps service is **Monday, [[DATE]]**. You will start your first day at your project site or, if approved by your supervisor, by teleserving from home. If teleserving, please be sure to complete the teleservice agreement form which needs to be signed by you and your supervisor. The form can be found on the VISTA Campus (or the Helpful Links handout) and will soon be posted in the Chat.
- If you are unable to begin your service on Monday, make sure you contact your supervisor or regional office immediately, and let us know by responding to any of the emails you received from us.

Whether you'll be showing up on-site on **Monday** or teleserving until it is safe to arrive on site, we want to point out that as an AmeriCorps member, you will be serving in a professional work environment and you'll want to set yourself up for success. So if you're teleserving on day 1 you'll want to confirm a start-time for **Monday** and a schedule for your remote orientation and training. If you haven't done so already, you'll also want to make sure your workstation is set up prior to **Monday** morning. For those who are able to be on-site, you'll want to confirm details with your supervisor, such as the address where you need to report and the time you should arrive on your first day; the dress code of the organization; the parking situation (if driving), or any other special considerations such as the average commute time, or if you should bring anything with you (i.e., paperwork; identification; etc.). Regardless of the situation, don't be afraid to ask questions and reach out to your supervisor – they are there to help with your onboarding process.

## Day 1 of Your Service Term



- On-Site Orientation
  - Structure determined by your project
- Webinar with AmeriCorps HQ: Launching Your VISTA Service
  - 3:00-4:30 p.m. ET; attendance is required
  - Complete the Oath of Service

- On your first day of service, you'll continue your orientation with your project site and AmeriCorps headquarters.
- Your supervisor may have prepared a formal agenda for you and scheduled meetings or other activities. Day 1 schedules vary by project, so please check in with your supervisor about what to expect and what materials you'll need on your first day.
- Along with starting your on-site orientation on **Monday [[DATE]]**, AmeriCorps headquarters will present your second orientation webinar called Launching Your VISTA Service. We'll be back online with you for the Launching webinar from 3:00-4:30 p.m. Eastern (just like today's webinar).
  - Similar to this webinar, you will receive an email from AmeriCorps headquarters with participation details.
  - On next week's webinar, we'll go a little deeper into the AmeriCorps VISTA program, your VISTA Assignment Description, and member resources.
  - We'll also have time again for Q&A to make sure you are in good shape for your first week of service.
- On **Monday's** webinar, we will also administer your Oath of Service. To submit the Oath of Service form, you'll need to be able to log on to [myamericorps.gov](http://myamericorps.gov). So please be sure to have your user name and password available on **Monday**.

# Terms and Conditions Review



## VISTA Terms and Conditions

Welcome to VISTA Terms and Conditions

As a VISTA member, you'll gain experience, a wide range of benefits, such as a living allowance, financial help with school or student loans, and a lot more. You'll also have to adhere to a few terms and conditions while you serve.

This course will help you make sense of the requirements. Once you've completed the course, you will be directed to My AmeriCorps where you will log in to your account and electronically certify your acceptance.

*¿Quiere tomar el curso en español? Ingrese a su cuenta de VISTA Campus y haga clic en el siguiente enlace: en español*



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As you know, there is a course on the VISTA Campus that you must complete before you can be enrolled as an AmeriCorps member. This course covers the rules of participation in the AmeriCorps VISTA program – what is allowable while you are serving as an AmeriCorps member. Since AmeriCorps VISTA is a program of the federal government, we are bound by a variety of public laws, federal regulations, and other rules. We want to make sure you are aware of this from day 1 and that you feel comfortable in your VISTA role.

We hope that you have already completed the terms and conditions course, and we're going to highlight a few critical pieces of information from that in the next few minutes. If you've already completed the course online, this should be an easy and quick review for you. And hopefully this will help emphasize the content of the course if you have not yet completed it.

## Terms and Conditions



I can voice my political opinions using social media where my profile identifies me as an AmeriCorps member.

YES

NO

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Here's what we'll do: We'll present several scenarios and ask you to indicate yes or no in the Chat. Just type Y or N for each scenario. **[CLICK]**

Here's the first scenario:

I can voice my political opinions using social media where my profile identifies me as an AmeriCorps member.

Per the terms and conditions, are members allowed to do this?

*[Speaker: Pause for 10-15 seconds and comment on the Ys and Ns showing up in the Chat]*

Thank you for your thoughts on this scenario.

## Online Political Activity

Phone: 833-568-8864  
Webinar ID: 160-459-7414  
Passcode: 756643



Yes, you can have AmeriCorps listed on your personal social media profile but cannot represent yourself as a spokesperson for AmeriCorps, VISTA, or your sponsor.

You cannot do this while teleserving or serving at your site or using any equipment at your site.

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Here's the answer, per the AmeriCorps VISTA terms and conditions:

Yes – you can have AmeriCorps listed on your personal social media profile and voice your own personal political opinions as part of your online life. However, you cannot represent yourself as a spokesperson for AmeriCorps, VISTA, or your sponsor. Additionally, you can voice political opinions on your own time, but not while serving at your site or while teleserving, nor while using any of the equipment at your site (including their Wi-Fi network or your office computer). Also, you should not put the AmeriCorps logo as your profile picture when voicing political or other sensitive opinions on social media. When in doubt, keep your AmeriCorps service and political activity completely separate.

## Terms and Conditions



I can demonstrate in a political rally.

YES

NO

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Here's the next scenario:

I can demonstrate in a political rally.

Per the AmeriCorps VISTA terms and conditions, are you allowed to do this? Indicate Y or N in the Chat.

*[Speaker: Pause for 10-15 seconds and comment on the Ys and Ns showing up in the Chat]*

## Political Demonstrations

Phone: 833-568-8864  
Webinar ID: 160-459-7414  
Passcode: 756643



Yes, as long as you are on your own time and not identified as an AmeriCorps member or perceived to be an AmeriCorps member.

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Here's the answer:

Yes, you can demonstrate in a political rally—on your own time as long and as you are not identified as an AmeriCorps member or perceived to be an AmeriCorps member. The 'perceived to be an AmeriCorps member' is an important consideration since some of you may be serving in a small town or a local area where you are not necessarily wearing your AmeriCorps gear but people happen to know that you are an AmeriCorps member. When in doubt about a specific activity, it's best to avoid it initially and consult with your supervisor or AmeriCorps Regional Office for clarification.

## Terms and Conditions



I can ask people to donate money to a partisan political candidate, as long as it's on my own time and I'm not identified as an AmeriCorps member.

YES

NO

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Next up, what do you think about this one?

I can ask people to donate money to a partisan political candidate, as long as it's on my own time and I'm not identified as an AmeriCorps member.

Per the terms and conditions, are you allowed to do this? Please type Y or N in the Chat.

*[Speaker: Pause for 10-15 seconds and comment on the Ys and Ns showing up in the Chat]*

# Partisan Fundraising

Phone: 833-568-8864  
Webinar ID: 160-459-7414  
Passcode: 756643



**No**, you cannot raise money on behalf of a partisan candidate at any time during your AmeriCorps year.

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Here's the answer—and this is an important one:

No, you cannot raise money on behalf of a partisan political candidate at any time during your AmeriCorps year. It doesn't matter if it's off-duty or at home, or while not identified as an AmeriCorps member – a federal law called the Hatch Act prohibits all fundraising for partisan political candidates.

You can, however, raise funds in support of an *issue* on your own time, and when you are not identified as an AmeriCorps member.

## Terms and Conditions



I can have outside employment and/or earn additional income while serving as an AmeriCorps member.

YES

NO

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Here's our last scenario:

I can have outside employment and/or earn additional income while serving as an AmeriCorps member.

Per the terms and conditions, are you allowed to do this? Go ahead and type Y or N in the Chat.

*[Speaker: Pause for 10-15 seconds and comment on the Ys and Ns showing up in the Chat]*

# Outside Employment

Phone: 833-568-8864  
Webinar ID: 160-459-7414  
Passcode: 756643



Yes, you may have part-time outside employment.  
Here are the rules:

- It cannot conflict with your AmeriCorps service requirements.
- You cannot be employed by your sponsor organization.
- Your supervisor must approve your request form.
- It must be part-time.
- You must submit the outside employment request form and receive approval from your project supervisor.

[vistacampus.gov/resources/outside-employment-policy](https://vistacampus.gov/resources/outside-employment-policy)

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And here is the last answer:

Yes, you may have outside part-time employment while serving in AmeriCorps. Here are a few key rules to keep in mind:

- Outside employment must not conflict with your project service or service hours, nor can it conflict with any applicable law or AmeriCorps VISTA program requirements or policies.
- Under no circumstances may an AmeriCorps VISTA member be an employee of or contractor for the sponsor or project to which they are assigned to serve.
- Your supervisor must approve and agree that the outside work will not interfere with the AmeriCorps project. If the work does interfere, the member may be asked to either end employment, or to end AmeriCorps service.
- Only part-time outside employment is allowed while serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA member.
- You have to request and receive approval for outside employment from your project supervisor. The outside employment request form can be found on the VISTA Campus. You can find more information regarding the outside employment policy at [vistacampus.gov/resources/outside-employment-policy](https://vistacampus.gov/resources/outside-employment-policy)

## Terms and Conditions Review



- **Key Issues:**

- Online political activity
- Political demonstrations
- Partisan fundraising
- Outside employment



- **Reminder:**

- You must complete the full online Terms and Conditions course by tomorrow's deadline.

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Thank you for going through these scenarios. While the terms and conditions of your AmeriCorps service contain many rules, we know that these four issues in particular raise a lot of questions for new members. Again, we want you to feel comfortable getting started as an AmeriCorps member, so please don't hesitate to reach out to your project supervisor or the AmeriCorps Regional office if you have more questions about these activities.

**[CLICK]**

And, again, you'll need to complete the full terms and conditions course and indicate you've completed it in [myamericorps.gov](https://myamericorps.gov).

## AmeriCorps VISTA Member Benefits



- Living allowance — direct deposit
- End of service benefit (Segal Education Award or Cash Stipend)
- Loan forbearance
- Loan deferment
- Healthcare benefit
- Public assistance protection
- Leave
- Relocation
- Childcare



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Again, we want to draw your attention to a few key items today because they are time sensitive, and you'll be able to find a lot more details about all member benefits on the VISTA Campus.

# Benefits of Service



vistacampus.gov/members/benefits-of-service

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This page of the VISTA Campus contains an overview of all of your benefits. Some benefits, such as the living allowance, are available to all AmeriCorps VISTA members. Other benefits may only apply to some members (for example: childcare assistance).

Please be sure to review all of this carefully. Right now, we'll walk through some of the benefits that seem to generate the most questions from members.

# Living Allowance



**Living Allowance**

The AmeriCorps VISTA program provides a living allowance that enables you to live very frugally, like the community you are serving. The allowance is based on poverty rates for a single individual in your geographic area. The living allowance is paid biweekly and deposited directly into your bank account.

The living allowance covers basic necessities such as housing, food, and utilities. Federal income tax deductions, if applicable, are withheld from the living allowance. No state, county, or city tax deductions are withheld. You are responsible for paying the appropriate taxes.

Your sponsoring organization or your AmeriCorps VISTA State Office can give you the most up-to-date information on the amount that you will be receiving for each pay period.

Prior to starting VISTA service, you must complete the following forms in your MyAmeriCorps account: *Direct Deposit*, *Federal Tax Withholding (W-4 form)*, and *Unpaid Compensation Information* (also known as Designation of Beneficiary). Watch this video on how to complete your direct deposit.

While the VISTA program does not encourage you to seek outside employment, and understanding that commitment to your assigned project is your top priority, you are permitted to work part-time with permission from your supervisor.

View the living allowance rates that VISTA Members and Leaders receive, listed by state and county of service. See the *AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook* and speak to your supervisor for more detail.

Visit our *Managing Your Living Allowance* site for tips and resources to help you with everyday savings, budgeting, and building your financial literacy skills.

**Resources**

For more information on the living allowance and suggestions for living on a limited budget, explore these useful resources:

- [Managing Your Living Allowance](#)
- [Resources for Living on the Living Allowance](#)
- [Saving Money on Health Care](#)
- [Budget Calculator](#)
- [Living Allowance Calendar and Sample Statement](#)
- [VISTA Living Allowance Rates](#)
- [VISTA Living Allowance Rates by County](#)
- [Living on the Living Allowance \(Webinar for VISTAs\)](#)
- [Living Allowance in Chapter 5 of Member Handbook](#)

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Let's talk about your living allowance.

From the Benefits page on VISTA Campus, you can find a good deal of detail on the living allowance benefit.

There are additional links at the bottom of this page under Resources, including tips for how to make the most of the Living Allowance. Here you will also find a Living Allowance calendar and access to the Living Allowance rates. The rates of pay do vary across the country, so please check out this link to confirm the rate for your area. These links are also included in the Helpful Links handout for today's session.

# Living Allowance



- First living allowance payment on [[DATE]]
- Paid every two weeks, on Fridays
- May be paid directly from your sponsor or from AmeriCorps HQ
- Federal taxes are withheld from your pay; state taxes are not
- Living allowance statements can be accessed from your My AmeriCorps account

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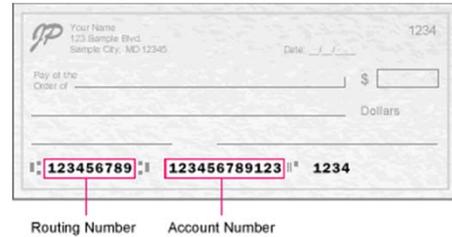
Quick question here: Does anyone know when will you be getting your first payment? If so, please type your answer in the Chat. *[Speaker: Pause for Chat responses]*

- Your first living allowance is scheduled to be on [[DATE]]. Members are paid every two weeks, on Fridays. While this information applies to most members, you may be paid directly by your AmeriCorps sponsor. Please ask your AmeriCorps supervisor if you are paid directly by them. This will be an important detail so you know the sponsor's payment schedule and process.
- Federal taxes are withheld from your living allowance, but state taxes are not. You must determine your own level of responsibility for state taxes. We suggest you check in with your state tax office or the comptroller for more details.
- If you are paid by AmeriCorps headquarters, you can access your living allowance statement in My.AmeriCorps.gov. If you are paid directly by your VISTA sponsor, you will receive pay statements from them.

# Direct Deposit



- Please take great care with completing this form! Incorrect bank info will result in a two-week delay in getting paid
- Get routing and account numbers from your checks or online account
- Call your bank to confirm



→ →  
**NOT** your account or routing number.



In order to ensure that you receive your living allowance, it is critical to complete the direct deposit information correctly.

If either the routing number or account number you entered for Direct Deposit is not correct, you will not receive your living allowance payment as scheduled – and please note, you’ll have to wait at least two more weeks until the next pay period to be paid.

You can find the routing number and account number on your checks (if you have them), or go to your online banking site and look at an account statement. You may also want to call your bank just to be sure you have the correct information. Please be sure to double-check that the numbers are accurate in your my.americorps.gov account.

## End of Service Benefit



When you successfully complete your service term,  
you will receive:

**Education Award (\$6,345)**

OR

**Cash Stipend (\$1,800)**

*If you select the Education Award now, you  
can change to the Cash Stipend until the end  
of your 10<sup>th</sup> month of service.*

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After successfully completing your AmeriCorps service, you are eligible for one of two benefits: the education award or the cash stipend.

### Education Award

- Can be used to pay any qualified federal student loans, or to pay for education at any Title IV institution (which is an institution that accepts federal funds). You have seven years to use it, and you don't have to use it all at one time. You cannot, however, transfer it to anyone else.

### Cash Stipend

- The cash stipend is paid out via direct deposit at the very end of your service.

The most important detail to know is that if you are unsure which benefit to choose, I suggest that you select the Education Award because then you have until the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of service to switch to the cash stipend. Once you start service, you are NOT able to switch from the cash stipend to the education award. So when you choose the Cash Stipend it is a final decision, but if you select the Education Award you have some flexibility up until your 10<sup>th</sup> month of service. More specific details regarding Education Award eligibility, institutions that may match the education award, and other things to know can be found on [VISTACampus.gov](http://VISTACampus.gov) as well as on [AmeriCorps.gov](http://AmeriCorps.gov).

## Loan Forbearance & Deferment



*If you select the Education Award:*

- **Loan Forbearance**

- Temporary postponement of principal **federally backed loan payments**
- Interest accrues, but you can ask AmeriCorps to pay it at completion of service
- Request forbearance in my.americorps.gov

*If you select the Cash Stipend:*

- **Loan Deferment**

- Postponement of monthly loan payments
- Set up and request directly with lender



For either selection, you must initiate the process.

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If you have student loans now, there are ways you can postpone repayment of federally backed student loans during your year of service.

If you chose the Education Award, you can request Forbearance for your federally-backed student loans, which means:

- You do not make monthly loan payments during your year of service, and
- You can ask the National Service Trust to pay the accrued interest on your federal loan after you complete your year. (Just be aware that the interest payment is considered taxable income.)

Federal loan forbearance is not guaranteed, and you must initiate the process by submitting a loan forbearance request in your my.americorps.gov account. You will be able to do this approximately a week into your service using the “My Education Award” link which will appear in your my.americorps.gov account.

It’s possible that you have loans where the payments and accrual of interest are currently suspended due to the pandemic for the next few months. We would still recommend that you place your loans in forbearance, though, because that way you won’t need to make payments until you end your service next year. And at that point, you can ask the National Service Trust to pay the interest that accrues after the current suspension deadline(s). But remember that not all loans are the same, so you need to check with your specific loan lender for details on your loan repayment timeframe.

If you select the End of Service Cash Stipend or you have private student loans, you may request loan deferment, which means:

- You apply directly with your lender, giving the reason of 'economic hardship.'
- You may be able to have your accrued interest paid by the federal Department of Education if you have federally subsidized loans that are deferred.
- You may be able to have a portion of your Perkins loans forgiven.

Loan deferment is not guaranteed and may not be offered by all lenders, and you should check with your lender for specifics.

Neither of these will happen automatically; you will need to request them through the appropriate process either in the My AmeriCorps Portal or with the bank that holds your loan.

## More Information



### Education Award:

[nationalservice.gov/resources/edaward](https://nationalservice.gov/resources/edaward)

### Forbearance Requests:

[my.americorps.gov](https://my.americorps.gov)

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For more details on everything we just covered, go to the Ed Award Tutorial on the AmeriCorps website, which is at [nationalservice.gov/resources/edaward](https://nationalservice.gov/resources/edaward).

And for a quick recap/reminder on the forbearance process: After you have officially started service, you can go to your [my.americorps.gov](https://my.americorps.gov) account to submit your loan forbearance request with AmeriCorps. Remember that it is your responsibility to submit the forbearance request and check on its status. At the end of your year, it is also your responsibility to submit any education award payment requests, as well as interest accrual payment requests from the National Service Trust.

## Healthcare Benefit



**Healthcare Allowance** up to \$8,200 to cover out-of-pocket expenses for members who have health coverage

OR

**Health Benefit Plan** for members who do not have health coverage

### More information:

[vistacampus.gov/healthcare](http://vistacampus.gov/healthcare)  
[americorpsvista.imglobal.com](http://americorpsvista.imglobal.com)  
[healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov)



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Next, let's look at healthcare benefits. The AmeriCorps VISTA program offers two different health benefit options: One for members who have health coverage (like private insurance or Medicaid) now, and the other for members who don't have health coverage.

**If you have health insurance** or other coverage: You are eligible to enroll in the AmeriCorps VISTA Healthcare Allowance, which provides reimbursement up to **\$8,200** for qualifying out-of-pocket healthcare expenses.

- You can use the healthcare allowance towards out-of-pocket expenses, like:
  - Co-payments for office visits, services, or prescriptions
  - Medications and medical supplies
  - Meeting your annual deductible
- The allowance will not reimburse you for the cost of buying health insurance (or paying monthly premiums).

**If you do not have any health coverage now**, you are eligible to enroll in the AmeriCorps VISTA Health Benefit Plan. This is a safety net plan that covers basic healthcare needs. It covers many basic services with very low co-pays, but it has some limitations and it does not cover pre-existing conditions. There is no deductible for the Health Benefit Plan.

Both of these options include limited dental and vision benefits and also include a Teledoc service for phone and video health care with board-certified and licensed doctors. And both benefit options are free, so nothing is deducted from your living allowance no matter which option you choose. Both options only cover you, the AmeriCorps member.

To receive a benefit, you must enroll – there is no automatic enrollment. In about two weeks, you will get an email from IMG, the AmeriCorps VISTA health plan administrator, with instructions on how to enroll.

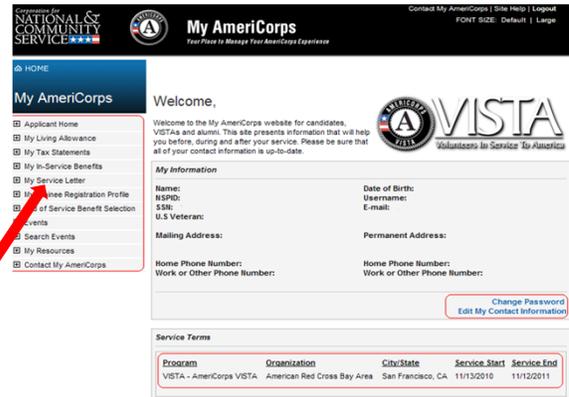
Given the current situation and concerns around testing for COVID-19, the best source for information is the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Please follow their guidance on who should be tested and measures for testing. If testing for COVID-19 is recommended, testing is covered under both the Health Benefit Plan and Healthcare Allowance. And if an AmeriCorps VISTA member is diagnosed with COVID-19, both the Health Benefit Plan and Healthcare Allowance will cover medically necessary care, in accordance with the benefit plan.

VISTAs who want to seek coverage through the health insurance marketplace can take advantage of a Special Enrollment Period of 60 days (from the start and end dates of your AmeriCorps service). Go to [Healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) to shop for plans and see what subsidies you qualify for. To enroll for these benefits during a Special Enrollment Period, you will need to call the Marketplace.

# Public Assistance Protection



- For public assistance in place prior to VISTA enrollment:
  - Benefits remain the same
- For new benefits, VISTA living allowance:
  - Is not factored in for most public assistance
  - Is factored in for SNAP eligibility
- In about two weeks, your AmeriCorps service letters will be accessible in your my.americorps.gov account



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Next, let's talk about public assistance benefits and how they may be impacted by your AmeriCorps VISTA service benefits.

If you are already receiving public assistance, such as TANF or LIHEAP, then your VISTA living allowance or any other payments you receive from the AmeriCorps VISTA program should not affect the level of assistance you receive.

Likewise, in applying for new public assistance benefits, your living allowance should not be factored in when determining the level of benefits you receive.

The sole exception to this provision is SNAP (formerly called food stamps). If you enroll in SNAP now (or at any time during your year of service), your living allowance and other AmeriCorps VISTA payments will be counted as income in calculating your eligibility and benefit level. If you were already receiving SNAP prior to enrolling in the AmeriCorps VISTA program, your benefit will remain unchanged.

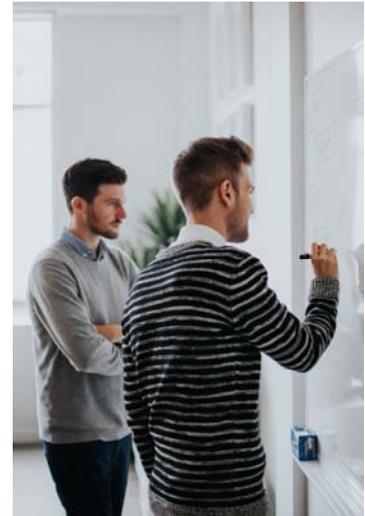
Public benefits are managed by state or local entities and AmeriCorps is not involved in how they are administered, so you'll want to speak with a caseworker for specific advice in these areas. Depending on your location, it's possible that some of these offices have become extremely busy and overwhelmed, so if you need advice, it may take a long time for the state or local office to respond.

In about 2 weeks, you will be able to access, view, and print your service letters from your home page in my.americorps.gov. When applying for public assistance, you will be able to print a letter citing the authority for what's called 'income disregard' from your account.

## Leave Benefits



- 10 days personal leave
- 10 days sick leave
- Observe the national holidays of site
- Leave is tracked and approved by supervisor



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As an AmeriCorps VISTA member, you have certain leave benefits available during your year of service.

- You have 10 days of personal leave and 10 days of sick leave available to you, but make sure to read the VISTA Member Handbook regarding the time periods you are permitted to use your leave.
- Additionally, you will be able to observe the national holidays that are recognized by your service site. So for example if your site observes Labor Day as a day off, then you would also have that day off. However, you DO NOT get excused leave for federal holidays that are not recognized by your site. For example, if your site does not give its staff a holiday for Veterans Day, you are also expected to serve on that day.
- You and your supervisor will monitor your time and attendance, and you will send any leave requests to your supervisor.

## Other Benefits



- Relocation  
[vmsu@cns.gov](mailto:vmsu@cns.gov)



- Childcare  
For more information and to apply: [americorpschildcare.com](http://americorpschildcare.com)

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There are other benefits available to AmeriCorps VISTA members and, as we previously mentioned, some benefits may not apply to you. These include benefits such as relocation and childcare.

- If you have relocated more than 50 miles from your home of record to your service site, or if you will be relocating within 45 days, you may qualify for a relocation travel allowance and one-time settling-in allowance. If you are eligible for financial travel support, you should have already received communication from the VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) which includes a Relocation Form for you to complete and return. If you relocated or plan to relocate more than 50 miles to your service site and have not yet received an email confirmation or if you have any questions about the Relocation Form that you need to submit, you can inquire by emailing [VMSU@cns.gov](mailto:VMSU@cns.gov).
- In addition, AmeriCorps VISTA offers a child care benefit to members who qualify. To qualify, you must meet specific eligibility requirements, such as household income limits, and you must be the parent/legal guardian of a child under 13 who lives with you. For more information and to apply, visit: [americorpschildcare.com](http://americorpschildcare.com)

# Reminder: Online Resources

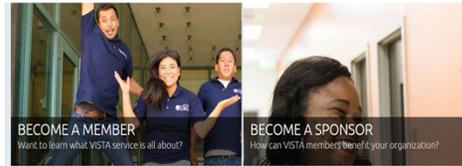


[my.americorps.gov](http://my.americorps.gov)

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Not yet a part of the VISTA program?



[vistacampus.gov](http://vistacampus.gov)

These are the two websites that have figured prominently today and in many emails you've received from AmeriCorps. If you haven't already, please bookmark these sites so you can easily and quickly access them at any time.

As a reminder, my.americorps.gov is the My AmeriCorps Portal or you may hear it called just the Portal. This is the website where you applied for your AmeriCorps position, where you complete your direct deposit and other onboarding forms, and where you can access your VISTA Assignment Description. It is also where, in a few weeks, you will be able to access your living allowance statements, request some of the benefits we discussed today, and print a letter that verifies your AmeriCorps service.

The Campus is located at VISTACampus.gov. This is the website where you complete your on-boarding coursework and tutorials.

## Spotlight: VISTA Campus



A screenshot of the VISTA Campus navigation menu. It features a vertical list of five blue buttons: 'Entering Service', 'Learning Resources', 'Benefits of Service', 'Trainings', and 'Support'. The 'Learning Resources' button is highlighted in a darker blue. Below the buttons is a 'Quick Links' section with a red heading and four bullet points: 'Member Handbook', 'Terms & Conditions', 'VISTA Forums', and 'VISTA Map'.

- Capacity Building
- Communication
- Fundraising
- Poverty in America
- Volunteers
- Working with Partners
- Outreach to Community
- VISTA in Action
- Project Management

Please explore the VISTA Campus early and often; it's an important resource to help you navigate your year of service, access additional training opportunities, and more.

Here's a quick look at the Learning Resources section to give you a sense of the breadth of information available to you.

# Connecting on the VISTA Campus



- Entering Service
- Learning Resources
- Benefits of Service
- Trainings
- Support

### Quick Links

- Member Handbook
- Terms & Conditions
- VISTA Forums
- VISTA Map



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You can also locate and reach out to other AmeriCorps VISTA members using the VISTA Map and VISTA Forums on the Campus.

## Reminder: Pre-Service Tasks



- Courses and Tutorials ([vistacampus.gov](http://vistacampus.gov))
  - VISTA Terms and Conditions of Service
  - VISTA Civil Rights and Responsibilities
  - Benefits of AmeriCorps VISTA Service
  - VISTA Mission and Program Goals
  - Test your knowledge!
- Onboarding Forms ([my.americorps.gov](http://my.americorps.gov))
  - Direct Deposit
  - Federal Tax Withholding
  - Unpaid Compensation Information
  - End of Service Benefit Selection
- Online Criminal History Check



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We have just a few minutes left on our session today.

Here's one last reminder about the coursework, onboarding forms, and online criminal history check that are due from you; and be sure to use the VISTA Member Orientation Checklist to keep track as you work your way through this list.

## Webinar Evaluation



- How can we improve this presentation?
- Please take a few moments to complete a brief evaluation survey
- Find the survey link in the Chat on your screen
- Thank you for your feedback!

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Finally today, we'd love your feedback on our presentation. What worked well for you? How can we improve this presentation for future AmeriCorps members?

Please take a few moments to complete a brief survey. We will use your input right away as we complete preparation for our webinar next week. And thank you for sharing your feedback!

*[Speaker: Mention that there is a link in the Chat that should be used by those on a smartphone/tablet. Those on a laptop/desktop should have a link appear when they exit the webinar.]*

## Session Overview



What did we accomplish today?

- ✓ Connected you to AmeriCorps staff and each other
- ✓ Helped simplify the complex onboarding process (make sense of all those emails!)
- ✓ Re-enforced key information from your onboarding work (repetition ahead!)
- ✓ Highlighted where you find answers/resources



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With that, I want to revisit our session overview. Today, I hope that we have started to build some new connections and put faces to names and that we helped clarify some of the complexity of starting your AmeriCorps service.

We know this is a busy time for you and so much information is available. I hope today's discussion helped clarify some of the AmeriCorps requirements and helped you know where to find information quickly.

Thank you for your service!

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Thank you for joining us on today's webinar! From all of us here at AmeriCorps, thank you for joining the AmeriCorps team! We look forward to seeing you again on **Monday** at 3:00 p.m. Eastern for our second orientation webinar. Have a great rest of your week!