

On-Site Orientation and Training Guidebook

Introduction

The goal of this guidebook is to help supervisors effectively plan, implement, and evaluate On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) for VISTA members. Developing an OSOT that is appropriate and relevant to all VISTA members in one project can be a challenge, especially since sites are often in different locations, can differ by project focus, and member experiences vary, even within one program.

Another challenge is striking a good balance between providing *enough* information to help the VISTA begin in their new role and *not overwhelming them* on their first day or week.

On-Site Orientation and Training prepares VISTAs to start their assignments with confidence, by delivering the foundation, direction, and skills that will allow them to have a successful VISTA term.

This guidebook will provide a suggested planning timeline for developing your OSOT, some sample agendas for OSOTs of varying lengths, a series of activities and strategies for making your OSOT interactive, fun, and productive, and lastly, some guidelines for OSOT evaluation.

Suggested Planning Timeline

Whether you are planning an OSOT for 20 VISTA members or 2, starting early is always best. This will keep things manageable during your normal work flow. Here is a recommended timeline to help you cover (and check off) all the essential elements of an OSOT. Don't forget to document the process throughout; you'll be glad you did when you start to plan for next year!

6+ weeks before

- Set date(s) for your OSOT and share with your incoming VISTAs and project supervisors.
- Reserve a meeting space.
 - When considering different spaces, look for free parking, access to public transit, and ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessibility. Is one room enough space for your orientation? Will you have breakout sessions? Will you need outdoor space for icebreakers or other activities? Make sure the space you choose can meet your needs.
- Brainstorm topics and begin developing learning objectives.
 - Incorporate the wisdom of former members.
 - Ask departing VISTAs to write letters to their replacements, which can be read at orientation.
- Contact potential presenters to inquire about their availability and interest.

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- Secure free or low-cost skill training from community resources.
- Ask staff, colleagues with other organizations, and community experts to share their knowledge and best practices.
- Draft an early agenda and map out the critical pieces. Your agenda may be full of holes at first, but this draft will serve as a guide in your process.

Four weeks before

- Set agenda (sessions and timing) and learning objectives.
- Map out critical pieces first (for example, if key presenters are available only on certain dates, the rest of the schedule must work around them).
- Send agenda to CNCS State Director for review.

Two to three weeks before

- Confirm presenters and send presenter guidelines and learning objectives.
- Check supplies and order any additional materials.

One week before

- Send final agenda to VISTAs and project supervisors.
- Follow up with presenters regarding parking, timing, offer to print handouts, etc.

One day before

- Print agendas and handouts.
- Set up room.

Day(s) of OSOT

- Set up any refreshments that will be provided.
- Welcome VISTAs and presenters as they arrive.
- Introduce presenters before their session with a brief bio or blurb.
- Facilitate agenda and keep VISTAs and presenters on time.
- Wrap up with reminders and announcements.
- Clean up room.

Within one week after:

- Create and send evaluations to VISTAs; also include copies of handouts, presentation slides, and presenters' contact information.
- Send hand-written thank you notes to presenters.
- Review evaluations and debrief with VISTA staff and/or presenters

Creating an OSOT Agenda

OSOT can take many forms and yours may be longer or shorter than the examples provided below. Start by allocating time to review CNCS requirements and policies in addition to the requirements and policies of the sponsoring organization. Then, plug in time for skills training and round it out with team-building exercises.

Review this [comprehensive checklist](#) that covers topics and tasks for orienting your members. The nature of your OSOT will depend on the particular characteristics of your organization, project, and VISTA member(s), as well as the time you have available.

Take your OSOT from Ho-Hum to Wow!

Tips and Tools for Encouraging Interaction

Your members are new to your organization, your community, and perhaps they are tired from Pre-Service Orientation. Despite their best intentions, it may be hard for them to remain completely engaged and focused during your OSOT. Adding activities and opportunities for interaction are a great way to energize the group, spark conversations, ease tension, and test the retention of information. Additionally, interaction is integral to building relationships among new people, such as VISTA members, supervisors, staff, and community partners.

Below are tips and tools for infusing interaction into your OSOT, including examples of activities you can use. First, however, it is important to keep in mind different learning styles, the characteristics of the group, and your goals for OSOT when deciding on any particular activity or set of activities. Some considerations are:

- Different backgrounds of the VISTAs (culture, experience, physical ability, etc.)
- Group size
- Available time
- Creating a safe and welcoming environment

Introductory	Team Building	Topic Exploration
Used to introduce participants to each other and to facilitate conversations.	Used to bring together individuals who are in the early stages of team building. This can help people start working	Used to explore a topic at the outset, or perhaps to change pace and re-energize people.

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	together more cohesively toward shared goals.	
1. The Name Game 2. Affirmative Inquiry	1. Picture Pieces Game 2. Blind Numerical Order	1. Three-Way Communication 2. Red Flag VISTA Game Show

Tip from the Field: *Send your VISTAs on a "scavenger hunt" to introduce them to your community.*

"I was sent on a 'scavenger hunt' to meet our community partners. I was given a list of our partners and was told to introduce myself to as many as possible by the end of the day – either in person or over the phone. This was a great way for me to get to know my way around town and to start building relationships."

Example Activities

Introductory

1. The Name Game

Timing: Varies by group size, about 1-2 minutes per participant.

Materials: Flip chart to post questions.

Goal: To facilitate introductions and start relationship building by sharing a personal story.

In a circle, have each person introduce themselves along with any key information you wish to know (e.g., position title, department, service site, etc.). In addition, they should answer one question from the following about their name:

- Do you have a nickname? How did you get it?
- Were you named after someone? Who? Tell us about them.
- Would you like to change your name? To what and why?

2. Affirmative Inquiry

Timing: 20-30 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials: Handout with the questions to facilitate note taking; pens.

Goal: To build relationships through positive storytelling and group sharing.

Pair participants up and have them interview one another about their previous service experiences. Ask the following questions:

- What was a high-point service experience for you?

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- What is an accomplishment you had during this experience?
- What about the organization or team you served with made it so good?
- What are two ways this year could also have such high-point experiences?

Participants take turns interviewing and actively listening to their partner and capturing notes on what they said. After 8-10 minutes, have pairs connect with one other group and then take turns reporting out what their partners said. If there is time, have the whole group come together and report out in a circle.

Team Building

1. *Picture Pieces Game*

Timing: 20-30 minutes.

Materials: An image, scissors, flip chart, markers, tape.

Goal: To teach participants how to work in a team. (Demonstrates how each person working on their own contributes to an overall group result.)

The activity leader chooses a well-known picture or cartoon that is full of detail and cuts it into as many equal squares as there are participants in the activity. Do not show the original picture to the participants yet. Each participant is given a piece of the “puzzle” and instructed to create an exact copy of their piece of the puzzle five times bigger than its original size. Provide paper, rulers, pencils, markers, etc. to complete the task. When all the participants have completed their enlargements, ask them to assemble their pieces into a giant copy of the original picture on a table.

Debrief with the group about the end-product:

- How does the team picture compare to the original?
- How did the team communicate while making the enlargements? Did they communicate?
- Why is communication across departments, with other organizations, or with the communities they serve important?

2. *Blind Numerical Order*

Timing: 20 minutes.

Materials: Blindfolds (optional).

Goal: To encourage communication and active listening to solve problems as a team.

Blindfold all the participants or have them close their eyes. Whisper a number to each of them without letting other participants hear. The numbers should be random instead of in order. For a few participants, use negative numbers, zero, really high numbers, etc. After whispering the number, move the participant to a random location in the room. Once every participant has a number, instruct them to organize themselves in a line in order from lowest to highest number. (At intervals during the game,

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create restrictions for the whole group or certain members, e.g., no talking, no using your right arm, one person must sit down and remain sitting.) Stop when the team successfully gets in order or when the time is up.

Debrief the experience with the group:

- What was the most difficult aspect of this exercise?
- Did you assume that the assigned numbers would be in order?
- Did you have a sense of working together? Why/why not? How frustrating was it when you could not talk?
- What was necessary in order for you to be successful?
- How important is good communication in groups?
- How does this activity relate to our group?

Topic Exploration

1. *Three-Way Communication*

Timing: 20-30 minutes.

Materials: Flip chart, markers, a few bandanas, clipboards, pen and paper.

Goal: To discuss pros and cons of different communication methods and styles. (Groups physically mimic a specific communication type to make them aware of the differences.)

Preface the game with a brief discussion about the various ways people communicate with their friends, supervisors, colleagues, etc. Tell them that in this activity, they will discuss and determine key aspects, pros/cons, and guidelines for a specific type of communication. Three different communication methods will be explored: Face-to-face, telephone, and email.

Divide participants into three groups:

1. *Face-to-face:* These people do not have any controls on their communication. They should sit in one area of the room and use pen and paper to write their findings during the activity.
2. *Telephone:* These group members should be blindfolded in order to replicate the telephone experience (in which they cannot see the person they're talking to). They should sit together in one area of the room. One person will act as the scribe for the group's findings and will not wear a blindfold.
3. *Email:* These participants should sit back to back and may not speak. They should each have paper, pens, and clipboards. In order to communicate, they must write notes and pass them to one another.

Give the groups a scenario they may encounter during their service that requires a clear solution or next step. Give them 5-7 minutes to get to a solution using their method of communication, and then have

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them report their findings back to the whole group. If time allows, switch groups and test multiple scenarios with increasing complexity.

Capture the findings on chart paper and debrief with the group the pros/cons of each type of communication given the scenario.

2. Red Flag VISTA Game Show

Timing: 10-15 minutes, and can be adjusted per the group size.

Materials: Prepared scenarios.

Goal: To test understanding of policies and procedures.

Prepare in advance some scenarios your VISTA may face either in regard to VISTA policies, office procedures, community interactions, or another topic of relevance to their service experience.

Read aloud, or have a VISTA member read aloud, one or more scenarios. Have VISTA members raise their hands when a “red flag” behavior occurs in the scenario. Call on one person from the group to state what the “red flag” behavior was and briefly why it is a problematic behavior. Depending upon the response, the facilitator, or other VISTAs, can provide further explanation or clarification. Then continue with the scenario. It can be fun to add cheesy game show style introductions and cheering after each response; add some personality!

Example scenarios:

- The local discount housewares store is hiring! Finally, your chance to work your way up the ladder of success in corporate America. Your project only has you busy during business hours, and if you could work nights you could make a lot of money, so you decide to ...
- Monthly reports are due tomorrow, but you’ve been invited to go on a tour of the city with underprivileged youth which could really inform your project. However, you won’t be able to do both. Conundrum! You had better ...
- Your VAD is really easy. Like, super super easy. You honestly think you could complete the entire thing in two weeks without even breaking a sweat. When you talk to your supervisor, you realize that he knew it was going to be easy, but just didn’t know what else to do with you. So you ...

How to Quickly Engage Your Audience

If time is limited, try the simple activities below to quickly engage your audience during your presentation.

- **Brainstorming:** Generate ideas among participants by eliciting quick contributions without trainer comment or opinion. Record the ideas as they are shared.
- **Case Study:** Have participants discuss a real case study. Give them discussion questions as applicable to the topic.

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- **Create a Quiz:** Have participants create a quiz question that they know the answer to, based on the topic. Have them write the question on one side of an index card, and the answer on the other. Then have them work in pairs or small groups to share questions.
- **Field Trips/ Scavenger Hunts:** Engage participants by showing and introducing them, not only to the organization, but the community.
- **Group Review:** Ask participants to share what they learned. Use chart paper to record their responses.
- **Guided Teaching:** Use leading questions to guide participants through the material, using their own knowledge.
- **Learning Plan:** Ask participants to write down specific additional things they want to learn because of what they have learned in the OSOT.
- **Movement Poll:** Poll participants and have them do something physical in response, such as standing up, shaking a leg, or spinning around.
- **Next Steps:** Have participants write down how they will use what they've learned and what they want to learn next. Have members share before leaving.
- **Sticky-Notes Questions:** Have participants write their questions on sticky notes and post them on the board during the break. When you come back from break, answer the questions and take down the sticky notes as they are answered.
- **Role Play:** Have participants work in pairs to act out scenarios. Give them time to discuss what it feels like to see things from a different point of view.
- **Self-Assessment:** Have participants reflect on what they have learned about a topic by giving a written or verbal self-assessment. Do not require that they share their responses.
- **Stretch Break:** If participants are getting restless or sleepy, take a quick guided stretch break to get the blood flowing and their brains working.
- **True/False:** Have participants work in groups. Give a list of true/false statements and have people discuss what they think is true and what is false, then give the correct answers.

OSOT Evaluation

You have just completed your VISTA On-Site Orientation and Training - congratulations! Before filing away your OSOT documents until next year, it is recommended that you evaluate your OSOT and incorporate the information into next year's planning. Depending on the nature of your program, you may find that an informal method of collecting feedback works better than formal surveys.

Below you will find sample questions to use to measure the success of your OSOT and isolate areas for future improvement. These questions have been structured around the CNCS Learning Objectives. You will also find tips on survey design and how to build these suggestions into future trainings.

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Anonymous surveys can be collected via Google Forms, online programs such as SurveyGizmo or SurveyMonkey, or on paper. Limit surveys to no more than 10 questions to increase validity of the results.

Evaluating the VISTA Member Experience

Survey of Individual Training Sessions

Consider breaking the survey down by topic to have VISTA members evaluate the effectiveness of a specific training or session. Limit topic surveys to no more than 5 questions. This design is best utilized for an OSOT with fewer, but more intensive, training sessions.

Example questions:

1. How effective (engaging, knowledgeable, articulate, and well-prepared) was the facilitator during this session?
2. Would you recommend this training to future VISTA members?
3. Do you have suggestions of topics that should be included in future OSOTs?

If the survey format allows it, provide additional space for open comments. You may also consider using a format that allows the VISTA member to rate the sessions and presenters on a scale from Very Effective to Not Effective.

Survey by Learning Objective

Depending on the structure of your OSOT, you may find that collecting feedback around the CNCS-provided learning objectives better suits your program. Below are sample questions to ask your VISTA members to make sure you covered all the target areas. Limit this to no more than 10 questions.

1. *Have you addressed management, communication, and learning styles between your supervisor and yourself?*
2. *Do you know the mission of [insert organization name]?*
3. *Do you have an adequate understanding of the community you serve (socio-economic and political structure, physical boundaries of the service area, how the VISTA project will impact the community, tour of community and introductions to key community partners, and potential resources to help reach project goals)?*
4. *Do you have an understanding of reporting policies?*
5. *Do you know who to contact for work-related issues, including questions regarding your VAD, timesheets, and other project issues?*
6. *Do you understand the overall goal of your VAD?*
7. *Do you have an understanding of the steps you will need to take to complete your VAD?*
8. *What are your immediate needs/concerns with respect of to your VAD and project assistance?*
9. *How effective (engaging, knowledgeable, articulate, and well-prepared) was the facilitator during this session?*

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10. Do you have suggestions of topics that should be included in future OSOTs?

Shaping the Questions

When designing your survey, consider the use of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Proper use and balance of these two types of questions can elicit responses to determine the effectiveness of the OSOT, while also bringing insight into future VISTA needs. Closed-ended questions, such as multiple choice surveys, should be used when a short or one-word response provides sufficient information. Open-ended questions garner an exploratory response and allow for more in-depth answers, including answers not yet considered, to be shared and addressed. Keep in mind that if you choose closed-ended questions, the “additional comments” section can still provide the in-depth feedback found in open-ended questions.

Evaluating the Supervisor Experience

Following OSOT, it is important that you as a supervisor reflect on how the training went. You may find that an informal method of collecting feedback from those who were involved in OSOT is more appropriate than a survey. A debriefing session no more than one week after the conclusion of OSOT with all individuals who were involved in the planning process is recommended. Bringing questions to guide the discussion may help facilitate conversation. If you are the sole planner of OSOT, reflect upon these topics and write down the answers for future reference.

Example questions:

1. *What went well with the planning process of OSOT? What needs to be improved?*
2. *Were the training topics relevant?*
3. *How effective were the facilitators?*
4. *Review member survey results*

The main points of this discussion should be recorded to incorporate into future OSOT planning, through an internal memo or other document.