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Letter From A Former Member:

Hello!

My name is Marquis Davis and I served as the VISTA Volunteer and Development for the Immigration Services Program at Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen. When I first started my service I was excited to jump into the work but also apprehensive because I wasn't quite sure how I would get it done. I had no projects in mind, no experience in this field, and little knowledge of how to build capacity. But with each passing day, I learned more and more about how I could help my organization grow. Once I became accustomed to the daily office operations, identifying areas for development became easier. Learning about my community and its available resources was very helpful in creating projects for outreach. I have no doubt that you are capable of sustaining old projects and creating new ones to improve this program. Learn from your peers, connect with your community, and attend VISTA webinars! You will find valuable resources when you take the time to research about your service and community, and watching your program grow is most rewarding.

Introduction

This manual is designed to provide the incoming VISTA member, future staff, or other volunteer members with materials and information necessary to continue the work that has been done by their predecessor. In it, you will find documents used by the previous VISTA member and staff, information about office procedures, important contacts, and how to best integrate into the nature of work done at this office. Please refer to this manual whenever you need it; use it as a guide to help you in your beginning stages of service and build upon it as you learn.

For the VISTA member:

In collaboration with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the Volunteer and Development Coordinator for Catholic Charities' Immigration Program helps build the capacity of the program by recruiting and coordinating volunteers and pursuing funding opportunities. This will increase the program's participation in outreach efforts and help the immigrant community in the area to become aware of their immigration legal options and access quality legal services. Listed below are what I have found to be the fundamental VISTA duties:

- Prepare outreach materials and conduct outreach presentations
 - Recruit, train, and coordinate volunteers for legal clinics
 - Assist preparing funder marketing materials
 - Research funding opportunities
- Write grant proposals and reports

*You'll come to find that the VISTA member has more duties than what is listed above; administrative duties will also be required like copying, filing, and printing. The position calls for a lot of interpersonal interaction with members of the community; do not be afraid to engage in conversation! In all, you are there to do whatever helps to build capacity, as long as they are within the boundaries of your duties (you will learn more about that during your VISTA orientation).

For staff/volunteers:

Staff members include community volunteers, college interns and students, or any other person who has decided to dedicate their time to helping the program blossom and grow. It is important for all staff members to know that their duties will have a wide range while working with the Immigration Program. There will be times where they are required to do simple tasks such as mailing letters, answering phone calls, and scheduling, but other times may call for analyzing confidential documents, maintaining case files, and working with clients who are experiencing complex circumstances. The duties of a staff member differ from those of a VISTA member's in

that they can be more direct. While the VISTA member has sets of duties, which are defined by their program, staff members can be tasked with a number of responsibilities according to their job description. However, both positions have duties that overlap, assisting the program in its development.

General Office Procedures

1. Forms and Files

Working with the Immigration Services Program involves maintaining a large inventory of forms and files. There are cabinets filled with client case files that are specifically organized so they are easily accessible when needed, and forms are placed in designated folders to facilitate legal procedures. Undoubtedly, you WILL have to locate a client's file or be asked to retrieve one. There, here are several things that you should know to make that process easier:

- All client case files are held in filing cabinets inside the immigration offices. The offices are located on the 1st and 3rd floors of the building.
- Case files are organized alphabetically by last name. However, most of the clients have two last names (example: Maria Rojas Diaz). In this case, you would look for this file under the "R" section. If the case file only has one last name (Jordan Diaz), you would simply look under the "D" section.
- Case files are also organized by type of immigration benefit. All DACA files are held in the 1st floor office. The other types of immigration files are held upstairs in the 3rd floor office.
- Case Files are also organized by label colors. DACA files have red labels, Citizenship applications blue, U-Visa, VAWA, and Relative Petitions green, and FOIA yellow. You can also look inside the file to determine what type of immigration case it is.
- All forms are held in a file holder located in the 1st floor office. Each form is placed in a folder with a specific label. If you need to use a form, just search through the labels and copies of the form will be located in that folder.
- If there are no copies of forms left in the folders, more copies can always be printed from the computer. Once you have access to the system, these forms will be shared with you. If they haven't been shared or you can't find them, ask a case manager or supervisor.

Additional Information:

- Depending on the status of the case, it may be located on the 1st floor office for easy access. More specifically, pending cases are held there so that the case manager can keep track of approaching deadlines for submissions. Do not be confused if you see

non-DACA cases in the 1st floor office; the case manager sometimes self-organizes them.

- There are some forms that you may not be qualified to sign-off on or review with a client. Always ask a case manager or supervisor before filling out any form.
- Many case files are VERY confidential, containing information that MUST NOT be shared with anyone who is not a part of the immigration office staff. There will be a bright orange paper with a note stating “Extremely Confidential” as you open the case file. Please consult with the case manager or supervisor if you are unsure what to do.
- If at any point in time you are unsure of what to do with a case file or form, ALWAYS ask the case manager or supervisor. They will know what to do.

2. Office Calendar

The office calendar is used to schedule appointments, set reminders, view other staff's schedule, and just about any other thing you can use a calendar for. It is completely online using Microsoft Outlook and may be accessed once you are logged into the system. Please note the following:

- Once you are registered to work for Catholic Charities, the calendar will be set up for you. If you have any questions about the layout or how to perform specific processes, ask the case manager, supervisor, or experienced staff member.
- Viewing other staff member's schedules is done when they share their personal calendar with you. This makes viewing and sharing things easier. To do this, just ask all staff members to share their calendar with you.

3. Print, Copy, Scan and Fax

There is an all-purpose machine on the 3rd floor office that can print, copy, and scan documents, amongst other functions. Performing a specific action is self-explanatory as there is a screen with options to choose. The fax machine is located on the 1st floor in a parish office (not immigration office). Just simply ask to use the fax machine if needed. If you are unsure how to use it, you can always ask the parish or immigration staff.

4. Budget/Reimbursement

The Immigration Program uses bookkeeping to keep track of cash flow. This is used for client fees and checks that are written out to government agencies when submitting an application. The business manager handles the overall budget; you do not have to worry about handling those funds.

- The Immigration Program accepts cash, check, and money order for client fees. When a client comes in to pay their fees, record it in the book located in the 1st floor office.

- Record all information such as the client name, date, and amount received. Don't forget to give the client a receipt!
- Any questions on bookkeeping and cash handling should be directed to the case manager or supervisor.

5. Mailing Procedures

The Immigration Program receives a lot of mail coming from government agencies, clients, and other affiliates. The most important things to remember about mailing are recognizing which mail is intended for immigration and how to file and send mail from the office.

- Any mail that is directed to the immigration office will be written as such. When receiving mail, just look for "Immigration Services Program" or other wordings indicating that it is intended for the immigration office.
- Most of the mail received comes from government agencies. If you see mail coming from places such as United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), or National Visa Center (NVC), it is designated for the immigration office.
- When sending mail, make sure all information is accurate. Many clients frequently change their mailing address and it is important to aware of their most recent change.
Hint: *Client case files will always have most recent address towards the front of the file.*
- There is a mailbox for the immigration office. Parish staff helps with sorting out which mail is theirs and which belongs to immigration. They are there to help if you need it.

6. Office Supplies

There are supplies located in every office. There are scissors, paper, pencils, pens, paper clips, tape, sticky notes, folders, staplers and more. They are all available to use whenever you need them.

7. Dress Code

As a professional organization, there is a business casual dress code required. There's no need to come in dressed in a suit and tie or tuxedo, but you should come into the office dressed appropriately:

- No sweatpants
- No t-shirts,
- No shorts, or other inappropriate garments.
- Do not wear clothes that have wordings that may be offensive. When you attend orientation, you will get a guide on how to dress for work.

Contacts

The Immigration Program only has a few contacts that are used on a regular basis. Different people or organizations may be contacted depending on the situation. Therefore, I've listed the contacts that are used daily throughout the week and the contacts of people who can provide assistance. If you have general questions or need help, the contacts listed below can surely help you, as they are the senior staff. They are the ones who organize weekly meetings, events, and work with clients on a daily basis.

First Name	Last Name	Position	Organization	Phone	Email
Laura	Lobe	Case Manager	Catholic Charities, Immigration Program	(732) 214-8743	llobe@ccdom.org
John	Donnelly	Supervisor	Catholic Charities, Immigration Program	(732) 324-8200	jdonnelly@ccdom.org

Organization	Address	Phone
New Brunswick Police Department	25 Kirkpatrick St, New Brunswick, NJ 08901	(732) 745-5200
Women Aware	250 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08901	(732) 249-4900
Anshe Emeth Community Development Corporation	222 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08901	(732) 296-9922

**The Immigration Program has a list of references that is used when clients are looking for services or help that we cannot provide. This has come to be very useful when working with clients. The reference list will be attached to the binder.

Communication Resources

Having communication resources is very important when working to develop your program. There are several resources around the area that I have used for recruiting volunteers and general information. Most of my contacts consist of college universities; they are great communication resources:

- Rutgers University School of Social Work, 536 George St., New Brunswick, NJ 08901 (848) 932-7520
- Rutgers University Center for Latino Arts and Culture, 122 College Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 (848) 932-1263
- Seton Hall University, 400 South Orange Ave, South Orange, NJ 07079 (973) 761-9000
- Middlesex Community College, 2600 Woodbridge Ave, Edison NJ, 08837 (732) 548-6000

When recruiting for volunteers, you want to call the University and ask how you can best go about making a posting for recruitment. I have had success recruiting volunteers and interns with all of these universities.

With New Brunswick being a highly Latino community, the Immigration Services Program has established a good reputation with the locals. And with the office located alongside Sacred Heart Church, it provides for consistent connection with community members. The best way to go about outreach efforts in New Brunswick is to contact local churches--many immigrants are church members, as it serves as a safe place for them. Contact churches with your name, program name, and reason for calling. It will be a big help during outreach efforts.

It is also a good idea to reach out to other churches and organizations in surrounding communities. Here are a few that I have given presentations to:

- St. James Roman Catholic Church, 36 Lincoln Ave, Jamesburg, NJ 08831 (732) 521-0100
- St. Joseph's Church, Mountain Ave & E High St, Bound Brook, NJ 08805 (732) 356-0027
- St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, 15 Maple St, New Brunswick NJ 0890, (732) 545-2195

If you would like to know more about Immigration Law in general, there are useful websites, which provide information on current laws, legal training, and more. Here are the ones that I have used and found helpful:

- Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) www.cliniclegal.org
- New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice www.njimmigrantjustice.org
- United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) www.uscis.gov

*We typically use the USCIS website to stay informed on current immigration law, news, and benefits. It is very helpful when clients are asking about fees and application processes. I received immigration law training from CLINIC, and what I learned from their training made the work easier in the office. Be sure to ask the supervisor or case manager if you are interested in receiving training.

Volunteer Development

The most effective strategies I've used to recruit volunteers is to draft a job description and post it on a university website. With the office being in New Brunswick, it is very close to the Rutgers University campus, allowing for quick outreach to students. I have already listed the schools above. The best strategy would be to contact those departments and ask how you can go about recruiting volunteers.

I have typically contacted volunteers through email; I rarely call. I understand that they may be students or have other things going on with their lives, so I try not to interfere with that. Remember that they are devoting their time to you and aren't being paid, so try not to put too much pressure on them when reaching out for volunteer opportunities.

Volunteers can help with a number of duties including:

- Daily office operations
- Outreach events
- Presentations
- Drafting legal documents
- Fundraising

Volunteers are a big help when working in a small office such as this. There are many members of the community who require these services and all the help will be needed. Volunteers are a great source of communication as well. When they help during events, they share their experiences with friends or anyone else who may be interested. Before you know it, you'll have more volunteers willing to help!

In terms of volunteer development and training, feel free to use the manuals I have constructed. They provide information on immigration law and assistance when helping clients apply for benefits. The manuals are located in the office and are available at any time.

Lastly, when creating volunteer schedules, keep in mind that they have other things going on such as school, work, etc. Always ask them which days and times would work best, send them a draft schedule, and modify it according to their needs.

Grant and Funding Opportunities

The Immigration Program frequently searches for grants that relate to the services we provide. Keep this in mind when applying for grants. When researching funding opportunities, be sure to meet with the supervisor so that the funding aligns with our scopes of services and to make sure the Program meets the qualifications.

Websites you will find useful when researching grants:

www.grants.gov

www.justice.gov/ovw

www.foundationcenter.org

*It will be helpful to create an account with the Foundation Center. They will keep you updated on grant opportunities and the best funding methods.

Lastly, applying for grants involves a lot of work. You will need to develop abstracts, budget sheets, and other descriptions to prove that you qualify. Do not worry! You will not have all this information right away. The supervisor will help you get all the information you need.

Training Opportunities

If at any time you are looking for classes, workshops, or lectures on how to build your skills as a VISTA member or volunteer, be sure to check the Rutgers website about free workshops or lectures that are being held around the campus. Most of them are open to the public. The university serves as a great tool, do not hesitate to use it!

Exit Report

Being a VISTA member can be challenging at times--it seems that you are responsible for so much but have so little time and knowledge. Always remember that the work you do is a continuous process; there is no start and finish, only consistent development. There will be things that you don't know or questions that you can't answer at first, but this is why I have developed this manual for you so that you can have as much knowledge as possible when you start.

Even I had things I didn't know when I first started out. To prove it, I made a "Top 10 List" of the things I wish I had known when I started:

1. How to research, write, and apply for grants
2. How to begin recruiting volunteers
3. How to train volunteers
4. How to construct job descriptions
5. What community resources are available
6. Best practices for volunteer development (still working on this one)
7. Anything about immigration law
8. What to include on presentations
9. My limitations as a VISTA member (i.e. direct vs. indirect work)
10. Other ways to raise funds besides applying for grants

I have tried to include everything that I could in this manual so that you can be as prepared as possible when starting your work. As you learn about building capacity, community resources, etc., be sure to take note of it as you go. I wrote this manual on a word document so that it could be modified and improved when needed.

Please look over and review the documents that I have attached. They will be very helpful when you are creating projects and organizing events. I suggest reading the manuals in the office and the monthly reports first. They will provide you insight on how I was doing during the year and where those areas can be approved. The office manuals will teach you about immigration law, which will be VERY helpful as you work. The more you understand about the work you are doing, the easier it will be.

If at some point during your service you get lost and don't know what to do, ask the people around you: the supervisor, case managers, volunteers, and interns. Those who have been here for some time will surely know how to help.

And you can always contact me at my email address for any guidance or assistance:

marquis.davis09@gmail.com

BEST OF LUCK,

Marquis Davis