

Six VISTA Leader Roles

An Overview

Click on each of the VISTA Leader Role icons below to learn more about each of these aspects of VISTA Leadership.



The Ambassador



The Mentor



The Recruiter



The Facilitator/Educator



The Liaison



The Resource Generator



AMBASSADOR

A VISTA Leader Role

Ambassador: A Definition

Ambassadors serve as representatives or messengers for certain institutions or interests. As a VISTA leader, you represent national and community service in your town or city, and region. **You are a spokesperson and advocate for VISTA, your sponsoring organization and their respective missions.** You also represent an ethic of service demonstrated by your individual commitment to serve.

Ambassador: Role Objectives

The Ambassador's goal is to promote the national and community service movement and raise awareness about AmeriCorps VISTA. This means letting people know about successful VISTA projects, encouraging community volunteers to get involved in VISTA projects, and raising visibility for AmeriCorps VISTA.

The Ambassador role aims to create mutually beneficial relationships that strengthen VISTA members and their projects. These relationships may range from simple commitments to well-defined partnerships or strategic alliances.

Ambassador: Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes

To be successful as an Ambassador, a VISTA leader will need to develop specific knowledge, skills and attitudes such as those listed below.

Knowledge:

- A thorough knowledge of the VISTA legacy, vision and mission
- Awareness of specific VISTA members' projects, assignments and roles
- Familiarity with the CNCS State Office's VISTA project-related priorities and goals
- Some understanding of members' sponsoring organizations and communities
- Familiarity with key organizations and service partners operating in the leaders' town/city or region
- Information about the main service-related activities, events and celebrations carried out in the region/area

Skills:

- Ability to articulate the VISTA vision and mission
- Capacity to foster excitement in others about the VISTA mission and service ethic
- Effective public speaking and presenting
- Leadership skills in promoting, communicating and persuading
- Networking and relationship building skills

- Diplomacy skills such as empathetic and attentive listening, tactful communication and effective negotiation

Attitudes:

- Passionate about and committed to the VISTA mission and leader role
- Positive
- Enthusiastic
- Outgoing
- Resilient
- Persistent
- Humble
- Professional

Ongoing Strategic Priorities & Practical Strategies for Effective Ambassadorship

The leader should consciously identify, create, and engage in opportunities to represent AmeriCorps VISTA. Listed below are some practical strategies for effective Ambassadorship.

- Orient yourself with the VISTA legacy, vision, and mission; then create and memorize “talking points” about VISTA that include anecdotes from your personal experience and your community.
- Commit to wearing the AmeriCorps VISTA pin or logo every day; encourage other VISTA members and supervisors to do likewise.
- Complete a self-assessment of the necessary skills and attitudes for effective ambassadorship; develop a plan and strategies to enhance your abilities
- Learn about your members’ projects, assignments, and roles by reading about them, having one-on-one conversations with members, and making site visits. Introduce yourself to and establish contact with your members’ organizations; ask how you can help them raise the visibility of VISTA members and projects in the community
- Visit other key organizations and service partners in your region/area where VISTA members are not present; introduce the VISTA mission and establish work contacts
- Identify key service activities and events scheduled in your region, and identify appropriate potential opportunities for VISTA representation and engagement; work with your CNCS State Office and sponsoring organizations in order to plan and strategize to get VISTA members and their communities involved in these activities and events
- Create effective presentations to introduce and promote the VISTA mission and member activities (your members might be a good audience for you to test and practice your presentations).
- Use every opportunity to represent/promote VISTA and the ethic of service; encourage others to engage in partnerships and commitments; websites, local newspapers, bulletin boards and community forums are potential venues.
- Discuss and clarify your supervisor’s expectations about your ambassadorship activities, including communicating and working with organizations where VISTA members are placed.

Transformational Leadership & the Ambassador Role



Inspiring a Shared Vision

Inspiring a Shared Vision of a community without poverty and of a community engaged in service to others is the essence of the Ambassador role. Your Ambassador role gives you the opportunity to represent and share the VISTA mission and service ethic with passion and enthusiasm.



Modeling the Way

As a representative of the VISTA mission and service ethic, you are expected to be a role model. Role modeling means always acting in such a way that it serves the VISTA members, the project, and the VISTA mission. Lead the way by being the first to wear your VISTA button at all times, by succinctly describing the VISTA mission, and by sharing information about successful VISTA endeavors.

The Relationship between the Ambassador & Other VISTA Leader Roles



The Facilitator/Educator

Skills required and tasks carried out in your Facilitator/Educator role contribute greatly to your role as an Ambassador. Initiating, creating, and fostering relationships to promote the VISTA mission relates to the Facilitator role of the VISTA leader that brings people together for a common purpose. The Educator role supports the training of members and other project partners in the VISTA mission and member projects.



The Liaison

This role involves fostering communication between the VISTA leader and other project partners, and therefore goes hand in hand with ambassadorship. Both roles emphasize creating and fostering mutually beneficial relationships.



The Mentor

As an Ambassador, you are a role model and coach to your members in promoting the VISTA mission and service ethic. The role of Mentor complements this aspect of ambassadorship.



The Recruiter

The Ambassador role is complementary to the Recruiter role since each requires an understanding of and commitment to the VISTA mission. Promoting VISTA in the community requires similar knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective recruiting.



MENTOR

A VISTA Leader Role

Mentor: A Definition

A mentor is a trusted counselor or guide, a tutor or coach. As a VISTA leader, you have a role in influencing and guiding VISTA members toward achieving their VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) goals. In a nutshell, **a mentor guides more than directs.**

Mentoring can be a peer-to-peer relationship, or it can be a relationship between an individual with more experience who shares information and skills with one who is less experienced. Mentoring can also be a combination of the two in which varying levels of experience in different areas can be shared within the partnership. Mentoring can also be formal or casual/informal.

Mentor: Role Objectives

The Mentor's goal is to foster a **purposeful relationship** between him or herself and VISTA member(s) interested in developing skills and finding opportunities for personal and professional growth. The assumption underlying the mentoring relationship is that the mentee is trustworthy, competent, dedicated, and motivated to grow and develop with support from the mentor. At times, the informal mentor will be called on to guide the mentee through a challenging situation. In this way, the VISTA leader's goal is to act as an ally or coach to VISTA members when they are struggling.

Mentor: Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes

To be successful as a Mentor, a VISTA leader will need to develop specific knowledge, skills and attitudes such as those listed below.

Knowledge:

- Self-awareness related to the leader's purposeful intention of influencing the VISTA member in a way that ensures successful achievement of the project's goals
- A thorough understanding of the VISTA legacy, vision, mission, project and VAD goals, activities, priorities and timelines
- An understanding of the personal and professional goals of members
- Insight into how the VISTA members' strengths and weaknesses match or frustrate the needs of the project
- Familiarity with the CNCS State Office's VISTA project-related priorities and goals
- Clarity about your responsibilities as a mentor or a coach, and how they differ and when each are most appropriate to utilize

Skills:

- Active listening skills
- Ability to ask probing questions – without always giving an answer

- Ability to set clear boundaries to avoid dependency-producing behaviors
- Ability to articulate the VISTA vision and mission, and assist the member in articulating the vision and goals of the project and VAD
- Relationship building skills

Attitudes:

- Comfortable letting go of the need to feel competent (give yourself and the mentee permission to say, “I don’t know,” thereby creating an opportunity to learn)
- Open, respectful and non-judgmental
- Supportive of independent thinking and problem-solving
- Self-directed role modeling
- Positive
- Enthusiastic
- Professional

Practical Strategies for Effective Mentoring

The most important reality is that your VISTA member either will or will not look up to you as a mentor, someone they want to emulate and learn from. Good mentors are aware of their ability to influence, and conduct themselves with purpose and intention.

The next decision you have to make as a VISTA leader in the Mentoring role is whether you want to pursue formal mentoring relationships with your VISTA members, or more informal relationships.

If you decide to create more formal mentoring relationships with members, this entails two important steps: (1) assessment and (2) intervention. Some questions, strategies, and ideas for each step are listed below.

1. Mentoring assessment means learning what the VISTA member/mentee’s needs and objectives are and determining how you might help them meet those objectives.

- In what way(s) does the mentee want to grow and develop?
- Research on mentoring recommends “starting where the mentee is” by building on the strengths, interests, and talents of the mentee or VISTA member
- What is the VISTA member already good at? How can this interest or talent help them with their development objective?
- Meet with the VISTA member to define and write out the desired objectives of the mentoring relationship; what activities or methods will be used to meet the objectives?
- Discuss with the mentee who would be the appropriate person to mentor the VISTA member? If it is not you, the VISTA leader, who else would be appropriate? What can you do to monitor and support the mentoring relationship?
- Work with the site supervisor to clarify each of your roles and to coordinate support and guidance for the VISTA member

- It will be important for you to review the workplan and strategic vision with the supervisor so that you share a common understanding of the priority goals and activities, the resources needed to achieve them, and how both of you will work with and support the VISTA member.
- Consider the VISTA member's site supervisor and sponsoring organization. What information and resources does the sponsoring organization possess that would support your mentoring role with the VISTA member? Who in the organization already has information, or has access to information and resources that may be helpful in mentoring the VISTA? What does the organization know about you and your role as leader? What does the organization need to know and how will you ensure they know it? How will you partner with the sponsoring organization on behalf of your VISTA as a mentor who is role modeling relationships?
- Contact the CNCS State Office for information about events or opportunities that may benefit the mentee; the State Office may also have access to other VISTA members who previously served on the project, or other personnel who may be able to offer relevant expertise and guidance.

2. **Mentoring intervention** means implementing the activities planned, which in turn will help the mentee meet his or her objectives.

- Enter into a contract with the mentee about the expectations and structure of the relationship; establish mutually clear activities and timelines that will help the mentee meet his or her developmental objectives.
- Determine your mentoring communication process: What information do you need to share with each other, how often and using what method? If you will meet on a regular basis, when and where?
- Encourage VISTA members to regularly select the activities that will help them meet their objectives themselves.
- Look for ways to expose the VISTA members/mentee to activities, experiences, and opportunities that they would not otherwise have.
- Allow the VISTA member to take smaller risks within a supportive environment.
- Set the VISTA member up to succeed at the activity by offering achievable challenges; for example, if the mentee's goal is to become an effective public speaker, you might provide them an opportunity to give a brief introduction of another speaker at a community event (help them practice beforehand).
- Schedule a time to "de-brief" or talk about how the risk or activity went and what they learned from the experience.
- Remember that the power of mentoring is in the relationship; build the relationship through experiences that not only encourage growth, but also foster trust, respect, and communication.

Transformational Leadership and the Mentor Role



Modeling the Way

The Mentor sets an example by behaving in ways consistent with the shared values and vision of the sponsoring organization, VISTA mission and the project's goals and values. The Mentor recognizes small progress and achievements and promotes VISTA members' continuing growth.



Enabling Others to Act

A Mentor helps people develop the skills, internal resources, and freedom they need to meet their assignments objectives.



Encouraging From the Heart

The Mentor encourages from the heart by recognizing and appreciating the VISTA members' contributions to the project's success at whatever phase the project is in. The Mentor also celebrates individual and team achievements both genuinely and regularly in big and small ways. In working from the heart, deep relationships and trust are fostered en route to the desired change.

The Relationship between the Mentor & Other VISTA Leader Roles



Facilitator/Educator

Skills required and tasks carried out in your Facilitator/Educator role contribute to your role as Mentor. Facilitation skills will assist you in asking good coaching questions and helping you to identify learning/development needs. Furthermore, awareness of members' projects and personal and professional goals will help you to connect members with appropriate activities, people, and resources and also support relevant training opportunities for members.



Liaison

This role focuses on being a communication link, resolving conflict, and responding to challenging situations faced by VISTA members. It is closely tied, therefore, to the Mentor role. Both roles emphasize connecting people and nurturing growth and development.



Resource Generator

As a Mentor, you may be connecting VISTA members to networks and resources to help them meet their personal objectives and project goals.



RECRUITER

A VISTA Leader Role

Recruiter: A Definition

Recruiters persuade others to unite their abilities and expertise to achieve common goals. **A Recruiter is responsible for finding the right VISTA(s) for the next year's open VISTA position(s).** As a Recruiter, the VISTA leader is responsible for “selling” the position, the site, the agency, VISTA, national service and a city, town or region of the country. It also means being a matchmaker connecting someone's skills and desires with the requirements and vision of the position and shared VISTA goal of eliminating poverty.

Recruiter: Role Objectives

The goal of the Recruiter is to advertise open VISTA placements and attract as many qualified applicants as possible. In order to be truly effective as a VISTA Recruiter, it helps to view the role as a series of small steps:

1. Gather information about the anticipated VISTA Assignment Description
2. Develop a recruitment plan
3. Implement the plan
4. Evaluate the plan

Recruiter: Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes

To be successful as a Recruiter, a VISTA leader will need to develop specific knowledge, skills and attitudes such as those listed below.

Knowledge:

- Thorough understanding of the goals of the VISTA project
- An understanding of the benefits of VISTA service
- Familiarity with the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) for which members are being recruited
- Familiarity with the community in order to know where to go to recruit people and who to talk to
- An understanding of the sponsoring organization and its key players

Skills:

- Communication skills, written and verbal
- Public speaking / presentation skills
- Good active listening skills and a willingness to ask questions in order to learn more about someone
- Interviewing skills
- Project planning and event organizing skills
- Creativity

Attitude

- Outgoing
- Positive
- Enthusiastic
- Determination, flexibility and patience
- Dedicated to seeing VISTA positions filled with the best possible people
- Professional

Practical Strategies for Effective Recruitment

Above all, the Recruiter role requires listening and conversational skills. Employing active listening skills is surprisingly difficult. Listening means preparing a few questions that, when answered, will provide pertinent information about the person as a potential VISTA, their needs and strengths, and what kind of project position would be the best fit for them.

The ability to make an individual feel you are completely interested and invested in what they have to say is a critical skill of a VISTA leader. It is a poignant way to obtain their interest in what you have to say; and to learn more about VISTA.

There is so much you could say about VISTA, the organization and the role, but you don't want to overwhelm a potential recruit, so be selective about what you tell them. Ask yourself, "What are the most important things I want this individual to know and remember about VISTA?" Keep in mind different generations will be interested in information relevant to their age and needs.

Interested is Interesting – What to ask a potential recruit before launching into your AmeriCorps VISTA spiel...

- What type of work are you interested in doing?
- What are your plans in the coming year? (looking to move, go back to school, get a job, etc.)
- What have been some of your favorite courses at school or university?
- What have you heard about AmeriCorps or VISTA?
- What are your reasons for exploring VISTA?

Here are other suggested steps for the Recruiter role with ideas and key questions to ask during each phase of recruitment.

1. Gather information about the anticipated VISTA assignments and positions.

- Plan for what the VISTA will do. Find out from your supervisor what their assignments will look like. What will be the VISTA's key responsibilities?
- Do not start recruiting VISTAs until there is an assignment written for the position you are recruiting for! This may be an approved VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) or the VISTA assignment as outlined in your project's application. It is like being an architect of a house. You need to have a blueprint and some sketches of what the final product will look like before you can ask someone whether they want to build it and live in it. Similar to a blueprint, the VISTA needs an assignment from which to start. Think of your own VAD for your VISTA year. How would you re-write it based on what you know now?

What was helpful in your VAD? What do you wish had been there that was missing? The assignment does not need to be entirely fleshed out, but it should show a potential VISTA what opportunities await them. A VISTA needs enough direction to get started, but not so much direction that they feel they are just following a recipe.

- Part of your matchmaking role is getting to know the organization and the community. Get to know your organization. Identify key organizations, people, and resources in the community. Gather information about what it takes to be successful in a particular community.
- Identify skills and interests required to carry out the key responsibilities. What specialized knowledge will this person need? What motivations and interests will this person need? What other qualities does the person need to be successful in this organization and community?
- Brainstorm possible places you might find someone with the skills, motivation, and other qualities required to carry out the assignment.

2. Develop a recruitment plan.

- Develop a tentative calendar for the year; listing your recruitment efforts and events in order to help stay on track. Remember that you will need to plan for some events several months in advance. Job fairs often require registering in advance. Return to your calendar or recruitment plan often to make updates and adjust your time and tasks as needed.
- Use a multi-faceted approach to recruiting. This means you recruit for the same position in more than one way.
 - What online resources are available to post the VISTA position (AmeriCorps recruitment system, Peace Corps Web site, social media, nonprofit job listings online, etc.)?
 - What activities or events should you go to in person (city job fairs, college career fairs, church socials, etc.)? Who do you need to call to find out about these events and activities?
 - What “paper-based” recruitment should you do (write a job posting for local newspapers, neighborhood papers, community newsletters, flyers at the laundromat, etc.)?
- Find out what others are doing and create a list of the contact names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of key contacts and resources.
- Create a strong AmeriCorps VISTA message or “elevator speech” that you could deliver to anyone you meet, then tailor it to person’s particular circumstances.
- Know what you need to do with interested applicants’ contact information. Does your program or sponsor have a database where you can record potential VISTA members’ names and contact details? What is the next step? When does the program review applications and schedule interviews? When will the program make a final decision about VISTA members for the following year? You need to know this so you can communicate it to potential applicants.

3. Implement the plan.

- This is the fun part. Follow through on the recruitment plan/calendar that you created in the previous step.
- As you get people interested in the VISTA position, send them a quick note to let them know you received their application.

4. Evaluate the plan.

- Return to the information you gathered in the first two steps. How well did you do at creating a recruitment plan that was multi-faceted? How successful were you in your role as sales representative and matchmaker? Were you able to complete the recruitment plan in a timely manner, or were you scrambling to recruit someone at the end of the year?
- The true test of your recruitment efforts will be whether the VISTA successfully completes his or her term of service and fulfills the assignments mandate. What are you doing this year with your current VISTA members to make sure they stay? You can send supportive e-mails and make encouraging phone calls, set conference calls to help members connect with you and other members, have parties or potlucks in the VISTA members' honor, or send random notes and messages of appreciation.

Transformational Leadership & the Recruiter Role



Inspiring a Shared Vision

Recruiting requires transmitting a shared vision. In order to do your best work as a matchmaker, you must appeal to the dreams, values, and goals of others and draw parallels with what the position has to offer. Everything about recruitment requires planning and thinking. Something as basic as what you say to a potential recruit, and the questions you ask to strike up a conversation, require thinking ahead and writing something down.



Encouraging From the Heart

Retaining VISTA members is all about encouraging from the heart. It is about random appreciative remarks to let people know that you notice their achievements and efforts. Asking questions, listening to responses, and putting yourself in other people's shoes is critical to retaining VISTA members. Think of ways to celebrate a job well done. Remember to also celebrate the risk-taking, effort, and learning opportunities associated with failures and mistakes. As you know, being a VISTA is about planning and trying things based on the best information available. When something doesn't work, it is important to learn from the experience and do better next time. Encourage VISTA members to document their learning experiences so that others (the next VISTA member, sponsoring organization, community) can benefit.

The Relationship between the Recruiter & Other VISTA Leader Roles



Ambassador

This role includes representing and promoting the VISTA mission among project partners in the community and is, therefore, closely tied to the Recruiter role. Both roles emphasize communicating the VISTA mission and generating excitement about past, present, and future VISTA projects.



Facilitator/Educator

The question-asking and public speaking/presentation skills required in your Facilitator/Educator role complement your role as Recruiter. Facilitation skills will assist you in making links with important recruitment partners and in helping to resolve conflict. Furthermore, awareness of members' projects and needs will help you explain typical VISTA projects to potential recruits.



Resource Generator

As a Recruiter, you are making connections with individuals and organizations that will also help you and other VISTA members connect to networks and resources and, in turn, meet specific project goals.



FACILITATOR/EDUCATOR

A VISTA Leader Role

Facilitator/Educator: A Definition

Facilitators foster and maintain mutually respectful, safe and meaningful learning environments. **As a VISTA leader, this means you will help identify VISTA members' learning and development goals and work with them to achieve those goals.** Educators are responsible for imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes to group members. **This transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes occurs both formally and informally in serving as a teacher, instructor and/or role model.**

The Facilitator/Educator role requires you to facilitate the transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes to VISTA members to help contribute to a meaningful service experience and successful project outcome. In some cases, VISTA leaders act as educators to directly impart knowledge. More often, however, VISTA leaders facilitate learning and reflection by identifying and creating learning and growth opportunities for members to engage in.

Facilitator/Educator: Role Objectives

The **first goal** of the Facilitator/Educator is to create opportunities for VISTA members to reflect on and learn from their service experience. The **second goal** is to facilitate opportunities for the transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to meaningful and productive projects and personal growth among VISTA members.

Facilitator/Educator: Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes

The successful Facilitator/Educator will need to develop specific knowledge, skills and attitudes such as those listed below.

Knowledge:

- An acquaintance with facilitation methods
- Familiarity with VISTA members' education/development needs to successfully complete their project VISTA Assignment Description
- Familiarity of members' learning styles/preferences
 - Knowledge of VISTA members' personal growth goals and needs
 - An awareness of VISTA members' assignments and projects, and the skills and knowledge they must possess to complete them
 - Information of the members' sponsoring organizations' member training plans and other training opportunities
- Knowledge and information about potential training opportunities in the region, including those sponsored by AmeriCorps VISTA and those offered by local schools, colleges/universities, non-profit resource centers, etc.

- Awareness of the experiential learning cycle, adult learning principles and different training/teaching techniques
- Information about team building and ice breaker/energizer activities.

Skills:

- Needs assessments skills
- Facilitation skills
- Training/teaching skills
- Training design, facilitation and evaluation skills
- Mentoring and coaching skills
- Listening skills

Attitudes:

- Enthusiastic about the growth of each VISTA member
- Positive
- Inspirational
- Willing and able to be both an educator and a learner
- Open minded
- Humble
- Professional

Ongoing Strategic Priorities & Practical Strategies for Effective Facilitation/Education

In this role, the VISTA leader works to identify, create, and facilitate learning and sharing opportunities for VISTA members to gain new knowledge and skills. Remember that the VISTA experience offers two important opportunities for each VISTA member: (1) The opportunity to serve a community project that aims to eliminate poverty and (2) The opportunity to grow as a person. In this regard, the Facilitator/Educator role is crucial in improving individuals and communities.

Listed here are some steps, strategies, and ideas that could be helpful in this endeavor:

- Learn about members' current skills, talents, and strengths
- Determine members' learning needs (conduct a needs assessment)
- Learn about knowledge and skill requirements for your members' projects and assignments
- Discuss, clarify, and identify your supervisor's expectations about your role in relation to communicating and working with member organizations and member training needs
- Discuss, clarify, and identify your members' expectations about your role in relation to facilitating their learning and training needs
- Learn about your members' personal goals
- Learn about your members' learning styles
- Work with your members to develop individual training plans for them
- Visit key organizations and service partners in your region/area to identify potential training/learning opportunities available to your members

- Coordinate with training providers to seek and secure potential training opportunities for your members
- Design and conduct training sessions/events and team-building activities for your members
- Promote knowledge-sharing and skill-building opportunities for members to learn from each other
- Identify and participate in skill-building opportunities to enhance your own training and facilitation skills

Transformational Leadership & the Facilitator/Educator Role



Enable Others to Act

Enhancing members' knowledge and skills enables individuals to act and perform confidently and competently. This aspect of transformational leadership is therefore the crux of the facilitator/educator role.



Modeling the Way

As a VISTA leader Facilitator/Educator, one way to facilitate and educate is by acting as a role model. To do this, you can be open about your own learning needs and development and what you are doing to improve your own effectiveness in your role. For example, you might explain that you are working on becoming a better public speaker and have started attending Toastmasters meetings in your free time.

The Relationship between the Facilitator/Educator & Other VISTA Leader Roles



Ambassador

This role focuses on raising the visibility of AmeriCorps VISTA and promoting cooperation and collaboration among project partners, including members. In both roles, the VISTA leader identifies opportunities to bring groups of people or organizations together. Leaders will likely be working with other partners and training providers to secure training opportunities for their members.



Liaison

In carrying out your Facilitator/Educator responsibilities, you will use Liaison skills. Training needs of members will vary. Therefore, the leader will need to identify a range of resources and opportunities and then work to find common ground where the most learning needs can be met for the largest number of people.



Mentor

The role of mentor complements the leaders' facilitation/education efforts. Mentoring is another method of helping VISTA members get their learning needs met.



Recruiter

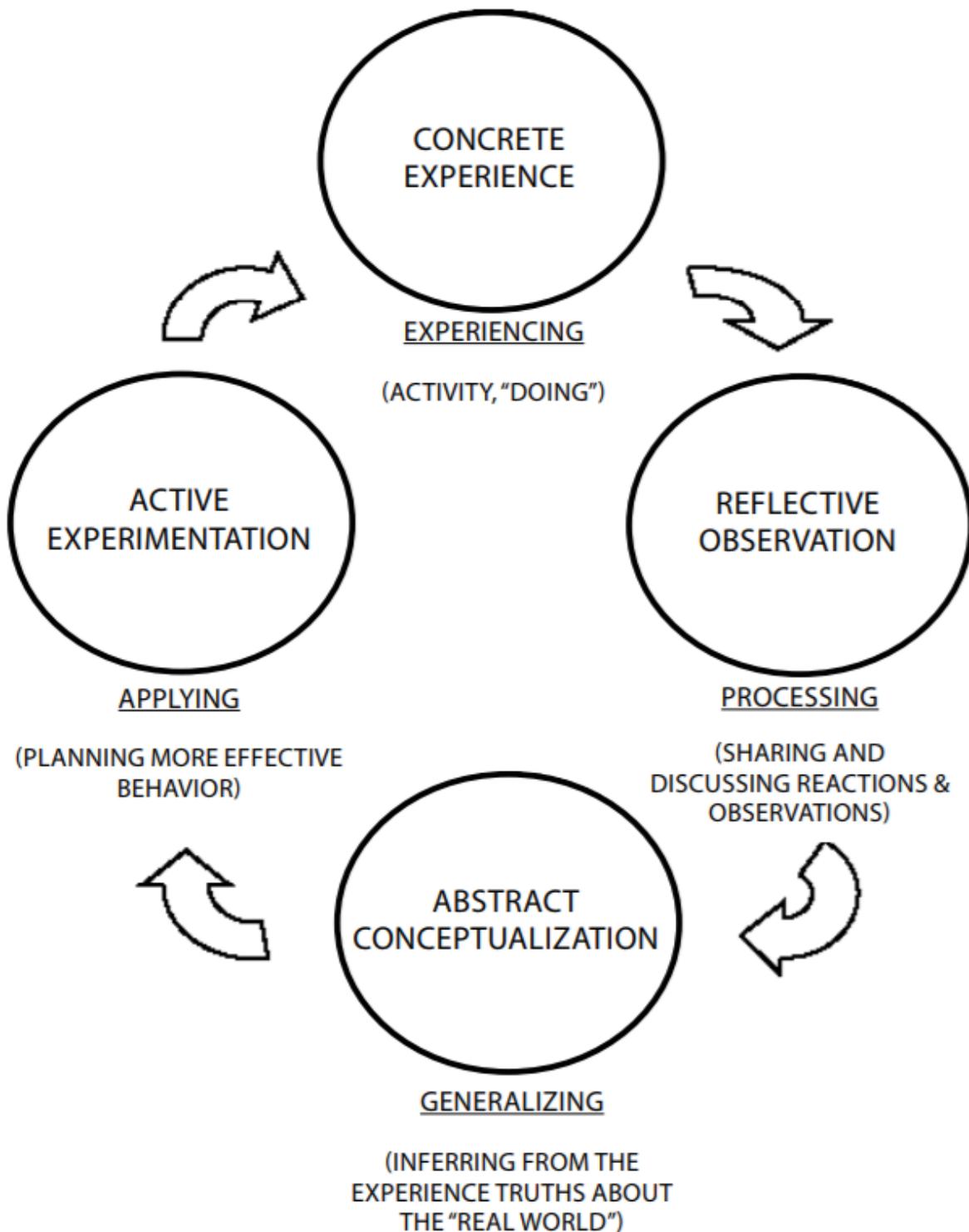
Recruitment skills will help you as a Facilitator/Educator in persuading other organizations and individuals to provide training and skill-development opportunities for members.

On the next two pages, you will find two models to assist with your role as Facilitator/Educator:

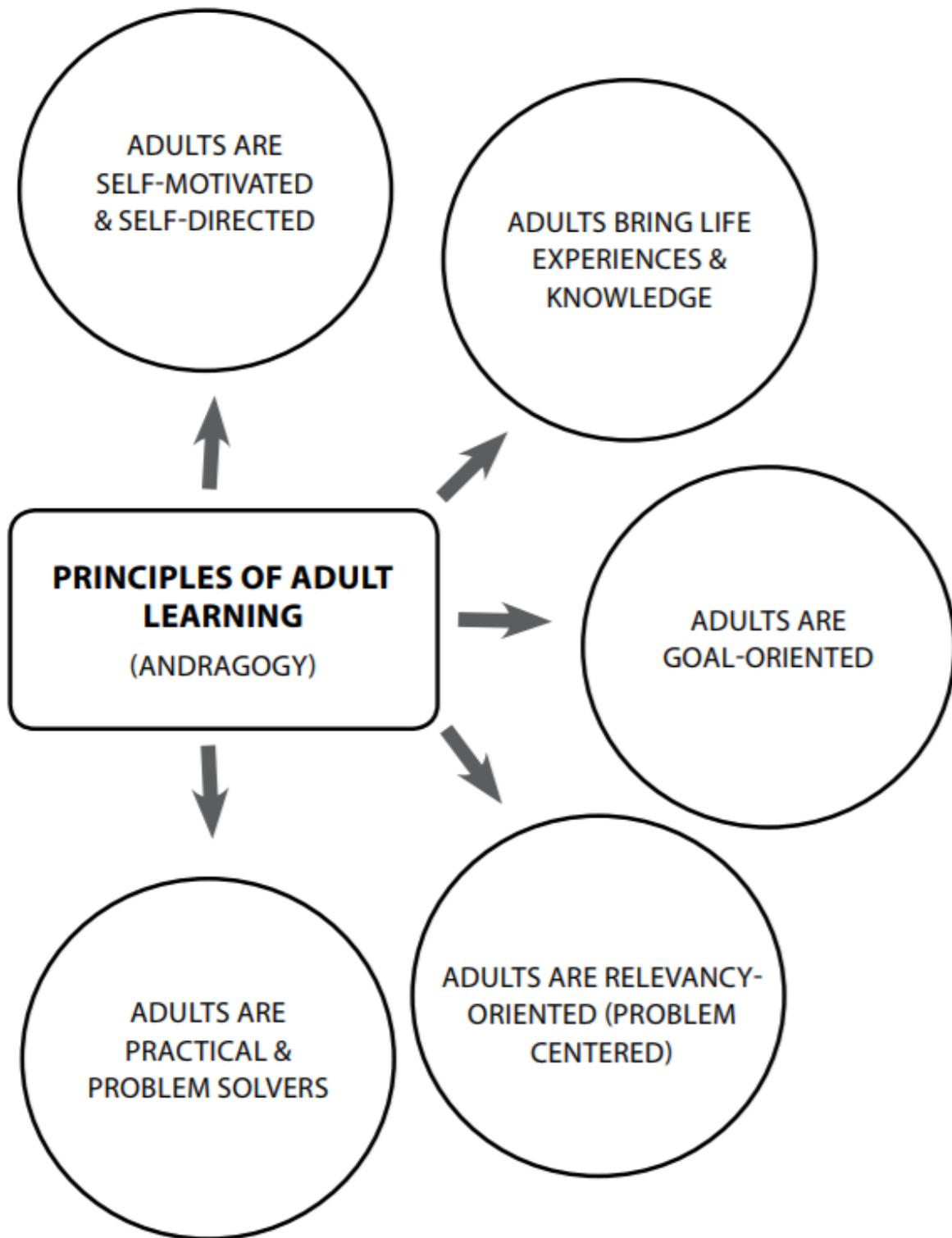
1. The Experiential Learning Cycle which outlines a method by which we learn new things.
2. Principles of Adult Learning.

The Experiential Learning Cycle

by David Kolb



Principles of Adult Learning
by Malcolm Knowles





LIAISON

A VISTA Leader Role

Liaison: A Definition

A Liaison is someone who connects two or more individuals or groups. **The role of the Liaison requires the VISTA leader to be constantly aware of the relationships between key players (self, members, supervisor, sponsor, CNCS State Office, community) and to identify the needs of these players.** These needs may be as complex as resolving conflicts between a VISTA member and the sponsor site, or as simple as connecting a VISTA member with someone who can help her to meet her project goals. The Liaison role involves acting as a **communication link** and a **conflict resolver/mediator**.

Liaison: Role Objectives

The ultimate goal of the Liaison is to bring people together. Part of your responsibility as a VISTA leader is to ensure relationships between team members are on track and that members have what they need in order to accomplish the goals set out in their VISTA Assignment Description. Therefore, as a Liaison you may be the person members come to when they have a conflict or an unmet need.

Liaison: Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes

On the surface, this role may appear simple. However, acting as a Liaison is one of the most crucial and complex roles of the VISTA leader. To be successful as a Liaison, a VISTA leader will need to develop specific knowledge, skills and attitudes such as those listed below.

Knowledge:

- Thorough understanding of the goals of the VISTA project(s)
- Awareness of the VISTA members' challenges and progress in order to forecast current and future needs
- Familiarity with an extensive network of people and organizations at the community, municipal, state and federal levels so that you can help meet VISTA members' needs by connecting them with others
- Awareness of the relationships between project members, and project members and supervisors
- Familiarity with techniques to strengthen and improve communication and feedback between members, members and supervisors

Skills:

- Ability to network
- Strong communication skills
- Ability to build trust quickly with all partners and team members involved in a project
- Conflict resolution skills
- Intuition (to hear what is said and notice what is *not* being said)
- Ability to anticipate and predict future needs related to attaining project goals

Attitudes:

- Open to feedback
- Non-judgmental
- Passionate about and committed to the VISTA mission and leader role
- Positive
- Inquisitive
- Humble enough to admit that you do not have all the answers, but will try to help VISTA members get what they need
- Professional

Practical Strategies for an Effective Liaison

The Liaison role encompasses at least two different functions: (1) communication link between key players and (2) conflict resolver/mediator. Further explanation of each function and key questions to ask are provided below.

1. **Communication link** is an important liaison function because, if done well, it can prevent conflict and miscommunication among key players. In this function, you may be questioned about how the project interfaces with the sponsor agency's mission, and goals, or about the VISTA member's tasks and progress. Therefore, you must keep track of who is doing what, how, and why.

Consider yourself on a year-long fact-finding mission. If you are the VISTA leader for multiple sites, acquiring all this knowledge may be difficult. Do as much as you can. At the very least, develop relationships with people at each site who can get you the information when you need it so you can answer any question that may arise. Here are some steps and key questions to assist you in tracking who is doing what and help people make connections.

- Familiarize yourself with all aspects of the sponsor site(s).
 - What is the site's mission? What are the ultimate goals of the project?
 - Who are the key players in the sponsoring organization? Who holds decision-making power? Who holds veto power?
 - Which people in the sponsoring organization do the VISTA members go to with questions on a regular basis? What are their roles and responsibilities within the organization?
 - What are the sponsoring sites' expectations of the VISTA members? What is their understanding of the project?
 - What other organizations or individuals does the sponsoring organization collaborate with in the community?
 - What other organizations does the sponsoring organization "compete with" for funding, volunteers, and other resources?

- Familiarize yourself with the individual VISTA project goals (assignment for each member), and how they fit within the sponsor organization. Capture this information on a one- or two-page document so that you can clearly communicate it to others.
 - What are VISTA members expected to do in their role? What are VISTA members not expected to do in their role?
 - What is each VISTA member working on? What progress have they made? What remains to be done before the end of the VISTA term of service?
 - What specific questions or needs do VISTA members have at this time? Are there places in the assignment where VISTA members seem stuck?
- Brainstorm ways you can connect VISTA members with other individuals, organizations, learning opportunities, or other resources to assist them in completing their project. Ask the VISTA member(s) what ideas they have and then share your own ideas with the member(s). You might also refer to the Resource Generator role for further suggestions on linking VISTA members with people and resources.

2. **Conflict resolver/mediator** is a function requiring a great deal of time and patience. Conflicting perspectives and personalities are a normal part of teamwork. However, it is how these conflicts are managed that determines whether or not they detract from project goals. Resolving or managing conflicts can be one of the most important and difficult roles as a Liaison. The first step is to assess your own comfort with conflict. If you are not comfortable with conflict and tend to avoid situations where conflict arises, it is essential that you get additional training or do extra reading to learn to manage conflict effectively. You may also want to find someone on your team who is skilled in this area and can coach you. If conflict is not managed appropriately, it can have a negative impact on key players and may impede progress toward project goals. The following list is a summary of suggestions about conflict from the book, *Building Community—The Human Side of Work*:

- Recognize that conflict is normal and can be an important catalyst for change where change is needed or desired.
- Everyone has experiences of conflict. It is how we handle conflict that is important.
- We can view conflict as negative or positive. A positive approach involves focusing on how best to use this conflict to achieve the project goals. In other words, ask, “How can we use this divergence in purpose or personality to give us a broader perspective or more fully shape our project?”
- Conflict is typically about what people need or want, and rarely about who is right or wrong. If people’s needs are satisfied and their wishes are heard and dealt with fairly, everyone benefits.

- At times it may be important to ask if all parties want to resolve the conflict and try to settle their differences. Otherwise, it may be appropriate to agree to disagree after attempts at understanding have failed.
- If the parties agree to work on a resolution, it is best to assume that each party means well. If you assume the parties are trying to create conflict, your chances of resolution are already diminished. If you help to identify a party's positive intentions, there is greater likelihood differences will be resolved.
- You must then "listen for understanding" (Carl Rogers). This means reframing the issue at hand. Each person must seek to understand the other person's point of view and see the issue from his or her perspective before restating it. Such an approach often paves the way for a breakthrough in dialogue that will result in positive negotiation or resolution.

Adapted from *Building Community—The Human Side of Work*, by George Manning, Kent Curtis and Steve McMillen, Whole Person Associates, 1996

Transformational Leadership and the Liaison Role



Inspiring a Shared Vision

As a Liaison, help define a common vision of the project successfully completed. Become adept at being able to quickly and succinctly communicate the purpose, goals, and value of your project. You will need to do this in order to bring new members up to speed, as a reminder to key players, when seeking out requested resources, and to help motivate key players.



Enabling Others To Act

The Liaison will enable others to act by functioning as the communication link and, most importantly, by stopping conflict from preventing the team from meeting project goals.



Modeling the Way

In order to be sought out as someone who can help in a time of need, the liaison must be competent at resolving his or her own conflicts and be skilled at bringing people together to achieve common goals.

The Relationship between the Liaison & Other VISTA Leader Roles



Ambassador

This role focuses on representing and promoting the VISTA mission among project partners in the community and, therefore, is closely tied to the Liaison role. Both roles emphasize connecting people and fostering relationships.



Facilitator/Educator

Skills required and tasks carried out in your Facilitator/Educator role contribute to your role as Liaison. Facilitation skills will assist you in making communication links and helping to resolve conflict. Furthermore, awareness of members' projects and needs will help you to connect members with people/resources and also to support training opportunities for members.



Mentor

As a Liaison, you are a role model and coach to your members in promoting the VISTA mission and service ethic and in helping them to achieve their project goals for the year.



Recruiter

The Liaison role is complementary to the Recruiter role. An understanding of sponsoring organizations' needs and VISTA projects will help you recruit new members for the next service year.



Resource Generator

As a Liaison, you act as a connection to networks and resources for your VISTA members to help them meet their project goals.



RESOURCE GENERATOR

A VISTA Leader Role

Resource Generator: A Definition

Resource Generators identify and build relationships that lead to the acquisition of needed resources. These resources generally include, but are not limited to, money, materials, supplies, people, knowledge, information, partnerships and alliances. This role requires the VISTA leader to actively identify, link, educate and connect themselves and other VISTA members with those who have power and influence when it comes to getting the resources you need. This role is depends on the VISTA leader's ability to build and constantly expand a network of relationships.

Resource Generator: Role Objectives

The Resource Generator's primary objective is to facilitate VISTA members' successful completion of project tasks by helping them access the resources they need.

Resource Generator: Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes

To be successful as a Resource Generator, a VISTA leader will need to develop specific knowledge, skills and attitudes as outline below.

Knowledge

- A thorough initial understanding of specific VISTA members' projects and project needs (to do this, conduct an assessment as described below)
- Continued awareness of changing VISTA member resource needs throughout the year (remind VISTA members that it is their responsibility to get this information to you)
- Awareness of potential community resources
- Identify community stakeholders
- Awareness of the sponsoring organization's resource connections that might be helpful to you and your VISTA member(s)
- Resource relationships that previous VISTA member(s) may have established
- Awareness of the benefits of reciprocity
- Knowledge of the resource needs of potential community resource partners

Skill

- Networking skills
- Ability to assess and identify mutual needs with potential resource partners
- Ability to seek out unfamiliar groups and organizations with a view to making unlikely connections and reaching common goals
- Organizational skills
- Feedback and follow up with partners in your resource network. When someone in your network helps you, remember to do the following:

1. Thank the person and be specific about what you are thanking them for.
2. Acknowledge the effort they made on your behalf.
3. Tell them what it means to you.

Attitude

- Positive and open attitude about opportunities and risk taking
- Tenacious and undeterred if someone says 'no'
- Win/win
- Gratitude
- Professional
- Enthusiastic

Ongoing Strategic Activities for Effective Resource Generation

- Continually scan the external environment for possible resources.
- Plan ahead and consider the amount of time others will need to make decisions.
- Foster and maintain mutually satisfying resource exchange relationships.
- Manage and maintain key relationships with other VISTA leaders, other members, their supervisors, sponsoring organizations, and the CNCS State Office.
- Remember, success often depends on persistence and building relationships.
- Build a resource exchange team with the VISTA members you support.
- Bring potential donors on site visits. Make the project come alive and touch the heart of the potential resource donor.

Practical Strategies for Effective Resource Generation

Here are some steps you may wish to follow in your role as a Resource Generator.

1. Identify possible resources required for VISTA projects.

According to *Discover Total Resources: A Guide for Nonprofits*, total resources include: people, money, goods and services. All four of these resource categories work together and independently to meet community needs. Excerpts of the resource category definitions are as follows:

- **People:** People are the key to all resources (money, more people, goods, and services). People are everywhere. The challenge is to discover how to utilize the most people, in the best combination, to your organization's greatest advantage.
- **Money:** Money isn't everything, but you can't run a nonprofit without it. According to the American Association of Fundraising Council, individual donations account for 85% of charitable giving in America. Donations are not the only source of money for nonprofits. There is also investment income; membership dues; earned income from businesses, goods and services; government grants and contracts.
- **Goods:** Any personal property value, excluding money and securities, is a good. Often called money substitutes, a good is a vital non-cash resource for any

organization. Goods are available everywhere there are people ... homes, businesses, governments, civic groups. To obtain goods, determine your needs, match them with the most probable sources, and develop an action plan. Throughout national service programs such as AmeriCorps VISTA, these are most often called “in-kind” resources.

- **Services:** Services are the most underrated of all community resources. Corporations, small businesses, vendors, colleges, other nonprofits, individual professionals and tradespeople... everyone providing a service for a fee is almost certainly also providing it for free or at a discount for some worthy cause. Services can also be “in-kind resources.”

2. Conduct a self-assessment with each VISTA member.

The following questions provide you with a basic format for the assessment.

- What is your project goal?
- What tasks are associated with achieving the goal?
- What resources will you need to complete these tasks and meet this project goal?
- What resources do you already have?
- What alliances and/or partnerships are critical to your success?
- Who are the key stakeholders? Who might contribute to or detract from your success?
- What relationship do you need to develop with these key stakeholders?
- What are the specific unmet financial or material needs?
- Are you confident you have the skills required to get the project done?
- What do you need from me to help you generate resources?

These questions are designed to guide you through a self-assessment process. Consultant Mark Goulston suggests that you reframe or rephrase questions into a “fill in the blanks” format. How different does it feel to be asked, “What are your goals?” compared to, “We are meeting together now, because you want to accomplish _____? In order to accomplish _____, you are likely to need _____.” This method encourages VISTA member(s) to work collaboratively with you instead of feeling challenged, or put on the spot with “What are your goals?” Direct questioning can sometimes lead to defensiveness or a feeling of having to give the “right answer.” Try this out and see if you find a difference in the quality of the assessment results.

Note: Consider approaching each member individually before conducting a group assessment. This will be an opportunity to support the development of a resource network between members. It is highly likely that some members of the group already have or are able to secure resources that others need. Often, they are able to share those resources. Ideally, members should reach out to one another in addition to seeking support from you, the VISTA leader.

3. Support VISTA members throughout the year with their resource generation goals.

Transformational Leadership and the Resource Generator Role

Each of the Transformational Leadership practices play a role in generating resources.



Inspiring a Shared Vision

Create a shared vision of a skilled resource generation team. Determine what this means in terms of project success and improving people's lives.



Enabling Others to Act

Resource generation will enable others to act. Members, clients, sponsors and, ultimately, AmeriCorps VISTA all benefit from resources that assist in meeting the VISTA assignment and project goals.



Challenging the Process

Use tried and true methods, and then stretch yourself to be creative. Try new approaches to generating resources. Question the inclusion of certain items on your resource list. Do you really need a particular resource? Or are you simply doing things the way they are usually done? Can something be eliminated?



Modeling the Way

You must walk the talk. Build your own network and introduce VISTA members into that network. Treat VISTA members as part of your network with all the respect that you give to others who help you.



Encouraging From the Heart

Help VISTAs see that seeking resources provides an opportunity for others to add meaning to their lives by making meaningful contributions of time, talent, money, or material goods. Ultimately, well-used resources change people's lives for the better.

The Relationship between the Resource Generator & Other VISTA Leader Roles



Ambassador

This role provides opportunities to gain access to resources. The astute leader will learn about existing and potential community resources.



Liaison

This role ties in with the need to connect members with the people whose resources they need. This role is about empowering members to generate resources on their own.



Facilitator/Educator

This role also complements the Resource Generator role. Facilitating relationships and creating opportunities for members to learn and generate resources is a big part of being successful in the Resource Generator role.



Recruiter

The skills used in successfully recruiting new VISTAs or community volunteers are powerful when it comes to finding and recruiting other human resources. The leader must broaden his or her understanding of recruitment beyond member recruitment to include resource recruitment. Ask yourself what talents, skills, knowledge, and connections volunteers can bring to project tasks and goals.



Mentor

As a Mentor, the VISTA leader has an opportunity to guide and support VISTA members in improving their ability to generate resources.