

# What makes a VISTA different from an employee?

It's key to understand the differences between a VISTA and a regular employee and make sure that other staff is aware of the differences. The differences provide a frame for how to meet the unique needs of the VISTA member. Working with your staff, you may want to coach them on the differences.

## Some Key Differences:

- Motivation for applying
- Potential need for greater support & coaching
- Compensation
- Tenure in position
- Commitment and sacrifices
- Budget
- Expectations/goals from the experience
- Responsibilities
- Opportunities for growth
- Scope of impact
- Regional and national implications
- Ability to terminate

## The Implications of these Differences:

- Start up and orientation might be different. With a VISTA, supervisors may have to help meet some basic needs that a regular employee wouldn't require. For example, VISTAs can't focus on the task at hand if they don't know where they will live. A supervisor may want to assist the VISTA in finding a place to stay.
- VISTAs are working their way out of a "job." This might create stress for the VISTAs as they have a limited amount of time to accomplish goals set forth in the VAD.
- There's a potential need for greater support. The VISTA may be young, in his or her first office position, or transitioning from the corporate world to a nonprofit, or from a managerial position to a lesser one. The supervisor may need to help the VISTA adjust to both the nonprofit world and to the cultures of the organization and community.
- The supervisor should share with the VISTA how the organization works—its culture. Give the VISTA as much upfront information as possible and articulate the non-negotiables.
- A national recruit may not have the connections with and knowledge of the local community that a local recruit may have. For example, someone who is locally-based may know where amenities such as grocery stores, gas stations, and laundry mats are located.

In reviewing these differences with your staff on site you may want to debrief them on these differences. Suggestion: if you have a visible writing space or white board you can go over the differences and similarities with your staff in a Venn diagram.

**How is a VISTA different from a regular employee?**

