

VISTA Leaders

VISTA Leaders are former VISTAs, AmeriCorps members, or Peace Corps volunteers who demonstrated exemplary skills and leadership in community service. About 165 VISTA Leaders serve each year throughout the country with projects that support economic opportunity, education, access to food resources and more for economically disadvantaged individuals.

1. Mission of a VISTA Leader

VISTA Leaders support and coordinate larger VISTA projects (involving at least six VISTAs) in their efforts to address the needs of low-income communities. They serve as role models, trainers, and resource providers who strengthen the capacity of VISTAs and VISTA projects. They serve different functions depending on the needs of the local projects, like recruiting and coordinating VISTAs; preparing in-service trainings; identifying new funding sources; and serving as liaisons with the community and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

2. Goals of the VISTA Leader Program

- Foster greater communication between VISTAs and their project sponsor, and among VISTAs within a state and a cluster.
- Provide additional support for VISTA members.
- Provide an extended service opportunity for outstanding VISTAs who demonstrate leadership abilities.
- Promote leadership skills in the service and nonprofit field.

3. Responsibilities of a VISTA Leader

Specific responsibilities vary, but most VISTA Leaders are involved in developing or expanding a new or existing VISTA project. Leaders help recruit, screen, and train VISTA members. They coordinate VISTAs and develop monitoring, reporting, and project management systems. Leaders promote information sharing; create a VISTA support network; develop in-service training workshops; conduct site visits; and create model programs. Many write grants, fundraise, and conduct broad-based public awareness campaigns. In general, they set an example of leadership for VISTAs: ensure positive relations, facilitate idea sharing, and mediate issues with the community, the project, supervisors, and VISTA members.

3. Responsibilities of a VISTA Leader, cont.

VISTA Leaders do not supervise VISTAs (or other CNCS-supported National Service Participants or volunteers). They are prohibited from preparing VISTA project applications or applying for other CNCS grants. They are also prohibited from preparing and submitting progress reports, although they often assist in gathering information from VISTAs and local site supervisors.

4. Requesting a VISTA Leader

Corporation State Offices discuss the opportunity to place a VISTA Leader with project sponsors. Coordination and planning should begin as the project is being developed or renewed for another year. Sponsors must request a Leader by including a specific position description in their project application to the State Office. If the need for a Leader develops after the project application has been approved, the assignment description should be submitted to the State Office for approval and the project application should be amended accordingly. The assignment description should also be used as a tool for recruiting.

5. Application Process

Once a Leader position is approved, the sponsor creates an opportunity listing for the position in the My AmeriCorps portal. A VISTA who wishes to serve as a Leader must complete and submit an application to that listing through the My AmeriCorps portal. The project sponsor reviews applications, conducts interviews, and selects a final applicant for the Leader position.

VISTA Leaders, cont.

6. Selection of a Leader

VISTA Leaders are carefully selected on the basis of their service performance and their ability to communicate well with their peers. They are selected by the project sponsor and approved by the State Office. VISTAs who have completed at least one year of VISTA service with strong recommendations, outstanding performance, and demonstrated leadership ability are eligible to serve. VISTA Leaders are placed throughout the year.

7. Placement of a Leader

A specific assignment description for each Leader is developed by the project sponsor and submitted to the Corporation State Office. The sponsor reviews applications, conducts interviews (either by telephone or in person) and selects an applicant to serve as Leader. The Corporation State Office places the applicant into the VISTA Leader position.

8. Training

VISTA Leaders have three training opportunities during their year: VISTA Leader Orientation, Professional Development Webinars and the Action Learning Challenge. They can also receive one-on-one coaching from the Leader Training Team. Leaders also have access to a large collection of resources devoted to them on the VISTA Campus.

All VISTA Leaders attend the VISTA Leader Orientation, preferably within the first three months of starting their Leader year. The orientation is designed to enhance and reinforce the Leaders' understanding of important leadership capacities and the six VISTA Leader roles — mentor, ambassador, liaison, facilitator & educator, recruiter, and resource developer.

8. Training, cont.

After completing the orientation, Leaders can participate in monthly skill-building webinars on topics that enrich their professional and personal growth. Leaders also have the opportunity to apply for an Action Learning Challenge, an immersion-learning model that is designed to enhance professional skills through meeting a significant goal that will positively influence the future of the VISTA program.

To learn more about VISTA Leader training opportunities go to the Leaders area of the VISTA Campus.

9. Length of Service

An individual may serve a total of five full-year terms in VISTA. Technically, then, a VISTA Leader could serve a maximum of four years if the individual performed outstandingly and the State Office agrees that it benefits the project.