

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

By Elaine Williams

One of the most difficult challenges in managing a project is to avoid the 'activity trap.' People too frequently want to dive head on into activities related to a project with very little planning, prioritizing, determining goals, or developing milestones or measurements of goal achievement. This can be dangerous because it can lead to chaos, failure to achieve goals and an inability to coordinate appropriate activities.

The VISTA leader needs to have a clear definition of their project management role so they effectively guide their VISTA members to successful goal attainment of the VISTA project. Project management is a carefully planned and organized effort to accomplish goals that lead to desired outcomes. It includes developing a project plan, which includes project goals and objectives, specifying tasks or how goals will be achieved, defining what resources are needed, and working within a prescribed budget and timeline.

Project management also includes implementing the project plan, along with periodic benchmarks for checkpoints. Plans are not prisons. Checkpoints provide an opportunity to make course corrections when new information comes in or situations change requiring a change in plans. If no changes are required then these checkpoints assure that the plan is being guided according to the prescribed agreements. There are several phases to project management, but the important phases include: planning, implementation, evaluation, refinement of the plan and re-evaluation.

Within each phase of a project plan, the VISTA leader will need to offer guidance and support for management of timelines, tasks to be accomplished, setting priorities, identifying methods to monitor and influence the project's progress, planning for barriers and interruptions, and, evaluation and course correction. Finally, and most importantly, lines of communication need to be established during every phase of a project which identify: who needs to be communicated to/from; how often; through what method(s); topics and information to be communicated, feedback and follow-up.

Most importantly, determination needs to be made regarding who will be responsible for organizing and disseminating needed communication and ensuring the lines of communication are open and flowing as prescribed in the project plan.

As a VISTA leader you want to consider the following as you translate your assignment into a project plan:

1. What is your responsibility in supporting a VISTA member as he/she implements goals, activities and steps of the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)?
2. What phases of a project plan do you anticipate being the most challenging for you? Why? What can you do to maximize your success?
3. How will you coordinate your role responsibilities with the project supervisor's role and responsibilities?
4. What knowledge must you possess in order to lead and support your VISTA members as they enter various phases of their VISTA Assignment Description?
5. What skills do you require to ensure successful project management?
6. What fears or concerns do you have related to your VISTA leader role and your responsibilities related to project management? What resources can you access to help you be successful in overcoming these fears or concerns?