

## Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project

Dear Member:

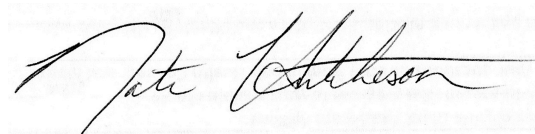
We are currently accepting applications for member organizations to host one or more AmeriCorps VISTA members through the Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project, a collaboration of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and Housing Action Illinois.

VISTA members give a year of full-time service to their country, and, in return receive health insurance, a monthly stipend, and an education award. VISTAs are placed for one year with host-site organizations to work on projects identified by the host-site that will build their capacity to fight poverty in their community. Host-sites identify and design the projects to create, launch, update, expand programs such as volunteer recruitment and management, resource development, and community organizing. Selected host sites are responsible for covering a portion of the costs (around \$3,500), providing an appropriate workspace, as well as project supervision and guidance.

Attached you will find a document outlining the details of the VISTA program, what roles VISTAs can play within an organization, the principles the program is based upon and the focus areas for VISTA projects. This is not an exhaustive explanation but it will provide you a working understanding of the program and help you decide whether your organization should apply to host a VISTA member.

The deadline for submitting an application is 5:00 pm CST on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013. Successful applicants will be notified by February 15; executed agreements will be due March 1, 2013. For more information or to request an application, please contact the VISTA Leader Lily Brown at [lily@housingactionil.org](mailto:lily@housingactionil.org) or 312-939-6074 ext 107.

Sincerely,



Nate Hutcheson  
(312) 939-6074 x 201  
[nate@housingactionil.org](mailto:nate@housingactionil.org)

Below you will find some bullet point basics about the requirements for all parties involved in the Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project. Followed will be an overview of the VISTA program, including things to think about before applying, appropriate VISTA projects, the pillars and characteristics of VISTA and the focus areas of acceptable VISTA projects. This will provide you a working knowledge of the VISTA program and allow you to effectively apply, but to be the best possible host site and VISTA supervisor you should also look over the following information:

<http://vistacampus.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2223>

This is a link to the Supervisor's Manual and provides detailed information of the rules and regulations for VISTA's and their supervisors. It is a useful resource that you will reference throughout your time as a supervisor. Strongly encourage bookmarking this webpage.

<https://vistacampus.org/login/index.php>

This is the link to access the VISTA Campus for Supervisors. The Campus provides the most exhaustive information for VISTAs, Supervisors and Leaders with a Campus focused on each of them. In order to access the information you will be required to create an account and will need to log in whenever you want to access it. However, you can also access it (with some limitations) as a guest. It is strongly recommended to visit this, as the Campus will provide you links to important resources like the manual and other aspects of the AmeriCorps pages. There are also webinars, tools, and forums available through the Campus.

<http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/sponsorguide.pdf>

This is a helpful brochure that will be useful to read over during your application process and in the earlier stages of being a VISTA sponsor, it will not be as useful as the year goes on like the link prior. Also, it is deceptively long if you look at page numbers because it alternates between an informational page and an image and the next page, making it a quicker read than expected

<http://vistacampus.org/mod/resource/view.php?id=10385%3E>

This is an interactive PDF that can also be downloaded as a standard PDF as well. It does have audio that accompanies it but this can be muted if you would rather simply read along. It can be a little cheesy but has helpful resources and provides further examples and tools to determine proper VISTA projects. It is a 101 guide that will be helpful in the beginning of the process.

<http://www.americorps.gov/about/programs/vista.asp>

This is the link to the "About" section for the VISTA program on the AmeriCorps website. It is a good place to start to get your bearings at the AmeriCorps webpage and provides basic information.

[http://www.americorps.gov/about/programs/vista\\_faq.asp](http://www.americorps.gov/about/programs/vista_faq.asp)

FAQs for people interested in being VISTAs to reference when recruiting and explaining the program to interested parties.

## **Program Requirements**

The following sections outline the basic requirements and expectations of IAHSF VISTA members, Project Host Sites, and Housing Action Illinois as the Project Sponsor. This information will be further outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding between Housing Action Illinois and the Project Host Site after the approval of the application.

### **AmeriCorps VISTA members will:**

- Build capacity for organizations and communities to ameliorate issues related to poverty;
- Commit to serving as a full-time VISTA member for one year;
- Receive an annual living allowance of approximately \$10,000 and healthcare from government;
- Receive a post-service Education Award of \$5,500 OR a \$1,500 cash stipend from government upon completion of year of service;
- Attend VISTA Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) and any training events prescribed by IAHSF and/or CNCS;
- Participate in national days of service including Martin Luther King Day, 9/11 Day of Remembrance, and AmeriCorps Week in May;
- Be available for service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### **Project Host Sites will:**

- Provide a Site Supervisor to give day-to-day supervision of the activities of the VISTA member(s);
- Recruit, screen, interview, and select VISTA candidates with the assistance of Housing Action Illinois;
- Provide VISTA member(s) with on-site orientation and training to the project and the local community;
- Reimburse VISTA member(s) for all local project-related travel expenses;
- Assist VISTA member(s) to find safe, appropriate, and affordable housing, if housing is not provided by the Project Host Site;
- Enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Housing Action Illinois which details the expectations of all parties involved;
- Complete Cost-Share Commitment form to provide Housing Action Illinois a Project Participation fee to be estimated at \$3,500 per VISTA member position during the 2013-2014 fiscal year and pay fee upon request.

### **Housing Action Illinois and CNCS will:**

- Provide Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) for VISTA members;
- Provide In-Service Training for the VISTA member(s) during their term of service;
- Provide oversight and coordination through the IAHSF Director and VISTA Leader;
- Visit Project Host Sites when appropriate to assist in the self-assessing their progress toward project goals and performance measures;
- Assist with recruitment and selection of VISTA members
- CNCS manages VISTA member payroll and healthcare

## Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program

Authorized in 1964, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a federal anti-poverty program administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). VISTA provides full-time volunteers (VISTAs) to nonprofit organizations and public and local agencies to strengthen programs that bring individuals and communities out of poverty. VISTAs support anti-poverty projects by building the capacity of organizations serving low-income communities; encouraging volunteer service; and generating the commitment of private sector resources. The VISTA program places VISTAs with sponsors, which absorb most of the costs related to project supervision and logistical support. The VISTA program provides a small living allowance and certain benefits for VISTAs. Investment by the sponsors and the community is fundamental to the VISTA program, as the VISTA resource is intended to be short-term.

### Things to Think about Before Applying for a VISTA Project

Supervising a VISTA is different from supervising a local, paid employee. VISTAs are volunteers, and they commit themselves to serving for one year in the community and to the goals of the project. Therefore, they have a community development and capacity-building focus to their project assignment. Other staff in your organization may not recognize the difference. One of the challenges of having VISTAs is ensuring that everyone who interacts with them understands they are with your organization for a very specific purpose and not as “general help.” At the same time, VISTAs are subject to the same or similar working conditions as their colleagues and should not be exempted from following the rules of conduct that everyone else has to follow. Your role as supervisor is to support the integration of VISTAs into your organization and the community, while at the same time giving appropriate feedback to them on their service performance and appropriate community involvement.

The most important competency in supervising a VISTA project is communication with your VISTAs. Do not assume they understand the big picture regarding the project. Meet regularly with your VISTAs.

In addition, you must:

- Share the project plan with the VISTA
- Introduce the VISTA to the community
- Provide structure, advice, and guidance for the VISTA's assignment
- Clarify internal policies for requesting leave, and obtaining reimbursements and obtaining supplies
- Understand and refer, as needed, to the full set of policies in the VISTA Member Handbook
- Assess assignment performance with the VISTA
- Give the VISTA feedback on their project activities
- Work with the VISTA on meeting personal and professional goals
- Partner with the VISTA in developing community activities
- Ensure that the rules, regulations, and guidelines of the VISTA program are met
- Collaborate with CNCS State Office staff specialists on in-service training needs
- Provide support in emergencies as outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement between your organization and the Corporation

## Key Questions to Consider

- Is there a poverty-focused project my organization would like to start or expand?
- What are the long-term goals of the project?
- Are the project's goals to help move people and communities out of poverty (not just to make poverty more tolerable)?
- What population(s) does the project target?
- How will we include the local community in project planning and implementation?
- How will a VISTA support these efforts?
- How will we measure the project's impact?
- With what other community groups or organizations will we collaborate?
- Do we have the resources to support one or more VISTAs?

## Types of Service Performed by VISTAs

In determining whether the VISTA program is the right match for your organization's needs, think about the kinds of activities you expect VISTAs to perform.

Below are some examples of the natural progression in the types of service performed by a VISTA. Except for discrete training purposes, VISTAs should not be involved in performing direct services such as tutoring, teaching, counseling, driving clients, painting, manual labor, or clerical work.

If the VISTA program does not quite meet your needs, you may consider other programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service, including AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps), and Senior Corps. For more information on these programs, visit [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

<b>Acceptable Service</b>	<b>Capacity Building</b>	<b>Sustainable Activities</b>
Recruit volunteers	Develop forms, volunteer assignments	Develop volunteer handbook
Train direct service providers	Write training curriculum or train the trainer curriculum	Develop training manual
Coordinate projects	Develop procedures and systems	Develop volunteer management system and procedural guide
Public speaking	Develop speakers' bureau	Develop community partnerships
Write press releases	Develop press kits, media database	Secure media partners
Organize fundraising events	Grant writing; develop database	Secure project staffing
Organize task forces/coalitions	Develop leadership structure of task force/coalition	Create infrastructure
Conduct outreach	Design brochures, posters	Create mechanism for project evaluation

Of course you can create projects that are not listed above, as long as they are capacity-building in focus. It is important to keep in mind that VISTA projects continue for multiple years, typically three to five. The VISTA Project Plan and VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) outline the activities for the project's implementation during the year.

Although the project plan and VAD outlines the results you expect to achieve during a one-year period, the goals should relate to a three-year timeline. Meaning, the project you outline can have goals that have a scope beyond one year but the tasks assigned to the VISTA should be able to be completed in one year. It is contingent upon CNCS funding and project approval, HAI approval, and your performance as a host site the previous years that your organization will be able to have a VISTA(s) for multiple years. Therefore, plans should be outlined to continue the project initiated by a VISTA without the continuation of the VISTA program to be prepared.

It is general practice to follow the following project focus for each year in the VISTA program:

- 1<sup>st</sup> year with VISTA(s): Develop Project(s)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year with VISTA(s): Implement Project(s)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year with VISTA(s): Wrap-up Project(s)

## **Effective Programming Characteristics**

Programming priorities are derived from local, state, and national needs or trends, and they may change over time as needs change.

Programming should be based primarily on addressing local needs. Project approval decisions by the Corporation State Offices will be guided by programming that addresses the VISTA program's "Key Principles" and the Corporation's "Pillars of Service."

### **Those Pillars are:**

- **Service as a Solution:** To increase the social impact on individuals in communities served through CNCS programs.
- **Expand Opportunities to Serve:** To increase the number and diversity of those who participate in service and volunteerism.
- **Embrace Innovation:** To increase investment in community programs that work.
- **Build Enduring Capacity:** To strengthen individual, organizational and community capacity to use service as a solution to achieve results.

## **VISTA Program Key Principles**

Each VISTA project must be developed in accordance with the parameters defined by federal law, federal regulations, and the key VISTA principles: Anti-poverty Focus, Capacity Building, Sustainable Solutions, and Community Empowerment.

### **Anti-Poverty Focus**

As previously noted, by law, the purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. The goal of every project must be to help individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. The project should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

### **Community Empowerment**

Potential and current VISTA project sponsors must ensure that their project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community assets, strengths, and resources.

Community participation is not only required by federal law and regulation, it is also a highly effective practice for programming that supports lasting change in the community. It allows low-income individuals the freedom to speak for themselves in determining the projects that suit their specific needs. It often results in innovative programming, as well as meaningful experiences for the VISTAs.

### **Sustainable Solutions**

As originally designated in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act and reinforced in the Serve America Act, VISTA members are a short-term resource who serve to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. All VISTA projects should be developed with a goal to phase-out the need for VISTA members and strengthen the ability of the project to continue without them.

VISTA projects typically last three to five years. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must think about how to use the VISTA project to phase in other resources and systems to replace the VISTA resource.

Mobilizing community resources helps to ensure that anti-poverty activities continue long after the VISTA resource is withdrawn. The following conditions are necessary for achieving sustainability through VISTA programming:

- The commitment, energy, and initiative that the VISTA brings to the community
- The involvement of the sponsoring organization in project supervision, support, self-assessment, and planning
- The participation of the project beneficiaries in all phases of project development and implementation
- The continued participation of the community through the provision of volunteers, material and financial resources, and expertise

The sponsor and Corporation must regularly monitor progress towards sustainability to ensure that progressive steps are taken toward the eventual absorption of project initiatives by the sponsor and the community.

## **Capacity Building**

One way to achieve Sustainable Solutions is to strengthen the ability of local organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and partnership development, VISTAs help sponsors to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. However, projects should focus their performance measures on achieving outcomes and impact on the community and/or beneficiary population, and not outcomes on capacity building for the sponsoring organization or its partners, affiliates, or intermediary organizations.

In order to build capacity, VISTAs do not perform direct service. Direct service is defined as activities that immediately address individual clients' needs and these activities are usually focused on short-term goals. VISTAs are community mobilizers. They are not temporary employees. Ideally, VISTAs work themselves out of a job and create systems that remain long after their service ends.

Furthermore, VISTAs are prohibited from engaging in activities that would supplant the tasks of or displace paid staff, contractors, or existing volunteers. This includes activities related to the development and management of other Corporation grants and programs.

VISTA projects have an average lifecycle of three-five years. New project development takes place throughout the year. However, there may be a waiting period for final project approval and ensuing

VISTA placement depending on the number of VISTA projects being closed, the amount of resources available, and a new sponsor's attributes in relation to the rest of the state's portfolio.

## **Priority Programming Areas**

In fiscal year 2011, VISTA and the Corporation State Offices will give priority to new project development and the renewal of current projects that focus on three of the Social Impact Areas of the Serve America Act: Economic Opportunity, Education and Healthy Futures. In addition to the wide variety of programming that can fall under the Social Impact Areas listed below, VISTA will target new development supporting the Department of Education's Title I School Improvement Grants, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, and mayoral-led efforts to develop city-based partnerships implementing antipoverty programming, as appropriate.

### **Economic Opportunity**

One in four working families (and the 21 million children in those households) is dependent on employment that offers poor job security, low pay, few benefits, and little opportunity for advancement.

Acquiring equity, financial education, and generating savings are critical to helping people move toward financial stability, recognize and avoid financial predators, reduce the high costs of poverty, increase access to sound financial products and services in low-income communities, and capitalize on financial opportunity. For FY 2011, priority for new project development will be given to those projects focusing on the following areas:

### **Asset Development**

Asset development remains one of the most promising program areas by which VISTAs can truly effect sustainable change in partnership with low-income communities and the organizations serving them. The VISTA program dedicates members to microenterprise initiatives, which help low-income individuals become self-sufficient by developing their own businesses; and to programs focusing both on general financial literacy and asset savings, such as Individual Development Accounts (IDA). VISTAs can also play a role in supporting Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites and ensuring that low-income individuals and families are able to access benefits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Childcare Tax Credit (CTC), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

### **Financial Literacy**

In the United States, an estimated 19 million households do not have a savings or a checking account. VISTA supports programs dedicated to empowering individuals and low-income communities to take advantage of opportunities and build wealth that will ultimately lead to an exit from poverty. The ability to budget, plan, manage, and capitalize on financial opportunities are important skills to all, but they are vital to those with limited financial resources available.

Individual financial literacy is the first line of defense against fraud, deception, and high financial costs that often plague low-income communities.

### **Community Economic Development**

VISTA supports programming that contributes to the economic development of low-income communities. By improving sustainable growth in living standards, VISTAs are able to have a lasting impact on the community and build the economic infrastructure that will provide tangible and intangible benefits for residents of the surrounding area.

### **Housing**

VISTA supports programming dedicated to connecting families and individuals to emergency housing and transitional services, providing affordable permanent housing, and encouraging advocacy with populations in need.

In particular, VISTA supports projects that enhance the capacity of community groups to empower individuals to be involved in preserving and maintaining affordable housing. This includes projects that integrate residents in equitable housing development and revitalization.

### **Employment**

VISTA supports programming that enables individuals to obtain or train for employment that is sufficient to avoid or exit poverty, provide necessities, and allow

individuals to save for the future, particularly veterans and spouses of deployed enlisted military personnel.

## **Education**

VISTAs continue to play a role in developing programs that promote education among at-risk children through early childhood education; educational access and assistance to youth; and connecting youth with the resources that will lead them to college or vocational education. The completion of high school greatly affects the chances of one's ability to provide sufficiently for him or herself and to gain a future of prosperity. Although VISTA supports service-learning as a self-development tool for VISTAs and VISTA Leaders, service-learning as a single-focus programming area is not a priority. The placement of VISTAs at colleges and universities to serve their student populations is not appropriate, rather VISTAs should focus on building the systems necessary to connect institutions of higher education and their resources with low-income, low performing schools.

In addition to project that focus on youth completing high school, projects focusing on adult learners achieving that same goal as a means to move towards higher education, vocational training, or employment remain a priority, as do projects aimed at providing basic literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) for immigrant and refugee populations.

The VISTA program places a particularly high priority on new project development with communities with underperforming schools, and schools that are participating in the Department of Education's Title I School Improvement Grants.

## **Healthy Futures**

The VISTA program gives priority for programming in this area to community-based projects that develop or enhance programs in the areas of Access to Health Care and Health Care Services, as outlined in the Serve America Act.

### **Access to Health Care**

Organizations that provide access to preventive services, health services and benefits for low income individuals, particularly homeless and veteran populations as well as families of enlisted military personnel, are strongly encouraged to consider VISTA as a solution to enhancing the reach of their programming to under-served populations.

### **Health Care Services**

Legislated programming areas include supporting projects that address significant health care problems, including mental illness, obesity (especially among children), and health care for homeless individuals (especially homeless children) through prevention, treatment, and community-based care activities. VISTA also seeks projects that provide for the care and rehabilitation of mentally ill individuals and individuals with disabilities. Of particular priority are programs that provide mental health services to the families of low-income enlisted military personnel.

## **Veterans and Military Families**

VISTA resources should be used to increase economic opportunity for low-income veterans and military families. Projects serving low-income veterans and military families should be developed under one or more of the Economic Opportunity, Education and Healthy Futures categories, with special priority given to support the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness efforts to end homelessness among veterans.

All VISTA projects should be encouraged to recruit veterans, particularly those projects serving veterans and military families.