



AMERICORPS | FLORIDA VISTA NETWORK

2023-24 Resource Guide

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Background

What is AmeriCorps VISTA? VISTA stands for Volunteers in Service to America. It is a national service program sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that has been described as the “domestic Peace Corps.” It was established in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson as part of the War on Poverty. Individuals ages 18 and up, dedicate a year of their lives to help meet the needs of low-income communities across the country.

What is the AmeriCorps|Florida VISTA Network? A|FVN partners with colleges, universities, and community-based organizations to place AmeriCorps members throughout Florida. The program provides networking opportunities, resources, and training for those participating in our VISTA network to combat poverty through engaging students and leveraging higher education resources. AmeriCorps members are successfully building bridges between the classrooms and communities by connecting educators, students, and community partners to improve education and address societal needs through campus-community partnerships, applied civic education, and engaged citizenship.

Local projects are developed in accordance with AmeriCorps VISTA’s core principles: an antipoverty focus, community empowerment, sustainable solutions, and capacity building. In alignment with this mission and Florida State University’s goal to bolster education across Florida, our VISTA program concentrates its capacity building efforts in the following education-based focus areas: Education, Economic Opportunity, Healthy Families, Veterans & Military Families, and Environmental Stewardship.

The AmeriCorps|Florida VISTA Network is a program of Florida State University’s Center for Leadership & Social Change.

Potential Engagement Strategies for VISTA Projects

- Community-based learning and/or civic engagement experiences for students
- Symbiotic campus-community collaboration/partnerships and research
- Advancing equity and increasing opportunity
- College Access & Success programming/mentoring
- Collective Impact
- Philanthropy
- Social Innovation and/or Social Entrepreneurship

Project Criteria

- Eligible Project Host Sites include colleges, universities, and community-based organizations in Florida. *Proposed projects should clearly describe how the proposed VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) and position description relates to the partnerships between higher education and local communities to address poverty. All VISTA host sites must be a public sector organization or private organization designated as non-profit by the IRS.*
- Faculty and staff designated as the VISTA Site Supervisor or supervising the VISTA at additional Project Sites are required to participate in a Site Supervisor Orientation.
- Project proposals must adhere to the guidelines of appropriate tasks for an AmeriCorps VISTA. AmeriCorps VISTAs are different from AmeriCorps members. VISTAs do not provide direct service, but indirect service. (Direct service for purposes of training volunteers or for short-term projects is permissible.) VISTAs serve as coordinators and capacity builders. They are not the ones doing service, but the ones making service possible for others. This may include (but is not limited to) the creation of new campus-community partnerships, recruitment and coordination of volunteers, and grant writing. VISTA members may not lobby, engage in religious activities, or provide administrative support.

- Each proposed A|FVN project/position should engage college students, faculty, or staff and leverage education and community resources to address **one primary AmeriCorps Priority Area**. Refer to the [FY 2023 VISTA Guidance](#) for additional details. VISTA position descriptions should focus on building long-term relationships with community organizations. Specifically, A|FVN AmeriCorps positions should focus on building the systems necessary to connect institutions of higher education and their resources with low-income communities. For projects proposing AmeriCorps members be placed at a community non-profit organization, applications should demonstrate how higher education partnerships will be leveraged to benefit low-income communities.

Sustainability Policy & Project Timeline

Institutions submitting a **new** Project Host Site Application should complete the application and VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) to reflect project activities and goals for year one of an anticipated three-year project cycle with the goal of building capacity to reach sustainability at the conclusion of three years. Likewise, institutions whose current VISTA position(s) are entering year two or three should complete applications and VADs accordingly working towards the goal of sustainability at the end of project year three. VISTA projects are reviewed and renewed annually. At the conclusion of a three-year project cycle, projects may be renewed for an additional year on a case-by-case basis.

Year 1 – AmeriCorps VISTA Member establishes and creates a program or project.

Year 2 – AmeriCorps VISTA Member continues to implement project and begins to create structure for sustainability.

Year 3 – AmeriCorps VISTA Member focuses on making the project sustainable.

Year 4 – Considered on a case-by-case basis to achieve project sustainability.

Project Participation Fee: To help offset the costs of match requirements to AmeriCorps, administration, recruiting, supporting, and training VISTA members, Project Host Sites pay a Project Participation Fee (non-Federal funds) to A|FVN based upon the number of VISTA slots for which an institution is applying to host (*not the placement of any specific VISTA member*). The Project Participation Fee is estimated to be \$6,000 to \$6,500 per VISTA slot in FY 2023-24 (anticipated grant period is from 9/24/23 to 9/23/24). *The exact amount will be set when AmeriCorps issues the terms and conditions of the 2023 grant renewal application to A|FVN. If your Project Host Site Application is approved, A|FVN will issue a Memorandum of Understanding, Cost-Share Commitment Form, invoice, and related sub-grantee paperwork.* This Project Participation Fee is comparable with other similar programs nationwide. A Project Participation Fee is a common practice for VISTA programs across the country and is strongly encouraged by AmeriCorps to help build the capacity of projects. This fee is non-refundable. Payment for 2023-24 Project Participation will be due to A|FVN on or near August 18, 2023.

Review Process: Project Host Site Applications will be evaluated by A|FVN in part using the criteria outlined on the Reviewer’s Score Sheet provided as part of the Resource Guide. Project Host Site Applications receiving an average score of 70 or below may be excluded from consideration. To ensure that VISTA resources are placed in as many communities as possible, A|FVN considers approving Project Host Site Applications from diverse sectors of higher education in the Florida College System, the State University System of Florida, as well as the independent sector. Consideration is also given to applications from community-based organizations that collaborate/promote access to higher education.

Force Majeure & COVID-19: *Subject to AmeriCorps’ SE Regional Office review and approval,* to best support VISTA programming during times of uncertainty including COVID-19, host sites are asked to plan and prepare for extended teleservice programming, wherever possible, as long as AmeriCorps approves while ensuring the VAD is a direct reflection of that work. This includes providing remote supervision, project management and implementation, necessary equipment and access to materials to support teleservice of AmeriCorps members. We understand that some projects may require the AmeriCorps member to work in-person regardless of current or future conditions (e.g., COVID-19). If the selected candidate is expected to do in person work, A|FVN requires its host sites to inform candidates prior to selection by explicitly stating in your position description and interview of candidates. Please convey the percentage of time expected for in-person work, and if that percentage is likely to change or not depending on COVID restrictions.

Adapted AmeriCorps VISTA Programming & Priority Areas

Focus Area	Objective	Programming Areas
Education	K-12 Readiness & Success	Projects in this area can include providing services for children in poverty to make gains in school readiness and success. These projects can include any in or out-of-school tutoring or mentoring programs for K-12 students.
	Post –Secondary Readiness & Success	Projects in this area can include any in or out-of-school tutoring, mentoring, or college access and success programing for economically at-risk students.
	STEM Education	AmeriCorps VISTA remains committed to expanding projects focused on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education programs that will build partnerships between STEM students, faculty/staff, and community partners to develop long-term solutions for bolstering the number of underrepresented students who obtain STEM degrees.
	Community Colleges	Projects that collaborate or work in concert with community colleges are encouraged, given the hub of services and supports that these schools currently provide to low-income populations. Beyond the significant educational benefits imparted through curriculum and class instruction, community colleges provide a strong foundation for workforce development and strengthening local economies.
Healthy Futures	Food Security & Community Gardens	Projects in this area can include any projects that increase access to nutritious food, ranging from food banks or food pantries to food reclamation projects, and community garden projects for low-income families and individuals.
	Access to Health Care	Projects in this area can include various health services programs, ranging from support in acquiring health services or health insurance to providing health services in health clinics.
	COVID-19	Projects could include developing new partnerships with programs that offer access to health benefits, education and/or services support, such as programs focused on community pandemic recovery, K-12 learning loss, & technology access to support virtual learning. Other goals could be fundraising to support existing/new telemedicine services, creating or enhancing community volunteer or peer volunteer programs & creating outreach.
Economic Opportunity	Financial Literacy	Projects in this area can include various financial literacy concepts, ranging from budgeting and long-term financial planning to tax support and general financial literacy.
	Housing	Projects in this area can include various housing projects, ranging from developing and/or repairing healthy, safe, and affordable housing units, to making accommodations to make housing accessible to persons with disabilities.
	Job Readiness	Projects in this area can include various employment services, ranging from skill and job trainings, resume/portfolio development to job search process and employment placements.
Environmental Stewardship	Energy Efficiency	Projects in this area can include connecting underserved populations to renewable energy and energy efficient practices. Building community resilience.
	Awareness & Stewardship	
Veterans & Military Families	Support services for low-income veterans and military families	Projects in this area can include initiatives that provide support to low-income veterans and military families in the areas of Education, Healthy Futures, & Economic Opportunity.

PRIORITY POPULATIONS AND REGIONS FOR FY 2023:

Within the focus areas described above, AmeriCorps VISTA encourages **new** project development in the following specific populations and geographic areas. Projects focused on serving these populations and communities will be given the highest consideration for investments of AmeriCorps VISTA resources.

- **Rural Communities** - VISTA seeks a balanced portfolio of urban and rural programming. More than 35% of those living in rural counties live in high-poverty areas, and 85% of persistent poverty counties are in rural America. VISTA will continue to invest resources to create economic opportunity and ensure access to health care in rural communities.
- **Native American Communities** - According to the Census Bureau, Native Americans have the highest poverty rates in the country, and reservations are some of the poorest locations in the United States. The devastating impact of COVID-19 on tribal nations and communities was a clear demonstration of the continuing need to support economic and health initiatives. The Navajo Nation alone surpassed New York and New Jersey for the highest per-capita infection rate in the US in May 2020. (CNN)
- **Areas of Concentrated Poverty** - Additionally, Priority will be given to projects that serve individuals experiencing deep poverty and communities with a high number of households experiencing deep poverty (concentrated poverty). Deep poverty is defined as having a household income below 50% of the federal poverty line.

Example 1: VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

**Adapted from Ohio Campus Compact's VAD for C2C*

VISTA Project: State College Peer Mentoring VISTA Member Name: Johnny AmeriCorps		
Site Name: Flamingo State College	VISTA/CNCS Focus Area: Education/Connect2Complete (C2C)	Program Year: 2018
Additional Programming Option: n/a		
VISTA Member Activities and Steps Checklist		Planned Period of Work
<p>Goal 1: To help more first-year, Pell-eligible college students persist to second-year enrollment (College Success). VISTA member will work to support the design and implementation of the Connect2Complete Program. 150 first-year Pell-eligible college students will participate in the program in year two. The VISTAs will help to ensure that at least 75% of enrolled C2C students will complete at least one semester in the C2C Program each year and reenroll at a rate that is at least 10% higher than comparable Pell-eligible students on their respective campuses.</p>		September 2018 to September 2019
<p>Activity 1: VISTA member will recruit an average of eight Peer Advocates per semester. Promote the C2C Peer Advocate opportunity in order to recruit high-quality applicants – specifically students in their second year that are in good academic standing, have leadership potential, ideally those who have similar backgrounds as the students they will be mentoring.</p> <p>Step 1: Promote C2C opportunities with students using social media, flyers, and attending recruitment fairs</p> <p>Step 2: Meet with faculty and staff to promote C2C opportunities throughout campus and present program in targeted classes</p> <p>Step 3: Assist with the application, interview & selection process for Peer Advocates</p>		Fall 2018 & Spring 2019 semesters
<p>Activity 1 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments: <i>If this is a year 2 or 3 VAD revision, please note what activities the VISTA accomplished in the previous year, and what activities still need to be done in this grey box. Remove activities/steps completed and replace with new or up-graded activities/steps. Some activities are routine and will not change from year to year, others will need to be updated each program year.</i></p>		Activity 1 Completed (date):
<p>Activity 2: VISTA member will coordinate training programs designed specifically for the C2C Peer Advocates. The training programs, built on successful models previously piloted by C2C campuses, will include units on leadership, conflict resolution, study skills and strategies, professional communication, time management, and accessing and providing referrals to campus and community resources.</p> <p>Step 1: Work with faculty and staff to establish training needs and objectives</p> <p>Step 2: Identify relevant training resources</p> <p>Step 3: Create training schedule for each semester</p>		Ongoing
<p>Activity 2 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:</p>		Activity 2 Completed (date):
<p>Activity 3: VISTA member will provide weekly reflection and support sessions for the C2C Peer Advocates, assist in coordinating community engagement activities, and serve as liaisons between the Peer Advocates and campus administration offices, when necessary.</p> <p>Step 1: Schedule and create agendas for weekly reflection and support sessions</p> <p>Step 2: Schedule meetings with campus and community partners as needed</p>		Ongoing
<p>Activity 3 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:</p>		Activity 3 Completed (date):
<p>Activity 4: Civic engagement experiences for students, VISTA will work with developmental education courses, Peer Advocates, and C2C students to create and/or facilitate participation in community-engaged learning activities in conjunction with developmental education courses, credit-bearing leadership development courses for Peer Advocates, and through projects coordinated by Peer Advocates and campus community engagement offices.</p> <p>Step 1: Work with C2C stakeholders to identify appropriate civic engagement projects</p> <p>Step 2: Implement and support logistics for projects as needed</p> <p>Step 3: Provide project summaries and accomplishments to stakeholders and sponsors</p>		Ongoing

Activity 4 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:	Activity 4 Completed (date):
<p>Activity 5: VISTA member will coordinate the collection of evaluations and assessment data of students mentored by the C2C Peer Advocates. Data will be analyzed and compared with success and completion rates of the general student body and comparable student demographics not involved with C2C (control groups).</p> <p>Step 1: Meet with C2C faculty, staff, and Office of Institutional Research to coordinate evaluation process</p> <p>Step 2: Disseminate evaluation results to project stakeholders and sponsors</p> <p>Step 3: Utilize evaluations to plan for on-going program improvements</p>	Ongoing
Activity 5 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:	

Example 2: VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

VISTA Project: Florida Campus Compact		VISTA Member Name: Sally AmeriCorps	
Site Name: East FL University	VISTA/CNCS Focus Area: Education	Program Year: 2018	
Additional Programming Option: National		Days of Service	
VISTA Member Activities and Steps Checklist		Planned Period of Work	
Goal 1: Develop campus-community partnerships with local school districts and community-based agencies to increase “College Access” and preparedness for students.			
Activity 1: Research and collaborate with key individuals within the local school district to form a program model, mission, goals, and outcomes Step 1: Set meetings with primary school and community partners to build the capacity of or start a new mentoring program Step 2: Research best mentoring practices Step 3: Create timeline for Spring 2019 pilot mentoring program Step 4: Begin preliminary recruitment of students mentors to participate		August 2018 to November 2018	
Activity 1 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:		Activity 1 Completed (date):	
Activity 2: Develop resources to assist school district and community partners with effective program development, implementation, and evaluation Step 1: Work with school staff and partner agencies to establish training needs for volunteers Step 2: Create training manual for mentors/volunteers Step 3: Assist schools and community partners to implement trainings Step 4: Create feedback forms for students enrolled in the program Step 5: Research and design tools for performance measurement		October 2018 to December 2018	
Activity 2 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:		Activity 2 Completed (date):	
Activity 3: Implement a small-scale pilot mentoring program in Spring 2019 Step 1: Conduct in-class presentations to recruit mentors, specifically targeting Education or relevant majors Step 2: Screen and select student mentors Step 3: Assist schools and community partners with training and placing mentors Step 4: Conduct regular site visits to monitor progress Step 5: Administer feedback forms to all stakeholders and students Step 6: Based on feedback collected, create plan for implementation in the Fall 2016 semester		January 2019 to July 2019	
Activity 3 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:		Activity 3 Completed (date):	

VISTA Member Activities and Steps Checklist	Planned Period of Work
Goal 2: Work with school district and community agencies to assess their ability to host expanded College Access mentoring program(s).	
Activity 1: Convene campus/community committee to oversee development of expanded programming Step 1: Work with appropriate community and school partners to define committee members Step 2: Committee meets regularly to plan program Step 3: Committee defines goals and timeline for expanded programming Step 4: Committee assigns tasks to specific members and has clear ideas on how to implement action steps	August 2018 to August 2019
Activity 1 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:	Activity 1 Completed (date):
Activity 2: Develop resources and funding for mentoring program(s) Step 1: Work with campus faculty/staff and community partners to define potential sources of funding and/or in-kind donations Step 2: Research and submit funding and grant proposals	August 2018 to August 2019
Activity 2 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:	Activity 2 Completed (date):

VISTA Member Activities and Steps Checklist	Planned Period of Work
Goal 3: Develop, enhance, and coordinate student and community engagement opportunities for National Days of Service including the September 11 National Day of Service & Remembrance and Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.	
Activity 1: Recruit National Days of Service Planning Committee Step 1: Recruit students, faculty, staff, and community partners for committee Step 2: Identify meaningful service projects to be conducted Step 3: Committee creates a marketing plan to recruit volunteers Step 4: Facilitate student training and monthly committee meetings	August 2018 to August 2019
Activity 1 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:	Activity 1 Completed (date):
Activity 2: Coordinate September 11 National Day of Service & Remembrance & MLK Jr. Day of Service project(s) Step 1: Seek out sources of funding and local support for projects Step 2: Assist with recruitment, training and selection of student and community volunteers Step 3: Assist with program planning and logistical support Step 4: Conduct project(s) alongside students and community volunteers and partners Step 5: Facilitate reflection and volunteer recognition Step 6: Provide project summaries and accomplishments to stakeholders and sponsors	September 2018 and January 2019
Activity 2 Comments/Summary of Accomplishments:	Activity 2 Completed (date):

Tips for Creating a VISTA Assignment Description

This document provides tips on developing assignment descriptions for VISTA members.

1. Provide each VISTA member with an individual VISTA Assignment Description that describes the capacity-building activities the member is responsible for completing.
2. The VISTA Assignment Description should identify key capacity-building tasks and activities that can be realistically accomplished in a single year.
3. Include enough detail in the VISTA Assignment Description to guide the VISTA member while still allowing for flexibility in carrying out day-to-day tasks and activities.
4. If the VISTA member will be responsible for providing data that address results identified in the project plan, then be sure to train the member on these responsibilities and reporting methods.
5. If the VISTA member will fill out monthly reports, then review these reporting forms to ensure that they address the activities and steps described in the VISTA Assignment Description.

Additional examples and templates of VISTA Assignment Descriptions along additional guidance can be found on the VISTA Campus website at <http://www.vistacampus.gov/supervisors/vista-assignment>. Do not hesitate to contact A|FVN with any questions.

Preferred Skills and Qualifications for AmeriCorps members:

- At least a bachelor's degree or commensurate life/work experience.
- A desire to make a positive difference in the lives of national service participants and low-income communities.
- Experience with student development programs, higher education student organizations, volunteer management and training, events planning, and fundraising. Prior AmeriCorps or Peace Corps experience.
- Outstanding organizational skills, oral and written communication skills, and Microsoft software skills.
- Exceptional capacity to lead persons of diverse backgrounds and in diverse community and organizational settings.
- An ability to set goals, take initiative, and work independently and collaboratively within a team-oriented environment.
- An ability to meet deadlines, work flexibly, and effectively handle stress.
- An ability to live at the poverty level, while serving full-time for one year.
- Willingness to make in-state travel to periodic state events and regional trainings.

Reviewer's Proposal Score Sheet

Project Site Applications receiving an average score below 70 may not be considered for approval.

1) Narrative (45 points total)

Assessment of Need & Project Plan – 15 points Proposal clearly defines a poverty issue that affects the community. Clearly outlines how the project will target AmeriCorps/VISTA Focus Areas. Representation and input from low-income communities is incorporated into the project plan, design, and implementation. If the applicant is a community-based organization, there is a clear plan to collaborate with higher education institution, including a letter of support. Or, Higher Education institution has provided a community partner letter of support.	Pts.	Comments
Does not meet the criteria	0	
Meets very little of the criteria	4	
Meets some of the criteria	7	
Meets most of the criteria	11	
Meets all of criteria	15	

SCORE:

Management & Support – 15 points Clear plan for AmeriCorps member supervision, on-the-job travel and reimbursement for costs incurred to complete position duties and professional development opportunities for the AmeriCorps member.	Pts.	Comments
Does not meet the criteria	0	
Meets very little of the criteria	4	
Meets some of the criteria	7	
Meets most of the criteria	11	
Meets all of criteria	15	

SCORE:

Applicant Resources – 15 points Level of support provided for AmeriCorps member. Examples include adequate workspace, access to phone, e-mail, parking, housing, or housing assistance, etc. Housing and other assistance is recommended but is not a requirement of the Project Host Site Application.	Pts.	Comments
Does not meet the criteria	0	
Meets very little of the criteria	4	
Meets some of the criteria	7	
Meets most of the criteria	11	
Meets all of criteria	15	
SCORE:		

2) VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) -45 points

VAD(s) focuses on one primary AmeriCorps/VISTA Project Focus Area and may include applicable Additional Programming Options, per AmeriCorps Guidance. VAD has no more than four goals total, along with corresponding service activities. VISTA service activities are clearly aligned towards achieving project goal(s).

AmeriCorps/VISTA Priority Areas

- Economic Opportunity (Financial Literacy, Housing, & Employment)
- Education (School Readiness, K-12 Success, & Post-Secondary Success)
- Healthy Futures (Access to Healthcare, Food Security & Community Gardens, COVID-19)
- Environmental Stewardship (Land Asset Mapping & Data, Urban Resilience & Gentrification)
- Veterans & Military Families (Economic Opportunity, connecting veterans to services & benefits)

	Pts.	Comments

Does not meet the criteria	0	
Meets very little of the criteria	18	
Meets some of the criteria	27	
Meets most of the criteria	36	
Meets all of criteria	45	

SCORE:

3) Member Position Description – 10 points

Used to recruit and inform potential members about specific assignments to be performed on the project.

	Pts.	Comments

Does not meet criteria	0	
Satisfactory	7	
Excellent	10	

SCORE:

Total Score: _____

Prohibited Service Activities for AmeriCorps Members

AmeriCorps members may not perform specific activities in the course of their duties, while charging time to the AmeriCorps program, nor at the request of anyone including A|FVN or sponsoring organization staff. Furthermore, members and staff may not engage in conduct that would associate the national AmeriCorps program or the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS) with prohibited activities. Prohibited activities are summarized as follows:

- 1) Performing services or duties that have been performed by or were assigned to any:
 - a) Presently employed worker;
 - b) Employee who recently resigned or was discharged;
 - c) Employee who is subject to a reduction in force or who has recall rights pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement or applicable personnel procedures;
 - d) Employee who is on leave (terminal, temporary, vacation, emergency or sick); or
 - e) Employee who is on strike or is being locked out.
- 2) At no time should a member be hired to perform any work for the project station even if it is unrelated to the member's service. Project Host Sites should not employ an AmeriCorps member prior to the end of the member's scheduled term of service.
- 3) AmeriCorps member living allowances/stipends cannot be supplemented nor modified monetarily.
- 4) Participating in efforts to influence legislation, including state or local ballot initiatives, or lobbying for your program;
- 5) Organizing a letter-writing campaign to congress;
- 6) Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- 7) Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials;
- 8) Voter registration drives;
- 9) Organizing or participating in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;
- 10) Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- 11) Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- 12) Engage in religious instruction; conduct worship services; provide instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship; construct or operate facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship; maintain facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship; or engage in any form of religious proselytizing; or
- 13) Providing a direct benefit to a for-profit entity, a labor union, a partisan political organization, or, in general, an organization engaged in the religious activities described in the preceding bullet.

AmeriCorps members, like other private citizens, may participate in the above listed activities on their own time, at their own expense, and at their own initiative. However, AmeriCorps members may not wear AmeriCorps t-shirts or other service gear in such instances.

For more information, refer to the [VISTA Member Handbook](#) provided to each VISTA member at his or her Pre-Service Orientation, and accessible online.



February 23, 2010

MEMORANDUM

To: Corporation State Offices

From: Paul Davis, Acting Director, AmeriCorps VISTA

Subject: Guidance for Alternative Break & Similar Programs

Alternative Break (AB) programs can be an effective way to channel the efforts of highly talented and motivated university students to communities in desperate need of assistance. This memo provides guidance for VISTA project development with respect to AB programming to ensure conformance with the VISTA program's statutory purpose, legal framework and programming principles. This guidance is applicable to other similar programs that, like AB programs, immerse volunteers on an episodic basis for short-term community service projects.

The following principals shall be applied to all AB efforts.

Sustainability:

- a. The target community is identified in the project application.
- b. Project beneficiaries are involved in the planning, development and implementation of the project.
- c. Either the university or the low-income community local to the university have an ongoing relationship with either the AB program or the AB target community; the relationship is maintained after the VISTA's departure.
- d. Target community selection is prioritized as follows:
 - Communities local (i.e., in the same community or city) to the University
 - Communities in the same state or region as the University
 - Communities outside the state or region of the University
- e. The AB volunteer efforts are part of a comprehensive program in the AB target community, similar to the principles AmeriCorps NCCC applies to its spikes and VISTA applies to Summer Associate projects.
- f. The University has a plan to continue the AB program once the VISTA has developed the capacity of the university to maintain the program.
- g. The VISTA is establishing an on-going AB volunteer generation program.
- h. The VISTA is not the individual primarily responsible for the project. (If s/he were the sole person, s/he would essentially be replacing or supplanting full-time university staff).

Poverty Reduction/Alleviation:

The AB target community is in the United States and is low income/underserved and aligns with the programming/priority area of the VISTA member's VAD.

Results are reported to demonstrate long-lasting positive effects in reducing/alleviating poverty.

VISTAs may be permitted to go on Alternative Spring Break if they:

Are influential in setting up the program, as described by their VISTA Assignment Description.

Have permission from their direct supervisor and check in at least once during the event.

Have permission from A|FVN and AmeriCorps SE Regional Office, which is obtained at least one month prior to the departure of the member.

Will be documenting significant aspects of the trip for sustainability (i.e. the relationship/partnership between the service organization and the host site), noting what went well and what could be improved (and how) and listing what outcomes were achieved.

Are accompanied by a university staff member. A VISTA may never act as a chaperon.

Logistics:

Supervision on AB project is by the University staff member.

University and/or student volunteers assume all liabilities.

The services activities will not endanger the safety of the VISTA.

VISTA travel, including emergency travel if injured on-site, and lodging is university's responsibility. Appropriate housing, supervision and other supports must be available to the VISTA.

A|FVN Guidelines for Alternative Spring Break/Immersion Projects:

Project Host Sites may request to have a VISTA member participate in leadership role as part of an alternative break or similar immersion program following the CNCS guidelines. Service on ASB trips must tie to one or more of the project goals incorporated into the project proposal and VAD. Target communities should also be identified in the Project Host Site Application. If not identified in the initial proposal, it may be necessary to amend the project plan with AmeriCorps. Prior consultation with A|FVN for any sites wishing to send VISTAs on ASB trips must occur within the first month of the VISTA's service. Final approval from AmeriCorps is required before a VISTA may attend an ASB trip.