AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance for Current and Potential Project Sponsors

Fiscal Year 2012

October 1, 2011 – September 30, 2012

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I.   Introduction

The purpose of the Fiscal Year 2012 AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance is to inform stakeholders, particularly current and prospective sponsors, of the programmatic highlights for the fiscal year. This guidance is intended to direct the development of VISTA projects and outline the national programming priorities for the VISTA program.

With the September 13, 2011, release of the U.S. Census Bureau's report "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010," it is clear that the anti-poverty mission of the VISTA program is more critical than ever. The report states: "The official poverty rate in 2010 was 15.1 percent — up from 14.3 percent in 2009. This was the third consecutive annual increase in the poverty rate. In 2010, 46.2 million people were in poverty, up from 43.6 million in 2009 — the fourth consecutive annual increase in the number of people in poverty. The number of people in poverty in 2010 (46.2 million) is the largest number in the 52 years for which poverty estimates have been published."

II.   Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program

AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) designed specifically to fight poverty. Authorized in 1964 and founded in 1965 as Volunteers in Service to America, the program was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993. VISTA has been on the front lines of the fight against poverty in America for more than 45 years.

VISTA supports efforts to alleviate poverty by encouraging individuals, ages 18 years and older, from all walks of life, to engage in a year of full-time service with a sponsoring organization (sponsor) to create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

About VISTA Sponsors

Public organizations such as nonprofit private organizations, Indian Tribes, and state and local government organizations can apply to be VISTA sponsors. Eligible nonprofit private organizations are not limited to those with IRS 501(c) (3) status, but rather all organizations with IRS 501(c) status that focus on anti-poverty community development. Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible. Organizations can be local, state, or national. Sponsors must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise the VISTAs, and provide necessary administrative support to complete the goals of the project. Sponsors must develop and manage projects with the involvement of the communities that will be served.

Organizations interested in becoming a sponsor can visit AmeriCorps.gov or contact the CNCS State Office in their state. Interested organizations must submit a concept paper and application online through the CNCS eGrants web-based system, under the FY 2012 AmeriCorps VISTA State Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA).

About VISTA Members

VISTA members, commonly referred to as VISTAs, range in age and come from diverse racial, geographic, and economic backgrounds. Each VISTA makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project with a sponsor. They live and serve in some of our nation's poorest areas. VISTAs receive a modest living allowance and health benefits during their service, and have the option of receiving a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which can be used to pay for college or student loans, or an end-of-service cash stipend after completing their term of service.

In FY 2012, the VISTA program anticipates supporting roughly 8,000 full-time VISTAs and VISTA Summer Associates, who will serve with approximately 1,000 sponsors. They will leverage human, financial, and material resources to develop self-sustaining solutions to problems in low-income communities across the country.

Individuals can apply to become a VISTA online at AmeriCorps.gov. In FY 2012, the VISTA program will continue effort to increase the number of veterans serving as VISTA members. Sponsoring organizations are encouraged to recruit veterans through local organizations and development programs that benefit veterans and military families.

Purpose of AmeriCorps VISTA

AmeriCorps VISTA is a federal program charged with alleviating poverty in the United States. Since its authorization in 1964, its purpose has been:

> *to strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty and poverty-related problems in the United States by encouraging and enabling persons from all walks of life, all geographical areas, and all age groups, including low-income individuals, elderly and retired Americans, to perform meaningful and constructive volunteer service in agencies, institutions, and situations where the application of human talent and dedication may assist in the solution of poverty and poverty-related problems and secure and increase opportunities for self-advancement by persons affected by such problems.*

The VISTA program supports many different, locally driven solutions to strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty and poverty-related problems. As noted in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, the program is designed specifically:

- To generate the commitment of private sector resources.

- To encourage volunteer service at the local level.

- To support efforts by local agencies and community organizations to achieve long-term sustainability of projects.

- To strengthen local agencies and community organizations that serve low-income communities.

Accordingly, in choosing which project applications to support, the VISTA program evaluates potential and current VISTA projects and sponsors on the basis of their ability to manage and effectively apply VISTA resources to build long-term, sustainable solutions to poverty in their community. A VISTA project must:

- Involve beneficiaries in project development and implementation throughout the life of the project.

- Address the needs of low-income communities and otherwise comply with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Services Act Of 1973 (DVSA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4951 et seq.), applicable to VISTA and all applicable published regulations, guidelines, and CNCS policies.

- Lead to building organizational and/or community capacity to continue the efforts of the project once VISTA resources are withdrawn.

- Describe in measurable terms the outcomes and impact of the project on the beneficiary population and community.

- State clearly how VISTAs will be trained, supervised, and supported to ensure the achievement of program goals and objectives, as well as compliance to program rules and regulations.

- Demonstrate the relationship among key aspects of the project throughout the application, including: a problem statement that demonstrates need; a project plan that includes performance measures; and a VISTA member assignment description.

- Ensure that VISTA and community resources are sufficient to achieve project goals.

- Have the management and technical capability to implement and oversee the project successfully.

- Have an appropriate number of requested VISTAs to match the project goals and select VISTAs with the skills and qualifications necessary to meet the goals and objectives of the project described in the application.

III. Framework for VISTA Programming

Projects must be developed in accordance with all four of the VISTA Core Principles: Anti-Poverty Focus, Community Empowerment, Sustainable Solutions, and Capacity Building.

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 their project engages low-income community residents 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.

Federal law requires community participation in the development and implementation of VISTA projects. More importantly, community participation is a highly effective component of program planning that helps create lasting change in a community. It gives low-income individuals the freedom to speak for themselves in determining the projects that suit their specific needs. Community involvement often results in innovative programming and meaningful experiences for the VISTAs.

Sustainable Solutions

As directed by Congress, VISTAs are short-term resources that serve to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. **VISTA projects should be developed with a goal to phase out the need for VISTA members and maintain the ability of the project to continue without them.**

Capacity Building

VISTA projects expand the scale, reach, efficiency or effectiveness of, or leverage resources for programs or organizations that fight poverty. Rather than providing direct services to low-income individuals and communities, VISTAs strengthen and support organizations by building infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, securing long-term resources, coordinating training for participants, and more as determined by local needs. VISTAs should work themselves out of a job and create systems that remain long after service ends.

In order to focus on capacity-building activities, VISTAs do not perform direct service, which primarily includes activities that immediately address individual clients' needs.

Furthermore, VISTAs may not engage in activities that would supplant the tasks of or displace paid staff, contractors, or existing volunteers. This prohibition includes activities related to the management of other CNCS grants and programs.

IV. Programming Areas

This section outlines poverty-related issues that are legislated programming areas of VISTA. It also provides examples of how VISTA projects might address these areas.

Key Legislation

- Domestic Volunteer Service Act (as amended by Public Law 113-13, April 2009)
- National Service Trust Act (as amended by Public Law 113-13, April 2009)
- Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (Public Law 113-13, April 2009)

Key Regulations

- Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Parts 1206, 1210-1211, 1216-1220, 1222, 1226

VISTA Resources and the CNCS 2011–2015 Strategic Plan

CNCS recently adopted a new Strategic Plan for 2011–2015.

MISSION STATEMENT
Improve lives, strengthen communities and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

GOAL 1
Increase the impact of national service on community needs in communities served by CNCS-supported programs

GOAL 2
Strengthen national service so that participants engaged in CNCS-supported programs consistently find satisfaction, meaning and opportunity

SERVE AMERICA ACT FOCUS AREAS
Disaster Services
Economic Opportunity
Education
Environmental Stewardship
Healthy Futures
Veterans and Military Families

← CNCS PROGRAMS →

GOAL 3
Maximize the value we add to grantees, partners and participants

GOAL 4
Fortify management operations and sustain a capable, responsive and accountable organization

All new VISTA project development must fall within the six Focus Areas in Goal 1 of the CNCS 2011–2015 Strategic Plan, which are:

- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Healthy Futures
- Veterans and Military Families
- Disaster Services
- Environmental Stewardship

All VISTA resources must be used to create, expand, or enhance projects that lift people out of poverty; however, making a strong, defensible connection to poverty is easier in some focus areas than others. **We expect to direct most VISTA resources in the Economic Opportunity and Education focus areas.** We will address the other focus areas, according to the ability of CNCS State Offices to identify opportunities in those areas that can have a direct impact on breaking the cycle of poverty. This section provides guidance on programming activities for the focus areas that are appropriate for VISTA projects.

Economic Opportunity

One in four working families (and the 21 million children in those households) depends on employment that offers poor job security, low pay, few benefits, and little opportunity for advancement. Acquiring equity and 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
- Capitalize on financial opportunity

In FY 2012, VISTA will give priority to new projects that focus on the following areas:

Housing
VISTA supports programming that connects families and individuals to emergency housing and transitional services, provides affordable permanent housing, and encourages advocacy with populations in need.

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

Financial Literacy
In the United States, an estimated 19 million households do not have a savings or a checking account. VISTA supports programs that provide low-income individuals and families access to financial opportunities and help them 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. Individual financial literacy is the first line of defense against fraud, deception, and high financial costs that often plague low-income communities. This type of programming includes projects that focus on connecting individuals to community supports and resources, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, individual development accounts (IDAs), and other asset building programs.

Employment
VISTA supports programming that enables individuals to obtain or train for gainful employment. This type of programming includes projects that focus on adult learners moving towards higher education; on vocational training aimed at building and gaining skills, particularly, for veterans and spouses of deployed enlisted military personnel; and on basic literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) for immigrant and refugee populations.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service
VISTA supports the development of supplementary service projects to commemorate the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. The MLK Day of Service not only provides an opportunity to honor and celebrate Dr. King's life and legacy, it also is a way to transform his life and teachings into service activities that strengthen communities and address local needs.

For the 2012 MLK Day of Service, CNCS, in alignment with its 2011–2015 Strategic Plan, has adopted the overarching theme of "Economic Opportunity." As Dr. King worked for increased opportunity for all Americans, we encourage all VISTA projects and members to create or support an initiative that opens doors to economic opportunity for low-income families and individuals, especially given the current economic challenges facing our nation.

VISTA members and sponsors also should take the opportunity on MLK Day of Service to conduct outreach to diverse populations and engage potential new partners. All CNCS Offices and VISTA projects should encourage their VISTAs to organize or participate in a Day of Service project that not only promotes community volunteering but also strengthens economic security.

Because MLK Day of Service is near tax season, we encourage VISTA projects and members to develop or support MLK Day activities that promote the availability of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and free tax preparation services through Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites.

The VISTA program will issue a more comprehensive guidance regarding programming for the 2012 MLK Day of Service at a later date. Meanwhile, toolkits, resources, and information about the MLK Day of Service will be available at www.mlkday.gov. Sponsors should also submit their plans for their events and share results and media coverage at www.mlkday.gov.

Education
VISTAs continue to play a pivotal role in developing programs that promote educational achievement and engagement among economically disadvantaged children, youth, and adults.

VISTA projects should expand the scale, reach, efficiency or effectiveness of, or leverage resources for programs or organizations that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged people, especially children and adults, as well as veterans and members of military families. In FY 2012, VISTA will give priority to new projects that focus on the following areas:

School Readiness
These projects build capacity for programs that help pre-K students enroll in, maintain enrollment in and succeed in early childhood education programs. In particular, projects should build capacity for programs that develop or engage in proven or promising in-school and out-of-school time activities, such as teaching, tutoring, and the provision of education-related supportive services for children or their families to improve school readiness.

Success in School
These projects build the capacity of programs that help students in grades K–12 maintain enrollment in and succeed in school. In particular, projects should build capacity for programs that engage in proven or promising strategies that improve learning and grade-level success in low-achieving schools, such as:

- Teaching, tutoring, and mentoring of students
- Providing supportive services to teachers and school leaders
- Providing expanded learning programs that are aligned with schools and school districts (such as before and after school, as well as summer learning)
- Providing family engagement programs
- Providing other types of school improvement support to school systems (such as improved school-community partnerships)

College Access and Success
These projects build capacity of programs that help students in grades 9–12 and students working toward a GED as they prepare for college and careers. In particular, projects should build capacity for programs that engage in proven or promising counseling, academic, enrollment, and retention activities that benefit economically disadvantaged and first-generation college students.

The use of service-learning as a pedagogy for improving the success of economically disadvantaged students is appropriate. However, service-learning as a single focus program area is not permissible. The placement of VISTAs at colleges and universities to only serve their student populations or to build the capacity of the college or university is not appropriate. All VISTA projects working in this area, including service-learning projects, must: (1) focus on building the capacity of low-income communities, schools, and organizations; and (2) support them to develop sustainable connections to the resources available at institutions of higher education.

The VISTA program places a particularly high priority on new project development in communities that have underperforming schools and schools participating in the U.S. Department of Education's Title I School Improvement Grant program, including those taking part in the federal interagency School Improvement Initiative.

Healthy Futures
The Healthy Futures focus area contains the following principal objectives: aging in place, food security, and access to health care. Of these, VISTA will give priority in FY2012 to new projects that focus on food security and access to health care.

Food Security
The VISTA program supports anti-hunger efforts that help low-income families and individuals gain access to healthy food and improve their diets. Examples of anti-hunger efforts include food banks, farmer's markets, and community gardens, with particular emphasis on projects that provide holistic, wraparound services that move low-income individuals on a path toward financial independence.

Access to Health Care
VISTA encourages organizations that provide access to preventive services, health services, and benefits for low-income individuals – particularly, homeless and veteran populations and families of enlisted military personnel – to consider VISTA as an effective means to enhance the reach of their programming to underserved populations.

Health Care Services

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 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 supports projects that increase economic opportunity for low-income veterans and military families under one or more of the Economic Opportunity, Education, and Healthy Futures focus areas. We will give special priority to projects that support the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (http://www.usich.gov/) efforts to end homelessness among veterans.

The VISTA program encourages projects to recruit veterans to serve as VISTAs, particularly at those projects serving veterans and military families.

Disaster Services

VISTA's contribution in the Disaster focus area consists of long-term recovery efforts. Community economic development, the essence of the VISTA program, is critical in the recovery of an area hit by a disaster.

Disaster response is generally an inappropriate activity for the VISTA program, given its legislative framework and emphasis on in-direct service. The exception is responsive intervention in low-income communities suffering the effects of a disaster. In this case, the VISTA program would support projects that adapt in response to a local disaster. For example, job placement projects that help place local workers in disaster response positions.

The VISTA program support may only support preparedness and mitigation activities that are designed to lift people out of poverty.

VISTA resources should not be used for training responders, or for environmental cleanup activities. While these activities are important and worthwhile, VISTA resources are most effectively and appropriately used in long term recovery efforts.

Environmental Stewardship

The Environment Stewardship focus area has three objectives: decrease energy and water consumption, improve at-risk ecosystems, and increase green job opportunities. The goal of increasing green job opportunities has a strong connection to VISTA's anti-poverty focus; however, the other two objectives in this focus area make not have as strong a connection. An environmental project serving a low-income community is not acceptable unless there is a strong connection to lifting people out of poverty.

Examples of projects or programs in this area that show a strong connection to poverty include those that:

- Add energy conservation components to existing housing and financial fitness programs, when those energy conservation components provide household savings potential for participants
- Create or expand existing job training and placement programs to include green jobs, aimed at low-income job seekers, that incorporate solar, wind, and conservation technologies (making sure there is a local demand for the skills)
- Focus on green microenterprise development[1]

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[1] A microenterprise is a type of small business. Because microenterprises typically have little to no access to the commercial banking sector, they often rely on "micro-loans" or microcredit in order to be financed.

- ▪ Focus on youth development and provide leadership development and job training skills to at-risk youth through conservation activities.

VISTA resources may not be used to support projects whose primary focus is to improve at-risk ecosystems unless there is a compelling connection to lifting people out of poverty.

V. Performance Measures

Building the capacity of organizations to fight poverty is a critical element of every VISTA project, as explained in the [VISTA Framework section](#) of this document. Through Goal Three of its 2011–2015 Strategic Plan, CNCS seeks to strengthen its capacity and that of the national service network to measure performance and evaluate program outcomes and impact.

In FY 2012, VISTA sponsors will pilot standardized performance measures that reflect the results of their capacity building activities. The list of standard performance measures below should cover nearly all of the types of capacity building activities for VISTA Projects. In addition to the progress reports that projects submit regularly on their progress toward accomplishing their project plan, projects will be required to select a set of standardized capacity-building performance measures that reflect their work during the period of October 1, 2011 to September 30, 2012. Projects will track their progress during the year and will report their performance for the measures that they select, using the VISTA Progress Report Supplement, as part of the annual survey completed online by sponsors in the eGrants system.

CNCS State Office staff will be available to provide technical assistance about how to report on the measures.

Performance Measures
*Number of veterans and military family members engaged in providing services through CNCS-supported programs
*Percent of service participants engaged in CNCS-supported programs who report having an experience that expands educational, employment or civic opportunities
*Number of community volunteers recruited by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Number of community volunteers managed by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Number of organizations that received capacity-building services from CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Number of staff and community volunteers that received training (of one or more types) as a result of capacity-building services provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Number of organizations that completed a community assessment identifying goals and recommendations with the assistance of CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Hours of service contributed by community volunteers who were recruited by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Hours of service contributed by community volunteers who were managed by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants

Performance Measures
Number of organizations implementing three or more effective volunteer management practices as a result of capacity-building services provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Number of organizations reporting that capacity-building activities provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants have helped to make the organization more efficient
Number of organizations reporting that capacity-building activities provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants have helped to make the organization more effective
Number of new systems and business processes (technology, performance management, training, etc.) or enhancements to existing systems and business processes put in place as a result of capacity-building services provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Number of additional activities completed and/or program outputs produced by the program as a result of capacity-building services provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants in (a) Disaster Services, (b) Economic Opportunity, (c) Education, (d) Environmental Stewardship, (e) Healthy Futures, and/or (f) Veterans and Military Families
Number of organizations that have experienced an increase in requests for their programs and services as a result of capacity-building services provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Number of additional types of services offered by organizations as a result of capacity-building services provided by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants in (a) Disaster Services, (b) Economic Opportunity, (c) Education, (d) Environmental Stewardship, (e) Healthy Futures, and/or (f) Veterans and Military Families
Dollar value of cash resources leveraged by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
Dollar value of in-kind resources leveraged by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants

*Priority measures

VI.   VISTA Support

To leverage resources and meet local community needs, the VISTA program makes several types of support available to approved VISTA project sponsors. These are:

AmeriCorps VISTA Members

A VISTA makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project at a nonprofit organization or public agency. VISTAs live and serve in some of our nation's poorest urban and rural areas. They do not provide direct services, such as tutoring children or building homes. Instead, VISTAs focus on building the organizational, administrative, and financial capacity of sponsors, and applying the four key principles, as described in the "Effective Programming Characteristic" section, in their service.

AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders

VISTA Leaders serve in projects that have six or more VISTAs, or in a geographical area where VISTAs serve in an intermediary organization. Their role is to expand and build the capacity of the VISTAs they lead and to assist sponsors with the supervisors of those VISTAs. While Leaders do not supervise VISTAs, they can play a much-needed role in assisting project supervisors with recruitment, retention, and performance of VISTAs.

AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates

Existing sponsors of year-round VISTA projects may apply to CNCS State Offices to add Summer Associates to their projects. In developing the concept paper for Summer Associate programming, sponsors incorporate activities that should result in a credible effort to help people move out of poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. Unlike year-round VISTAs, Summer Associates may carry out direct service activities that support the overall goals of the VISTA project. Associates generally serve for a period of eight weeks.

The VISTA program will issue guidance regarding FY 2012 programming for Summer Associates at a later date.

Standard Projects

For standard projects, CNCS places up to a certain number of VISTAs with a sponsor and the sponsor funds local operating and logistics costs. VISTAs assigned to standard projects receive a biweekly living allowance and other benefits (including health care) from CNCS, as described in the *AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook*. Most VISTA projects fall under this category.

Support and Program Grants

CNCS awards support grants to a limited number organizations to assist in the support of a VISTA project. We anticipate a decrease in support grants awarded for FY 2012. Grant funds can be used for one or more of the following:

- Supervision of the VISTAs, Leaders, and Summer Associates
- Service-related transportation expenses of VISTAs, Leaders, and Summer Associates
- Project staff travel for monitoring sites
- Audits (program grants only)

In some limited instances, with the VISTA Director's approval, existing sponsors may receive program grant funds to cover the VISTA member living allowance and other associated costs.

Cost-Share

To expand the scope and impact of VISTA, CNCS encourages sponsors that have the means to share a portion of the costs associated with supporting VISTAs. Through cost-share, a sponsor covers the living allowance of some or all of its VISTAs. CNCS covers all the remaining federal program costs for each VISTA (member training, health care, child care, and end-of-service cash stipend or Segal Education Award). For standard projects, CNCS pays the VISTAs directly and invoices the sponsors on monthly basis for the living allowance of VISTAs covered by the cost-share arrangement.

Sponsors may pay their cost-share portion on either a prepay basis or via monthly reimbursements to CNCS.

While cost share is an effective strategy to leverage VISTA resources, it is not a requirement for becoming or remaining a VISTA sponsor. VISTA recognizes that many potential sponsors, particularly those most in need of VISTA resource for capacity building, may not be able to support a cost-share agreement.

For more information on the cost-share partnership, please visit CNCS' website at http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp.

VII.   Next Steps

If your organization would like apply to become a VISTA sponsor in order to develop or enhance a community-supported antipoverty project, please visit http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp for the Concept Paper instructions, and the contact information for your local CNCS State Office.

We encourage organizations to email the state office in their area of their intent to apply. For example, organizations in Alaska should send an email to AK@cns.gov. The list of state offices is referenced and linked below for your convenience. You may also email vista@americorps.gov to request by mail a more in-depth booklet, *Is VISTA Right for Your Organization*.

VIII.   Technical Assistance Resources

CNCS State Offices

CNCS has staff working in offices throughout the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa. The role of the state office is to conduct outreach, program development, technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation in support of CNCS national service network and to provide AmeriCorps VISTA member support. A complete list of state offices is available at: http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp.

VISTA Campus

The VISTA Campus is an online learning environment for the VISTA community—members, Leaders, supervisors, alumni, and state offices. The resources are designed to support VISTAs in their professional and personal development, and to offer sponsors and supervisors training and technical assistance related to recruitment, supervision and coaching, and the application of VISTA policy. The Campus contains tutorials, interactive courses, toolkits, guides, manuals, and links to resources related to the VISTA mission. The VISTA Campus is accessible at: www.vistacampus.org.

Resource Center

The National Service Resource Center is a web-based clearinghouse that contains downloadable tools and courses for training and technical assistance purposes. Publications, tip sheets, web links, toolkits, and other resources cover a wide range of topics an can be found at: http://nationalserviceresources.org/

Developing Performance Measures

CNCS has contracted with Project STAR to offer assistance in the development of performance measurement, which is a critical part of the VISTA project application. Online toolkits and tutorials provide step-by-step guidance in developing performance measures, creating project plans, and developing data collection instruments. Sample project plans and VISTA assignment descriptions are also available. Access VISTA-specific performance measurement resources on the VISTA Campus, http://www.vistacampus.org, or go to http://nationalserviceresources.org/star/vista and choose the VISTA section. Additional resources for the standardized performance measures that reflect capacity building activities will be available during FY 2012.

ListServs

Want to connect with other people working in the national service field? CNCS sponsors several listservs to help people working in the national service field connect. The listservs target different audiences and topic areas. Descriptions of the listservs and instructions on how to sign up are available on the Resource Center at http://nationalserviceresources.org/email-lists

External Resources

Many other online resources can be helpful to potential and current VISTA sponsors. The following list includes various resources focused on poverty, asset development, and other topics. Inclusion in this list does not imply or convey endorsement by CNCS.

Poverty and Poverty-Related Issues

- U.S. Census Poverty page: http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html.
- Institute for Research on Poverty, Univ. of Wisconsin: http://www.irp.wisc.edu/
- University of North Carolina School of Law, Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity: http://www.law.unc.edu/centers/poverty/default.aspx
- National Poverty Center at University of Michigan: http://www.npc.umich.edu/about_us/
- Rural Poverty Research Institute: http://www.rupri.org/index.php
- University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research: http://www.ukcpr.org/
- West Coast Poverty Center: http://wcpc.washington.edu/
- Health and Human Services, Poverty, Income, and Assets: http://aspe.hhs.gov/_/topic/topic.cfm?topic=Poverty,%20Income,%20and%20Assets
- WhyHunger (formerly known as World Hunger Year, or WHY) : http://whyhunger.org/

Outcomes and Impact Measurement

- Demystifying Outcome Measurement in Community Development: http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/publications/communitydevelopment/w07-5.pdf
- Basic Guide to Outcomes-Based Evaluation for Nonprofit Organizations with Very Limited Resources: http://managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcomes.htm
- Outcome Indicators Project: http://www.urban.org/center/cnp/projects/outcomeindicators.cfm
- United Way Outcome Measurement Resource Network: http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/files/legacy/filemanager/download/Program Mgmt/Outcome_Measurement_Showing_Results_Nonprofit_Sector.pdf

Economic Opportunity

- Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship: http://www.nfte.com/
- Pact: http://www.pactworld.org/
- The Virtual Library on Microcredit: http://www.gdrc.org/icm/
- Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University: http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/research/respoverty1.html
- CFED: http://www.cfed.org/
- Homeless Veterans: http://www1.va.gov/homeless/
- MyMoney: http://www.mymoney.gov
- Treasury Department's Office of Financial Education and Financial Access: http://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/offices/Pages/--Office-of-Financial-Education-and-Financial-Access.aspx

Education

- U.S. Department of Education: http://www.ed.gov
- U.S. Department of Education Guidance for School Improvement Grants Programs: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html
- *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*, Institute of Education Sciences: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/Turnaround_pg_04181.pdf
- *Improving Low-Performing Schools: Lessons from Five Years of Studying School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind*, Center on Education Policy, December 2009: http://www.cep-dc.org/publications/index.cfm?selectedYear=2010

- National Center on Secondary Education and Transition: Increasing Rates of School Completion: http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/default.asp
- The Center for Public Education: http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org
- National Education Association's Preventing Future High School Dropouts: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/dropoutguide1108.pdf

Healthy Futures
- Let's Move!: http://www.letsmove.gov
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council: http://www.nhchc.org/
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council Homeless Veterans' Health Care: http://www.nhchc.org/veteranshealthcare.html
- National Rural Health Association: http://www.ruralhealthweb.org/
- Health and Human Services: Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration: http://www.samhsa.gov/
- Sesame Workshop Health and Wellness Initiative: http://www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/health