

Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Guidance for AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsors

On Tuesday February 17, 2009 President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act), designed to jumpstart the recovery of the American economy.

The Recovery Act included \$201M for the Corporation, \$65M of which for AmeriCorps VISTA. This is an exciting opportunity for VISTA. As a program designed to create economic opportunity, we are well positioned to play a role in helping to address the economic challenges the country faces. We are proud to have been recognized as such by both the White House and Congress, and to have their trust placed in us at this time in history.

First, here is some basic information about the VISTA Recovery funds:

- Based on anticipated cost factors, \$65M will fund approximately 3,000 VISTA members. We've received very strong initial expressions of interest, so we expect to be able to quickly allocate all of these positions once the Corporation is approved to obligate Recovery Act funds.
- This is a one-time infusion of funds that is above and separate from VISTA's annual budget. Any VISTA slots awarded under the Recovery Act will only be available through September 30, 2010.
- Recovery Act funding and activities will need to be carefully tracked and reported on separately from regular VISTA activities.

Given the one-time nature of the Recovery Act funding, and the fact that most VISTA projects need up to 3 years to achieve sustainable results, a significant number of Recovery VISTA positions will be used by existing sponsors with the capacity to expand effectively. At the same time, however, our State Offices are accelerating the development of new projects.

All VISTA projects are required to create or expand programs that alleviate poverty and build economic opportunity. To maximize impact, however, we will give priority to projects that work in the following areas:

- Employment and skills training programs;
- Financial Planning;
- Home foreclosure prevention and housing assistance;
- Nonprofit Capacity Building;

- Volunteer Generation and Management; and
- Other activities that will support economic recovery in communities

Expanding existing VISTA projects

The quickest and most efficient way of expanding existing projects with Recovery Act funding is to increase the number of VISTA slots available to current project sponsors that have the capacity to effectively use the additional resource. The Corporation has held a number of preliminary conversations with targeted current sponsors and learned that they are prepared to recruit new members for their projects as soon as Recovery Act funding is made available.

Developing new VISTA projects

The VISTA program will support new projects with funding from the Recovery Act, particularly in programmatic areas where few existing projects exist. State office staff is in the process of completing the development of new projects already in the pipeline and will conduct targeted outreach to additional organizations working in the area of poverty alleviation. In addition, VISTA has been contacted by a number of potential sponsors interested in establishing new partnerships.

Delivery Schedule

State offices have already begun new program development and have notified existing sponsors to begin recruiting additional VISTA members. Actual awards for new programs and the assignment of additional VISTA members to existing projects will begin as soon as possible with the aim having all Recovery Act VISTAs placed by the end of fiscal year 2009 (i.e., by September 30, 2009). To accomplish this goal, VISTA is scheduling additional pre-service orientation sessions beginning in April. Since Recovery Act funding is not available after fiscal 2010, it is likely that Recovery Act VISTA members who begin their term of service at any time in fiscal 2010 would have to be supported by the Corporation's fiscal 2011 appropriation for the final one to six months of their terms.

For more background, please see the VISTA Recovery Plan on the Corporation website by following this link:

http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/09_0606_recovery_plan_acvista.pdf

The following FAQs will provide you with the information we have as of now.

How can my organization apply to receive VISTAs under the Recovery Act?

Nonprofit organizations and local, state and federal agencies can contact the Corporation for National and Community Service office in their state for

information about how to apply for VISTA resources. Tribes are also eligible and can contact the Corporation office in their state or send an e-mail to Recovery@cns.gov to be forwarded to the Strategic Advisor for Native American Affairs.

Click on the following links for additional information and resources:

A list of Corporation State Offices and their contact information can be found at www.cns.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp.

For more information about sponsoring a VISTA project, including eligibility requirements, go to http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp

For the current VISTA Program Guidance go to: http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/2009_VISTA_PG.pdf

Organizations not currently VISTA sponsors should contact their State Office as soon as possible.

Who do I contact if my organization wishes to place VISTAs in more than one state?

If you are interesting in sponsoring a VISTA project that would operate in more than one state, send an e-mail to Recovery@cns.gov and we will get back to you with specific contact information.

Are there any special requirements for receiving Recovery Act VISTAs?

As discussed below, projects that receive VISTAs funded by the Recovery Act will be required to report quarterly on national Recovery-specific results, and will need to track the VISTAs funded by the Recovery Act separately. Otherwise, the requirements for receiving Recovery Act VISTAs are the same as for receiving standard VISTAs. See the links above for more information about what these requirements are.

Will the benefits, or terms and conditions, for VISTAs serving under the Recovery Act be any different from those of other VISTAs?

No. The only difference between “Recovery Act VISTAs” and our regular VISTAs is the source of funds from which they are supported. All VISTAs funded under the Recovery Act will receive the same benefits and be subject to the same terms and conditions of service as our regularly serving VISTAs.

What is the timeline for implementing the VISTA Recovery Act plan?

The Corporation expects to have approval to spend the Recovery Act funds by April and the goal is to have all 3,000 Recovery Act VISTAs placed by the end of September 2009.

How soon should I apply for Recovery Act VISTAs?

If you are an existing VISTA sponsor and have been awarded slots that have not been filled due to lack of Corporation resources, contact your Program Officer immediately to see about having those slots filled with VISTAs from the Recovery Act.

If you are an existing VISTA sponsor who would like to expand your awarded slots, contact your Program Officer immediately to see about amending your Memorandum of Agreement for a one-time expansion of slots.

If you do not have an awarded VISTA project, contact the Corporation Office in your state to begin the process of submitting a Concept Paper.

When can we start recruiting the new VISTAs?

Current VISTA Sponsors can begin recruiting immediately, directing VISTA applicants to the AmeriCorps Portal (my.americorps.gov). The applicants may be approved by state offices and scheduled for pre-service orientation once the additional Recovery funds have been allocated to the states. Sponsors should contact their state offices to determine when those funds will be available.

Organizations which are still designing a VISTA project in coordination with their state office must wait until the project is finalized and approved.

Will there be some relaxation to the indirect service provision for VISTA activities under the Recovery Act?

No. Under the Recovery Act, there are no changes to the types of service activities in which VISTAs may participate.

Does the Corporation have resources available to support VISTA member supervision and transportation?

The Corporation has limited resources available to support such costs. Typically the sponsoring organization is responsible for providing supervision and on-the-job transportation for the VISTAs assigned to the projects, as well as work space and equipment. The Corporation recognizes that in certain circumstances, this may not be possible and therefore to ensure the project's success, can negotiate and provide limited support funds for supervision and on-the-job transportation.

Since the Recovery funds are available for only one year, if an organization wants to apply for a new VISTA project, should they apply for a one-year project?

The Recovery Act funds are available for one year only. Any project receiving resources from the Recovery Act should be prepared to demonstrate results of those resources within one year. Organizations interested in continuing to sponsor a VISTA project after that year, may apply to their Corporation State Office for regular, non-Recovery Act resources, just as they would under normal circumstances.

Do we have to track the money and Recovery VISTAs separately from our regular VISTAs?

Yes. The money provided under the Recovery Act must be tracked separately from our other appropriated dollars. The VISTAs and funds will have to be tracked and reported on separately.

More detailed information on this will be available soon.

Will there be additional reporting requirements for the projects that receive funding or VISTAs under the Recovery Act?

Yes. All projects that receive VISTAs funded by the Recovery Act will be required to report quarterly on national Recovery-specific results. This reporting will be separate from, and in addition to, regular project progress reports (see more on this below). The national measures will include existing VISTA measures, such as volunteers generated and private sector resources raised, and will also include additional measures that are directly related to certain recovery-specific activities. More information on these measures will be made available soon.

Projects will need to report on the results produced by the “Recovery VISTAs” separately from those produced by their regular VISTAs.

How will projects receiving Recovery VISTAs report on results?

A unique report, the VISTA Recovery Act Progress Report Supplement, will be created in eGrants. The report will be similar in function to the VISTA Progress Report Supplement (VPRS) currently in eGrants. Projects receiving Recovery VISTAs will complete this report quarterly. More information will come to you about how this will work.

Can Recovery Act VISTAs and Regular VISTAs be part of the same project plan?

Yes. Projects receiving Recovery VISTAs will **not** have to develop separate project plans. Project plans reflect the goals of the overall project, not to individual VISTAs. It is acceptable to have VISTAs funded under the Recovery Act and VISTAs funded through our regular appropriation work together on the same project goals, and be included in the same project plan, especially if the Recovery Act VISTAs will simply be augmenting the existing program activities.

Sponsors may want to amend their project plan if the Recovery VISTAs will be significantly increasing the scope of the project, or if they plan to use the new VISTAs to expand into new issue areas. This will be a decision made by the sponsoring organization in consultation with their program officer.

Will projects receiving Recovery Act VISTAs need to submit a separate project progress report (PPR) for those VISTAs? Will project level performance measures need to be separated out on the PPR?

Projects receiving Recovery Act VISTAs will not need to submit a separate PPR.

The PPR reflects the project's goals and will mirror the project plan. Thus, projects receiving Recovery Act VISTAs will not need to submit a separate PPR. For the purposes of the PPR, the activities and results of the Recovery Act VISTAs and the regular VISTAs do not have to be broken out. The PPR reports on the accomplishments of the overall project, not the individual VISTAs. The performance measures established and reported on should reflect the specific goals of that project.

For the purposes of public reporting on results relative to the Recovery Act, projects will use (as described above) the separate VPRS tool, and will report on nationally agreed upon performance measures. For those measures, and those measures only, sponsors will have to track the accomplishments of the Recovery Act VISTA as distinct from their regular VISTAs.

Will projects receiving VISTAs under the Recovery Act have to develop unique VISTA Assignment Descriptions (VAD) for the Recovery VISTAs?

Not necessarily. If the Recovery VISTAs will simply be augmenting existing project activities and a VAD has already been developed that is relevant to what the new VISTAs will be doing, there is no need to develop a new one.

If, however, the sponsoring organization plans to use the Recovery VISTAs to expand into a new program area or to provide new services within the project, then a new VAD may have to be developed to reflect the assignments for those new VISTAs.

Will our Memorandum of Agreement (MA) have to be amended to reflect the placement of Recovery VISTAS?

Yes. Any existing project that is supplemented with VISTAs funded by the Recovery Act will need an amendment to its MA that indicates they are being provided Recovery Act VISTAs, that the funding is one-time only, and specifically the additional reporting requirements required under the Recovery Act.

Will there be additional Pre-Service Orientations (PSOs) be scheduled to support the increased number of VISTAs?

Yes. The Corporation's expectation is that organizations placing members funded through Recovery Act resources will receive the same type of support as our regular VISTA projects, including: orientation, training, recruitment support, etc. Additional PSOs and Supervisor Orientations (SO) will be scheduled to accommodate the increase. You will get information as soon as it is available, which we expect to be shortly.

Dated: March 13, 2009