



**AmeriCorps VISTA
Program Guidance for Current
and Potential Project Sponsors**

**Fiscal Year 2015
October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2015**

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

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I. Introduction

The AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance directs the development of new projects and outlines national programming priorities for FY 2015. All new AmeriCorps VISTA projects developed this fiscal year must adhere to this guidance.

Prospective AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors should read the guidance in its entirety. Current sponsors may wish to review Section IV which highlights changes in this document from last year.

II. Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program

Founded in 1965, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) is a federal national service program designed to strategically partner with nonprofit organizations and public agencies and increase their capacity to lift Americans out of poverty. In 1993, VISTA was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs, housed at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

AmeriCorps VISTA supports efforts to alleviate poverty by recruiting Americans 18 years and older from a diverse range of backgrounds in a year of full-time service with a sponsoring organization (“sponsor”) to create or expand programs designed to empower individuals and communities in overcoming poverty.

While strong progress has been made in lifting Americans out of poverty following the Great Recession, recent data from the United States Census Bureau identifies more than 45 million Americans still living below the poverty line.

2015 marks 50 years since VISTA deployed its first corps of members as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “unconditional war on poverty in America.” This year is an opportunity to celebrate the work of VISTAs while continuing to explore new strategies to help lift Americans out of poverty.

About VISTA Sponsors

Nonprofit organizations, Native American tribes, and city, state, and local government agencies are eligible to apply as AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors. Sponsorship is not limited to those designated by the Internal Revenue Service (“IRS”) as 501(c)(3); it may also include nonprofits with other IRS 501(c) statuses that focus on anti-poverty community development. Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible. Sponsors must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise AmeriCorps VISTA members, and provide the necessary administrative support to achieve the goals of the project. Sponsors must also develop and manage projects with meaningful involvement of the communities that will be served.

Organizations interested in becoming a sponsor should begin by visiting NationalService.gov and contacting the [CNCS office in their state](#). Organizations may also review [Is VISTA Right for Your Organization?](#) and [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA](#) for more in-depth information about becoming a sponsor. After contacting their state office, interested organizations can apply by submitting a concept paper and application through the CNCS eGrants web-based system, under the FY 2015 AmeriCorps VISTA State Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA).

About AmeriCorps VISTA Members

[AmeriCorps VISTA members](#) vary in age and hail from a range of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Each VISTA commits to one year of full-time service on a specific project with a sponsor.

The AmeriCorps VISTA [Summer Associate Program](#) allows members to serve through an existing VISTA project for 8–10 weeks through the summer months.

Both VISTAs and Summer Associates live and serve in some of our nation’s poorest areas. They receive a modest living allowance and [other benefits](#) during their service. After successfully completing a term of service, VISTAs and Summer Associates may receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award which can be used to pay for college or student loans, or an end-of-service cash stipend.

In FY 2015, AmeriCorps VISTA plans to support approximately 7,000 full-time VISTAs and Summer Associates who will serve with approximately 800 sponsors. They will leverage human, financial, and material resources to develop sustainable solutions to problems in low-income communities across the country.

Individuals interested in serving as a VISTA should apply at [NationalService.gov](#).

III. Framework for VISTA Programming

Core Principles

Projects must be developed in accordance with AmeriCorps VISTA’s core principles: an anti-poverty focus, community empowerment, sustainable solutions, and capacity building.

Anti-Poverty Focus

The statutory purpose of AmeriCorps VISTA is to support efforts to eliminate poverty. Each VISTA project should focus on empowering individuals to emerge from poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. VISTA projects should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

Community Empowerment

Prospective and current AmeriCorps VISTA project sponsors must engage low-income community members in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating the project. Each project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of community residents, and tap into inherent community assets, strengths, and resources.

Sustainable Solutions

Congress has directed AmeriCorps VISTA to serve as short-term resources that serve to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. Projects should be developed with a goal to phase out the need for VISTAs within three years and have the project continue without them.

Capacity Building

VISTAs create systems that remain long after their term of service ends. VISTA projects expand the scale, impact, and resource-leveraging ability of programs and organizations that work to eliminate poverty. Our members strengthen sponsors by building infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, securing long-term resources, coordinating training for participants, and more, as determined by local needs.

Members focus on capacity-building activities. They may perform limited direct service, which primarily includes activities that address individual clients’ immediate needs, under special initiatives.

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

Key Legislation and Regulations

The VISTA program's governing [legislation](#) and applicable [regulations](#) are the:

- Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (as amended)
- Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (Public Law 113-13, October 2009)
- Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Parts 1206, 1210-1211, 1216-1220, 1222, 1225, 1226

Assessment of Project Applications

In choosing which project applications to support, the AmeriCorps VISTA program evaluates prospective and current VISTA projects and sponsors on 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 stakeholders in project development and implementation through the duration of the project
- Address the relevant needs of low-income communities and otherwise comply with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (DVSA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4951 et seq.), applicable to VISTA and all applicable regulations, guidelines, and policies
- Build organizational and/or community capacity to sustain the project beyond the VISTA term of service
- Describe the intended outcomes of the project on the targeted population and community
- Clearly state how VISTAs will be trained, supervised, and supported to ensure mission success, as well as compliance with DVSA program rules and regulations
- Illustrate the relationship between key project elements throughout the application, including: a statement demonstrating the need and intended outcomes; performance measures; and VISTA member assignment description(s)
- Ensure that VISTA and community resources are sufficient to achieve project goals
- Possess sufficient management and technical capability to implement and oversee the project
- Request an appropriate number of VISTAs to achieve the project mission, and select VISTAs with the requisite skills and qualifications to meet established goals and objectives.

Evidence-Based Programming

In FY 2015, CNCS will increase its application of an evidence-based approach to AmeriCorps VISTA programming. CNCS supports projects that demonstrate the effectiveness of proposed interventions in addressing relevant community needs. Indicators of effectiveness may include past performance, results from credible research, or results from similar, successful programs. Evidence should provide the basis for decisions about the design, frequency, and intensity of proposed interventions.

For example, the U.S. Department of Education maintains an online clearinghouse of proven models of impactful education programs, and it should be consulted when developing relevant applications:

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>.

The Secretaries of Labor, Commerce, Education, and Health and Human Services have also issued guidance (“[Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity](#)”) on proven workforce development models that should be consulted when developing relevant applications:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/skills_report_072014_2.pdf.

IV. FY 2015 Programming Areas

This section outlines key programming areas of CNCS and AmeriCorps VISTA and provides examples of how projects might address them.

Overview of CNCS Strategic Plan for FY 2011–2015

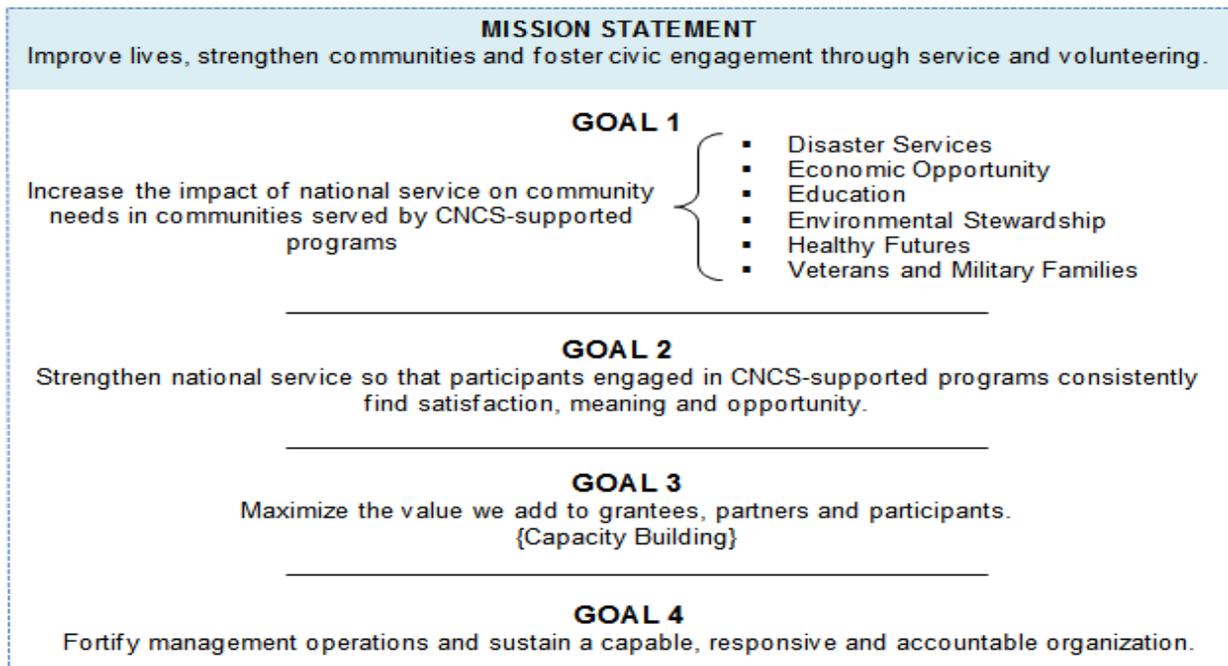
The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act directs CNCS to focus national service in areas where it can have a major impact. CNCS is fulfilling congressional instructions by targeting agency resources in the CNCS [Strategic Plan](#).

CNCS has developed four strategic goals that encapsulate key elements needed to measure the agency’s performance as it executes this important mission. The goals outlined below form the foundation of the strategic plan.

Each strategic goal is supported by one or more objective that defines an “action plan” for the agency to reach each long-term strategic goal. In turn, each objective is supported by at least one performance measure, which defines the measurable targets the agency expects to achieve. CNCS will use the performance measures to monitor its progress toward achieving all four goals of the strategic plan.

To enhance the impact of national service on community needs, Goal I includes six focus areas for concentrated programmatic attention: Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. Each focus area contains objectives and performance measures available on the “[CNCS Performance Measurements](#)” section of the National Service Knowledge Network [website](#).

Through Goal II, CNCS supports the national service network in providing experiences offering a combination of professional and educational benefits to service participants.



Goal III aims to strengthen CNCS' capacity, as well as the capacity of the national service network, to measure performance, evaluate program impact, and leverage community assets through public-private partnerships.

Goal IV targets the agency's infrastructure for further enhancement to achieve the objectives of Goals I-III.

VISTA Programming Priorities for FY 2015

This year's priorities are guided by the CNCS Strategic Plan and AmeriCorps VISTA's statutory mandate to focus on eliminating poverty. CNCS expects that at least 80 percent of AmeriCorps VISTA resources will be invested in building the capacity of anti-poverty programs and organizations operating in these areas:

- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Healthy Futures
- Veterans and Military Families.

Within these four focus areas AmeriCorps VISTA encourages new project development where appropriate in the following specific programming areas and initiatives (see p. 7). Projects focused in these areas will be given the highest consideration for investments of AmeriCorps VISTA resources:

- Data Collection and Management for Results
- Intergenerational Hunger
- My Brother's Keeper
- Refugee Resettlement/Anti-Trafficking.

Economic Opportunity

AmeriCorps VISTA's commitment to ending poverty requires an intense focus on projects that equip those we serve with skills, education, and training that track the needs of employers looking to hire. The July 2014 "[Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity](#)" report specifies that projects using "coordinated strategies across systems, and flexible, innovative training strategies that integrate the education, training, and support services" are needed when dealing with workers with lower skills or those facing multiple barriers to employment.

In FY 2015, VISTA will give priority to projects that support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to the improved economic well-being and financial security of economically disadvantaged people.

VISTA project activities should focus on the following objectives of Economic Opportunity:

- **Financial Literacy:** Improving access to services and benefits aimed at contributing to enhanced financial literacy
- **Housing:** Transitioning individuals into or helping them remain in safe, healthy, affordable housing
- **Employment:** Improving employability that leads to increased success in becoming employed.

CNCS is a member of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and also maintains an interagency agreement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to launch a VISTA corps this year focused on preserving affordable housing and helping low-income residents access other necessary supports. AmeriCorps VISTA applications that focus on housing should align with the USICH strategic plan [Opening Doors](#) and utilize USICH strategies and technical assistance resources.

Education

AmeriCorps VISTA will place priority on projects that provide support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children. The program will target new project development in communities with schools that received School Improvement Grants from the U.S. Department of Education or were identified by a state educational agency that has requested and received approval from the Department for Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility, including those schools participating in the [Together for Tomorrow](#) initiative. Projects should focus on the following objectives:

- School readiness for economically disadvantaged young children
- K-12 success in student educational and behavioral outcomes in low-achieving schools
- Post-secondary success.

Where feasible, project activities should align with the goals of Together for Tomorrow:

- Celebrate and inspire community and family engagement in education and strengthen a community culture of education success
- Foster the capacity of low-performing schools to manage school-community partnerships
- Focus community partnerships on boosting key measurable student outcomes—attendance, behavior, course performance, college access.

STEM Education

AmeriCorps VISTA is 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. The progress made in the prior fiscal year through such projects should continue and expand to include at least 15 new communities nationwide in FY 2015.

Community Colleges

Projects that partner 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

The VISTA program will give priority to projects that meet health needs, including access to food resources and health care, for economically disadvantaged individuals.

Projects should support the following Healthy Futures Objectives:

- **Obesity and Food** (Food Resources): Improving access to nutritious food.
- **Access to Health Care:** Connecting economically disadvantaged individuals to preventative and primary health care services.

Hunger

AmeriCorps VISTA is committed to ending child hunger. Building on our existing support of critical U.S. Department of Agriculture programs, such as the Summer Food Service Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program, school breakfasts, etc., VISTA is committed to projects that further leverage coordination between national service programs and public/private partnerships. Potential focus areas might include projects that expand breakfast in the classroom or address transportation barriers to food access, specifically in rural areas or other venues with hard to reach populations.

Inter-Generational Food Security

AmeriCorps VISTA will give priority to projects that increase access to healthy foods across generational lines (e. g., a VISTA project that develops a one-stop, congregate meal program model where food for parents and their infants and children, or seniors could be provided simultaneously). Ideal projects will advance co-located services and move individuals and families toward economic self-sufficiency.

Health Care

Given the nexus between poverty and negative health outcomes, AmeriCorps VISTA will aim to ensure that underserved low-income individuals and families are connected to an initial visit with a primary care provider and ongoing preventative health care services. Seamless access will involve developing health care resources that:

- Bring culturally relevant services to underserved groups according to age, geography, and disability
- Create wrap-around support including physical, mental, and social welfare elements
- Assist individuals in accessing health insurance coverage and finding a primary care provider.

Veterans and Military Families

AmeriCorps VISTA will support projects that focus on low-income veterans and military families as beneficiaries or enhance existing projects to better serve those populations. In FY 2015, we aim to expand programming in support of Veterans and Military Families around:

- Economic opportunity – employment, financial literacy, housing
- Education – school readiness, success in K-12 education and beyond
- Healthy futures – food security, access to health care.

Additional Programming Considerations

My Brother's Keeper

In response to the President's call around the My Brother's Keeper initiative to support boys and men of color and all youth, AmeriCorps VISTA will aim to support its goals through projects focusing on:

- Entering School Ready to Learn – closing the word gap, ensuring access to high-quality early care and education, and expanding health and developmental screenings
- Reading at Grade Level by 3rd Grade – joint book reading or in-home literacy programs and increasing the capacity of successful reading proficiency programs
- College Access – improving access to college advising and support tools, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in low-income communities
- Workforce Development – programs aimed at increasing entry-level jobs, mentorship, and apprenticeship options.

Refugee Resettlement/Anti-Trafficking

Poverty acutely impacts refugee populations, and AmeriCorps VISTA will give priority to projects that provide support services to low-income, documented immigrant and refugee populations, particularly unaccompanied minors and victims of human trafficking. Our emphasis in FY 2015 will be programs that raise awareness of trafficking and connect those vulnerable groups with comprehensive support services. Project activities should focus on economic opportunity, education, and healthy futures.

Ideally, AmeriCorps VISTA projects will focus on refugee populations that have been placed in a community by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement and are likely to maintain a continuous presence in the United States.

Rural Community Development

VISTA seeks a balanced portfolio of urban and rural programming. More than 35 percent of the people living in completely rural counties live in high-poverty counties and more than 26 percent live in persistent-poverty counties. VISTA will continue to invest resources to move people in rural communities out of poverty.

Data Collection and Management for Results

Increasingly, nonprofit organizations are asked to take on important, complex challenges. They are also increasingly attempting – and being asked by funders, beneficiaries and other stakeholders – to ensure that they efficiently and effectively use their limited resources.

Performance measurement, performance management, and evaluation are elements that can be used by nonprofit organizations to know whether they are effective in getting results. However, many nonprofit organizations lack the capacity to use these tools.

VISTA has a 50 year history of building the capacity of nonprofit organizations and public agencies to create or strengthen anti-poverty programs. In FY 2015, AmeriCorps VISTA seeks proposals from organizations with an interest in helping organizations build their capacity – or that of their programs – to more effectively use information to implement programs that address poverty. Depending on the organization's need and capacity in this area, this initiative would involve placing VISTA members with organizations to address capacity around Performance Measurement, Evaluation, or Performance Management.

Other Programming

Disaster Preparedness and Long-Term Recovery

Following a disaster, those affected by poverty suffer the greatest losses and have the most limited access to public and private resources; socioeconomic status is a significant predictor in the pre- and post-disaster stages. AmeriCorps VISTA has an opportunity to prevent impoverished communities and individuals from sinking deeper into poverty following a disaster.

Where appropriate, AmeriCorps VISTA will focus on assisting low-income communities with strategic planning to prepare for the occurrence of natural disasters. Examples might include working with community nonprofits to increase their capacity for sheltering, feeding, and providing disaster education and case management services to low-income, special needs, or other underserved populations.

Recovery efforts might include projects that assist families in gaining access to federal, state, local, and private funding to repair and reconstruct their homes; organize donations committees; provide case management services or connect skilled volunteers to homeowners in need, or other critical services.

Environmental Stewardship

AmeriCorps VISTA will focus on projects that prioritize energy efficiency to reduce poverty. Priority will be given to projects focused on promoting energy efficiency, clean energy, and climate resilience, and projects that make alternative energy technologies available to low-income communities to reduce utility costs and/or provide the necessary skills for “green jobs.” All VISTA project applications in the Environmental Stewardship focus area must provide evidence that there will be a direct benefit to communities experiencing poverty.

National Days of Service

VISTA supports the development of supplementary service projects to commemorate the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service and the September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance. VISTA members and sponsors should take the opportunity on these national days of service to promote community volunteerism, conduct outreach to diverse populations, and engage potential new partners.

For the MLK Day of Service in 2015, VISTA encourages sponsors and members to promote the [Earned Income Tax Credit](#) or get involved in the [National Point-in-Time Count of people experiencing homelessness](#). Resources to help plan an MLK Day of Service project are available at [MLKDay.gov](#).

V. VISTA Support to Projects

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

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 core principles](#) in their service.

CNCS requires all potential VISTAs to attend a Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) to learn the terms and conditions of VISTA service and certain leadership skills. Candidates must successfully complete PSO before they can officially begin their term of service as VISTAs.

VISTA Leaders

VISTA Leaders serve in projects that are approved for eight or more VISTAs. Their role is to expand the capacity of the VISTAs they lead and to assist sponsors and 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.

VISTA Summer Associates

Existing sponsors of year-round VISTA projects may apply to CNCS State Offices to add Summer Associates to their projects. Summer Associates generally serve 8 to 10 weeks during the summer. In developing the concept paper for Summer Associates 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.

The VISTA program will issue guidance regarding FY 2015 programming for Summer Associates at a later date.

Standard Projects

For standard projects, CNCS places 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 of organizations to assist in the support of a VISTA project. We anticipate a decrease in support grants awarded for FY 2015. 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 cost-share projects, CNCS pays the VISTAs directly and invoices the sponsors for the living allowance of VISTAs covered by the cost-share arrangement.

Sponsors must pay their cost-share portion via 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 resources for capacity building, may not be able to support a cost-share agreement.

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

Supervisors Orientation

CNCS offers a required orientation for supervisors of VISTA projects. New VISTA supervisors must attend a Supervisors Orientation at least three months prior to the date their VISTAs begin service. At the orientation, which usually lasts three to four days, supervisors learn more about the terms and conditions of VISTA service and specific ways they can support the VISTAs at their organization. They also learn about the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD), which outlines the project activities assigned to each VISTA.

VI. Reporting, Monitoring, and Oversight

CNCS routinely monitors VISTA projects and provides training and technical assistance to sponsors. Monitoring activities may include those conducted for all sponsors before the application is approved, routine activities conducted for all sponsors during the project period (such as Progress Report reviews), and activities conducted for select sponsors each year (such as site visits). In addition, ongoing communication with sponsors (e.g., phone, email, etc.) is an integral component of oversight and monitoring.

Sponsors must be engaged in continuous monitoring of projects. Sponsors are also required to regularly report to CNCS viable and verifiable information about the project in a number of ways, such as:

Progress Report

Sponsors complete the Progress Report to document development in meeting performance measure targets and identify project successes, challenges, and areas requiring training, technical assistance or other interventions. The Progress Report is submitted in eGrants quarterly for first-year projects and twice yearly thereafter, unless otherwise specified by the CNCS State Office.

VISTA Progress Report Supplement

Sponsors use the VISTA Progress Report Supplement in the eGrants system to report on program-wide performance measurements at the end of the fiscal year. For FY 2015, sponsors will report data related to activities occurring between October 1, 2014 and September 30, 2015.

Sponsor Verification Form

Using the Sponsor Verification Form, sponsors must certify that VISTAs assigned to their project are reporting for service. The sponsor must certify the Sponsor Verification Form in eGrants biweekly.

Cost Share Payments

If a sponsor participates in the cost share program, CNCS invoices the sponsor for the living allowance of VISTAs covered by the cost-share arrangement, and sponsors must make payments.

Federal Financial Report

Sponsors that receive a support grant or program grant must complete a Federal Financial Report to document their grant's financial progress.

VII. Next Steps

If your organization would like to apply to become a VISTA sponsor to develop or enhance a community-supported anti-poverty project, please review the [Concept Paper instructions](#) and the contact information for your local CNCS State Office.

We encourage organizations to notify the state office in their area of their intent to apply to become a VISTA project sponsor. For example, organizations in Alaska should send an email to AK@cns.gov. A complete list of CNCS state offices is available at: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact-us/state-offices>.

You may also email vista@americorps.gov to request by mail a more in-depth booklet, [Is VISTA Right for Your Organization?](#), or review [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA](#).

VIII. Technical Assistance Resources

CNCS State Offices

CNCS has staff working in offices throughout the United States, including American Indian and Alaska Native nations, and in the U.S. Territories. 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-us/state-offices>.

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.gov.

National Service Knowledge Network

The [National Service Knowledge Network](#) is a web-based clearinghouse that contains downloadable tools and courses for training and technical assistance purposes. The Network consists of publications, tip sheets, web links, toolkits, and other resources that cover a wide range of topics. The Network also features a webpage detailing [CNCS' priorities and performance measurements](#) and [VISTA-specific resources](#), including the [eGrants Performance Measures Module for AmeriCorps VISTA](#).

Developing Performance Measures

CNCS has resources for performance measures on the National Service Knowledge Network [website](#).

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 on this list does not imply or convey endorsement by CNCS.

Poverty and Poverty-Related Issues

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

Evidence-Based Programming

- CNCS Performance Measure Core Curriculum – *Evidence*: <https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/npm/training-resources>
- Best Evidence Encyclopedia: <http://www.bestevidence.org/index.cfm>
- Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy: <http://coalition4evidence.org/wordpress/>
- PerformWell: <http://www.performwell.org/>
- What Works Clearinghouse, Department of Education: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Performance Measurement

- CNCS Performance Measure Core Curriculum: <https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/npm/training-resources>

- Basic Guide to Outcomes-Based Evaluation for Nonprofit Organizations with Very Limited Resources: <http://managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcomes.htm>
- Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy: <http://coalition4evidence.org/wordpress/>
- Demystifying Outcome Measurement in Community Development: <http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/publications/communitydevelopment/w07-5.pdf>
- 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/ProgramMgmt/Outcome_Measurement_Showing_Results_Nonprofit_Sector.pdf

Economic Opportunity

- CFED (Corporation for Enterprise Development): <http://www.cfed.org/>
- Homeless Veterans: <http://www1.va.gov/homeless/>
- Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University: <http://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/>
- MyMoney: <http://www.mymoney.gov>
- Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship: <http://www.nfte.com/>
- Pact: <http://www.pactworld.org/>
- Treasury Department's Office of Financial Education and Financial Access: <http://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/offices/Domestic-Finance/Pages/OfficeOfFinEdTechAstCtr.aspx>
- U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness: <http://www.usich.gov/>
- Virtual Library on Microcredit: <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/>

Education

- *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/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=297>
- National Center on Secondary Education and Transition: Increasing Rates of School Completion: <http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/default.asp>
- National Education Association's Preventing Future High School Dropouts: <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/dropoutguide1108.pdf>
- The Center for Public Education: <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org>
- The School Turnaround Learning Community: <http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org/>
- *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*, Institute of Education Sciences: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/Turnaround_pg_04181.pdf
- U.S. Department of Education Guidance for School Improvement Grants Programs: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>

Healthy Futures

- Health and Human Services: Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration: <http://www.samhsa.gov/>
- 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/resources/clinical/tools-and-support/veterans/>
- National Rural Health Association: <http://www.ruralhealthweb.org/>
- Sesame Workshop Health and Wellness Initiative: <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/health>

APPENDIX: Performance Measures Reporting Requirements

In FY 2014, VISTA introduced changes to eGrants, including a new Performance Measures Module that standardizes how new applicants and current sponsors submit performance measures information for their project. The Performance Measures Module also incorporates the National Performance Measures described below. In FY 2015, the Performance Measures Module and corresponding project application instructions must be used by all organizations submitting new applications as well as existing sponsors submitting renewal applications. Technical assistance is available through the [National Service Knowledge Network](#), which includes the [eGrants Performance Measures Module for AmeriCorps VISTA](#), and [CNCS state offices](#).

Capacity Building Performance Measures

CNCS seeks to strengthen the capacity of national service grantees, partners, and participants. Enhancing the capacity of organizations and programs to alleviate poverty is a core principle of the VISTA Program and a critical component of every VISTA project. In fact, the activities of VISTAs most directly relate to capacity building; therefore, a major emphasis of VISTA’s programming plan this fiscal year is the continued implementation of performance measures to capture the results of capacity-building activities associated with VISTA projects.

Table 1 (below) lists the National Performance Measures that reflect most capacity building activities performed in VISTA projects. The [CNCS Performance Measurements](#) webpage also lists these Goal 3 Capacity Building Performance Measures (Outputs and Outcomes), along with definitions of key terms and data collection standards.

In FY 2015, new applicants and renewal applicants for VISTA program support will identify in their application at least one Goal 3 Capacity Building Output and at least one Goal 3 Capacity Building Outcome that best reflect their capacity building activities (in exceptional cases, applicants may identify their own capacity building output or outcome). In accordance with the definitions and protocols identified for that measure (see the VISTA-specific section of the [CNCS Performance Measurements](#) webpage), sponsors will track their progress during the project year and report their performance for the Goal 3 Capacity Building Measures they selected, using the VISTA Progress Report.

Using the VISTA Progress Report Supplement, an annual survey completed by sponsors in the eGrants system, sponsors will also report data related to Goal 3 Capacity Building Measures for activities occurring between October 1, 2014 and September 30, 2015.

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

**Table 1. CNCS Strategic Plan Goal 3
Capacity Building Performance Measures Available to VISTA Sponsors**

Output Performance Measures
G3-3.1 Number of community volunteers recruited by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
G3-3.2 Number of community volunteers managed by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants
G3-3.4 Number of organizations that received capacity building services from CNCS-supported organizations

or national service participants¹

G3-3.5 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

G3-3.6 Number of organizations that completed a community assessment identifying goals and recommendations with the assistance of CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants

G3-3.7 Hours of service contributed by community volunteers who were recruited by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants

G3-3.8 Hours of service contributed by community volunteers who were managed by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants

Outcome Performance Measures

G3-3.3 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

G3-3.9 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

G3-3.10 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

G3-3.11 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

G3-3.13 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

G3-3.14 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

G3-3.15 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

G3-3.16. Dollar value of cash resources leveraged by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants.

G3-3.17. Dollar value of in-kind resources leveraged by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants.

G3-3.18. Number of new beneficiaries that received services as a result of capacity building efforts in a) Disaster Services, b) Economic Opportunity, c) Education, d) Environmental Stewardship, e) Healthy Futures and/or f) Veterans and Military Families.

G3-3.19. Number of new beneficiaries from one or more targeted or underserved populations (counts by target population, e.g., racial or ethnic group) that received services as a result of capacity building efforts in a) Disaster Services, b) Economic Opportunity, c) Education, d) Environmental Stewardship, e) Healthy Futures and/or f) Veterans and Military Families.

¹ If you are a federated network with chapters and not a stand-alone 501(c)(3), you would report one (1) as the number of organizations receiving capacity building services from national service participants.

Performance Measures Alignment Requirement

The VISTA program seeks to devote resources to support certain programming areas for Goal 1 (as noted above in [Section IV](#) and Table 2 below) of the CNCS Strategic Plan. CNCS State Offices will support this effort by developing new VISTA projects whose interventions correspond with the Goal 1 performance measures included in the AmeriCorps VISTA section on the [CNCS Performance Measurements](#) webpage.

VISTA sponsors are not required to report data on Goal 1 performance measures. However, as outlined in the AmeriCorps VISTA section on the [CNCS Performance Measurements](#) webpage, each performance measure has key terms and definitions, which are necessary to determine whether a VISTA project supports programming that aligns with that measure.

A project corresponds to a Goal 1 performance measure, if...

...VISTAs are building the capacity of a program or organization that has identified a poverty-related need, a beneficiary population, and intended outputs or outcomes for beneficiaries ...

Table 2. CNCS Strategic Plan Goal 1

Focus Areas, Objectives, and Programming Areas Relevant to VISTA

VISTA will give highest priority to organizations that are working in the following areas:

Focus Area	Objective	Programming Area
Economic Opportunity	Financial Literacy	Providing financial services-related assistance to economically disadvantaged people to improve their financial literacy.
	Housing	Providing housing-related assistance to economically disadvantaged people to improve their housing situation.
	Employment	Providing employment-related assistance to economically disadvantaged people.
Education	School Readiness	Providing services for children living in poverty to make gains in school readiness in terms of social and/or emotional development.
		Providing services for children living in poverty to make gains in school readiness in terms of literacy skills.
		Providing services for children living in poverty to make gains in school readiness in terms of numeracy (math) skills.
K-12 Success	K-12 Success	Providing services to students living in poverty to improve academic performance
		Providing services to students living in poverty to improve academic engagement.

Focus Area	Objective	Programming Area
	Post-Secondary Success	<p>Providing services to students living in poverty to increase enrollment in a post-secondary institution.</p> <p>Providing services to students living in poverty to receive a vocational or technical certificate from an accredited postsecondary institution or to continue to another year of post-secondary education.</p>
Healthy Futures	<p>Obesity and Food (Food Resources)</p> <p>Access to Health Care</p>	<p>Providing services to individuals in underserved community to gain access to food resources.</p> <p>Providing services to individuals in underserved community to gain access to preventative and primary health care services.</p>
Veterans and Military Families	Veterans Served	<p>Providing services to low-income veterans, veterans' family members, family members of active duty military, and military service members.</p>