



**DATE:** October 19, 2015

**TO:** Potential New AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsor Organizations

**FROM:** California State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service

**SUBJECT: Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) for New AmeriCorps VISTA Projects**  
**Concept Papers Due: November 20, 2015**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The California State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) announces the opportunity, subject to availability of resources, to develop and sponsor new AmeriCorps VISTA projects in California. This Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) is open to those organizations that are not currently AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors.

VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a national service program that supports efforts to alleviate poverty by engaging individuals, 18 years and older, in a year of full-time service with a sponsoring organization. VISTA projects help to create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty. VISTA members focus on building permanent infrastructure in sponsoring organizations that bolsters their ability to alleviate poverty in their community.

Public organizations such as state and local government, Indian Tribes and non-profit private organizations can apply to become VISTA sponsors. All organizations with an IRS 501(C) status and a plan to focus on alleviating and reducing poverty are eligible to apply for VISTA resources. Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible.

A Sponsoring Organization (sponsor) must be able to direct the proposed project, recruit and supervise VISTA members, and provide the necessary administrative support to accomplish the goals of their proposed project.

## **VISTA PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES FOR FY 2016**

The CNCS California State Office is currently accepting Concept Papers that propose to address one or more of the following issue areas from the [CNCS Strategic Plan 2011-2015](#) and the [FY 2016 AMERICORPS VISTA PROGRAM GUIDANCE](#)

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

### **Economic Opportunity**

In FY 2016, AmeriCorps VISTA will continue to 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:

- **Employment:** Improving and/or creating job skills training programs that will lead to increased employment
- **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 and healthy affordable housing.

### **Education**

AmeriCorps VISTA will give priority to projects that facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children. AmeriCorps VISTA will target new project development in communities with Title I schools, particularly those with School Improvement Grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

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.**

#### *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.

#### *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 AmeriCorps 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*

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., AmeriCorps 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 wrap-around services and move individuals and families toward economic self-sufficiency.

#### *Health Care*

AmeriCorps VISTA will focus on funding projects that aim to ensure that underserved low-income individuals and families are connected to primary care providers and ongoing preventative health care services. Seamless access will involve developing health care resources that:

- Bring culturally relevant health 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 primary care providers.

#### **Veterans and Military Families**

AmeriCorps VISTA will support projects that focus on low-income veterans and military families as beneficiaries and/or that enhance existing projects to better serve those populations in the following areas:

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

#### **PRIORITY PROGRAMMING FOR FY 2016**

Within the four focus areas described above, AmeriCorps VISTA encourages new project development where appropriate in the following specific programming areas. Projects focused in these three areas will be given the highest consideration for investments of VISTA resources:

- Opportunity Youth and My Brother's Keeper
- Rural Community Development
- New American/Immigrant and Refugee Integration

### *Opportunity Youth and My Brother's Keeper*

In response to the President's My Brother's Keeper initiative to support boys and men of color and all low-income youth, AmeriCorps VISTA will aim to support projects focusing on:

- Ensuring all youth out of school are employed
- Ensuring all youth remain safe from violent crime
- Ensuring all children enter school cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally ready
- Ensuring all children read at grade level by 3rd grade
- Ensuring all youth graduate from high school
- Ensuring all youth complete post-secondary education or training.

### *Rural Community Development*

AmeriCorps VISTA seeks a balanced portfolio of urban and rural programming. More than 35 percent of those living in rural counties live in high-poverty areas. AmeriCorps VISTA will continue to invest resources to create economic opportunity in rural communities as well as support programming in the other priority areas.

### *New Americans / Immigrant and Refugee Integration*

Poverty acutely impacts immigrant and refugee populations, and AmeriCorps VISTA will prioritize projects that support local government and non-profit efforts to increase the civic, economic, and linguistic integration of new Americans. In addition, VISTA will continue to support efforts that raise awareness of human trafficking and connect those vulnerable groups with comprehensive support services.

### **COST SHARE PARTNERSHIP**

As a federally funded program, VISTA receives a limited financial allocation each year to support the work of VISTA projects across the country. VISTA is able to increase its reach in supporting anti-poverty programs by leveraging resources through cost-share partnerships.

As a cost share partner, a sponsor contributes the living allowance of one or more of its VISTA members. In California this rate ranges from \$11,676 – \$19,800 per year per VISTA depending on the county. Please note that the cost share partner's portion of support does not have to be paid up front. Projects are invoiced every four weeks.

Projects wishing to cost share all or some of the requested VISTA placements should indicate that intention in the concept paper.

### **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Eligible applicants interested in sponsoring an AmeriCorps VISTA project for two (2) or more AmeriCorps\*VISTA members are invited to submit a concept paper via [eGrants](#)---the CNCS electronic grants system. Concept Papers responding to this RFCP must be submitted by **8pm Pacific Time on Friday, November 20, 2015.**

Applicants wishing to sponsor a project with only one (1) AmeriCorps VISTA member will be encouraged to provide a cost share for that single VISTA placement.

[A Guide to Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA Project Sponsor](#) and [Creating an eGrants Account and Submitting a VISTA Concept Paper](#) provide instructions on developing and submitting a Concept Paper. Concept Papers must be submitted in the [eGrants](#) system under the NOFA: **AmeriCorps VISTA State FY 2016**. As stated previously, the California State Office submission deadline for this RFCP is November 20, 2015. *The NOFA deadline that appears in eGrants should be disregarded.*

### **SCOPE OF PROJECT**

Subject to availability of resources, AmeriCorps VISTA members will be awarded on a full-time basis for one year of service to newly approved VISTA sponsoring organizations. CNCS will make awards covering a period not to exceed one year with the potential for continuation. Members are projected to begin service in July 2016.

The CNCS State Office will be guided by locally driven programming that addresses the following “Key Principles.” Each VISTA project must be developed in accordance with the parameters defined by law, federal regulations and the key VISTA principles: Anti-Poverty Focus, Capacity Building, Sustainable Solutions and Community Empowerment.

#### *Key Principles:*

- **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 to simply make poverty more tolerable. The project should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.
- **Community Empowerment**  
All VISTA project sponsors must ensure that their project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, implementing and evaluating the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community assets, strengths and resources
- **Capacity Building**  
One way to achieve sustainable solutions is to strengthen the ability of local organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach and partnership development, VISTAs help sponsors to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. However, projects should focus their performance measures on achieving outcomes and impact on the community and/or beneficiary population, and not only outcomes on capacity building for the sponsoring organization or its partners, affiliates or intermediary organizations.
- **Sustainable Solutions**  
As originally designated in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act and reinforced in the Serve America Act, VISTA members represent a short-term resource and work to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. All VISTA projects should be developed with a goal establishing permanent infrastructure to sustain the project following the phase-out of VISTA members.

With the exception of cost share and intermediary projects, VISTA projects typically last three years. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must consider how to utilize the VISTA project to phase-in other resources and systems to eventually replace the VISTA resource.

### **CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL**

Criteria for approval are based on whether the proposed project:

- Fits with one or more of the VISTA Programming Priorities for FY 2016 detailed above and in the [FY 2016 AMERICORPS VISTA PROGRAM GUIDANCE](#)
- Addresses the needs of low-income communities by proposing a VISTA project that builds capacity for evidence-based programming that alleviates poverty. Specifies the community need (poverty issue), the number of people impacted, the programming to alleviate poverty, evidence that the intervention reduces poverty, the number of people that will be served, and the number of people whose situation will improve.
- Fosters organizational capacity so that the project can continue once VISTA resources are gone.
- Involves beneficiaries of the service and the low-income community in project development and implementation. This is required and must be noted in the Concept Paper. If the organizations board of directors does not consist of at least 51% of the low-income beneficiary community, the sponsor must create an Advisory Council with a composition of at least 51% of its members from the low-income community. The board or advisory council must review and provide written comments concerning the project application prior to submission. A copy of these comments will be a required attachment of any full application submitted.
- Is designed to generate public and/or private-sector resources.
- Promotes local volunteer service.
- Complies with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended; 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, VISTA regulations and VISTA policies.
- Further criteria for determining approval are based on whether the applicant:
  - Is a local or state government agency, Tribe or a private organization designated as a non-profit by the Internal Revenue Service.
  - Has resources available for VISTAs to perform their activities, such as space, supplies, and on-the-job transportation, and is able to provide emergency cash advances when needed.
  - Has the management capacity and commitment to recruit, train, supervise, and otherwise support VISTAs recruited locally and nationally.
  - Understands and is committed to promoting national and community service.
  - Has the capacity to build community partnerships and collaborative efforts to achieve project self-sufficiency.

New project development occurs annually and is always subject to availability of resources. The CNCS California State Office strives to ensure that the portfolio of California VISTA projects is both programmatically and geographically diverse, and also inclusive of all sizes of agencies ranging from small grassroots organizations to larger statewide and national organizations.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Please contact the CNCS California State Office at [CAvistainquiry@cns.gov](mailto:CAvistainquiry@cns.gov) with any questions not addressed by this RFCP.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL REFERENCE MATERIALS**

- [Creating an eGrants Account and submitting a VISTA Concept Paper](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Instructions](#)
- [CNCS Strategic Plan 2011-2015](#)
- [FY 2016 AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance](#)
- [eGrants system](#)
- [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA](#) (Flash Course)
- [VISTA 201: Applying for VISTA Resources](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Supervisors Manual](#)
- [VISTA Performance Measures](#)

## TIMELINE

- October 19, 2015:** RFCP Released –  
To apply, go to: [eGrants Log-in](#)
- Select NOFA: FY 2016 AmeriCorps VISTA State
- October 29, 2015:** Technical Assistance Webinar – 11:00 a.m. PST (Call-in details below)
- November 13, 2015:** Interested applicants email letter of intent to apply to [cavistainquiry@cns.gov](mailto:cavistainquiry@cns.gov) (Not required and non-binding).
- November 20, 2015:** Deadline for submitting final concept papers in eGrants.
- December 18, 2015:** CNCS California State Office will notify organizations if their Concept Paper has been approved and a full application requested.
- January 25, 2016:** Full application due to CNCS California State Office via eGrants. Submit all supporting documentation and attachments via email on or before the deadline to the assigned Program Officer.  
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- February 29, 2016:** CNCS California State Office decisions announced and application processed via eGrants. Memorandum of Agreement issued.
- April 2016:** Mandatory VISTA Supervisor Orientation for approved project sponsors. Staff should register for orientation 45 days in advance.
- May 2016:** Deadline for approved VISTA projects to submit recommended VISTA candidates to CNCS California State Office. Candidate applications are due 45 days in advance.
- July 2016:** VISTA candidates attend Pre-Service Orientation (PSO). VISTAs begin service following PSO.
- June 2016:** Next Request for Concept Papers pending resource availability

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WEBINAR INFORMATION**

**Date:** Thursday, October 29, 2015

**Time:** 11:00 AM-12:30 PM, Pacific Time

**To join the audio conference**

Toll free number: (866) 759-5212

Participant code: 46195315

Leader: DANETTE MARTIN

**Webinar**

Please be sure to RVSP for the webinar at [cavistainquiry@cns.gov](mailto:cavistainquiry@cns.gov) in order to receive a *Skype* meeting invitation.