DATE: July 26, 2016

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 by August 25, 2016

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 IRS 501(c) status and a plan to focus or 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 project, recruit and supervise VISTA members, and also 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 and FY 2016 VISTA 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 building capacity in the following programming areas:

- **Employment**
  Improving or creating job skills training programs that 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, 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 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 Future 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., 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 individual 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 serving low-income veterans and military families as beneficiaries and/or that enhance existing projects to better serve populations in the following areas: Project activities should focus on one or more 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

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 $11,880 – $20,640 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 two 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 are invited to submit a concept paper via eGrants---the CNCS electronic grants system. Concept Papers responding to this RFCP should be submitted by **8pm Pacific Time on the due date.**

The California State Office encourages applications from organizations seeking to serve as intermediary organizations, supporting VISTA members placed at multiple locations. Organizations interested in sponsoring a project with fewer than three (3) AmeriCorps VISTA members are encouraged to partner with other organizations on a multi-site project application, or to contact the California State Office to discuss other opportunities for project development.

All Concept Papers must be submitted via eGrants. Please see A Guide to Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA Project Sponsor and Creating an eGrants Account and Submitting a VISTA Concept Paper for instructions on developing and submitting a Concept Paper. Additional resources for using eGrant are available at http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants. When applying, please select the NOFA: *AmeriCorps VISTA State FY 2016.* The NOFA deadline that appears in eGrants should be disregarded.

SCOPE OF PROJECT

Subject to availability of resources, AmeriCorps VISTA projects will be awarded on a full-time basis for one year to newly approved VISTA sponsoring organizations. CNCS will make awards covering a period not to exceed one year with the potential for continuation.

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 intermediary projects, VISTA projects typically last three years. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must think about 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 **FY VISTA 2016 Programming Priorities** or **Priority Areas** listed in the California VISTA Programming and Geographic Development Priorities section of this document.
- 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 the VISTA resources are withdrawn.
- 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, inclusive of all sizes of agencies ranging from small grassroots organizations to larger statewide and national organizations, and strategically invests in anti-poverty solutions in California.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact the CNCS California State Office at cavistainquiry@cns.gov with any questions not addressed by this RFCP.

CLICK LINKS BELOW TO ACCESS SUPPLEMENTAL REFERENCE MATERIALS:

- Creating an eGrants Account and submitting a VISTA Concept Paper
- eGrants system
- CNCS Strategic Plan
- VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA (Flash Course)
- VISTA 201: Applying for VISTA Resources
- AmeriCorps VISTA Supervisors Manual
- VISTA Performance Measures
- AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Instructions

TIMELINE

RFCP Released	Tuesday, July 26, 2016
Tech. Asst. Webinar	Friday, August 12, 2016
Concept Paper Due	Thursday, August 25, 2016
Concept Paper Decision	Thursday, September 15, 2016
Full Application Due	Monday, October 17, 2016
Application Decision	Tuesday, November 29, 2016
Enrollment in Supervisor Orientation	Monday, December 5, 2016
Supervisor Orientation	Monday, January 23, 2017
Earliest Expected Start Date of VISTA Members	Monday, April 10, 2017

Steps in Timeline

1. **RFCP Released**

   To apply, go to: http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/index.asp.
   Select RFCP: FY 2016 AmeriCorps VISTA State

2. **Technical Assistance Webinar**

   Friday, August 12, 2016 at 2pm Pacific Time
   Conference Call: 866-759-5212; Passcode: 46195315
   Join Skype Meeting (click to join)

3. **Concept Papers Due**

4. **Notification of Concept Paper Decision**
   CNCS California State Office will notify organizations if their Concept Paper has been approved and a full application requested.

5. **Full Application Due**
   Application must be submitted to CNCS California State Office via eGrants, along with all supporting documentation and attachments on or before the due date.

6. **Application Decision**
   CNCS California State Office decision announced and application processed via eGrants. Memorandum of Agreement issued.

7. **Supervisor Orientation**
   Mandatory VISTA Supervisor Orientation for approved project sponsors. Registration occurs 45 days in advance.