



DATE: October 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 November 30, 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 with IRS 501(c) status can apply to become VISTA sponsors. Applicants that have a focus or plan to focus on alleviating and reducing poverty are eligible to apply for VISTA resources. Public and non-profit private organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are ineligible.

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 2017

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 2017 VISTA Guidance](#):

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

Additionally, priority will be given to projects that serve areas of concentrated poverty. This is defined as Census tracts or counties with 20 percent or higher poverty rates. These can be rural or urban areas and the projects can be located in or serve the high-poverty areas. Further consideration will

be given to persistent poverty areas – those that have had a poverty level of 20 percent or higher for 30 years or more. Given the generational nature of poverty, every effort will be made to target AmeriCorps VISTA resources to these areas. To assist in targeting these areas, USDA has developed a concentrated [Poverty Mapping Tool](http://rdgdwe.sc.egov.usda.gov/rdpoverty/index.html) – (<http://rdgdwe.sc.egov.usda.gov/rdpoverty/index.html>) that provides a way to identify them easily.

Economic Opportunity

In FY 2017, 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, SNAP, School Lunch and Breakfast, 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 7 populations. Additionally, 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

OPIOID ADDICTION RECOVERY

The National Institute on Drug Abuse states in its Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment, “To be effective, treatment must address the individual’s drug abuse and any associated medical, psychological, social, vocational, and legal problems.” AmeriCorps VISTA welcomes applications from non-profit health clinics or local/state agencies using research-validated techniques, like cognitive behavioral therapy and Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), who could use VISTA members to help increase outreach to low-income rural communities currently not served or underserved by opioid treatment programs. One programming goal might include developing new partnerships with programs that offer employment, legal, education and/or services support, such as Legal Aid, WIC clinics and community colleges. Other goals could be fundraising to support existing or new telemedicine services, creating or enhancing community volunteer or peer volunteer programs and creating outreach materials to encourage addict enrollment in the recovery program.

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 the following areas:

- Economic opportunity – employment, financial literacy, housing (particularly veterans’ homelessness)
- Education – school readiness, success in K-12 education and college success
- 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. Thus we are seeking sponsors with the capacity to Cost Share 2 or more VISTA positions.

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.

Below is a chart of the biweekly and annual reimbursement commitment.

Bi-Weekly/Annual Commitment	County
\$455.70 Bi-weekly – \$11,880 Annually	Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tulare, Tuolumne, Yolo, Yuba
\$491.96 Bi-weekly – \$12,828 Annually	Mono, Monterey, Riverside, San Bernardino
\$509.88 Bi-weekly – \$13,296 Annually	San Luis Obispo, Solano
\$542.22 Bi-weekly – \$14,136 Annually	Nevada, San Benito, Sonoma
\$587.30 Bi-weekly – \$15,312 Annually	Napa, San Diego
\$613.48 Bi-weekly – \$15,996 Annually	Los Angeles, Santa Barbara
\$641.20 Bi-weekly – \$16,716 Annually	Contra Costa, Orange, Ventura
\$697.20 Bi-weekly – \$18,180 Annually	Alameda, Santa Cruz
\$791.70 Bi-weekly – \$20,640 Annually	Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara

Projects wishing to cost share all or some of the requested VISTA placements should indicate that intention and specify the source of funding 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 will prioritize developing Concept Paper applications that propose one of the following:

1. Serving as intermediary for 3 or more organizations;
2. Cost sharing 2 or more VISTA members;
3. Placing a minimum of 5 VISTA members; or
4. Meeting needs in communities dealing with concentrated poverty ([Poverty Mapping Tool](http://rdgdwe.sc.egov.usda.gov/rdpoverty/index.html) – <http://rdgdwe.sc.egov.usda.gov/rdpoverty/index.html>).

Organizations interested in sponsoring a project with fewer than five (5) non-cost share 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. A tutorial on how to use eGrants is available at <http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants>. When applying, please select the NOFA: **AmeriCorps VISTA State FY 2017**. 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 of 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 2017 Programming Priorities** or **Priority Areas** listed in the California VISTA Programming 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](#)

DEADLINES AND DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE	
RFCP Released	Wednesday, October 26, 2016
Technical Assistance Webinar	Wednesday, November 9, 2016
Concept Paper Due	Wednesday, November 30, 2016
Concept Paper Decision	Friday, December 30, 2016
Full Application Due	Tuesday, January 31, 2017
Application Decision	Tuesday, February 21, 2017
Enrollment in Supervisor Orientation	Monday, March 13, 2017
Supervisor Orientation*	April 24-27, 2017
Earliest Expected Start Date of VISTA Members*	July 11-14, 2017
Next Request for Concept Papers Released	Friday, March 10, 2017
Next Concept Paper Deadline	Friday, April 28, 2017

* The Supervisor Orientation and VISTA member start dates are subject to change.

Steps in Timeline

1. RFCP Released

To apply, go to: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/index.asp>.
 Select RFCP: **FY 2017 AmeriCorps VISTA State**

2. Technical Assistance Webinar

Wednesday, November 9, 2016 at 11am Pacific Time
 Conference Call: [866-670-8282](tel:866-670-8282)
 Passcode: 75536092
[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.