



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

Fiscal Year 2014

October 1, 2013 – September 30, 2014

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

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I. Introduction

The AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance directs the development of new VISTA projects and outlines the national programming priorities for the VISTA program for the fiscal year. All new VISTA projects developed in FY 2014 must follow this guidance. Prospective VISTA sponsors should read the entire document, while current sponsors may wish to review the sections that have changed from last year, as noted in [Section II](#).

With the September 12, 2012, release of the U.S. Census Bureau report [Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2011](#), it is clear that the anti-poverty mission of the VISTA program is as critical as ever. The nation's official poverty rate in 2011 was 15.0 percent, with 46.2 million people in poverty. Although the poverty rate in 2011 is down from 15.1 percent in 2010, neither the rate nor the number of people in poverty was statistically different from the 2010 estimates. The poverty rate for children under the age of 18 stood at 21.9 percent.

II. Key Changes From Previous Year

Section	Topic	Change
V	Programming Areas for FY 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Highlighted emphasis to expand programming in support of National Guard members and their families; spur student interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education▪ Added Earned Income Tax Credit and Point In Time Count of the Homeless as focus of the Martin Luther King Day of Service in 2014
VIII	Reporting, Monitoring, and Oversight	New section

III. Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program

AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) designed specifically to fight poverty. Authorized in 1964 and founded in 1965 as Volunteers in Service to America, the program became part of the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993. VISTA has been on the frontlines of the fight against poverty in America for almost 50 years.

VISTA supports efforts to alleviate poverty by engaging individuals, 18 years and older, from all walks of life, in a year of full-time service with a sponsoring organization (sponsor) to create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

About VISTA Sponsors

Public organizations such as nonprofit groups, Indian Tribes, and state and local government agencies can apply to be VISTA sponsors. Eligible nonprofit organizations are not limited to those with IRS 501(c) (3) status; they also include nonprofit organizations with other IRS 501(c) statuses that focus on anti-poverty community development. Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible. Organizations can be local, state, or national. Sponsors must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise the VISTAs, and provide the necessary administrative support to accomplish the goals of the project. Sponsors must develop and manage projects with the involvement of the communities that will be served.

Organizations interested in becoming a sponsor can visit NationalService.gov or contact the [CNCS office in their state](#). Organizations may also review [Is VISTA Right for Your Organization](#) and [VISTA 101](#) for more in-depth information about becoming a sponsor. Interested organizations may apply by submitting a concept paper and application through the [CNCS eGrants](#) web-based system, under the FY 2014 AmeriCorps VISTA

State Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). Prior to submitting a concept paper, interested organizations should contact the [CNCS office in their state](#).

About VISTA Members

[VISTA members](#), commonly referred to as VISTAs, range in age and come from diverse racial, geographic, and economic backgrounds. Each VISTA makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project with a sponsor.

A few members serve in the summer months through the AmeriCorps VISTA [Summer Associate program](#). This program offers members the opportunity to engage in community service through an existing AmeriCorps VISTA project for eight to 10 weeks during the summer.

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 2014, the VISTA program expects to support about 7,000 full-time VISTAs and VISTA 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 can apply online to become a VISTA at [NationalService.gov](#). In FY 2014, the VISTA program will continue efforts to increase the number of veterans serving as VISTA members. We encourage VISTA sponsors to recruit veterans through local organizations.

IV. Framework for VISTA Programming

Core Principles

Projects must be developed in accordance with all four of the VISTA Core Principles: Anti-Poverty Focus, Community Empowerment, Sustainable Solutions, and Capacity Building.

Anti-Poverty Focus

The statutory 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 simply make poverty more tolerable. VISTA projects should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

Community Empowerment

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

Sustainable Solutions

As directed by Congress, VISTAs are short-term resources that serve to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. VISTA projects should be developed with a goal to phase out the need for VISTA members and maintain the ability of the project to continue without them.

Capacity Building

VISTA projects expand the scale, reach, efficiency or effectiveness of, or leverage resources, for programs or organizations that fight poverty. Rather than providing direct services to low-income individuals and communities, VISTAs strengthen and support organizations by building infrastructure, expanding community

partnerships, securing long-term resources, coordinating training for participants, and more, as determined by local needs. VISTAs should create systems that remain long after their service ends.

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

Furthermore, VISTAs may not engage in activities that would supplant the tasks of, or displace, paid staff, contractors, or existing volunteers. This prohibition includes activities related to the application to and the 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 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 throughout the life of the project.
- Address the 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 continue the efforts of the project once VISTA resources are withdrawn.
- Describe the intended outcomes of the project on the beneficiary population and community.
- State clearly how VISTAs will be trained, supervised, and supported to ensure the achievement of program goals and objectives, as well as compliance with the DVSA program rules and regulations.
- Show the relationship among key aspects of the project throughout the application, including: a problem statement that demonstrates need; a project plan that includes performance measures; and a VISTA member assignment description(s).
- Ensure that VISTA and community resources are sufficient to achieve project goals.
- Have the management and technical capability to implement and oversee the project successfully.
- Request an appropriate number of VISTAs to carry out the project goals, and select VISTAs with the skills and qualifications necessary to meet the goals and objectives of the project described in the application.

Evidence-Based Programming

In FY 2014, CNCS will continue to explore how to apply an evidence-based approach to VISTA programming. CNCS seeks to support projects that demonstrate the effectiveness of their proposed intervention in addressing a particular community need. Evidence of effectiveness could include past performance, results from credible research, or results from a similar, successful program. Evidence would provide the basis for decisions about the design, frequency, and intensity of the proposed intervention.

For example: A poverty project applicant proposes to engage VISTAs to create a volunteer recruitment and management system in which recruited volunteers will tutor third-grade students in an impoverished area in a low-performing school for an hour a day, three days per week. The applicant believes that as a result of the tutoring, the students' academic performance will improve. In an evidence-based programming approach, the applicant would describe in its proposal the evidence (e.g., an independent study from a university) that the intervention (a certain set of tutoring activities delivered by volunteers for one hour, three times per week) will result in improved academic performance. See the [Performance Measures Core Curriculum](#) on the National

Service Network and the [External Resources Section](#) herein for resources to help identify evidence of effectiveness.

CNCS recognizes that in certain cases, evidence may not be available for a particular program design if, for example, the intent of the VISTA project is to create a new program.

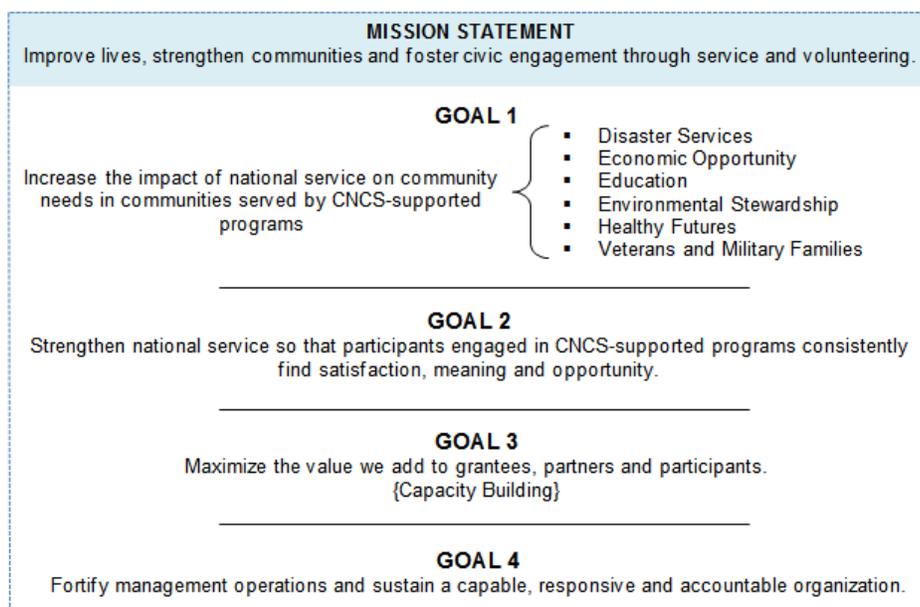
V. Programming Areas for FY 2014

This section outlines key programming areas of CNCS and VISTA in Fiscal Year 2014. It also provides examples of how VISTA projects might address these areas.

Overview of CNCS Strategic Plan for FY 2011–2015

In the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, Congress directed CNCS to focus national service in areas where service can make a major impact. CNCS is carrying out Congress’s intent by targeting agency resources in the CNCS [Strategic Plan](#) for 2011–2015.

CNCS developed four strategic goals that encapsulate key elements needed to measure the agency’s performance as it carries out its important mission. These goals (outlined below) are the foundation for the agency’s [Strategic Plan](#) for 2011–2015.



Each strategic goal is supported by one or more objectives that define an “action plan” for the agency to reach each long-term strategic goal. In turn, each objective is supported by one or more performance measures, which define the concrete, 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 1 of the strategic plan 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 has objectives and performance measures, which are available on the [CNCS Performance Measurements](#) section of the [National Service Knowledge Network](#) website.

Through Goal 2, CNCS supports the national service network in providing experiences that offer a unique combination of professional, educational, and life benefits to service participants.

Through Goal 3, CNCS seeks to strengthen its 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.

Strategic Plan Goal 4 pinpoints the agency's infrastructure for further enhancement so that CNCS is optimally positioned to reach the long-term aspirations and objectives of Goals 1 through 3 of the strategic plan.

VISTA Programming Priorities for FY 2014

VISTA identified the Focus Areas, objectives, and performance measures in Goal 1 of the CNCS Strategic Plan that best correspond with the VISTA anti-poverty mission. Ultimately, CNCS expects to invest no less than 80 percent of VISTA resources toward building the capacity of programs and organizations work in these four Focus Areas in Goal 1 of the CNCS Strategic Plan:

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

The following sections present general guidance on programming activities in these four Focus Areas. More detailed instructions will follow in [Section VI](#).

Economic Opportunity

In FY 2014, 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). VISTA programming in economic opportunity aligns well with the USICH strategic plan [Opening Doors](#). The VISTA program highly encourages applications that focus on the Housing objective and utilize USICH approaches and technical assistance resources.

Education

VISTA will give priority to projects that provide support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children. The VISTA program will target new project development to communities that have schools that:

1. Received awards from the Department of Education under the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. These schools must be implementing one of the SIG school intervention models.
2. Were identified by a state educational agency that has received approval from the Department of Education of its request for Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility, including those schools taking part in the federal interagency initiative, [Together for Tomorrow](#).

Project activities should focus on the following Education Objectives:

- **School Readiness:** School readiness for economically disadvantaged young children,
- **K-12 Success:** Educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary, middle, and high schools, and
- **Post-secondary Success:** Preparation for and prospects of success in post-secondary education institutions for economically disadvantaged students.

Where feasible, project activities in these Education Objectives should seek to 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, and College access (the ABCs)—as a means to improve low-performing schools.

Additionally, programming that effectively introduces or expands science, technology, engineering, and math education (STEM) in targeted schools is encouraged.

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.

Veterans and Military Families

VISTA will support projects that either focus specifically on low-income veterans and military families as beneficiaries, or enhance existing projects to begin or better serve low-income veterans and military families. Emphasis in FY 2014 should be to expand programming in support of National Guard members and their families. Project activities should focus on the following Focus Areas:

- **Economic Opportunity** (Financial literacy, Housing, Employment)
- **Education** (School Readiness, K-12 Success, Post-secondary Success)
- **Healthy Futures** (Obesity and Food, Access to Health Care)

The VISTA program encourages all projects to recruit veterans to serve as VISTA members, particularly projects that serve veterans and military families.

STEM AmeriCorps

On April 22, 2013, President Obama announced at the launch of a new STEM AmeriCorps initiative by CNCS to spur student interest in science, technology, engineering, and math education.

The goals of STEM AmeriCorps include improving academic performance in STEM coursework; expanding the number of students on track to graduate ready for college and for careers in STEM fields; increasing interactions between youth and STEM professionals; and sparking the imagination and interest of students to pursue STEM subjects.

As the first phase, 50 AmeriCorps VISTA members will serve with FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), a nonprofit founded to inspire an appreciation of science and technology in young people through robotics competitions. Serving in low-income communities across the country, the VISTA members will recruit volunteers and support teams of students to participate in FIRST competitions, making it possible for more students to be exposed to the STEM fields.

National Guard: Joining Community Forces

On March 15, 2013, CNCS and the National Guard Bureau announced a collaborative effort to place AmeriCorps members in Delaware and locations across the country as part of a new Joining Community Forces initiative. The partnership will strengthen National Guard support services by providing access to the capacity-building services of AmeriCorps VISTA members. VISTAs will help expand the capacity of local National Guard units to provide services for returning guardsmen and their families at risk of homelessness and joblessness, or otherwise in need of economic stability assistance.

Other Programming

Disaster Services

VISTA's contribution in the Disaster focus area consists of long-term recovery efforts. Community economic development, the essence of the VISTA program, is critical in the recovery of an area hit by a disaster. Disaster response is generally an inappropriate activity for the VISTA program, given its legislative framework and emphasis on capacity-building. The exception is responsive intervention in low-income communities suffering the effects of a disaster. In this case, the VISTA program would support projects that adapt in response to a local disaster. For example, job placement projects that help place local workers in disaster response positions.

The VISTA program resources may only support preparedness and mitigation activities that are designed to lift people out of poverty.

Environmental Stewardship

The Environment Stewardship focus area has three objectives: decrease energy and water consumption, improve at-risk ecosystems, and increase green job opportunities. The priority performance measure in this focus area is related to improving acres of at-risk ecosystems, making anti-poverty programming very challenging. An environmental project serving a low-income community is not acceptable unless there is a strong connection to lifting people out of poverty. VISTA does not encourage new project development with Environmental Stewardship as its primary focus. Rather, environmental components could be incorporated into programming in other areas, such as adding energy conservation components to existing housing and financial fitness programs, or expanding jobs programs to include green jobs, but not as the primary VISTA contribution.

In 2014, the VISTA program will support programs, such as the [Conservation and Service Corps](#), or youth corps, which engage primarily at-risk young adults in a combination of community service, workforce development, and education. Nonprofit organizations may utilize VISTA resources to help establish or expand youth corps' that engage at-risk individuals in hands-on service and job training experiences on public lands, waterways, cultural heritage sites, and community green spaces.

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 2014, VISTA encourages sponsors and members to promote the Earned Income Tax Credit or get involved in the National Point-in-Time Count of the Homeless.

Rural Community Development

VISTA seeks a balanced portfolio of urban and rural programming. VISTA will, therefore, continue to invest resources to move people in rural communities out of poverty. The VISTA program will support programming in rural low-income communities that respond to the CNCS strategic Focus Areas and Objectives, as noted above.

VI. Performance Measures Reporting Requirements for VISTA Projects

In FY 2014, VISTA will introduce 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. The Performance Measures Module and corresponding project application instructions will become

available in early FY 2014. Technical assistance will also be available through the [National Service Knowledge Network](#) and [CNCS state offices](#).

Goal 3 Capacity Building Performance Measures

Through Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan, CNCS seeks to strengthen the capacity of national service grantees, partners, and participant (see chart on page 7). 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 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 (although the list does not represent the full universe of capacity building activities). 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 2014, 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, 2013 and September 30, 2014.

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 participants ¹
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

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.

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.

Goal 1 Performance Measures Alignment Requirement

The VISTA program seeks to devote resources to support certain programming areas for Goal 1 (as noted above in [Section V](#) 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 [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 [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 ...

...that reflects the beneficiary population, outputs, outcomes, and key definitions identified in a Goal 1 measure.

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	<p>Providing services for children living in poverty to make gains in school readiness in terms of social and/or emotional development.</p> <p>Providing services for children living in poverty to make gains in school readiness in terms of literacy skills.</p> <p>Providing services for children living in poverty to make gains in school readiness in terms of numeracy (math) skills.</p>
	K-12 Success	<p>Providing services to students living in poverty to improve academic performance</p> <p>Providing services to students living in poverty to improve academic engagement.</p>
	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	Obesity and Food (Food Resources)	Providing services to individuals in underserved community to gain access to food resources.
	Access to Health Care	Providing services to individuals in underserved community to gain access to preventative and primary health care services
Veterans and Military Families	Veterans Served	Providing services to low-income veterans, veterans' family members, family members of active duty military, and military service members.

VII. 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](#), as described in the [Section IV](#), in their service.

The CNCS requires all potential VISTAs to attend a Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) to learn the term 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 Associate 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 2014 programming for Summer Associates at a later date.

Standard Projects

For standard projects, CNCS places up to a certain number of 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.

Supervisors Orientation

The 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.

Support and Program Grants

CNCS awards support grants to a limited number organizations to assist in the support of a VISTA project. We anticipate a decrease in support grants awarded for FY 2014. 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, according to terms, 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.

VIII. 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 if 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, fax, 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 2014, sponsors will report data related to activities occurring between October 1, 2013 and September 30, 2014.

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.

IX. Next Steps

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

We encourage organizations to email 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/stateoffices.asp>.

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](#).

X. 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/stateoffices.asp>.

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.org.

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](#), including [VISTA-specific resources](#).

Developing Performance Measures

CNCS has resources for performance measures, referenced above in Part VI, 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

- 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

- 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>