

Western District AmeriCorps VISTA

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service to America)?

- ✓ AmeriCorps VISTA is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service and is a national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. VISTA is often referred to as the American Peace Corps. VISTA members commit to serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization or local government agency, working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, strengthen community groups, support youth development, and much more.
- ✓ Summer Associates serve for 8-weeks from mid-June through mid-August developing and supporting similar projects.

What can VISTAs do?

- ✓ Year-long VISTAs do not perform direct service (direct tutoring, work in community gardens, etc). Rather, they help organizations develop new programs and services or expand existing programs and services. They work at the organizational level to build program infrastructure and program sustainability. Some examples of the types of work year-long VISTAs can perform:
 - Increasing the number and retention of low-income beneficiaries served through our programs
 - Assisting with building partnerships and collaborations
 - Helping to improve organizational infrastructure (e.g., by developing volunteer recruitment and training systems or developing and revising policies and procedures)
 - Increasing organizational resources by establishing or expanding a pool of volunteers
 - Increasing financial resources and helping to build sustainable funding streams for organizations including grants research and writing, recruiting local business sponsorships, etc.
 - Conducting public outreach to increase participation in programs and services
- ✓ Summer VISTAs may perform in direct service roles as well as program development roles.
- ✓ One consistent goal for every VISTA project should be the sustainability of the project by the sponsoring agency and the low-income community after AmeriCorps VISTA project sponsorship ends. VISTAs are expected to work toward building the sustainability of their projects.
- ✓ Organizations working with VISTA must ensure that the project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, and implementing the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community strengths and resources. This is not only required by law and federal regulation, it has proven to be highly effective in guaranteeing appropriate, sustainable programming.

Who pays travel expenses of VISTAs?

- ✓ VISTAs will participate in a number of orientation and professional development programs offered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. These costs are paid by the Corporation
- ✓ Travel expenses for Western District VISTA projects will initially (during this pilot year) be paid through the District office. Educators involved in district VISTA projects are encouraged to support VISTA travel whenever possible through other local or program funding sources to maximize all district resources.

What do we need to do to get a VISTA for our project?

- ✓ This is the easy part! Educators who wish to have their projects supported by VISTA volunteers only need to complete a simple application form that can be found on the Western District website at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/dist/western/index.html>. Deadline for applications is April 6!

- ✓ Priority for VISTA projects will be given to those projects that reach across program areas, are multi-county, and have the broadest reach in the district.
- ✓ The Western District will develop the position descriptions, coordinate recruitment, and pay advertising costs for the positions in this pilot year.

Where will VISTAs be housed?

- ✓ VISTAs will be housed throughout the Western District where county Extension Offices can provide work space and office equipment for their use.

If our office provides space for a VISTA, what are we expected to provide?

- ✓ Your office will need to provide adequate workspace. You do not need to provide an office and workspace can be shared.
- ✓ You will also need to provide office resources to enable the VISTA to perform their job. This includes a computer, access to a printer and copier, internet, phone, and basic office supplies. (If you have a budget for your project, office supplies can be paid from those funds or shared among counties cooperating on the project.)
- ✓ The hosting office does not need to provide support staff unless you choose to.

How do VISTA project expenses get covered (program supplies, etc.)

- ✓ Costs related to your project are expected to be paid for in the same manner you would support any of your educational programs. This can be through your county budgets, local and partner contributions, etc. The Western District Office cannot support direct program costs unless you have been awarded innovative grant funds.

What's in this for the VISTA?

- ✓ VISTAs receive a small living stipend every two weeks which amounts to approximately \$10,000 for the year.
- ✓ \$4,725 education award or \$1,200 stipend if they successfully complete their service.
- ✓ Health coverage, liability coverage, FICA, moving allowance, and child care for income-eligible members.
- ✓ Training in project management and leadership for members and project supervisor.

What else do we need to know?

- ✓ If your project is awarded district VISTA support, an educator will need to provide appropriate supervision. (If the right people are hired for these positions, most VISTA volunteers are highly capable, motivated, self-starter individuals!)
- ✓ Supervisors, or their designees, may be required to attend some orientation with their VISTA.
- ✓ Supervisors are also required to coordinate all VISTA member evaluations and project reports (generally done quarterly and "not too painful"! ☺)