



VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA

Is a VISTA project right for you?

- Is your organization or agency addressing poverty?
- Do you engage residents of the low-income community in creating solutions?
- Are you dedicated to building your capacity to grow and sustain services?
- Do you have the ability to create community partnerships needed to support a VISTA project?
- Can you cover the time and money it takes to manage a VISTA project?

AmeriCorps VISTA & Lake Effect Leaders

Mission: Founded in 1965, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) is a federal anti-poverty program designed to provide needed resources to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to increase their capacity to lift communities out of poverty. Lake Effect Leaders is an intermediary sponsor that provides opportunities for 20+ government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and schools located in Erie County and Crawford County to receive a full-time AmeriCorps VISTA member in order to help their agency expand the scale, impact, or resource leveraging ability of a specific anti-poverty program in NW PA. Each individual VISTA project at an organizational host site typically lasts three years or more. The host site project applications forms the foundation on which the entire VISTA member experience is built, from recruitment to the end of service.

To comply with Corporation requirements, VISTA projects must include the following four core principles:

1. **Anti-Poverty Focus:** The statutory purpose of AmeriCorps VISTA is to strengthen and support efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty and address poverty-related problems in the United States. Each VISTA project must focus on empowering individuals to emerge from poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. VISTA projects should focus on long-term solutions to poverty rather than short-term services. How the VISTA project will alleviate poverty for the agency's target population in Erie/Crawford County must be effectively communicated.
2. **Capacity Building:** VISTA projects leverage resources for, or expand the scale, reach, efficiency or effectiveness of, programs or organizations that fight poverty. VISTA members strengthen sponsors by building infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, securing long-term resources, and more, as determined by local needs, with all activities focused on creating pathways out of poverty for low-income communities.
3. **Community Empowerment:** Prospective and current AmeriCorps VISTA project sponsors must engage people of the communities to be served by the project in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating the project. Each project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of community residents, and tap into inherent community assets, strengths, and resources.
4. **Sustainable Solutions:** AmeriCorps VISTA members serve as short-term resources to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. Projects should be developed with a goal to phase out the need for VISTAs and have the project continue without them.





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VISTA Programming Priorities for FY 2020

VISTA is seeking project applications for programming in any of the following four CNCS Focus Areas in FY 2020: ***Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures, Veterans and Military Families, and Education.***

Economic Opportunity: AmeriCorps VISTA's commitment to ending poverty requires focusing on project sponsors that *provide opportunities to low-income individuals* to get workforce training, education, and skills that will meet the needs of employers. In addition, projects that focus on housing are strongly encouraged to apply.

Priority areas include:

- **Employment/Workforce Development:** Improving or creating job skills training programs that lead to increased employment, particularly vocational education and apprenticeship programs.
- **Housing:** Transitioning individuals into or helping them remain in safe, affordable housing, with a special focus on veterans. Organizations focused on eviction prevention are encouraged to apply.
- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Improving access to computers and high-speed internet as well as the skills to effectively use this technology, particularly for underserved rural and tribal areas.

Healthy Futures: The VISTA program will give priority to projects that meet health needs for economically disadvantaged individuals.

Priority areas include:

- **Access to Health Care:** Connecting economically disadvantaged individuals, particularly youth, to preventative education and treatment/recovery services in regards to the opioid crisis, and mental health services.
- **Food Security:** Alleviating hunger and increasing access to nutritious food.
- **Opioid Addiction Prevention and Recovery:** VISTA opioid programming focuses on addressing the opioid crisis in the United States by placing VISTA members with organizations that are creating or expanding opioid prevention and recovery projects targeting low-income communities. These communities often suffer from a lack of resources and may be disproportionately impacted by the opioid crisis as a result. VISTA programming supports prevention, intervention/treatment, and recovery efforts under the Corporation for National and Community Service's Healthy Futures focus area.

Education: The VISTA program will support projects that enhance 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 large concentrations of low-income students (e.g., Title I schools).

Priority areas include:

- **School readiness** for economically disadvantaged children.
- **K-12 success** in student educational and behavioral outcomes in low-achieving schools

*Content that appears in this document was taken directly from the *AmeriCorps VISTA Annual Program Guidance For Current And Potential Project Sponsors* report FY 20. More information can be found at <https://nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2020%20Annual%20Program%20Guidance.pdf>



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- **Career and Technical Education (CTE)** to help students gain the skills they need to compete for employment.
- **College access** for low-income students.
- **STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) programs as pathways for underrepresented students.

Veterans and Military Families: AmeriCorps VISTA will support projects that focus on low-income veterans and military families as beneficiaries.

Priority areas include:

- **Economic opportunity:** Employment and veterans' homelessness prevention/reduction.
- **Education:** School readiness, success in K-12 education, career and technical education (CTE) and post-secondary employment success.
- **Healthy futures:** Opioid prevention, intervention, and recovery.

In addition, CNCS will prioritize the following:

- Data Collection and Management for Results
- Assignments supporting programs that will serve Pennsylvania's small and mid-size cities, as well as rural areas.
- Assignments building capacity in programs using evidence-based models to the extent possible. Please share why you believe the intervention you're selecting will be successful in your community. For example, as we examine new assignment proposals, we will be looking for strong evidence backing nutrition education and financial education interventions supported by those assignments.

Standard Project Application Timeline

October 8: Requests for Proposals sent out

December 7: VISTA project applications due

February/March: Selected VISTA Projects Announced

July: LEL VISTA Members Start Service

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