

VISTA On Site Orientation Training Guidelines

Create an efficient, meaningful OSOT

The scope and duration of the OSOT depends on the background of your member and the specifics of your organization. The CNCS requirements for the OSOT are to:

- Develop an OSOT plan which is consistent with project goals and which meets minimum desired outcomes.
- Submit OSOT plan to the Corporation for National Service (a.k.a, Corporation) State Program Office **30 days prior to the Pre-Service Orientation (PSO)** your VISTAs will attend.
- Involve the member in an ongoing evaluation of OSOT activities; adjust plans, as necessary, to meet individual member's needs.
- Evaluate OSOT, and have written member and supervisory **evaluations submitted** to the Corporation State Program Office **within five days of the completion of OSOT**.
- Begin process of defining in-service training needs based on OSOT outcomes and evaluation.

OSOT outcomes

By the end of OSOT, your VISTA member should have gained:

Understanding of common expectations and agreements for working relationship between VISTA and supervisor:

- Supervisor's other roles and responsibilities
- Supervisor's management style
- Meetings/Interactions between VISTA and supervisor
- Clear understanding of the lines of communication between VISTA and supervisor
- Clear understanding of the support provided to the member
- Clear on the terms and conditions of VISTA service
- Clear on the chain of command

Understanding of the culture and mission of the sponsoring organization:

- History of organization
- Organizational mission
- How it functions as a non-profit, municipality, state, county or federal entity
- Its role in the community
- Introductions to staff

Knowledge of the bigger picture related to the VISTA project and the community:

- The VISTA project and its history
- How and where does the VISTA fit into it all
- Introduction to the community
- The socio-economic and political structure
- Potential resources that can be applied to achieve project goals
- History and present status of community self-determination and problem-solving efforts

Understanding of the organization's VISTA Policy:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Time and attendance, duty hours
- Annual leave
- Sick leave
- Mileage reimbursement policy and procedure
- Working with the media
- Fund raising activities
- Evaluation of individual VISTA and of the project
- Reporting requirements for the VISTA project

Developing a personal work plan with the supervisor that:

- Specifies tasks and activities with goals and objectives in the project plan.
- Specifies training that builds upon PSO, OSOT, In Service Training and Close of Service activities and the personal and professional development of the VISTA member.

Building skills and knowledge needed to implement the Member Assignment

Description:

- Depending on the project, areas such as
 - computer skills
 - public speaking
 - group facilitation
 - conflict resolution
 - needs assessment and asset mapping,
 - proposal writing
 - negotiation and interviewing skills
- Assignment-specific such as

- domestic violence hotlines
- early childhood literacy
- laws regarding foster care
- credit management
- micro-enterprise development

VISTA OSOT FAQs

Why do OSOT?

The main beneficiary of a strong OSOT plan is the AmeriCorps*VISTA member. With the OSOT plan as a reference, both you and the member will know what you expect to be accomplished during the orientation and the year of service. Although it is important to establish a strong supervisory role from the outset, you can involve the member in preparing subsequent, spelled-out project work plan objectives for weekly or monthly review.

How long should OSOT last?

Yours may last one, two, three or four weeks, depending on the project, community, and VISTA needs. The length and content may be determined, for example, by whether you are recruiting a member from the local community or not. The length may be influenced by whether you are recruiting someone with previous experience on this or similar projects. Your project may require extensive skill training and/or experiential learning (e.g., requiring your new member to spend significant time shadowing others involved in the project or conducting field interviews). All of these factors and others should be taken into consideration when you design your OSOT's duration.

What's the timeframe for submitting an OSOT Plan?

Your OSOT plan should be in the Corporation State Office 30 days before the start of the PSO. The State Office will review your plan for consistency with project goals, for technical quality and for its potential for meeting desired OSOT outcomes. State Office staff will discuss your plan with you prior to PSO.

Does a particular format have to be followed?

You may send to the State Office whatever format you like. A couple sample plans are attached for your reference; you may chose any format.

What about specific issues for locally recruited members?

It is important that all projects receiving a member prepare and conduct an On-Site Orientation and Training, even if the member is from the community they will be serving. It has been the experience of Corporation for National Service staff based on the monitoring of such projects that even though your agency has recruited and interviewed a prospective member locally, there is still a great need for initial orientation and training.

For instance, you will need to thoroughly discuss the specifics of their AmeriCorps*VISTA role, your agency functions, and your member's new relationship with the community. The member

often will need to look at the community from an entirely new perspective and may need help on redefining his/her role in the community. These individuals may not be familiar with the politics of the community with which they may now have to engage. Finally, often locally recruited members have unique skill training needs to effectively carry out their project.

What about specific issues for those recruited from outside the community being served?

The On-Site Orientation and Training for Members who are recruited from other cities and states and who need to relocate to their community of service may need very different kinds of orientation and training than locally recruited members. Keep in mind that members who are moving to significantly different environments from which they were raised and educated often experience a period of "culture shock" and stressful transition and adaptation. Look at the "Working with National Recruits and Members from Outside your Community" section of this site for more ideas about their OSOT.

VISTA OSOT Resource List

Find additional support and information

Don't know where to start? Here is a list of possible resources to get you thinking.

Information about the community and resource

- Internet
- Libraries
- Town Welfare Offices
- Chambers of Commerce
- Newspapers
- Churches
- Trade Associations
- Medical Centers and Dentists
- Supermarkets
- Laundromats
- United Way Agencies
- Area Agencies on Aging
- Community Action Agencies
- Career Centers
- Local Businesses
- Social Workers
- Local Radio and TV stations

- Foundations
- State and Federal Government Agencies
- Other AmeriCorps projects
- Other Corporation for National Service projects:
 - National Senior Service Corps
 - AmeriCorps*State and National
 - AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps

Training and research:

- Community Colleges/Universities
- Community Resource and Technology Centers
- Community Adult Education Programs
- High Schools
- Human Resource Departments of Non-Profits and/or Businesses

Selected web sites and printed materials:

- Corporation for National Service Website: www.nationalservice.org
- State Service Commission Web Sites:
www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/statecommission.asp
- The Learning Institute for Nonprofit Organizations website: www.uwex.edu/li

Selected Bibliography:

- *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets* by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight
- *A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents*, by John P. Kretzmann, John L. McKnight, and GERALYN SHEEHAN, with Mike Green and Deborah Punttenney
- *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining and Enjoying the Journey* by Michael Winer and Karen Ray
- *Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Workshops*, Larry Nolan Davis and Earl McCallon