

AmeriCorps*VISTA : What To Know Before Beginning Service

VISTA Project Name: _____

Applicant Name: _____

Congratulations on being recommended by this sponsoring organization for AmeriCorps*VISTA service! We commend you for your desire to serve your community and country. Your application will be forwarded to the local State Office of the Corporation for National & Community Service (“CNCS” - the federal agency responsible for VISTA) for final review and approval. CNCS staff want to ensure that your expectations for service are met and that you enjoy your experience as fully as possible. Accordingly, State Office staff want to be sure that the following information has been explained to you by your AmeriCorps*VISTA sponsor prior to final approval. You and your project sponsor representative are requested to sign at the end to signal that this information has been fully reviewed.

Philosophy and Assignment

VISTA’s mission is to “increase the capacity of low-income people to improve the conditions of their own lives.” VISTA Members will serve others and support community residents and organizations to build their capacity to respond to problems in the community. To volunteer with VISTA is a commitment to national and community service. It is not paid employment.

Initials

You should have received a copy of the applicable VISTA Work Plan and Assignment Description. The work plan describes the organization’s goals and objectives for your service. The assignment description defines your role and your responsibilities as they relate to the goals and objectives to be accomplished during this one year of service. Both the workplan and the assignment description are subject to some modification as circumstances may warrant. Initial below to show that you have received your VISTA Work Plan/Assignment Description.

Initials

VISTA Policies

A VISTA is a full-time, community service volunteer and not an employee of the VISTA sponsor or of the Corporation, except for purposes of the Hatch Act (which prohibits political activities while enrolled as a VISTA) and the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA, which provides Workman’s Compensation if an injury is a direct result of service). The living allowance and education award are both subject to federal income tax and state/local income taxes. CNCS does NOT withhold state or local income taxes. FICA (Social Security withholding) will be applied only if the \$100 per month cash stipend is selected instead of the education award.

VISTAs may not receive other monetary compensation for their services. Since the VISTA is not an employee, no unemployment compensation will be paid during or upon completion of service from the sponsor.

Initials

The term of service is one year and requires a full-time commitment. A full time commitment is defined by the Congress as “24 hours a day, 7 days a week.” This full-time commitment translates into being available to the community at all times and without regard to regular working hours, except for periods of approved leave. This means that a VISTA cannot hold a full or part-time job in addition to their service. Absence from the project’s service area requires the approval of the VISTA Supervisor. Full or part-time enrollment in school is prohibited except: 1) taking one course which is directly related to the VISTA assignment or part of a career development plan; or, 2) to retain eligibility for a Pell Grant. Approval by CNCS is required before enrollment in any type of formal training that may result in absence from the assignment.

Initials

By law VISTAs are prohibited from any involvement in partisan or nonpartisan election activities, in voter registration activities, and in providing transportation to the polls in their capacity as a VISTA. VISTAs retain their rights as private citizens but *as VISTAs*, they may not engage in political activities that may be construed as attempting to represent the sponsor, the Corporation for National & Community Service, or fellow VISTAs. Current policy also prohibits VISTAs from engaging in any religious activity as part of their duties or which could be perceived as part of their duties by members of the community. Full texts of policies are printed in the AmeriCorps*VISTA Handbook.

Initials

VISTA Orientation and Training

Pre-Service Orientation (PSO): All VISTA Members will receive three days of Pre-Service Orientation which is usually held out-of-state. Members are sworn into service on the 3rd day and the year-long VISTA commitment begins the following day.

Initials

Additional training may include one or more of the following. 1) On-Site Orientation to introduce the VISTA to the local sponsor and community; 2) Early Service Training (EST) follow-up training 90-120 days after PSO; and 3) Other locally identified training to meet needs and opportunities that may arise throughout the year of service. VISTAs and sponsors share responsibility for identifying such needs.

Initials

VISTA Assignment (*sponsor fills in these blanks for the VISTA applicant*):

The projected official start date is _____. The last day of service is expected to be _____. Site of your assignment is (address)

_____.

The VISTA Project Supervisor is _____. Your on-site supervisor is _____. The regular days of service and service hours are *expected* to be: _____.

Benefits (*sponsor fills in these blanks for the VISTA applicant*):

The gross monthly subsistence allowance is \$_____ (divided by 2.2 pay periods per month average). VISTAs are required to use Direct Deposit to have their bi-weekly allowance deposited directly unless written justification is provided to CNCS as to why direct deposit should not be required. A Direct Deposit form will be available in a packet of forms for you to complete prior to Pre-Service Orientation.

VISTAs are eligible to enroll in group life insurance for which a bi-weekly premium of \$2.07 is deducted from the subsistence allowance. Child-care benefits are contingent on having a child under 13 living with you, meeting an income threshold, needing child-care assistance to complete the VISTA assignment, and having a financial need to pay necessary child-care expenses. It is good to begin determining eligibility before PSO.

Before the PSO, the VISTA must choose either the \$4,725.00 Education Award or the alternative the end-of-service stipend of \$1200.00 (accrued at the rate of \$100.00 per month). Any time prior to the end of your 10th month of service, you have the option of changing from the educational award to the end-of service stipend (you must call the Detroit CNCS State Office for form). You will not be able to change from the end-of-service stipend to the educational award. Student loan deferment or forbearance or forgiveness opportunities are available depending on the type of student loan. Consult the VISTA Member Handbook or CNCS staff to obtain information about whether you would qualify for these benefits as a result of VISTA service.

Initials

Health coverage is only for the individual VISTA member. Ten days of personal leave and ten days of medical leave are available during the year of service. Each can be used with the approval of the sponsor. If unable to continue service as a result of injury or illness, after utilizing all personal and medical leave (medical leave may be extended for an additional five days if it is clear that service can resume with the additional five days), the VISTA will be asked to resign due to inability to fulfill the commitment to one year of service.

I have read and I understand these policies.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

VISTA

Applicant: _____

Project

Supervisor: _____

NOTE: *A copy of this document should be given to the VISTA applicant, a copy retained by the VISTA Supervisor, and the original-signature copy attached to the VISTA application booklet and submitted to the Corporation for National and Community Service office in Detroit.*