

Request for VISTA Concept Papers

The Iowa State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service is pleased to announce an opportunity for nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and federally recognized tribes within the state of Iowa to apply to sponsor an AmeriCorps VISTA project. The first step in applying to sponsor a VISTA project is to submit a concept paper. **Concept papers are due Monday, November 5, 2018.** Proposed projects would likely be awarded in the new year and start their first VISTA members in July of 2019.

AmeriCorps VISTA members are full-time volunteers who create and expand programs that bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty. VISTA members serve primarily in the focus areas of economic opportunity, healthy futures, education, and veterans & military families.

For additional information about VISTA, its core principles, and its focus areas, please review the [AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance for Current and Potential Project Sponsors](#). The full Iowa Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) is enclosed in this document. Please review the RFCP in its entirety and the guidance linked above before applying for AmeriCorps VISTA resources.

Application Process

The application process is a multi-tiered process. To apply for AmeriCorps VISTA resources, organizations first complete a concept paper. The [VISTA Concept Paper Instructions](#) contain step-by-step guidance on this process, which is completed in our online system, eGrants. The Notice of Funding Opportunity you should select within eGrants will be labeled “**FY 2019 AmeriCorps VISTA State.**”

The CNCS Iowa State Office will host two technical assistance webinars. VISTA 101 will be held on September 6, 2018 @ 10:00 am Central Time and VISTA 102 will be held on October 4, 2018 @ 10:00 am Central Time. The links to the webinars and call-in information can be found later in this document.

Review Process

In addition to the Assessment of Project Applications listed on pages 3-4 of the [AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance for Current and Potential Project Sponsors](#), the CNCS Iowa State Office will consider the following factors in the review of concept papers:

- Alignment between proposed outcomes and a documented community need
- Likelihood that the proposed project will help bring individuals out of poverty
- Ability to serve communities and organizations not previously supported by VISTA
- Ability to serve under-served communities
- Geographic service area
- Ability to engage a minimum of three VISTA members in the proposed program and to cost-share one of the requested VISTA members (approximately \$12,500)

Questions? If you have any questions, please contact the Iowa CNCS State Office at 515-776-4552 or ia@cns.gov.

IOWA VISTA REQUEST FOR CONCEPT PAPER

SUMMARY: The Corporation for National and Community Service Iowa State Office seeks applications for the AmeriCorps VISTA program from innovative, high-performing and outcome-driven organizations that share the VISTA mission to provide long term solutions to poverty. This Iowa Request for Concept Paper (RFCP) is for placement of VISTA members will start in July and/or August of 2019 pending the FY19 federal budget.

AGENCY DESCRIPTION: The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) (www.nationalservice.gov) is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through its core programs: [Senior Corps](#), [AmeriCorps](#), and the [Volunteer Generation Fund \(VGF\)](#). As the nation's largest grant-maker for service and volunteering, CNCS plays a critical role in strengthening America's nonprofit sector and addressing our nation's challenges through service. The mission of CNCS is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

PROGRAM TITLE: AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America)
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/ameri-corps-vista>

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: AmeriCorps VISTA is a highly professional and rigorous volunteer service program, through which national service members serve with organizations full time for one year. VISTA projects focus on building permanent capacity and infrastructure in nonprofit and other organizations to help more effectively bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

Authorized in 1964, the AmeriCorps VISTA program supports efforts to eradicate poverty by encouraging individuals from a range of diverse backgrounds and experiences to engage in a year of full-time service.

Specifically, as noted in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, the VISTA program is designed to:

- Generate the commitment of private sector resources.
- Encourage volunteer service at the local level.
- Support efforts by local agencies and community organizations to achieve long-term sustainability of projects.

The AmeriCorps VISTA program places VISTA members at sponsoring organizations that absorb most of the costs related to project supervision and logistical support. VISTA provides a small living allowance and specified [benefits](#) for members during their service. Investment by the sponsoring organization and the community is fundamental to the VISTA program, as the VISTA resources are intended to be short-term.

To achieve its program purpose, VISTA operates under the following core principles:

Anti-Poverty Focus – The purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, tribal, or public agency with a program that is poverty-related in scope may be considered for VISTA project sponsorship. The project should

address helping individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply making poverty more tolerable through short-term services.

Community Empowerment – Sponsoring organizations ensure that the project engages residents of low-income communities 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 assets, strengths, and resources.

Sustainable Solutions – VISTA members provide short-term human resources to build long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. All VISTA projects should be developed with the goal to phase out the need for VISTA members and strengthen the ability of the project to continue indefinitely.

Capacity Building – VISTA members do not provide direct services to low-income individuals; rather, they work to increase the capacity of organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of community volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and collaborative development, VISTA members mobilize local resources to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. Projects focus on achieving impactful outcomes on the community and/or beneficiary population.

ELIGIBLE SPONSORS: Public organizations such as state and local government organizations, Indian Tribes, and nonprofit private organizations may apply to be VISTA sponsors. Please note that eligible nonprofit private organizations are not limited to those with IRS 501(c) (3) status, but rather all organizations with IRS 501(c) status that focus on anti-poverty community development.

Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible.

Organizations may be local, state, or national. National organizations should consider applying to VISTA Headquarters for sponsorship of VISTA if the intent of the project is to benefit more than one state.

Sponsors must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise the VISTA members, and provide necessary administrative support to complete the goals of the project. Sponsors develop and manage projects with the involvement of the communities that will be served. The beneficiary of any VISTA initiative is the poverty community. The goal for every VISTA project is for the sponsoring organization to sustain the VISTA member's outcomes beyond the service term.

Organizations that have previously sponsored VISTA projects for more than 3 years may apply with a new project and program emphasis and must demonstrate a prior successful record in project management and achieving results.

VISTA MEMBERS: AmeriCorps VISTA members come from diverse race, age, geographic, and economic backgrounds. They live and serve in some of our nation's poorest areas. Each VISTA member makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project with a sponsor.

VISTA members must be at least 18 years of age and must be either a U.S. citizen, national, or legal permanent resident alien of the United States.

VISTA members are national service professionals who build organizational capacity, or indirect service. VISTA Members do not perform direct service or physical labor. [Examples](#) about the

difference between direct and indirect service are available on the [VISTA Campus](#) and the [Partner with AmeriCorps VISTA](#) section on CNCS’s website.

AmeriCorps VISTA Members cannot displace staff positions or staff duties. AmeriCorps VISTA Members are not considered employees of sponsoring organizations, nor are they considered employees of the federal government, except in [limited circumstances](#). Members are a federal resource recruited by a sponsoring organization to accomplish the project’s goals.

While in service, AmeriCorps VISTA Members receive a modest living allowance and [benefits](#). Members also have the option to receive either an [Eli Segal AmeriCorps Education Award](#) or an end-of-service cash stipend after successfully completing a term of service.

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS: To be considered as a VISTA sponsoring organization, an application should meet all the requirements of sponsorship listed in the [Concept Paper](#) and the [VISTA Project Application Instructions](#) as well as the [AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance for Current and Potential Project Sponsors](#). More information is available at the [Partner with AmeriCorps VISTA](#) page on the CNCS website.

Programming should be based primarily on addressing local needs. Project approval will be guided by programming that addresses the VISTA program’s core principles, and strategic plan focus areas and objectives.

A VISTA project may be continued for up to three years; however, projects are considered for renewal on a year-to-year basis, depending on the availability of resources, program performance, and the priorities of CNCS.

When completing the application for AmeriCorps VISTA sponsorship, ensure the proposal:

- Reflects AmeriCorps VISTA’s anti-poverty mission and addresses the core principles
- Addresses one or more of the CNCS Strategic Plan Focus Areas and AmeriCorps VISTA Priorities which include:

Education	This focus area aligns with projects that support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children. Projects should focus on school readiness, K-12 success in educational and behavioral outcomes and post-secondary success. Additional priority is provided to sponsors proposing to utilize VISTA resources to expand STEM education programs.
Healthy Futures	This focus area addresses unmet health needs, including access to health care, increasing physical activity and improving nutrition in youth, and increasing seniors’ ability to remain in their own homes. Additional priority is provided to sponsors proposing to utilize VISTA resources to launch or enhance Opioid addiction prevention and recovery programming.
Veterans and Military Families	This focus area aligns projects that will focus on the unmet needs of veterans, members of the armed forces, and family members of deployed military personnel. Generally, this also aligns with one or more of the other

	focus areas (Education, Healthy Futures and/or Economic Opportunity).
Economic Opportunity	This focus area addresses unmet needs of economically disadvantaged individuals to get workforce training, education and skills that will meet the needs of employers. In addition, it also includes asset building, such as financial literacy, an utilizing VISTA resources to expand a sponsor's ability to transition individuals into or help them remain in safe, healthy affordable housing.

- Demonstrates an understanding of the AmeriCorps VISTA program; and participation in National Days of Service
- Articulates clearly defined project goals with measurable impact under the appropriate performance measures for the AmeriCorps VISTA program
- Clearly states the applicant's financial commitment towards the project and ability to effectively manage AmeriCorps VISTA resources

IOWA VISTA PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS:

The Iowa State Office specifically seeks projects that focus on the following Strategic Plan Focus Areas of: 1) Economic Opportunity, 2) Education, 3) Healthy Futures and 4) Veterans and Military Families. Please see Section IV (pages 4-6) of the [AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance for Current and Potential Project Sponsors](#) for more information regarding VISTA Programming Priorities.

Concept Papers for Iowa AmeriCorps VISTA projects should propose activities for a minimum of four (3) full-time VISTA members. If an applicant is unable to administratively support this number of full time members, we recommend you contact our office to further discuss options on a case-by-case basis. Often times, sponsors find success collaborating with one or more partnering organizations to host multiple VISTA members.

Additional consideration will be given to concept papers/organizations that:

- serve rural communities
- focus on Opioid and Prescription Drug Addiction Recovery
- demonstrate an ability to provide cost share; funds for the living allowance (approximately \$12,500 for one member) of one or more AmeriCorps VISTA members

COST SHARE VISTA MEMBERS IN IOWA

VISTA regulations do not require a non-federal match, however in order to maximize federal resources and to the keep the federal cost of VISTA members to a minimum, the Corporation for National and Community Service looks to VISTA sponsors to help pay the member living allowance for some of the project's VISTA members. Currently, the living allowance for Iowa VISTA members is approximately \$12,500 per year. Organizations that are able to financially support a VISTA member's living allowance will receive priority consideration.

The goal of the Iowa State Office is to have one out of every 3-4 members cost shared by the sponsoring organization in year one (*Example: programs with four members; one member would be coded as a cost share member, the sponsor would support the living allowance amount of approximately \$12,500*).

SPONSOR TRAINING

All sponsors approved for VISTA placements will be required to enroll a supervisor in a virtual national supervisor orientation. The training will include an overview of VISTA and best practices for managing VISTA members during their term of service.

Additionally, all VISTA sponsors will be required to attend a Sponsor or Supervisor training with Iowa State Office staff. This training will be hosted in Des Moines, IA, last for one day and the cost for travel will be covered by the sponsoring organization. This training will be held in early 2018.

Finally, all VISTA sponsors are asked to attend a quarterly conference call. These calls provide timely updates, and best practices for operating your VISTA project.

RETURNING SPONSORS

AmeriCorps VISTA projects are initially approved for a one-year period and considered for continuation based on an annual review for up to two additional years. The CNCS Iowa State Office reviews the project's previous accomplishments, long-term plans for project sustainability, timeliness and completeness of required program documents, and member recruitment and retention.

Organizations that have previously sponsored AmeriCorps VISTA projects for more than 3 years can reapply to sponsor a new project with a new program emphasis. Prior sponsors must demonstrate a successful project management track record with quantitative and qualitative results.

The CNCS Iowa State Office's decision to continue a project is based on funding availability, program performance and compliance, and CNCS's strategic priorities.

HOW TO APPLY: Applying for VISTA is a multi-tiered process. Organizations interested in sponsoring VISTA members need to submit a concept paper. If the concept paper is accepted, your organization will be invited to submit a [full application](#) to the State Office for review and approval.

Concept papers are due Monday, November 5, 2018. All interested organizations must submit the Concept Paper by 4:00 pm Central Time on the due date via the eGrants system. Full instructions for applying through [eGrants](#) may be found at: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants>

Only concept papers submitted electronically via the CNCS [eGrants](#) system will be considered.

Please note that it is important to create a Concept Paper in eGrants under the **FY 2019 AmeriCorps VISTA State** Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). This NOFA will be available in FY19. If you experience difficulty locating the NOFA, please contact our office.

The submission of a concept paper does not guarantee approval or commitment of VISTA resources. Each submission is evaluated on its merits and is subject to the availability of resources. Upon approval of the concept paper, applicants will then be invited to submit an Application for Federal Assistance through the eGrants system. The tentative application timeline is presented in Attachment 1 of this document (or page 8).

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: The CNCS Iowa State Office hosted a series of technical assistance webinars. Please see below for details on how to join. If you are interested in learning more about

the AmeriCorps VISTA program and the Iowa VISTA Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) process please plan to join us on September 6th and October 4th.

Technical Assistance Webinar: VISTA 101: What is VISTA / RFCP Timeline Overview
Thursday, September 6, 2018 from 10:00 am – 11:00 am Central Time

To join the webinar, click on the blue text “Join Skype Meeting” below. You will be prompted to either listen to the call via your computer or by phone. To listen via your computer select “Use Skype for Business Audio” and you will be connected through your computer. To listen to the audio via your phone, select “Don’t Join Audio” on the Skype meeting pop-up and utilize the “Join by Phone” call-in information listed below.

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Iowa VISTA Request for Concept Paper: Technical Assistance Webinar: VISTA 102: VISTA Concept Paper & eGrants Overview

Thursday, October 4, 2018 @ 10:00 am Central Time

To join the webinar, click on the blue text “Join Skype Meeting” below. You will be prompted to either listen to the call via your computer or by phone. To listen via your computer select “Use Skype for Business Audio” and you will be connected through your computer. To listen to the audio via your phone, select “Don’t Join Audio” on the Skype meeting pop-up and utilize the “Join by Phone” call-in information listed below.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Corporation for National and Community Service, Iowa State Program Office, 515-776-4552 or ia@cns.gov.

NEXT STEPS

If your organization would like to apply to become a VISTA sponsor to develop or enhance a community-supported anti-poverty project, please review the following:

1. [AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance for Current and Potential Project Sponsors](#)
2. [Online Tutorial: VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA Tutorial](#)
3. [VISTA Concept Paper Instructions](#)
4. Attend Technical Assistance Webinars hosted by the CNCS Iowa State Office. If you are unable to attend, please contact ia@cns.gov for a link to the recording.
5. Submit the VISTA Concept Paper by November 5, 2018.

RESOURCES:

- [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA Tutorial](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Guidelines](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance for Current and Potential Project Sponsors](#)

All resources can be found at:

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/ameri-corpsvista/sponsor-vista-project>

Attachment 1

The VISTA Process – Abridged Version: Start to Finish



1. Potential VISTA sponsor completes the AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper-2018 document and submits **Concept Paper**.
2. The concept paper is reviewed by State Office and review panel. Notices are sent to potential sponsor if approved to move forward and submit the **full Application for Federal Assistance**
3. Feedback from the concept paper is incorporated into the full application; VISTA Assignment Descriptions (VADs) are created by applicant for each VISTA slot. Full application is submitted through CNCS online grants management system.
4. A **Memorandum of Agreement (MoA)** is signed between CNCS and new VISTA sponsor and sent to headquarters for processing.
5. The newly developed VISTA program meets with the state office for **in-depth training** regarding steps to set-up the VISTA program appropriately.
6. The VISTA Sponsor's designated Program Director attends the **National VISTA Supervisor Orientation**.
7. The sponsor / program begin recruiting VISTA members by creating and implementing a **recruitment plan** and developing **service opportunity listings** in the eGrants Portal to be posted on <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/join-ameri-corps>.
8. The sponsor / program monitors portal and local interest; **performs interviews, checks references and backgrounds** for best candidates.
9. The sponsor / program select a candidate(s) to recommend to the state office for VISTA service; completes **nomination paperwork** for each candidate and transmits all information to the state office.
10. The state office reviews applications and completes **National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW)** check; if approved, candidates are invited to participate in a virtual national VISTA member orientation (VMO).
11. On their first day of service, during their VMO webinar VISTAs take the **oath of service** to officially be sworn-in to service as VISTA members.
12. VISTA members get their fingerprints rolled during their first weeks for an **FBI background check**. Completed fingerprints are mailed to VISTA HQ.
13. The sponsor / program complete an **on-site orientation** with new VISTA members during their first few weeks.
14. The sponsor verifies VISTA members at the project are actively serving by certifying the **sponsor verification form** in eGrants Portal biweekly.
15. The VISTA Member(s) participate in **training**, found on the VISTA Campus or provided by their service site or program sponsor.
16. The VISTA member works to **accomplishing goals** established in their VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)
17. The Sponsor completes **Project Progress Reports** in eGrants based on performance measures established in the VISTA application.
18. Within 6 months, the sponsor does a formal **mid-year evaluation** of VISTA Member(s) (recommended).
19. Within approximately 11 months, the VISTA member(s) and sponsor receive a notice that the **Close of Service Form** is due. The Sponsor provides an evaluation of the VISTA member(s) performance and future plans.
20. The VISTA member **completes 12 months of service**.

FY19 VISTA Application Tentative Deadline Chart**

Process	July Starts**
TA Webinar: VISTA 101: What is VISTA / RFCP Timeline Overview	Sept 6
TA Webinar: VISTA 102: VISTA Concept Paper & eGrants Overview	Oct 4
Concept Paper Due by 4:00 pm Central Time	Nov 05
Concept Paper Review Completed– Notice if approved for Full Application	Nov 16
Full application due / VADs submitted via email	Dec 20
Full application Review Completed – Notice if Approved / MoA signed	Jan 14
Iowa VISTA In-Person Training	Feb
National VISTA Supervisor Orientation	Feb / April
Recruiting/Selection Starts	March / April
Virtual Member Orientation for VISTA Candidates / Start Date of VISTA	July

***All dates are subject to change. Recruitment of VISTA members is ongoing.*