

## **Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) for New AmeriCorps VISTA Projects in Nevada Concept Papers due November 6, 2017**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Nevada State Office of the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS) announces an opportunity, subject to the availability of resources, to develop one or more new AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) programs sponsored by innovative, high-performing, and outcome-driven organizations that share the AmeriCorps VISTA's mission: providing long-term solutions to eliminate poverty. Please share this notice with your networks and contact the CNCS Nevada State Office ([nv@cns.gov](mailto:nv@cns.gov), 775-784-7474) with any questions.

### **AGENCY DESCRIPTION**

CNCS is a federal agency that engages 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. CNCS's mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

### **ELIGIBLE SPONSORS**

Public organizations such as state and local government organizations, Indian tribes, and nonprofit private organizations may apply to become AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors. All Organizations with an IRS 501(c) status that focus on anti-poverty community development are eligible to apply, however, **organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible.**

Organizations can be locally, state, or nationally based. National organizations should consider applying to AmeriCorps VISTA Headquarters for AmeriCorps VISTA sponsorship if AmeriCorps VISTA members will serve in more than one state.

Each AmeriCorps VISTA project's goal must incorporate plans to sustain project outcomes after the project agreement ends. Sponsors must be able to direct the project, recruit, and supervise AmeriCorps VISTA members, and provide the necessary administrative support to complete project goals.

AmeriCorps VISTA project beneficiaries are low-income individuals and impoverished poverty communities. Sponsors develop and manage projects with input and involvement from the beneficiaries being served.

### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Authorized in 1964, the AmeriCorps VISTA program supports efforts to eradicate poverty by engaging citizens in a year of service. As defined by the [Domestic Volunteer Service Act](#), the

AmeriCorps VISTA program is designed to “generate the commitment of private sector resources, to encourage volunteer service at the local level, to support efforts by local agencies and community organizations to achieve long-term sustainability of projects....” AmeriCorps VISTA projects focus on building organizational capacity and strengthening organizational infrastructure to bring both individuals and communities out of poverty.

The AmeriCorps VISTA program places members at sponsoring organizations. Sponsoring organizations absorb most of the costs for project supervision, administrative overhead, and logistical support. The AmeriCorps VISTA program provides a small living allowance and specified [benefits](#) to members during their service. AmeriCorps VISTA resources are intended as short-term support for an organization—projects last, on average, approximately three years. Therefore, a sponsor’s commitment and community buy-in are crucial to a project’s success.

## CORE PRINCIPLES

AmeriCorps VISTA projects must operate under the following principles:

**Anti-Poverty Focus** – The purpose of AmeriCorps VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, or tribal or public agency with a program that is poverty-related in scope may be considered for AmeriCorps 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** – AmeriCorps VISTA members provide short-term human resources to build long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. All AmeriCorps VISTA projects should be developed with the goal to phase out the need for AmeriCorps VISTA members and strengthen the ability of the project to continue indefinitely.

**Capacity Building** – AmeriCorps 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, AmeriCorps VISTA members mobilize local resources to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. Projects focus on achieving impactful outcomes on the community and/or beneficiary population.

## ABOUT AMERICORPS VISTA MEMBERS

AmeriCorps VISTA members come from diverse racial, social, geographic, and economic backgrounds. They live and serve in some of our nation’s poorest communities. Each member makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve at a specific project.

Members provide capacity building services, or in-direct service. AmeriCorps VISTA members do not perform direct service or physical labor. For example, if the proposed project’s goal is to provide access to more affordable housing, then an AmeriCorps VISTA member could design a Volunteer Recruitment Program or serve to develop an Outreach and Engagement Plan once housing units are available. Constructing the homes or demolishing structures at the location of

a future housing unit are not appropriate AmeriCorps VISTA activities. AmeriCorps State, AmeriCorps National, or AmeriCorps NCCC members, however, can perform direct service activities. More examples about the [difference between direct and indirect service](#) are available on the [VISTA Campus](#) and the [What VISTAs Members Do](#) section on CNCS's main 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.

Each AmeriCorps VISTA candidate must take a course explaining the Terms and Conditions of the program before they begin service. A quick overview of the Terms and Conditions of the VISTA program and [limitations on member activities](#) are also available on the VISTA Campus.

AmeriCorps VISTA members must also 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.

#### CONCEPT PAPER REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must meet the requirements of sponsorship listed in the Concept Paper and the Application for Federal Assistance, as well as the Program Guidance for 2018. More information is available at the [Sponsor a VISTA Project](#) page on CNCS's website.

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 Priority areas as outlined in the [FY 2018 VISTA Program Guidance](#);
- Demonstrates an understanding of the AmeriCorps VISTA program within the context of national 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.

#### NEVADA STATE OFFICE PRIORITY AREAS

The Nevada State Office seeks concept papers that align with the following CNCS Strategic Focus Areas: Education, Veterans & Military Families, Healthy Futures, and Economic Opportunity. **We are specifically targeting resources to programs that seek to address the growing opioid and prescription drug abuse epidemic as it pertains to the areas noted above.**

#### AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Subject to the availability of resources, **twelve (12) standard AmeriCorps VISTA positions and seven (7) cost-share AmeriCorps VISTA positions** may be awarded on a full-time basis for one year of service to one or more new VISTA sponsoring organizations. The Corporation will make an award covering a period of one year, with the potential for continuation. Members are

expected to begin service in April of 2018. The state office will consider all applications but is specifically interested in supporting programs that propose to **support three or more AmeriCorps VISTA positions**. Organizations who cannot support this minimum number are encouraged to consider partnerships with other organizations who are interested in working towards the same goals.

### WHAT IS COST SHARE?

Cost-share Sponsors help extend AmeriCorps VISTA's programmatic reach. To maximize federal resources, CNCS looks to project sponsors to pay for member(s) living allowances. The organization enters an agreement with CNCS to recruit for a predetermined number of cost-share positions. Once an AmeriCorps VISTA member is recruited and coded as cost-share by the state office, the sponsor is billed for the number of days that member serves. Living allowance rates are based on the county in which the member serves (roughly \$12,000 in Nevada counties). Cost-share projects can also receive CNCS funded VISTA member(s) as part of the negotiated number of placements.

While not a requirement under current regulations, cost-share agreements are strongly encouraged. **Organizations that can support cost-share agreements are given preference**. The amount an organization is expected to cost share coincides with the length of the AmeriCorps VISTA project. It is expected but not required that by year three all VISTA sponsors will participate in the cost-share arrangement to some extent.

AmeriCorps VISTA continues to cover the cost of benefits and services for the AmeriCorps VISTA members and your organization for all cost-share and standard placements including:

- A Segal AmeriCorps Education Award or post-service stipend;
- Health Benefit Plan **OR** Healthcare Allowance for all members assigned to your project;
- Payroll services: Members receive their paychecks directly from AmeriCorps VISTA;
- Training in project management and leadership for members and project supervisor;
- Travel costs associated with training;
- Relocation and settling-in allowance for members relocating to serve;
- Liability coverage for all members, under the Federal Employees Compensation Act and the Federal Torts Claims Act;
- Child care for income-eligible members;
- FICA;
- Assistance with recruiting members;

### 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 Nevada 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 three 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. Priority is given to new applicants to ensure that resources continue to be shared equitably around the state.

The 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 hosting VISTA members must first submit a Concept Paper. **Concept Papers must be submitted in eGrants by Monday, November 6, 2017 by 5:00 PM PST.** Please see the *Resources* section below to create an eGrants account and access instructions for the AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper.

Concept Papers must be created under the following Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for consideration: **AmeriCorps VISTA State FY 2018.** Only concept papers submitted in eGrants will be considered. Submitting a concept paper does not guarantee approval or resource commitment. Submissions are evaluated on the information included in the narratives and are subject to the availability of current program resources.

#### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WEBINAR – Highly encouraged but not required

**The Nevada State Office is hosting a technical assistance webinar on October 10, 2017, at 10:00 AM PST.** Representatives from organizations that want to apply for AmeriCorps VISTA resources are highly encouraged to attend this session using the information below. Please note that to fully participate you are encouraged to both call in and login with the information below.

**Conference Line:** 1-866-670-8282

**Passcode:** 76227428

→ [Join Skype Meeting](#)

Please follow the link below to find support for Skype for Business:

<https://support.skype.com/en/skype/windows-desktop/>

#### APPLICATION (Phase 2)

If a concept paper is accepted, the organization will be invited to submit a full application to the NV State Office for review and approval. If the application is approved, the organization will sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MA) with CNCS.

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR ACCEPTED PROJECTS

Once the MA is signed, Program Officers will work with sponsoring organizations to support their AmeriCorps VISTA project. Sponsors will designate a staff member to supervise the project and send the individual to a supervisor training prior to recruiting AmeriCorps VISTA candidates. Sponsors are expected to develop assignment descriptions, recruit, and orient incoming members, and identify ongoing training opportunities for members who serve at their organization. Sponsors are also expected to report on project progress and verify when members serve for the duration of the project.

**TIMELINE**

October 2, 2017	Request for VISTA Concept Papers released;
October 10, 2017	State Office hosts a webinar for interested applicants (SEE WEBINAR INFO ABOVE);
November 6, 2017	Completed Concept Papers due to Nevada State Office via eGrants;
November 10, 2017	Applicants whose Concept Papers are successful are notified and invited to submit a full application;
December 11, 2017	Completed full applications due in eGrants;
December 15, 2017	State Office announces new project sponsors;
December 2017 – January 2018	State Office provides technical assistance to new project sponsors;
TBD	Mandatory VISTA Supervisor Orientation for new project sponsors;
March 1, 2018 (estimated)	Deadline for new projects to submit recommended VISTA candidates to State Office;
April 16, 2018 (estimated)	First set of VISTA candidates from new projects attend Pre-Service Orientation and start service.

## CONCEPT PAPER AND APPLICATION RESOURCES

- [AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Instructions](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Project Application and Instructions](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Standard Budget Instructions](#) (not required for initial Concept Paper submission)
- [VISTA Performance Measures](#) (not required for initial Concept Paper submission)
- [eGrants Log-in screen](#) (and tutorial to create and manage an eGrants account)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Performance Measure Module in eGrants](#) (Flash Course)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA](#) (Flash Course)
- [VISTA 201: A Guide to Applying to become an AmeriCorps VISTA project sponsor](#) (Flash Course)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Supervisors Manual](#)
- [Is AmeriCorps VISTA Right for Your Organization?: A Guide to Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsoring Organization](#)
- [Sponsor an AmeriCorps VISTA Project](#)
- [CNCS Website](#)
- [VISTA Campus](#)

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Any interested organization or individual with additional questions not addressed by this RFCP may contact:

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