



AmeriCorps*VISTA

Pre-Interview Information

Please read over the following information and be prepared to ask any questions during the interview.

What is AmeriCorps*VISTA?

AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is one of two AmeriCorps programs run directly by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). It is a full-time, year-long program for men and women age 18 and older from all backgrounds. AmeriCorps*VISTA Members work with agencies (Sponsors) in communities across the United States to help further local efforts in alleviating poverty. The Sponsors are typically community-based organizations that have been approved by CNCS and may be focused on literacy, homelessness, hunger, economic development, disaster relief, elderly, youth or other issues. AmeriCorps*VISTA Members do not provide direct service such as one-on-one tutoring, teaching, or counseling. Rather, they work to mobilize community resources to aid the Sponsor in strengthening their capacity to serve the community. Examples of activities include recruiting/coordinating local volunteers, soliciting donations, developing a new program, providing resources to a community, and raising public awareness about a particular issue that affects a low-income community. The Sponsor provides day-to-day supervision for the AmeriCorps*VISTA Member as well as a work plan that outlines goals and objectives for the year.

What kind of support does the AmeriCorps*VISTA Member receive?

AmeriCorps*VISTA Members receive a subsistence allowance of approximately \$10,500.00 for the entire year, paid in bi-weekly paychecks. Members must budget the allowance to pay for their own food and housing. The allowance is subject to both Federal and State taxes and the amount is adjusted to reflect the cost of living in the specific area the AmeriCorps*VISTA is serving. The living allowance in _____ is \$ _____ a month.

AmeriCorps*VISTA Members also can choose between a stipend at the end of the year that accrues at a rate of \$100.00 per month (\$1200.00 after a full year) or an education award which totals \$4,725.00. This education award is a voucher, which is held in trust for seven years until the Member chooses to use it. It can be used to pay back qualified student loans or to pay for future education at an accredited institution.

Two types of student loans are deferred during the year – Stafford and Perkins – and the Perkins may be partially canceled if the end of year stipend is chosen. Interest on those loans may also be deferred depending on the lending institution. More details are available upon request.

If an AmeriCorps*VISTA Member must relocate over 50 miles in order to serve, he or she is eligible for a re-adjustment allowance of approximately \$550.00 as well as reimbursement for some travel expenses.

Health insurance is provided at no extra cost to the Member. It is not a comprehensive health plan, but covers most medical needs and emergencies an AmeriCorps*VISTA Member may encounter during the year. Life Insurance is an option and AmeriCorps*VISTA Members may purchase it at a very low cost if they choose.

What are the restrictions to AmeriCorps*VISTA service?

During the year of service, AmeriCorps*VISTA Members may not have other jobs – full- or part-time – nor may they enroll in college – full- or part-time. There are also limitations on the extent of political activity in which an AmeriCorps*VISTA Member may engage.

What training is provided?

Before an AmeriCorps*VISTA Member begins service, he or she attends Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) which is conducted by the Corporation. The PSO covers the terms and conditions of VISTA service and introduces some general techniques in areas such as volunteer recruitment, fund-raising, etc. Immediately following the PSO, the VISTA goes to his or her project site, where he or she begins on-the-job training, carried out by the Sponsor. The on the job training is conducted by the Supervisor and covers the specific work in which the AmeriCorps*VISTA Member will be engaged. Sometime during the year, the VISTA attends an In-Service Training, conducted by the Corporation.

What about housing?

The Corporation for National Service does not arrange for housing. However, if an AmeriCorps*VISTA Member is placed in an unfamiliar area, he or she should request assistance from the Sponsor in locating affordable housing. When an applicant is discussing an assignment with the Sponsor after being referred, it is appropriate to ask about the level of assistance that the Sponsor is able to provide.

A Brief History of AmeriCorps*VISTA

Several events precipitated the creation of the VISTA program in 1964 of which the most influential was the then two year old Peace Corps, enjoying demonstrated success overseas. Michael Harrington's landmark book on poverty in the United States, *The Other America*, reached an audience unaware of the terrible poverty in the US. Desegregation lawsuits, forced school integration and discrimination in federal jobs and housing, in addition to the violent unrest of the civil rights movement in the South were other factors that led the federal government to begin addressing the need for a "domestic Peace Corps." President Kennedy's 1963 State of the Union Address mentioned this idea and a proposal for a National Service Program was submitted in the ensuing months. Unfortunately, the proposal was met with little enthusiasm in Congress and eventually was tabled. It was not until President Johnson's War on Poverty programs that the VISTA (Volunteers in Service To America) program was created.

In December of 1964, the first group of twenty VISTA volunteers were received at a White House reception and were told by President Johnson that their job would be:

...to guide the young, to comfort the sick, to encourage the downtrodden, to teach the skills which may lead to a more satisfying and rewarding life. No aspect of the War on Poverty will be more important than the work you do...Your pay will be low; the conditions of your labor will often be difficult. But you will have the satisfaction of leading a great national effort and you will have the ultimate reward which comes to those who serve their fellow man.

One month later, this first group, ranging in ages twenty to eighty, received six weeks of training and went off to serve in the migrant work camps of California, the urban neighborhoods of Hartford, Connecticut, and the rural hollows of Kentucky. By the end of 1965, 2,000 VISTAs were serving in urban and rural communities throughout the United States. These first VISTAs were typically college-educated, middle class, nationally recruited people who, influenced by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and the social and political turmoil of the country, wanted to make real change in the lives of poor people.

The number of volunteers serving has fluctuated over the past thirty years going from a high of 6,000 during the Carter Administration to 1,500 during President Reagan's terms in office. Currently, there are over 5,000 VISTAs serving throughout the US and the program itself has changed very little in terms of nationally recruited VISTAs. The work that VISTAs do still has an anti-poverty focus and most VISTAs serve because they want, like the VISTAs of the '60s, to make a difference.

In 1993, with the passage of the National Service Trust Act, AmeriCorps was created and the field of national service expanded. The AmeriCorps grants program, including, for example, City Year and Teach for America, and the National Civilian Community Corps joined VISTA in allowing citizens to contribute to the ethic of service that has uniquely defined this country.