

VISTA PROJECT NARRATIVE

Please do not write more than 1-3 paragraphs per question but only when needed. Concise is best. Do not redesign or reformat this form. Work in this form only!

A. Executive Summary

Provide a brief narrative of your proposed AmeriCorps*VISTA project, including population to be served, issue areas, history of your organization's activities in these issue areas, and the type of service activities you expect the AmeriCorps*VISTA members to accomplish.

As an umbrella agency, Redwood Community Action Agency's (RCAA) programs provide a wide range of services to low and moderate income residents of Humboldt County. The long-term goal is to develop programs through which people can become self-sufficient and empowered to improve their own lives. Operating under RCAA, the Natural Resources Services Division (NRS) actively strives to protect and restore community and watershed health. Because natural and human communities of the North Coast are inextricably linked, and the sustainability of both is inter-dependent, NRS works to strengthen ecosystem and community integrity. Each NRS project includes scientific, economic, social, and environmental justice considerations, which are incorporated into its planning, design, and implementation efforts. Much of NRS' strength is based on taking a 'big picture' approach, from developing the project vision through planning, implementation, and evaluation. Some of our broad endeavors include:

- Non-Motorized Transportation, Recreation, and Public Access Planning;
- Urban, Rural, and Backcountry Trail Design and Construction
- Collaborative Process Development
- Facilitation & Coordination of Public Participation
- Active Living Education, Collaboration, Policy and Program Development
- Education and Interpretation

VISTA staff would be working with an NRS' Projects Coordinator to maintain the Henderson Community Garden, a community space that has facilitated increased self-sufficiency and access to food for low-income, Hmong immigrants for over 25 years. The VISTA member will expand the current use of the garden and will provide support to families that currently use garden plots to grow their own food. The VISTA member will also assist other RCAA divisions initiate garden spaces and educational programs. The Multiple Assistance Center (MAC), the main emergency and transitional living program for homeless families in the County, the RAVEN Project, a youth led, youth implemented street outreach program/drop-in center, as well as the Energy Demonstration Program, have existing or potential garden spaces that the VISTA member will establish and/or maintain. These sites will provide families and youth the opportunity to grow and use their own food and will enable an increased sense of self-sufficiency and food security. Throughout the efforts described above, the VISTA member will provide outreach, education, demonstration programs and general support for community gardeners, grassroots groups and other local agencies attempting to initiate garden and/or food-centered projects.

B. Needs and Activities

1. State in measurable and quantifiable terms the *specific poverty-related need(s)* identified by the community(ies) that the AmeriCorps*VISTA project will address, including the number of low-income people directly affected by the problem(s).

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In broad terms, census data for Humboldt County indicate that 19.5% (24,059) of the population lives at or below the federal poverty level, including over 6,600 children below the age of 18. This project attempts to address many of challenges of food insecurity by providing spaces to grow food and arenas to learn valuable skills related to food production and nutrition. The Henderson Community Garden is located in a low-income area of Eureka and provides garden plots to 16 low-income, Hmong families. The capacity of the garden will be expanded to potentially incorporate between 8 and 10 more plots for low-income families. The Multiple Assistance Center (MAC) serves as the main emergency and transitional living program for homeless families in Humboldt County and currently operates classes and other educational programs related to nutrition and food preparation. The RAVEN Project is a youth led, youth implemented street outreach program/drop-in center that provides numerous free services to youth up to age 21 whom are homeless, runaway, traveling, disenfranchised, street, or at risk. The Energy Demonstration Program assists low to moderate income households reduce their energy burden, improve the health and safety conditions of occupied housing and to foster client self-sufficiency. These garden sites and programs sites will provide families and youth the opportunity to grow and use their own food and will enable an increased sense of self-sufficiency and food security. It is estimated that 200 homeless children and youth will use the gardens to grow food after fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and establishment of the new garden plots.

C. Strengthening Communities

1. Describe how the new infrastructure or organizational capacity created by your project will bring individuals and, ultimately, the community out of poverty.

This garden project will increase the number of low-income residents who grow at least a portion of their own food through gardening at a designated gardening site by conducting gardening workshops and promoting the development of a network of community gardens. It will conduct outreach to other agencies and communities which are working with or are interested in developing a countywide network of community gardens to provide options for low-income residents who do not have access to land. Additionally, it will:

- Provide workshops on freezing, canning, drying, or preserving homegrown foods;
- Increase capacity to prevent hunger and food insecurity;
- Increase the number of low-income families and households with knowledge related to the growing, preparation, and preservation of their own fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Assist in providing supplementary food for people;
- Improve food access through gardening projects;
- Conduct advocacy and outreach with anti-hunger activities;
- Involve low-income persons in self-sufficiency programs;
- Encourage self-sufficiency in the community as a whole.

2. How will you involve the community to ensure the sustainability of the proposed project?

The garden will be managed and maintained by a certified Master Gardener as well as RCAA staff and clients, and will be open to the general public as an educational resource, particularly in terms of local resource stewardship, food security, establishing links between residents and the natural environment, and a garden's potential role in the broader urban ecosystem. School teachers, AmeriCorps service member, numerous non-profit organizations, County Public Health, Department of Health and Human Services, StraightUp AmeriCorps, local elementary schools, Humboldt State University, College of the Redwoods and other local stakeholders, will be able to use the garden for their educational programs and activities. It is expected that a number of garden plots will be reserved for school-related projects and that many of the products from these gardens will be delivered to nearby low-income elementary schools that face difficulties in securing nutritional food for their children. Garden staff and

clients will also hold routine demonstration days to encourage hands-on learning experiences with children and other local residents.

3. How, if at all, will you collaborate with other national service programs (AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, RSVP, NCC) in order to support the proposed project?

The project will initiate and maintain communication with the City of Eureka in order to increase number of garden plots available. It will conduct outreach to other agencies and communities which are working with or are interested in developing a countywide network of community gardens to provide options for low-income residents who do not have access to land. And this garden project will coordinate public education efforts for community garden development through presentations, press releases, flyers, classes and other educational programs. Straight Up AmeriCorps members will be recruited and trained to serve as volunteer gardening instructors to school-aged youth and roughly 20 Straight Up AmeriCorps members will be recruited to participate in volunteer "Clean Up" Days 3-4 times a year. 75 community members will be recruited and trained to serve as volunteer instructors and 20 community members will be recruited to participate in a public awareness campaign about food resources and nutritional programs. The project will also conduct a fundraising campaign, soliciting grants, donations from nurseries and building supply businesses, and in-kind services and equipment to support the garden.

D. VISTA Assignment Description

1. **List** the tasks and activities AmeriCorps*VISTA member(s) must perform to implement the strategies described in the project plan(s). These tasks and activities should logically relate to the overall project goals and activities you propose in your VISTA Assignment Description. This section will include more detail on the actual service activities.

- Serve as lead staff in expanding and sustaining the Henderson Community Garden, Multiple Assistance Center garden, Energy Services garden, and RAVEN Project garden;
- Identify and establish contact with garden users and oversee garden site activities, including general work days and communication among gardeners;
- Coordinate seed and starts donations, soil amendment donations, and conduct gardening workshops for garden users;
- Recruit a pool of volunteers from groups such as AmeriCorps, RSVP, U.C. California Extension Master Gardener Volunteers, horticulture programs at College of the Redwoods and Humboldt State University, to assist with the development of the gardens;
- Establish tracking procedures for evaluating public education activities; fundraising and donation-solicitation activities; completion of individual plots at each garden; and use of the plots by garden users;
- Initiate donor recognition activities, including individual and public acknowledgement;
- Develop policies and procedures for the operation of the gardens, and maintain them in accordance with generally accepted community garden standards;
- Develop and maintain permanent on-site green waste receptacle; encourage gardeners to regularly use the on-site composters;
- Develop a demonstration project, including model garden beds, for use as educational tools for the community at large;
- Coordinate plot use among the gardens;
- Conduct outreach and coordination with community partners to develop a county-wide network of community gardens;

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- Coordinate public education efforts through presentations, press releases, flyers, etc.;
- Provide workshops on freezing, canning, drying or preserving homegrown food;
- Assess current operations, capacity for growth, resources, and operations needs at each garden site.

2. **List** the recommended skills and qualifications that an AmeriCorps*VISTA member should have to successfully complete the project plan.

- Master Gardener certification (or qualified related experience);
- Excellent interpersonal skills;
- Ability to work with people from a variety of ages, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds;
- Excellent writing skills;
- Strong organizational skills, including the ability to prioritize tasks for self and volunteers;
- Experience in volunteer recruitment and community resource procurement and fundraising strategies;
- Knowledge of computer operations and basic graphic design concepts are desirable;
- Spanish language proficiency is desirable;
- Ability to lift up to 50 pounds.

E. Project Management

1. Describe plans for daily supervision of AmeriCorps*VISTA members. Specify who will be supervisor and if supervision will be their full-time or part-time responsibility.

Supervision of the VISTA member will be provided by the NRS Projects Coordinator and will also be working with the Directors for each of the RCAA divisions where new sites are to be established. The VISTA member will also be working independently in the gardens for a portion of their time.

2. Are 51 percent or more of the persons on your board of directors' members of the low-income community? If not, please describe how your agency has developed, or will develop, an advisory council for the AmeriCorps*VISTA project that consists of members or representatives of the low-income community served by the proposed project.

The RCAA board does not reflect a 51% majority of low-income members, but given the history of RCAA and the daily interaction with a diversity of community interests, we do not anticipate any problems developing an advisory committee that is representative and comprised of the individuals and families targeted for this project.

F. Organizational Capacity

1. What in-kind resources will you provide to ensure the success of the proposed project?

Work-related materials will be provided (computer work station, printer, internet service and office supplies) as well as mileage reimbursement for project related travel. An agency vehicle will also likely be available to the VISTA member. The NRS Projects Coordinator will provide garden-site introduction and other training as necessary, and will assist with meeting facilitation, grantwriting, and other tasks as needed.

2. Describe current activities your organization and other organizations are undertaking to address the problems identified in your need statement. Describe how the proposed project will complement this work.

The NRS Projects Coordinator is currently managing the Henderson Community Garden, holding clean-up days, collecting fees, and other general maintenance duties, and is working to convene a collaborative of agencies and grassroots groups interested in addressing the issue of local food justice and sustainability. First 5 Humboldt, an existing partner in this effort, is working with a local church group and the Boys and Girls Club to apply for funding and additional support for the conversion of private lands into community garden spaces. NRS is also working with County Public Health and numerous other organizations to facilitate the Humboldt partnership for Active Living (HumPAL), a diverse group that works to improve individual, family and community health and well-being through the integration of routine physical activity into daily life - HumPAL accomplishes this through education, policy change and support of community design that encourages active living.

3. Describe the accessibility of services provided to members of the community with disabilities. Is your organization able to accommodate AmeriCorps*VISTA members with disabilities?

Our business sites are fully accessible to persons with disabilities, however, the garden spaces may pose slight access difficulties insofar as there is often uneven or rough terrain and obstacles such as rocks, irrigation pipes and fencing. NRS does not have access to a wheelchair equipped vehicle.

ATTACHMENTS

Please submit the following attachments with your project narrative or soon after.

- List of Board of Directors, or governing body (not applicable if public entity).
- List of Advisory Council Members if already selected. If not, the list must be submitted before the end of the first quarter of the project.
- Copy of Articles of Incorporation (not applicable to public entities).
- Organizational chart.
- Tax exempt status: either IRS determination or copy of application to IRS for exemption (not applicable to public entities).
- Copy of Supervisor's Resume and Job Description.
- One letter of commitment from the proposed board of directors. The letter should describe the type of support and/or resources the partner organization will contribute.

