

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.

The mission of the Redwood Community Action Agency (RCAA) Straight Up AmeriCorps program is to ensure a brighter future for our community's youth by providing a consistent, positive presence of an adult in their lives. Straight Up AmeriCorps members achieve this mission in rural Humboldt County by: mentoring the lowest achieving youth to attain school success; supporting our most vulnerable youth to lead healthier lives by providing out-of-school wellness activities; engaging youth in our community through volunteer opportunities; and, recruiting and coordinating adult volunteers to help meet the needs of our youth. The program works in partnership with schools and community organizations to serve youth from low-income families. The RCAA Straight Up AmeriCorps partnership has successfully served children and families in this area for the past 12 years.

However, in order to continue to provide these services, the RCAA Straight Up AmeriCorps program must identify a comprehensive strategy for sustainability through more diversified funding sources. The VISTA member on this project will work with the partnership to establish a long-range plan and implement strategies to sustain the services provided to low-income communities and youth.

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).

The RCAA Straight Up AmeriCorps program currently provides service opportunities for 46 AmeriCorps members to directly serve 176 low-income children and youth in low-income communities throughout Humboldt County. This program has been funded primarily through the Corporation for National and Community Service, with cash match support contributed by local community partners. Each year, the program is required to reduce the amount of federal funds requested from CNCS by 4% (over \$20,000). In order to maintain the level of services currently provided to clients, the program needs to develop more diversified funding sources to bridge the gap caused by the annual reduction in federal funds.

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.

The Straight Up AmeriCorps program provides students from low-income communities who are performing below satisfactory in school with a unique, intense, mentoring relationship based on goal setting. During the most recently completed year of the program, 93% of mentored students reported a significant increase in school success, and 59% improved final grades by at least one letter grade from the 1st quarter report card. In focus groups, mentees consistently report that one reason the Straight Up program works is because AmeriCorps members are able to form trusting relationships with students,

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which is something that students don't usually get from other school staff. Straight Up AmeriCorps members are also able to connect students to other resources available in the community, and can advocate for students' needs. Straight Up members also create safe places for students' during the after-school hours. All of these services, if continued at the current level, will continue to prevent students' from needing more serious and costly interventions in the future, and will give students the skills needed to create a brighter future for themselves and the community. This partnership feels that the proposed VISTA project is the best strategy to ensure that these activities can continue.

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

The Straight Up AmeriCorps program is supported by a diverse partnership including schools, school districts, after-school networks, charter schools, and community organizations serving youth. Partner host sites will continue to support the project with a cash match contribution. A group of partners has developed a fundraising sub-committee, which will work with the VISTA to help give direction to the sustainability plan, as well as help expand the program's community connections through partner affiliations. Additionally, the proposed VISTA project will help the program to develop an advisory board of local business owners with an interest in developing a more employable workforce.

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 Straight Up AmeriCorps program is a member of the North Coast Regional Network for Service and Volunteerism (NCRN), a collaborative that includes over a dozen local national service programs who meet regularly to coordinate marketing, outreach, training, recruitment and service day activities. Participation in this collaborative will help the VISTA member with his/her understanding of the history of local national service programs and resources provided, The VISTA member will use this knowledge to develop concise and accurate messages for all materials created to aid in fundraising. These outreach materials will continue to be used with minor adaptations upon completion of the project plan and withdrawal of VISTA support.

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.

- Research program accomplishments and develop program fact sheets
- Research foundations
- Develop talking points and letters of inquiry for approaching potential funders
- Attend and participate in RCAA grant coordination meetings, Straight Up fundraising committee meetings, NCRN meetings, and other meetings as requested.
- Present information to small and large groups as needed.
- Create and maintain databases to record systems and data.
- Develop and maintain methods to keep Straight Up AmeriCorps alumni connected to current program needs and accomplishments.
- Participate in trainings, service events, program orientation, and overnight retreat.
- Write grants
- Work with partners, alumni and community volunteers to create at least one fundraising event.
- Update and maintain portions of the website that pertain to alumni relations and fundraising.

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

Skills

- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Ability to relate to diverse groups of people
- Strong computer skills, including web design, desktop publishing, excel, and outlook
- Strong organizational skills

Preferred Qualifications

- Bachelors degree or equivalent coursework
- Experience writing reports, public speaking, and/or fundraising.
- Knowledge of current issues in education and youth development
- Experience in community development
- Grant writing experience
- Good driving record

E. Project Management

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

The VISTA member will work under the direction of the program manager, who maintains an office in the same building as the VISTA. The program manager will be available on a full-time basis to answer questions and provide support as needed. The program manager will also arrange for a weekly formal meeting with the VISTA to discuss progress towards goals.

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 Straight Up AmeriCorps program has an advisory council that consists of representatives from the low-income schools served by the Straight Up AmeriCorps program.

F. Organizational Capacity

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

The VISTA member will be eligible to receive mileage reimbursements for daily travel from home to site. The program will provide use of an agency vehicle for travel related to VISTA's position. The VISTA member will have their own workspace which includes a computer with internet, desk, phone, and palm planner.

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 Straight Up AmeriCorps program is currently taking steps to address the problem identified in the need statement. The partnership has convened a fundraising sub-committee which has identified short-term

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fundraising goals for immediate needs until the arrival of the proposed VISTA. Program staff have started to research fundraising possibilities and attend community meetings and trainings. The VISTA project will complement the current activities by elaborating a basic plan into a focused system and will work with the fundraising sub-committee to develop long-term fundraising goals and strategies.

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?

Straight Up AmeriCorps will make any reasonable accommodations to facilitate the service of a qualified VISTA member serving with the project.

The VISTA member will have a desk with computer, phone, and internet access. Supplies and filing space will be made available. The VISTA member will have access to an agency vehicle for work related driving (conditional on a safe driving record). During the first month of service, program staff will aid VISTA as needed in accessing resources such as affordable housing, food stamps, food boxes, reduced utilities, and other benefits he/she may qualify for.

Federal law requires that AmeriCorps*VISTA sponsoring organizations make reasonable accommodations to meet the needs of qualified persons with disabilities wishing to serve as members. Indicate any factors the Corporation should be aware of when assigning members with disabilities to this project, such as availability of transportation and housing, accessibility of facilities, etc.

PART III. 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.

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