



AmeriCorps Alliance VISTA Frequently Asked Questions

What is AmeriCorps VISTA?

AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) is a national service program designed specifically to alleviate poverty. Authorized in 1964 and founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965, VISTA was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993. VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for over 50 years.

Who is eligible to apply?

You must be a U.S. citizen, national, or legal permanent resident alien of the United States, over 18 years old, and have a high school diploma or GED to be a VISTA. Find full [eligibility requirements here](#).

What do Minnesota Alliance With Youth AmeriCorps VISTA members do?

Alliance AmeriCorps VISTA members serve full-time for a year at schools, nonprofits, and community based organizations across Minnesota. VISTAs support and amplify the capacity of organizations to be effective and powerful solutions in addressing poverty and educational inequities. The service of VISTA members allows partner organizations to support more youth to graduate and works to close the opportunity and achievement gaps in Minnesota. Examples of past Alliance VISTA projects include developing a strategic organizational brand, establishing restorative services within a school district, fundraising and event planning, grant writing, etc.

What does it mean that the Alliance "sponsors" VISTA positions?

VISTA sponsors are organizations that grant VISTA positions to other organizations and act as intermediaries between the national VISTA program and host sites. Sponsor organizations develop a cohort around a specific focus area with the overlying goal of alleviating poverty. For example, the Alliance VISTA cohort aims to alleviate poverty via educational equity. Specifically, the Alliance provides administrative support to its sites and professional development opportunities for the VISTA members in our cohort.

How is the Alliance different from other VISTA sponsors?

The Alliance's VISTA project focuses on serving young people of color and young people living in poverty, with the ultimate goal of supporting more youth to graduate and closing the opportunity and achievement gaps in Minnesota. We do this alongside the Alliance's GradMinnesota, AmeriCorps Promise Fellow, and Minnesota Youth Council initiatives. Other sponsor sites may focus specifically on issues like health, employment or supporting refugee populations.

The Alliance also differs from other VISTA sponsors with our focus on Member Professional Development and Support. Members attend monthly trainings focused on skill building and community learning sessions. Members complete a Professional Development Plan and the Alliance provides a set amount of funding to each member to help complete their set goals.



Alliance VISTAs who are interested can elect to be matched with a Life Coach during their service term to support personal and professional goals. Additionally, members are supported by both a VISTA Leader and an Alliance Trainer

What does it mean to be part of a VISTA "cohort"?

Alliance VISTAs meet at least once a month for [professional development trainings](#) and are encouraged to collaborate and connect with one another both inside and out of service. This cohort of VISTAs provides a supportive peer-learning environment for our members as they grow and overcome obstacles during their terms of service.

When would I serve, and for how long?

The Alliance VISTA cohort runs for a full year beginning in August. VISTAs can serve up to five one-year terms, but they can only earn up to two education awards. There is no limit on the number of end of year cash stipends they receive.

What do VISTA members typically do after completing their service?

The Alliance is committed to preparing our VISTA members for post-service life. Many members go on to grad school, find jobs at their host sites or through connections made during their service year, or complete another year of service.

Can I choose my host site?

When applying for a position, prospective VISTAs apply and interview directly with their desired host site. Alliance VISTA host sites are located within the Twin Cities and in greater Minnesota. To learn more about our current host sites, [click here!](#)

What kind of training and support will I receive?

The Alliance VISTA Program is committed to investing in its members' professional development. We estimate that our members have the opportunity for more than 200 hours of support and training throughout the service year. In addition, each member completes a Professional Development Plan and the Alliance allocates a set amount of money to each member to complete activities on this plan. [Learn more about our VISTA's professional development.](#)

When can I apply?

Position descriptions and instructions for how to apply will be posted in February. Service members will be selected by early June. To receive updates on applying for the upcoming cohort, [complete this form!](#)



VISTA BENEFITS

Will I get paid?

Alliance VISTAs receive a bi-weekly living allowance. VISTA members who successfully complete a term of service are also eligible to receive either a [Segal AmeriCorps Education Award](#) or an [end-of-service cash stipend](#).

What is the Segal Education Award and how can I use it?

The Segal AmeriCorps Education Award is a post-service benefit for participants who complete a 12-month term. It may be used to pay educational costs at eligible post-secondary educational institutions, as well as to repay qualified student loans. The Segal Award is subject to income tax. [Learn more here](#).

I can't afford to serve because of student loans.

VISTA members are eligible to postpone payments on *qualified* federal student loans during their term of service (called a forbearance). Upon successful completion of service, members are also eligible to have all or a portion of the interest that accrued during their term paid off. [Learn more about forbearance](#).

What are "qualified" student loans?

A "qualified" student loan is any federally backed student loan in the VISTA member's name. If you do not know if your loans are qualified, ask your lenders. There should also be a citation on the loan papers, referring to Title IV of the Higher Education Act or Title VII or VIII of the Public Health Services Act. Refer to this [Alliance student loan resource guide](#) for more information. Private loan companies may not recognize AmeriCorps forbearance. It is ultimately the VISTA member's responsibility to ensure that their student loans are eligible for forbearance.

Will I receive health care benefits?

AmeriCorps VISTA provides a Healthcare Allowance benefit to members who maintain primary health coverage from another provider. This option covers out-of-pocket expenses like copayments and deductibles. A basic Health Benefits Plan is also available for those who are legally exempt from the federal requirement to maintain health care coverage.

Does VISTA provide child care benefits?

To qualify for the child care benefit, the VISTA member must meet the following requirements:

- The VISTA member's household income must not exceed 75% of the state's median income for a family of the same size; this limit is different for each state and may change annually. **The total household income is used to determine your income eligibility excluding your VISTA living allowance.**



- The member must not currently receive a child care subsidy from another source at the time of acceptance into the program (including a parent or guardian) which would continue to be provided while the member serves in the program.
- The member must be the parent or legal guardian of a child under the age 13.
- The child must reside with the member. The member must certify that he or she needs child care in order to participate in the VISTA program.

For full information on the VISTA childcare benefit, [click here](#).

Will I qualify for public service benefits (food stamps, energy assistance, etc)?

While many service members may apply for and receive public benefits, AmeriCorps VISTA cannot guarantee eligibility. Use this [Bridge to Benefits](#) tool created by Children's Defense Fund to determine what public benefits you may be eligible for.

Can I hold another job during my service?

VISTA members may hold outside employment while serving as a VISTA. Any outside employment must not conflict with the VISTA member's training, service, or service hours as assigned by AmeriCorps VISTA or the sponsor. Find more information on AmeriCorps VISTA's Outside Employment Policy [here](#).

Will VISTA pay me to relocate?

VISTA candidates approved to relocate to serve are eligible for a Relocation Travel Allowance, which is intended to off-set the cost of relocating to serve and the shipment of personal effects between the home of record and the service site. The rate, established by the federal government and the VISTA program, is based on the mileage between the home of record and the site, not to exceed \$1,000.

Members moving 50 miles or more from their home of record are also eligible for a settling-in allowance of no more than \$550. It is disbursed in the regular biweekly living allowance payment.

What is Non-competitive Eligibility?

VISTA members receive one year of Non-Competitive Eligibility for federal jobs. Non-Competitive Eligibility will allow VISTA members to apply for post-service federal jobs that are not publicly posted, which could give them a leg up in the federal hiring process. [Learn more here](#).

What other policies or restrictions should I be aware of?

For more in depth information on VISTA policies and restrictions, visit the [VISTA Member Handbook](#).

Thank you for your interest in Minnesota Alliance With Youth's AmeriCorps programs! If you are considering the opportunity or have additional questions about the service term, please reach out to Christina Berget, AmeriCorps Recruitment Specialist. We look forward to hearing from you!

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