

VISTA Vocab

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General AmeriCorps Terms

VISTA – VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) was founded in 1965 as a national service program to fight poverty in America. It was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993.

AmeriCorps (pronounced Ameri-core) – AmeriCorps engages adults in involved public service work. Members commit to serve at nonprofit organizations or public agencies in fields such as education, public safety, health care, and environmental protection. [AmeriCorps Fact Sheet](#).

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) – [CNCS](#) is an independent federal agency that funds and oversees VISTA, AmeriCorps State and National programs, and other national service programs.

National Service – This term is used to describe programs under CNCS in which individuals dedicate a period of time to service in their community. AmeriCorps National Service members in Minnesota include VISTA, Promise Fellows, and NCCC, among others.

Hatch Act – The federal law that prohibits VISTA Members from engaging in political activities while serving at their host sites or from representing themselves as VISTA Members while engaging in political activities during their outside-of-work time. [Learn more](#).

Member – Short-hand term for AmeriCorps Promise Fellow or VISTA.

Sponsoring Organization – A sponsoring organization can be a government agency, a government of an Indian nation, or a private non-profit organization that partners with the low-income communities it serves and with AmeriCorps to provide service members to host sites. The Alliance is the Sponsoring Organization for Alliance VISTAs.

Host Site – The organization/school/district/agency that hosts VISTA Members and ensures that each service member is properly supported throughout their service year.

Service – Since AmeriCorps members are not employees, terms such as “work” and “job” are not accurate. Instead, we use the word “service”.

Living Allowance – Since AmeriCorps members are not employees, terms such as “paycheck,” “salary,” or “paid” are not accurate. Instead, we say that members receive a living allowance. Also referred to as ‘stipend.’

Ed Award – AmeriCorps members receive an Education Award (or Ed Award) upon successfully completing their year of service. The Education Award is \$5,815 that may be used towards future education expenses or to pay back qualified student loans.

End-of-Service Stipend – AmeriCorps members may elect to receive an end-of-service stipend instead of an Education Award. The end-of-service stipend accrues at the rate of \$150 per month, for a total of \$1,803 awarded upon the completion of the service year.

[More information.](#)

Qualified Student Loan Forbearance – Forbearance means that you do not have to make payments or pay interest on qualified loan(s) during service. After you successfully complete service, the National Service Trust will pay some or all of the interest that accumulated while you were a member. Private loans do not qualify for forbearance. [More information.](#)

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program forgives your direct federal student loans after you have made 120 qualifying monthly payments under a qualifying repayment plan while working full-time for a qualifying employer. AmeriCorps is a qualifying employer. [More info here.](#)

InterCorps Council (ICC) – ICC is a [peer-led group of AmeriCorps members](#) from across the state of Minnesota who promote statewide collaboration, education, communication, and engagement between different AmeriCorps programs.

Alliance VISTA Service Terms

VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) – The VAD is a position description and work plan that outlines the goals and activities of each VISTA project. It is used as the main guide for VISTA service. All VISTA members have a VAD created by their host site.

Capacity Building – VISTA members build their host site’s capacity to serve the needs of the community. Common capacity building tasks include: program development, creating systems, program evaluation, building partnerships, volunteer management, fundraising, or marketing and outreach. VISTA members are not intended to do direct service (i.e. tutor students, teach classes, act as an administrative assistant, etc).

VISTA Leader –VISTA Leaders provide support to a cohort of VISTA members serving at different host sites. VISTA Leaders work with the sponsoring organization’s VISTA Trainer to lead meetings and training opportunities for their cohort, provide site visits, and are the VISTAs’ go-to person with questions about service.

Trainer – A sponsoring organization’s Trainer supports AmeriCorps members throughout their year of service by working with a VISTA Leader to lead cohort meetings, coordinate larger training opportunities, and complete site visits at host sites.

Supervisor – Each VISTA is assigned a Supervisor to provide day-to-day guidance, supervision and support. The Supervisor ensures the effective implementation of the VISTA Model at their Host Site. A VISTA supervisor is commonly a staff member at a particular Host Site, and is the individual the VISTA will have the most day-to-day contact with during their service year.

Professional Development Plan (PD Plan or PDP) – Used to assist VISTA Members in setting professional and personal development goals for their term of service and to track Professional Development hours.

Performance Measurements (Sometimes referred to as Project Measurements) – Performance Measures for Alliance VISTA Members are be classified under two categories: Capacity Building and Anti-Poverty. Host Sites determine the appropriate Performance Measurements for their VISTA Project.

Periodic Reports – Periodic Reports include four Quarterly Reports and an end-of-year supplementary report that are submitted over the course of the VISTA Service year. These reports capture the work the VISTA Member has done in reaching their Host Site’s Capacity Building and Anti-Poverty goals.

Monthly Reflections – Alliance VISTA Members submit monthly reflections on the successes and challenges of service, updates on their Professional Development plans, and any additional recognition their VISTA Project has received. The first monthly reflection is due the final day of September.

Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) – An intensive training which provides an overview of your role as an AmeriCorps VISTA member candidate, the role of your sponsoring organization, and the role of the Corporation State Office. Upon completion of PSO, candidates are officially sworn in as VISTAs.

Settling In Allowance – VISTA Members moving 50 miles or more from their home of record to their project site may be eligible to receive a settling-in allowance of no more than \$550. Requests for settling-in allowance should be directed to the Corporation State Office. The settling-in allowance is subject to federal income tax deduction, and it is disbursed in the regular biweekly living allowance payment.

Outside Employment – A VISTA Member may be employed part time outside of their VISTA service. If a VISTA pursues outside employment while in VISTA service, the VISTA may not be an employee or contractor for the sponsor, sub-recipient, or other project-related organization to which the VISTA is assigned to serve.

While in VISTA service, the VISTA may only accept outside employment for positions that are:

- Legal;
- Part-time;
- Do not conflict at all with the VISTA's service or service hours;
- Do not violate any applicable Federal, state, and local laws and regulations; and
- Do not conflict with any AmeriCorps VISTA program requirements or policies.

[Learn more here.](#)

VISTA Campus – The VISTA Campus is a comprehensive online learning center for the VISTA community.

VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) – VMSU provides administrative support to VISTA candidates, members, and alumni. This support includes assistance with the member application, enrollment forms, training events, active service, end of service, and post service. You can contact the VMSU for assistance through the National Service Hotline at 800-942-2677 or submit a request online to the VMSU at https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask_eg

AmeriCorps VISTA Healthcare Allowance – The Healthcare Allowance is a supplemental healthcare reimbursement program to offset out of pocket expenses following payment by the VISTA's primary insurance plan. Expenses include: annual deductible, coinsurance, copayments and other charges for qualified medical, dental or vision expenses. The VISTA Healthcare Allowance is not an insurance policy or program. It is for the individual VISTA member and not for costs associated with insurance premiums, costs associated with non-essential health benefits such as cosmetic or elective, or costs associated with the care of your dependent spouse and/or children. [Learn more here.](#)

AmeriCorps VISTA Health Benefit Plan – A self-funded, basic health benefits plan for members who demonstrate that they are legally exempt from having ACA compliant coverage during their term of service. [Learn more here.](#)

IMG VISTA – AmeriCorps VISTA Healthcare Program. The Healthcare Allowance Plan and the VISTA Health Benefit Plan go through IMG.

Non-competitive Eligibility Status – A unique benefit of VISTA service that allows the federal government to hire previous VISTA members, without the VISTA members having to compete with the general public, provided that they meet the minimum qualifications for the job.

AmeriCoach – VISTA Members serving through the Alliance have the opportunity to be matched with a Life Coach throughout their Service term to support personal and professional goals. VISTAs will note their interest to be matched mid/late October.