



Virginia Housing Alliance

AmeriCorps VISTA Project

2018-2019

Project Information &
How to Apply

Letters of Interest must be submitted by January 12, 2018

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Introduction to the VHA AmeriCorps VISTA Project

Dear Continuum of Care, Balance of State Local Planning Group, and Homeless Services Agency Representatives,

Four years ago, VHA launched its AmeriCorps VISTA project designed to provide Continuums of Care (CoCs) and Balance of State Local Planning Groups (LPGs) with a package of on-going technical assistance and a well-trained VISTA Member to implement community capacity building initiatives. Due to the success of the project, we are excited to continue to expand and offer this resource package to more CoCs, LPGs, and highly qualified homeless services agencies. The project will provide CoCs/LPGs/homeless services agencies in Virginia a VISTA Member who will receive training and on-going support from VHA and partners to assist your local Continuum of Care/LPG/agency in meeting our shared goals:

- Engaging current and new stakeholders in the local response to homelessness,
- Assessing and improving the local system that responds to homelessness,
- Utilizing data to articulate need and progress and make data-driven decisions (and therefore be more competitive in garnering resources),
- Supporting program transition to housing first and housing focused service delivery, and
- Complying with federal and state policies.

VHA has been partnering with you, formally or informally, for the past several years to assist in meeting the goals of the HEARTH Act, aligning programs with a housing first philosophy, and/or providing more targeted assistance to your community. We are well aware of the challenges of addressing the issue of homelessness in communities across the Commonwealth and believe that strong and effective regional partnerships – and the human capital to carry out the work – are key to pursuing our joint goal of ending homelessness across Virginia. Therefore, we determined that our AmeriCorps VISTA project had to directly support the efforts at the local CoCs and LPGs. In 2015, we were excited to expand the program to homeless service provider applicants to meet capacity building needs that grow your housing first programming while also displaying an active commitment to advancing partnerships and achieving mutual objectives at the CoC/LPG level.

This packet provides information on the AmeriCorps VISTA program, including VHA's project requirements and the general activities in which a VHA AmeriCorps VISTA Member would be engaged in your community. Also outlined in this packet is the timeline and process for applying for this opportunity.

We look forward to continue working with you to end homelessness in Virginia. Thank you, as always, for your commitment and dedication to this important work.

Sincerely,
Sim Wimbush, Executive Director

Project Overview

AmeriCorps VISTA Program

VISTA was founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965 as a national service program designed specifically to fight poverty in America. In 1993, VISTA was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs under the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). AmeriCorps VISTA Members make a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project at a nonprofit organization or public agency. They focus their efforts to build the organizational, administrative, and financial capacity of organizations that fight illiteracy, improve health services, foster economic development, and otherwise assist low-income communities.

VHA VISTA Project Goals

The Virginia Housing Alliance (VHA), state and national partners, and our service provider partners across Virginia are working to reduce and end homelessness through transitioning to proven solutions and evidence based best practices and enhancing the homelessness response system to meet the needs of Virginia residents. This VISTA project provides the human capital necessary to support this transition to a sustainable and more effective system/program, while engaging VISTA Members in the causes and solutions to homelessness. VISTA Members are placed in communities across the state and provide key leadership, guidance, and direction to help VHA's local partners achieve greater impact for their clients experiencing and at risk of homelessness. Specific project objectives and an overview of potential work plan activities are outlined below:

Objective 1: Promote permanent housing focused solutions to ending homelessness.

Increase knowledge and implementation of best practices.

CoC/LPG VISTA activities: Provide case examples of program models that have been proven successful in other communities in Virginia and across the nation; Organize presentations and dialogues on the transition to housing first; Assist community in adopting housing focused performance measures; Develop housing first trainings for stakeholders; Assist providers in implementing best practices for housing focused emergency shelter, rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing.

Service Provider VISTA activities: Assess the provider's engagement in housing focused solutions and alignment with housing first principles; Review similar program models from other Virginia communities and across the nation and offer guidance on how to adjust program policies to reflect best practice; Revise/develop housing first training for board member orientation and other stakeholders that highlights how the agency fits within the regional homeless services system; Develop housing first focused educational materials for community members.

Objective 2: Improve data quality and use in decision-making.

Improve HMIS participation and data quality. Use data to clearly articulate need and progress and make decisions on allocation of resources.

CoC/LPG VISTA activities: Assist with data collection, entry, and aggregation; Review/design strategies to improve bed coverage and data quality; Conduct outreach to agencies to discuss

benefits of HMIS participation; Conduct community assessments; Create report templates; Implement a process for data-informed decision-making. Educate community on HUD's System Performance Measures and how to use them to guide systems planning.

Service Provider VISTA activities: Assess the extent of the provider's HMIS usage and the quality of the entered data; Review/design strategies to improve data quality; Assist with data collection, entry, aggregation, and reporting; Benchmark provider's project outcomes against community-wide System Performance Measures; Explore ways to improve project outcomes and offer best practice guidance to partner agencies to do the same; Explore opportunities to expand HMIS access to volunteers and train accordingly.

Objective 3: Build strategic partnerships that advance efforts to end homelessness.

Increase meaningful engagement of current CoC members and new stakeholders, including Workforce Investment Boards, Public Housing Authorities, affordable housing providers, businesses, mainstream health services and veteran and youth specific services and programs. Enhance formal planning and community infrastructure.

CoC/LPG VISTA activities: Schedule/prepare agendas for CoC-wide meetings and committee meetings; Assess current participation in CoC efforts; Assist in creation and approval process for policy, procedure, and agreement documentation related to governance, committee structure, partnerships, and collaborative projects; Conduct outreach to new partners.

Service Provider VISTA activities: Expand participation in CoC/LPG efforts and engage in committees and working groups at the systems level; Develop and implement a volunteer recruitment and management strategy; Create a community outreach plan to engage landlords, business leaders, and similar stakeholders in the agency's housing focused mission.

Objective 4: Engage in special initiatives to end veteran, chronic, and youth and family homelessness.

Actively engage the community in achieving the *Opening Doors* federal strategic goals: preventing and ending homelessness among veterans, chronic, and youth and families with children. Work with the community to apply the innovations and new practices brought about through these initiatives in its efforts to end homelessness among all subpopulations.

CoC/LPG VISTA activities: Assess the community's involvement in initiatives to sustain the end of veteran homelessness and to end homelessness among chronic, youth and families with children; Assist in coordinating by-name lists, outreaching to key stakeholders, organizing case conferencing meetings, and logging and reporting housing placements; Determine where the CoC/LPG can integrate these practices in its approach to assisting all subpopulations and work with initiative partners and CoC/LPG leadership to expand their use; Enhance coordination across sectors to address gaps and develop collaborative strategies to end homelessness among all subpopulations.

Service Provider VISTA activities: Assess the provider's involvement in initiatives to sustain the end to veteran homelessness and to end homelessness among chronic, youth and families with children and ensure its active engagement in and alignment with CoC/LPG efforts; Educate volunteers to veteran, chronic, youth, and families initiatives and direct their set a path to ending homelessness

among all subpopulations; Educate the agency's board to importance of supporting these initiatives, and their greater application in achieving the agency's mission; Work with agency leadership to define specific housing placement goals and regularly brief volunteers, staff, the board, and external stakeholders to the agency's progress in meeting its targets; Strengthen interagency and inter-sector collaboration to end homelessness among all subpopulations.

Project Details

How many VISTA Members can I apply for?

Only one VISTA Member will be placed with each host site.

How big is VHA's VISTA project?

Currently, VHA has eleven VISTA Members at host sites across the state and a VISTA Leader providing leadership for the cohort of VISTA Members.

Where do VISTA Members work?

VISTA Members are placed and work on-site to build capacity at VHA VISTA host agencies, most likely the Continuum of Care/Local Planning Group lead entity, although other arrangements can be made. Homeless services agencies host VISTA Members within their offices. One VISTA Leader serves on-site at VHA and is dedicated to statewide and VISTA project capacity building.

Who will employ the VISTA?

The VISTA is a volunteer receiving a living stipend through a federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The VISTA is regarded as a federal employee for limited purposes. The VISTA is affiliated with Virginia Housing Alliance, the host site, and the AmeriCorps VISTA Program. This VISTA will carry the title of *VHA AmeriCorps VISTA Member* and indicate that s/he is serving with your agency.

Do VISTA Members work full-time?

Yes. VISTA Members work a full 40 hours each week and commit to serving for a one-year period. VISTAs have leave benefits including 80 hours of personal time, 80 hours of sick time, and national holidays observed by the host site.

How will the VISTA Members be recruited?

VISTA Members will be recruited in a collaborative fashion. Host sites will recruit locally for VISTA applicants through their own networks. VHA will recruit through statewide and national networks. All VISTA applicants must fill out an official online AmeriCorps application to be considered for the position.

How can we ensure that the VISTA is qualified to assist our CoC/LPG/agency?

The VISTA applicants are screened and interviewed by both the host site and VHA. Quality selected VISTA Members need to be approved by the host site, VHA, and CNCS. CNCS will provide an initial orientation focused on poverty and capacity building. VHA staff will provide an intensive initial training focused on homelessness at the federal and state level and the VISTA work plans.

Who supervises the VISTA Members?

Each host must declare a site supervisor who supervises the VISTA's day to day activities and provides the VISTA with project guidance. The VHA Director of Programs and the Program Manager act as the VISTA Project Supervisors and monitor overall project progress and needs. One VISTA Leader, housed in the VHA office, is dedicated to mentoring VISTA Members, coordinating training and professional development opportunities and general project support. VISTAs send weekly updates to the VISTA

Leader. VHA will serve as the intermediary for the VISTA program, coordinating all responsibilities with CNCS.

What training do VISTA Members receive?

VISTA Members attend a four-day in-person, or a 5-week on-line, Pre-Service Orientation focused on poverty issues and run by CNCS. During the members' first week of service, VHA hosts them in Richmond for a two-day orientation/training focused on homelessness best practices, Housing First, and our VISTA project goals. The host site provides each member with an On-Site Orientation/Training to their specific agency, Continuum of Care and community. On-going project-specific training is held on a quarterly basis in Richmond and hosted by VHA. The VISTA Leader and VHA staff work with members to identify additional areas of needed support and arrange one-on-one calls with VISTA Members and sites, project-wide conference calls, and other venues to support VISTA Member on-going professional and subject matter development. AmeriCorps VISTA provides free professional development webinars for VISTA Members throughout the year.

What does VHA mean by capacity building?

The VISTA program is focused on providing support for organizations by placing VISTA Members to create, expand, and strengthen systems, and build structure and collaboration that will allow the CoC/LPG/agency to partner with regional stakeholders and better serve people experiencing homelessness in their communities. The VISTA host site organization is making a commitment to improving its effectiveness and sustainability and to stand behind the VISTA's capacity building role.

Who develops the VISTA's work plan?

The host site and VHA work together to create an appropriate assignment. Upon selection of participating CoCs/LPGs/agencies, VHA will work with the host site to assess capacity building needs and create the VISTA work plan, called the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD), for the year. The VHA VISTA Project has a VAD template that will be built upon so that each VISTA Member a site-specific VAD. This process ensures that the activities of the VISTA meet local needs as well as overall project goals. During the first two months of the VISTA service term, the site supervisor will work with the VISTA Member to action plan the VAD and begin tracking progress on the VAD activities.

What are the reporting requirements?

VISTA Members complete two weekly reports for VHA: a weekly update report and a time sheet. Site supervisors must sign each week's time sheet. A six-month progress report and end-of-year progress report must be completed by each site to assist with VHA's reporting to CNCS. VHA completes all other VISTA program reporting to CNCS. VHA works with sites to track outputs and outcomes of the VISTA project.

What may VISTA Members NOT participate in?

In compliance with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), VISTA Members and their projects cannot:

- Displace a current employee or serve in a regular staff position. VISTA Members cannot fill staff positions.

- Focus on direct-service activities.
- Be involved with political advocacy, religious instruction, voter registration, fundraising for host site match or operating expenses, union organizing, or clerical activities.

What benefits do VISTA Members receive from CNCS?

Administered by CNCS, VISTA Members receive the following benefits: living stipend, education award or end-of-service stipend, life insurance option, health benefits, loan forbearance/deferment, interest repayment, leave benefits, and, if applicable, child care benefits and relocation reimbursement. CNCS provides free professional development webinars and further learning opportunities to VISTA Members through an AmeriCorps VISTA training team.

What does VHA provide?

- A comprehensive community orientation tool focusing on community status towards implementing a housing focused system, data informed decision-making and processes, and building community support and strategic partnerships. This assessment-like tool can assist in providing focus for the VISTA Member's activities, provide structured CoC-level learning for the VISTA, and serves as the basis for on-going technical assistance to host sites provided by VHA and partners throughout the year.
- Peer exchange opportunities through facilitated forums and connections with other programs and leaders across the state.
- In-person, orientation and training for the VISTA to the homelessness field, state and federal homelessness policy, and best practices in transitioning to a homeless crisis response system. This includes training provided by key state officials and homeless service and housing providers.
- On-going VISTA mentoring, support and professional development, including quarterly in-person trainings.
- One initial site visit focused on project planning, and additional site visits as needed to address host site technical assistance needs and review project progress.
- Access to VHA resources, educational materials, and learning opportunities.
- Overall project administration related to the federally funded VISTA program – including reporting and compliance requirements.

What must host sites provide?

- A clear and detailed work plan for VISTA Member developed with VHA VISTA Project Supervisors.
- Adequate work space for the VISTA Member including desk, phone, computer, internet access, and office supplies.
- A thorough on-site orientation and training.
- Reimbursement for local work-related travel.
- The completion of all required reporting on or before the determined deadline.
- A designated Site Supervisor who will provide community orientation support, weekly supervision, and VAD action planning to the VISTA Member.
- A financial match of \$15,000 for the one-year placement. (See Financial Match section on Pg 10.)
- Additionally, the host site will:

- Actively recruit VISTA applicants.
- Engage VISTA Member as active member of the agency and Continuum of Care.
- Participate in VISTA Member progress reporting, site visits, and technical assistance.
- Allow VISTA Member to participate in required VHA trainings.
- Plan for, and communicate about, any site supervisor transitions.

Financial Match

Why is there a financial match?

In order to support the technical assistance and training package for the VISTA Member and host site, the project requires a financial match of \$15,000. This match helps cover the costs of the trainings, including VISTA travel, lodging, and meals, as well as site monitoring, community assessments, and on-going technical assistance. The financial match also covers the cost share match VHA pays to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and helps cover the costs to administer the overall project, including reporting and ensuring compliance with this federal program provided through CNCS.

What if we are unsure of how to secure the financial match?

We are aware that the timeline for submission of the LOI is tight. If you are unsure of how to secure the financial match by the LOI deadline, please still submit the LOI and indicate that you are still working on options for the local financial match. Submitting an LOI does not commit you to the VISTA project. If you have questions or would like to discuss further, contact Hunter at 804-332-0560 or hsnellings@virginiahousingalliance.org. Once the CoC/LPG/agency host sites have been secured, we will develop a payment schedule for the match.

VHA VISTA Project Timeline (proposed)

January 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters of Interest due [January 12, 2018] • VHA and VISTA Advisory Council review Letters of Interest • Selected host sites are announced [by January 26th] • Execution of Memorandum of Understanding between VHA and host site
February 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) co-created between VHA and host site • VISTA Member recruitment begins
March – May 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VISTA Members selected and approved • Host site supervisor orientation/training by VHA
June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Service Orientation by CNCS (4 days in-person, or 5 weeks on-line) • In-person* VHA training (2 days) • VISTA's first day at host site [Actual date TBD] • On-Site Orientation/Training • VISTA conducts VHA VISTA Project's community orientation and VAD action plan
July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site visit (VISTA Member, site supervisor, VISTA leader, and project supervisor)
August 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person* VISTA cohort meeting (training and project reflection)
November 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person* VISTA cohort meeting (training and project reflection)
December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six-month project progress report due to VHA
February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person* VISTA cohort meeting (training and project reflection)
June 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-of-year project progress report due to VHA • End of Service • In-person* celebration and reflection (members and supervisors)
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VISTA professional development and training webinars • Host site technical assistance activities, webinars, and conference calls

*in-person = hosted in Richmond VA

How to Apply

Is my agency eligible to host a VISTA Member?

Your agency is eligible if it is the lead entity representing a Continuum of Care (CoC) in the Commonwealth of Virginia, local planning group (LPG) that participates in the Balance of State (BOS) Continuum of Care, or a homeless services agency with a history of collaboration with its CoC/LPG. Agencies must also be current VHA members or become VHA members upon selection.

Can my CoC/LPG partner with another CoC/LPG to apply for a shared VISTA Member?

Yes! Here at VHA, we love partnerships and believe in the benefits of peer exchange and regional collaboration. Therefore, we encourage CoCs/LPGs to partner to apply for a shared VISTA Member and be able to share the costs of the financial match and supporting the VISTA Member.

Can an existing/former host site apply for another year?

Host sites can potentially have a VISTA Member on-site for up to three years. Existing or former host sites are invited to resubmit a LOI that describes how another VISTA's work will build on the prior work of VHA/VCEH VISTA Members in the community or agency.

How will host sites be selected?

The VHA VISTA Advisory Council will make decisions based on the following criteria: (1) The stated commitment of the CoC/LPG/homeless services agency and relevant stakeholders to achieving the project goals and supporting the VISTA's capacity building role; (2) The ability of the CoC/LPG/agency to support the VISTA in achieving the project goals; (3) The need of the CoC/LPG/agency for this support in order to improve the local system, or in the agency's case, support for the furthering regional collaboration, (4) The ability to secure the financial match; (5) The need to ensure geographic diversity of the VISTA placements.

Letter of Interest

Letters of interest must be submitted by email to Emily Brown no later than **Friday, January 12, 2018**. If you have any questions, please contact Emily at ebrown@virginiahousingalliance.org or 804-840-8844. VHA requests a letter of interest from each CoC/LPG, partnership of CoCs and LPGs, or homeless services agency that would like a VISTA Member placed in their community/agency. The letter of interest should contain the following information and must not exceed five pages.

1. List a lead agency for the purposes of this project as well as the primary contact, including name, title, address, email, and phone number. Also list other key stakeholders (e.g., CoC Steering Committee) who will be involved in the project. If you are applying as a partnership between more than one CoC/LPG, please select a primary lead and contact person for the project.
2. Describe the capacity of the lead agency to support the VISTA Member in meeting the objectives of the project including (a) the resources available to support the project (desk space, computer, internet access, telephone use, local training opportunities), (b) the capacity of the lead agency to provide weekly supervision and project guidance, and (c) any previous experience working with AmeriCorps VISTA, national service participants, and/or community volunteers.

3. Briefly describe the commitment to building capacity and the current efforts of the CoC/LPG/homeless services agency to achieve the project objectives listed in the “VHA VISTA Project Goals” section on pages 3 – 5.
4. Briefly describe why the CoC/LPG/agency is in need of support from VHA and the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Describe any challenges you believe your CoC/LPG/agency and the VISTA Member may face in achieving the goals listed above.
5. Describe the projects and/or work plan for the VISTA as they relate to the programs overarching objectives on pages 3 – 5.
6. A plan for securing the local financial match.