



EMERGE VISTA Program Request for Proposals: VISTA Host Site Applications 2018-2019 Program Year

EMERGE Community Development (EMERGE), in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), is requesting applications from organizations interested in hosting a full-time, AmeriCorps VISTA member from August 2018- to August 2019. Through partnering with EMERGE to host a VISTA project, your organization can build its capacity to more effectively fight poverty by creating and expanding programming, developing long-term resources and strengthening community partnerships.

EMERGE coordinates and supports VISTA members throughout Minnesota with a focus on building capacity in 501c3 nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, faith-based organizations, and tribal, state and local government agencies that serve individuals returning to the community after incarceration or individuals with criminal backgrounds. Typically, organizations are granted a VISTA position(s) that can be renewed for up to three years; however, in some occasions a project can last up to five years.

We invite your organization to participate in this annual competitive selection process.

Applications must be submitted to EMERGE by Monday, February 5, 2018 by 5pm.

Application Process and Timeline**

Webinars: 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Live: Thurs, 1/18/18 Live: Tues., 1/23/18; Live: Fri., 1/26/18; Prev. recorded: Tues., 1/30/18	Prior to submitting a project application, you are required to participate in one informational webinar about partnering with EMERGE to host a VISTA member and the application process. Register for one of the webinars by emailing: washingtonk@emerge-mn.org Application materials will be distributed electronically to all prospective host sites after completion of an EMERGE Informational Webinar.
Monday, February 5 by 5:00 pm	Deadline for submitting Host Site application – email to washingtonk@emerge-mn.org
Wednesday, February 21	Sites notified of conditional selection decisions (Final project site selection is based on submission of a thorough work plan and initial site visit)
Thursday, March 1 (8:30 – 12:30pm)	Half-day, mandatory work plan training for site supervisors conditionally accepted into the program; <i>hold this date on your calendar as soon as you apply!</i>
Friday, March 9 by 5:00 pm	Deadline for sites to submit work plan to EMERGE
Mon. March 12 - Thurs. March 15	Site visits conducted for new sites with conditional acceptance
Friday, March 16	Sites notified of final project selection decisions; Memorandum of agreement sent to selected sites. Sites invoiced for initial deposit of \$1,000 due to EMERGE.
Late-March/April	Supervisor webinars on VISTA recruiting; VISTA member recruitment begins
Friday, April 20	Memorandum of Agreement and Deposit payment due to EMERGE
March, April and May	Host Sites work on recruiting, screening and selecting VISTA members
Wednesday, June 6	Deadline for having VISTA member recruited and for submitting all required paperwork;
Wednesday, June 20 (9 - 4:30pm)	Full-day mandatory supervisor training – “Being Ready for Your VISTA Member”
Monday, July 9	Sites invoiced for remaining balance of \$4500.
July 30 – August 2 (tentative) **	VISTA member attends Pre-Service Orientation and begins service
Friday, August 10	Remaining balance of \$4,500 due to EMERGE
Monday, August 13 (tentative)	Half-day VISTA member/supervisor training

**Dates subject to change and events on the timeline are contingent upon award of AmeriCorps VISTA resources from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Contact: AmeriCorps & Volunteer Program Manager, Kristen Washington at (612) 787-3750 or washingtonk@emerge-mn.org
Kristen can also assist if you have questions about the process or whether a VISTA project idea meets EMERGE and AmeriCorps VISTA guidelines.



PROGRAM INFORMATION

AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) is a national service program coordinated by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that places members in American communities to eliminate poverty in those communities. Founded in 1965, the VISTA program provides full-time, year-long service positions to eligible agencies to help them build their permanent infrastructure to more effectively bring individuals, families and communities out of poverty.

EMERGE Community Development's mission is to reveal the potential in people and communities through skill building, employment, and economic opportunity. The EMERGE VISTA project aligns with the Economic Opportunity focus area. The VISTA project will seek to decrease recidivism and poverty for those with a criminal background. The project expects to benefit nonprofits or government agencies that serve individuals currently incarcerated, individuals recently released from incarceration, or individuals with criminal histories.

EMERGE's VISTA program has been in existence since August 2011 and has served as a VISTA sponsoring organization supporting approximately 73 VISTA members placed at over 22 different partner host sites. These VISTA members have contributed to the poverty-fighting work of their host sites in a variety of ways, and have served more than 5,000 low-income individuals, 65% of whom had a criminal background. The VISTA members have assisted our partner organizations in building program capacity in the following service areas: Employment and Educational Services, Financial Services and Education, and Housing Services and Education.

Many organizations across Minnesota that work with people in poverty, are also serving clients who are facing the added barrier of a criminal background. This can have lifelong impacts on job prospects, housing choices, and financial stability. The EMERGE VISTA program was developed to support and build the capacity of service providers so they can better help these clients succeed.

The EMERGE VISTA program will:

- Grant 15 AmeriCorps VISTA members to community organizations and units of government to work on projects each host site defines that will build their capacity to address the workforce, housing and/or financial literacy needs of the people they serve
- Provide your agency with a full-time dedicated and well-supported volunteer who is committed to building the capacity of your agency
- Increase the number and leadership capacity of people entering Minnesota's re-entry and social services workforce
- Support the service member through a modest AmeriCorps living stipend, monthly meetings & professional development, mentorship, and the support of a cohort of their peers

AmeriCorps VISTA members are full time volunteers who are charged with helping bring individuals and communities out of poverty by performing 'indirect service' that increases the capacity of their host organizations. Members are prohibited from engaging in direct service, focusing instead on creating systemic change. VISTA members are provided with a modest living allowance and health care allowance through CNCS to support their full-time, full-year commitment to combating poverty.

AmeriCorps VISTA members:

- Are dedicated and well supported volunteers committed to the success of your mission
- Come from a wide range of backgrounds, including recent graduates, seasoned professionals seeking a career change, and those following a non-traditional pathway into nonprofit careers
- Commit to providing your agency with a full year of service and capacity building
- Are recruited and selected by YOUR agency to meet YOUR capacity building needs
- Represent diverse communities and walks of life, and may be recruited from among the people you serve who are ready to give back to their community

Building and sustaining thriving communities along with alleviating and eliminating poverty drives every VISTA project.



CORE PRINCIPLES OF VISTA PROJECTS

Every VISTA project must be developed in accordance with these AmeriCorps VISTA principles:

Anti-Poverty Focus – Supporting and strengthening efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty. Projects should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

Capacity Building – Helping organizations build infrastructure, expand community partnerships, secure long-term resources, create and expand programming and more, as determined by local needs.

Community Empowerment – Each project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of community residents and tap into inherent community assets, strengths and resources.

Sustainable Solutions – VISTA members serve as short-term resources to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. Projects should be developed with a goal to phase out the need for VISTAs and have their efforts remain.

2018 – 2019 FOCUS AREAS FOR EMERGE VISTA PROJECTS

Financial Literacy – Improving access to services and benefits designed to promote enhanced financial literacy for economically disadvantaged individuals with criminal histories.

Housing – Transitioning individuals into or helping them remain in safe, healthy, affordable housing for economically disadvantaged individuals with criminal histories.

Employment/Education – Improving or creating job skills training programs that lead to increased employment, and improving access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged individuals with criminal histories.

Within the focus areas described above, projects that strategically address poverty that acutely impacts individuals with criminal backgrounds will be given the highest consideration for investment of AmeriCorps VISTA resources. In addition, priority consideration will be given to current EMERGE program partners whose projects align with VISTA's anti-poverty mission and goals.

BENEFITS AND EXPECTATIONS OF VISTA MEMBERS

VISTA members serve full-time, typically 40 hours per week, and should be available for evening and weekend project needs as necessary. VISTAs may hold outside employment and may participate in classes, so long as the needs and requirements of the VISTA project supersede any needs and requirements related to outside employment or coursework. To enable their service, VISTA members are provided a monthly living allowance approximately \$472.22 pre-taxes bi-weekly (set at 105% of the local poverty level), a Healthcare Allowance (up to \$7,150) or Health Benefit Plan, childcare assistance (if eligible), monthly professional development training, guidance and support. Upon completion of a successful year of service, CNCS provides members a \$5,920 Segal AmeriCorps Education Award or a \$1,803 cash stipend. Education Awards cannot be used on all student loans (terms apply). Members are required to attend regular (typically monthly) trainings at EMERGE or another designated location.



HOST SITE REQUIREMENTS

Financial Commitment: Every VISTA Host Site makes a cost share contribution to EMERGE VISTA Program to support the VISTA program. The cost share amount increases after the first two years of the VISTA project to help Host Sites build their financial capacity in a progressive manner to sustain this work. The graduated cost share structure is as follows (and is subject to change):

- Years 1 & 2 – \$5,500 (**plus \$250 professional development)
- Year 3 – \$7,500 (**plus \$250 professional development)
- Years 4 & 5* – Full cost share (**plus \$250 professional development)

* Most VISTA projects are able to attain sustainability by the third year of the project. However, under special circumstances, Host Sites are allowed up to two more years of the VISTA resource at full cost share rates (equal to the annual amount of a VISTA member's living allowance which is currently \$12,312 and subject to a cost of living adjustment).

**Member Professional Development: Host Sites should budget in \$250 for VISTA member's Professional Development.

Project Plans (Volunteer Assignment Descriptions): Sites must develop a meaningful, clear and outcome-based plan of work for their VISTA member that details the anti-poverty need for the project, intended outcomes, required action steps and intended results that can be tracked and measured to monitor progress.

Host Sites must be able to measure and document the results of their efforts. Sites conditionally awarded a VISTA member must attend a half-day training (on March 1) where they will be provided technical assistance to aid them in developing thorough project plans and appropriate performance measures as determined by VISTA guidelines.

Submission of a detailed and thorough outcome-based work plan is the final step for potential Host Sites to be accepted into the VISTA program.

Member Recruitment: Host Sites are responsible for recruiting, screening and selecting VISTA applicants. This includes, but is not limited to, posting the position in the AmeriCorps online system, listing on e-job searches, putting ads in the local paper, recruiting from your current volunteer pool, etc.

EMERGE VISTA Program supports the recruitment process by providing helpful resources and guidance. Host Sites recommend candidates to EMERGE VISTA Program, but it is the state office of CNCS that makes final decisions regarding placement of candidates.

EMERGE VISTA Program also conducts general statewide recruitment activities. However, the primary responsibility for filling the VISTA position rests with the Host Site. Sites should plan for an adequate amount of time in the months of April and May for recruiting, interviewing and selecting a VISTA member.

Administrative Support: Host Sites are expected to provide a supportive work environment including: reasonable office space, their own computer, internet access, fax, phone, professional development opportunities, service-related mileage reimbursement and/or travel costs to and from EMERGE sponsored trainings, etc., comparable support to that of a paid staff member.

Supervision: Supervisors are expected to be actively and regularly involved in the VISTA member's work. Supervisor involvement is a key determinant of a successful VISTA placement. Expect that your site's VISTA Supervisor will spend an average of 10-12 hours per month supervising each VISTA member. *Please take this into careful consideration when deciding whether or not to apply and when choosing a staff member for the VISTA Supervisor position.*

Reporting: Site Supervisors and VISTA members are required to complete a minimum of two quarterly project progress reports per year according to EMERGE VISTA and CNCS guidelines. Types of data that is requested is as follows depending upon the project scope:

- The number of housing connections made;
- The number of participants who secure housing;



- The number of participants who receive housing education;
- The number of participants that receive financial and financial literacy services;
- The number of participants who complete a financial literacy training, and, of those, the number who increase their financial literacy knowledge;
- The number of employment or educational connections made;
- The number of participants who achieve gainful employment and their rate of pay;
- The number of participants who receive job training or other skill development training;
- 3 and 6 month job retention rates for clients placed into employment;

Training Attendance: Site supervisors are required to attend the equivalent of two full-day mandatory supervisor trainings/meetings prior to the start of the service year, and a half-day supervisor/member orientation at the start of the service year. Additional training opportunities may be offered to site supervisors with the expectation that they will attend with advance notice or send someone when applicable.

Site Visits: Prior to host site selection, a site visit will be coordinated with the EMERGE VISTA Program and the host site. Throughout the VISTA program year, the EMERGE VISTA Program staff conducts a minimum of two site visits with the site supervisor and VISTA member to review the project plan and ensure program compliance.

Sustainability: Host Sites must ensure that the VISTA member’s work is continually leading toward building organizational and/or community capacity to continue the efforts of the project once the VISTA resources are gone. Thus, all VISTA project plans must include steps to ensure the long-term viability of the project.

VISTA DUTIES

The purpose of AmeriCorps VISTA members is to build capacity. This means VISTA members **do not** engage in direct service activities. Rather than providing direct service (i.e. case management), VISTA members strengthen and support organizations by building infrastructure, expanding partnerships, securing long-term resources, coordinating training, designing new or expanding existing programs, and more to create a lasting impact on an organization’s ability to serve low-income and disadvantaged people. Additionally, VISTAs **do not** engage in activities that would displace or supplant paid staff, contractors or existing volunteers.

EXAMPLES OF ALLOWABLE CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Fund Development

- Create a revenue development plan and development calendar; provide revenue development training to staff
- Conduct grant/donor research, pursue new grant opportunities and develop new avenues for creating revenue streams
- Implement donor tracking software or update donor database (for staff to maintain)
- Develop and pilot new fundraising and/or donor recognition events

Program Development and Evaluation

- Research and develop new programs or services and/or evaluate and increase effectiveness of current services
- Take steps to expand current services or reach an underserved population in existing geographic area
- Develop and pilot methods for collecting information related to service recipient outcomes and satisfaction
- Analyze information related to service recipient outcomes and/or satisfaction and present conclusions to stakeholders

Community Engagement/Awareness/Outreach

- Conduct assessment of community needs and create a map/inventory of community assets and gaps in service
- Develop an organizational or program marketing plan and create or update marketing materials and website
- Identify areas for collaborating with partners and make presentations to community groups
- Determine proper use of/pilot use of social media



Employment and Education Services

- Research complimentary sector and other training opportunities to enhance employment opportunities for unemployed and underemployed individuals with criminal backgrounds
- Research and determine best practices for the creation of employment services programs to assist unemployed or underemployed individuals with criminal backgrounds gain employment readiness skills
- Manage and refine Mock Interview process for Employer Services Department
- Create pre- and post- surveys to evaluate current employment readiness programs and work with program staff to make necessary curriculum enhancements

Financial Services and Education

- Research financial wellness programs and determine best practices for implementing a financial wellness workshops
- Research viable financial opportunities to assist the unbanked and those without access to financial institutions and create partnerships to provide financial services for clients
- Research and write grants to support the expansion of financial wellness services
- Develop new relationships with local financial institutions to establish a strong referral network and determine eligibility for local banking and asset development services.
- Organize, coordinate, and facilitate financial literacy trainings

Housing Services and Education

- Conduct assessment of community needs and create a map/inventory of community assets and gaps in service
- Research current housing programs that offer services to individuals with criminal backgrounds, and seek opportunities to create new partnerships and/or collaborate on offering housing fairs and expungement services for individuals with multiple housing barriers
- Identify new opportunities to work with property owners and landlords to determine their rental criteria and where possible create new relationships to build more housing opportunities for individuals with housing barriers such as previous evictions, bad credit, and/or criminal histories
- Develop renter's rights curriculum and pilot Renter's Rights training programs quarterly
- Research and conduct outreach to homeownership programs to determine opportunities to collaborate on offering workshops for individuals with criminal histories to learn about homeownership opportunities

KEY CAPACITY-BUILDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- **Who would be doing this work if you had no VISTA? Who will be doing it after they're gone? Is this type of activity typically done by paid staff in other similar organizations?** *VISTA members are intended to create something new and/or enhance existing efforts and not to deliver core organizational functions.*
- **What will remain after your VISTA member is done with his/her term of service?** *If nothing remains but a hole in your human resources that a VISTA member previously filled, capacity was not built.*
- **How will the work be sustained?** *Creating new programs and systems that cannot be sustained after the VISTA is gone is counterproductive and a waste of resources. Sustainability planning is an essential element of VISTA project planning*



VISTA HOST SITE SELECTION

Host Site applications will be reviewed and recommended by a selection committee representing the interests of low-income/disadvantaged individuals, families and communities. Final decisions are made by EMERGE VISTA Program in consultation with CNCS staff.

Applications are reviewed for:

- The project's fit with program goals and CNCS priority focus areas and EMERGE's mission and goals.
- The project's innovative and impactful response to a substantiated and relevant community need that will provide an attractive national service opportunity for a VISTA member.
- The project and organization's capacity to sustain the work after the VISTA resource has ended.
- The clarity and quality of work plan that clearly defines realistic, achievable goals and outcomes; responds to a real community need or opportunity; demonstrates measurable outcomes; and is logical and detailed. (Work plans are developed upon conditional selection as a VISTA Host Site with training and support provided by EMERGE VISTA Program and CNCS.)
- The organization's capacity to direct and support a VISTA member and ability to measure and report on success.

Note: Not every site accepted into the program finds a qualified VISTA candidate. As a result, more Host Sites are selected for the recruiting process than there are positions. VISTA positions are then filled on a first-come, first-served basis until capacity is reached.



EXAMPLES OF PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROJECTS

Nonprofit Agency - Focus Area: Employment and Educational Services

Major Duties for the year:

- Identify 25 – 30 new second chance employers to target as employer partners.
- Research complimentary sector and other training opportunities to enhance ex-offenders’ employment opportunities.
- Research labor market information to determine sectors with current employment opportunities and seek educational institutions offering training for those sectors to possibly partner on offering training programs for unemployed and underemployed individuals.
- Manage and Refine Mock Interview process for Employer Services Department.

County Agency - Focus Areas: Employment and Educational Services AND Financial Services and Education AND Housing Services and Education

Major duties for the year:

- Research, design and implement a Computer Skills Training workshop.
- Create, research best practices, and develop a pilot financial literacy & tenant education program.
- Offer 2 Employment Incentive Workshops for employers willing-to-hire individuals with criminal histories.
- Offer 2 hiring and resource fairs to provide employment opportunities and resources to low-income individuals and individuals with criminal histories.

Nonprofit Agency - Focus Areas: Employment and Educational Services AND Financial Services and Education

Major duties for the year:

- Create new relationships with employers to increase employer outcomes for ex-offenders.
- Develop tools, resources and events to benefit participants served. Will include creating and implementing a Mock Interviewing program, developing job readiness website and workbooks accessible to incarcerated individuals, and events such as job fairs and information sessions.
- Research, create and implement Financial Literacy Training for individuals with criminal histories onsite.
- Develop relationships with local financial institutions (banks, credit unions) and community organizations in order to develop pipeline of volunteers who can continue to implement a financial literacy training.

Nonprofit Agency - Focus Area: Employment and Educational Services AND Financial Services and Education

Major duties for the year:

- Work with program staff to design and implement a series of on-site weekly job and soft skill training curricula.
- Work with program staff to design and implement a series of on-site quarterly life skill training curricula.
- Create and develop a Financial Literacy training
- Work with program staff to design and implement on-site new client orientation training curricula.
- Develop relationships with local organizations to allow financial resources to ensure program participants have access to the financial tools and accounts they need.
- Develop volunteer program to sustain the financial literacy trainings.

Nonprofit Agency - Focus Areas: Financial Services and Education

Major duties for the year:

- Develop new relationships with local financial institutions to establish a strong referral network and determine eligibility for local banking and asset development services.
- Organize, coordinate, and facilitate financial literacy trainings.
- Research and determine the best practices in creating partnerships to begin offering Individual Development Accounts for program participants.