



COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

AMERICORPS*VISTA PROJECT :: AN INTRODUCTION



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Communities In Action (CIA) wants to ensure that your future with AmeriCorps*VISTA service is positive and that you have all the information you need to make a well-informed decision regarding your commitment to serve. Accordingly, we are providing you with the following overview of AmeriCorps*VISTA service.

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When you arrive at Pre Service Orientation (PSO), you will receive an AmeriCorps*VISTA member handbook that will explain in more detail these and other guidelines, benefits and restrictions to your service.




AMERICORPS*VISTA :: HISTORY




Established in 1964, Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) is now administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). CNCS is an umbrella agency for a number of federally funded volunteer programs, including the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), and the Senior Companion Program (SCP).





AmeriCorps*VISTA was founded on three basic tenants:

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1. That private citizens can, on a voluntary basis, contribute to the solution of the nation's poverty related problems;
 2. That the full-time presence and personal involvement of volunteers brings an added dimension to public and private institutions working to alleviate poverty; and
 3. That the skills and energies of volunteers are most effective when the volunteer lives and works in the same community with the low-income people they serve.







For over 40 years, members have been actively serving in low-income communities by mobilizing people, businesses and organizations with the goal of creating sustainable, healthy communities. There are approximately 5,500 VISTA members serving nationwide, approximately 80 of which serve in Montana.








AMERICORPS*VISTA :: YOUR ROLE




Your efforts will focus on mobilizing community resources and increasing the capacity of low-income people to solve their own problems. You will serve with a local organization, usually private non-profit or public agency, on an assignment determined and defined by CIA, the organization you will be serving with, and the low-income community they serve.



Before arriving at your work site, you will receive a VISTA Assignment Description (VAD). This work plan will describe the organization's goals and objectives for your service. Know that the work plan is subject to modification as your year of service progresses.




AMERICORPS*VISTA :: POLICY OVERVIEW



As an AmeriCorps*VISTA member, you will pledge to serve on a full-time basis for a term of one year. Some positions follow a standard 40 hour/week schedule; others will require you to be available to the community at all times without regard to regular working hours, except for periods of approved leave.


AmeriCorps *VISTA service is a 12 month service opportunity. Therefore, VISTA members may not be employed either full or part-time during their year of service.



VISTA members cannot attend classes (full or part time) during the service year. There are two exceptions for part-time enrollment:

- If the VISTA member is a Pell Grant recipient
- If the class is directly related to the project assignment.


*In both cases, the class must be approved by CIA and CNCS.




The University of Montana has a program called VISTA ALIVE (Academic Learning through Integrated Volunteer Experience). VISTA members currently serving in Montana and who are accepted into the ALIVE program can earn college credit for serving.




AMERICORPS*VISTA :: POLICY OVERVIEW



AmeriCorps *VISTA members are prohibited from participating in political campaigns for voter registration drives, providing transportation to polls, lobbying and pro or anti-labor organizing or taking any action with respect to partisan or nonpartisan political activity while on duty or perceived to be on duty as an AmeriCorps *VISTA member.



Whether or not the VISTA member agrees with a position on a passionate subject, it is best that they disengage from politics during their service year. Also, VISTA members cannot use the VISTA network to invite cohorts to a rally, attend political press conferences, develop campaign materials, work on a campaign, etc. If you have questions about whether a particular activity would constitute prohibited political activity, please contact the CIA VISTA Project Director or Manager.



AmeriCorps*VISTA members may not give religious instruction, conduct worship services, proselytize, or engage in any other religious activity as part of their duties. Members may participate in religious activities outside of their official duties.



AMERICORPS*VISTA :: BENEFITS

You will receive a gross monthly subsistence allowance of approximately \$833 (paid out every two weeks) prior to taxes and other withholdings. This allowance is subject to Federal Income Tax withholding. You will receive instructions for direct deposit at your Pre-Service Orientation (PSO). Direct deposit is required for all Montana VISTA members.

You are authorized to take up to 10 days of personal leave and 10 days of sick leave. Personal leave is not allowed during the first 3 months of service, or the last 30 days of service, without prior approval from your site supervisor and CIA.

Prior to PSO, you must choose which end of service option you would like to receive. Your options include either a \$4,725 Education Award or a \$1,200 year end cash stipend (accrued at \$100 per month). The cash stipend is subject to Federal Income Tax withholding and FICA (7.65%) at the time of payment.

You are eligible to enroll in group life insurance for which a biweekly premium of approximately \$2.07 is deducted from your biweekly subsistence allowance. An enrollment form will be included with your PSO registration information.

You can also enroll in the AmeriCorps*VISTA contracted health benefits plan (for yourself only). There is no charge to you for this benefit. However, there are some limitations and exclusions. The health benefit does not include dental or optical care, nor does it pay for costs related to pre-existing conditions, except for the cost of maintenance prescriptions.

If eligible, you may receive up to **\$400 per month per child** for childcare reimbursement. Childcare benefits are contingent upon having a child under the age of 13, meeting the income requirements and needing assistance in order to serve as a member.



PRE-SERVICE ORIENTATION

After your application is approved through the CNCS Montana State Office, you will be required to attend a Pre-Service Orientation (PSO). PSO is typically a three (3) day event designed to provide you with a basic orientation in several critical areas of AmeriCorps*VISTA service. PSO is for new AmeriCorps*VISTA trainees only; **you should not bring any family members, friends or pets.** Additional training, including On-Site-Orientation (provided by sponsor) and Community Building Institute (sponsored by CNCS) is typically provided within the first three months of your service year. PSO and CBI will be provided at the expense of the Corporation for National and Community Service and will normally require overnight travel.



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PRE-SERVICE ORIENTATION '09

Pre Service Orientation for July 2009 is scheduled to be held July 13-15 in Helena, Montana.

You must be in Helena by the morning of the 13th. Your first day volunteering at your site will be July 20, 2009. Be sure to discuss your personal travel options with the Communities In Action Project Director and VISTA Leader.




RELOCATION INFORMATION




If you will be relocating to a new city in order to perform your service, please review the following information aimed at making your transition smoother.

Transportation Options:




Commercial Carrier :: AmeriCorps*VISTA members authorized to travel by air will receive a prepaid ticket and \$15.00 each way (from home to destination and return) for miscellaneous travel expenses such as taxi fares, parking fees, etc. If costs exceed \$15.00, you will be reimbursed for actual expenditures after providing receipts. All travel provided will be at the lowest rate available.




Private Automobile :: AmeriCorps*VISTA Members authorized by the CNCS-Montana State Office to drive will be reimbursed at the rate of \$.405 per mile plus \$10.00 for every whole multiple of 100 miles. Mileage is computed on the basis of the Rand McNally computerized mileage guide. CIA recommends that you have reliable transportation while serving in Montana.



RELOCATION INFORMATION



Relocation Allowance :: A relocation allowance is authorized by the CNCS-Montana State Office on initial assignment. This is intended to assist with initial moving-in expenses (security deposit, utility deposit, etc.). \$550 will be included in your first biweekly allowance check and is subject to income tax withholding.



Baggage Shipment Allowance :: Volunteers who relocate to Montana will be authorized a baggage reimbursement of personal effects shipped from your home of record to your project site. You are eligible for \$25.00 per 100 miles relocated, not to exceed \$500. In order to get reimbursement, make sure the receipt you submit includes the weights of the parcels you have sent. Receipts must be submitted to the Montana State Office **within thirty (30) days of your PSO. Submit all receipts together.** Reimbursement will be for the actual amount of receipts submitted to the state office up to the amount authorized. The same baggage reimbursement will be available to you when you return to your home of record at the end of your service.



Housing:

You are responsible for finding affordable housing in your new location; however your future site supervisor and VISTA Leader will be available to help you with this task. Please be in touch with Communities In Action to ensure that a temporary housing situation is secured for you upon your arrival.



COMMUNITIES IN ACTION :: THE PROJECT

The **Communities In Action (CIA)** project is recruiting at least 15 new VISTA members for service in a variety of community programs throughout eastern Montana beginning July of 2009. The project, based in Sidney, is a multi-faceted approach to creating healthy communities by utilizing the community building model. CIA is working with communities to develop an infrastructure in response to the modern day needs of frontier life by incorporating all aspects of community health and wellness (Social, Physical, Environmental, and Community Wellbeing).

EASTERN MONTANA :: IMAGES



COMMUNITIES IN ACTION :: PAST VISTA PICTURES





LINKS

www.communitiesinactionmt.com

<http://www.montanapictures.net/>

<http://www.prevention.mt.gov/VISTA/about/statemap/>

<http://www.nps.gov/yell>

<http://www.nps.gov/glac>

<http://www.forwolves.org/ralph/wpages/beartooth.htm>

<http://www.makoshika.org/>

<http://www.nps.gov/thro>