



AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America)

PURPOSE: AmeriCorps*VISTA is a national service program created in 1964 as part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" that was adopted into the AmeriCorps family of national service programs in 1993. The intent of the program is to utilize full-time VISTA members to "build permanent infrastructure and capacities in nonprofit organizations and communities to help bring individuals and communities out of poverty" in the United States. The Initiative Foundation supports this program because it supports our work to mobilize local citizens to effect positive change in their communities and aligns with our interest in alleviating and addressing issues of poverty across our region.

PROGRAM: AmeriCorps*VISTA is one of several national service programs managed by the Corporation for National and Community Service. It is sometimes referred to as the "domestic Peace Corps." AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve one-year terms in local nonprofit and government agencies to "assist in the solution to poverty and poverty-related problems" and "to strengthen local agencies and organizations to carry out the purpose (of VISTA)."

HOW IT WORKS: The Initiative Foundation serves as the Sponsoring Organization for up to 19 VISTA Project Sites in its 14-county service area. Interested local organizations apply to the Foundation (typically in January) for a VISTA placement and are selected by Foundation staff based on need, demonstrated ability to achieve their goals and alignment of their project with the missions of AmeriCorps*VISTA and the Initiative Foundation. If selected through this competitive process, an agency recruits a qualified candidate who commits to a full year of service but can reenroll with that project site or transfer to another for up to three years of total service.

During the first year of a VISTA project, aside from providing mileage reimbursement and office support, there is little or no out-of-pocket cost to a Project Site. For the following years (up to a total of four years) there is a graduated cost share requirement whereby Project Sites contribute to help cover program expenses. Sites contribute \$2,500 in year two, \$5,000 in year three, and \$10,380 for a full cost share in year four.

In return for committing to a year of fulltime community service, VISTA members receive a number of benefits to help them subsist: a monthly living allowance (set at 105% of local poverty level - currently \$865 for Initiative Foundation VISTAs), basic health coverage, service-related travel reimbursement, in-service training, and an end-of-service stipend of \$1,200 or education award of \$4,725. VISTAs must be available to serve 24 hours a day / seven days a week and cannot hold outside employment or attend school while serving. AmeriCorps*VISTA service with the Initiative Foundation typically begins and ends in mid-August.

TYPES OF VISTA PROJECTS IN CENTRAL MINNESOTA:

Typical Initiative Foundation AmeriCorps*VISTA Project Sites include: Faith in Action programs, non-profit human service agencies, churches, community action councils, etc. The Foundation currently supports a wide variety of VISTA projects that include, among others:

- providing assistance to elderly individuals and couples to help them continue living in the home of their choice,
- installing solar hot air collectors on the homes of families receiving energy assistance,
- developing and delivering financial literacy training and free tax clinics,
- coordinating work skills training to recent immigrants,
- organizing youth development opportunities for local young people,
- expanding long-term mentoring programs for youth,
- researching and reporting on regional work force development experiments.

VISTAs support the work of their Project Site by developing volunteer networks and systems, finding and securing additional funding sources, developing new programs and promoting agency services, among other tasks.

To apply to be a VISTA MEMBER, an individual must:

- be 18 years of age or older,
- be a citizen or have permanent resident status,
- be able to offer one year, full-time service, without regard to regular working hours,
- have relevant skills, experience, qualifications to perform the designated assignment,
- be willing to live among and at the economic level of the low-income people served by the project to the maximum extent practicable.

To be eligible to apply as an Initiative Foundation PROJECT SITE an agency must:

1. Be a public sector organization or a private organization designated as non-profit by the IRS.
2. Comply with applicable financial and fiscal requirements established by the Corporation for National & Community Service.
3. Have the necessary resources to support VISTA members in performing their assigned tasks; i.e., space, consumable supplies, telephone, service-related transportation reimbursement, etc.
4. Be able to mobilize local resources to help achieve short and long-term project goals.
5. Have the capacity and commitment to recruit, orient, train, supervise and otherwise support locally- and nationally-recruited VISTA members in appropriate capacity-building roles.
6. Understand the spirit of, and be committed to, promoting national service and the VISTA program.
7. Be experienced in issues related to the beneficiaries of service and being addressed by the proposed project.
8. Be able to build community partnerships and collaborative efforts in order to achieve project self-sufficiency.

TO APPLY:

Volunteers apply by completing and submitting the on-line application form found at <https://recruit.cns.gov> or by contacting Initiative Foundation Project Sites directly and submitting a hardcopy application. The majority of Initiative Foundation VISTAs are selected in the spring to begin service in August though this can vary based on training dates.

Agencies apply by contacting the Initiative Foundation and submitting the necessary project application in January for an August VISTA placement. (Note: there are sometimes openings for project sites throughout the year so agencies should call for details.) The Foundation reviews applications and selects Project Sites via a competitive process that considers the project's fit with Initiative Foundation priorities and AmeriCorps*VISTA goals, the potential benefit of a VISTA to the community, and the ability of the agency to meet the requirements of the AmeriCorps*VISTA program.

For more information and project application materials, please contact:

Chris Fastner , Initiative Foundation VISTA Program Manager

405 First Street SE, Little Falls, MN 56345

Phone: 320.632.9255 * 877.632.9255 toll-free * TDD 1.800.627.3529 * Fax: 320.632.9258

E-mail: cfastner@ifound.org Web-site: www.ifound.org

National Americorps web-site: www.americorps.gov