



**DATE:** November 1, 2012

**FROM:** Corporation for National and Community Service - Connecticut State Office

**SUBJECT:** Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) for New AmeriCorps VISTA Projects in Connecticut –  
Concept Papers Due December 5, 2012

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Connecticut State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) announces an opportunity, subject to availability of resources, to develop new AmeriCorps VISTA projects in Connecticut. This Request for Concept Papers is open to organizations that are NOT current VISTA project sponsors. Please share this notice with your networks, and contact the CNCS Connecticut State Office at [CT@cns.gov](mailto:CT@cns.gov) with any questions.

AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) is a full-time, national service program for individuals interested in developing lasting solutions to the problems of poverty in the United States. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve in community and faith-based non-profit organizations, Indian Tribes, and with local governments to develop and expand services and programs that help bring low-income individuals out of poverty.

Public organizations such as state and local government, Indian Tribes, and non-profit private organizations can apply to be VISTA sponsors. Please note that eligible non-profit private organizations are not limited to those with IRS 501(c) (3) status, but rather all organizations with IRS 501(c) status that focus on anti-poverty community development; organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible.

The CNCS Connecticut State Office is accepting Concept Papers that propose to address any of the following focus areas from the AmeriCorps VISTA FY2013 Program Guidance:

### **Economic Opportunity:**

- Housing: Transitioning individuals into safe, healthy, affordable housing;
- Employment: Improving employability that leads to increased success in becoming employed.

### **Education:**

- School Readiness: School readiness for economically disadvantaged young children,
- K-12 Success: Educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary, middle, and high schools, and
- Post-secondary Success: Preparation for and prospects of success in post-secondary education institutions for economically disadvantaged students.

### **Healthy Futures:**

- Food Resources: Improving access to nutritious food.

### **Veterans and Military Families:**

- Economic Opportunity (Financial literacy, Housing, Employment)
- Healthy Futures (Food Resources, Access to Health Care)

Applicants are invited to submit a concept paper on or before December 5, 2012.

## **SCOPE OF PROJECT**

Subject to availability of resources, AmeriCorps VISTA positions will be awarded on a full-time basis for one year of service to new VISTA sponsoring organizations. CNCS will make an award covering a period not to exceed one year with the potential for continuation. VISTA members will likely begin service during 2013 or 2014.

Programming should be primarily based on addressing local needs, and the CNCS Connecticut State Office will be guided by locally-driven programming that addresses the Core Principles of VISTA.

## **VISTA Core Principles**

Each VISTA Project must be developed in accordance with the parameters defined by law, federal regulations and the core VISTA principles: Anti-Poverty Focus, Community Empowerment, Capacity Building, and Sustainable Solutions.

### **Anti-Poverty Focus**

The purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. The goal of every project must be to help individuals and communities out of poverty, not to simply make poverty more tolerable. The project should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

### **Community Empowerment**

All VISTA project sponsors must ensure that their project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, implementing and evaluating the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community assets, strengths and resources.

### **Capacity Building**

One way to achieve sustainable solutions is to strengthen the ability of local organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and partnership development, VISTAs help sponsors to bolster their capacity to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. If you are invited to submit the full application, keep in mind that VISTA projects should focus their performance milestones on achieving outcomes that measure the impact on the community and/or beneficiary population, with a lesser focus on outcomes of capacity building for the sponsoring organization or its partners, affiliates, or intermediary organizations.

### **Sustainable Solutions**

As originally designated in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act and reinforced in the Serve America Act, VISTA members represent a short-term resource and work to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. **All VISTA projects should be developed with the goal of an eventual phase-out of the need for VISTA members and the ability of the project to continue without them.**

Most single-site VISTA projects typically last three years. Multi-site projects usually run longer than three years, but individual host sites may be limited to three years. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must think about how to use the VISTA project to phase-in other resources and systems to replace the VISTA resource.

Colleges, universities and cities are encouraged to apply for VISTA projects that focus on building long-term relationships with community organizations whose work is focused on one or more priority areas.

## CONCEPT PAPER PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

All applicants must review and be familiar with the contents of the following documents:

A Guide to Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA Project Sponsor:

<http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/sponsorguide.pdf>

AmeriCorps VISTA FY2013 Program Guidance:

[http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/2013\\_vista\\_pg.pdf](http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/2013_vista_pg.pdf)

All applicants must follow the AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Instructions:

[http://www.americorps.gov/forms/ac\\_vista\\_concept.pdf](http://www.americorps.gov/forms/ac_vista_concept.pdf)

## E-GRANTS

CNCS requires that all applicants submit applications electronically via the CNCS web-based application system, eGrants: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/>

If your organization has not used the CNCS eGrants system before, you will need to create an account.

Select the following NOFA for the concept paper: **AmeriCorps VISTA State FY 2013 NOFA**

Technical questions about eGrants may be submitted to the National Service Hotline via phone at 1-800-942-2677 or via Web form: <https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask>

## CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL

Criteria for approval are based on whether the proposed project does the following:

- Fits with one or more of the VISTA programming priorities listed on page 1 of this RFCP;
- Addresses the needs of low-income communities;
- Leads to building organizational capacity so that the project can continue once VISTA resources are withdrawn;
- Involves beneficiaries of the service and the low-income community in project development and implementation. This is required and must be noted in the Concept Paper in the Strengthening Communities section.
- Is designed to generate public and/or private-sector resources;
- Promotes local volunteer service;
- Complies with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended; 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, VISTA regulations; and VISTA policies.

Further criteria for determining approval are based on whether the applicant meets the following:

- Is a local or state government agency, Tribe, or a private organization designated as a non-profit by the Internal Revenue Service;
- Has resources available for VISTAs to perform their activities, such as space, supplies, and on-the-job transportation, and is able to provide emergency cash advances when needed;
- Has the management capacity and commitment to recruit, train, supervise, and otherwise support VISTAs recruited locally and nationally;
- Understands and is committed to promoting national and community service;
- Has the capacity to build community partnerships and collaborative efforts to achieve project self-sufficiency.

As previously mentioned, VISTA projects have an average lifecycle of three years unless the applicant is sponsoring a multi-site project. New project development occurs annually and is always subject to availability of resources. The CNCS Connecticut State Office strives to ensure that the portfolio of VISTA projects is diverse, both in terms of programmatic areas as well as geography.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Any interested organization or individual with additional questions not addressed by this RFCP may contact: CT@cns.gov

Additional resources:

General information on CNCS and all national service programs:

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/>

Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009:

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/serveamerica/index.asp>

Specific information on VISTA:

[http://www.americorps.gov/for\\_organizations/apply/vista.asp](http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp)

VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA" (Flash Course):

<http://vistacampus.gov/v101>

### **TIMELINE**

**November 1, 2012:** Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) Issued

**November 9, 2012:** Interested applicants e-mail letter of intent to apply (not required and non-binding)

**November 16, 2012:** Webinar for interested applicants

**December 5, 2012:** Deadline for submitting concept papers

**December 21, 2012:** CNCS Connecticut State Office staff will notify organizations if their concept paper has been approved and provide guidance on the next step of the application process to approved applicants.

**January 21, 2013:** Deadline for organizations with approved concept papers to submit full project application via eGrants. All supporting documentation and attachments must be E-mailed or mailed and received by the CNCS Connecticut State Office on or before January 21, 2013. E-mail attachments are preferred; however, any documents that need to be mailed may be sent to the following address: Corporation for National and Community Service, 135 High Street, Room 272, Hartford, CT 06103

**February 28, 2013:** CNCS Connecticut State Office staff will notify organizations of decisions on applications and proceed with final approval process of accepted applications.

**March 15, 2013:** VISTA Member Assignment Descriptions due to CNCS Connecticut State Office

**March 15, 2013:** Application approvals completed and Memorandums of Agreement issued

**April 2013:** Projects approved to place VISTAs in 2013 begin recruiting VISTA candidates. CNCS Connecticut State Office staff will provide technical assistance to new VISTA project directors.

**June 2013:** VISTA Supervisors attend Supervisor training

**July or August 2013:** VISTA candidates will attend training and start service. Specific deadlines for submitting VISTA candidate nominations to CNCS Connecticut State Office will be shared as the information becomes available.