

Corporation for National and Community Service

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DATE: November 22, 2017

TO: Potential New AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsor Organizations

FROM: California State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service

SUBJECT: Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) for New AmeriCorps VISTA Projects Applications Due by March 12, 2018

INTRODUCTION

The California State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) announces the opportunity, subject to availability of resources, to develop and sponsor new AmeriCorps VISTA projects in California. This Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) is open to those organizations that are not currently AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors.

VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a national service program that supports efforts to alleviate poverty by engaging individuals, 18 years and older, in a year of full-time service with a sponsoring organization. VISTA projects help to create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty. VISTA members focus on building permanent infrastructure in sponsoring organizations that bolsters their ability to alleviate poverty in their community.

Public organizations such as state and local government, Indian Tribes and non-profit private organizations with IRS 501(c)3 status can apply to become VISTA sponsors. Applicants that have a focus or plan to focus on alleviating and reducing poverty are eligible to apply for VISTA resources. Public and non-profit private organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are ineligible.

A Sponsoring Organization (sponsor) must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise VISTA members, and also provide the necessary administrative support to accomplish the goals of their proposed project.

VISTA PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES FOR FY 2018

The CNCS California State Office is currently accepting Concept Papers that propose to address one or more of the following issue areas from the [CNCS Strategic Plan](#) and [FY 2018 AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance](#):

- *Economic Opportunity*
- *Education*
- *Healthy Futures*
- *Veterans and Military Families*

Additionally, the California State Office is seeking proposals that focus on the following types of programming.

Cities, Counties, and Regional Initiatives

Initiatives led by cities, counties and their partners offer unique opportunities to use VISTA members as a cost-effective resource to increase the reach/scale, effectiveness, and efficiency or leverage critically needed resources for local and regional efforts designed to help low income individuals and families become self-sufficient. We are seeking proposals from cities, counties, regions, and/or their community partners that plan or are carrying out programming to alleviate poverty. Community partners applying on behalf of a city or county initiative should demonstrate that they have the active support of their city and/or county officials.

Veterans

California has the largest veterans' population in the United States. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reported that in 2016 over 1.7 million former service men and women reside in California. We are seeking proposals that focus on low-income veterans and military families as beneficiaries or enhance existing projects to better serve those populations particularly in the following areas:

- Economic opportunity – employment and veterans' homelessness prevention/reduction;
- Education – school readiness, success in K-12 education and college success; or
- Healthy futures – opioid prevention and treatment.

Native Americans

California has the largest indigenous population in the United States with a population of 362,801 Native Americans. We are seeking proposals from Tribal nations, tribal non-profit organizations, and non-profit organization engaged in antipoverty programming benefiting Native American communities that fall under the Focus Areas of Economic Opportunity, Health, and Education. Potential VISTA sponsors can be tribal nations, tribal non-profit organizations, or non-profit organizations that are proposing projects specifically targeting Native Americans and Indian Country. We also encourage tribal colleges and/or universities with a large Native American student body to apply. Any applicant working with a tribe should demonstrate that they have the active support of the tribal government.

Affordable Housing or Homelessness

California is facing a homelessness and an affordable housing crisis. Over half of the state's population struggles to maintain affordable housing. Homelessness and displacement of low income renters continues to increase especially as housing in urban centers becomes increasingly unaffordable. We are aiming to increase the number of VISTA programs focused on reducing homelessness, increasing access to or creating affordable housing, and transitioning individuals into or helping them remain in safe, healthy, affordable housing.

Opioid Addiction Prevention and Recovery

The opioid epidemic is devastating communities across the country. In California there were 1,966 opioid-related overdose deaths in 2015. We are seeking to increase programming focused on addressing the opioid crisis by placing VISTA members with organizations that are creating or expanding opioid prevention and recovery projects targeting low-income communities. The programming treats opioid addiction and recovery as a health issue and fits into the Corporation for National and Community Service's Healthy Futures focus area; however, other focus areas such as Education may be impacted. The programming emphasizes prevention, intervention, and recovery.

Disaster Recovery

California has experienced several federal and state declared disasters that destroyed homes and businesses. Often low income individuals and families in these areas need targeted assistance and support to rebuild their lives. We are seeking VISTA sponsors that are engaged or plan to engage in targeted assistance to help low income individuals and families recover. This programming can be under one or more of the Focus Areas of Economic Opportunity, Health, and Education.

COST SHARE PARTNERSHIP

As a federally funded program, VISTA receives a limited financial allocation each year to support the work of VISTA projects across the country. VISTA is able to increase its reach in supporting antipoverty programs by leveraging resources through cost share partnerships. Thus we are seeking sponsors with the capacity to cost share 2 or more VISTA positions.

As a cost share partner, a sponsor contributes the living allowance of one or more of its VISTA members. In California this rate ranges from \$12,312 – \$24,120 per year per VISTA depending on the county. Please note that the cost share partner’s portion of support does not have to be paid up front. Projects are invoiced every two weeks.

Below is a chart of the biweekly and annual reimbursement commitment.

Bi-Weekly/Annual Commitment	County
\$472.22 Bi-weekly – \$12,312 Annually	Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Siskiyou, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tulare, Tuolumne, Yuba
\$491.96 Biweekly – 12,828 Annually	Sierra, Yolo
\$509.88 Bi-weekly – \$13,296 Annually	Mono, Riverside, San Bernardino
\$542.22 Bi-weekly – \$14,136 Annually	Solano
\$562.52 Bi-weekly – \$14,664 Annually	Nevada, San Luis Obispo
\$613.48 Bi-weekly – \$15,996 Annually	Monterey
\$641.20 Bi-weekly – \$16,716 Annually	San Benito
\$674.66 Bi-weekly – \$17,592 Annually	Los Angeles, Napa, Santa Barbara, Sonoma
\$791.70 Bi-weekly – \$20,640 Annually	Orange, San Diego, Santa Cruz, Ventura
\$925.12 Bi-weekly – \$24,120 Annually	Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara

Projects able to cost share all or some of the requested VISTA placements should indicate that intention and specify the source of funding in the Concept Paper.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Eligible applicants interested in sponsoring an AmeriCorps VISTA project are invited to submit a concept paper via [eGrants](#) – the CNCS electronic grants system. Concept Papers responding to this RFCP should be submitted by **8pm Pacific Time on the due date**. *Please note the answers to the Narrative sections must not exceed 4 pages (or 1,000 words).*

The California State Office will prioritize approval of Concept Papers that are one of the following types of projects:

1. Intermediaries applying on behalf of 8 or more organizations;
2. Organizations proposing to cost share 2 or more VISTA members;
3. Projects that will place a minimum of 7 VISTA members with a single agency or as a part of a collaborative of 3 or more organizations; or
4. Meeting needs in communities dealing with concentrated poverty (Poverty Mapping Tool – <http://rdgdwe.sc.egov.usda.gov/rdpoverty/index.html> and the Economic Security Index – <http://www.basiceconomicsecurity.org>).

Interested organizations that do not meet one of the above-listed criteria should contact the California State Office at ca@cns.gov to discuss other opportunities to host an AmeriCorps VISTA member.

All Concept Papers must be submitted via eGrants. Please see [A Guide to Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA Project Sponsor](#) and [AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Instructions](#) for instructions on developing and submitting a Concept Paper. A tutorial on how to use eGrants is available at <https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants>. When applying, please select the NOFA: *AmeriCorps VISTA State FY 2018*. The NOFA deadline that appears in eGrants should be disregarded. *Please note the answers to the Narrative sections must not exceed 4 pages (or 1,000 words).*

SCOPE OF PROJECT

Subject to availability of resources, AmeriCorps VISTA projects will be awarded on a full-time basis for one year to newly approved VISTA sponsoring organizations. CNCS will make awards covering a period not to exceed one year with the potential for continuation.

The CNCS State Office will be guided by locally driven programming that addresses the following “Key Principles.” Each VISTA project must be developed in accordance with the parameters defined by law, federal regulations and the key VISTA principles: Anti-Poverty Focus, Capacity Building, Sustainable Solutions and Community Empowerment.

Key Principles:

▪ **ANTI-POVERTY EMPOWERMENT**

As previously noted, by law, 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 achieve lasting solutions to poverty. However, projects should focus their performance measures on achieving outcomes and impact on the community and/or beneficiary population, and not only outcomes on 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 a goal of establishing permanent infrastructure to sustain the project following the phase-out of VISTA members.

With the exception of intermediary projects, VISTA projects typically last three years. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must think about how to utilize the VISTA project to phase-in other resources and systems to eventually replace the VISTA resource.

CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL

Criteria for approval are based on whether the proposed project:

- Fits with one or more of the **FY 2018 VISTA Programming Priorities** or **Priority Areas** listed in the California VISTA Programming Priorities section of this document.
- Addresses the needs of low-income communities by proposing a VISTA project that builds capacity for evidence-based programming that alleviates poverty. Specifies the community need (poverty issue), the number of people impacted, the programming to alleviate poverty, evidence that the intervention reduces poverty, the number of people that will be served, and the number of people whose situation will improve.
- Fosters organizational capacity so that the project can continue once the 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. If the organizations board of directors does not consist of at least 51% of the low-income beneficiary community, the sponsor must create an Advisory Council with a composition of at least 51% of its members from the low-income community. The board or advisory council must review and provide written comments concerning the project application prior to submission. A copy of these comments will be a required attachment of any full application submitted.
- 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:
 - ✓ Is a local or state government agency, Tribe or a private organization designated as a nonprofit 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.

New project development occurs annually and is always subject to availability of resources. The CNCS California State Office strives to ensure that the portfolio of California VISTA projects is both programmatically and geographically diverse, inclusive of all sizes of agencies ranging from small grassroots organizations to larger statewide and national organizations, and strategically invests in antipoverty solutions in California.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact the CNCS California State Office at ca@cns.gov with any questions not addressed by this RFCP.

CONCEPT PAPER INSTRUCTIONS:

[AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Instructions \(MUST READ\)](#)

CLICK LINKS BELOW TO ACCESS SUPPLEMENTAL REFERENCE MATERIALS:

- [Creating an eGrants Account](#)
- [eGrants system](#)
- [CNCS Strategic Plan](#)
- [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA \(Flash Course\)](#)
- [VISTA 201: Applying for VISTA Resources](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Supervisors Manual](#)
- [VISTA Performance Measures](#)

Key Deadlines		
RFCP Released	Monday, November 21, 2017	Tuesday, March 13, 2018
Technical Assistance Webinar	Thursday, January 18, 2018	Thursday, April 26, 2018
Concept Paper Due	Monday, March 12, 2018	Monday, June 18, 2018
Concept Paper Decision	Friday, April 13, 2018	Monday, July 16, 2018
Full Application Due *	Friday, May 15, 2018	Monday, August 13, 2018
Application Decision*	Friday, June 15	Wednesday, September 13, 2018
*Enroll in Supervisor Orientation	Monday, July 2, 2018	December 2018
*Supervisor Orientation	August 2018	January 2019
Earliest Expected VISTA Member(s) Start*	November 2018	April 2019
Next Request for Concept Papers Release*	Tuesday, March 13, 2018	Winter 2019

* All dates following the Concept Paper Decision, including Supervisor Orientation and VISTA member start dates, are subject to change.

Steps in Timeline

1. RFCP Released

- To apply, go to: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants>
- Select NOFA: **FY 2018 AmeriCorps VISTA State**

2. Technical Assistance Webinar

- Thursday, January 18, 2018 at 1pm Pacific Time
- [Join Skype Meeting](#)
- Conference Call: **866-670-8282**; Passcode: 75536092

3. Concept Papers Due: Monday, March 12, 2018

4. Notification of Concept Paper Decision

CNCS California State Office will notify organizations if their Concept Paper has been approved and a full application will be requested.

5. Full Application Due

Application must be submitted to CNCS California State Office via eGrants, along with all supporting documentation and attachments on or before the due date.

6. Application Decision

Memorandum of Agreement issued if project approved by CNCS California State Office

7. Supervisor Orientation

Mandatory VISTA Supervisor Orientation for approved project sponsors. Registration occurs 45 days in advance.