

AmeriCorps VISTAs in the Piedmont FAQs

A program of United Way of the Piedmont

Why the VIP VISTA Program?

United Way of the Piedmont fights for the opportunity for everyone in every community to thrive. Access to healthcare, education, and economic mobility are critical needs. In Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union Counties, capable community partners are providing essential services. For many agencies, demand for services has increased while financial resources and staff capacity have stayed constant or declined.

The VISTAs in the Piedmont (VIP) program is designed to build the capacity of nonprofit, government, and educational agencies in United Way of the Piedmont’s three-county footprint to improve outcomes, increase resources, and drive strategic programming. Beginning in Summer 2021, the program is expected to include 20 VISTA members.

Is My Agency Eligible to Apply?

Agencies are encouraged to apply if they:

- Are a nonprofit, public agency, or tribal organization
- Serve Spartanburg, Cherokee, and/or Union County
- Address the underlying causes of poverty through health, education, and/or financial stability
- Are dedicated to building their capacity to grow and sustain services and resources
- Have a full-time staff member able to supervise the VISTA member(s)
- Can provide full-time capacity building work for the VISTA member(s)

2021-22 Program Site Timeline

Application Process

Nov. 1, 2020 – Applications open

Nov. 20, 2020 / Dec. 9, 2020 – Mandatory information session for applicants (*choose one*)

Jan. 8, 2021, 12 pm – Application submission deadline

May 7, 2021 – Wait list submission deadline

Agencies Selected for the Summer 2021 Cohort

Feb. 1, 2021 – Selection decisions communicated via email

Feb. 8, 2021 – Mandatory VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) Workshop

Mar. 8, 2021 – Mandatory VISTA Recruitment Workshop; VADs due

Mar. 15 – June 30, 2021 – Member recruitment

June 2021 – Date TBD, mandatory supervisor training

July – Aug. 2021 – Dates TBD, VISTA members arrive & attend On-Site Orientation and Training

Agencies Placed on the 2021-22 Wait List

June 1, 2021 – Wait list status notification

Applicant sites with a “wait list” designation will retain this status for one year. If a VISTA opening occurs for the August 2021 cohort, wait listed sites will be contacted according to application scoring. Representatives from these agencies are encouraged to attend the June supervisor training.

Agencies With “Request Denied” Status

Applicant sites denied for the 2021-22 service year are encouraged to apply again in Spring 2022.

Commonly Asked Questions

What is AmeriCorps VISTA?

Across the nation, AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) engages more than 8,000 individuals each year to eliminate poverty. Through this federal program, AmeriCorps VISTA Members serve full-time for one year at a nonprofit, government, or educational entity to build capacity. Instead of a salary, VISTA members receive a living stipend set at the Federal Poverty Level. The VISTAs in the Piedmont program is designed to build your agency’s capacity in order to provide health, education, or financial stability services to low-income residents in sustainable ways.

What kind of work can VIP VISTAs focus on?

A VISTA member should focus on sustainable work that builds your organization’s capacity to provide services. This may mean making services more effective, using resources more efficiently, creating new resources, or expanding partnerships –there are many possibilities! However, a VISTA **cannot** focus on direct service (e.g., providing services to clients). Current year position descriptions are available at www.vistasinthepiedmont.org. Each VIP VISTA position focuses on one or more of the following:

- Marketing / Social Media
- Fundraising / Events / Grant-Writing
- Outreach / Partnership-Building
- Documenting / Modifying Operations / Plan
- Enhancing Volunteer Management Systems
- Program Development / Expansion
- Community Assessments / Resource Maps
- Data Collection / Analysis

Where have past VIP VISTAs served?

United Way of the Piedmont has hosted over 250 AmeriCorps VISTA members since 2007. A list of the most recent sites is available at www.vistasinthepiedmont.org.

How will sites be selected?

The VISTA Advisory Board carefully reviews each application and scores it according to the rubric. The application and rubric are available on the VIP website. Successful sites demonstrate:

- Understanding of the AmeriCorps VISTA program
- A clear connection between the requested VISTA position(s) and fighting poverty
- A clear connection between the requested VISTA position(s) and selected performance measures

- Understanding of the capacity-building and sustainable nature of the proposed VISTA(s) work
- Ability to thoroughly support the VISTA(s) throughout their service, including training with an emphasis on cultural awareness

If my agency is selected, what happens next?

You will be notified of your selection decision via email by February 1, 2021. **Your site may accept or decline the position.** If you decline, your slot(s) will be offered to another applicant. If you accept, a member of the VIP VISTA team will begin working with you to prepare a Memorandum of Agreement and recruitment materials.

What must my agency provide before and during the service year?

Accepted agencies are expected to provide mileage reimbursement for service-related travel to the VISTA member(s) at the federal reimbursement rate, a \$6,000 per VISTA cost-share payment (due 60 days after the member begins service), and participation in required trainings. Your agency must also provide position-specific training, a workspace, supplies, and supervision. The total cost to each agency varies, but generally runs between \$7,000 – 9,000 per full-time service year.

The cost-share payment covers a \$100 per month housing stipend paid directly to each VISTA member's landlord. It also offsets the administrative costs of the program, including staff time, trainings, materials, a two-day orientation, and a graduation ceremony.

Can my agency secure a grant or private funding to cover our cost-share payment?

Yes! The source of funds used to pay your cost-share payment is entirely up to your agency. There are no restrictions from United Way of the Piedmont or the AmeriCorps VISTA program.

Who are AmeriCorps VISTA members?

AmeriCorps VISTA members must meet several federal guidelines:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Be a US citizen or legal permanent resident
- Pass a criminal history review

In our experience, most AmeriCorps VISTA members are recent college graduates or enrolled in graduate school. Members want to make the world a better place and have a passion for eliminating poverty in America. We find that members are highly motivated, eager to gain work experience, and desire to learn new skills.

Why would someone serve?

Each member serves for their own reasons, but common motivations include:

- Seeking job experience
- Wanting to “test drive” a nonprofit or public sector career
- Taking a gap year before graduate or medical school
- Unsure about the future and want to be productive while they figure it out
- Desire to give back to their community / country

What benefits do AmeriCorps VISTA members receive?

While serving, AmeriCorps VISTA members receive the following benefits through the federal AmeriCorps agency that administers the program:

- A living allowance of \$12,877, paid bi-weekly *[subject to change based on FPL]*
- Up to \$6,000 toward educational expenses, paid at the end of service
- Health benefits, including reimbursement of out-of-pocket costs
- Childcare benefits
- Federal Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE) status upon completion of service

Additionally, the VIP VISTA program provides a monthly housing stipend (up to \$100/mo) and monthly shopping for household goods at the Gifts in Kind Center. Regular professional development and networking opportunities, a discounted YMCA membership, and access to professional mentors are also valuable benefits.

How are AmeriCorps VISTA members recruited and assigned to sites?

The VIP VISTA staff and Leaders conduct broad local and national recruitment to the program. Applicants complete a phone screening and are asked to identify which sites they would prefer to serve with.

Your agency receives application packets and then determines which applicants to invite for an interview and ultimately who will receive an offer. Most agencies conduct two rounds of interviews and try to notify applicants of their final decisions within 3 weeks of receiving their packet. Recruitment is competitive and agencies may offer to multiple candidates before one accepts. Agencies are also encouraged to conduct their own recruitment. Former interns and volunteers make terrific VISTA members!

What if I still have questions?

The VIP VISTA program encourages any agency potentially interested in hosting a VISTA to attend one of the Fall 2020 information sessions. Registration information is available at www.vistasinthepiedmont.org/apply-to-host-a-vista.html. Attendance at one of these sessions is mandatory to submit an application, but attendance does not obligate you to apply. If you have additional questions, please contact hlother@uwpiedmont.org.