



## 2012-2013 AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidelines and Procedures

### About the VISTA Program

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) is a catalyst for economic growth in 20 Minnesota counties. We work to build a prosperous region with vibrant communities and innovative businesses.

SMIF, in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), is seeking proposals from organizations interested in hosting full-time AmeriCorps VISTA members to assist in the “Economic Opportunity” of employability for the 2012-13 program year.

AmeriCorps VISTA (founded as Volunteers in Service To America), often described as the domestic Peace Corps, is a national service program coordinated by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The VISTA program provides full-time, year-long service positions in eligible agencies to help build their permanent infrastructure to more effectively bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

SMIF coordinates and supports five VISTA members across its 20-county service area. VISTAs serve in 501(c) nonprofit organizations; educational institutions; faith-based organizations; and tribal, state, and local government agencies to build organizational capacity for conducting anti-poverty work. Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible. Typically, organizations are granted a VISTA position that is renewable for up to 4 years.

The purpose of AmeriCorps VISTA members is to build capacity. This means that VISTA’s do not engage in direct service activities. Rather, their activities create a lasting impact on an organization’s ability to serve low-income communities. Additionally, VISTA members cannot be engaged in activities that could be considered replacement for a paid staff.

### **Eligible Organizations**

Community Partner Site Qualification:

- A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, a local unit of government, or a public school district
- An organization in existence for at least one year
- Located in SMIF’s 20-county region or from organizations dedicated to serving within the area. The counties include: Blue Earth, Brown, Dodge, Faribault, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Le Sueur, Martin, Mower, Nicollet, Olmsted, Rice, Sibley, Steele, Wabasha, Waseca, Watonwan, and Winona
- Must have paid staff, specifically a paid executive director, who will provide oversight/supervision to the VISTA member

### **SMIF Provides:**

- VISTA member with a minimum of two years’ post high school work or college, with a preference for college graduates in a related field of study. We select members who:
  - possess a positive attitude
  - are open to growth and new experiences

- understand the importance of creating permanent infrastructure to more effectively bring individuals and communities out of poverty
- want to make a difference in southern Minnesota and are dedicated to serving community and working as part of a team
- Program orientation and monthly meetings/trainings for VISTA member include:
  - strategies to create permanent infrastructure to more effectively bring individuals and communities out of poverty and best practice
  - topics related to creating permanent infrastructure, impact of poverty, and community service
  - civic engagement, leadership, team building and group dynamics

### Community Partner Site Provides:

- Recruiting, screening and selection of VISTA applicants. This includes, but is not limited to, posting the position in an AmeriCorps online database, listing on e-job searches, putting ads in the local paper, recruiting from your current volunteer pool, etc. Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation supports this process by providing helpful resources and guidance. Host Sites recommend candidates to Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, but it is the state office of CNCS that makes final decisions regarding placement of candidates. SMIF also conducts general statewide recruitment activities. However, the primary responsibility for filling the VISTA position rests with the Host Site. Sites should expect to spend at least 20 hours in the months of April and May on recruiting, interviewing, and selecting a VISTA member.
- Site Supervisor\* who will:
  - spend an average of 10-12 hours per month supervising each VISTA member. Please take this into careful consideration when deciding whether or not apply and when choosing a staff member for the VISTA Supervisor position
  - train, coach and evaluate member
  - attend two regional site supervisor meetings
  - along with VISTA member, complete four progress reports per year (due quarterly) according to SMIF guidelines.

***\*Supervisors are expected to be actively and regularly involved in the VISTA's work.***

***Supervisor involvement is a key determinate of a successful VISTA placement.***

- Welcoming work culture with staff fully understanding VISTA member role
- Desk or workspace (individual or shared) for member
- Site accessibility for members with disabilities
- Service-related travel reimbursement
- Ensure that the VISTA's work is continually leading toward building organizational and/or community capacity to continue the efforts of the project once the VISTA resources are gone. Thus, all VISTA project plans must include steps to ensure the long-term viability of the project after the member is gone.

## Application Proposal Materials

### Part 1—Proposal and narrative due Friday, March 2, 2012

VISTA projects typically have a three-year project period. The proposal and narrative give you the opportunity to shape your VISTA project and document the potential impact that a VISTA member will have on your organization and the SMIF Foundation region and to discuss how your organization will utilize the VISTA resource.

### Part 2—Project Plan

Sites must have developed a clear, outcome-based plan of work for their VISTA member that details the anti-poverty need for the project, intended outcomes, required action steps, and intended results that can

be tracked and measured to monitor progress. Sites must be able to measure and document the results of their efforts.

**Application materials and information can be found online at [www.smifoundation.org](http://www.smifoundation.org) under “Applications.”**

**Contact VISTA Program Manager, Pam Bishop, 507-455-3215, [pamb@smifoundation.org](mailto:pamb@smifoundation.org), before beginning your VISTA Host Site application if you have any questions about whether or not your VISTA project idea fits with selection criteria or have questions about the process.**

## Application Selection

- Applications will be reviewed and recommended by a selection committee representing the interests of people currently experiencing poverty. Final decisions will be made by SMIF in consultation with CNCS staff.
- Applications will be selected based on your organization’s eligibility and readiness to host a member.
- Applications are reviewed for the:
  - project’s fit with CNCS priority focus area; SMIF invites organizations to consider hosting an AmeriCorps VISTA program member by becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA program Community Partner Site (CPS). Proposals must focus on programs and services for individuals and families experiencing economic hardship that focus on work in the area of “Economic Opportunity,” specifically related to employability, enabling individuals to obtain or train for gainful employment. In addition, SMIF seeks sites which encourage business creation or expansion. This may include development of business education for individuals desiring to start or expand a company. We seek sites which look to increase partnerships and collaborations to achieve these initiatives.
  - project’s innovative and impactful response to a substantiated community need
  - organization’s existing capacity to direct and support a VISTA member
  - clarity and quality of work plan that clearly defines realistic/achievable goals and outcomes; responds to a substantiated community need or opportunity; demonstrates measurable outcomes; and is logical and detailed. (Workplans are developed upon conditional selection as a VISTA Host Site with training and support provided by Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation and CNCS).

*Note: More often than not, not every site accepted into the program finds a qualified VISTA candidate. As a result, we select more Host Sites for the recruiting process than we have positions. Our five positions are then filled on a first-come, first served basis until we reach capacity. As a result, it is typical that not every site recruiting ultimately hosts a VISTA member because they did not find a qualified candidate in time.*

## Application Process and Timeline

March 2, 2012	Deadline for submitting Host Site Application and Project Plan
March 15, 2012	Sites notified of conditional selection decisions (Final project site selection is based on submission of a thorough work plan)
March 20, 2012	Full-day mandatory workplan training for site supervisors conditionally accepted into the program
March 27, 2012	Sites notified of final project selection decisions
April & May 2012	Host Sites work on recruiting, screening, and selecting VISTA members
Friday, June 8, 2012	Deadline for having VISTA member recruited and for submitting all required paperwork.
Wednesday, June 27	Half-day Supervisors Training – “Being Ready for Your Vista Member”
July 31- August 3	VISTA member attends Pre-Service Orientation and begins service

**Applications and all required documentation are due Friday, March 2, 2012**

- Submit application and attachments via email to: [jenniferh@smifoundation.org](mailto:jenniferh@smifoundation.org)
- Incomplete grant applications or applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered.
- All applicants will be contacted via email or telephone to confirm receipt of their application.
- For more information, call 507-455-3215 or visit our website at [www.smifoundation.org](http://www.smifoundation.org).

*Funding for the AmeriCorps VISTA program is provided by the Corporation for National & Community Service and SMIF. We are committed to recruiting and engaging individuals without regard to disability, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. Reasonable accommodations provided upon request.*

*SMIF is a member of the Minnesota Council of Foundations and adheres to the Council of Foundation's Statement of Principles and Practices. SMIF's annual report is available on-line at [www.smifoundation.org](http://www.smifoundation.org).*